

FOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS™

with the Benvies

No. 7 • March 2019

MENU

Picture of the month
Hebridean rust

News from Niall and Charlotte

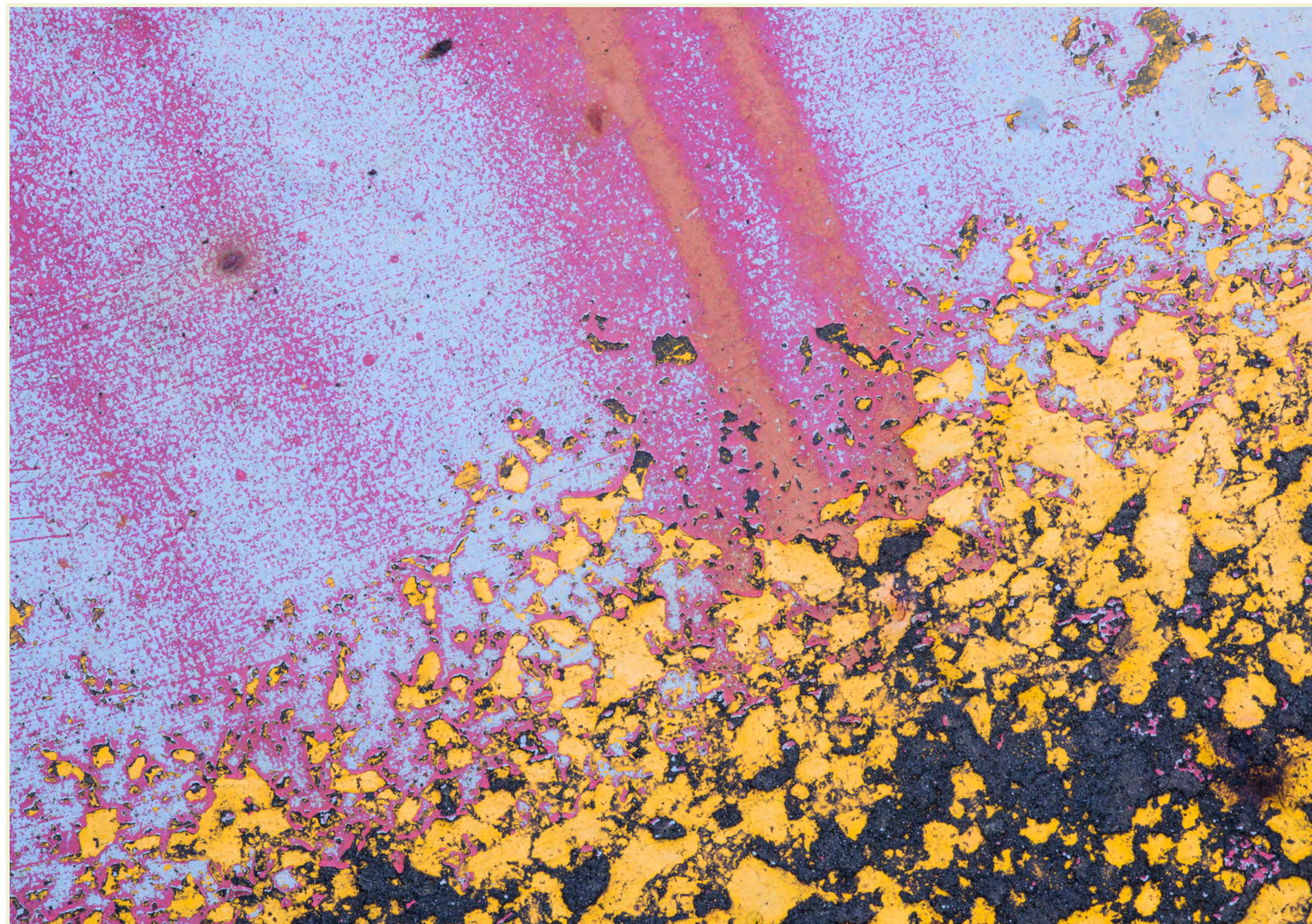
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Austrian Tyrol, June 2019

