



Left: The mobile sauna set up for the evening. Below: Parked up at Castletown Beach, at the western corner of Dunnet Bay. All photos: Caorann Fosbrooke.

foot trailer and fully committed to the mobile sauna dream. Within a few months, an idea on a screen had turned into real wood and steel.

Throughout the design and build process, I spent a lot of time carefully researching what makes a good sauna. The principles are surprisingly simple: quality heat, good airflow, comfortable seating and materials that can withstand repeated cycles of heat and moisture. The challenge was fitting all of that into a structure capable of travelling Scotland's roads while still feeling welcoming and beautiful.

Timber was central to many of those decisions. My original ambition was to use entirely local timber throughout, but after much deliberation I chose imported Western Red Cedar for the interior cladding and benches. Its stability, durability and reputation as a sauna timber made it difficult to find an accessible and affordable Scottish equivalent.

I was delighted to be able to use locally sourced Scottish larch for the exterior cladding. The trees were felled just two miles from my dad's croft near Loch Migdale, outside Bonar Bridge. We milled the timber ourselves using his Lucas Mill and

If you can stand the heat

Saunas are popping up like mushrooms all over the country. Caorann Fosbrooke has built a mobile one

About five years ago, during a short spell of living in Nairn, I visited Watershed Sauna (watershedsauna.com) in Findhorn and was completely blown away. We watched dolphins swimming offshore, enjoyed a few rounds of heat in the sauna and exhilarating dips in the sea, shared plenty of laughs, and left feeling utterly blissful. I came away with a new appreciation and slight obsession for outdoor sauna culture and continued trying them wherever I could, all the while dreaming up ideas and designs to one day build a sauna. A couple of years ago that idea began to become a reality!

Luckily, designing and building a sauna suited my skill set perfectly. I grew up learning from wonderfully creative parents, my mum Christel, an artist and art teacher, and my dad, Henry, a man devoted to woodcraft, trees and interesting projects (www.logtagon.com). Childhood was spent drawing, creating, chopping and carving – experiences that later shaped both my career as a design engineer and my creative hobbies, from campervan conversions to building wooden surfboards and surf craft.

Alongside that, surfing became a lifelong obsession. Through countless hours in the sea, I developed a deep appreciation for Scotland's coastline, weather and wild places. Looking back, it is no surprise that I became captivated by the idea of designing and building a sauna suited to the Scottish wild.

In 2023, my now wife Jasmine and I moved to Thurso. Living in Caithness only deepened my appreciation for the coastline. The beaches, cliffs and ever-changing seas felt like the perfect setting for a sauna experience, yet at the time there were none in the area. The idea of creating a space that encouraged people to slow down, connect with nature and enjoy these landscapes in a different way became the driving force behind Clach Mara Sauna.

With design support from my dad and advice from Ross at Glass & Grain Saunas (glassandgrainsaunas.com), the sketches evolved into a detailed 3D model, and a business plan. An amazing start-up grant from Highlands and Islands Enterprise topped up my own life savings, and before I knew it, I had ordered a 14-



BUILDING OF THE COAST

Right, clockwise from top:
Processing the timber for the sauna build.
Watertight and on the trailer.
The finished interior.
Fitting out the interior.
Putting on the exterior cladding.
All photos: Caorann Fosbrooke.

trusty rusty old Fordson Major tractor, before passing it to a local craftsman who planed it into rainscreen cladding. Not long afterwards, we were fixing it to the sauna walls.

The wood-fired stove is another key part of the design. Great saunas are not simply about reaching high temperatures. The quality of the heat matters more. Water poured onto hot stones creates *löyly*, the gentle burst of steam that defines the traditional sauna experience. It is this combination of heat and humidity that creates a feeling of relaxation, restoration and connection. Seeing the warm glow of the stove on a dark Scottish winter night also adds that extra comfort to the heat.

The build itself took around eight weeks. Five of those were spent in the Glass & Grain workshop in Perth getting the structure weatherproof before towing it north to Thurso for the finishing touches and exterior cladding.

Nearly a year on, Clach Mara Sauna is doing exactly what it was built to do: sitting in beautiful places and offering a simple wild sauna experience to both locals and visitors. Don't get me wrong, building it, and running the business alone, has been the most challenging project of my life – and I owe a huge thanks to people who helped the dream come to life, and all the amazing customers so far. Every challenge feels worth it when I see people emerge smiling, hear laughter drifting from the benches or watch someone quietly appreciating the beauty of the ocean and elements around them.

For me, that connection between people, place and wellbeing is what Clach Mara Sauna is really about.

www.clachmarasauna.com

Caorann Fosbrooke is a mobile sauna operator in Caithness.

