

# MENU

NUMBER 16 • MAY 2021



Returning  
to Retreats

*Burgundy*

*Cairngorms*

*Islay*

*also*

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Essay: Integrity | Marc Wynen

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*Charlotte makes*

Strawberry tiramisu

*And...breathe*  
How we've stayed  
creative (and sane)  
during lockdowns.







ARUM MACULATUM



*Cormier*

*Avelinier*



*Mésange  
charbonnière*

*Éclishe*

*Cormier*



**E**VER SO SLOWLY, the fog of the pandemic is beginning to clear, for those of us, at least, fortunate enough to have been vaccinated. It's hard to know yet how our sector will look after this is all over but it's also hard to imagine we'll see a complete return to travel as usual. We're allowing for the possibility that some airline routes will be cancelled and that some people will no longer want to endure long-haul travel or perhaps even air-travel full stop. But we also take comfort from knowing that we are just a two hour TGV rail journey from Paris, itself easily accessible from the UK—and much of Europe—by train. This, combined with an ever-growing realisation of the sort of high quality Retreats we can deliver here on our own doorstep in the southern Morvan, gives us the confidence to focus our offer increasingly—though not exclusively—on locations in France.

It would be easy to assume that, with no Retreats to run at the moment, we'd have lots of spare time to reflect and just enjoy being here at Les Saumais. But as anyone with a new garden will testify, there is no end of things to be done. While our home-





made 7.5 m long polythene tunnel and vegetable plot are first and foremost for us, we are developing the rest of the garden and *prairie* (uncultivated grassland) for the benefit of the wealth of insect and bird life already here, not to mention the wall lizards, slow worms and wasp spiders. Nevertheless, our Retreats work is never far from our minds and we've given some thought to how we can improve what we do for you.

### Zoom - more than a flirtation

One of the things that has become apparent to us in the last year is just how much more effective it is to teach, one-to-one, over Zoom than it is in person to a group clustered round a big screen. With that in mind, we are going to stop doing formal day-end tuition on our Retreats and use that time instead to discuss the work you've made that day and look at books. Or simply to go for an evening walk, with or without a camera. We want to give you more time to reflect

rather than being busy all the time, essentially to run our Retreats like, eh, retreats.

Photographers who'd like to learn the special skills we teach are invited to take the one-to-one eLearning class with me before the Retreat and we can consolidate that learning during the Retreat itself. This means photographers who aren't especially interested in the topic are free to pursue their own work. As before, I will give help during post-production but this will be done via Zoom within the room, making it easier for me to give help where and when it is needed, by screen-sharing.

### Deep discovery

While all last summer was taken up with house preparations, I've given priority this spring and summer to "deep discovery" of the landscape within a 15 km radius of our home. That involves explor-



ing of the network of woodlands and green lanes through this *bocage* landscape, figuring out the best spots and the best times of day for photography. I'm compiling lists of interesting plants, many of which, like the wild service tree, are rare in Britain today. I'm learning where corn buntings and nightingales, woodchat shrikes and turtle doves are holding territories. And creating connections with people I meet when I'm out and about, local farmers and staff in the Morvan Natural Regional Park.

We can't claim that the Morvan has the drama of the Alps. What this rolling, wooded landscape does have, though, is something altogether more beguiling - an air of nostalgia. Our house sits right in the middle of one of the best preserved areas of *bocage* an enclosed landscape dating back to the late 1700's. Some of it could come straight from faded sepia images of parts of southern England pre-First World War. And with

an abundance and diversity of life in hedgerows largely extinguished in the UK and elsewhere by intensification, neglect and abuse, there is little of the sense of despair that those with a historical perspective often succumb to when viewing the British landscape. We feel like we're in a good "neighbourhood" with good neighbours; we feel at home.

#### Dealing with the pandemic

This is all fine and well and we're grateful that serendipity has brought us to this particular spot. But the business of business has to go on and after more than a year without any Retreats our resourcefulness has been tested to the limit. Overlaying the challenges of simply keeping the ship afloat have been those associated with settling in a new country with which we are no longer politically aligned. Some problems we have anticipated and planned for; others come out of a sunny sky and can leave you bailing out for days. Hope has





proved to be a fragile craft during these months as governments tack and jib their way through the storms of the pandemic and Brexit, casting overboard anyone not tightly secured. There have certainly not been enough lifebelts for everyone crammed aboard.

We've long since set hope aside in favour of action. We know that no one will come and get us so we've been swimming towards the shore all this time, trying not to drown along the way. My mantra—*life is short, make every day count*—has been echoing louder than ever during this passage. And to that end, we've learned to live intensely each day, to get to the end of it and know we couldn't have swum another stroke, done anything more for our cause.

