

FOOD AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREATS™

with the Benvies

No. 11 • November 2019

MENU

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Singing Sands, Islay

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I'm deeply impressed by how digital technology has changed the approach of landscape photographers. As well as the obvious technical advantages that encourage experimentation, minds have opened wide to the possibility of shooting in near darkness. Thus it was, half an hour after sunset on a gloomy November afternoon on our recent Islay Retreat when we conjured some of the most atmospheric images of the week, helped along the way by a little split-toning. - *Niall*

News from Niall and Charlotte

This coming year is one of big changes for us. Already plans are well-advanced for our re-location to France in late May 2020 (although our company remains a British-based one) with all the excitement, challenges and possibilities that presents. And while Charlotte has moved about 26 times in her life, I have lived in the same corner of Angus for over 50 years. Moving to France isn't a lifestyle choice for us; it's a way of dodging an inescapable rut at a time of life when it's all too tempting to ease off a little, to sidestep new challenges. This understanding informs our work too: there is always a recipe to adapt; a new way to present; a different way to interpret a subject; a new technique to master. Our wish to share all this remains undiminished. And we're fortunate to have three children who, for now at least, are settled in their lives and can help us make this transition. Long may that continue!

This has been the first full year of operation for Food and Photography Retreats and already our repeat booking rate is high. We're grateful to you all but we also realise we need to add to our roster of locations. The Cairngorms in Scotland has been added for 2020 and is sold out. We're excited to introduce Slovenia into our programme too, a country we've been getting to know over the last four years. You can read about that Retreat later in this newsletter, as well as our Digital Skills Retreat in Burgundy in September/October. Great hospitality remains at the core of our work and guests comment on how much they enjoy the dinner party atmosphere each evening. As time goes on, we are refining the tuition side of things, cramming in less and going into more depth. The consultations with Mr Benvie have proved very useful too, giving each guest undivided attention to address their particular photographic "issue".

If you haven't travelled with us already, we hope you'll do so in 2020 and for those who have, we look forward to sharing time and having fun, with you, again.

*Our best wishes
Charlotte and Niall*

Idea - Taking history

While competition undoubtedly makes for better sports performances, I'm not sure it makes us better photographers.



The last 15 years have seen something a surge in camera club membership in many parts of the country driven, to some extent, by people wanting to learn how to get to grips with the complexity of digital photography. And there is no doubt that the technical side of photography is far more complex now than it was when I started shooting Ektachrome in the late 1970's. I imagine that different clubs fulfil an educational role with varying degrees of success but we've all witnessed a tremendous growth in knowledge amongst recreational photographers generally, about all technical aspects of photography, in the last decade. People no longer ask why they need to calibrate their display.

Concurrent with this has been a recasting of photography as a competitive sport, not only within camera clubs, where competitions have always had a place, but in the photographic community more generally. Many of us, I'm sure, receive a steady string of email invitations from obscure competitions inviting us to enter our best work (don't even waste your time



Old places and old characters:
is anyone recording them before
their passing?

reading the rules) even if we don't routinely enter competitions. At least a few of these have earned a reputation as rights-grabs exercises or simply earners for the organisers. May they wither and die on the vine.

I've read through the PAGB guidelines "Tips for Judging, Critiquing and Self-Assessing Photos" and can tell you that, from the perspective of a practising creative, they are not framed to encourage imagination, creativity, or anything else that will help you derive satisfaction from your work. There is a deadening formulism implicit in these guidelines - "Is the image free from lens flare effects?", "Does the image include elements in the near, middle and far distances?" that demonstrates an ignorance of the sophistication of many recreational photographers today, whose appreciation of the potential of the medium is somewhat more mature than those who wrote the guidelines.

Perhaps it's time for camera clubs to embrace a new role - one that fosters mutual cooperation, the exchange of knowledge, community engagement and produces something of real, enduring value. I'm thinking of camera club members as documenters of time and place. Their time and their place.