Inspiration
Ernst Haas



We dubbed the clients on our February Retreat to Harris, the "Connoisseurs of Corrosion". When the weather is against us, I'm grateful for photographers who allow their imaginations to be captured by less obvious subjects (that look good in the rain). And I have to say that while Harris is rightly celebrated for its enchanting beaches, it is also home to some of the most vividly-coloured rust I've seen anywhere. Some old Austin Maestro work vans dumped near Lingerabay are especially, eh, fascinating. While I normally make a chocolate bar collage out of these sorts of images, this little section reminded me of a bubbling lava flow (with pyroclastic bombs in the background...) On Harris, not only can you contemplate the world in a grain of sand, you can see volcanism play out on the bonnet of an ancient van. - Niall

News from Niall and Charlotte

It was with some trepidation that we timed our first Retreat to the Isle of Harris for the middle of winter. What if the ferries are cancelled? What if it rains for a week? What if it is too windy to photograph? But we have a good division of labour in our household: I imagine problems, Charlotte provides solutions and between us we're able to present a smooth operation without our guests being aware of the hoops we've sometimes jumped through.

As it happens, Harris went off without a hitch, excepting the shyness of the sun. I find it encouraging, though, how many photographers are open to shooting in a wide variety of conditions and to be frank, somewhere like Harris really benefits from some "atmosphere". Nevertheless, we continue to learn from each trip and, even with a small group, the limitations of my 27 inch editing display for tutorials became obvious. So, ahead of our upcoming Retreat with Willi Rolfes in Burgundy, we've invested in a 55 inch Sony OLED TV screen that, now we have a good profile for it, delivers remarkably accurate colours and is extraordinarily sharp. This, combined with additional technical PDFs



enhances our tuition offer, something that will be further expanded (for a German-speaking audience at least) when my new book comes out later in the year. This is an expanded version of my e-book some of you have, with additional sections added. With top German nature photographer, Sandra Bartocha, in

charge of the design, and FotoForum publishers taking care of the production, it promises to be something of a landmark for us.

It's hard to ignore environmental calamity in the news at the moment and even harder to avoid despondency. Nevertheless, we employ another division of labour that draws a distinction between our work as artists in reaction to it and our work as Retreat hosts and teachers. We don't, can't, allow the two to become mixed up or we wouldn't be able to do our jobs properly for you. But we do hope that when you look at a body of work like [Dispatches from the collapse](#), you'll see thinking, creative minds at work just as capable of anticipating problems and creating solutions to give you the best Retreat we can.



Our best wishes
Niall and Charlotte

Idea - editors



Sand patterns, Luskentyre, Harris. Experienced editors have seen so many photographs that they are in a better position than most of us to judge if work has merit or not. Why not listen to them?

I was amused to see a large poster in a local shopping centre a while ago proclaiming Facebook's intention to recruit more "fact checkers" in an attempt to displace "fake news" from its users' feeds. We used to call these people "editors". You could react in one of two ways to this: "about time too - credulous people need to be protected from the cynics"; or "if people developed their critical faculty a bit more they wouldn't be taken in by fake news and there wouldn't be a need for fact checkers". For my part, as someone already baffled by much of what happens in modern industrial society, I'd go with the first view. I want an editor to intervene on my behalf; a professional who knows more about something than I do, sparing me from a perpetual state of doubt and need to investigate everything I read from scratch. It's just too exhausting, too time consuming and I want to do other things. Like being out in Nature.

While I'm delighted that this particular social media platform is reviving the concept of the editor in the context of news, it's a pity that the same courtesy isn't being extended to protect us from the anodyne "art" photography that dominates this and its sister platform, Instagram. (Photos of family, friends and

cats are excluded from this critique; they aren't trying to be something they're not.) It's perhaps unfair to characterise it thus as the picture clearly has meaning and significance for the person who has posted it but there, usually, the interest ends and the thought that it might have wider appeal could have been scotched by the intervention of a kindly editor, had one existed. When people who know what they're talking about, through deep knowledge and wide experience, tell you that your work isn't up to the mark, it tends to make you try harder until it is. Good editors are more than mere gatekeepers; they foster talent when they see it and protect us from ourselves when they don't.

