

MENU

NUMBER 14 • JUNE 2020

Freedom!

So, where to now?

The bug set

Making and
lighting

Charlotte makes

Mackerel with orange
and fennel salad

Introducing

Eliot Porter

Our story in
50 Objects



with the Benries

eLearning

A new way of
sharing with you.

Iona makes

French baguette.
In France.

BOOKS FOR INSPIRATION
LYS



Lunan Bay, Angus, Scotland.



Hello from Charlotte and Niall

How are you all? We and our loved ones have managed to avoid all contact with COVID-19 but we know that in the UK especially, and some other parts of Europe, many have not been so lucky. Likewise in the USA, which has followed its own particular path. As lockdowns ease and we begin to experience more freedom than we've enjoyed for much of this year, the time of reckoning will begin as the dust settles and we can see just how badly the economic landscape has been affected.

One question we keep asking ourselves is this: will people still want, indeed be able to, travel as much as they did previously? Will airlines and routes simply disappear given that there has been an over 90% contraction in air travel for months. Will flights become unaffordable if aircraft are permitted to fly with only a third of their seats occupied? How long will a two week

quarantine period on inter-country visits be enforced? Clearly these questions are central to our own business but the answers are no clearer to us than to anyone else.

Nevertheless, uncertainty has proved to be a catalyst for positive change at Food and Photography Retreats. Retreats remain our principal "product" but we have been busy during lockdown devising a portfolio of services that can be delivered online, at a distance. I'm sorry to say that we haven't yet found a way to spirit a dish of Charlotte's mackerel with orange and fennel salad to your desk but my side of things lends itself a little more to online delivery.

In the course of developing these online services, we've looked at a lot of what's out there already and found much of it wanting in terms of authority, production values or specificity. Even if you've not travelled with us, you may have gained



Hello from Charlotte and Niall

the impression from MENU that we, well, take a bit of trouble over things, and bring a lot of care and experience to what we do. We do the same in our eLearning lessons, ePresentations and in the production values of our eBooks. The eLearning has proved to be a very effective teaching tool already thanks to the screen-sharing facilities of Zoom and Skype that lets me guide students through every stage of a process while they do it, rather than simply following me. You can read about the six eLearning courses we currently offer later in this issue. While these are all photography related, we will be adding some cookery ones with Charlotte later in the summer.

I was disappointed to be unable to fulfil a conference engagement in Mallorca this spring because of the pandemic but that made me wonder if the whole model of physical conference attendance (however much fun it is)

might be about to change as we're called upon to restrain our travels. The fact that I - and other presenters - can speak to a camera club meeting or conference audience anywhere in the world, to take questions and for them to see the images clearly through screen-sharing, holds many exciting possibilities, and massive savings for the organisers.

There is no doubt though that the "physical" Retreat experience is unbeatable and we remain wholly committed to that as our main model. During the pandemic, we've done the right thing by our clients, provided refunds whenever asked and transferred deposits to future Retreats as requested. We are grateful that so many of you intend to travel with us next year but we'd also like to fill up some remaining space in Slovenia and Torridon later this year and to hear from you about booking next year. Please

forgive us for the short notice on some of the Retreats dates but our plans for recces. have been curtailed somewhat this year and plans have had to change. I'm not sure any travel company has been unaffected so we hope you'll view some indecision on our part as events unfold, benevolently.

Enjoy your freedom - and long may it last, this summer and beyond.

Best wishes from

Charlotte and Niall

Directors

Food and Photography Retreats



Our story in 50 Objects

MOTOROLA TWO-WAY RADIOS



*This is your
Captain
speaking!*

The two-way radio crackled into life in her handbag as Charlotte stood in the queue to pay in one of Tobermory's coffee houses. "This is your Captain speaking, this IS you Captain speaking", a voice of reassuring authority declared for all to hear. Witnesses from our group who were at the scene later reported how Charlotte blanched and shrank visibly as I launched into a long-winded explanation of what was happening next. It seemed that half of Tobermory found out what was happening next. My point is...everyone needs to know how to operate their two-way radio.

We introduced "radios-for-all" last year, not to embarrass the unfamiliar but as a safety measure. Now and again, we get guests who are like greyhounds released from their traps and as soon as the minibus door is open they are as dog after hare. And that might mean they've not heard anything I've said about safety at the site or other details like RV time. The radio (which also has a panic button incorporated) gives the guest the opportunity easily to draw my attention and for me to keep in touch with the group when it scatters. Even in coffee shops.

I used to spend a lot of time going from guest to guest, like an eager bee, keen to pollinate them with my knowledge. The radios now put the choice to have me there or not in the hands of the guest, and saves a lot of wasted flight time on my part.

There is only one part of the process to refine now: getting everyone to remember to charge their radio each night. **MN**

Our story in 50 Objects

1001 NAPKINS

Packing for a Retreat is always quite a task with lots of careful planning, boxes to fill, must-have kitchen utensils and what seems like most of my store cupboard ingredients. Also, essentials, like sparkles for the puddings, numerous herb-infused oils, edible flower decorations and some speciality flours. You get the idea. Oh, and of course, gin - to share with the guests. Naturally. There is also a special box that contains an ever-growing pile of hand-made napkins. Family tell me I'm obsessed with making them. Like I don't know. You see, this is the thing; I see nice material and think - ooh! that will do nicely for napkin. So, I'll have one and a half metres of that then spot another colour and pattern that would match the first and so on and before I know it, I'm leaving the shop with enough fabric to provision a minor royal household. Once I get home, the ironing board and sewing machine come out and several hours later there

are dozens more to cram in the box. Niall is a bit precious about space in the box trailer we transport our Retreat equipment in; there is always space, of course, for his huge TV screen but if I

ask for just another box for napkins..? It's not hard to go through 200 a week on a busy Retreat, after all. I have to say that I find the process of making them very therapeutic, rare switch-off time.



