



weddings







# Alana's Bridal Lounge

Our Passion is Perfection

Alana Allan is suitably proud of her thriving business in the heart of Kilmarnock. Alana's Bridal Lounge opened in April 2014 and is attracting well deserved attention from all over Ayrshire and beyond.

Her stylish boutique provides brides with a stunning choice of bridal gowns from many of the UK's leading designers and Ayrshire's best selection of bridesmaid and flower girl dresses.

The wedding industry is intensely competitive but Alana's twenty years of invaluable experience as a seamstress and her commitment to her customers are what set her apart.

Her recent success is something she's worked hard for from the beginning. She originally trained with Jaeger for five years, before moving to Nike as a training supervisor. Then, like many women, she took a break from work to have her children.

On her return, she enjoyed working at the popular bridal boutique, Cuco, in the busy seaside town of Troon. It was at Cuco that she began working with women from all over Scotland, providing bespoke alterations for their chosen gowns.

Through listening to her customers, Alana had the inspired idea that beautiful and pristine once worn wedding dresses could be skillfully altered to fit someone new perfectly. In this way, she could offer budget conscious brides something truly special.

With this idea in mind, she first set up independently in 2007, thanks to generous help from family and friends. Her subsequent journey from shops in Darvel and Ayr, to her beautiful Bridal Lounge in Kilmarnock, has provided Alana with an enviable reputation and maturity as a businesswoman.

She has now moved away from the once worn market, but her dedication to providing both the ideal dress at a reasonable price and to understanding each and every bride remains.

Alana has designed her Bridal Lounge with a very special customer experience in mind. It boasts a luxurious runway, which leads to an impressive gilded mirror where ladies can be uniquely pampered and get the magical feeling of approaching their partner on their wedding day.

Each bride is given a generous exclusive appointment, so that they have Alana's undivided attention and expert eye all to themselves. There is never any rush or any pressure.

There's no doubt that Alana's happy customers feel she has helped make their day undeniably special. Voted for by them, she was shortlisted for the prestigious 2014 Scottish VOWS awards for Best Bridal Service and again, this year, at the Scottish Wedding Awards in the same category.

Alana herself says, "I hope to be able to make ladies feel relaxed and to give them a unique service, using my years of experience. I do all alterations myself. It's something that my competitors don't do. I aim to provide a very personal service from start to finish and to continue to help the women of Ayrshire and beyond find the dress of their dreams."

With such dedication and determination we are sure that Alana's Bridal Lounge will go from strength to strength and do just that.

Visit Alana's Bridal Lounge at The Scottish Wedding Rooms, 2 College Wynd, Kilmarnock KA1 1HN or call 01563 573415 for an appointment.



BY: SHIRLEY HUSBAND

SUGAR & SPICE AND ALL THINGS NICE

**When I arrive at Sugar & Spice, owner Nancy Davidson is on the telephone in her bright, busy studio. She's dealing with an enthusiastic enquiry from an aspiring baker, keen to join her team for work experience.**

She's a very busy lady and I wait patiently, admiring the astonishing birthday cakes in a glass cabinet by the door. She explains to the caller with warmth and patience that she's far too busy at the moment, but encourages them and asks them to call back at a quieter time of year.

When Nancy was just 21 and an aspiring baker herself, she decided to make her own wedding cake. She had no idea that it would lead to a lifelong commitment to cake baking and design. Through passion and hard work, she has managed to sustain an impressive 23-year-old business that has become the gold standard to which local cake makers aspire.

It was 1978 when Nancy enrolled on her first cake-making course. The Scottish Women's Rural Institute held it in a church hall in Ayr. She says she initially didn't show much promise. "I think the lady who ran the course took pity on me," she laughs, "I wasn't much good! I was so young and I was surrounded by older ladies, all very experienced, but they helped me such a lot and my cake was a real success."

A farmer's daughter from Darvel, Nancy grew up with a tradition of cooking and baking, mixed with a generous pinch of a practical can-do attitude. She

was soon receiving requests from admiring family and friends. After her son was born, she left her job as a biochemistry scientific officer for the NHS and concentrated on her cakes full-time.