The role of the editor at the gate, and all her (or his) accumulated knowledge, has been trampled underfoot as massed ranks of people with cameras surge forward to claim the publication space. Now (rather like trusting a chimpanzee to assemble a watch from a box of parts) something amazing may appear that would otherwise have been rejected but it's a slim chance, with a lot more shouting and confusion, fractiousness and dissembling, than vision, being propagated. I don't have the time or necessarily the knowledge to tell what is authentic, form a view on what is an

“Awesome capture!”, or to understand the context in all the photography I see. I want a good editor to do that for me, because I want to do other things besides. Like being out in Nature.

One of the biggest swindles of the digital era is the mis-selling of agency. We’ve been told that we will be empowered by choice and the independence of being our own travel agents, accountants, marketing specialists and web masters. In truth, this agency comes at the cost of the huge amount of time it takes to acquire large amounts of knowledge of often transient value. It’s knowledge that has little relevance out in the physical world where natural processes underpin all the mechanisms that allow the synthetic, digital one to be contrived. Mesmerised by the virtual world, it is very easy to lose sight of the real one where, by the good grace of photosynthesis and the carbon cycle, mycorrhiza and a multitude of interlinked processes and organisms, we can live as physical beings. Ignorance of, or disinterest in, our physical roots disregards the primary need to maintain the conditions in which life and diversity can thrive.

The notion of agency, ultimately, is illusory and right now, Mother Nature looks like she’s squaring up to give us a good talking to.

The nature photographers I admire most, such as Vincent Munier and Laurie Campbell, are editors of natural knowledge. Their’s isn’t the “fake news” that emanates from contrived set-ups but the real thing

that results from long observation, an understanding of the animal’s biology and willingness to entertain the idea that it too may be acting on something other than a purely instinctive level; that it may believe it has some agency in its life. This is knowledge we can all acquire, whether it is in a back garden or under a sullen arctic sky, if we can just pull ourselves away for long enough from the digital flypaper.



