

# FOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS™

*with the Benvies*

No. 2 • August 2018

## MENU

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Colour Transect #16

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Inspiration  
*Angélica Dass*



*56.847° N  
colour transect #16*

When I first started to create Colour Transects in 2017, my intention was to simplify and clarify the image's colour content for the viewer. By adding the latitude where the image was taken, the viewer could also test the received wisdom that a subtler palette prevails further north. The concept is borrowed from ecological sampling where a line is defined through a habitat and records made at regular intervals. The exercise can be repeated at different times on the same line to introduce consistency to the sampling process. In a Colour Transect, lines are drawn across the image in post production and colours sampled to colour the swatches. We teach this skill on some of our Retreats and encourage you to find new uses. This month's Inspiration, *Angélica Dass*, has found another, brilliant application for sampling. - Niall



## News from Niall and Charlotte

We sometimes read the home page of our website, with its invitation to “slow down” and encouragement to “give yourself time to think and reflect” and wish that we could take some of our own advice. But the creative life means that there is always a new avenue to explore, new technique to perfect or new recipe to try. We sort of like it that way; idleness doesn’t sit comfortably and industry, to some extent, is its own reward.

Nevertheless, it’s rather nice when this work is acknowledged publicly, as it was recently when Steve Watkins, Editor of the UK’s *Outdoor Photography* magazine, singled Niall out in his July editorial. “There are many top professional photographers who have fallen into the trap [of living on past successes]. ...Our columnist, Niall Benvie, is one who I feel has trodden the path of continual change throughout his career. You only need to take a cursory glance at his website to see just how diverse his work has been over the years and yet every stage along the path has been taken

with great mindfulness and a clear progression in, and application of, acquired knowledge. It’s impossible to define Niall’s style but I am always eager to discover what he will do next.” Enough already! Often the “what he will do next” arises from conversations with other creative people, whether they are recreational photographers, such as our guests, musicians, painters or writers. Creativity is a process best practised in the company of others.

Sometimes, in our case, that company is each other. We often set out on a car journey with a woolly idea to discuss and, by the time we arrive, it has turned into a sweater-shaped plan. So it was, recently, that we realised there was a call for Retreats that also cater for the non-photographer in the family. Often, couples travel separately for no other reason than a lack of shared interests. So, our Burgundy Retreat in April 2019 is evolving a parallel offer for those who love food more than photography and includes a day at the celebrated *Cook’s Atelier* in Beaune, as well as

chocolate and patisserie work with Charlotte. Do drop us a line if this tweaks your interest.

Before that though, we are planning a pre-Christmas long weekend (7th - 11th December, 2018) at a fabulous base in the Cairngorms National Park, Scotland, for outdoor photography - on the one side - and festive baking, chocolate making and decoration - on the other. We’re working hard to get the brochure out very soon. But if it sounds like your cup of mulled wine, call us for a chat; it may be the perfect Christmas present to give to each other.

