

FOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS™

with the Benvies

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Menu

Picture of the month

Cow parsley

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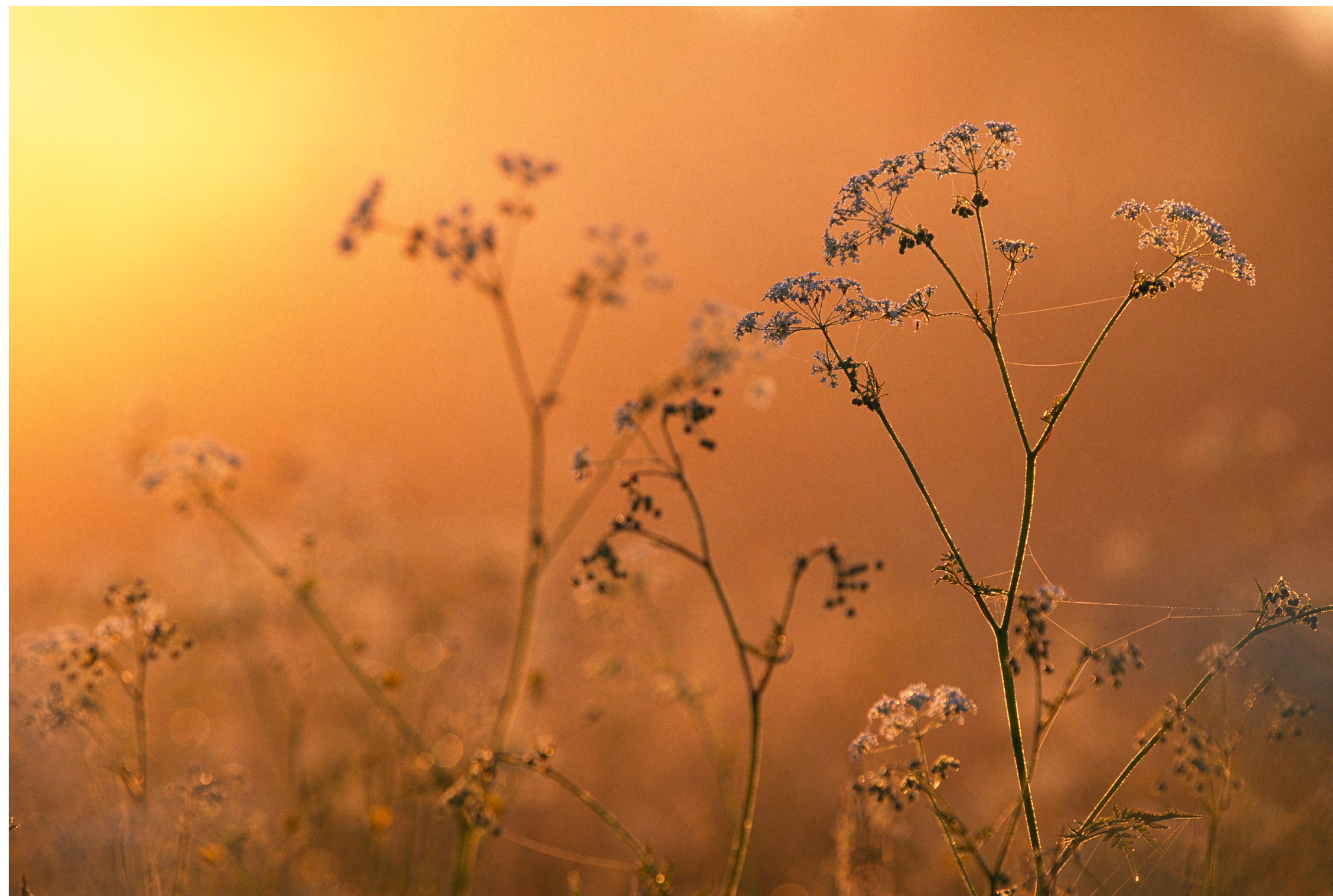
Apricot and frangipane cruffins