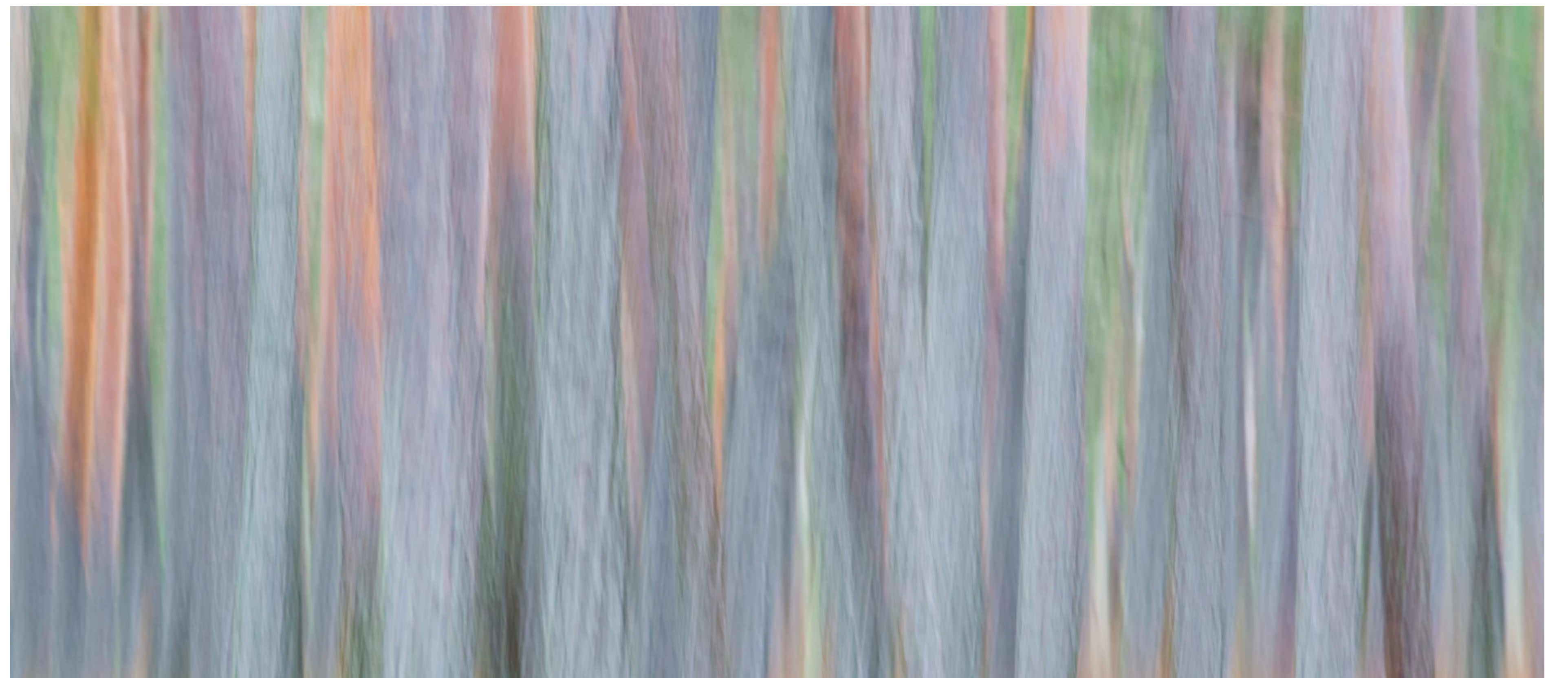
Wild rabbit in full flight as it chases hares on the Isle of Islay - for fun.

Skill - Haasian Blur



Forgive me if this seems obtuse: the widely used term, ICM, describes an action rather than the consequence. I prefer an alternative term, "Haasian Blur", which describes the outcome and acknowledges the technique's original exponent, Ernst Haas, more of whom later in this newsletter.

I've judged photo competitions where a large percentage of the "creative" offerings were deliberately blurred. As the technique has grown in popularity, so to has the need to diversify it to remain interesting. One variation you may want to try is to look for layers in the landscape then covert them into "barcodes" by dragging with the camera on a video head for perfect linearity. The photo on the left has been rotated by 90 degrees: it is, after all, an interpretation, rather than a representation, of the beach at Luskentyre, Harris. I think there is scope too for placing the camera on a vibrating platform to create a specific type of blur reminiscent of canvas. Whatever you do, starting off with a strong framework of shapes and contrasting tones or colours, remains as important as ever.



