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## THIS LIFE Lorne Blyth

Having built up a niche travel business specialising in Italian cookery holidays, Lorne combines frequent trips abroad with life in Edinburgh's Stockbridge, where she has created a light-filled home for her young son

Text by Fiona Armstrong Photography by Angus Bremner







Lorne Blyth's spacious Georgian apartment is light and airy, the white painted floorboards [left and right] highlighted by the original sash-and-case windows. The baby grand piano [above] is a source of fun for Lorne and Calum, while her online sales – part of her Flavours travel business – include these funky jute floor cushions [above left]. Throws and cushions in the living room [left] are from Anta and John Lewis. In the hall [below right] is an original poster from Local Hero







**Dropping in to Lorne Blyth's place** is an uplifting experience. It's something to do with the white spaces, the exhilarating pace of our host's conversation and the intense beans in her coffee pot. The latter have enjoyed a robust life before being roasted and blended in Italy, the country at the thumping heart of Lorne's working days.

Ten years ago she spotted a gap in the market for holidays that immerse guests in the Italian love affair with food. "At the time cooking holidays involved British chefs travelling to Italy," says Lorne, who conceived a more organic experience utilising the traditional skills of Italian cooks. Flavours Cookery Holidays filled its first villa in the Lazio region in 1998. A decade later, it has expanded into six Italian regions and opened premises in Edinburgh's Stockbridge.

Lorne frequently visits the privately-owned Italian villas she cherrypicks to host guests. But home is a flat within a handsome Georgian building, a stroll from the office. She lives there with son Calum and enjoys vistas to shared gardens at the front and a cobbled street to the rear. "I love the city," says Lorne, "yet it's peaceful here and nobody looks on to us."

The flat represents new beginnings for Lorne, whose ▶





Lorne and Calum [above] love the quiet of their Edinburgh home [right] with gardens to the front and cobbled streets to the rear. In the bedroom [left], the throw and curtains are monogrammed with Lorne's initials



## "I LOVE THE WAY THE DRAWER IN THE WOODEN MONEYBOX PINGS OPEN. I KEEP PRECIOUS THINGS IN IT, SUCH AS CALUM'S BIRTH NAME TAG"

world was shattered three years ago by the sudden loss of Calum's dad, her fiancé, Guy Henderson, in an accident. In the aftermath, she explains, her focus on life sharpened.

"You reassess what's important and I wanted to find a place I really liked," she says, leaving a rural lifestyle in West Lothian for the city. Initially she rented this flat, but when the owners decided to sell, Lorne snapped it up. With the help of painters and decorators, she subsequently gave the place a makeover, lifting carpets to reveal floorboards that were then painted white, like the walls. "Even in the middle of winter it feels light and bright," says Lorne.

Sash-and-case windows remain in good working order and Lorne plans to expose cornice work concealed by a lowered ceiling. Originally part of one large house, the flat's modifications include a 1970s' recess in the living room, the walls of which had small, ineffective windows that Lorne had boarded up and painted over.

Her honed focus also prompted a paring down of possessions. "I just wanted things I love," explains Lorne. A prime example is a traditional Fair Isle straw-backed chair in the living room, handcrafted using hardwoods and straw (from Shetland oats) by islander Stewart Thompson. Lorne and Guy – who met in 1989 in Shetland – commis-

sioned the chair and some of the wood used came from a ship wrecked on Fair Isle at the turn of the last century.

Other treasured possessions include a wonderful foghorn that belonged to Lorne's father and, beside it on the hearth, a wooden moneybox from Edinburgh's Laigh coffee house, bought at auction. "I love the way the drawer pings open," she laughs; "I keep precious things in it, such as Calum's birth name tag."

Seating, including a pale grey Habitat sofa, strikes a contemporary chord that suits Lorne's pared-down style. Anta cushions and throws, and Habitat cushions, provide injections of colour, as does a fabulously curvaceous lime easy chair from Edinburgh's Moleta Munro.