During the last year, I've noticed the fad of "mindfulness" seeping into various corners of the photographic world and just wish it would be called what is actu-

ally is: paying attention. That would stop those people with a more robust world view recoiling from something that's a central part of the creative process.

"Paying attention" is a discipline all photographers need to cultivate but which is too often pushed aside in the rush of busy lives. This is especially true of wildlife photography which needs us to slow down dramatically to the pace of the natural world. For most of us unable to spend protracted times in the field, this can be done only in our immediate neighbourhood or garden. That's what we're doing—and you can take advantage of—in our little, but surprisingly impressive, corner of the south Morvan.

### Never stop...making.

We've kept in touch with many of our clients and friends during our *confinement* and a few folks have commented that they've hardly picked up a camera in the

last year. It's a shame when travel and photography become inextricable, especially if creative expression forms part of your defences against despondency. I think the secret is to have a project or creative practice that works wherever you find yourself, from which you can draw satisfaction. For Charlotte, that's in a kitchen, for me, it's in the shape of the field studio. Julie Powell says in her book, *Julie and Julia*, "You know what I love about cooking? After a day when *nothing* is sure...you can come home and absolutely know that if you add egg yolks to chocolate and sugar and milk, it will get thick. That's such a comfort." I get the same comfort from knowing that even if it's a gloomy day with unwelcome news, I can still go out in our *prairie* and make something beautiful and original with little more than a camera, two flashes and some pieces of plastic.

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## INTEGRITY

INTEGRITY. NOW, THERE'S a loaded word. From its Latin meaning of "making whole...bringing together the parts." the word today has acquired strong moral overtones in its everyday use. Similarly, "dissonance" has been wrestled by the psychological community from its obscure corner and forced into a public marriage with "cognitive" to characterise the state of holding one belief but having to act in the opposite way. Nevertheless, these are the words I'll use because they are useful ones in discussing how we can make creative practice more central in our lives and the rewards we can reap from doing so.

"Creative practice" is nothing more complicated than doing things with thought, consideration (for yourself and others), care and remaining in a state of openness to the possibility that they can be done better or differently or more personally. When I teach photography to students, I am very interested to see how much "creative practice" overflows from

the exercise of their discipline (in this case, photography) into the rest of their



lives. At meal times, do they pile food high on their plate or arrange it elegantly? Is there dissonance between the

specificity of their photography and choice of generic fonts in their captions?

How far, in other words, are they willing to allow their creative practice to overflow before they feel the need to sand-

bag it? I do this, not in any sort of judgmental way, but rather so that I can see where I can give encouragement and perhaps even help them to shove the sandbags back a bit further. In truth, many of us need permission to be honest to our creative selves.

When I finished farming in the late 1980's, I decided—because I was fortunate enough to have choices—that I wanted to live with integrity, that is, for my life and work to be as one as much as possible. My conservation principles had been sorely tried by my collaboration with modern, chemical farming, no matter how many trees I planted to assuage the guilt. I made the pact many of us make when we are young and naïve—that doing fulfilling, honest work was more important than earning lots of money. Well, that plan worked out! This route, without any way markers, can force an extreme form of creative practice just to keep the show on the road and is certainly not for everyone. I've



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sometimes wondered if it was even for me. But thirty years on and there's a certain sense of satisfaction in seeing how things have joined up.

The way Western people tend to compartmentalise our lives into "work" and "play" and a latent sense in many people that this isn't how they want to live, provides an easy target for all sorts of online lifestyle coaches. Typically, these silver-tongued rogues will regale you in honeyed-tones with their incredible journey from college drop-out, or addict or victim of abuse to Six Figure Social Media Influencer, achieved by doing nothing more than relentlessly following their dream (which also happens to be yours). Why wouldn't you buy their cut-price tell-all course? Perhaps a few of these people are genuine but experience and common sense suggests that following your dream (especially when it's shared by *lots* of others) is a shortcut back into a regular job for the vast majority of us. But I think that rather than

abandoning the dream, allowing it - your creative impulse - to flow more widely into corners of your life you had previously sandbagged - may be just as fulfilling, and a lot more realistic.