And we know that guests appreciate that we take the trouble to set a nice table each evening.

On one trip last year, we were discussing the merits of having rings so that a napkin could be used a couple of times before changing rather than simply once. The very lovely Jane Lee came up with the idea of wooden rings painted with a flower design so everyone would know their own. A few weeks later, while we were on a Retreat in Austria a surprise parcel arrived for me. And inside - 12 hand-made napkin rings, each of a different colour with a wild flower painted on each one. We used them every night and they made the table setting even prettier. This was one special gift and is treasured by us. They now come with us on every trip. Our ever-growing kit for the Retreats is made more special with gifts like this from guests, the stories that come with them and the memories they recall. **MC**

Books for inspiration

LYS

SANDRA BARTOCHA & WERNER BOLLMANN

Two friends, one large photographic project. We started the journey because we both have a deep love for the Scandinavian landscape, the same view on photographic aesthetics and the same sense of humour. The journey? To travel the entire European North, from the bright Danish woodlands and meadows in the South to the blue glaciers of Svalbard in the North; from the storm-battered coast of Norway in the West to the dark Finnish forests in the East.

In the glow of the midnight sun, or under dancing polar lights; in a snow storm over the tundra or on the quiet waters of the skerries, we have photographed the impressive Scandinavian landscapes, their charismatic animals and their often diminutive but yet enchanting plants. And we tried to do so in our very own aesthetic style, sensitive and full of emotions. We chose an approach which is far away from documentation, trying to capture the essence of the diverse habitats, just as the character, the soul of the great



Nordic landscapes and their inhabitants would demand. LYS – a working title in the beginning – a small word which means light in Norwegian and Danish, became a leading source of inspiration throughout our journey North.

During the 4 years working in the field, we

lived through many adventures and many memorable and incredible situations. We enjoyed night skies at -40° C in snow shoes in the Finnish taiga, got lost in the skerries with a kayak and had the time of our lives sailing from Stockholm to Germany on a catamaran. We explored

the arctic landscape by snowmobile and dog sled and hiked through endless blueberry forests in Sweden. Freezing, sweating, soaked to the skin and bitten a thousand times. Luck and misfortune went hand in hand, but luck prevailed. And after this long stretch of time, we are full of gratitude and humility for all the exciting moments and quiet times we were allowed to experience in the North.

It has been the journey of our lives, something you don't experience every day. And with this we have tried to create something of unprecedented dimensions: a large-format book that does not describe only a certain region or a specific subject, but an *oeuvre* which covers the entire and unique beauty of Scandinavia: a true declaration of love to the Light and to the North.

- Sandra Bartocha and Werner Bollmann.

You can order this inspiring, self-published book (and help the authors directly!) from <http://www.lys-publishing.com>

