

# Top award for city guest house

by Katrina Ashford

An Inverness guest house was one of only two Highland winners in the AA Awards 2007–2008, which were presented at a special lunch in Edinburgh recently.

Trafford Bank in the town's Fairfield Road won Best Guest House in Scotland, beating off stiff competition from top establishments around the country.

"I hadn't realised how many they [the AA] graded until we went to the lunch," said Lorraine Freel, partner in the Trafford Bank.

"I met the guy who made the final decision and realised he'd stayed with us earlier this year. I didn't know at the time he was with the AA. He just had his breakfast and left."

The nominations for the AA Awards are made by the inspectors who make a shortlist of establishments they feel are suitable from their annual inspection visits.

"We had our annual inspection last summer," Lorraine went on. "The inspector said he'd heard so many good reports about us that he had to come."

"I showed him round the house and garden, answering his questions about what we were going to do to improve the accommodation and so on."

From this visit, the report was put forward to the inspectors' panel from which a shortlist of four or five establishments was made.

Lorraine and partner Koshal Pun were notified of their achievement a few months ago, but had to wait until after the awards ceremony before making any



Picture: Alasdair Allen

Lorraine Freel of Inverness' Trafford Bank which won Best Guest House in Scotland in this year's AA Awards

official announcements; although they had an open day celebration for invited guests at the end of September.

The couple bought Trafford Bank five years ago this month, reopening as a B&B in February 2003.

"I can't believe it's been this long," Lorraine laughed.

Lorraine is an accomplished interior designer and used her skills throughout the house to blend the old with the new. Some of the pieces of furniture were actually designed by Lorraine, such as the chairs in the conservatory and some of the lights.

"Interior design started out as a hobby and I did up our old house in London,"

Lorraine continued. "I designed some of the lights and chairs myself and a friend in Battersea made them for us."

"This is our home as well as our business, so I like things to be nice."

And it isn't just the rooms which have received tender loving care. Guests are also pampered with local produce from breakfast to bathtime.

Breakfasts include local oatcakes, preserves, meats and smoked salmon and the bathrooms are bursting with the delightful scents of toiletries from Ness Soaps (an Inverness project for the handicapped), Strathpeffer Spa Soap Company and Arran Aromatics.

"I've been to Ness Soaps and met the people who make them. They're always very proud when they get an order."

Originally from Cambuslang, Lorraine's dad, Bill Freel, was the Baptist minister in Inverness for 18 years; indeed her parents live just over the wall from Trafford Bank.

Although the guest house has won other awards – it came number four out of Trip Advisor's top 10 guest houses in Europe as well as coming in its top 10 Hidden Gems – the AA Award is its most valuable accolade to date.

"The AA inspectors have been managers in the hospitality industry and know what they're talking about," Lorraine concluded.

"And that's why this award means more to us than any others."



Lorraine used her skills as an interior designer throughout the house