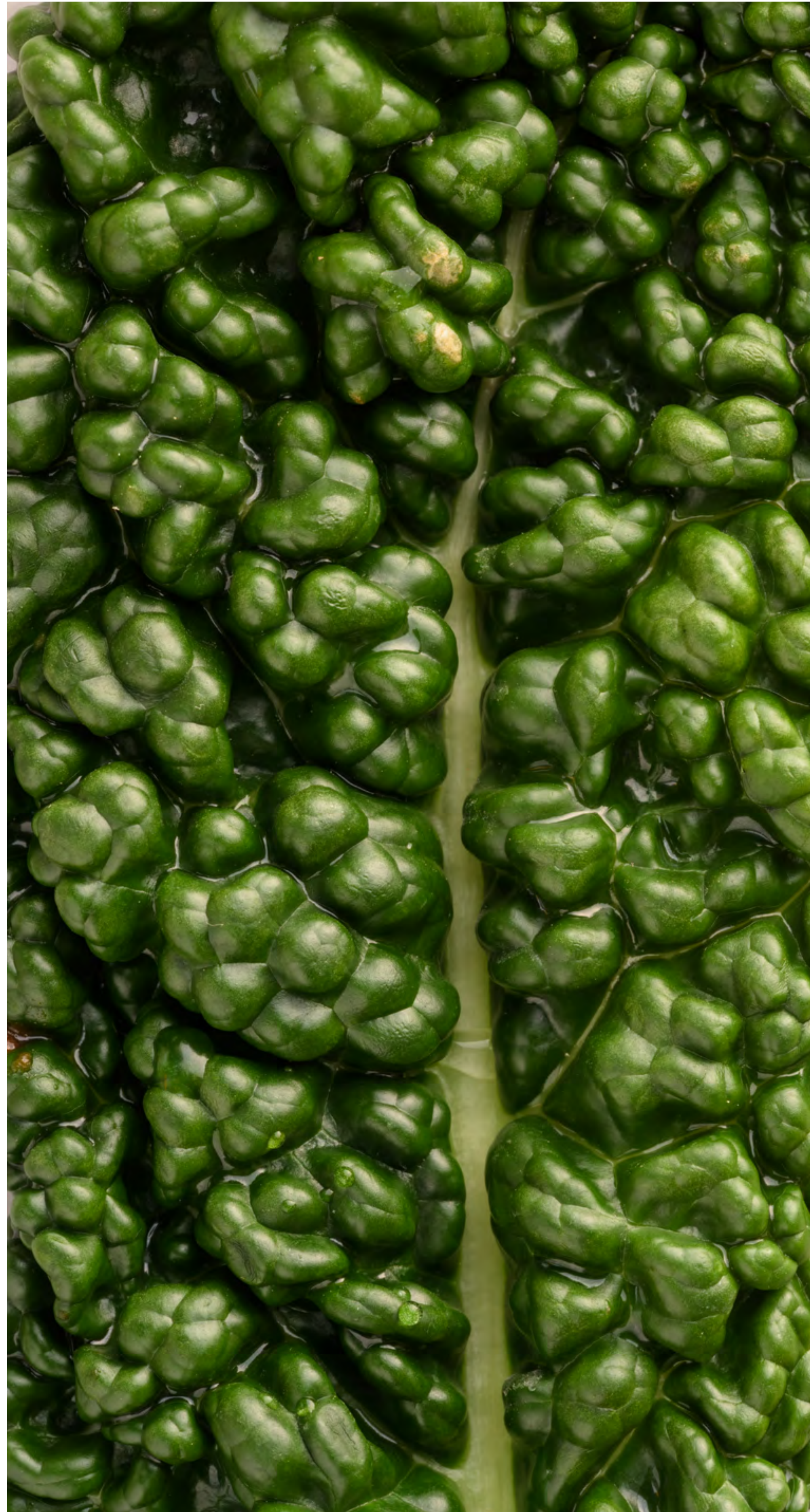
Food - Sweet chestnut and squash roast



Let's be honest: rightly or wrongly, "nut roast" has some reputational issues. And certainly none that suggest it is anything other than a form of penance. So when Charlotte was creating her own version of the veggie standard, it had to get a new name too. Yes, there are still some nuts in it but for sceptical carnivores, tasting this dish may be the turning point.

Photography note

There is one vital piece of information that is left out of every food photography tutorial I've ever seen: control high angle lighting. The best way to show texture is to keep the lighting angle low. But if you have a long softbox as your key light or, as in this case, an open door and diffuser, there's a high risk of high angle lighting flattening out the texture. It is much easier to visualise what's going on when you use daylight. As I moved my A1 piece of black foam core up and down at the right side of the photo, I could see shadows appear and disappear. Once I had the optimal amount of relief I clipped the board in place, then, during the 10 second exposure, gently filled the shadows on the coulis by moving a piece of silver foil around .



Sweet chestnut and butternut squash roast with a rich tomato and red pepper coulis.

