



"Rocks at Luskentyre - one of my personal all-time favourites, it was actually taken some years ago on slide film" says David Wilson

# Picture thriller to accompany crime novel series

By Katie Macleod

**'Hebrides' is a love letter - a lyrical and breathtakingly beautiful love letter - to the landscape and culture of the Western Isles, to the islands on the edge of the Atlantic that inspired the international best-selling 'Blackhouse' trilogy by Peter May.**

The photo book, released on September 26th, is billed as a companion to the fictional journey of Fin MacLeod, the protagonist at the core of Peter's crime novels - but it is much more than that. With prose by Peter and pictures by his close friend and former colleague, Barvas-based photographer David Wilson, 'Hebrides' documents the archipelago as it really is, and offers an insight into the inspiration behind the books.

An Lannatair's Faclan book festival will see the two friends reunited once more, as they introduce the audience to 'Hebrides' at a November 2nd event entitled 'Crime and Place.' 'Hebrides' first covers the history of the land and the locals, before Peter provides a window into his own connection with the Isles: the pages are peppered with memories from his days as a producer on TV's Machair, memories made real to the reader through David's dazzling photography. Each instalment of the trilogy also has a chapter dedicated to it, identifying the inspirations for, and locations in, the novels.

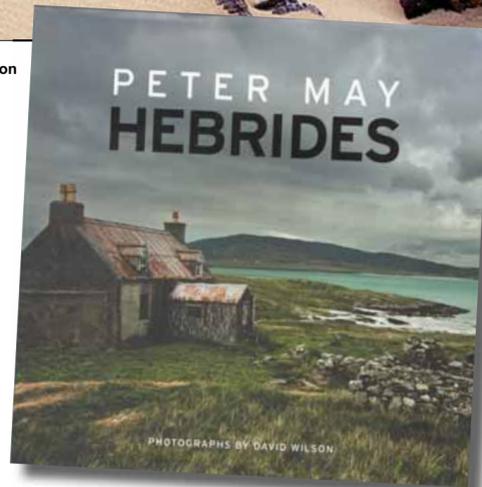
It is the kind of book that the phrase 'picture-perfect' was made for. The shots are stunning, ranging from the cliffs at Mangersta to the white sands of Eriskay. David explains that the images are "split fifty-fifty" between those "deeply connected to the storylines" and ones that "tell what the Hebrides are like."

Before he became a full-time photographer, David worked as a set designer, and it was when Peter employed him on the set of Machair in the 1980s that the two became firm friends. "Asking David to take the photographs for the book was a no-brainer," Peter explains.

"I have had several of David's wonderful photographs of the islands hanging in my house for years, and I was very familiar with the quality of his work. Not only are we friends, but David... was perfectly placed to take the photographs through all the seasons."

The start of this second professional partnership between the two friends began in a rather unorthodox fashion. "There was a knock on my window - I was still in bed - and there was Peter!" laughs David, recalling the morning Peter asked him to take part in 'Hebrides.'

"Myself and an executive from the publisher in London had arrived on an early flight to host a book event in Stornoway," remembers Peter. "I had told the publisher about David's work, so we decided to drive across the Barvas moor to see him, to look at some of his photographs and to discuss the possibility of him collaborating on



'Hebrides.'

"It was probably not quite 9am, and David and his wife were still in bed. But I decided that if I was up (which I had been since 4am) then he should be up too. So I banged on the window until he got out of bed and made us toast and coffee."

David's early-morning wake-up call resulted in a "marvellous" six months spent exploring his favourite locations across the Western Isles, as well as some he had never encountered: the Road to Nowhere on the north-east coast of Lewis; the summits of Cracabhal and Mealaisbhal in Uig; the lone road through the moors to Tamnavay.

The beehives in Morsgail were another new discovery for David, a location that plays a part in the third instalment of the trilogy, The Chessmen. "I had to go out and find them, Peter's directions weren't very good," laughs David. "I thought 'I'm giving up now, I'm going home', and then suddenly they were there!"

Other literary locations include the boatshed at the Port of Ness (which David shot in black and white to convey the atmosphere of the murder scene in opening pages of The Blackhouse), and the house of Fin's aunt in the fictional town of Crobost, inspired by a derelict - but striking - home in Skigersta.

At times 'Hebrides' exudes a dark feel; a feature that was no accident. The novels are crime stories, after all, and the gloom of a stormy Lewis day captures the plot perfectly. "It has a grey feel,



"Rocks at Mangersta - is just a typical shot of the wild Atlantic creating rock stacks on the west coast." says David Wilson

a lot more mood," says David. "It's not just sunny skies - although we do get them!"

His enthusiasm for the images and what they represent is infectious. There is as much - if not more - beauty in the images of brooding bleakness, as there is in pearly sands and sparkling skies. One particular picture of Luskentyre almost appears black and white, so dark is the sky, with just a sliver of sunlight reaching the shore.

"Suddenly it just all clouded over," says David of the day he took the photograph. "That's the beauty of the Hebrides - the weather. A lot of my photos aren't of places; they're photos of the weather." It's something Peter obviously appreciates too, describing the changeable weather as an "inescapable feature of island life" played out in a "kaleidoscope" sky.

A favourite photo for both friends - and a significant site in the novels - is one showing such unpredictable weather. A single shaft of sunlight falls over a shelling, standing stark against a black stormy sky. As Peter explains over email, this shelling with the green roof, situated about halfway across the Barvas Moor, "provides... an emotional marker for Fin in the trilogy." It is also one of David's best-selling prints, and the photographer has never seen such light repeated.

The Hebrides have captured the hearts of both men. David moved to Lewis permanently four years ago, and Peter has returned on a regular basis as a result of the trilogy. "Once Lewis gets into your bones, that's it," says the photographer with a smile. Peter echoes these sentiments in the pages of 'Hebrides', writing that "these islands have a way of getting under your skin and into your blood."

For those far and wide reading this beautiful book - whether familiar with Fin's fictional story or not - the lure of the island landscape set out on its pages will no doubt stir similar sentiments.

Peter's talk for Faclan will start on November 2 at 11.30am.



"North Uist - has been selected by the publishers as the cover for the second printing of the best-selling novel 'The Lewis Man'"