

Escape

Loch an Eilein Cottage

A stylish bolt-hole hidden in the glorious Rothiemurchus Estate offers peace, tranquillity and sublime views, as well as easy access to all the outdoors activities you could want

Photography David Garcia (interiors) and James Shooter
Words Catherine Coyle



Going away for a long weekend in Scotland can be a bit of a funny thing. It sometimes feels that your destination will either be too remote and isolated, or so overpopulated and pumped-up on VisitScotland-endorsed activities that you'll need a second holiday to recover. Admittedly, my standards are high – a result, thanks to this job, of being invited to stay in some of the country's finest hotels, cottages, lodges and castles. Nevertheless, I think everyone would agree that, if you've only got two nights to kick back, it had better be good.

Loch an Eilein Cottage is more than just good. It is in the Cairngorms National Park, deep in the heart of Rothiemurchus Estate, on land that has belonged to the Grant family for more than five hundred years; that it has not changed hands in half a millennium says ►

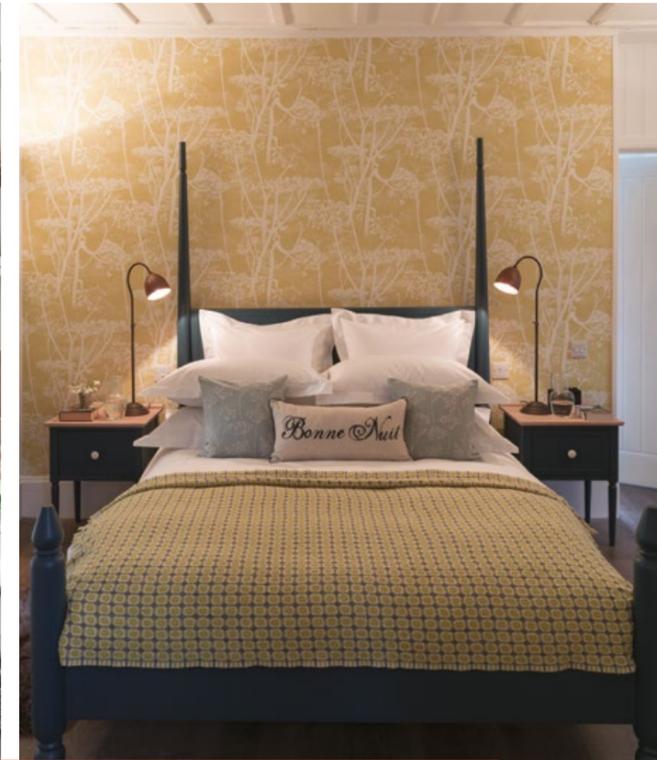
something about the spectacular beauty of this part of the world.

Rothiemurchus is a pretty polished destination, both for day visitors and those staying longer in its caravan and camping site. There is no bouncy, over-enthusiastic guide trying to cajole you into signing up to lots of different pursuits; that said, you're not left stranded and alone either, with no point of contact to answer a first-timer's questions. A balance has been effortlessly struck between space for those in need of R&R, and assistance for those seeking a more hands-on approach (think Segway safaris, treezone aerial adventures and quad-bike treks). And that's all within the estate's 18,000 acres. The beauty of it is there's no pressure to pack it all in; no one is judging you if you're not out at 6am on your mountain bike.

The most strenuous thing I did on my weekend here was a trip to the deli shop to stock up on homemade treats and ingredients. My cottage – secluded enough to warrant a head torch after dark, but close enough to the

action that you can cycle or walk to the estate shop (a café, gift shop and farm store in one) – was once home to Rothiemurchus employees. The splendour of its location on the banks of the loch, however, had always made owner James Grant want more for this quaint little Hansel and Gretel home in the woods. He enlisted the help of London-based interior designer Fanny Ward (with whom he had previously worked on the estate's Druie café and restaurant) and set about creating an interior that was as impressive and as soothing as its woodland surroundings.

It took six months to turn the place around, with Grant spending more than £100,000 on the renovation; but, having been a part of the estate since 1813, it was important to preserve and protect this special building. "I envisaged a comfortable and cosy cottage with a wow factor," says Grant. "The biggest change that we made to it was taking down the ceiling in the living area to expose the rafters." The kitchen and bedroom were also swapped around, improving the layout, and the sitooterie and



[Previous Page] Loch an Eilein is right outside the cottage window. [Clockwise from below] The living-cooking area is sophisticated and light, with pared-back furnishings such as a Loaf leather sofa, Romo-dressed window seat and Heal's bobble rug; the Luma of Barnes old school chairs around the Cox & Cox table add a contemporary feel to the Shaker-style kitchen; a double-sided Bonk & Co wood-burner warms both the living room and the bedroom



IN THE AREA

Whether you move at a fast pace or a slower one, this place has plenty to keep you occupied. Walkers, cyclists and runners will love stepping out of the cottage on to endless paths. Loch an Eilein is right outside the window, in all its tranquil, majestic beauty. Take a picnic to the water's edge or drop into the Loch an Eilein Gallery on its banks, for Instagram-ready photo opps. Ten minutes away at Inshriach Nursery is The Potting Shed. It only sells cake! Take a seat in the observation deck to bird-watch from a tremendous height, as you sip tea and eat cake (I had the hazelnut and pistachio with Lindt chocolate cream – wowzers!). Mr Simms' Olde Sweet Shoppe is in nearby Aviemore where, after a nostalgia-filled 20 minutes, I emerged with a bag of Russian caramels, liquorice wheels and white mice to keep my sugar levels up on the road home (*ahem*).

patio area to the rear were rebuilt.

Ward's reconfiguration of this traditional cottage is a revelation. From the outside, the expectation is of a small and cosy retreat; once inside, the space she has created is extensive but it hasn't lost that sense of intimacy. By opening up the living-kitchen-dining room to the apex of the roof, painting the wainscoting white, the space and light collide, enveloping guests like a warm blanket or a friendly hug. The décor is neither contrived nor stuffy; John Lewis lamps and cushions, a Cox & Cox console table, an assortment of Grant family art on the walls and a Bonk & Co double-sided wood-burner unite the traditional, usable and covetable aspects of this cottage. Ward has been clever; by looking outside to the soft Scottish palette, she has used the spectrum beyond the window in her interior design. There are heady loch blues, lavenders, heathers and earthy lichen hues, subtly married with the teals and faded yellows found in traditional Scottish tweeds.

The blend of old and new echoes the balance found throughout Rothiemurchus. The cottage is as well equipped as the estate itself; there's no pressure, though, to do anything more than sit in front of wood-burner and play Scrabble or enjoy the window seat where I found myself, mesmerised for an hour by a pair of red squirrels playing tag in the garden. Who needs life in the fast lane? ■ www.lochaneileincottage.com

