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Scotland: the great slate debate

Scotland has a unique architectural style. Whereas many buildings in England could be anywhere, many in Scotland could only be in Scotland – a subtle blend of design, environment, history and natural materials has created a traditional character that would be worthy of a trademark.



Scottish roof with Ballachulish Slate

But although some of these ingredients are sustainable, unfortunately some of the natural materials that shout 'Made in Scotland' are not and nowhere is that more noticeable than on Scottish roofs. Scotland's quarries have long since fallen quiet – mined out and economically unviable, slate hasn't been mined in Scotland since the 1950s.

The quarries in the Easdale, Ballachulish, Macduff and Highland Border areas produced some of the finest roofing slates in the world, influencing the design of Scottish roofs and, in turn, the buildings themselves. Relatively small and thick, their size called for steep roof slopes to reduce the risk of water penetration and this coincidentally offered an opportunity to create a worthwhile living space under the rafters; they were ideal for detailing so that dormers, turrets, skylights and intricate designs became commonplace and perfect for diminishing courses that made the best use of all that was being produced.

Good quality slate is an exceptional roofing material – strong, resilient, flexible to use, easy to fix, drop-dead gorgeous – it's been used, and will continue to be used, for centuries. Demand caused by the decline of the UK's slate industry has led to a growing stream of imports but, although there's now plenty of choice, quality issues have moved centre-stage – there's no such thing as 'good, cheap roofing slate' and the perils of using it have to be both understood and addressed.

The need for authenticity on restoration projects, to meet aesthetic requirements in historically sensitive areas or to satisfy an understandable desire to use a truly home-grown material has created a thriving market for reclaimed Scottish roofing slates. But, despite an estimated service-life of 150 years or more, this is starting to falter as a reliable source of good-quality roofing slates – and particularly in any reasonable quantity or at an affordable price.

It's causing a dilemma the industry is struggling to answer: what to use as an alternative? A successor is needed – and it's got a tough act to follow!

If that's the problem, do we have an answer? Well, yes, we think we do – SSQ Riverstone® Grey roofing slate. Launched ten years ago, 'Riverstone' has a unique character that's remarkably similar to some traditional Scottish roofing slates. It's available in a range of grades, sizes and thicknesses, its quality is internationally acknowledged and its acceptance as a non-indigenous alternative on heritage and conservation projects around the country speaks for itself.

But that's what we think! Zoë Williams (Group Marketing Manager) would like to know what **you** think. Is Riverstone a worthy successor for the Scottish market? Is it a true contender or is it just another pretender? Please email your thoughts to Zoë at zoe@ssq.co.uk – we may publish a selection of them in the next issue of Slateworks! (And if you haven't seen Riverstone yet, we'll happily send you a sample.)



Uncover the source,
 discover the pedigree



Photo: courtesy East Lothian Council



SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone floor tiles *Natural Split* (SSQ photo library image)



Photo: courtesy East Lothian Council

Prestonpans Library – where architecture meets practicality

Project: Prestonpans Library
Location: Prestonpans, East Lothian
Architect: East Lothian Council Property Services, Haddington, East Lothian
Roofing: Reywood Construction, Tranent Product: SSQ Ultra Riverstone® Grey roofing slate
Flooring: Ruebell Contracts, Edinburgh Product: SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone floor tiles, Natural Split Finish

The generosity of Scottish-American businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie financed the creation of over 2,500 libraries between 1883 and 1929 and, of the 660 built in the British Isles, one stands proudly in the small seaside town of Prestonpans, a few miles east of Edinburgh.

Prestonpans' red-sandstone and slate-roofed library opened in December 1905 thanks to a generous grant from Carnegie of £1,500. Just over a century later the library re-opened after a £780,000, year-long project has extended and refurbished the building, enabling it to expand the range of services it can offer.

As one of Scotland's 'Category B' listed buildings – defined as 'buildings of regional or more than local importance, or major examples of some particular period, style or building type' – the challenge facing the architects in East Lothian Council's Property Services Department was to harmoniously blend and separate the old and the new. To help preserve the historic building's traditional character, the extension had to be of contrasting architectural style and finish but, just as importantly, it had also to complement the original and not appear to be either out of place or dominating it.