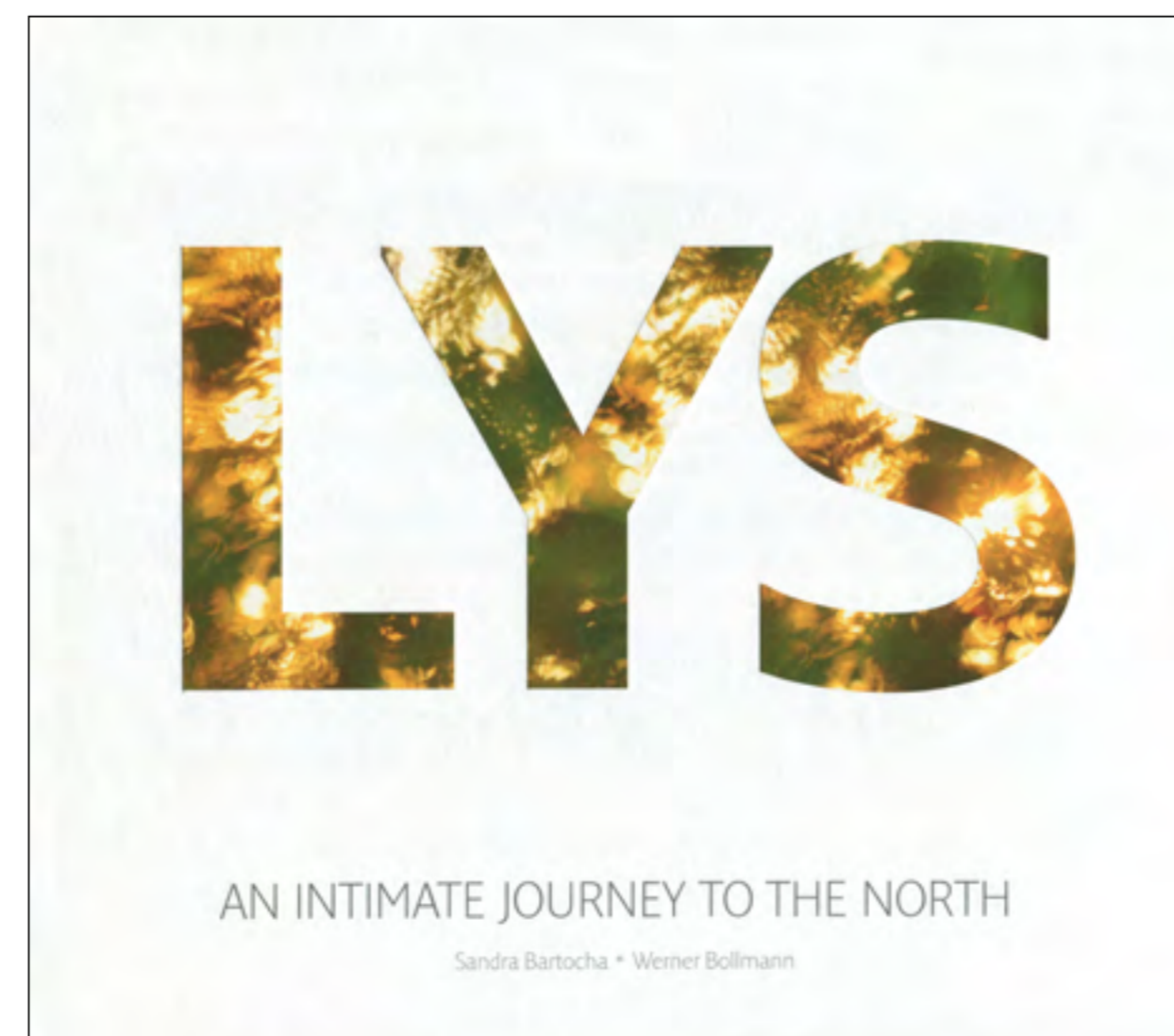




© Sandra Bartocha - from *Bright South*.



© Werner Bollmann - from *Silent Forests*.



Skills

THE BUG SET

After you've got to grips with field studio flower photography, I can guarantee that you'll want to have a go at small animals next. By this time you'll appreciate just how important it is to manage the distance between the subject and the background so that the former isn't overwhelmed by backlighting. While that's easy to achieve with plants - you can simply move the white background further away - you need a different strategy with small animals, involving a transparent set. This makes it possible to position the subject at just the right distance from the white background so that fine details and translucent appendages remain clearly defined.

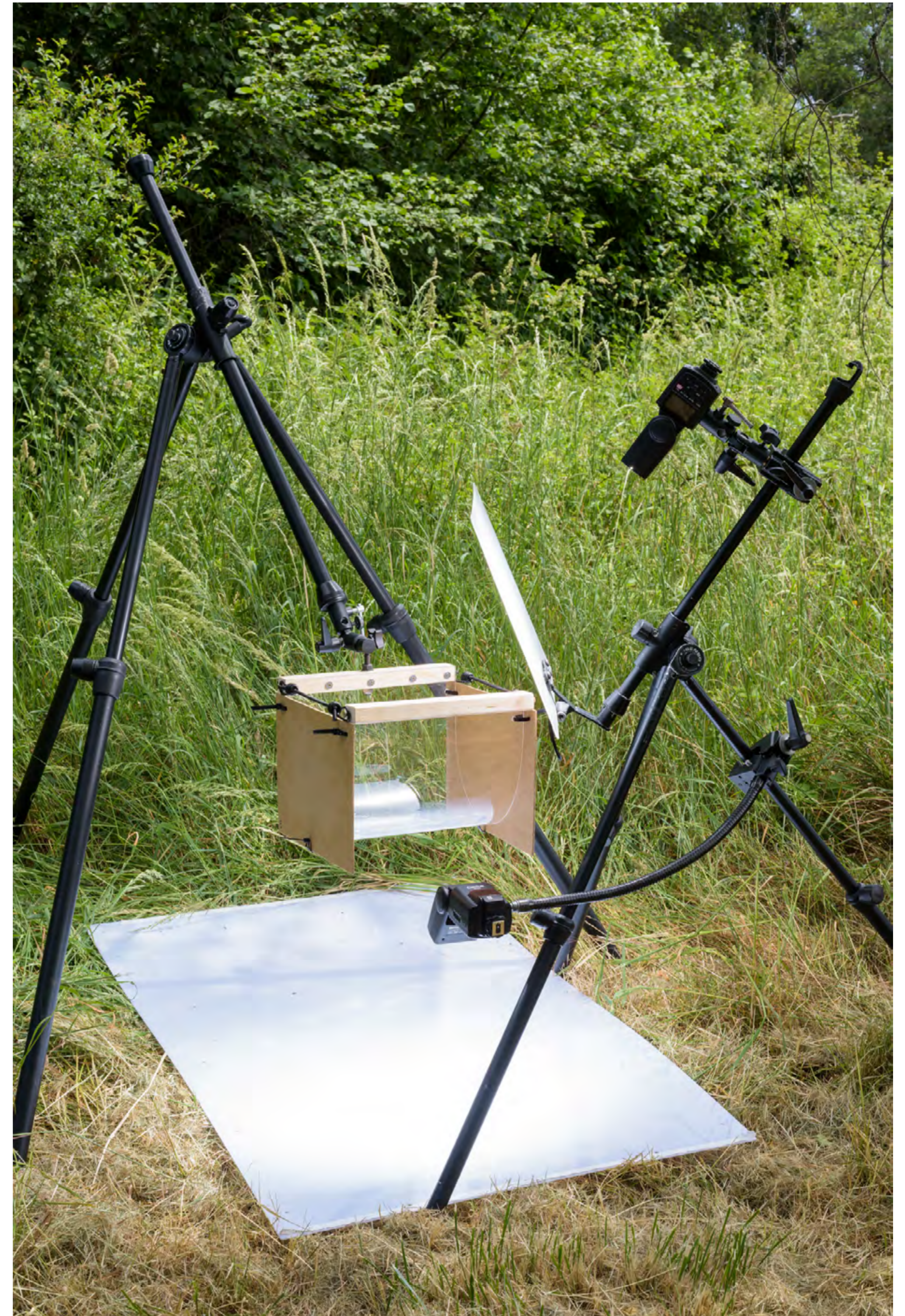
My bug set has undergone several transformations over the years but the latest is the best. I think of its creation as part of the COVID Dividend. When I undo the six re-usable zip ties that secure the end/side hardboard panels