Until the next time,

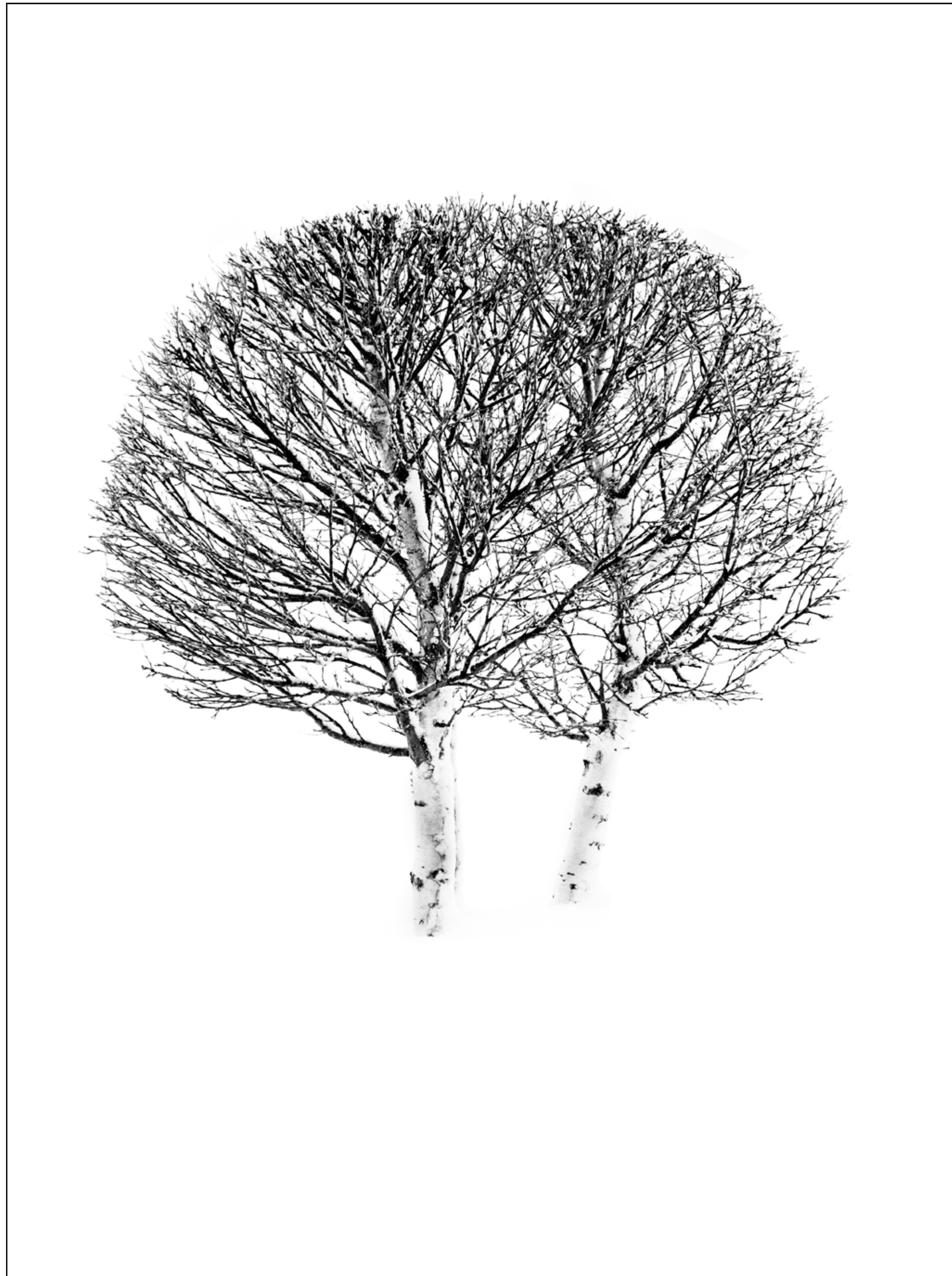
Our best wishes

Niall and Charlotte Benvie, Directors





## Idea - Style is endemic



*Twin birches, Senja, Norway. The greatest impediment to your development as a photographer can be the influence exerted by others. It's important to have belief in your own world view, then to have the confidence to have it scrutinized in your work.*

You're perhaps familiar with the notion that it takes 10 000 hours of concentrated application to become "expert" in any creative field. So, if we're able to apply ourselves properly for four hours a day, 5 days a week, we're looking at around 10 years from novice to master. That's a very imprecise figure of course, but it's clear that if the theory is valid, none of us are going to master any of the arts in the space of a year or two, especially one as complex as photography.

Photography is a generous medium, though, as it lets us believe we've mastered it as soon as we conjure our first "great picture". This is good as it encourages further practice until the point is reached when we realise how poor our early "achievements" actually were. And so the process repeats itself until, eventually, we create something enduring. For some of us that can take far longer than 10 000 hours while others fall into their stride sooner. Either way, each continues to think about the medium in an increasingly sophisticated way the longer they practise.

A useful measure of any artist's progress is the emergence of their style. This is something many photographers at the beginning of their journey

are impatient to define without realising that they possess one already. But lack of confidence and, more particularly, the pressure of external influences, tend to inhibit its expression until later on - perhaps after the 10 000 hours mark has been passed. I suspect too that in the days before the internet and an abundance of photo magazines the comparative insularity of photographers fostered individuality and allowed them to find their own voice more readily simply because there were many fewer influences to overcome.