Featured Retreat

Burgundy, April 2019

Inspiration

Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison



In the early 1980's I bought my first "proper" telephoto - a Tamron 300mm f5.6. What the lens lacked in speed it made up for close-focusing ability. With it, I learned how I could manipulate the appearance of the background and create contrast between it and a shaded subject. It's a style, popularised by Jan Töve and other Scandinavian photographers in the 1990's which is currently in vogue again and taken to a new level by [Sandra Bartocha](#), [Perdita Petzel](#) and others. This picture was made early one summer's morning in Alam Pedja Nature Reserve, Estonia with a 500mm lens and shot on Fuji Velvia. - Niall

News from Niall and Charlotte

So, here it is. Our very first newsletter as **Food and Photography Retreats Ltd.** The time feels right for this fresh take on photographic holidays and we're excited to build upon and share the knowledge and experience we've gained over 25 years to offer something a wee bit special. Thank you for the chance to tell you about it by subscribing to our newsletter..

We're not great ones for the hard sell but we hope that as you read this and future issues you'll come to appreciate what we bring to the table, literally and photographically. With the exception of **Instagram**, we're not active on social media, preferring instead to share what we do on the Food and Photography Retreats **website** and in this newsletter. They feel like more solid, less ephemeral platforms offering the chance to present ourselves in a more elegant way. With the introduction of new GDPR rules, we tore up our old mailing list and started afresh so if you like what you see here we'd be very pleased if you would **share** it with your circle so we can expand our audience.

The format of this newsletter, following that of our website, sets the pattern for future issues and we're particularly excited to include the work of other photographers and artists who you might - or might not - be familiar with. In some cases, they will be colleagues we've known for years; in others, they are people we've not met but whose work moves us and whose names will inevitably come up in conversation during the Retreats. In this issue, we feature the extraordinary photography of American artists, **Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison**, whose vision of our relationship with the Earth is surreal, intriguing and often deeply perplexing.

If you've been on our website, you'll know that we currently have two **Retreats** advertised, on the Hebridean island of Islay in November and in Burgundy in April 2019. Islay is fully booked but 5 places remain on the Burgundy one which we are co-hosting with the German photographer and teacher, **Willi Rolfes**. We operate a policy of uniform pricing so that no matter

how early or how late you book or whether you have a single room or share, you pay the same as everyone else. But places are limited!

Over the next two years, we will be travelling a lot in mainland Europe to research locations and venues for future Retreats and will advertise these once we're happy with the ground work we've done. Expect more in France and Scotland! If you have a place in mind you think is just perfect for what we do, just email us and we'll look into it.

Our best wishes

Niall and Charlotte Benvie, Directors



Idea - Context



Alpine forget-me-not is a species likely to shrink in range as climate change shifts it ever higher up the mountains. The picture forms part of the *Nostalgia for Snow* project which looks at what we will lose if the climate continues to warm. The context transforms it from a single interesting word into part of a dialogue.

Imagine you're at a really great party. There are lots of interesting people but as more and more arrive it gets louder and louder until all you can hear are random words. It becomes impossible to follow any conversations. The single words you overhear are intriguing but, by themselves, don't make any sense. Suddenly, the party seems a lot less interesting.

I think there are clear parallels with the photographic world we're now part of. We're awash with intriguing images that, by themselves, don't make sense. They may make us smile or frown for a moment but without context, without other images to "complete the sentence", their impact is fleeting, their meaning unresolved. Vincent Munier's 2010 book *Au Fil des Songes* (Kobalann) presents an interesting case study in context. The book is, on one level, about the nature reserves of Lorraine in France. But it is also a very individual expression of Vincent's feelings about these places. The photography is far removed from the sort that fills stock libraries and nature magazines and if the collection of images were to be broken down into individual "words", some would probably fail to elicit any "likes" at all on a Facebook page. But provide these with a context, of similar supporting images and words,

and something coherent and individual results: a complete statement about these protected areas that is moving and compelling. A spirit can be discerned.