There is an enduring fascination in looking at how our town or city used to be: what has changed, what has remained the same. How people dressed in the past, how they got around. How they lived. It's unlikely that when these prosaic scenes were recorded, the creator had any idea that they would be the subject of great interest in 50 or 100 years' time. Given the period of great upheaval we're entering into now, I think there is no better time to make a systematic record for those who follow us, not only of the appearance of our streets, estates and parks, but of the wild corners of our communities, those individuals at its heart - and those on its fringes.

This re-imagining of the camera club does nothing to diminish their role as providers of companionship, knowledge and entertainment. Indeed, if you're wanting to take photographs about-town and of strangers, it's a less uncomfortable experience when it's done as part of a group; it can be a lot more fun. Nature workers can concentrate on the wildlife in the city, perhaps using the field studio technique popularised by the Meet Your Neighbours project to show in great detail the smaller creatures that live amongst us. Landscape workers can challenge

themselves by applying the skills they employ in wild landscapes to represent the urban environment. If you're a portrait photographer, you can discover how, with some lights, a softbox and a "big camera" the balance of power between you and strangers subtly shifts, especially if your interest is legitimised by the context of the work you want to make.

This recording of community was often undertaken by the local "professional photographer" in the past but with their near extinction from the high street, a vacuum has been left. With all the ability, equipment and knowledge in camera clubs, their members are the natural inheritors of this role. Moreover, a club carrying on this sort of the work can spread the load, shoot to a "wish list" and produce a more comprehensive account along the way than can be achieved by any one individual. There is a role in this work for everyone - the gregarious and the reserved, the able-bodied and those less so. There is work for those who love cataloguing and ordering, for those whose main interest lies in the digital darkroom. The project doesn't, can't, end with a hard drive full of files. The images need to be realised - printed on archival photo-rag

and lodged with a public archive. Local authority cuts have led to the closure of many archive services so it's worth determining first where the work will reside. But get a local councillor or MP on your side and doors will certainly open.

There may be another bonus to this "reformation". Not everyone sees photography as a competitive sport and sometimes people want to do something with their pictures other than enter them in competitions or post on social media. Camera clubs that embrace the role of recording living history may just have the edge when it comes to attracting new members and sustaining the interest of the current ones. **M**