It should follow that the best teachers are those with many years of experience, whose work is readily identifiable and who are comfortable in their own photographic skin. Indeed, I have sometimes wondered what photographers with little experience and no publication record have to offer in their workshops. But an article in *New Scientist* a few years ago ("Don't get smart: the curse of knowledge", August 4th 2011) casts doubt on this assumption. And one sentence in particular stopped me short: ' "It's an oxymoron, but ignorance can be a virtue in education," [Susan Birch of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver] says. To teach effectively, you need to see things from the naive perspective of the pupil - and the more knowledge you



have acquired, the harder it becomes. "Sometimes a less-experienced teacher can be better at pitching the message at the right level," she says. In other words, perhaps the increasing sophistication that comes with time is actually more of a hindrance than a help.

My first reaction on reading this was that there are good and bad teachers across the knowledge spectrum. I remembered being taught at university by one brilliant professor who brought his subject to life and another whose whole class failed its first term paper as he had failed to communicate his expertise in an accessible way. I also remembered when I wrote my first photography book almost 20 years ago and trying to get to grips with Photoshop 5.0 in the space of a month so that I could write about it for the book. While, in retrospect, the information wasn't brilliant, it wasn't actually wrong either and I was at least able to produce something accessible to others a few weeks behind me on the learning curve.

I've heard stories too of well-known photographers who, perhaps because of declining stock income, have started to teach workshops and proved ill-suited to this sort of work. Some of us are natural teachers, others

are not but it seems that if you are, a lack of experience may not necessarily be a hindrance to helping others progress.

You may think that the lack of any formal accreditation for photography tutors would make it almost impossible to choose a workshop with confidence - a choice being made ever harder as more photographers clamber on the already creaking workshop bandwagon. And if those anecdotes and the research in *New Scientist* are to be believed, a "name" is no guarantee of a workshop's success.

But perhaps the choice isn't so hard after all. Look for a workshop pitched to your level of knowledge and the specific technique you want to master and you'll find the options dramatically reduced. Like most other leaders, I've taught workshops over the years to "mixed ability" groups because whoever has contracted me is worried about narrowing the appeal of the class by specifying that it is for "absolute beginners" or "those just about to become professional." I have to tell you that it always ends up as a compromise for everyone concerned. I think too that there is often a lack of focus on teaching specific skills - be that printing, using a

field studio, editing DSLR video or creating proposals - that themselves may take a few days to get to grips with - simply because of the smaller market.

Learning photography from a teacher attuned to you and what you want to learn will undoubtedly speed your creative journey. But in the long term, only through learning from and about yourself will your own style find expression. And that may take 10 000 hours.



*Raven, Alam Pedja, Estonia. There is a big difference between "the look" a photographer brings to their work and their actual style. Style is about their ability to change that look according to the subject matter and their intention - it's not a fixed thing. Style is about feeling comfortable in expressing your world view.*



# Skill - Creating colour swatches

I'm very fond of blending graphic design with photography to create images with a foot in both camps. Photoshop provides us with some powerful tools to extract the colours in an image and use them to apply a tint to text, backgrounds (see *Inspiration*, page 10) or, in the case of my Colour Transects, to create swatches that describe the key colours present in an image.

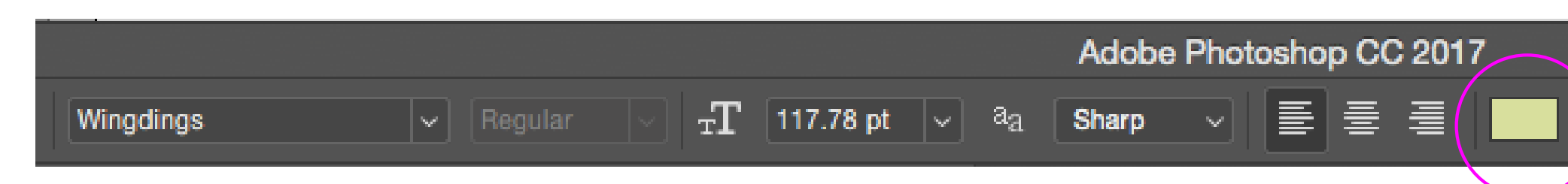
There are, of course, many ways in which you can create a grid of squares and really, Indesign makes life much simpler in this regard. However, relatively few photographers license Indesign compared to Photoshop, so we'll concentrate on the latter.