What does integrity-lite look like? It is the deployment of your creative skills and instincts at every opportunity, of finding new outlets for them, of giving yourself permission. Are your hard drives full of wonderful landscape images but indifferent ones of your family and friends? Of yourself? Invest time in making new ones. Figure out "brand you" to clarify your values; this can be useful to head off the ill-defined feelings of "cognitive dissonance" where heart and head are in conflict. Create a gallery space in your home, however much or little room you have. Resist the generic at every turn and substitute it with the personal. Engage with other people through your photography. This summer, every second Tuesday evening, we will be making formal portraits of the 200 or

so inhabitants of our village in Burgundy. It's not for profit but it is a great way of getting to know our human neighbours.

Bring your sense of composition, colour and light into whatever space you occupy at work and at home. Apply it to how you dress; apply your values to how you eat. And don't be afraid, ever, to appear eccentric; it's the opposite of being staid and you will have more interesting conversations with people who understand what you're doing than you ever will with tutters and eye-rollers.

Who knows when we will be able to travel again as many of us did before the pandemic? And while we all enjoy the excitement of new places, perhaps the first journey we need to make is to that line of sandbags, and just push them back a bit further.

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*Lars Andreas Dybvik*

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PLAY THE BOOK



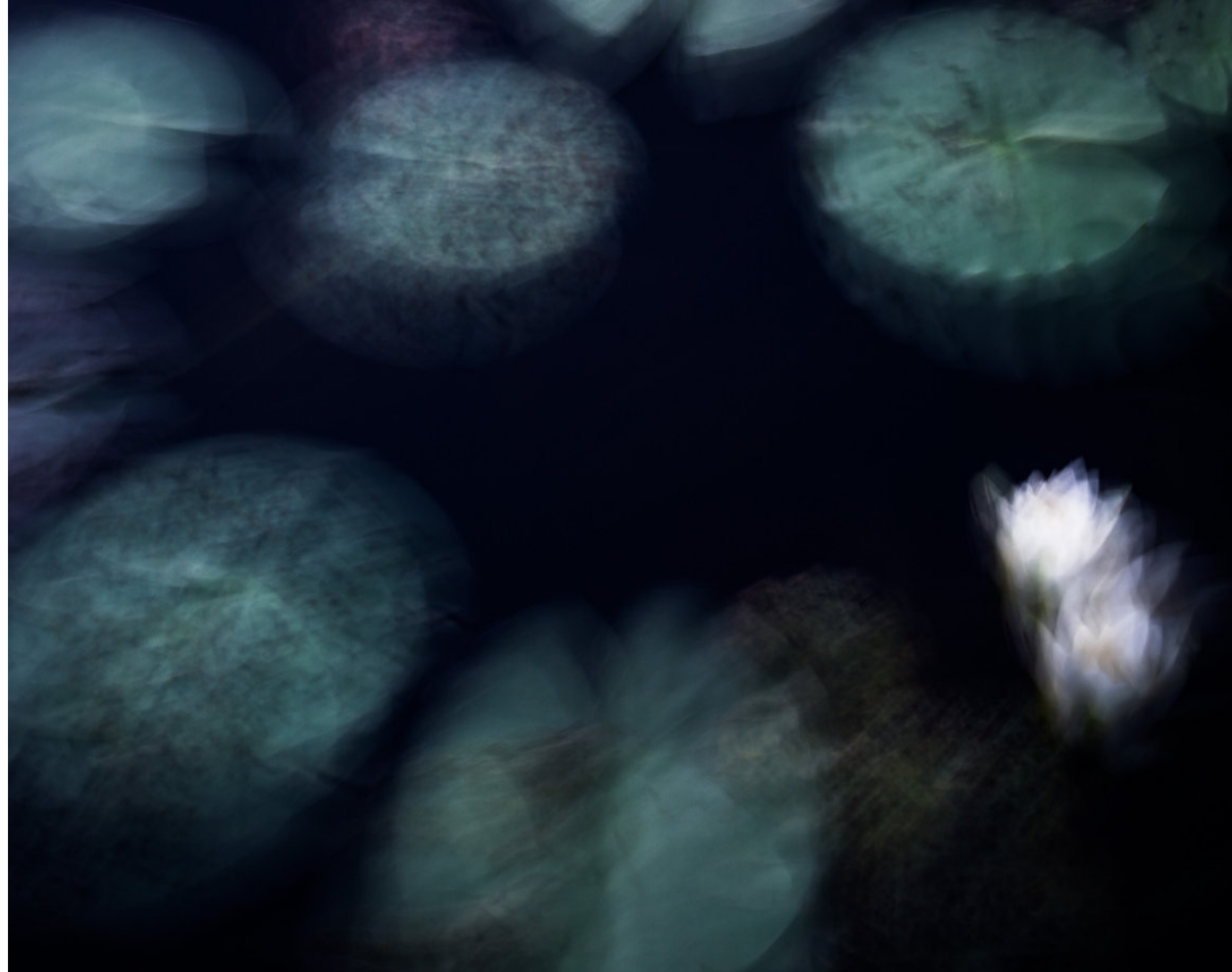
## “My pictures are my thoughts.”