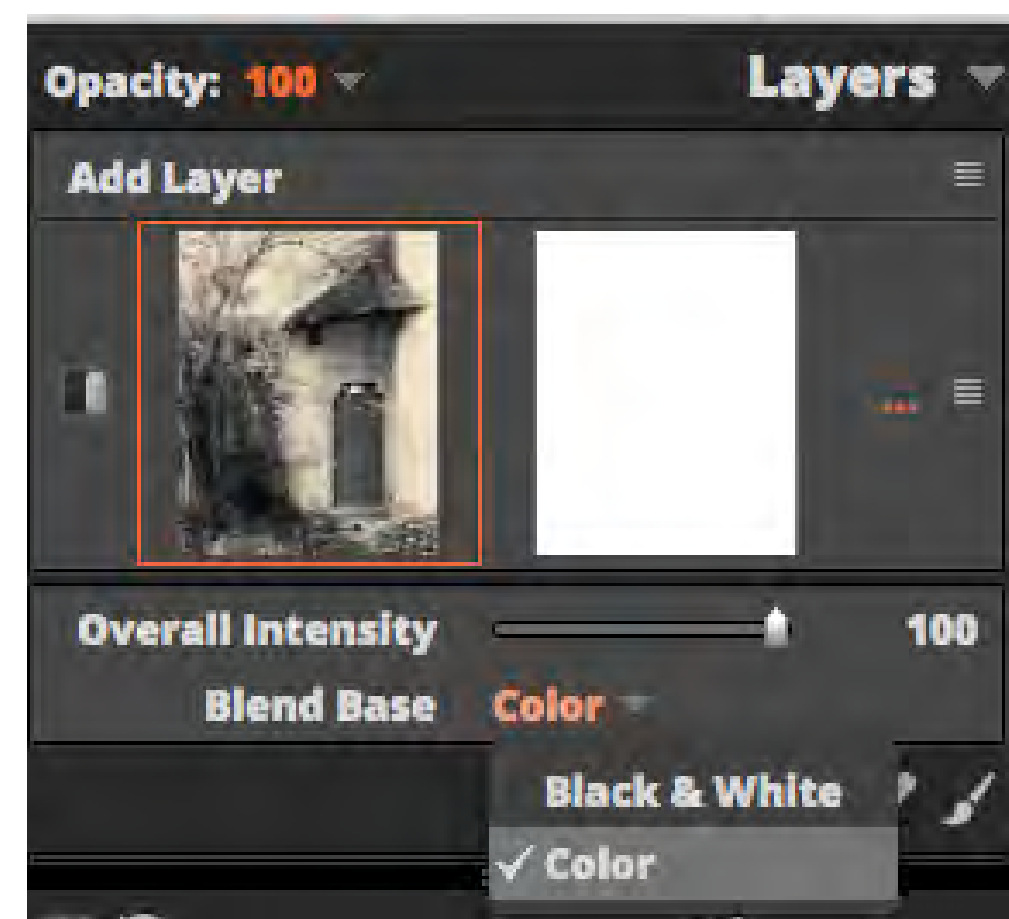


When did all the tree sparrows vanish? Did no one notice? Or care?

Skill - Vintage photographs

They used to say that the “CS” in Photoshop CS stood for “Cat Skinning” because there were many way to achieve the same effect. But not everyone who likes the appearance of aged photographs has the inclination to wade through the different methods to achieve the look they are after. So if you’re such a person, take a look at Exposure (formerly known as Alien Skin) X5.

Now developed as a full-blown alternative to Lightroom for processing RAW files, at its heart, Exposure is still the film simulation application *par excellence*. Not only does it have presets of just about every film and process ever invented but they are highly editable and it’s possible to create sophisticated looks without the knowledge that Photoshop demands.



Although you can work directly with the RAW file in Exposure, I still open the image, from within LR, as a 16 Bit TIFF in Exposure (Ctrl / Right Click > Edit in > Exposure X5); quite often there are finishing touches I want to make in LR.

For this sort of effect, try different vintage B and W presets. I used the Wet Plate - Damaged one here. To achieve the look of a hand-tinted black and white photograph, change the Blend Base (Layers) from Black and White to Colour then alter the Overall Intensity until the look is just right. Working in a 16 bit environment allows you to edit, effectively, non-destructively. **M**



Food - Spiced apple and bramble hand pies

This recipe was inspired by a recent food magazine article which I have adapted slightly. The guests on this recent trip to Torridon really enjoyed them after they photographed them, so I thought I would share the recipe with you. You can adapt the recipe by using different fruit and spice combinations, and even be creative with your pie shapes. Enjoy!

What you will need to make six pies

2 cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped into small pieces

150 g brambles

50 g golden caster sugar

1 tablespoons cornflour

1 tablespoons honey (always buy local honey or one which has true provenance)

1 teaspoon mixed spice (cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon type mix)

1 egg for the glaze

1-2 tablespoons granulated brown sugar to finish.

And either 2 x 320 g of shortcrust or puff pastry sheets

or

why not try your own pastry..it really is easy:-

300 g plain flour

pinch of salt

150 g cold unsalted butter (cut into small cubes)

100 g icing sugar (sifted)

2 egg yolks plus 3 tablespoons cold water- mix to blend.

2 baking trays, baking parchment, rolling pin and a 10 cm

cutter, a favourite playlist and a couple of hours to yourself.

Photography note

There was a chance on our recent Torridon Retreat to demonstrate how I would style and light a simple, low-key, overhead food shot. I treat the lighting for these as additive - that is, we start off with darkness and then let in a little bit at a time until only the key elements were lit. We then established a hierarchy making sure the "talent" (the pies) got more light than the supporting cast but partly shading them with black cards. The sole source of light was a Cactus strobe, fired through a sheet of Flyweight acting as a diffuser with top lighting carefully controlled with another black card. If you'd like to learn more about food lighting, do let us know.