These squares are, in fact, the letter N in the font Wingdings. I'll let you work out your own size and spacing with reference to the Character window in Photoshop. Having created a text layer, centre it on the blank page and type N as many times as you need squares. You'll have to get the right combination of font size, leading (the vertical gap between the lines of squares), and tracking (which affects the overall

spacing between the squares) to make a grid. Since we're dealing with uniform squares, you needn't fiddle with the kerning as well.

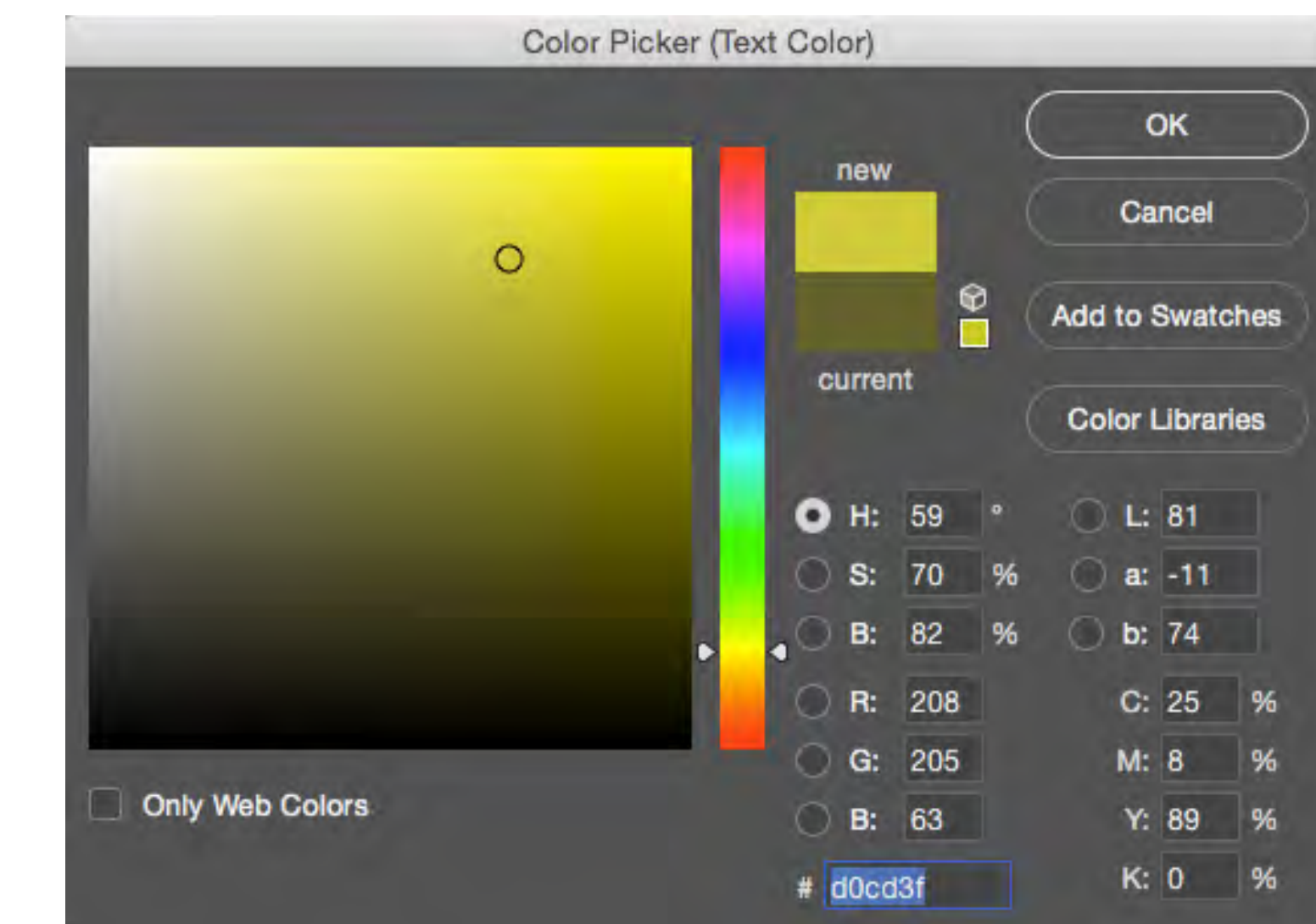


When it comes to selecting the colour for each swatch, go the Text layer you created when you typed the letter N numerous times. When you highlight one of the squares by dragging the mouse over it (with Text tool selected from the Tools panel), the top bar displays the colour you originally chose for that letter (mustard in this case). Click on the tab I've circled to display the Colour Picker.