A competent piano player, Lorne bought the second-hand baby grand after moving to the flat. "It's one of the few things that makes me switch off," she says, "and Calum is learning now."

It's easy to imagine dinner parties developing into a night of music and song, a conviviality that's at the heart of Lorne's business.

Lorne's weathered timber table was originally part of a sideboard, the legs too short for a dining table when she found it (at Courtyard Antiques, Causewayside), but the ►





## WHAT LORNE LIKES

An Italian friend runs **an annual flea market** in her street in central Bologna, which has lots of great finds.

I love being **in Puglia in the summer**. A day at the beach, reading, sunbathing and playing with my son is just perfect.

**Venice is the place** where I feel most inspired and creative. I spent my last birthday there.

It's difficult to choose between *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Thomas Crown Affair* as **my favourite feel-good film**.

My mother makes the most **delicious scones with her own home-made raspberry jam** (raspberries from the nearby Clyde Valley). With a with a cup of leaf tea, they are hard to beat.

When it comes to cooking, I'd say **keep it simple**. I don't like things overly complicated.

Dean Gardens is a bit like **a secret garden** and we have the magic key to open the gate. One particular bench has a fantastic view over the water of Leith and St Bernard's Well – the perfect spot to linger with a flask of coffee on a sunny day.

I'm often to be found at **Sprio**, the Italian coffee shop on St Stephen Street. There's live Italian radio, newspapers and a great cappuccino.

Even on the coldest day, I can't resist getting my shoes and socks off and **going for a paddle** in the water when I'm at the beach.

**My biggest indulgence has to be travel**. As well as time in Italy, this year we've had a month in South Africa, I spent eight days exploring San Francisco and Napa Valley, and we also took my son on his first ski-ing holiday to Austria.

A necessity is **a daily cuddle** from my son.



The success of Flavours Holidays has led to Lorne opening an Edinburgh office (far left). A much treasured piece of furniture, the Fair Isle chair (left) takes pride of place in the living room

"PLAYING PIANO IS ONE OF THE FEW THINGS THAT MAKES ME SWITCH OFF AND CALUM IS LEARNING NOW"



shop owner spliced in new timber to add height. It's typical of the loved and used pieces in this home, where nothing is just for show. "Calum plays there, too," Lorne confirms.

Her uncontrived style is also evident in the mix of dining chairs: white contemporary designs from Inhouse socialise with a farmhouse chair from the Tim Hardie antique shop (now at the Rait Antique Centre, Perthshire).

Lorne recalls her first encounter with Italy. After graduating in German, politics and economics, she worked in a village in Lazio as an au pair. "From the language to the lifestyle, everything was engagingly chaotic and I was seduced," she says. Working with children, using simple sentence structures, allowed her to grasp the language more readily.

Another dimension to her business is online sales of Italian home ware, including pretty pasta tins and funky travel bags. Jute floor cushions Lorne sells, depicting the words "Bla Bla", have made their way into her living room while her bedroom boasts a bed throw and curtains (subtly monogrammed with her initials) made from linens sourced by friend, Vanna Rossi, in Italy. "She makes these fabulous linen aprons including French nun designs," Lorne explains.

The Timorous Beasties' bedside lamp was a buy from Moleta Munro while the towel ladder was picked up at Habitat.

Calum's bright room is filled with toys and he loves joining friends to play in his tepee (from Habitat) when it's outside in the gardens. In the hallway there's an original poster from *Local Hero*, a film his dad loved.

The location of this home – close to Calum's nursery as well as work – makes life easier for Lorne. And with a large proportion of guests rebooking Flavours holidays, business only gets busier.

At the end of the day, she loves returning to the cathartic home she has created. "It feels like an extension of who I am now," she confirms. ■

**Flavours Italian Cookery Holidays, 132 St Stephen Street, Edinburgh, 0131 625 7002, [www.flavoursholidays.co.uk](http://www.flavoursholidays.co.uk)**