You will need a long 1.5 litre loaf tin (if you don't have one of these, a round or square cake tin, say 20-23 cm size would be fine)

Ingredients (serves 8)

For the sweet chestnut and squash roast:

- olive oil
- 100 g quinoa/lentil mix (a ready prepared pouch of the mix is perfect)
- 500 g butternut squash
- 2 parsnips
- 2 onions
- 2 sticks of celery
- 200 g vac-pack of chestnuts (Merchant Gourmet are good)
- 2 sprigs of fresh rosemary
- 2 tsp sweet smoked paprika / pimenton
- 2 tsp dried oregano (mixed herbs & herbs de Provence are just as good)
- 2 large field mushrooms
- zest of a lemon
- 60 g fresh brown bread crumbs
- 120 g dried apricots (roughly chopped)
- 150 g mixed nuts (chopped almonds / hazelnuts / pecans)

- 4 large eggs (beaten together)
- 40 g grated mature cheddar cheese.

For the tomato and red pepper coulis

- olive oil
- 1 red onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1/2 a jar roasted red peppers
- 4-5 sun dried tomatoes
- 1 tbsp tomato concentrate
- a good handful fresh soft thyme sprigs
- 2 tins chopped tomatoes
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar

Method

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4

Oil the tin and line with greaseproof paper, leaving some hanging over the edge so its easy to remove once cooked.

Peel and de-seed the squash, peel the onions and parsnips, and also use a peeler to strip away the stringy parts of the outer celery, and chop all into 2 cm chunks. Roughly chop the chestnuts and strip the rosemary stems and chop roughly. Put all these ingredients into a large roasting tray, add the smoked paprika, oregano / herbs, a good grinding of sea salt and fresh black pepper, and 2-3 tablespoons of

olive oil. Mix it all together and make sure it's all combined well and spread out evenly on the tray. Put in the pre-heated oven to roast for about 40 minutes. Meanwhile, chop the field mushrooms into similar sized chunks and add them to the mix for the last 10 minutes of roasting (mix them in well).