With the Colour Picker, you can move the sample tool to anywhere on the image and by clicking there, select

that colour to add a tint to the square. Click OK, then highlight the next square and repeat the process. I draw temporary lines across the image to use



as a guide when I'm taking my colour samples (the Line Tool is in the Tool palette. It creates a separate layer that you can delete once you've done your sampling).

We usually have a Colour Transects module on our Retreats so if you'd like to practise more, please join us.





## Food - Baked salmon and tomatoes with lentils and horseradish



Like many people, we eat rather less red meat than we used to, and a lot more fish. Although salmon is no longer regarded as a luxury food, Charlotte's treatment of it in this dish certainly makes it one.

### Photography note

Although I love the look of carefully managed daylight in still life work, I don't like how the sun comes and goes here in eastern Scotland and how brilliance and contrast are affected. It is not simply a matter of adjusting exposure: there is a difference in quality and modelling similar to the difference between shooting in deep shade and in bright diffused light.

This shot was created on a bright but overcast day in my dark studio with the light through the doorway diffused by a 2 metre Lastolite Lite Panel. Secondary diffusion, which helped to even up the exposure from the top to the bottom of frame, was provided by a short piece of Flyweight envelope diffuser, just out of frame at the top. I added to the brightness of the light with a grided Elinchrom RQ head popping some low angle flash through both diffusers.





### Ingredients (serves 4)

- 1 tablespoon of unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- A red onion, finely chopped
- 2 crushed garlic cloves
- 300 grams of green/Puy lentils
- Fresh thyme
- 450 ml of hot chicken stock
- 2 heaped tablespoons of creamed horseradish
- 75 ml of creme fraiche
- Lemon juice
- 4 Scottish salmon fillets
- Cherry tomatoes on the vine, allowing 5 per person.

### How-to

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (160° for fan) or gas 4. Heat the butter with the oil in an ovenproof dish then sauté the onion. Add the crushed garlic then sauté over a medium heat for another 30 seconds, taking care not to burn the garlic. Stir in the lentils, thyme and chicken stock. Cover the dish with foil then put it in the oven to cook for 20 minutes.

2. Place the cherry tomatoes, still on the vine, in a roasting tray, drizzle generously with olive oil and

sprinkle them with sea salt and ground black pepper. Put the tray in the oven for the tomatoes to roast while the lentils are cooking.

3. After the 20 minutes have elapsed, take the lentils out of the oven so you can stir in the horseradish with the creme fraiche, lemon juice and a little sea salt. You'll need to crush some salt onto the salmon along with freshly ground pepper. Rest the salmon on top of the lentils, cover and return the dish to the oven for a further 10 minutes.

4. Now the fillets should be cooked and it's also time to take the tomatoes out of the oven. Cut the stems, if you haven't already done so, so that each piece of vine has 5 tomatoes on it.

5. Spoon generous amounts of lentils on to pre-heated plates. Place the salmon on them, then the tomatoes on top of the fish. Drizzle any tomato juice from the roasting tray over the tomatoes, garnish with fresh thyme and serve with steamed green vegetables.

- Charlotte



*Featured Retreat - Burgundy 11-18th April 2019*

CONCEPTS FOR  
OUTDOOR  
PHOTOGRAPHERS

*a photographic retreat in  
rural Burgundy  
April 11-18, 2019*

WILLI ROLFES • NIAL BENVIE  
HOSTED BY  
CHARLOTTE BENVIE



**Stop Press!** You may have read what follows on the last newsletter but what we weren't able to tell you then is that we have added an additional offer to this Retreat for partners/spouses who are not photographers - but love food. Their programme includes a full day at the celebrated [Cook's Atelier in Beaune](#); and a chocolate and macaron making workshop over two days during which they'll learn the arts of the professional chocolatière. This is taught by Charlotte and the cost of it, and the day in Beaune, is included in that of the Retreat. There will be further kitchen demonstrations too during the week. Do drop us a line if you are interested in booking: [office@foodandphotographyretreats.com](mailto:office@foodandphotographyretreats.com).

