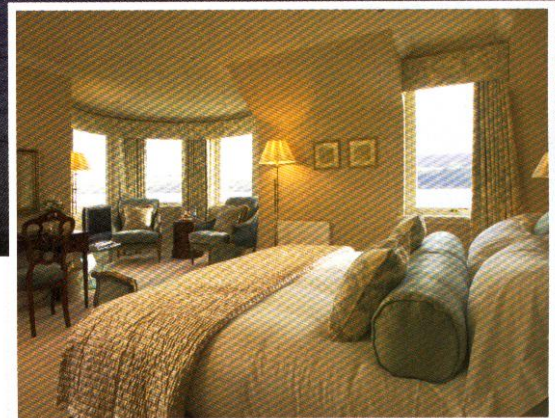
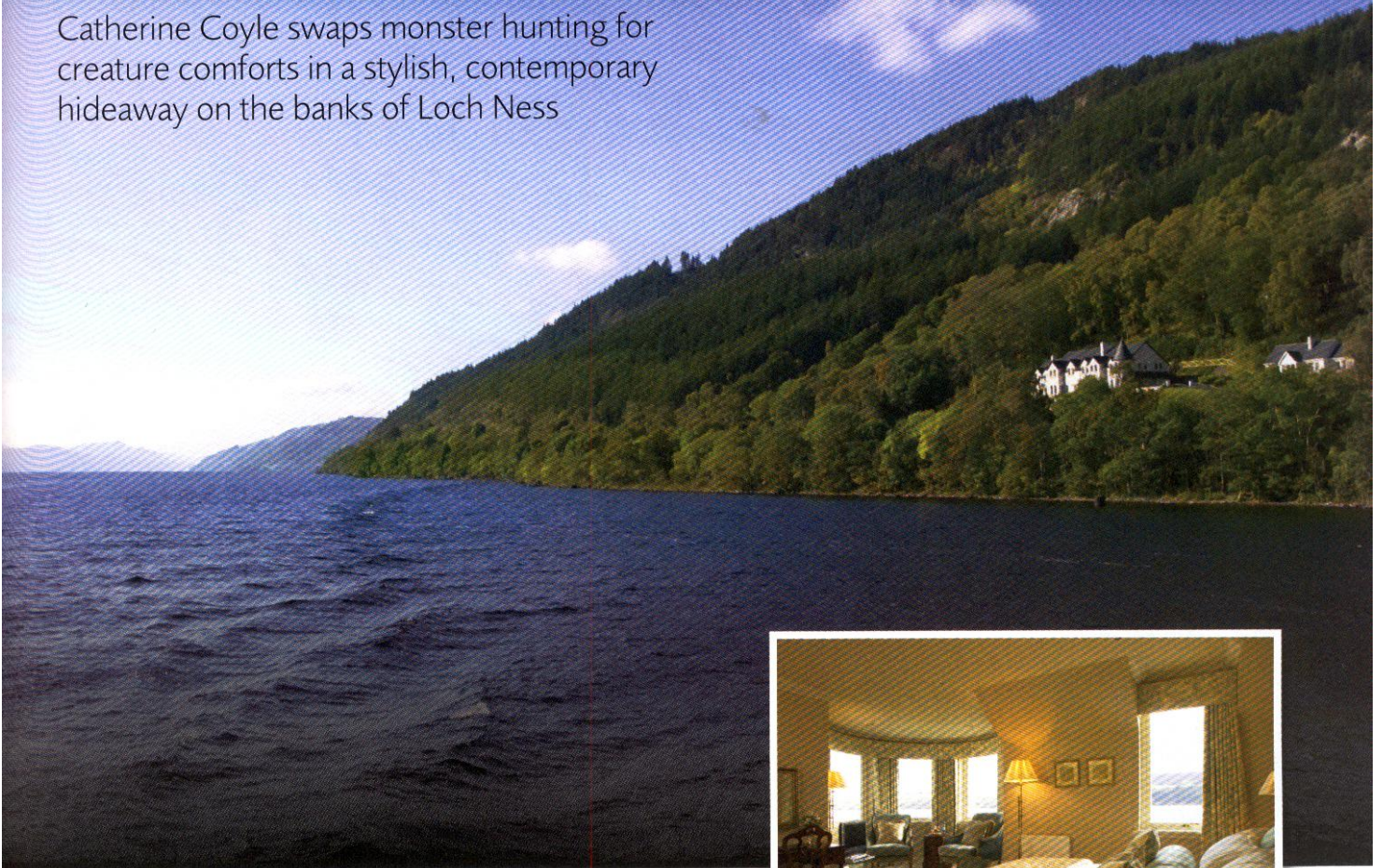


# Making waves

Catherine Coyle swaps monster hunting for creature comforts in a stylish, contemporary hideaway on the banks of Loch Ness



**I can't help myself.** I know it's ludicrous but I find myself repeatedly taking surreptitious glances towards the deep blue waters in a half-hearted attempt to see if I can see *it*. Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to boast a glimpse of Nessie? The legend of the Loch Ness Monster has thrived since the first reported sighting of a creature here in the early 1930s, and a host of Nessie hunters has flocked to the area ever since. Now, though, the monster myth has some competition: with a new attraction on the banks of the loch, Nessie's not the only reason to set out on a voyage of discovery.

