

Bothy brilliance



Stef Kaiser talks to Bobby Niven, founder of Bothy Stores, a hi-spec hut imagined as a work of art.

Bothy Stores sells architect-designed prefabricated cabins, alongside a range of products developed exclusively by a selection of prominent artists, designers and makers.

Its signature product is the Artist Bothy – a compact multipurpose cabin that can be installed on almost any site to provide a comfortable and sustainable private retreat. Sales of the Artist Bothy help to fund Bothy Project – a network of artist residency spaces across Scot-

land and beyond.

Bothy Stores is supported by Scottish Enterprise and Social Investment Scotland.

The Artist Bothy is an evolution of the Bothy Project network of off-grid artist residency spaces. Designed by the project's founders, artist Bobby Niven and architect Iain MacLeod, it was developed in response to demand for a multipurpose self-contained cabin that can be located almost anywhere.

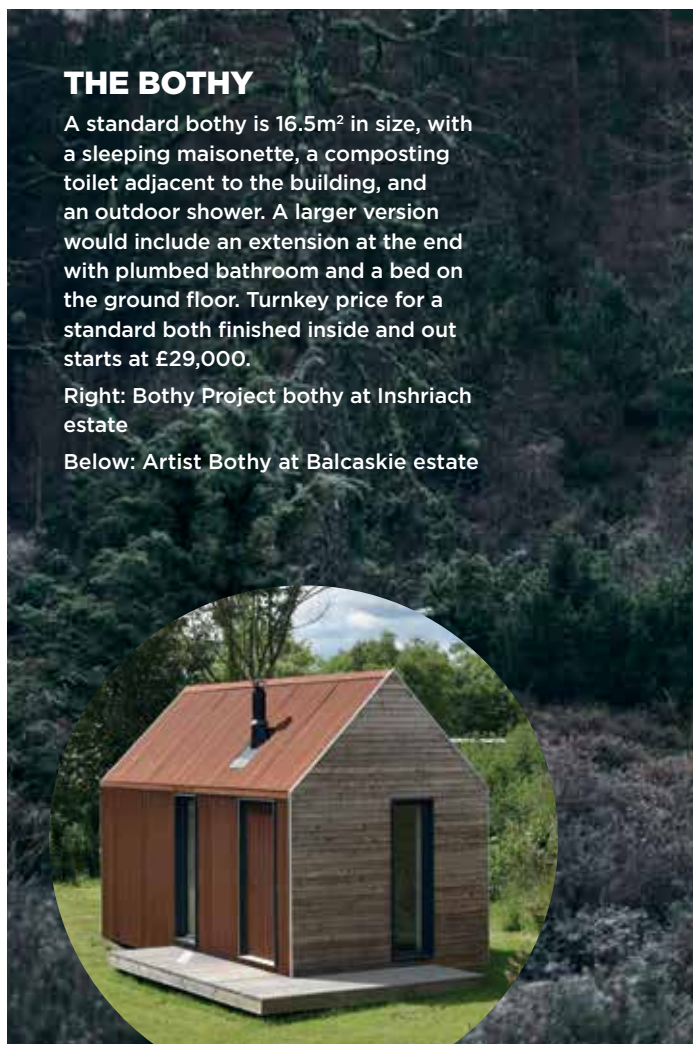
www.bothystores.com

THE BOTHY

A standard bothy is 16.5m² in size, with a sleeping maisonette, a composting toilet adjacent to the building, and an outdoor shower. A larger version would include an extension at the end with plumbed bathroom and a bed on the ground floor. Turnkey price for a standard both finished inside and out starts at £29,000.

Right: Bothy Project bothy at Inshriach estate

Below: Artist Bothy at Balcaskie estate



Artist and builder Bobby Niven (right) pictured with architect Iain MacLeod

How did you go from being an artist to designing wood cabins?

I was trained as an artist at Glasgow School of Art. In the art world, the challenge is sustaining practice and you end up working for other artists and galleries. And in doing so, you gain experience in working with different materials. While building timber constructions for gallery spaces, I started to enjoy joinery and carpentry and got interested in learning more about working with different types of wood or wood-based materials. From there, I started to get more and more involved in projects that required building wooden structures.

What are your considerations when sourcing timber for your bothies?

For Bothy Stores, we chose only trusted suppliers that we had experience working with before. For the cladding, we work with Russwood. As standard, they supply Scots larch for the gable end and the Russwood oak engineered floor, which is of European origin. For other timbers we have just started to work with Vastern Timber, who



THE BOTHY BUILDING BLOCKS

The Artist Bothy is constructed using a digitally-manufactured building system designed in partnership with Blok Build. The superstructure of these bothies is made out of closed-panel cassettes which are free of studwork. "It's a technique that could be using for housing but I haven't seen it being used in Scotland, Says Bobby Niven.

Sheets of OSB are cut into labelled parts on a CNC machine and assembled by hand into cassettes before being fully insulated and sealed. For the gable form the cassettes are joined by lap joints. This system is used for both the prefabricated and flat-pack version of the Artist Bothy.

The advantage of this construction technique is efficiency in both on-site construction and in resource use. The cassettes, which are made of OSB, don't rely on construction grade timber but use a lower grade sawmilling by-product, therefore maximising the carbon stored from a harvested tree.

offers a really great range of British timbers, including oak.

For us, price of materials is an issue because we face fierce competition from mainstream garden centres and other suppliers of off-the-shelf cabins. For them, cost is all that matters, not provenance of raw material, so that's who we compete with.

However, we'd like to use local or at least British timbers only and we are almost there. In some cases it is challenging to find suitable quality products at a competitive price, and we are still working a fair bit with Siberian larch, simply because of the excellent quality. The bulk of timber we use for our standard bothies is Scottish larch, which is fairly cost-effective and easy to source. If customers specify oak then there will be a mark up in price and it becomes a more exclusive designer product.

Currently, the OSB used in our cassettes is made from Smartply. I'd like to get more insight into provenance, energy efficiency and carbon footprint of the materials used. I would prefer it if the raw materials of the Blok Build cassettes were sourced from

the domestic supply chain and be able to specify it. Smartply was chosen for its quality and suitability, but is being processed in Ireland.

What makes your bothies special?

Following the trend of diversification of rural estates, glamping has become popular and as a result, there is quite a range of pods, cabins and yurts on the market. Design and longevity is what differentiates our bothies.

Aesthetically, they clearly stand out from the rest of glamping pods that are commonly seen around our country. They are architect-designed for a new, contemporary look, featuring minimalist shapes and a corrugated metal sheeting with an attractive rust patina. Culturally, and in the context of the big Scottish vernacular, it is this look that appeals to people, it reminds them of the countryside, of holidays in the Hebrides.

The bothies are designed to last a lifetime and built with with energy efficiency in mind. Under ideal conditions, the lifespan of

this metal sheeting is of 156 years, according to the supplier.

Who are your buyers?

A recent example of a Bothy installation is at Inverlonan estate, just outside Oban. The larger estate had been split up into smaller plots of land and they were looking to set up a Bothy hotel. The main farm steading was converted into a hotel centre with a series of bothies along the side of Loch Nell. Two bothies were installed at the start of this year and they are being used as "rough luxury" cabins. The resort was launched this year and demand is strong, especially given the staycation scenario. There is a key opportunity for landowners and events venues who need to move away from large gatherings towards smaller self catering units.

For the landlord, the return on investment for a cabin can be quite good, we're looking at 1.5 – 2.1 years to recover the cost of the bothy. But the benefit of the bothy over some other glamping pods is the return over the lifetime, because you can have it for 60 years.