Charlotte and I spent a week out in southern Burgundy in April/May this year to get a feel for what to expect when we return 11 - 18 April 2019 for our *Concepts for Outdoor Photographers* Retreat. And it confirmed what we had hoped for: so long as it's not a late one, we will arrive at the peak of spring, with leaves freshly emerged, most migrants returned and lots of subject for guests to practice the Retreat's ideas and techniques on. For those of us used to the UK's fickle spring weather - when the sun may

smile on you but the wind holds a knife to your ribs - spring in the Morvan is just delightful. I've posted a [soundtrack](#) recorded around our house, near Saint Seine, of nightingales with a supporting cast of green woodpecker, wood lark, edible frogs and a jay. But there were also hoopoes in the later part of the visit and the bird that helped us set our heart on the old house, a golden oriole singing, as ever, from the big oak beyond our hedge.

We have invited the veteran German workshop leader, photographer and author, [Willi Rolfes](#), to share the teaching duties on this Retreat. It is always interesting to work with other tutors and to witness how different teaching styles can benefit different guests. There is simply no "right way" to teach these things. The three main skills we want to help you master during the Retreat are the creation of collages (we call them "chocolate bars"); field studio photography of the sort that I've used to shoot the elements for the preceding composite; and processes surrounding my Colour Transects concept. Now, we don't want you thinking that you're going to be indoors all the time at the computer. Think of your time, instead, as divided between shooting the raw materials for a piece of work

in the field then creating the final work indoors when the light isn't good in the middle part of the day. A key element of our approach is to furnish you with the skills that will allow you to go away and create your own, original pieces long after the Retreat is finished. This is in contrast to a photo tour where you're essentially taking very similar pictures to those that have been produced many times before. We want you to be able to compose the piece rather simply perform it.