The existing building's plot-position, footprint, design and construction limited the site of the extension to the rear of the building which it would join at the gable end of a steeply pitched (40°), natural slate roof. Using this as an inspirational starting point, the extension's design features two disparate methods of construction to successfully marry it to the original building with the necessary 'complementary separation' required.

In practical terms, a dual-pitched roof running off the existing gable end (now an attractive interior wall) forms the 'backbone' of the 16.5m-long extension and on either side of this, shallow, mono-pitched roofs increase its overall width to 15m. To create a smooth transition from old to new, the new dual-pitched roof mirrors the form and appearance of its existing counterpart whereas the two adjoining side-extensions, along with the new gable end at the rear of the extension, are timber-framed and larch-clad with stainless-steel roofing.

Planning approval demanded the natural slate used on the extension match that of the original building and, as a result of its quality and appearance, SSQ Ultra Riverstone® Grey roofing slate was chosen. SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone floor tiles were used in the draught lobby of the new main entrance, their natural riven finish providing excellent slip resistance in this transitional area between internal and external environments.

The project won the *Architecture Meets Practicality* category of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional's (CILIP) biennial Public Library Building Awards 2007 which recognise the best libraries opened to the public.



Photo: courtesy East Lothian Council



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The Ideal Roofing Slate



Photo: courtesy Back to Front Exterior Design



Photo: courtesy Back to Front Exterior Design

Project: The Classic Show House at the EDF Energy Ideal Home Show, 2009
 Location: Earls Court, London
 Architect: Back to Front Exterior Design, Farnham
 Roofing: C&O Roofing, Huntingdon
 Product: SSQ Ultra Riverstone® Grey roofing slate (400 x 250 mm)

The Ideal Home Show has become enshrined in our design culture as a shop window for the latest domestic 'must haves'. So, being asked to supply the roofing slate for one of its two, inspirational show houses didn't need even a nanosecond's thought!

The world's largest and longest-running 'home interest' exhibition celebrated its 101st anniversary when it opened its doors at London's Earls Court Exhibition Centre earlier this year. Sponsored by EDF Energy, the show that launched the vacuum cleaner, the fridge and the microwave had a topical, no-nonsense, recession-driven theme of 'Don't move – improve!'.

As always, the show's legendary show houses dominated the exhibition; the full-size replicas providing a canvas on which to showcase ideas, deliver inspiration and create aspiration. Working to the show's theme, George and Yolande Hesse of Back to Front Exterior Design took 'a dull 1960's house lacking kerb appeal' and transformed it with an 'extreme makeover'. Based on a real house, two alternative schemes were presented to offer the widest range of ideas: the Classic Ideal Home and the Contemporary Ideal Home.

George Hesse was adamant about what he wanted on the roof of the classic home – it had to be natural roofing slate and nothing else would do! "I really dug my heels in on this subject!" said George. "Given what we were trying to achieve, I didn't feel that man-made 'slates' would be either appropriate or desirable." Having convinced the organisers, George called SSQ. "We've specified SSQ roofing slate on several occasions and I knew exactly what I wanted. Understandably, they didn't need any persuasion about whether they should have their flagship slate gracing the roof of a show house in the world's premier home show, and were delighted to supply the 4,500 slates we needed along with a contractor, C&O Roofing, to fit them!"

SSQ Ultra Riverstone® Grey roofing slate has become a popular choice of premium-quality roofing slate, its combination of quality, appearance, cost and availability making it ideal for both newbuild and restoration projects.

"The slates on the Classic Show House were one of its best aspects," George concluded. "They looked gorgeous and really set the building off. I feel vindicated – it was definitely the right decision!"