then release the two bungees that hold the set in an arc, the whole thing folds flat and can be carried in the portfolio case with the other backgrounds, diffusers and dampeners.



I found a hinge peg was the ideal way to attach the set to the supporting tripod. I drilled a recess on one side of the peg to take the Manfrotto 026 Swivel's locking bolt, helping to prevent the whole set from swivelling unbidden.

While the set is shown here configured for a dorsal view, it can easily be swung round by 90° for a side-on one. **MN**



Our Retreats programme

2020 - 2021

2020

Like everyone else in the travel industry, we have been forced to change our published programme of Retreats owing to COVID-19. As soon as we know when international travel can resume, we will update you but in the meantime, these arrangements stand.

October

10 - 17th

Slovenia. 2 places.

November

4 - 11th

Torricon, Scotland. 4 places.

14 - 21st

Islay, Scotland. 1 space.

2021 - *SO FAR*

February

20 - 27th

Islay - Coastlines and creativity.

March

4 - 11th

Harris - White sand, turquoise sea with Willi Rolfes.

April

17 - 24th

Wild Extremadura, Spain with Jose Benito Ruiz

May

15 - 22nd

Queyras, France. Orchids & marmots.

June

12 - 19th

Austria. Magical alpine meadows.

July

3rd and 4th week*

Burgundy - open for bespoke Retreats with us. Tell us what you'd like to do.

September

25 - October 2nd

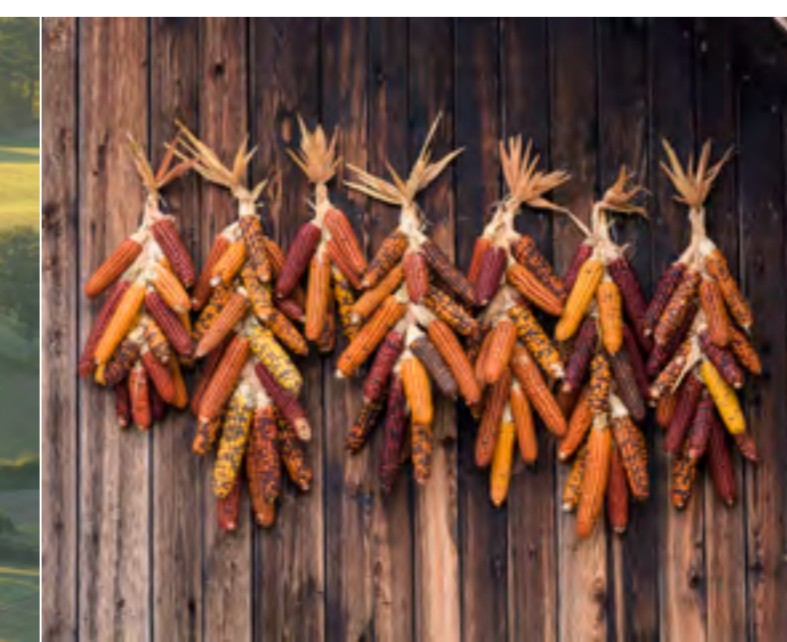
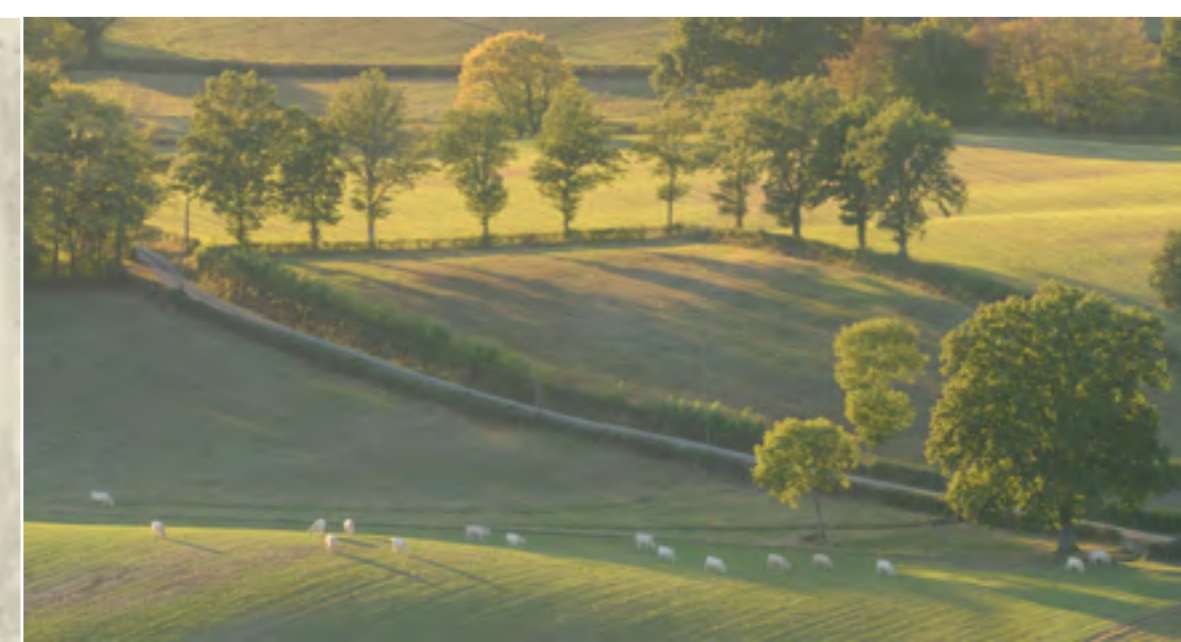
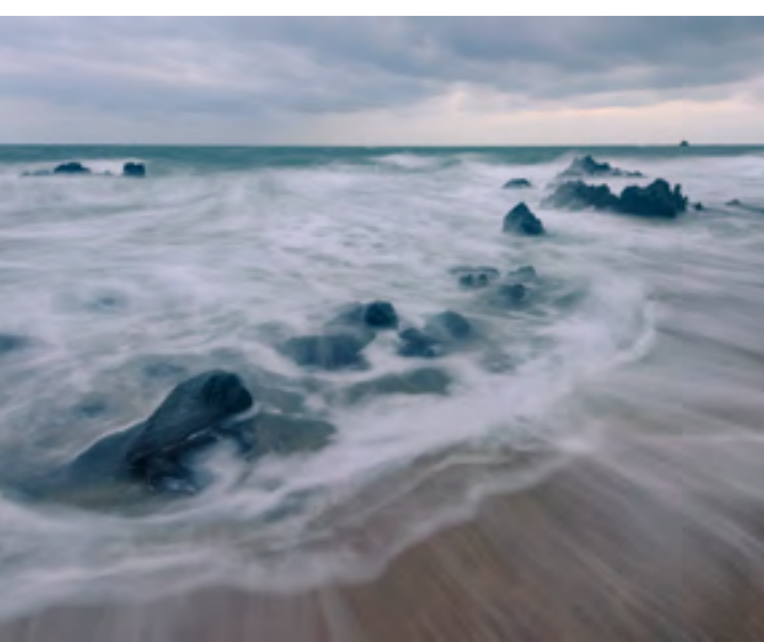
Burgundy - Rural life in old France.