You can find context for your images – and complete your sentences – through a number of avenues. If you are fortunate, the context may be provided by your own distinctive style and the interest that exists around your work. You as an individual, with a particular world view, provide the context. More often though, context comes from the images being part of a story-led project where they work together to support a narrative. And by the way, context is more than putting similarly themed images together in a set: that's equivalent to choosing words for a sentence because they all begin with the first three letters: quirky, but it's not how language works. If you are struggling to find the context that makes sense of your pictures, start by asking yourself what they are about. Something as vague as "the transitory nature of light" or "the impermanence of life" isn't going to cut it, I'm afraid. But if you can summarise in a sentence what links the images, then you've found their context. *The Wild Wonders of Europe* project linked its diverse collection of photographs under the simple theme of "Europe's natural crown jewels".

The **Meet Your Neighbours** initiative links its white background images of wildlife around the world with the description of “backyard biodiversity anyone can go and see”. There is no doubt that finding the context for your images gives you a much better chance of having your voice heard. Even then though, you may be struggling if your photography is generic.

Generic photographs are easy to spot. They look like hundreds, thousands of others taken at the same place or of the same species. It’s as if the photographer has taken what they think people expect to see rather than what they actually saw and felt. There is no element of individual expression: the artist has deferred to the apparatchik within. The words of others substitute the photographer’s own. Munier’s photography in “*Au Fil des Songes*” is anything but generic. It doesn’t try to be popular by seeking out “the jumping squirrel”, “plunging kingfisher” or any number of well-explored clichés. Instead the images are personal. And because of this, there is a sense of authenticity that is as palpable and fresh as when **Laurie Campbell** broke the mould of traditional British nature photography in the late 1980’s. People have an instinct for the authentic - and value it.

You might ask why any of this matters and wonder what’s wrong with making copies of photos you like by other people. If you’re content to work as a human photocopier that’s fine but you’re putting yourself down, allowing others to speak for you. Photography provides an incredible platform for self-expression, for framing and sharing your world view. Why wouldn’t you take full advantage of it? Find your words and say what you need to.

Our Retreats are planned to help you to find ways of making photographs that are less generic and more specific to you. You can learn about the skills we teach here ([click to link to the website](#)).



Nostalgia for Snow also highlights those cultural activities which rely on snow or ice - activities likely to become faded memories in just a few generations.

Skill - split toning colour photographs

If you've ever wondered just what the point of the Split Toning panel is in Lightroom, then you're missing out on a useful expressive tool. I say "expressive" because split toning isn't intended for you simply to render colours accurately but rather to allow you to inject a particular feeling into the image by introducing contrasting casts to the highlights and shadows.

Movie makers have long understood the power of a colour grade that warms highlights (such as white skin) and cools shadows - this is the so-called cream/teal rendering. We can do something similar in



Lightroom (or in a more sophisticated, selective way, in Photoshop). In these portraits of Iona I have applied a

simple split tone to the image on the right using these values: **Highlights - Hue 37, Saturation 22; Balance - 0; Shadows - Hue 117, Saturation 4.** Since the image is predominantly dark, raising the Saturation above 4 risks introducing an unhealthy tone in the shaded parts of her face.

This is a pretty basic use of split toning and doesn't really change the fundamental mood of the picture. But used carefully, and in conjunction with contrast tools, it's possible to create a rendering with the otherworldly quality beloved of lifestyle photographers.



My first port of call for this sort of conversion is [Alienskin's Exposure X3](#) - once a filter plug-in, now a grown-up, richly-featured alternative to Lightroom. You can work quickly with RAW files or TIFFs as there is no catalogue to slow things down. During Retreats that include a post-production module, we'll show you how to choose, refine and create presets to give your own distinctive look to your photographs, using Lightroom, Photoshop and Alienskin Exposure X.

If your only previous experience of split toning is in black and white, something new and exciting awaits!



Food - Apricot and Frangipane cruffins



A favourite at breakfast amongst guests are Charlotte's cruffins - a cross between a croissant and a muffin - which come in a variety of sweet or savoury forms. Here's how to make the yummiest of all - apricot and frangipane - with a few flaked almonds for texture. See the next page for the recipe.