Uncover the source,
 discover the pedigree





Project: a privately commissioned sculpture
 Client: Haig and Kerri Oundjian
 Sculptor: Rocca Gutteridge
 Supplier: Amarestone, Finchampstead, Berkshire
 Product: SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone

The Skater – skating on Riverstone

It seems only yesterday that Haig Oundjian, Watford Football Club's former vice-chairman, was at the peak of his career as one of Britain's top ice skaters. With a 'big birthday' due in May this year, his family commissioned award-winning sculptor Rocca Gutteridge to create a tribute to his success.

Born in Surrey, Haig was brought up in Canada where his mastery of skating started at an early age. Entering the fiercely competitive world of figure skating, Haig won the Men's British Figure Skating Championship three times (1968, 1969 and 1971), represented Great Britain at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble in 1968 and then Sapporo in 1972 and was nominated for the BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 1970 and 1971.

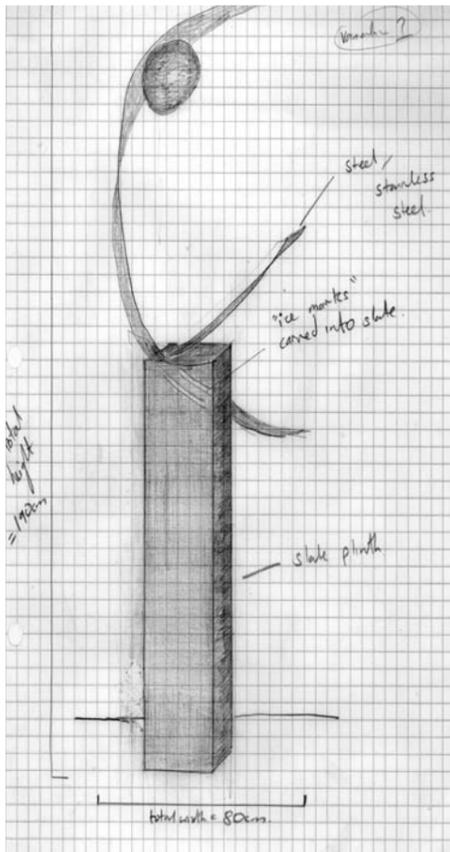
With her work having received international critical acclaim, Rocca Gutteridge is a talented and upcoming artist. Based at Edinburgh's Sculpture Workshop, Rocca has received commissions from around the world and has exhibited in France, Japan and the USA.

Having been approached by Haig's wife Kerri, Rocca worked closely with the couple to understand the subject and capture its essence. As she explained: "I wanted to capture the action and movement of a skater as they move across the ice. The slate represents the cold, hard, ice and the stainless-steel shards pierce the slate which is carved to create the lines we associate with movement on ice. I chose slate as I knew that carving it would create exactly the effect I wanted and Riverstone's beautiful quartz veining added an extra dimension which was a real bonus."

"I found SSQ through Google. They were really helpful when I contacted them and introduced me to one of their suppliers, Amarestone near Reading. Although I knew what I was looking for, it took a day searching through Amarestone's vast stock to find a slab with exactly the right colour and amount of quartz veining and then another long, hard day to bring it all together. I'd like to thank Steve Turner and stonemasons Ben Dixon and Kevin Drake for their patience and technical expertise."

"Sculpting can be rewarding work, even more so when you get the opportunity to work on such a personal level, with such high-quality materials and so much enthusiastic, professional help. I know Haig and Kerri are delighted with 'The Skater' and it takes pride of place in the garden of their London home – I'm pleased that I've given them something that celebrates Haig's success in the sport."

Rocca's work can be seen at www.roccagutteridge.co.uk



Sketch: courtesy Rocca Gutteridge



Payment by credit card

We've recently been asked if we accept payment by credit card. The answer is most certainly yes, we do (but not American Express or Diners Club International), and you can use your credit card for payment either in person or over the phone.

We hope you've enjoyed *Slateworks* and found it inspiring. If you have anything you would like us to consider for future issues, or would like us to send you, or your colleagues, additional copies, please contact Zoë Williams on:

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Samples and literature

A full range of product guides, slate samples and geological test documents are available on request from:

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