- Niall





Make your pies!

1. First of all prep all your ingredients - *mis en place* - everything in place. It makes things so much easier and is very satisfying.

2. Make the pastry by putting the flour, salt and butter in a bowl and rub together with your fingertip until it resembles breadcrumbs. Mix in the icing sugar and then add the egg yolk/water mix and blend it with a regular knife. If the dough feels too dry add one or two more tea spoons of cold water until you can get the dough into a ball. Once in a ball, flatten into a disc and wrap in cling film, and chill it for at least 30 minutes.

3. While your pastry is chilling put the apples and golden caster sugar in a pan with two tablespoons of water, cover and cook gently for about six minutes or until the apples are soft. Stir gently a few times to make sure they don't stick to the pan. Tip this mixture into a shallow dish to cool a little then add the brambles and stir. In a separate bowl, mix the cornflower and honey with the mixed spices, then stir gently into the fruit mixture.

4. Take the pastry out of the fridge - shop-bought rolls or your own homemade pastry - and uncurl or roll out until about 3.5 mm thick. Using the 10 cm cutter to cut out 12 circles. Spoon the fruit mixture into the middle of six circles and spread to about one cm from the edge each one. Brush the borders with egg glaze and place a plain pastry disc on top of each one to encase the filling, press down well to seal. Make a little indentation in the top and bottom of each one to make the apple shape and then press all the way around the edge of each circle with the prongs of a fork. With the remaining pastry, cut out some little leaves and stalks to finish off the pies and

after fixing them in place, brush with the egg glaze. Poke a little hole in the middle of each one with a skewer and then place on a baking tray lined with the baking parchment.

At this point set your oven to 200 °C/180 °C fan/ Gas 6. Chill the pies on the tray for about 15 minutes then bake in the oven for about 20 minutes or until the pastry is golden brown and the filling bubbling slightly through the hole. Remove from the oven and sprinkle immediately with the demerara sugar, and leave to cool. They are delicious with lashings of vanilla custard!

Note - you can freeze these pies unbaked, but omit brushing with the egg glaze. When you need them, remove from the freezer, brush with an egg glaze and cook them straightaway from frozen... just add an extra five minutes to your cooking time. Perfect I tell you! - *Charlotte*



*Featured Retreat -
Slovenia*

A LANDSCAPE AND CLOSE-UP
PHOTOGRAPHY RETREAT IN TRIGLAV
NATIONAL PARK, SLOVENIA
10 - 17 OCTOBER, 2020

We always like it when visitors come to Slovenia with no pre-conceptions - they are always pleasantly surprised. Yes, the country is beautiful in an obvious way, with jagged alpine peaks constructed from bright limestone, wild, fog-entwined forests, elegant churches perched ostentatiously on verdant hill-tops and turquoise rivers flowing through sculpted canyons. But for the photographer, there is so much more in the details, the threads of the landscape tapestry, to delight and hold our attention. It's a landscape where tradition and modernity meet, where there is pride in one and restraint in the other. You'll see no clear fells here, no litter and you'll enjoy being in a modern European state that values its wild nature.

Our base - each room with *en-suite* facilities - is in the village of Ribcev Laz, about 10 minute's walk from the shores of Lake Bohinj. In the autumn, the location has a lot of foggy mornings making it a great time to photograph in the beech and spruce forests along its shore. A 20 minute drive takes us above the fog to watch as it clears over different parts of the valley. All our locations are within an hour or so of our base giving more time to "get under the skin" of the place and less driving around. Some, such as Lake Bled, are very well-known, others we have discovered, less so.

Each day Charlotte works her magic in a tiny kitchen for us - each dinner as enjoyable as a great sunrise.

