

# LIVING

WINTER

THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

## LIGHT FANTASTIC

ARTIST PAM CARTER ON CAPTURING SCOTLAND'S  
ETHEREAL LIGHT AND VIBRANT COLOURS

### SPICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

*The story behind Glasgow's  
spicy Wester Rum distillery*

### FOOD TO WARM YOUR HEART

*Scotland's top chefs reveal  
their comfort food favourites*

### PUTTING HER HOOS IN ORDER

*Karen Harvey MBE on how  
she came to launch Hoos*

### THE JOY OF STAYING PUT

*Fabulous staycation  
destinations for 2021*

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# LIGHT *o f h e r* LIFE

By Maggie Ritchie

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*Pam Carter may have spent her childhood in Africa, but it's the ethereal essence of Scotland's light and landscape that inspires her art these days.*

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**P**AM CARTER's landscape paintings are alive with the tropical colours of her East African childhood – turquoise water and skies, orange and flame-red sunsets, purple mountains, emerald fields and golden sands.

However the vibrant scenes she paints are not those of Tanganyika, now Tanzania, where she lived until the age of 13, but of the Western Isles.

“When I studied at Glasgow School of Art, the fashion was for muted greys, but I always loved colour and was influenced by Joan Aardley and the Scottish Colourists,” says Pam.

“It wasn’t until I discovered the pure light and the drama of the Western Isles that I found an outlet for my love of colour.”

She became hooked and a lifelong love affair was established. “Once the isles grip you, you don’t go back,” she says.

Pam can trace her desire to be an artist back to her early years in East Africa, where she was born to an Austrian mother and Scottish father.

“My Jewish mother escaped from the war during the Anschluss, fleeing Vienna with her family when she was 15. She went to Cyprus then Israel, ending up in Africa, where my grandfather built up a delivery business.

“She met my father, who had been posted to North Africa by the Air Force and who ended up in East Africa after the war.

“I went to the only school available, a convent, and have happy memories of Africa. My first recollection of loving art was watching an artist paint Mount Meru when I was nine years old – it made me look again at the landscape.”

Pam was inspired to enter a children’s competition, which she won with a painting of people washing their sheets down by the river and spreading them out to dry on the rocks.

“Today I still love painting washing lines, but they are on Tiree rather than Africa,” adds Pam, whose family moved back to Glasgow, where she attended Bearsden Academy. “When independence came it was time to leave, as it was no longer safe for us.”

After graduating from Glasgow School of Art in 1974, Pam spent some time in the Seychelles, teaching pottery in a school for art and design.

“I was back among the bright colours of my childhood and when I got back to Scotland I missed them,” she says.

Pam taught in schools and colleges, latterly in Falkirk College, working on her own paintings in her spare time.

“I painted every spare minute that I wasn’t



*“Today I still love painting washing lines, but they are on Tiree rather than Africa”*

lecturing, which was exhausting. I left in 2003 to paint full time. It was a leap of faith but it was the right thing to do.”

Pam has her principal studio in her home in Torrance, outside Glasgow. Every inch is covered in original paintings and sculptures grouped in themes such as ‘swimmers’ in the

bathroom and a whole wall dedicated to her other love – dogs. She shares her home with Reuben the weimaraner and Harry Renaud the French bulldog.

“My cottage studio is the ideal place to work and live,” she says. “It’s in a lovely village on the outskirts of Glasgow below the Campsie Hills. The interior living space has a chunky chimney as well as a fabulous new extension with a glass link to another living space.”

Pam also has a cottage in Skye, which has a studio in the garden, an armadillo-shaped pod. “It’s right on the beach and has amazing views over to Knoydart.”

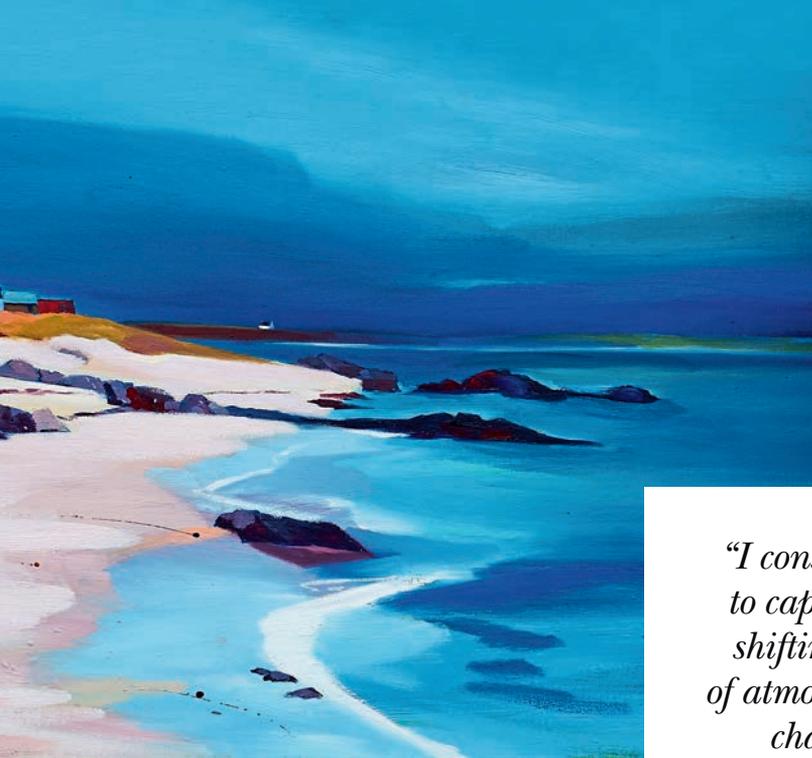
While she stayed put in Glasgow during lockdown, usually she spends her summers on Skye, running an annual exhibition at the An Talla Dearg in Isleornsay for five weeks.

