In brief
To celebrate the RIAS Festival of Architecture, Western Isles Architects Group and An Lanntair have teamed up to create the ‘Building our Islands’ project to increase awareness of architecture in the Outer Hebrides. This Architectural Trail has selected 29 notable places from the Butt of Lewis to Barra, with sites ranging in age from the Iron Age to the present.

The natural environment has significantly shaped architecture and human settlement, with towns and smaller settlements in the Outer Hebrides all close to the sea. The wet and windy climate is harsh on buildings and the architecture reflects this.

This trail is a mixture of public and private sites, historic and modern. These buildings show the skills and desires of island designers and craftsmen, mostly using local stone, sand and gravel. Other building materials were imported, since there is little timber or clay for building use. The importance of religion is reflected in some of the buildings chosen, while new buildings show the confidence Islanders have in reflecting their changing needs and aspirations.

As a result of the history of land ownership, very few houses predate 1880. The traditional dry-stone walled blackhouses, built in the North Atlantic longhouse tradition, gave way to newer White-houses with rendered stonewalls and a few standard layouts. Modern private homes now span a range of building materials, both local and imported, and feature unique and creative architectural design.

Acclaimed photographer John Maher has photographed the buildings, capturing the beauty of the islands’ variety of architectures.

Additional sites and information are available at www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk for more information on The Building our Islands project visit www.lanntair.com

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Locations

Lews Castle and Museum, Stornoway
Built in 1847-51 in the Neo-Gothic style popular in the Victorian era by Sir James Matheson and substantially altered by Lord Leverhulme. After being used as a school it re-opened in 2016 with the addition of a modern extension for the museum/archives.

The Boatman’s Tower, Stornoway
Built in the grounds of Charles Wilson’s Tudor Gothic Lewis Castle (1847-51). The boatman ferried people to Stornoway and the tower housed his family. It is one of three buildings voted as “their favourite building” as part of the Building our Islands Project.

An Lanntair, Stornoway
An Lanntair’s award winning building, designed by Nicoll Russell Studios, is inspired by its name, which means “the beacon” in Gaelic. The arts centre houses a multipurpose auditorium and cinema, gallery and café/bar.

Martin’s Memorial Church, Stornoway
A Stornoway landmark, built in 1878. Martin’s Memorial Church was designed by RA Bryden. An imposing Gothic church, The hall, designed by John Robertson, was added to the rear in 1893 and the pinnacles and spire were added in 1911.

Nicolson Institute Clock Tower, Stornoway
The Italianate Clock tower remains from the original elementary and infant school built in 1873, with the tower designed by Dr Alexander Ross in 1902. Adjacent to the Nicolson Institute, it is one of the three buildings voted as “their favourite building” as part of the Building our Islands Project.

Gibson Gardens, Stornoway
A large (in island terms) social housing project for rent which fits an urban site where a school hostel had been located. Completed in 2012 by local architects Anderson Associates. It was awarded the Outer Hebrides Design Award 2014 for Group Housing.

Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, Ness
Built in 1862 by David and Thomas Stevenson. Made from red brick, which was unusual for Scottish lighthouses, it is 37 metres high and has 168 steps to the top. Spray flies over the top of it in winter storms. It was one of the last lighthouses to be automated in 1998.

St Moluag’s Church, Ness
St Moluag’s Church is a 12th century Temple, said to have been built by the son of a Scandinavian King, who had converted to Christianity. Saint Moluag was a Scottish missionary and contemporary of Saint Columba. The building may have been altered up to the 16th century and was restored in 1911.

Architecture of Stornoway

Building our Islands: Architectural Trail

The leaflet has been produced by WAG and An Lanntair in association with Outer Hebrides Tourism.
**Locations**

**Garrannan Blackhouse Village, Carloway**
Blackhouses were common dwellings in the Hebrides. It is the best preserved one in Scotland. Dun Carloway, Carloway, was likely built in 1st Century AD Dun Carloway, Carloway.

**Dun Carloway, Carloway**
A broch is an iron-aged drystone hollow-walled structure found only in Scotland. Dun Carloway, was likely built in 1st Century AD and had four different phases of building. It is the best preserved Broch in the Outer Hebrides.

**The Summer House, Achmore**
Inspired by the traditional Hebridean summer dwellings or ‘airidhs’. The larch-clad cottage, designed by Stuart Bagshaw in 1999 as an interpretative centre of William MacGillivray, an ornithologist from Harris who worked with John, James Audubon on the book ‘Birds of America’. It is now a café.