The pictures are fragments of my time. Short, long, good and bad. Sometimes I'm clear-minded, other times I don't think at all. There might come photographs from both. I can give you a sharp and well-edited story that is not to be mistaken, or I can leave most of it up to you. Yet we perceive it differently. Each of us mirrors our own lives in what we see.

Different for each of us.

My pictures become your thoughts. I wrote this text a few years ago philosophising about visual expressions, and the opportunities that lies in not documenting precisely. Creating images that do not show what I see, but what I experience. And the infinite ways these images can be perceived by everyone but me.

For me, it is essential to make the pictures in camera. Not that this is nobler or more valuable in any way. But because my probably square brain is not able to create believable coincidences. It is far too system-orientated for me to be able





to take an empty surface and fill it with something visually interesting. Thus the key is to seek the resistance I get by abstracting in camera. I multi-expose, move the camera, shoot from a car at high speed (with a driver) and lots of other things. It can all seem like a random game, where I make "art by accident". But, there is always a plan in advance. Always a feeling at the bottom of it all. Intuition becomes the most important criterion when working both behind the camera and in post-production. Then a personal expression comes out at the other end without you struggling to find out what that is.

When I decided to make this book, I chose music as my theme. The book is called PLAY and is my visual composition. With dynamics through different parts, just as a piece of music would have. The book does not follow a traditional thread such as geography, colours or seasons. The images are chosen and put together in order to make up a larger sum than each individual picture by itself. As the silent pauses in music can be key elements in a piece, I allowed

some images to stand alone without company on the opposite side. Others stand against each other and almost fight. I did not want the book to be an easy ride full of eye-candy. You must find resistance. Music that lasts, and can be

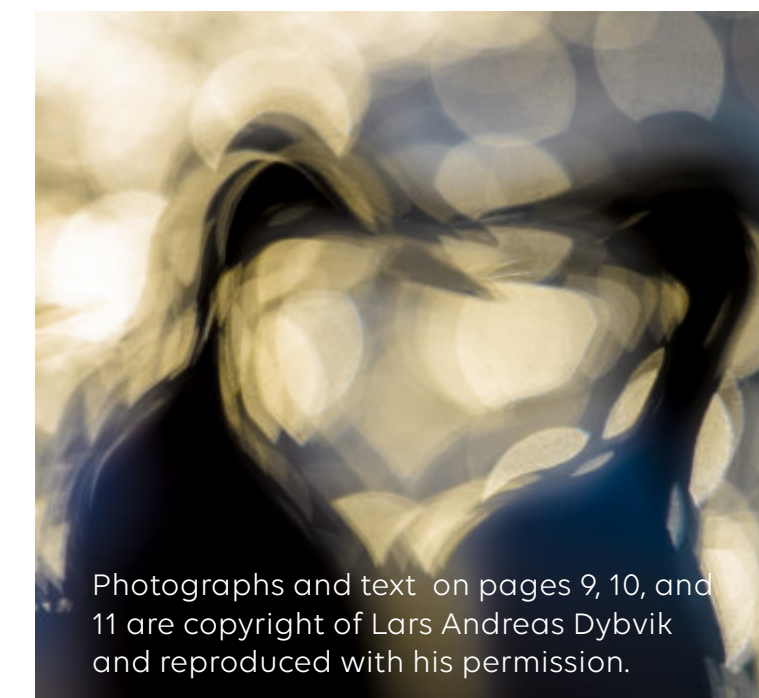
listened to over and over again, is not the one that sits immediately in the ear at the first hearing. It grows with the fact that you hear new elements and connections over time. The same I believe is the case for visual arts. Art historian

Gustav Svihus Borgersen has written the foreword, and mentions something interesting. "Photography unfolds in space, music in time." Theoretically, this is an impossible connection. So, it's all the more exciting to try! And it is up to you to find your music in the book.

Remember: my pictures become *your* thoughts.



Buy **Play the Book** from [here](#).