When we conceived Food and Photography Retreats, we saw detailed, supported tuition as one of the two core elements that distinguished our "offer" and that remains true to this day. We've learned how much guests value exposure to new ideas and techniques as well as the chance to have their work examined and their photographic interests discussed. We've also learned the value of not trying to cram in too much so on this Retreat we will be concentrating on shooting elements for "Chocolate Bar" composites, creating our famous "Colour Transects" and evaluating your work to help you progress. Combined with Charlotte's hospitality, it all makes for a great holiday. We love Slovenia: we think you will too. **M**



*Featured Retreat -
Burgundy*

A DIGITAL SKILLS PHOTOGRAPHIC
RETREAT IN AND AROUND THE
MORVAN NATURAL REGIONAL PARK
BURGUNDY
WITH AN ALTERNATIVE
COOKERY PROGRAMME
FOR NON-PHOTOGRAPHERS

27 SEPTEMBER - 4 OCTOBER, 2020



Based at the Château de Magny en Morvan



You might wonder why you need to go all the way to Burgundy to undertake a digital skills Retreat. You might not consider the rich opportunities for gathering the “raw material” we need to work with - from old stone work grazed by divine evening light to the bustle of the weekly food market. You might not know about the sense of moving back in time as we drive along narrow lanes hemmed in by hedges bounding small fields, squawked at by jays. Unless you’ve been, you won’t know about the wonderful space we have in the Chateau de Magny en Morvan’s beautifully restored stable block for teaching and discussing the work we are doing. It’s just beside the walled vegetable garden we have free run of, to

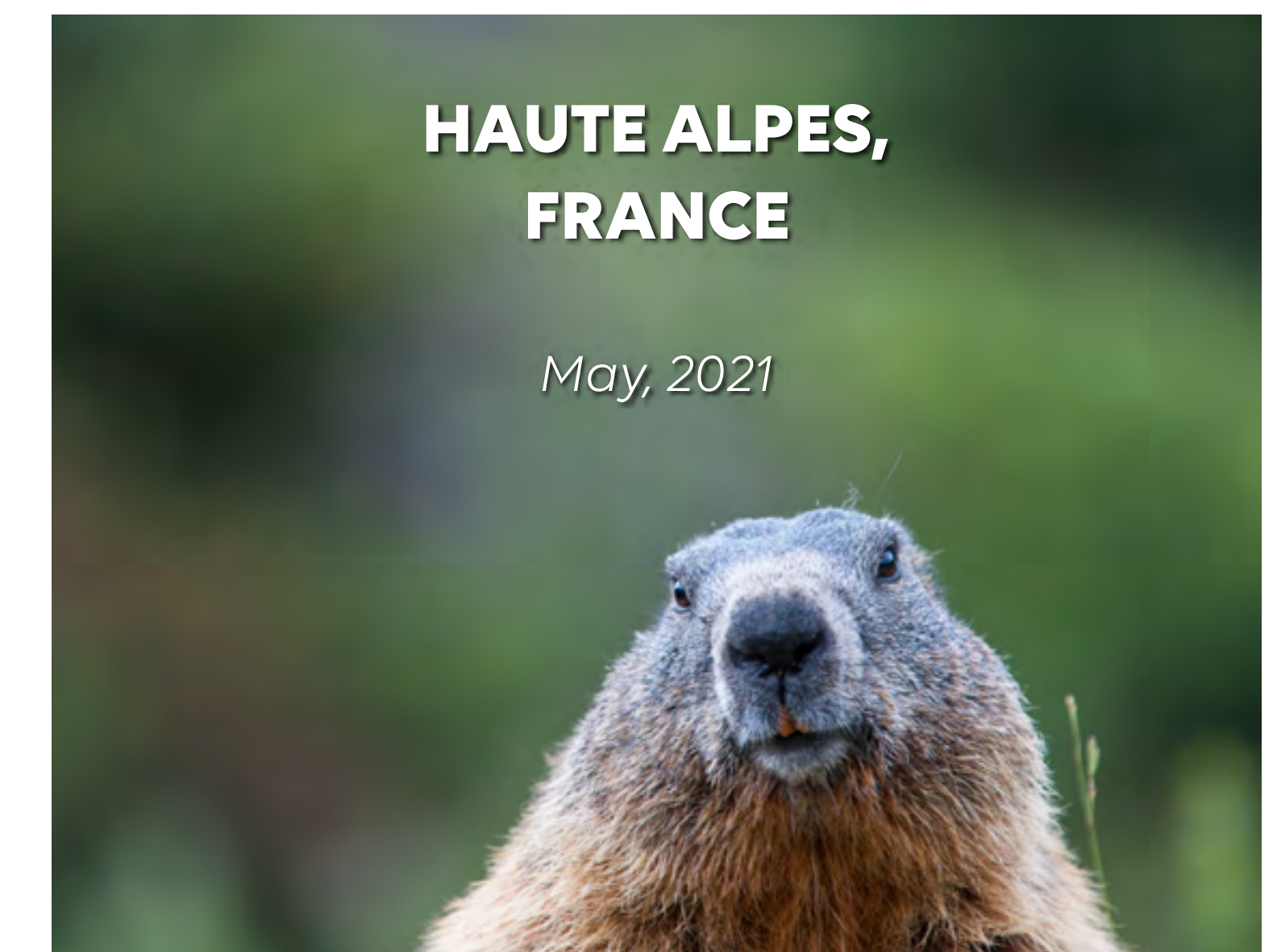
photograph and for Charlotte to gather produce for delicious, wholesome meals. And this *is* Burgundy, where they keep the best wine for themselves.