**Amhuinnusuidhe Castle, North Harris**
Amhuinnusuidhe Castle was built in 1865 in the Scottish Baronial style by the architect David Bryce and the 7th Earl of Dunmore. The public road to Hushinish passes the front door and through a grand arch. (Access by prior arrangement only.)

**St Clements Church, Rediel**
St. Clement’s earliest sections date to the 15th Century and it is the finest pre-reformation church in the Hebrides. Inside is one of the most ambitious and richly-carved tombs of the time for the MacKee clan chief. The carvings depict biblical stories, a stylised castle, a hunting scene and a Birlinn galley.

**The Folly, Prevlop**
This medieval castle was the seat of the Clan MacNeil. Built in the 15th century it was abandoned in the early 18th century, with stones used for building shipball. It was rebuilt in 1996-70. In 2000 The MacNeil Clan Chief leased it to Historic Scotland for an annual rent of £1 and a bottle of whisky.

**Scalpay Bridge, Scalpay**
Scalpay Bridge opened in 1997 and was designed by Halcrow Crouch. It replaced a bow loaded ferry as Scalpay’s link to Harris. Its design had to consider complex geology, environmental impact, climatic conditions, the lack of existing infrastructure and fit the natural beauty of the location.

**Taigh Charsabhagh, Lochmaddy**
A former inn with detached stable/stonehouse, built on the site of an old salt-house. Later used as a bothy and an estate workshop, it became derelict and was rescued and extended by Taigh Charsabhagh Trust in 1994/95 as an arts centre and museum. It also serves as the local post office and café.

**The Broch House, Borne**
Inspired by Scottish coastal Iron Age buildings, it is probably the first broch built in the UK since the Roman era. The 21st century comforts in what could be an ancient ruin. Designed by Stuart Bagshaw (Private residence, please view from the road.)

**Scalpaig Tower, North Uist**
The folly was built on the site of an Iron Age broch by Dr. Alexander MacLeod in the 1830’s to provide work during a famine. Now open to the elements, it is a nesting place for birds.

**The Girnal, Rodel**
Large iron-roofed 18th century structure, it is thought to have been a store or ‘keeping house’ with two floors and three bays. It is one of three buildings voted as ‘their favourite building’ as part of the Building our Islands Project.

**Scolpaig Tower, North Uist**
The current steading was built in the early 1700’s, originally the site was part of a Nunnery from 1300. Converted for the Uist Preservation Trust by Simpson and Brown in 1999 and now used as a craft centre and tearoom.

**The Summer Village, Carloway**
What lies within.

**Benbecula Water Tower, Balivanich**
An iconic structure built in the early 1970’s to service the RAF station in Balivanich. It is no longer in use. It divides local opinion but local support saved it from demolition. Its height makes it a notable landmark in the flat Benbecula landscape.

**Our Lady of Sorrows, Garrynamonie**
Designed in 1965 by architect Richard McCarron, this Catholic church has been described as “brutalist”, owing little to traditional Outer Hebrides building styles. It was largely self-built by the parishioners.

**St Michael’s of the Sea, Eriskay**
Constructed by the islanders themselves under the guidance of Fr. Allan McDonald using local stone, timber salvaged from wrecks and a lime mortar of burnt shells and sand in 1899-1903. The altar rests on the bow of a lifeboat washed overboard from an aircraft carrier.

**Cultris Houses, Barra**
Built in 2000 for Barra & Vatersay Housing Association (now part of HHP) by Ben Tindall Architects following extensive community consultation. The curved ends, similar to Viking longhouses, reduce heat lost from wind chill. Many other energy-saving design features are included.

**Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Castlebay**
Our Lady, Star of the Sea, designed by G. Woulfe Brenan and completed in 1888, is perched atop a crag in Castlebay. The church dominates the bay and is a beacon for returning boats. It is built of local granite, and a bell and clock were added to the tower in 1891.

**Kisimul Castle, Castlebay**
This medieval castle was the seat of the Clan MacNeil. Built in the 15th century it was abandoned in the early 18th century, with stones used for shipping ballast. It was rebuilt in 1996-70. In 2000 The MacNeil Clan Chief leased it to Historic Scotland for an annual rent of £1 and a bottle of whisky.