*Fresh mint chocolate macarons, from the kitchen of Charlotte!*

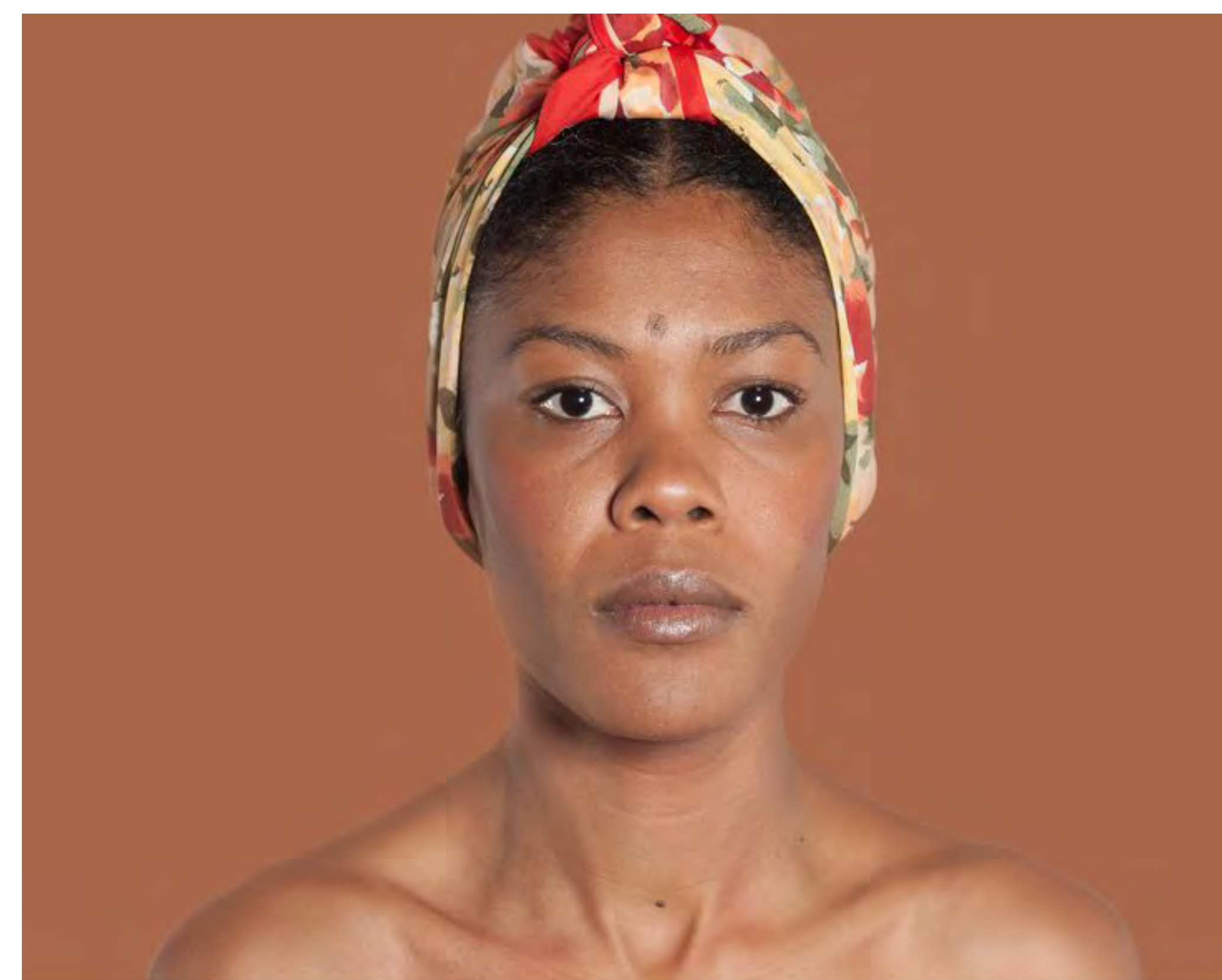


# Inspiration - Angélica Dass

Every so often, a photographer hits on a clever idea. A really clever one. Brazilian artist, **Angélica Dass** (right, below), has done just that with her project, *Humanae*, receiving worldwide acclaim in the process. Like many of the best ideas, it is both simple and challenging, as well as giving us a fresh perspective on an already well-explored topic.

The topic here is race, which Dass, with her own diverse heritage, has a particular interest in. In *Humanae*, she demonstrates how race, or more specifically skin colour, doesn't readily conform to easy, simplistic classification and highlights that by specifying the Pantone "colour" of the sitter as part of the image. Each is different (she has photographed over 3000 people so far). What is most telling though, and relatively few commentators have picked up on, is that all human beings occupy the warm part of the colour spectrum; there are no purples blues, greens or cyans amongst us - we're all variants of brown.

I love *Humanae* because it deconstructs entrenched ideas without fuss and in a highly accessible, replicable



**PANTONE 7522 C**

way: viewers can look at the large panels she has created and, without help, understand what she's saying. The project has been adopted by a wide variety of educators and students as a tool to discuss diversity, ethnicity and social justice.

On a technical level, the project caught my attention because of its use of colour sampling. The sitters are photographed against a white background but it is replaced in Photoshop with colour sampled from their nose. You can make this replacement in a variety of ways, but the Colour Replacement Tool (under Brush in the Tool Palette), with further work using the Refine Selection Brush, gives the best prospect of a good selection of loose hair.

Angélica Dass has presented *Humanae* on the TED Channel. Her talk is inspiring, moving and proof, if it were needed, of the enduring power of stills photography practised and presented with passion.

Photographs © Angélica Dass 2018.



## Bonus footage - the colour of mussels



*I love fusing ideas from one field of photography with those of another. So here, "Mystic Light" (the name given to this low-key style of food photography) meets Colour Transect. Good chefs care about presentation and the mix of colours on the plate so I wound back one stage further to explore - and clarify - the colours of the ingredients. The picture was lit with one flash from behind and above coming obliquely through a diffuser into my three-sided "dark space" and I split toned the image to make the shadows more cyan.*

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office@foodandphotographyretreats.com +44 7400 303 930.  
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