



Here comes Santa Claus: The faux stone fireplace was a labour of love but it's the perfect backdrop for the Christmas feast.

A CHRISTMAS CRACKER

After struggling to find the perfect log cabin to call her own, Alison Hougham stumbled across a piece of land that she has transformed into a festive fairytale, says **Nichola Hunter**

Personally, when someone says 'log cabin' I think of American settlers, Little House on the Prairie, and big, solid, chunky buildings. Alison Hougham thinks the same but surprisingly finding someone to build one of these nowadays is rather difficult.

'When I started Googling "cabins", what came up wasn't what I had in mind,' recalls Alison. 'The only things I could find were pre-fabricated, static caravan versions which were on sites with maintenance fees. Even when I started Googling "log cabins" they were akin to glorified sheds. I was just about to give up and then on page ten of Google search I found a Canadian company, Pioneer Log Homes, and I thought "that's it, that's exactly what I had in mind".'

After contacting their UK agent, Alison came up to Scotland to see a couple of examples of what they'd built, and she liked what she saw.

'I had thought about building down south, but the agent mentioned there was land for sale in the area and probably cheaper as well, so I compiled a list of land that I wanted to view in Scotland. However, a week before I planned to return to Scotland to view said land, I went on a blind date.'



Ho ho ho: Reds, greens and golds with a splash of tartan finish the look.

While Alison and her date didn't hit it off romantically it transpired he was selling a piece of land in Scotland and Alison asked if she could view it. 'It sounded idyllic and it was. I did go to my other appointments, but his was by far the best. So, that's how I came to own 1.7 acres in the woods on the shores of Loch Garry with a little burn and a lovely old Sir Thomas Telford Bridge.'

Once planning and building warrants were organised Alison ordered the logs. 'About half way through the process I went to Canada to check on progress and on 28 September 2016 the logs arrived in Scotland. Peter, the Timber King lumberjack from Canada, came across and the whole thing went up in a day and a half with the assistance of a crane. Then my carpenter took over to frame the roof and do all the internal work. Electricity

and heating were put in, the windows came a bit later than they should have, but by February everything was in and then it took me about a month to do all the little bits to get it just right.'

Alison had been living on-site since the groundworks started in July, starting off in a caravan and then building a garage which has now become The Bunk House. In February she

finally moved into the cabin.

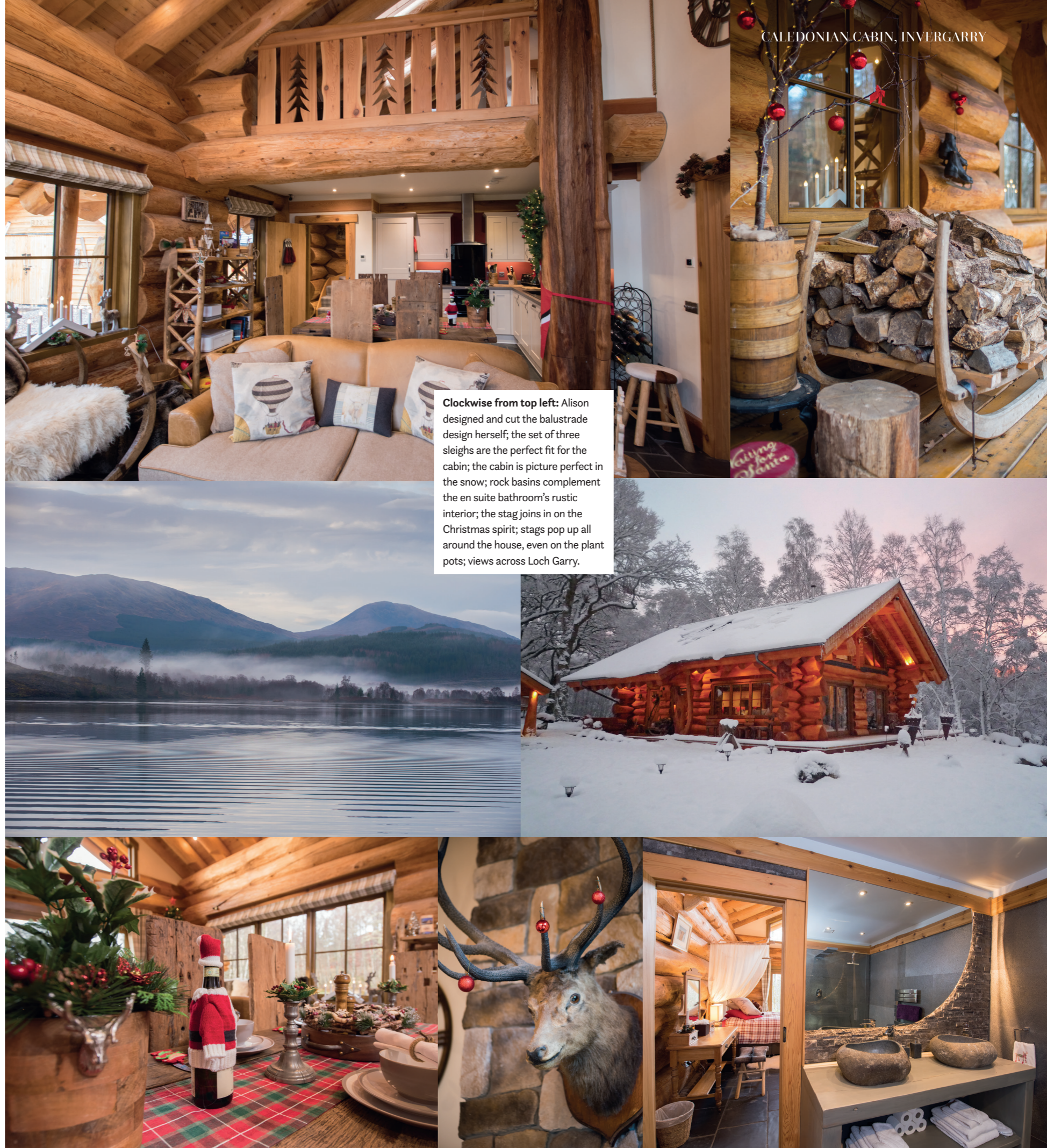
While Pioneer Log Homes can create some amazing properties, Alison's design was relatively simple. 'My brief to the architect was to design a very classic log cabin. The architect suggested the mezzanine level which has been something of a bonus, but aside from that it's pretty straightforward.'