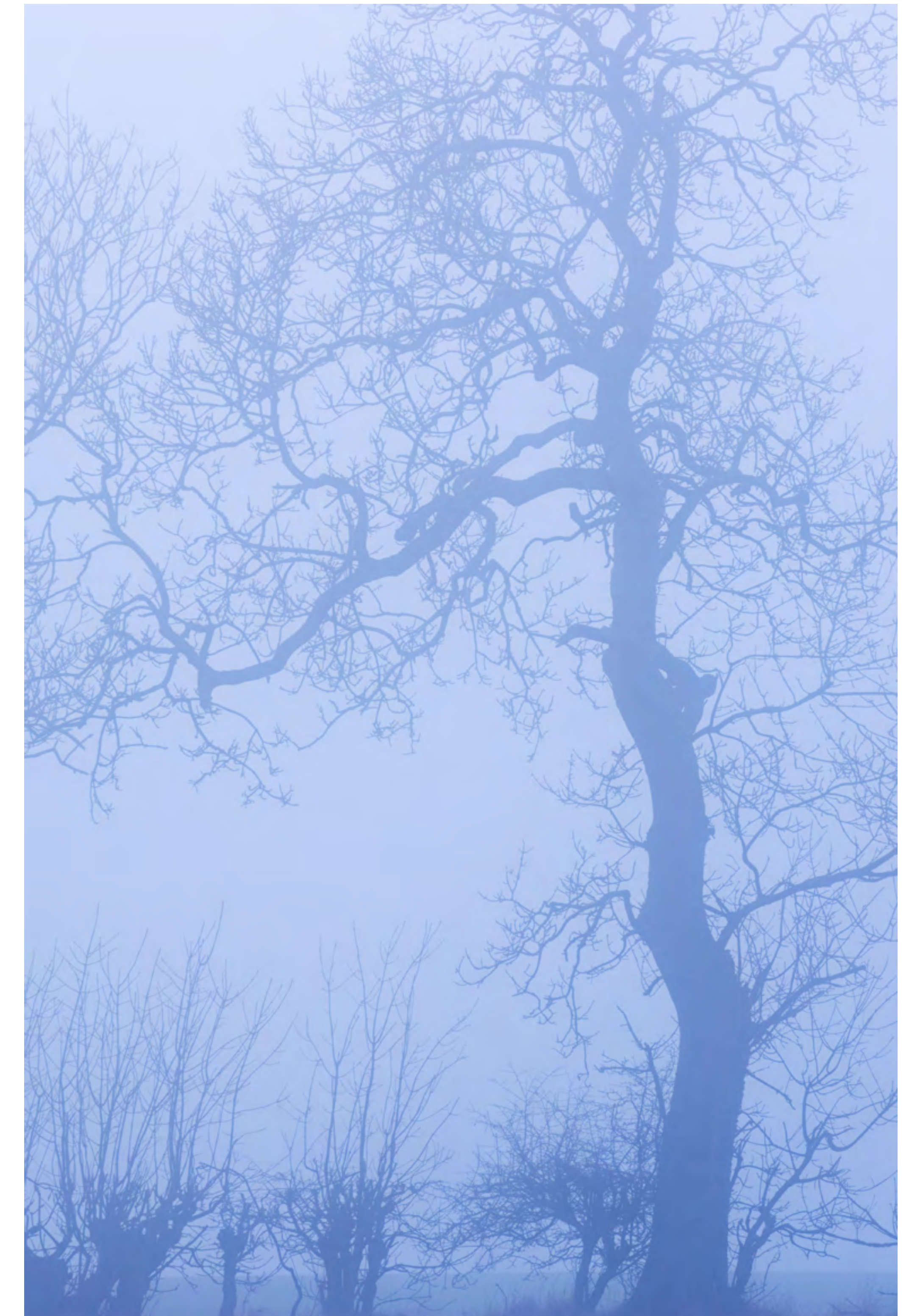
Once roasted, remove the tray of vegetables from the oven. In a large mixing bowl, place the bread crumbs, mixed chopped nuts and apricots, quinoa/lentil mix, lemon zest, and carefully add the roasted vegetable mix. Make sure to use a spatula to scrape all the spices and bits left over in the tin from the roasting. Add the beaten eggs, and really mix all of the ingredients together well, so that everything is well distributed within the mix. Tip all of this mixture into your prepared tin, leave the top slightly rustic - (it doesn't need to be smoothed out) place in the oven and roast for about 45 minutes until golden and slightly crisp on top.

Now make the coulis while the roast is in the oven. Finely chop the onion and garlic and set aside. Chop the red pepper and the sun-dried tomatoes. In a large frying pan or wok, gently sauté the onion in a splash of olive oil and a small knob of butter. Once they are softened and translucent, add the garlic. Make sure the garlic doesn't burn, so cook for a short time then add the peppers and sun dried tomatoes. Stir well and then add the tomato

concentrate and tinned tomatoes. Stir well to combine the ingredients. Stir in the balsamic vinegar and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Take a pair of kitchen scissors, and finely chop the soft thyme sprigs into the mix (the stems and leaves will be fine all chopped together as the flavour is lovely and fresh). Mix again and leave to simmer gently for the rest of the roast cooking time. (It will splash so I use a guard to cover the pan while it is cooking. A solid lid creates steam and doesn't allow the sauce to thicken naturally).

Once everything is cooked and ready, remove the roast from the tin and slice into individual portions. Take a big serving spoon and spoon a couple of portions of the coulis onto the middle of your warmed dinner plate, then place the roast on top. Garnish with a sprig of fresh thyme. This is delicious served with some freshly steamed greens or French beans and a nice glass of chilled white wine.