October

16 - 23rd

Slovenia - Old churches, misty lakes.

**Final dates to be published once accommodation is confirmed.*



Skills

E-LEARNING

There has always been a lot to say in favour of distance learning, but never as much now that I can guide students through various processes on their own computer rather than asking them to follow what I'm doing on mine. And the icing on the cake - a video recording of the whole lesson for

future reference. Zoom or Skype - we can make it work for you. Our approach to teaching skills has always been specific rather than general. I don't know if I can make you a "better" photographer, but I can teach you how to do things you maybe didn't know about before. Or to think about things in a different

way. I won't teach you Photoshop in an afternoon, but I will show you how to use the tools you need to achieve particular goals. Charlotte will not teach you how to be a better cook but can show you dishes and methods to help you to become one yourself. We have repackaged many of the skills

we teach on Retreats into eLearning courses which, we believe, you can get nowhere else. We are planning to add others later in the year, but here are the current offers. And please feel free to suggest others that you would like to do. If we have the knowledge, we'll make it happen for you.

THE FIELD STUDIO

£280, includes Field Studio eBook, acrylic background and front diffuser (shipped worldwide), 3 hours of one-to-one online lessons, including recording.

COLOUR TRANSECTS

£170, includes Photoshop templates. Approximately 2 hours of one-to-one online lessons, including recording.

CHOCOLATE BAR COLLAGES

£180, includes Photoshop templates. Approximately 2 hours of one-to-one online lessons including recording.



SPLIT-TONING AND COLOUR GRADING

£160, for 2 one hour, one-to-one online lessons including recording.

MAKING WORDS PART OF THE IMAGE

£160, for 2 one hour, one-to-one online lessons including recording.

FINDING YOU STYLE

£200 for 2 one-and-a-quarter hour online lessons including recording.

Full details are on our website - just click the turquoise text. [MN](#)

Skills

E-PRESENTATIONS

In my thirty year career, I've spoken at, and moderated, dozens of meetings at clubs and conferences, in the US, UK, Norway, Finland, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Israel. Now, using Zoom, these presentations are available to a much wider audience - at a fraction of the cost.

E-PRESENTATIONS

FIELD STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS.

Since I first published a series of technical articles 13 years ago and, subsequently, [eBooks](#), the backlit, white background look has gained a large following. But my colleagues and I in the “Meet Your Neighbours” project have continued to evolve the techniques to produce ever more inventive and original images..

In this presentation, I describe the genesis of the project, positive lessons I’ve learned from collaborating with other photographers and detail some of the techniques used to create the unique field studio look.