Photography note

While daylight is very popular amongst food photographers, I value the control and consistency (not to say short exposures) I have when I use flash. The trick is to make it look at least a little like daylight and control very carefully where it falls. I set up my elements on a floor tile - one of several I use as backgrounds for overhead shots and enclosed it in my three-sided "dark space" - boards covered with black fabric that eliminate unwanted fill-light. On the fourth, open, side I put up my Perspex diffuser, as close as possible to the set. The light came from a single Elinchrom HS Quadra head fitted with a 30° grid positioned 1.5m away at a very low angle. 55mm, f11.



Almond blossom, Spain

Ingredients (makes 12 cruffins)

- 2 tubes of fresh croissant dough
- A jar of apricot conserve
- 100g of ground almonds
- 50g flaked almonds
- 100g of softened butter (you'll need the wrapper for greasing the tin)
- 100g of icing sugar
- 25g of plain flour
- 1 large free-range (we insist!) egg, beaten

Equipment

A 12 cup muffin tin

How-to

1. Heat the oven to 180°/160° fan/gas 4. Lightly grease the muffin tin and set aside.
2. Make the frangipane in a mixing bowl: beat together the icing sugar and butter until light and fluffy then gradually beat in the egg. Once well blended add the flour and ground almonds and mix well. Set aside.
3. Break open the tubes of croissant dough and roll it out onto a lightly floured worktop area. Ignoring the diagonally perforated lines, cut a line across the middle horizontal perforation and then mark from top to bottom to make 6 even rectangles. Do this to both sheets of dough.

4. Spread the frangipane mix over the whole surface of each in an even layer. Take small teaspoons of the apricot conserve and dot small amounts around the frangipane so there will be a delicate taste of the apricot in each cruffin (a small knife to move the conserve off the spoon is very useful). Next, sprinkle the flaked almonds evenly over the whole surface.
5. Take each rectangle and from its long edge, roll the dough upwards into a roll and then spiral round to make the cruffin shape and place carefully in the cups of the muffin tin. *Make sure you place them in with the cut-side up.*
6. Bake in pre-heated oven for 17-20 minutes until golden brown and nicely puffed up.
7. Once baked, carefully remove the cruffin from the tin with a rounded knife or small cranked spatula, and place on a wire rack to cool slightly. You can glaze them with a little Apricot conserve brushed on for a nice shiny finishing touch. Devour when warm.

Note: These can be prepared the night before and placed in the muffin tin, covered with cling film and kept in the fridge. Remove from the fridge about 20 minutes before baking to bring them to room temperature.

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



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.

This summer, Charlotte is working on further expanding her repertoire of French dishes and I'm reviewing my activity levels accordingly. You can be sure that by the time guests join the Retreat, she will have put her own unique twist on these dishes.

Do drop us a line if your interested in booking one of the remaining places .

office@foodandphotographyretreats.com



Inspiration - Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind on viewing these photographs is, "what on Earth is going on here?" That question alone separates their work from the mass of contemporary photography which is substantially "of" the subject rather than "about" it. The ParkeHarrisons meld diverse interests in sculpture, performance, literature and environmentalism to produce images that intrigue, puzzle and often disturb in equal measure. I think of their work as the visualisation of a profoundly dysfunctional relationship between people and the natural world, often in ways we're not even aware of. That's the troubling bit. Are trees actually a whole lot more sentient than we give them credit for..?

A recurring motif is that of the caretaker of a devastated, sepia-hued world in which Robert himself features, always dark suited, often at the centre of an elaborately (self-) constructed set with theatrical backdrop. Learn more about their work and read reviews at: www.parkeharrison.com



- 1. *Flying lessons* - Earth Elegies collection
- 2. *Stolen Summer* - Gray Dawn collection
- 3. *Guardian* - Burn Season collection
- 4. *Summer Arm* - Gray Dawn collection

© Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison

Bonus footage - The Naturalist



The Naturalist - shot in the studio with one Elinchrom RQ head in a small Portalite softbox and LOTS of black flagging! A subtle split tone was applied during post. We will be introducing food and still life modules in due course.

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office@foodandphotographyretreats.com +44 7400 303 930.
Company registered in Scotland, SC596219.