

ON LOCATION

# Warm Respect for a Ruin



1. Alex and Seonaid Maclean-Bristol's house on the Isle of Coll in Scotland was built in the ruins of a house abandoned 150 years earlier.

2. The Maclean-Bristols left London six and a half years ago to return to Coll, where Mr. Maclean-Bristol's parents were running an 800-acre farm with Blackface sheep and Highland cows.

3. The new house was built partly out of stone from the old house. "We always wanted to do up this ruin," Mrs. Maclean-Bristol said. "But we wanted to be honest to it, as the ruin itself was what we liked."

4. The kitchen is on the ground floor, in the part of the house built in the ruin. The furniture is simple and functional; the floors are oak.

5. The living area links the new wing of the house to the old part, and looks out onto the ocean.

6. The open-air courtyard is framed by the walls of the ruin and strewn with beach pebbles.



7. Mrs. MacLean-Bristol, who worked as a Chinese and Japanese art specialist at Sotheby's before moving to Coll, has a cherrywood-lined study in the part of the house built on the ruin.

8. The oak-floored master bedroom is on the second level, overlooking the sedum-covered roof of the living area.

A modern farmhouse rises from the remains of a once-grand home on a Scottish island.

By CAROLINE EDNIE

ON THE tiny wind-lashed Isle of Coll in northwest Scotland, a modern five-bedroom farmhouse has risen from the ruins of a local landmark known as the White House, built in the mid-1700s.

The roofless limestone ruin had lain empty for more than 150 years before its transformation by Alex and Seonaid Maclean-Bristol, who share it with their children, Archie, 7; Fergus, 5; and Xander, 2. "There's no part of the house that I don't find magical," said Mrs. Maclean-Bristol, 39, gazing out the glass walls in the living room toward the Atlantic, lapping at the rocky coastline that cups Rough Bay, or Grishipol in Gaelic.

The home is on one of a group of islands known as the Inner Hebrides that has a population of about 200. It was once among the grandest houses on the island, and was built by the Maclean family, who have been landowners here for centuries, for

the man who managed their estate. Constructed on sand, it was abandoned in the mid-1800s when large cracks began to appear in the structure.

The ruin drew little attention as a viable place to live until the couple's arrival some six and a half years ago, precipitated in part by an invitation from Mr. Maclean-Bristol's parents, who wanted to turn over some of the responsibility for running their 800-acre farm to their son.

At the time, the couple had a new baby, and Mr. Maclean-Bristol, a former British Army captain who is now 40, was working in London for Project Trust, an educational charity run by his family, while his wife had a demanding job as a specialist in Chinese and Japanese artworks at Sotheby's. "Something had to give," Mrs. Maclean-Bristol said. "Moving to a remote area really appealed to me, as I lived in rural Suffolk for a large part of my childhood. And Alex is from Coll, so we both liked the idea of a very rural upbringing for our kids."

Initially, they rented a 19th-century house from Mr. Maclean-Bristol's parents. But it was dark, had no ocean views and was exposed to the full force of

the island winds. And the White House site, an early inheritance from his parents, beckoned.

"We always wanted to do up this ruin," Mrs. Maclean-Bristol said. "But we wanted to be honest to it, as the ruin itself was what we liked. People on Coll have incredibly personal relationships with ruins on the island, so we didn't want to create the sense that it would be utterly destroyed forever, with a silly pastiche in its place."

The design solution came out of discussions with William Tunnell of WT Architecture, in South Queensferry, near Edinburgh. After 18 months of construction, the 21st-century White House was completed, in June 2010. It cost £690,000 (or about \$1.14 million) to build the main house, with an additional £50,000 (or \$82,650) to shore up the ruin.

The new house is H-shaped. On one side is a courtyard framed by the original ruin and a light-filled three-story entrance hall, with an oak staircase up to the master bedroom and the couple's cherry-lined study in its office above that. The courtyard was left in its roofless state, with a dramatically cracked gable, the ground strewn with

pebbles and original window openings looking out onto the rocky dale.

From the entrance hall and the white-walled kitchen on the ground floor, a few steps lead down to the glass-walled living area — the bar in the H-plan — which has striking views of the ocean.

The new part of the house, the two-level wing that makes up the other side of the H, contains the library, a sitting room and four bedrooms. It was built partly out of stone recycled from the original house, and has an exterior stained black, recalling the tar-covered roofs of the fishing cottages along the west coast of the island. The sitting room, just off the main living area, is the children's favorite hangout, a cherrywood-lined playroom with benches at just the right height for their toy trains.

"Using cherrywood is maybe a bit daft with young kids punching around, since the wood is so soft — and it's already been drawn on with a permanent marker," Mrs. Maclean-Bristol said.

But "you can't always shelve beauty in favor of durability," she added. "Beautiful things so lift your spirit."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL HARDING FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES