

Irresistible isolation

Though Amanda Markham and Roderick James never intended to move in, they couldn't resist the beauty of this coastal paradise, says Nichola Hunter



PHOTO: NIGEL BRIDGEN

Sea views: The living room has stunning views to the Sound of Mull in the East.



Clockwise from top left: A painting by Catherine Forshall echoes the colours of the sea; Eagle Rock has many small windows to save energy; as the light fades the view changes; the Post Room features a mail sorting desk and shop display rail from an old cinema; a chair; the terrace; the master bedroom; marine-themed decor.



There's no denying that Eagle Rock is an amazing property but what's more amazing is that initially Roderick James and his wife Amanda Markham weren't planning to live in it. As an architect, Roderick is well known for his unconventional builds but he's not a man that specialises in the glass boxes that currently feature heavily on television. His style embraces a more holistic approach: clever designs that function well, look good, have character and, just as importantly, have minimal impact on the environment.

Roderick had been designing a house for a client when he came across an undeveloped woodland site for sale in 1998. With views over the Sound of Mull, the location convinced the couple to relocate from their home in Devon and build Tigh Na Mara.

The two-bedroomed house, whilst perfect for Roderick and Amanda, also proved way too popular with the rest of the family and Tigh Darach soon followed to accommodate the overflow. Everyone was happy and then Eagle Rock came along.

'We didn't start thinking about Eagle Rock until we were doing a development of 20 houses for the Ardtornish Estate,' Roderick recalls. 'At that time in order to kickstart the project we thought we would put our own name down and build a house on the site which we could rent. However, once we started building, we realised how much energy and effort was going into it. In the end, we decided it was such a nice house we wanted to move in.'

The project also grew bigger as it progressed. 'The site was impressive, being located on top of the hill, and we wanted to design something that was worthy of it,' he says.

Roderick's answer was to create a 400 square metre, four-bedroom, four-bathroom, elliptical plan house with 20-mile panoramic views from all rooms down the Sound of Mull. 'We wanted a low-lying house with a turf roof and more or less single storey,' he explains. 'We incorporated an inner courtyard because the site is so exposed.'

'It's incredibly windy here and we thought anyone living here would want somewhere to play ping pong and so on inside. In fact, what has happened is that now there's a building on the site you get shelter on either side of the house so it's not nearly as windy as it was. And, whilst the elliptical shape was designed to take advantage of the 270 degree views, this shape also breaks the wind very naturally. The wind flows around the property, rather like the way in which hurricane houses work.'

Whilst the elliptical shape was chosen to maximise the views, it also points to design similarities with the traditional Scottish broch. 'It wasn't designed to look like a broch or function like one, but we do have double walls so there's a cool, north-facing two-metre wide area which houses the laundry room, larder and cloakroom and which acts like a buffer between the north side and the inner heated areas. It's a concrete storage wall in the inside which stores heat in the

Roderick is well known for his unconventional builds

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK NICHOLSON AND NICEL RICHEN



Above: The internal courtyard is perfect for whisky and chess. **Right:** Eagle sculpture by Sophie Thomson. **Bottom right:** Old Navy lamps.

TOP TIPS

Roderick and Amanda's advice for building your dream home

1. Don't be constrained by convention. Enjoy the process.
2. Think carefully about space, light and texture, in that order.
3. Even 'warm' LED is a cold but energy efficient light. Use gold Oriluna reflectors to warm it up.
4. Put in huge quantities of insulation and argon-filled triple glazing
5. Don't accept without question architects and builders saying: 'You can't do that!'
6. Find an architect and builder you trust, then trust them.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK NICHOLSON

wall. All of that is rather similar to the traditional construction of brochs.'

The double walls add to the insulation qualities of the house, but the shape caused a few headaches. 'It was a very difficult house to build and put together. The house is nestled into the landscape with sedum and lead roofs, lime-harled battered walls, 450mm recycled newspaper insulation, and an internal Douglas Fir glulam structural frame,' he explains. 'This construction allows moisture to move through and evaporate outside. The internal walls are covered in soft cornered undercoat plaster which creates a texture which allows the light to bounce off. Fortunately, we had an extremely good builder and joiner in the form of Angus MacDonald and Lachlan Campbell, who did a superb job.'

If the build process was difficult the interior design evolved naturally, taking its cue from the shape and the views. 'We wanted to have a slightly contemporary castle feel on the north side when you arrive. It's quite imposing but as you come in the front door you're compressed into a low-ceilinged, modest hallway and then it opens out into the courtyard with light pouring from above. It's always

light in the courtyard and when you leave it, you're compressed again to enter the main living room where it opens up to the extraordinary view.'

Roderick likens it to a range of experiences as you move through the house. 'There's deliberately no corridors in the house, everything feeds off the central courtyard, including the four double bedrooms and the upstairs gallery space



“The courtyard is probably the area we spend the most time in

which houses a small cinema room, library and music areas.

'I'm surprised how much we use the courtyard as it has no view but it's such a nice, light area and you're never dazzled with sunlight. The courtyard is probably the area we spend the most time in – your eye roams around the space, it's a very interesting area to sit in and that's quite fun.'



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK NICHOLSON

There's no denying that Amanda and Roderick have an eye for the unusual and they like to play with that in their homes. The Tommy Carlsson painting in the courtyard is a case in point.

'It's incredibly clever. It's a painting of a balloon held on by a bit of string but even when you're right in front of it, you can't tell that it's not real. The desk and chairs are based on a design by Timothy Oulton, but they were made in India. I like that they reflect the light, they don't sit there as great big lumps of furniture.'

The bedrooms are equally individual and follow a theme. 'As we were planning to let the house, we designed each bedroom differently. We had the Fish Room, which had the fishing tackle, fish pictures and lighthouse paraphernalia. Then we've got the Explorer Room, with old snow shoes and skis, and the Post Room, which has an American post office sorting desk. We found that in the antique gallery called The Old Cinema.

'When we decided it was going to be our family home, we didn't feel the need to change anything. We had already concentrated so much on the detail, the furnishings and the way it was equipped. An enormous amount of thought went into that. It's a very interesting house to live in and move through. We made the right decision.'

Above: Roderick James and Amanda Markham enjoying the spectacular views. **Left:** The Explorer Room, complete with snow shoes and antique skis. **Below left:** Chair by Timothy Oulton.



FIELD FACTS

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Tigh Darach is available to let through CoolStays. www.coolstays.com