

Northern LIGHT



There is a wonderful childlike exhilaration built in to the idea of converting the simplest of shelters, ideally remotely sited, into a private haven, a den of one's own. Here architect Nicole Edmonds of Edge Architecture and Design, talks to Prestige Properties about the process of transforming dream into reality

How would this bothy originally have been used?

As a dwelling space for people involved with the farm, as I understand . . .

What sort of condition was it in before restoration work began?

Quite poor – as you can see from this photo that I took at the time.

What was the brief from the client?

The bothy was envisaged to be a private living space for the client. Generally the approach was to maintain the existing simplicity of the structure. Key to the brief was the client's decision not to include a full kitchen within the small building, as meals were shared in the kitchen at the main house. This approach to "living lighter on the earth" is inherent to the many diverse aspects of the work of all those living and/or working at Wester Lawrenceton. It is also, I believe, key in the sense of community that one experiences on visiting the farm. The main (original) space was to be open plan and a small extension to the north was initially proposed to accommodate a small Entrance Hall for coats and boots but also a Belfast sink and additionally a Shower Room with WC. The extension area would be available for use by others via a new external door. The client was quite specific about certain features (many of which were incorporated into the final design), for example a new door and

The newly renovated bothy pays homage to its simple origins and loses none of the spirit of the original. Sensitive and thoughtful attention to detail pays dividends

All images courtesy of Keith Hunter



a terrace/deck was requested to be created on the east elevation, rooflights were required and preference was that these be of long and narrow proportions. Other features initially discussed (ie a composting toilet) were released.

It looks quite large – how big is it in fact?

It's small. There is a total floor area of 43m². The original building is 38m² (this includes the mezzanine level which is a sleeping area and the storage area which is located beneath the mezzanine). The extension is 5m².

How did you approach the project – what specific considerations did you need to build in to the plan?

It seemed important, if the simplicity and integrity of the bothy were to be retained, that any extension should be minimal in size and certainly not become the dominant feature within the project. Additionally, particularly when working with small spaces, the design of the space becomes vital in that one strives to achieve a greater sense of space than that which one can measure in square metres. Working with the section of the building is key in this process as is the careful consideration of how the space will be lived in, where for example can clothes be stored efficiently and effectively? How can circulation spaces contribute to the quality of the space and not remain mere boxy corridors? Equally however, as with any project, there are many decisions that have to be balanced up in terms of ecological specifications, cost implications, technical ramifications, etc. I think in this project, the approach of the client both in terms of her brief and the larger picture within the context of Wester Lawrenceton Farm was one I could easily resonate with. Thought and reflection had gone into the initial brief, there was something definite to respond to, yes a good client.

How did you decide between strict restoration of the original structure and 21st century comfort?

There wasn't really a decision to be made here as the original building was a very simple

structure, likely designed and constructed by its first inhabitants. It would be impossible to obtain Building Warrant these days for such a structure. Health Acts etc throughout the intervening years have resulted in basic minimum facilities being required for dwellings. However, as I've already mentioned, there was a desire to retain a simplicity, which the original building embodied.

How is the bothy heated?

It has underfloor heating throughout both the extension and the original building. A gas fired combination boiler is located in the boiler cupboard which is contained within the extension and accessed externally from the east terrace. This heating system was selected primarily for the fact that it would occupy limited space and hence assist in our being able to keep the extension to a minimal size. There is also a wood burning stove in the main open plan space (occupying the recess of the original open fire).

What would you say were the key elements to the success of this project?

An inspiring project. A thoughtful, reflective client. A good team of builders/craftsmen.



Light floods in through the narrow windows in the roof (right)

The new douglas fir staircase (below) leads up to the mezzanine sleeping area. The use of natural, local materials throughout helps retain the integrity of the original structure



How did you select the materials and who sourced them?

I have always been interested in materials, particularly those that are natural and locally available. This approach was also something that inspired my client. Selecting materials is most often a weighing up of different factors - technical requirements and detailing, client preference, costs, availability... I specified and sourced many of the materials, however my client also participated in the sourcing of various products (Caithness slate and handmade terracotta tiles for example). All timber was locally sourced. We used douglas fir for the main structure and birch for window sills, cabinets and the mezzanine floor. Additional stone required for renovation work to areas of the bothy walls and the lower section of the new extension walls was a combination of recycled stone and some new sandstone from a local quarry.

What advice would you give someone thinking of a similar conversion project?

For this project – for any project in fact – find the right person to work with on your project, this is not a decision to rush.

Why enlist an architect for a project that many people would think was small enough just to plan with a local builder?

It appears to me that good design does not come about by chance. It takes hard work on the part of someone who cares immensely about design and the gifts it can bring. Good design cannot be pulled out of a box. **I**

Nicole Edmonds can be contacted at Edge Architecture and Design, Tel: 01309 691408, email: edgearch@freenet.co.uk

The scale of the extension (below) is such that it sits quietly by the side of the original building. Consistent materials help reinforce continuity