Loch Ness Lodge, halfway up the western side of the loch, is a comparatively new kid on the block. Not only is the hotel little more than two years old, it's also a far more modern interpretation of the traditional 'lodge' than is usually found in Scotland's rural heartland. And while it's true that tartan and tweed play a large part in the interior scheme, the overall approach to this exclusive-use venue is undeniably more contemporary, offering visitors something a little, well, unexpected.

Having cut his teeth at luxury hotels such as Dunkeld's Kinnaird Estate and Boath House in Nairn, Scott Sutherland (one half of the Loch Ness Lodge partnership, alongside his sister Iona) returned to the family business with plans under way to create a five-star retreat, complete with a cluster of on-site cottages. The aim was to offer a sanctuary that exuded elegance and refined charm but that, at the same time, encouraged guests ►

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VISITORS ARE INSTANTLY DRAWN TO THE VIEWS OF THE DEEP BLUE WATERS THAT APPEAR WITHIN TOUCHING DISTANCE



[Above, left to right] The Lodge sits comfortably in the surrounding woodland; an example of head chef Ross Fraser's award-winning cuisine; the tranquil tones of the main lounge

to relax and enjoy the surroundings without the stuffy pretensions that so often blight the five-star package. "I didn't want this to be the kind of place where guests were afraid to sneeze or talk or laugh," explains Scott.

What the Sutherlands have achieved here is a difficult balancing act: indeed guests, be they overnight visitors or wedding parties, have chosen to stay at a chic, exclusive venue where attention to detail and an acutely personal service come as standard. Where Loch Ness Lodge differs from most of its rivals, however, is that this is the kind of place where, should you feel in the mood to kick off your shoes, grab a book from the library and enjoy a glass of wine curled up in front of the log fire as if you were at home, there will be no disapproving hotel manager ready to reprimand. This is not to say that anything goes, simply that the environment has been created to be enjoyed rather than to be revered.

Both the cuisine and the interior design have won awards in recent months: head chef Ross Fraser won a coveted Médaille d'Or for dining excellence (confirmation that the food here is well worthy of its two AA rosettes); while interior designer Joanne McDonald from Luma Interiors has been notching up accolades, in particular for the Lodge's bedrooms. "We were keen to create a warm Highland welcome but with a wow factor," she explains. Harnessing the Lodge's breathtaking surroundings, Joanne incorporated different elements of the landscape into her designs – the colours of the loch and the dramatic countryside playing a major role in the scheme she devised, where a subtle palette allows continuity to flow throughout the Lodge. She recognises that "poor old tartan" has had something of a bad press in recent years but nevertheless did not want to dismiss it out of hand. "There are some lovely modern versions of tartans and tweeds around," she explains, and the interior decor here is proof of this.

Add glamorous touches such as the Osborne & Little cabriole upholstered dining chairs in rich ruby tones and the tactile Nina Campbell chenille fabrics used in the reception area, and it's not surprising that visitors feel an immediate connection to the place. The Affric – one of the seven individually styled bedrooms, and my home for the weekend – was inspired by the loch's sandy shores. Its warm, understated tones create an air of tranquillity and visitors are instantly drawn to the views – from every aspect – of the deep blue waters that appear within touching distance. Plans have already been approved for the creation of a marina and boathouse at Loch Ness Lodge; not to take full advantage of this spectacular setting would be criminal. Binoculars at the ready... ■

Loch Ness Lodge, 01456 459 469, [www.loch-ness-lodge.com](http://www.loch-ness-lodge.com), [www.luma-interiors.co.uk](http://www.luma-interiors.co.uk)

## IN THE AREA

Fairy stories aside, a mystical beauty does envelop this part of the country. Historical attractions, wildlife hotspots and typically Scottish villages abound. **Culloden Battlefield** (above) and Fort George are a short drive away, while nearby **Glen Affric**, with its nature reserve, is often lauded as the most beautiful glen in Scotland. The village of **Beauly** brings together much of what the Highlands are known for, with a fine larder in the Robertson family's **Tomich farm shop**, along with **Campbell's Highland Tweed House** where you can get fitted for a hunting jacket, and **House of Beauly**, which boasts gifts, textiles and a new food hall. Take a break from retail therapy and head to the falls at **Foyers** before stopping off at the **Dores Inn** ([www.thedoresinn.co.uk](http://www.thedoresinn.co.uk)), an unassuming white-washed cottage that is home to a great pub-cum-bistro with a strong focus on fuss-free seafood in laidback surroundings.

