

# TRADING UP

Arisaig, where houses cost up to £250,000, is just the sort of place families want to live



The Road to the Isles is drawing more young house-builders, seeking a better quality of life, writes **Lucy Penman**

For a generation of us, the stunning beaches around Arisaig on Scotland's west coast were a closely guarded but badly kept secret, thanks to their starring role in the film *Local Hero*. Now a younger generation is heading up the famous Road to the Isles for a taste of the scenery used as a backdrop to Harry Potter's screen adventures; and it seems many of those visitors are deciding they would like to stay, as the previously unspoilt countryside is becoming dotted with new-builds on plots with views that would make a Hollywood location scout weep.

Alongside the typical retired couples looking to run B&B businesses or just enjoy their retirement in a part of the world they have always loved, there are many younger families either buying a summer bolt hole or making the leap from urban living to the kind of lifestyle portrayed in *Monarch of the Glen* or *Hamish Macbeth*.

Charlie King, the local councillor for Mallaig, says: "There has been an increase in new houses, many of them holiday homes. It can make it hard for locals to get a first home although, if their parents have a croft they can leave it to them which will give them the land."

According to local estate agents, a plot of land near one of the more picturesque locations, such as Camusdarrach beach or the beaches

of Morar, can cost between £70,000 and £100,000, while a ready-built three- or four-bedroom detached house could cost up to £250,000.

Many newcomers are opting for self-builds. SkyeHomes, which produces traditional-style kit houses, has been doing good business both on the mainland and on the Isle of Skye. The company promises "the look and feel of a traditional Highland property with the ease of living and maintenance afforded by modern building standards". The kit homes,

which range from cosy cottages to substantial farmhouse-style homes, blend in well with their surroundings as they have a traditional look, but inside there is an emphasis on modern open-plan living. Prices range from £13,550 for a one-bedroom bungalow to £39,500 for a four-bedroom property.

David Ball was among the first of the new breed of self-build incomers to opt for a SkyeHomes kit when he moved with his wife and son to Skye from Hereford two years ago. David,

50, Jane, 44, and eight-year-old Liam now live in a spacious three-bedroom timber-frame home at Skabost Bridge on the island. The house has a large feature staircase and gallery area and to the side of the building is a workshop with an office above.

For Jane, the move was made easier as she was originally from Skye, although had lived down south for 20-odd years. When the couple were offered the opportunity to buy land from the local laird, they seized the chance to build the house they had always wanted. "We looked at a few kit-house companies before going with SkyeHomes," says Ball. "They had just started up then and we were interested in the type of design they were doing."

David and Jane then worked with a designer, making changes to the original kit to build the home that suited them. David, a mortgage broker, left his practice in Worcester and now works from his purpose-built office from where he looks out over acres of land to the sea. "There's a great quality of life here and lots of advantages for children," he says. "There are a lot of new-builds going on up here and the majority are people coming up from down south. A high proportion of people are building homes as second homes, retirement homes and holiday homes."

Claire MacAlpin, an estate agent at MacPhee & Partners in Fort William,

says they have seen a trend for younger families moving into the area looking for a lifestyle change. Previously buyers were predominantly retired people.

David and Jane's son attends the local primary school on Skye and David said the move — when Liam was five — has been ideal timing for him. He was also familiar with the island from visiting his mother's relatives. "He has so much space here", said David. "When we decided to make the move up here we didn't plan on building a 3,000-sq-ft house just for the three of us, but that is what we've ended up with after we sat down with the architect and tweaked one of their designs to suit our needs. In total, it probably took a year to get the design as we wanted it and we couldn't be happier now."

Of course, there are downsides to taking the Road to the Isles and staying when you get there. David admits it takes a while for an outsider to become established in business, and the cost of living is higher, for everything from fuel to food. But he says these are niggles which in no way detract from the joy of watching his son grow up with all the freedom he has on the island, and for him and Jane to enjoy their dream house in a dream location.

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The Balls' home on Skye was from a kit home adapted to their specifications