*45 minutes plus 15 minutes Q and A.
£150 - £300, depending on audience size.*

RETROSPECTIVE: THIRTY YEARS OF LIVING ON YOUR WITS WITH A CAMERA.

Over a thirty year career I seem to have earned a reputation as an outdoor photography innovator, keeping my work distinctive and contemporary.


Based on my eBook, [Retrospective](#), I describe the five periods of my career, the opportunities and challenges each presented and the main work produced during them. It’s a unique and entertaining insight into the realities of not only making a living as a professional creative but also keeping the show on the road, year after year.

*45 minutes plus 15 minutes Q and A.
£150 - £300 depending on audience size.*

THE AUTHENTICITY OF IMPERFECTION: EVOLVING NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY.

Nature photography has changed almost beyond recognition in the last thirty years and I have been there at each stage of the way. This presentation charts its evolution, drawing upon examples from my own work, from a highly niche activity to something more akin to a competitive sport.

I make the case for a more authentic, encounter-based type of photography that reflects the natural world as it is rather than what fashion demands. It’s an approach that is both deeply liberating and accessible.

*45 minutes plus 15 minutes Q and A.
£150 - £300 depending on audience size. *

Charlotte makes

MACKEREL WITH ORANGE AND FENNEL SALAD

For four guests.

4 fresh mackerel: gutted, filleted and boned
(to be barbecue or pan-fried on a griddle)

for the marinade

- 4 teaspoons of cumin seeds
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tablespoons of freshly-chopped rosemary
- 2 teaspoons of sea salt
- the finely grated zest of a large orange
- 100 ml of olive oil

for the salad

- 2 banana shallots, finely sliced into circles
- 1 red chilli, very finely chopped
- 50 ml of white wine vinegar
- 2 large or 3 small oranges
- 2 fennel bulbs with the outer layer removed
- 100 ml of olive oil
- a good handful of basil leaves, finely chopped
- sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- lemon wedges and a fresh french baguette, as accompaniment.

How-to

Lightly toast the cumin seeds in a dry pan for a few minutes then tip into a bowl and add all the other marinade ingredients. Mix



well then, in a shallow dish, lay the mackerel fillets out and cover them with the marinade. Make sure both sides are brushed with the mixture and set them aside for about an hour before cooking.

In the meantime, you can make the salad. Put the onions, chilli, white wine vinegar, orange zest and the juice of one orange in a bowl and mix well. Set aside. Next, peel and pith the other orange and carefully remove

the segments without their enclosing membranes. Set these aside separately. Slice the fennel into thin slithers, put it in a bowl and season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Add the olive oil to this and mix well. Just before you are ready to cook the fish, add the basil and orange mix to the fennel salad, mix well and then fold in the onion mix too.

To cook the mackerel, pre-heat the griddle and, after scraping off any excess marinade, carefully place the fillets, skin side down, on the cooking surface and cook for a few minutes, until the pink flesh turns white as it cooks through. Turn off the heat and set aside to rest for one minute or so.

Serve the salad on individual plates. Place the fish on top with a garnish of lemon wedge and the baguette and salted butter to the side.

Delicious, and it tastes even better with a glass of chilled white wine. But then again, what doesn't? **MC**

Iona makes

A CLASSIC BAGUETTE

For one baguette

- 175 ml of warm water
- 1/2 a teaspoon of dried yeast
- 240 grams of plain flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- a splash of olive oil

How-to

Whisk the water and yeast together in a large bowl and wait until bubbles rise to the surface (maybe 10 minutes). Add the flour to this mixture then stir with a fork until a dough forms and all the flour is absorbed. Let the dough sit for 20 minutes until all the water is soaked up. Add the salt and transfer the dough onto a well-floured work surface. Knead it until the dough feels smooth and elastic. If it's sticky at the beginning of the knead, just sprinkle some flour over it - but not too much. Alternatively, you can do the job with a dough hook in your food mixer. Transfer the dough into a large, lightly greased bowl (using a splash of olive oil) and cover it with a reusable material, such as beeswax paper or even

a tea towel. Leave it to prove for 45 minutes, or until it has doubled in size, whichever comes sooner.

Transfer the dough onto the floured work surface and form it into a rough rectangle, being careful not to knock any air out of it. Once you have formed the shape, fold first the longer sides into the middle, followed by the shorter ones. Next, flip the dough over so the newly folded seams are underneath. This gives the dough a smooth look during its second prove. Place it back in the bowl and cover again, leaving it until it has doubled in size again - for about an hour.

Take a piece of baking paper, lightly dust it with flour and lay it out on a



baking tray. Take the proved dough and gently form it into a baguette shape, about 30 cm long. Don't worry if the stick looks thin; it will fatten out during the third and final prove. Once you are happy with the shape, place it on the floured baking sheet and cover again until it has doubled in size, this should take around 50 minutes.

Pre-heat your oven to 220°C (for a fan) or 240 °C (for a conventional one). I know this sounds super-hot but a lower temperature causes the crust to form too quickly and prevents the baguette from rising fully. It ends up way too crunchy and too dense. Also, place an iron pan in the bottom of the oven- you'll see!