In 1993, she outgrew her kitchen at home and – much to her husband's relief – leased premises. Sugar & Spice was born, tucked away at 15 Academy Street in Troon, around the corner from the Royal Bank of Scotland. It quickly earned a reputation and expanded upstairs and then next door. Nancy's sister, Anne, had always helped out and in 2000 formally joined the business.

Nancy now employs eight members of staff and her business has constantly evolved. No two cakes are ever exactly the same. Sugar & Spice have created everything over the years from dogs' birthday cakes to end of mortgage and divorce cakes, alongside very special wedding, christening and birthday cakes.

Her current team now includes a talented young male designer called Jamie. "He's amazing," Nancy enthuses, "and he's raising our standards all the time."

Due to a dedication to excellence, quality and service, customer loyalty has been a major factor in the success of the business. Nancy is delighted to tell me that she makes wedding cakes for customers whose christening cakes she made years ago.

In fact, loyalty is something that comes naturally to Nancy too. She still uses her family recipes and







wherever possible stays true to her Ayrshire roots, using excellent ingredients from local suppliers.

Her stylish and comfortable consultation room is adorned with glorious wedding cakes, from the extremely glamorous to the beautifully simple. Prestigious plaques and awards are placed everywhere but Nancy speaks about them very modestly.

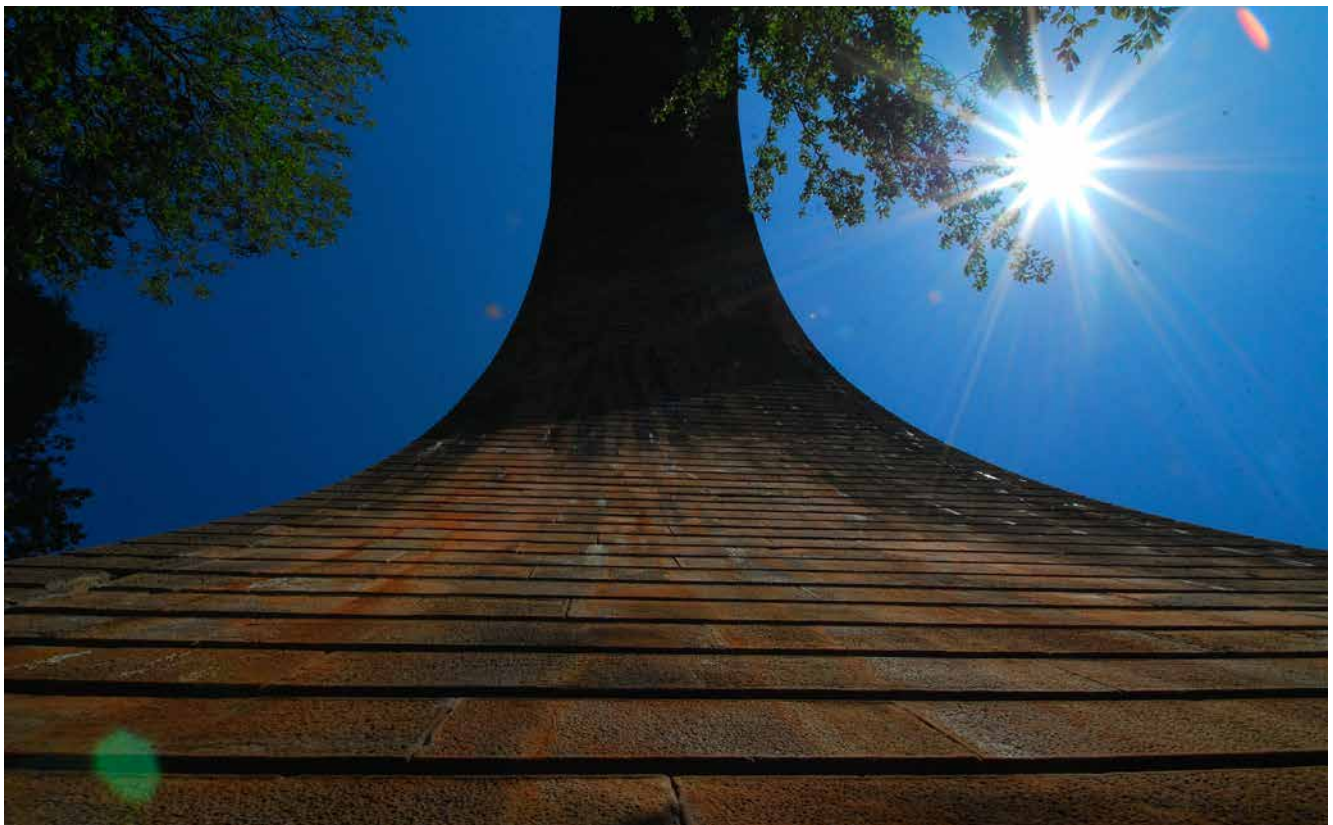
It's no surprise when she explains that customer expectations are constantly rising and she can't rest on her laurels. "Television shows, celebrity bakers and tutorials on channels like You Tube are revealing just what can be achieved using new ingredients, techniques and equipment. Cake design is an increasingly popular art form and we have to keep up."

