

# Amazing Ardtorna



A career as a hotel inspector meant that Karen O'Byrne knew how to run her own business

Words: **Nichola Hunter**  
Photographs: **Lucy Hamilton**

**K**aren O'Byrne eats, sleeps and breathes the hospitality business which is why guests are so keen to return to her home at Ardtorna.

The force majeure that is Karen started her career with a degree in business and hospitality management. After a stint in her family's hotel, she built her own guest house in Connel and then 14 years ago, started looking for some land on which to build her dream – a five-star B&B.

When a field on Mill Farm at Barcaldine by Oban with beautiful views over Loch Creran presented itself; it proved the perfect spot for Karen's build. "It was my dream for nearly 20 years," Karen recalls. "As a hotel inspector for the Scottish Hotel Awards, I had visited many hotels and travelled the world extensively. When it came to building and designing my own property, I knew exactly how it would look. The plans for the rooms, their dimensions and designs had been in my head for years."

Karen took her drawings to an architect and had the plans drawn up and with the planners on board, the project moved on apace. "From putting the offer in to buying the land and physically moving into the house took under a year. I wouldn't say it was a simple project, but I enjoyed it. I worked with local builders, Maple Joiners and they were fantastic."

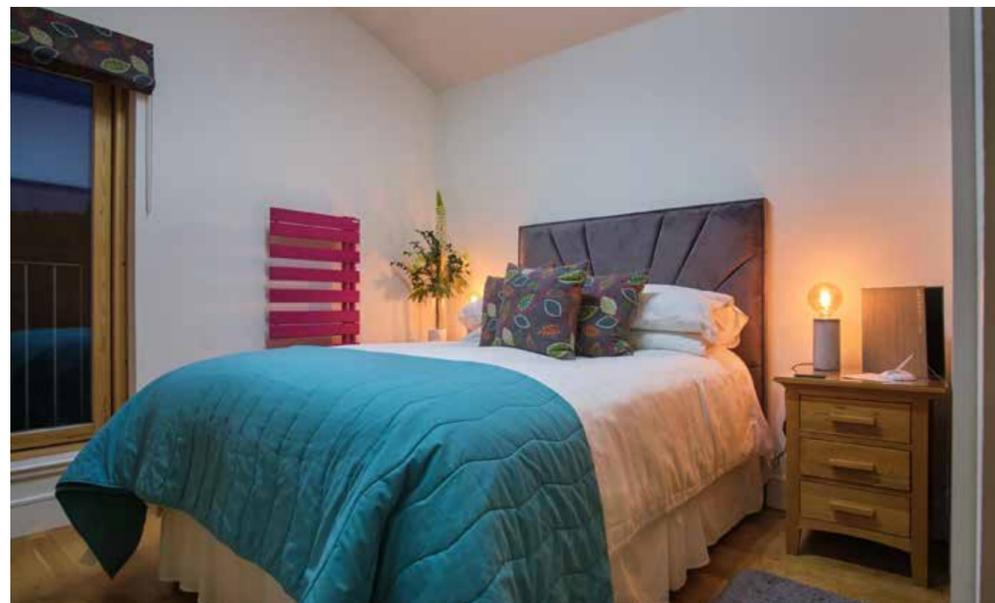
One of the most important parts of

the design was to have all four en suite bedrooms facing the loch. "While the view makes no difference to your grading with the tourist board it certainly does to your guests. Each of the en suite bedrooms enjoy a fabulous view of the loch and recently I changed all the windows into patio doors which lead onto private terraces. The dining room benefits from a loch vista and when guests walk in and say wow because of the floor to ceiling view; it's worth it."

It's not just the view that has the wow factor either, Karen has had a huge amount of fun planning the interiors as she explains: "I've always had a passion for interior design. My family are all photographers, and my sister-in-law has written books on interior design, so I've always paid attention to detail. Even before the foundations were dug, I'd bought the Italian blown lights which I've themed each bedroom around. So, we have a purple, yellow, black and green room and then I commissioned canvases to match. My next idea is to design a tartan for each room."

Unlike many B&B owners that open their homes to guests, Karen also decided that her living space would be equally luxurious. "I live on site, I work on site and having the opportunity to design this property myself I ensured that my living quarters are as nice as the guests'."

Karen is a woman who certainly won't rest on her laurels and although the awards the property has won read like a who's who of the hospitality world including The Best B and B/Guest House in Scotland from Visit Scotland, AA and The Scottish Hotel Awards, The most



Eco friendly property for Scotland, Innovation Award and even a Dame of Hospitality for Karen from The Scottish Hotel Awards she still wasn't quite finished. Last year she completed her second self-build – ArdCreran, a luxury self-catering property next door to Ardtorna.

The two-bedroom, eco-friendly property has loch views, hot tub access and more gadgets and designer names than you can shake a stick at. Samsung Frame TVs, a Rangemaster cooker, Smeg appliances, Le Creuset pots, Villeroy & Boch cutlery, Dyson hairdryers and of course, every home needs an ice cream maker, air fryer, electric curtains and a cocktail shaker. Then there's the pillow mist menu and the salt station...

Karen employs a builder on a permanent basis to maintain the properties and any time she goes away for a few days, 'he's wondering what ideas I'll come back with'.

Which leads us on to what's next. "I'd like to build a spa at the back of the property but that'll require quite a lot of excavation. I'm not about adding beds and more guests, it's about enhancing the experience. I don't want to lose the personal touch."

With Karen at the helm, this won't be a problem. Did I mention she's also a trained chef and cooks breakfast for the guests too? "Breakfast gives me a chance to chat to the guests and that's why I brought in the salt station. I was in Malaysia when I first came across a salt station. It was incredibly theatrical, and I was really impressed. They offered four different salts so obviously I had to go with more! Now at breakfast I can recommend which salts will complement each dish."

[To book Ardtorna or ArdCreran visit ardtorna.co.uk](http://ardtorna.co.uk)



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