When I wrote my first photography book in 1998, I was required by the publisher to include a sizeable chunk on digital imaging, which I knew very little about. Then again, neither did most other photographers. Since then the general level of knowledge has grown dramatically - but so too have the number of things we can do with our images. I teach from a knowledge base accumulated over 20 year of digital work, as a working professional photographer. But we hone in on the knowledge and skills you need to manage and

realise your images the way you want them to be. From capture to final print - we cover it all. Were we to look at all of Lightroom and Photoshop (not to mention Exposure X’s) capabilities, we would be there for a month so we home in on key areas such as workflow, optimal RAW processing, Layers, Blending modes, Masks and compositing. By the time you’ve been at your computer for several hours, you’ll need somewhere nice to go outside. And Burgundy is a pretty good choice. **M**



Dates - our Retreats in 2020. Full details on our website.



As well as helping you to photograph "expertly-sourced" locations, we teach:

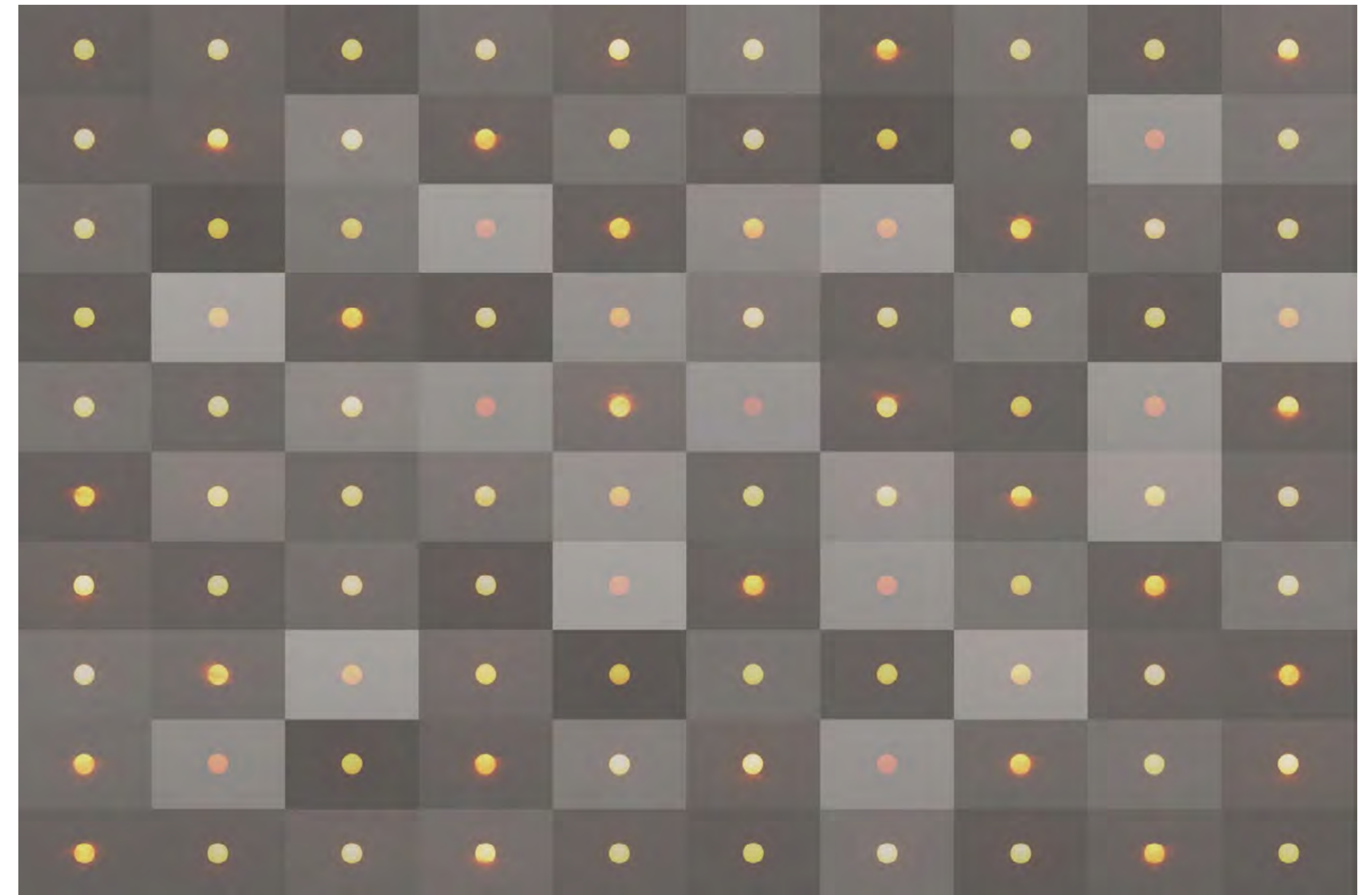
- Optimal exposure
- Advanced composition
- Digital workflow
- Lightroom processing
- Photoshop skills
- Light painting
- Colour Transects
- "Chocolate bar" composites
- Field studio photography
- Lighting for food photography
- Creating word pictures
- Landscape deconstruction.

Inspiration - David Ellingsen



photographs © David Ellingsen www.davidellingsen.com