Nancy appreciates her staff have been a huge part of her success and she speaks of them with fondness and pride. Over the years, as some employees have felt the need to move on and work for themselves, Nancy has had a broad minded approach and when too busy herself will make a point of passing a job to the person who can help that customer best.

It's this kind of steadfastness and care for her customers, colleagues and peers that have made Nancy so popular. If Sugar & Spice are all things nice then it's certainly been a fantastic recipe for an outstanding local business.



You can contact Sugar & Spice at 15 Academy Street, Troon or 01292 316830 and at [www.sugarandspicetroon.com](http://www.sugarandspicetroon.com)



## BALLOCHMYLE VIADUCT: AYRSHIRE'S HIDDEN TREASURE

BY: SHIRLEY HUSBAND

**T**here's no doubt that Ayrshire is a popular destination for tourists. People come from all over the U.K. and beyond to find out more about Robert Burns and appreciate the beautiful, rugged coastline.

Some of the best sunsets in the world are here to enjoy, alongside glorious, sandy beaches. We're lucky to have some of the best hotels, restaurants and food in the world, thanks to Ayrshire's entrepreneurs, farmers and fishermen.

We could get carried away boasting about the charms of some of Scotland's finest golf courses and our stunning historic houses and estates, such as Culzean Castle and Country Park and Dumfries House.

Thanks to a rich and close-knit farming tradition, we have lush countryside and rolling green hills, but after years of industrial decline and the closing of collieries and factories, what do the villages of North and East Ayrshire have to offer in terms of tourist appeal?

The answer is more than you might think.

Mauchline is 8 miles south east of Kilmarnock and has a fascinating heritage. Robert Burns spent a lot of time here. His wife, Jean Armour, was from Mauchline and it was home to other colourful

characters that are now part of international language, such as "Holy Wullie".

For anyone with a deeper interest in the town's local history, there are gripping and bloodthirsty tales galore from the Reformation and the adventures of the Covenanters.

Mauchline is situated on a gentle slope about 1 mile from the River Ayr, which flows south of the village. After an easy wander down to its banks, there's an interesting walk to be found.

Lining the riverbank, there are red sandstone caves, some of which served as an exciting backdrop to the adventures of desperate Covenanters fleeing Royalist troops.

Other parts of the soft stone of the riverbank display swathes of prehistoric rock art, well known to experts worldwide.

Nobody really knows what the intricate patterns of Neolithic 'cup and ring' markings were created for, but they may indicate homage to our ancient religion or even be an early form of writing and recording.

Above these mysterious caves and the tranquil river walk, towers one of Ayrshire's most impressive achievements and best-known inland landmarks.

At 177 feet or 54m, the Ballochmyle Viaduct's **CONT.**



## BALLOCHMYLE VIADUCT

Photo Credit | James Brown



railway track is the U.K's highest, surprisingly higher than that of the Forth Road Bridge. It was finished in 1850 and is still the one of the longest masonry arches ever constructed anywhere in the world.

It has even featured on the big screen, its height adding to the nail-biting chase in *Mission Impossible*, where Tom Cruise crosses the viaduct, struggling to hang on to a high speed train, whilst battling Jean Reno in his helicopter.

