



Shortlisted: Small House

When Old Meets New

Martin and Louise McBride were originally looking for a small property in Scotland to convert into a holiday home – but the subsequent project to transform a dilapidated grainstore was such a success that they decided to move there permanently from Glasgow.

The plan was to convert the stone grainstore building into the main living space of the house and augment this with an extension situated at the north end. The result is a 70m² two storey, two bedroom home, which cost around £1,400/m². The ground floor entrance hallway and main bathroom is housed in the new extension, while the living area leads seamlessly to the kitchen which in turn continues into the two-tiered landscape garden. Upstairs, the couple have incorporated two bedrooms – with the master bedroom being en suite.

The project was a perfect starting point for the couple's architectural practice (www.urbancreatures.co.uk), although Martin in particular enjoyed the more practical elements of the conversion. "I like the hands-on work – it's a good break from the architectural work which is more of a mental activity," admits Martin ■

Photography: Keith Hunter





Grain Exchange

Martin and Louise McBride have imaginatively converted and extended a tiny grain store to create an elegantly styled and cleverly planned 70m² home.

Words: Caroline Ednie Photography: Keith Hunter

Converting an old building into a contemporary home

When Martin and Louise McBride searched the web in 2001 for a small property in Scotland to convert into a holiday home, they had no idea at the time that the small dilapidated grain store they would eventually buy in rural Perthshire would become their permanent family home. Now, four years later and after a great deal of hands-on and often back-breaking work, the couple are enjoying their complete lifestyle – and property – change.

“We relocated completely by accident,” explains Martin, who, along with Louise, had previously lived and worked in the centre of Glasgow. “We wanted to buy a small property as a holiday home, so we started looking on the internet. We knew we wanted something to convert and we saw this property at the bottom of a website list. It said the property was called ‘The Grainstore,’ but there was no picture, and we thought it seemed quite odd because normally grain stores are big silver things, aren’t they? We didn’t understand it. But we decided to go up and have a look.” ▶



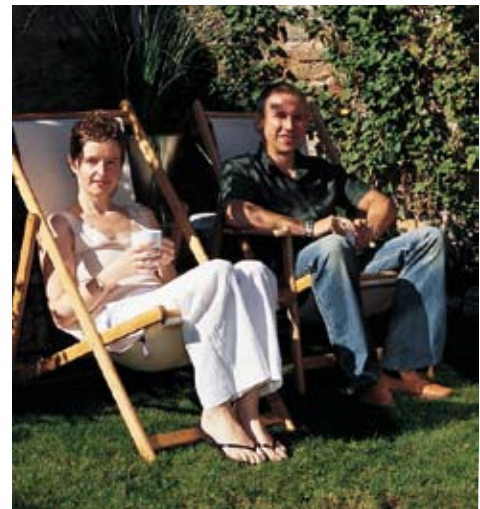


BLACK YELLOW MAGENTA CYAN



The kitchen, situated in the original grain store part of the building, houses a small breakfast area, which features black grass wallpaper.

“We decided to quit our jobs and move out of Glasgow and work on the project full time...”



What the couple found in rural Perthshire was a small derelict stone building surrounded by something resembling a rubbish tip. After closer inspection it became clear that the stone structure itself was sound, and since the price was right, Martin and Louise decided to buy it. The couple remained in Glasgow and worked on various ideas for their new acquisition, then eventually drew up plans for a conversion and extension scenario. “We were going to come up every weekend to work on it but we realised that this wasn’t going to work,” explains Martin. “We then thought that we’d get a caravan and live there, but at this time the adjoining cottage, which effectively landlocks the grain store, was also up for sale, so we decided to buy it. We then just decided to quit our jobs and move out of Glasgow and work on the project full time. We based ourselves in the tiny cottage – it was basically one room with a WC and shower – but it was liveable.”

The plan was to convert the stone grain store building into the main living space of the house and augment this with an extension situated at the north end. “We knew it would be a challenge because the grain store has such a small footprint, so we thought about adding an extension to what was already there in order to give us a decent-size bathroom from the



“We didn’t want radiators because it’s such a small house, we wanted to keep the walls uncluttered,”

The house features electric-powered warm water underfloor heating, specified to remove the need for radiators, which could have dominated the wall space in such a small home.

hallway,” explains Martin. The result is a 70m² two storey, two bedroom home. The ground floor entrance hallway and main bathroom are housed in a new extension which leads to the main living area contained within the original grain store. The living area leads seamlessly to the kitchen which in turn continues into the two-tiered landscaped garden. Upstairs, the couple have incorporated two bedrooms – with the master bedroom being en suite. Since the couple occupy the roof space, storage is tucked away into various clever nooks and crannies such as behind the headboard in the main bedroom and in the main wall in the living area.

The new extension also houses a large bathroom with lots of luxury touches such as the Arne Jacobsen-designed Vola taps and the deep bath from Victor Paris. In terms of sourcing the furniture, fixtures and fittings Louise admits that the couple scouted many different showrooms, kept a close eye on various sales and also surfed the web a great deal. ▶







“There were many times I was physically exhausted and just after we finished it I remember saying ‘never again!’”

