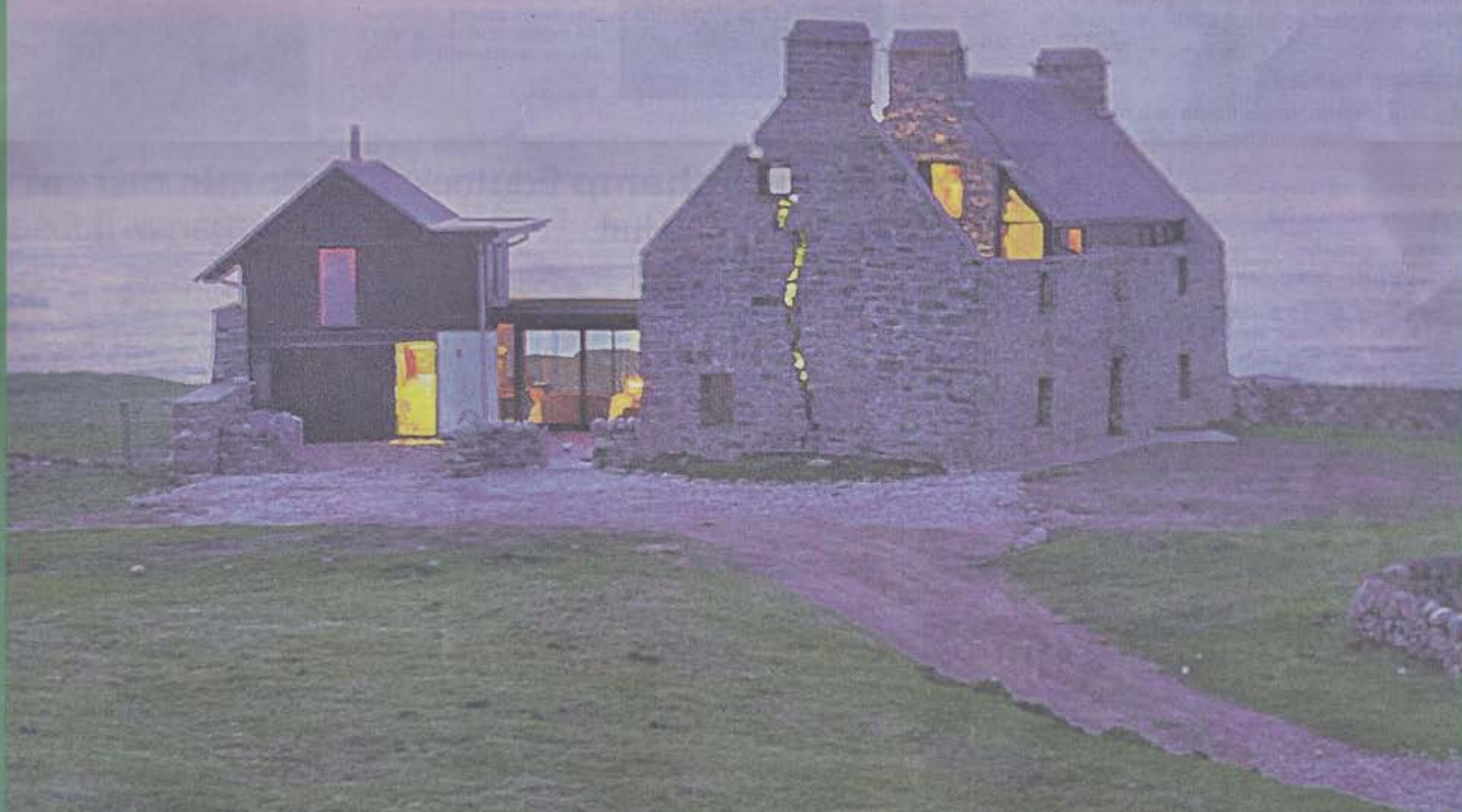


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INSIDE

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# home



## New horizons

The most inspiring homes in Britain **P12**

**PLUS Eight-page Scottish property market special P4**

## Nominated for a top Riba award, these new houses represent the cutting edge of British architecture, says **Helen Davies**

For those with the money, flair and, most important of all, patience, designing a dream home has become increasingly fashionable in the past decade. Rather than simply remodelling and extending an existing period property, it is much more satisfying to create something from scratch. Inevitably, alongside this passion, the desire has grown to rank the results, with several competitions launched to celebrate Britain's best or most stylish homes.

For architects, however, there is only one set of awards that really matters: the Manser Medal for the best new house or significant extension in Britain, given out each year by the Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba), the industry's professional association.

This year's long list, announced last week, contains 17 exceptional projects, from edgy urban homes squeezed into tight city infill sites to Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired woodland hideaways and cutting-edge glass statements deep in the commuter belt.

The selection will be narrowed down to a shortlist of six in September, with the winner announced at a dinner on November 10. The winning architect will receive a trophy commissioned by the award's sponsor, HSBC Private Bank, and a prize of £10,000.

Home has been given a sneak preview of three of the nominees. Each is very different in its style, size and location. Which one would inspire you?

### Epsom House, Surrey

It was being gazumped not once but twice that led Lelyana Kurniawan, 44, a former equity analyst, and her husband, Ian Harris, 41, a trader at Credit Suisse, to build their own home. The end result is a spectacular steel, glass and concrete home that makes passers-by stop in their tracks and peer in through the gates.

The Indonesian-born Kurniawan, who had previously lived in smart city-centre flats, wanted to "capture the maximum amount of sun and use a lot of glass". That was the brief she gave to her architect, whom she selected through the Riba website.