“My main inspirations as an artist are the Scottish landscape and seascape. I enjoy using colour to define contours, structure and changing light sequences. I search out specific viewpoints. I’m equally inspired by the rugged isolation of the Western Isles and the dramatic viewpoints of the eastern coastline.

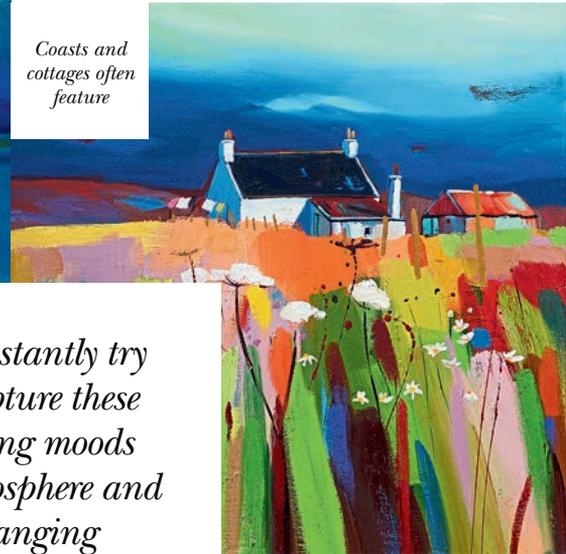


*Pam's paintings capture light and colour*





*Coasts and cottages often feature*



*“I constantly try to capture these shifting moods of atmosphere and changing sequences of light”*



“People will see a painting they like and ask for something similar, or they may love a particular island or cottage and ask for that.”

One of her most notable customers who came twice to see her annual exhibition on Skye was Princess Anne.

“I didn’t recognise her the first time she came ashore eight years ago – she’d been sailing with her husband off Skye. I even asked her if she’d rented her boat. She bought a beautiful print for her daughter, Zara.

“Two years ago she came back and this time I recognised her. What are you supposed to say to a Royal? I just stretched out my hand and told her I did recognise her this time!

“We had a lovely conversation about my art and she bought a print of Edinburgh Castle. I told her that I don’t usually paint castles, and she said ‘I know’. We had a great chat.”

Pam, 68, has a strong Christian faith, which, along with her art, has helped her cope with being diagnosed and successfully treated for breast cancer eight years ago. It has recently returned and she is undergoing treatment.

“I’m so grateful to have God in the centre of all this and I’m loving this period of my life, even though it’s a difficult situation. God has given me so much strength.

“The doctors have given me a good prognosis and I have no plans to give up work. An artist never retires.”

[www.pamcarter.co.uk](http://www.pamcarter.co.uk)

“A trip to the Western Isles always brings great reward as you can find sweeping golden sands and turquoise waters.

“Tiree has never-ending silver shores, scattered crofts and cottages, and a quality of light that can only be described as unique. Skye is renowned for its weather patterns, and I constantly try to capture these shifting moods of atmosphere and changing sequences of light.

“I love the iconography of Harris and Lewis: the harbours, the boats, the birds.

“The east coast seas and landscapes change frequently. I can’t resist trying to capture the many scenes – quaint fishing villages, rugged shorelines and sweeping sands.

“Often it’s the elements or the untamed force of nature that are my inspiration, but more than anything it’s the essential quality of light that Scotland has to offer.”

“I paint a number of themes: sunlit beaches, moody skies, white cottages,

wildflowers, mountain ranges, flights of birds, quirky sheep, harbours and beached boats, islands and sunsets. Each location and island has a different character.

“I’m drawn to the beach, to water and rocks, to the machair flowers, to island cottages, mountains and headlands. I have a small hunting ground but I love it.

“Every time I go back to a place it looks different, depending on the time of day, the season and the weather.”

Pam works predominantly in oil on several paintings at one time, building each one up over several stages, with paintings taking around eight weeks, and producing around 200 a year.

Her award-winning landscapes of coastlines, cottages and wildflowers, beaches and vistas such as Edinburgh Castle, are hugely popular, with people snapping up her paintings and prints online and in galleries and art fairs around the country. She also works to commission.