“We didn’t want radiators because it’s such a small house, we wanted to keep the walls uncluttered,” says Louise. “In fact, we tried to keep our living area as open plan and as minimal as possible,” continues Martin. “The idea was for the living area to open directly out to the garden so that the whole area feels bigger.” Additional access into the simple two-tiered landscaped garden, also designed by Martin and Louise, is via a back door in the kitchen. “We began the garden about a year ago,” explains Martin. “The stones and the stone wall in the garden were made

Design Details

Martin and Louise’s elegant uncluttered contemporary interiors are the result of a great deal of hard work and forward planning. Although they are often referred to as the ‘finishing touches’, features such as the backlit niche shelving in the bathroom and living room are anything but. Creating a streamlined modern look with all of the building services, such as plumbing and heating, concealed within the structure needs planning at the design stage. Even the use of different depth floor finishes, such as marble tiles and timber flooring, need to be planned ahead to ensure floors are level.

using the old stone on the site. We spend a lot of time in the east-facing garden in the summer.” In addition to the ornamental pear trees and bamboo screen, the couple have also incorporated lights which shine up the perimeter wall in the evening, creating a greater sense of openness.

From start to finish the whole build process lasted just over two years, although Martin and Louise hadn’t set themselves any strict schedule. During this period the couple were also setting up a full-time architectural practice, which is now based in the adjoining cottage, so they had their work cut out. But the couple are extremely proud of their finished home, and talk enthusiastically about the whole building process.

“I like the hands-on work – it’s a good break from the architectural work which is more of a mental activity,” admits Martin. “It’s nice to do things with your hands. Building a lot of the elements in the interior was great fun. But digging out the site was one of the most arduous tasks we’ve taken on, as it was full of rubbish. We needed a lot of skips. There were a lot of cobbles in the groundworks which made it very slow to prepare. We managed to get a mini digger to do much of the work but we also



The sliding doors, which lead out onto a western red cedar deck, were created by a local joiner and feature Brazilian cedar frames.

The bespoke joinery work throughout the house is down to Martin. Indeed, Martin and Louise were responsible for a great deal of construction work and finishes throughout the build. Friends were also drafted in to help with the tiling, floor finishes and balcony construction.

"We essentially did the joinery and all the partition works ourselves," explains Martin. "Louise installed all the insulation. It's a messy job so we had to make sure we had our masks on. We were also involved in installing the underfloor heating. When the hot water pipes were installed over the insulation, we put on the biscuit mix specified by the flooring people – this is a semi-dry cement that takes the heat. I was constantly up and down with a bucket and Louise spread it out. Afterwards, we put the flooring down and built the partitions and such like."

The couple are pleased with the energy efficiency of their home. There is no gas in the village, so the heat is electric. There is a storage tank in the garden and behind the living room wall is a large thermal store tank – a German Sanicube system that was specially created for the house. This provides the domestic water and underfloor heating, and is clean and maintenance-free, according to Martin and Louise. ▶



spent so much time moving mounds of stone. There were many times that I was physically exhausted and just after we finished it I remember saying 'never again!'

"To give you an analogy, I've run a marathon and I read some advice in one of the running magazines which said that you should only run your next marathon when you've forgotten about the last one. That's how I feel about taking on another project like this!" laughs Martin. "Looking back now, we've forgotten the pain," agrees Louise. ■

FACT FILE

NAMES: Martin and Louise McBride

PROFESSIONS: Architects

AREA: Perthshire

HOUSE TYPE:

Stable conversion with extension

HOUSE SIZE: 70m²

BUILD ROUTE: DIY with self-managed

specialist subcontractors where required

CONSTRUCTION: Stone/timber frame

FINANCE: Private

BUILD TIME: Aug '02 – Sep '04

LAND COST: £20,000

BUILD COST: £80,000

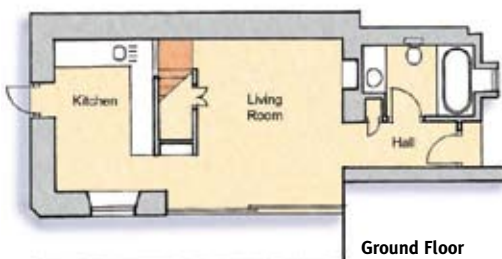
TOTAL COST: £100,000

HOUSE VALUE: Not known

COST/m²: £1,428

USEFUL CONTACTS: Architects Urban Creatures: 01796 481435
www.urbancreatures.co.uk Structural engineer TA Millard: 01738 638141
 Exterior Finishes Russwood Ltd: 01540 673648 Electrical contractor RW Bell: 01796
 472263 Windows and doors James Normand: 01738 624645 Heating Thermafloor:
 01738 620400 Bathroom fittings and tiles Scope Bathroom Interiors: 0141 882 8282;

Fired Earth: 01295 814315 Ironmongery D-Line from Allgood:
www.allgood.co.uk/www.d-line.com Metalwork Steven A Bell: 01738 787654
 Glass specialist Greg Robb Glazing: 01738 441212 Stonemason Stoneworks: 01796
 474495 Lighting Ligne Roset: 020 7323 1248 Grass wallpaper Stereo: 01892 615157
 Taps Vola: 01525 841155 Electrical fittings Edge by MK Electrical: 01268 563000



Ground Floor



First Floor

FLOORPLAN: The tiny living space is well planned over two floors; an open plan living room and kitchen makes the most of the ground floor, with two bedrooms upstairs.