The layout incorporates a master bedroom and en suite on the ground floor along with a kitchen, dining and living area, and the gallery space upstairs houses a twin bedroom, sofa bed and bathroom. The Shepherd's Hut that sits out the back under the oak trees offers additional accommodation.

Although the layout is straightforward, the decoration and furnishing of the property is intricate and highly detailed. 'I own the Packhouse interior and lifestyle store in Surrey so I'm not an interior designer, but I have an eye for interesting pieces. I knew how it was going to look inside and I just worked backwards from there.'

While the cabin lends itself brilliantly to Christmas celebrations the sleighs weren't actually bought with Christmas in mind. 'It was during my time buying for the Packhouse that I came across the sleighs and I bought a small, medium and large one which were made in Eastern Europe. I had no idea what I was going to do with them, but I really liked them and

“My brief was to design a very classic log cabin



CALEDONIAN CABIN, INVERGARRY

Clockwise from top left: Alison designed and cut the balustrade design herself; the set of three sleighs are the perfect fit for the cabin; the cabin is picture perfect in the snow; rock basins complement the en suite bathroom's rustic interior; the stag joins in on the Christmas spirit; stags pop up all around the house, even on the plant pots; views across Loch Garry.



Above: The view from the gallery level. **Below:** Alison gets the fire prepped for guests arriving.

TOP TIPS

Decorating for Christmas

1. Decide whether to harmonise or contrast and then try and keep to two colours.
2. Once you've chosen your theme, stay true to it.
3. Remember that sometimes less is more.
4. Make as many decorations as you can yourself from natural finds. Doing this can help fill large spaces inexpensively. Twigs painted or sprayed white with a dusting of glitter can look stunning.
5. Think about your audience. If you've got guests coming to stay, especially little ones, get them involved.

I took them up to the cabin. In March it was my 50th birthday and I had invited friends up to the cabin, but my sofa hadn't arrived yet. I had a hot tub but nothing to sit on. A friend mentioned that the large sleigh was so big you could make it into a bed, so I brought it in from outside, put the mattress from The Bunk House on it and covered it in some lovely goat hair rugs and cushions and it was the best seat in the house. When the sofa arrived, everyone agreed that the sleigh had to stay.'

Another talking point is the rock basins in the en suite bathroom. 'The first rock basin I bought for my house at home and it came from eBay. There are a few companies that sell them now and I think they originate from Indonesia. They're real river boulders that have been carved out and I think they're stunning.'

Alison certainly has an eye for the unusual but she's also not afraid to get her hands dirty to get the look she wants. 'I had planned to have a large stone chimney going right up through the house but it's incredibly expensive. Then I found a company at The Grand Designs Show and they were importing stone slips from America which looked

“ The large sleigh was so big you could make it into a bed, so I brought it in from outside



incredibly realistic. So, we framed the chimney breast and clad it in this faux stone from America. It was a joint effort between myself and the tiler. He was cutting while I was up there sticking it on where I wanted it. Everyone that sees it thinks that it's real stone.'

Again, dismayed at the cost implications, Alison had to think outside the box to come up with a balustrade design that came within budget. 'The balustrades were going to be a lovely woodland design plasma cut into sheet steel but as much as it was beautiful, I couldn't justify the money. The carpenter suggested I cut some thistles into the wood but I'm not that keen on thistles, so I thought perhaps some trees? I made up a template, got the jigsaw out, had a go and they looked alright so I went for it. I'm very proud of my trees, they're by me.'

This is indeed the house that Alison built and so successfully that Pioneer Log Homes were so impressed with the result that they've made her their UK distributor. Just goes to show, seek and you shall find, eventually on page ten of Google search.

Above: Alison on the front porch. **Left:** The gallery bath has a beautiful view. **Below left:** Tucked under the eaves is the gallery bedroom which can sleep two to four comfortably.



FIELD FACTS

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