- *Charlotte*



Featured Retreat - Magical alpine meadows - Austria



A MID-SUMMER
MACRO AND
LANDSCAPE
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREAT IN
THE AUSTRIAN TYROL,
15 - 22ND JUNE 2019

The Kaunergrat Nature Park, at the meeting of the Kaunertal, Pitztal and Inntal valleys, is one of the biological hotspots of central Europe, hosting over 1100 species of moths and butterflies alone - including the dramatic apollo - as well as an extraordinary range of alpine flowers. The Park also contains 84 three-thousand-metre peaks and lots of alpine farms: there is plenty to keep macro and landscape photographers busy. High levels of solar radiation that can lift the temperature at soil level to 70 degrees C, lime-rich soils and less than 60 cm of annual rainfall create the ideal conditions for many species to flourish. On this Retreat, close cooperation with the staff of the Naturepark will help us to get to the best places at the right time.

Leaving the protected "sunny slopes" around the village, we steadily climb up past old Norway spruces and Arolla pines, skirt past bogs, then enter the high alpine pastures, silent except for the clanking of cow bells. Here we can be productive without having to spend a lot of time driving around between locations. But we also give you time to relax amongst wild nature. Sometimes, just sitting and watching is what it takes to make good work.

During the Retreat, you will learn how to:

- shoot field studio photographs, against backlit, white backgrounds;
- composite these images into finished works;
- create Colour Transects, to add to your landscape repertoire.

Naturally, there will be plenty of chance to do "normal" photography too.

If your husband / wife / partner / friend isn't a photographer but *is* interested in food, we can devise a

programme for them focused on chocolate making and patisserie as well as exploring vegetarian cooking.

Our base will be in the village of Arzl im Pitztal in fully-appointed [apartments](#) that were renovated to a very high standard in 2018. They are just 20 minutes from the Naturepark headquarters. Each guest room has its own bathroom and there is wifi, if you need it. It's a great place to relax, to eat, to review your work and to enjoy fabulous mountain vistas. [Learn more here: there are still some spots left!](#)



Dates - our Retreats in 2019 and 2020. Full details on our [website](#)



**HARRIS,
SCOTLAND**
15 - 22 February, 2020



**BURGUNDY,
FRANCE**
27 Sept - 4 October, 2019 **(NEW!)**
16 - 23 April, 2020



**THE TYROL,
AUSTRIA**
15 - 22 June, 2019
12 - 19 June, 2020



**QUEYRAS N.P.,
FRANCE**
23 - 30 May, 2020

with Joe Cornish



**ISLAY AND JURA,
SCOTLAND**
17 - 24 November, 2019
14 - 21 November, 2020



**TORRIDON,
SCOTLAND**
2 - 9 November, 2019

Inspiration - Ernst Haas

Ernst Haas was one of the great photojournalists of the 20th century, a long term contributor to *Life* magazine and the Magnum photo agency and an early exponent of Kodachrome transparency film.

The original Kodachrome had an ASA (ISO) of just 16, so it's entirely possible that Haas stumbled into "blur" photography by accident. By the mid 1950's he had developed a reputation for his impressionistic street scenes (by this time he had moved from his native Vienna to New York City) and could fairly be considered the father of ICM photography.

Haas's repertoire was broad though and encompassed wildlife and landscape too - sharp and blurred. His first book, [The Creation](#) (1971), is a collection of this work and remains one of the biggest selling photo books of all time with sales in excess of 350 000 copies. Much of the work looks remarkably contemporary, even if the colours are those of the now unfamiliar Kodachrome palette, and deeply influenced a whole generation of photographers. Importantly too, he helped make colour photography "respectable" in the eyes of collectors.



© Ernst Haas Estate

Bonus footage - Luskenntyre, Harris



The Isle of Harris has been something of a recurring theme in this newsletter and it's no surprise given the variety of things there are for curious photographers to explore.

I've photographed a lot of sand in my time but there is no doubt that the variety of shapes created when black and white sand meet is greater here than anywhere else I've worked. This is due in part to the prevalence of strong westerlies which work a beach like a knife on a scraperboard.

While I normally shoot directly downwards to maximise the available depth of field, here I chose a slightly more oblique angle to enhance the sense of looking down on to a landscape from the air. What a wild place that would be.

We are returning to Harris 15 - 22 February 2020 so if you're interested, pop over to our [website](#).

- Niall

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