So who was the amazing mind behind this impressive feat of Victorian engineering?

As testament to the accomplishments of the Industrial Age and as a credit to Ayrshire, the Ballochmyle Viaduct was designed by John Miller, one of the greatest civil engineers of his time, often described as 'Scotland's Brunel'.

John Miller was born and educated in Ayr and became one of the Victorian era's most respected engineers. He was responsible for the design of the Glasgow to Edinburgh line and the Glasgow to Carlisle route, amongst many other achievements.

The design of Ballochmyle Viaduct was brave and ingenious. The steep, rocky landscape on either side of the gorge over the river was used as support for a wooden structure, around which the arches were constructed.

Local, red sandstone was used for the majority

of the construction, while harder freestone from Dundee was used for the critical arched rings.

Over 166 years later, it's still in use. Refurbished and upgraded just over ten years ago, it can handle the heaviest of freight trains, travelling at speeds that John Miller could only have dreamed of.

The viaduct has been a listed landmark since 1971 and A-listed since 1989. In 2014, it was designated a 'National Historical Civil Engineering Landmark' by the Institute of Civil Engineers and a plaque was unveiled.

Not only is the bridge a source of engineering pride for Ayrshire, but it also has majesty and grace, which will be there for generations to come.

It lends beauty to the landscape and to views of the River Ayr where, long before it was built, Burns was inspired to write his famous poem, "The Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle".

So, if you're looking for something a little bit different as a visitor to the area, a walk just outside Mauchline and down to this stretch of the River Ayr won't disappoint.

The caves are there to explore and as you wonder which ancient Scot carved the patterns of spirals and dots which are a mystery and a wonder, don't forget to look upwards to the stone arches towering above and to the achievement of an Ayrshire Scot of whom we can be very proud.





Photo Credit - Averil Fraser

BY: SHIRLEY HUSBAND

## SUNNY DAYS AND SECRET SUMMER RECORDINGS

We all love music. Many of us enjoy watching TV shows about it and the talent and creativity that are there in the most ordinary people. We're used to overused clichés, referring to singers as 'true artists' and loving it when they give us 'that little shiver'.

Scott Nicol wasn't interested in these shows or clichés 18 months ago when he started his music tuition business, Possibility Screams. However, he found more talent than he bargained for. A respected singer songwriter from Ayrshire, who has recorded and toured in the U.K. and America, he wanted to pass on his extensive experience to a younger generation.

Scott initially focused on teaching his beloved guitar, but his innovative approach, which focuses on bringing out pupils' originality, has led to an explosion in songwriting and creativity. With trademark enthusiasm, energy and musical ability, Scott has nurtured this talent and helped his students to shape their own songs.

This summer, he's truly turned their ideas and aspirations into reality, organising for accomplished Glasgow producer Sam Gallacher to record eight wonderful songs by Lori Smith, Evie Hughes, Emily and Charlotte Rutter, Shirley Husband, Scott Hewitt, Michael Crawford and Fraser Maxwell.

These young songwriters are all exceptional and with stories to tell. They are, bar one, unbelievably

under 16 and their heartfelt, uninhibited lyrics are deeply personal to them and their families. These lyrics and original musical ideas have been developed into beautiful songs, which will undoubtedly resonate with other young people. Their songs are truly from the heart and effortlessly translate into real emotion when they are heard.

We can now tell you that they are to be released on an album, which is aptly titled "First Light". It will be officially launched, by Possibility Screams, in Elliots in Prestwick at 6.30pm on November 6th, available on CD and iTunes from this date and a portion of each sale will be donated to Cash for Kids in Ayrshire.

Scott believes this to be a unique venture, but one that he certainly hopes to repeat. He says, "I feel really honoured to be a part of this amazing project, which I hope will inspire every one of these amazingly talented artists to go on and fulfill their potential in music."

We don't know what the future may hold for these young artists, but they're on an interesting and exciting journey and can certainly be very proud of this special first achievement.

For teasers of each track on Soundcloud and more information on Scott Nicol and Possibility Screams, visit:

<https://soundcloud.com/possibilityscreams> <http://www.scottnicol.us/possibility-screams>