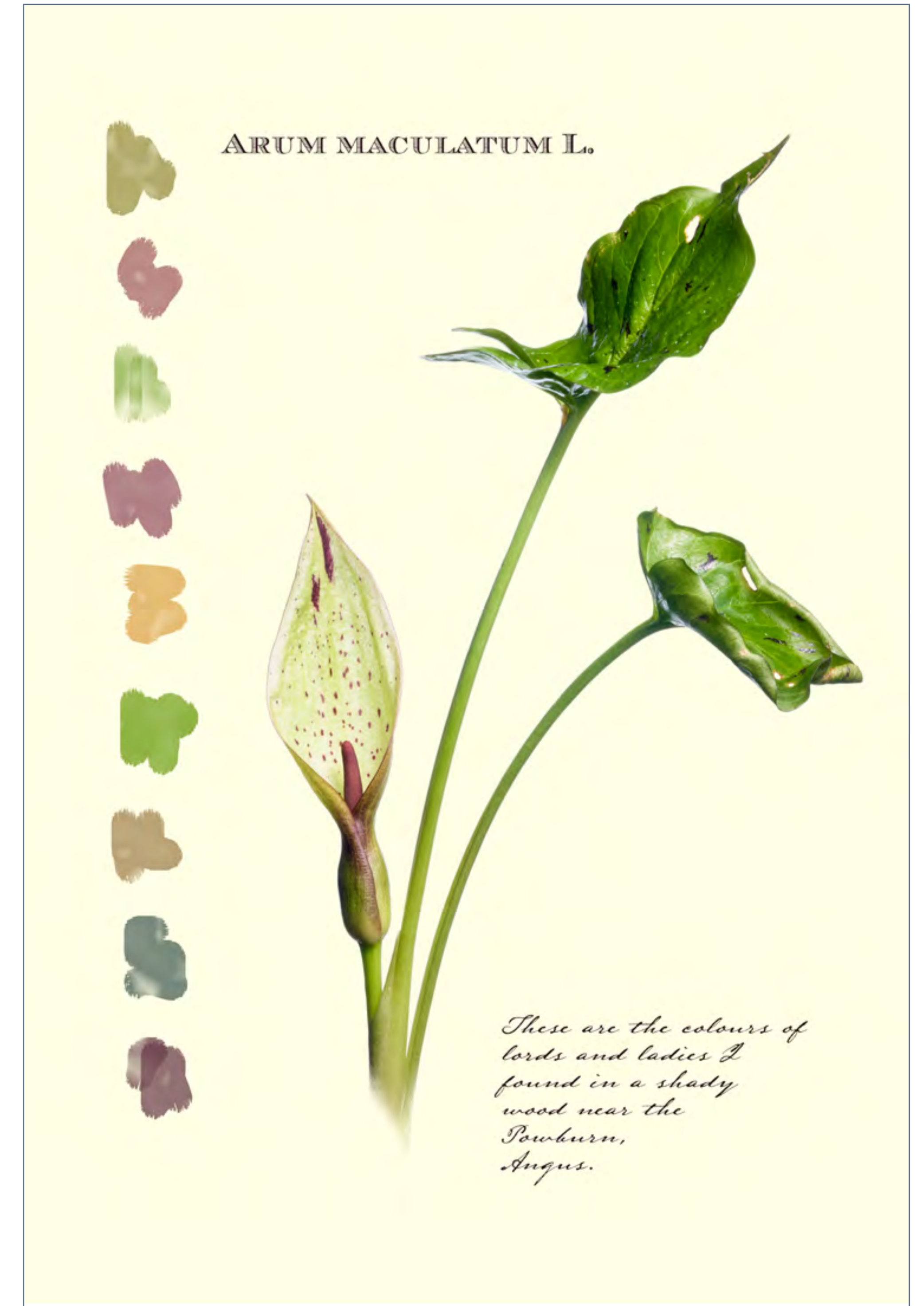
Uncover your baguette and when you are happy it has doubled in size (some air is lost each time in handling), make four or five slashes at a 30° angle across it, and dust with flour.

Place the bread on the middle shelf of the oven, ensuring it is positioned so that it will bake evenly. Then put ice cubes or cold water (both work equally well) in the pre-heated iron pan at the bottom of the oven. This produces steam and ensures that the baguette can rise fully before it develops a crust. Bake for about 20 -25 minutes until it is golden and crisp, but keep an eye on it throughout. You've taken a lot of trouble, after all!

When you think it is fully baked, remove it from the oven and flip it over. Tap the base of the baguette and if it sounds hollow, it's ready. If not; return it to the oven for another couple of minutes and test it again. Cool a little before serving and enjoy with Charlotte's tasty salad. Bon appetit! **MI**

At home

ART IN THE BACK GARDEN



Introducing

Eliot Porter

Eliot Porter, who died at the age of 89 in 1990, was America's leading pioneer in colour outdoor photography. Hitherto, photographic artists such as Alfred Steiglitz, his wife, Georgia O'Keefe, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams had worked exclusively in black and white*

Porter understood that, as an artist representing the natural world, black and white representations greatly under-reported its complexity. Colour photography's literality, normally regarded as a bar to its consideration as an expressive medium, was revealed instead as a huge creative challenge in its own right. Shadows and highlights were not simply different tonal renderings but also mixes of borrowed light as reflective surfaces acquired colour that was not their own. This understanding is clear in the picture at right, which became the cover of Porter's 1962 classic Sierra Club book, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the*



* While Ansel Adams also shot colour towards the end of his life, this work isn't considered as significant as his black and white catalogue.