I was introduced to the Canadian photographer, David Ellingsen's, work only recently, but his way of thinking was immediately familiar. While other photographers, such as [Matthew Chase-Daniel](#), have created large works in which images are composited without a breathing space between them, the viewing experience is sometimes suffocating: there is discontinuity without an obvious way out of the work. But Ellingsen's images here counter that through continuity - owing the repetition of the same motif in a myriad of forms - without losing the viewer by creating a quick exit from the work. There are no leading lines, no obvious subjects from which to leap onto the next image. The



appeal of these panels goes beyond visual - his work records and represents changes in environmental - the 2017 wildfires in BC (above, for examples shows the sun rising through wildfire smoke). This strong environmental thread finds its way through a diverse body of work that, unlike a lot of art photography, can be enjoyed on an aesthetic, as well as narrative level. It also reminds us that it's not technique, not equipment, knowledge or originality per se that count, but imagination in how we present our work and the context we give it. And that starts within ourselves, knowing what we are about and finding ways to represent that in images. We can take you down that road on our Retreats.

Bonus footage - Loch Clair shoreline



Tired of waiting for sun to rise over an obstructive cloud bank, I took my eyes from the sky and walked along the shore of Loch Clair, that iconic Torridon location that offers the best view in the glen of Liatach and the end of the Beinn Eighe ridge. The water level had been higher the day before as the swirl of course grasses along the shore confirmed. This morning, a pre-dawn frost had breathed all over the damp grass, whitening it alongside the less saturated mats.

Sometimes the pictures are just there for the taking: no cleverness, no intrigue, no explanation required. The best sort.

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