Every room in the 7,696 sq ft home, except the utility room, is flooded with natural light and has views over the lush Surrey countryside. Sliding glass doors run the length of the ground floor,

opening all the way, which creates a breeze, but also, slightly disconcertingly, allows in the occasional bird.

The house has six bedrooms, an office, a gym and a 16-metre swimming pool, as well as a private courtyard garden. It also ticks all the environmental boxes, with seven 260ft-deep boreholes for ground-source heating and solar thermal water-heating panels.

Achieving the sleek and polished look wasn't easy. Costs spiralled out of control — "I think it came to about £2m," Kurniawan says — and the build was fraught with problems. One of the contractors went bust (which was a "bummer") and, when the couple and their two daughters moved in, in 2009, it took another year to finish the remedial work and landscaping.

It was worth the wait. "You can see every change in the season," Kurniawan says, "the way the light plays and the first buds on the trees. I can't imagine ever living in a flat now."

**Owner's tip:** Building a house never ends. As soon as you move in, the maintenance begins.

**Riba verdict:** Externally a modern and uncompromising work of contemporary architecture — but the unrelenting geometry gives way to a surprising and delightful, homely and welcoming interior.

**Architect:** Eldridge Smerin; 020 7228 2824, www.eldridgesmerin.com.

### The White House, Isle of Coll

For 2,000 years, man has been living — and building shelters — on the protected beachside spot on the Hebridean island where the Maclean-Bristol family have created their dream home. Indeed, on the first day of the four-year project, they unearthed Bronze Age pottery.

Alex, 40, who was born on the remote Isle of Coll, returned there a decade ago with Seonaid, 39, who used to specialise in the Asian art world for Sotheby's. The couple have since had three sons, Archie, 7, Fergus, 5, and Xander, 2.

They initially settled in the grounds of his father's farm, then spent months searching for the perfect spot to build a house of their own. The island is rugged, just rock, bog and heather, and it is exposed to the elements, so there aren't endless sites to choose from.

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**SLIDING DOORS RUN THE LENGTH OF THE GROUND FLOOR AND OPEN ALL THE WAY, CREATING A BREEZE, BUT ALSO, SLIGHTLY DISCONCERTINGLY, ALLOWING IN THE OCCASIONAL BIRD**



Alex and Seonaid Maclean-Bristol, left, spent £690,000 building the White House on the Isle of Coll

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"We were living in a dark old manse with a view of a sheep pen, and wanted something more dramatic," Alex says. "We kept walking around the little bay, but then coming back to the ruin of the white house. It was in just the right position. It was a crumbling edifice, but it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The couple admit that it was difficult to find an architect who was willing to travel — it is a three-hour ferry trip from Oban — and who wanted to work with the C-listed remains of the Georgian manse. Fortunately, Will Tunnell, an Edinburgh-based architect who owned a holiday home on the island, was up for the challenge. They also had to rent accommodation for their builders, and feed them. "They ate a whole cow between October and April," Alex says. "But that's the beauty of being a farmer."

The project took four years — two to get planning permission and repaint the stone shell and two more to build the modern extension. The result is a five-bedroom, 2,874 sq ft home with a large open-plan kitchen that links the old with the new and flows through to a dining room and sitting room.

The house cost £690,000 to build — a third more than it would have been on the mainland — and no home on Coll has ever sold for more than £500,000, but the Maclean-Bristols seem unperturbed. This is their "for ever" house.

"I love walking in and remembering the broken rubble and thistles that used to be there," Alex says. "Now it is such a warm space, and the light is beautiful. Last midsummer, the sun didn't set until 10.45pm."

**Owner's tip:** Understand the detail and get your architect to explain it to you in bite-size chunks.

**Riba verdict:** The house sits comfortably within this extraordinarily beautiful landscape.

**Architect:** William Tunnell; 0131 331 2813, wtarchitecture.com.

A disguised trap door leads to the Balancing Barn's cobbled terrace



**"THE BUILDERS ATE A WHOLE COW BETWEEN OCTOBER AND APRIL. BUT THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF BEING A FARMER"**



Half of the 100ft-long structure juts out over the Suffolk hillside

### The Balancing Barn, Suffolk

Hanging precariously off a hill near Aldeburgh and clad in silver tiles, this is no ordinary holiday home. It even sways a little if you jump up and down in the living room, and a swing hangs off the end.

On the edge of a tranquil nature reserve, it was commissioned by Living Architecture, a not-for-profit enterprise established by Alain de Botton, the celebrity philosopher and author of books including *The Architecture of Happiness*, and designed by the Dutch architects MVRDV. (It's one of two Living Architecture projects on Riba's long list. The other is the Shingle House, in Dungeness, Kent, a dark, shed-like edifice with a concrete and timber interior designed by Nord Architecture.)

Living Architecture's mission is to bring modernism to the masses by employing leading architects to design homes, then letting them out. The Balancing Barn — which it describes as "genuinely a work of great beauty, not a piece of bling" — sleeps eight and starts at £720 for four nights.

The barn juts out dramatically over the landscape, providing stunning views over woods, ponds and meadows from its huge panoramic windows. There's even a disguised trap door that opens onto a cobbled terrace directly underneath the cantilevered living room. Tempted to stay? You can book at [living-architecture.co.uk](http://living-architecture.co.uk).

**Riba verdict:** It has a voyeuristic character: visitors gaze out on, rather than engage with, their surroundings.

**Architects:** MVRDV ([www.mvrdv.nl](http://www.mvrdv.nl)), Mole (01353 667068, [molearchitects.co.uk](http://molearchitects.co.uk)).

✦ Riba; 020 7580 5533, [architecture.com](http://architecture.com)

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**ST** To see more inspiring homes on the Manser long list, go to [thesundaytimes.co.uk/home](http://thesundaytimes.co.uk/home)