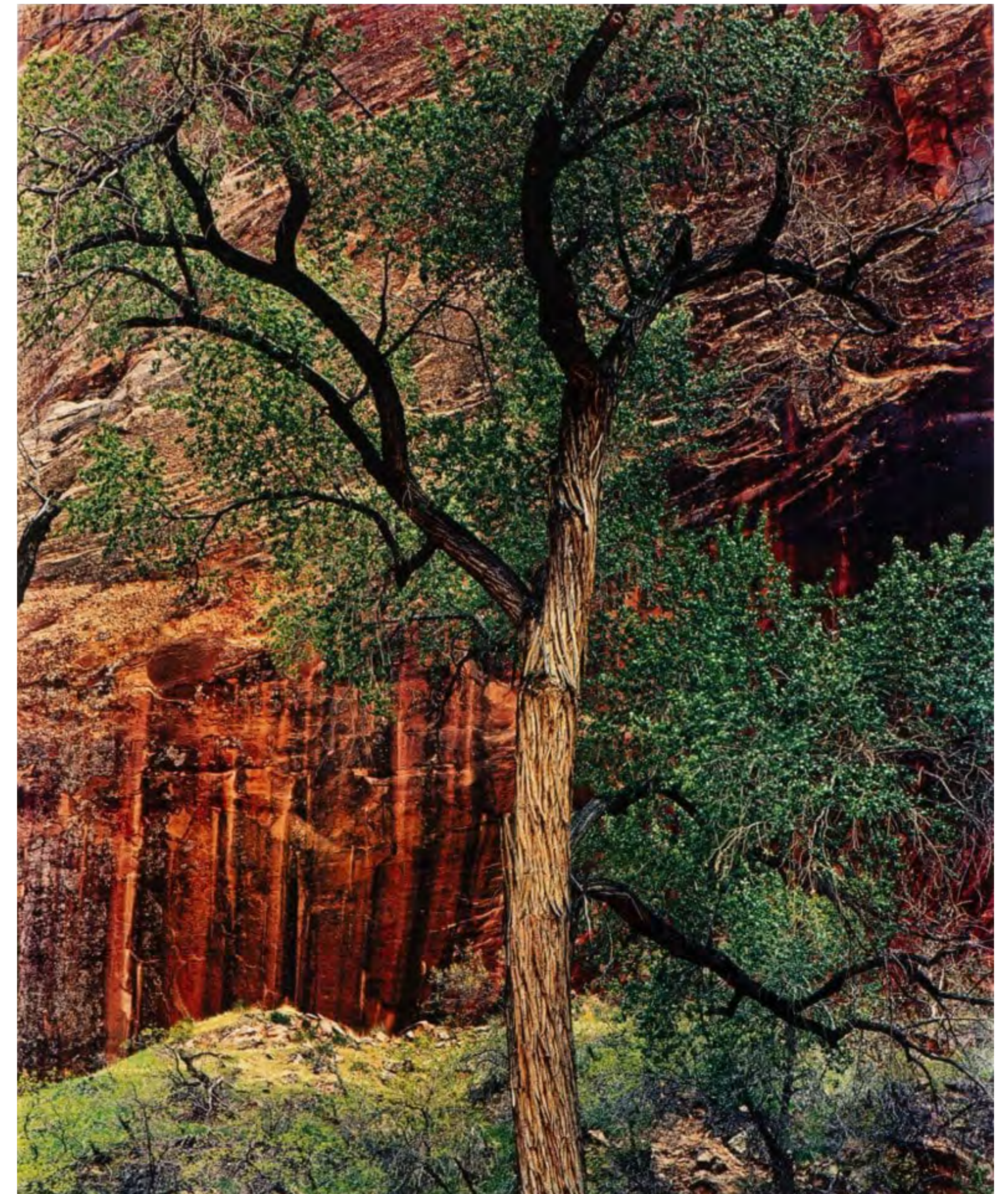
Introducing

Eliot Porter

World. This was the second in a visionary series of colour coffee table books that David Brower of the Sierra Club commissioned and was instrumental in establishing that colour photography had the potential to be every bit as artistically valid as monochrome.

Although he started out as a bird photographer, Porter is arguably the father of the "intimate landscape" - something between grand vista and close-up detail. It's a form many of us, perhaps of a more reserved disposition, are naturally drawn to. His pictures are "quiet", exquisitely (and not always obviously) composed. They are not "images with impact" but, rich with detail, they invite exploration contemplation and ask for some time from the viewer. There is an unself-conscious honesty about his landscape work that sets a high bar even for photographers today.

images © Eliot Porter/ Amon Carter Museum.



Bonus footage

Divach gorge

Over five autumns, I visited the majority of the Forestry Commission's (now, Forest and Land Scotland) properties across Scotland to document them and their recreational use. This was for the Commission to use in its publications and on its website. The first three assignments concentrated on the landscapes, before people became the main focus. Owing to the tendering process, it was sometimes quite late in summer before I could begin and the job often extended into early winter.

So it was that I found myself not far from Loch Ness one soaking November afternoon alongside a deep gorge headed by the 30 metre high Divach Falls. The ash and birch on the opposite bank at first looked like a chaotic jumble of branches. But these gradually resolved themselves into a more structured arrangement with the a large, moss-festooned ash taking centre-stage, all very Porter-esque. MN



MENU

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Words in [turquoise](#) are linked to external web pages.

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