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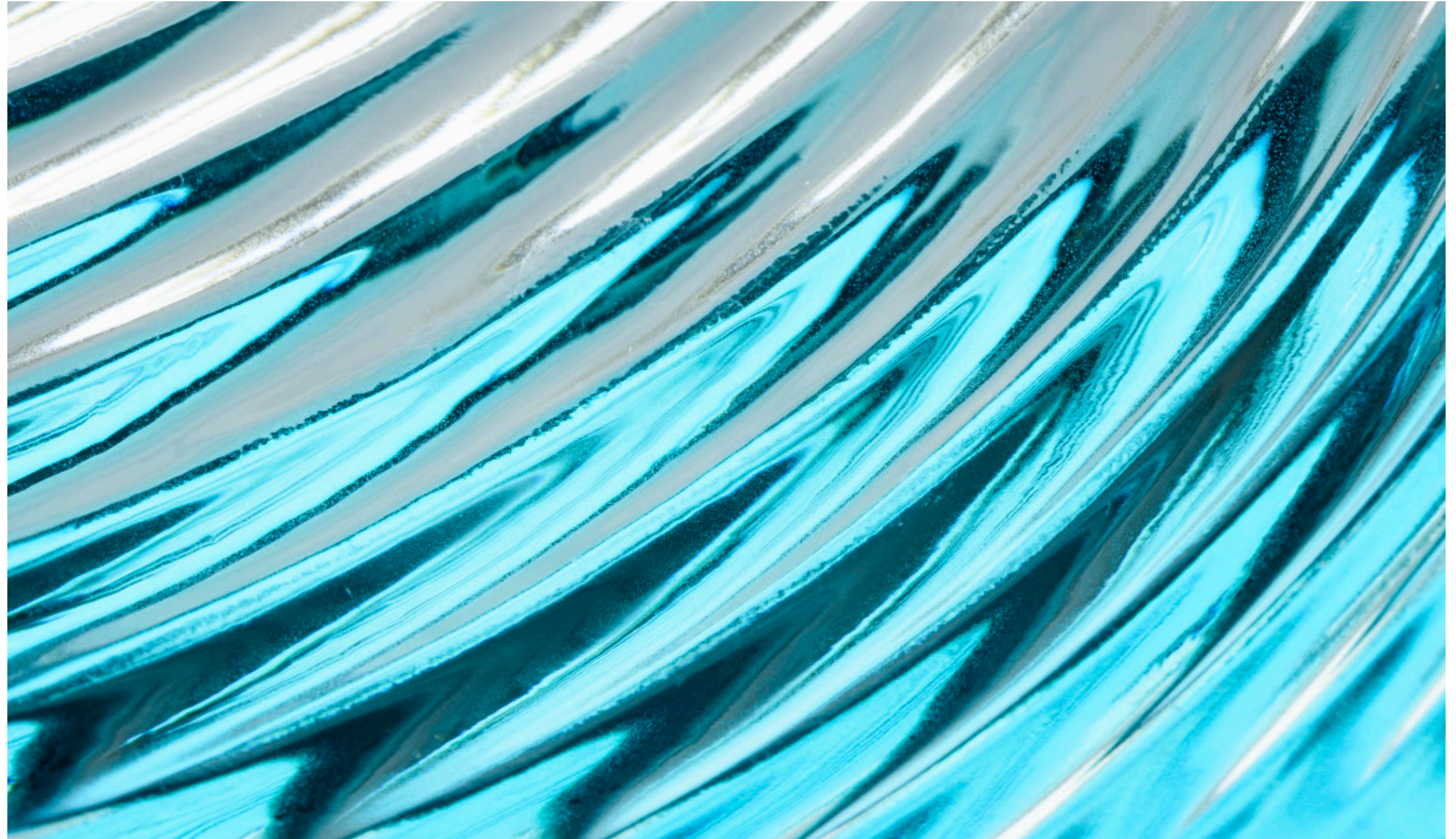


## Harris Gin bottle

OF THE MULTITUDE OF gins to have been brought to market in recent years, one stands head and shoulders above the rest: Harris Gin, created in an ultra-modern distillery near the pier at Tarbert. Harris Distillers was conceived not only to produce outstanding gin and whisky but to provide a mechanism for economic regeneration on an island where livings are precarious and the economy fragile. The economic success of this brand, which takes so much of its identity *from* the island, is largely kept *on* the island.

That identity is exemplified in the gin's extraordinary bottle (produced by Austrian glass maker, Stoelzle), whose heavy aquamarine base sends out ripples of colour that echo those of Luskentyre and Seilbost. Remove cork stopper and a perfect-pouring mouth is revealed - never a drop will be wasted.

We seem to acquire several bottles from guests after Harris visits...all of which are repurposed as rather fine water vessels.





## AFFINITY PUBLISHER

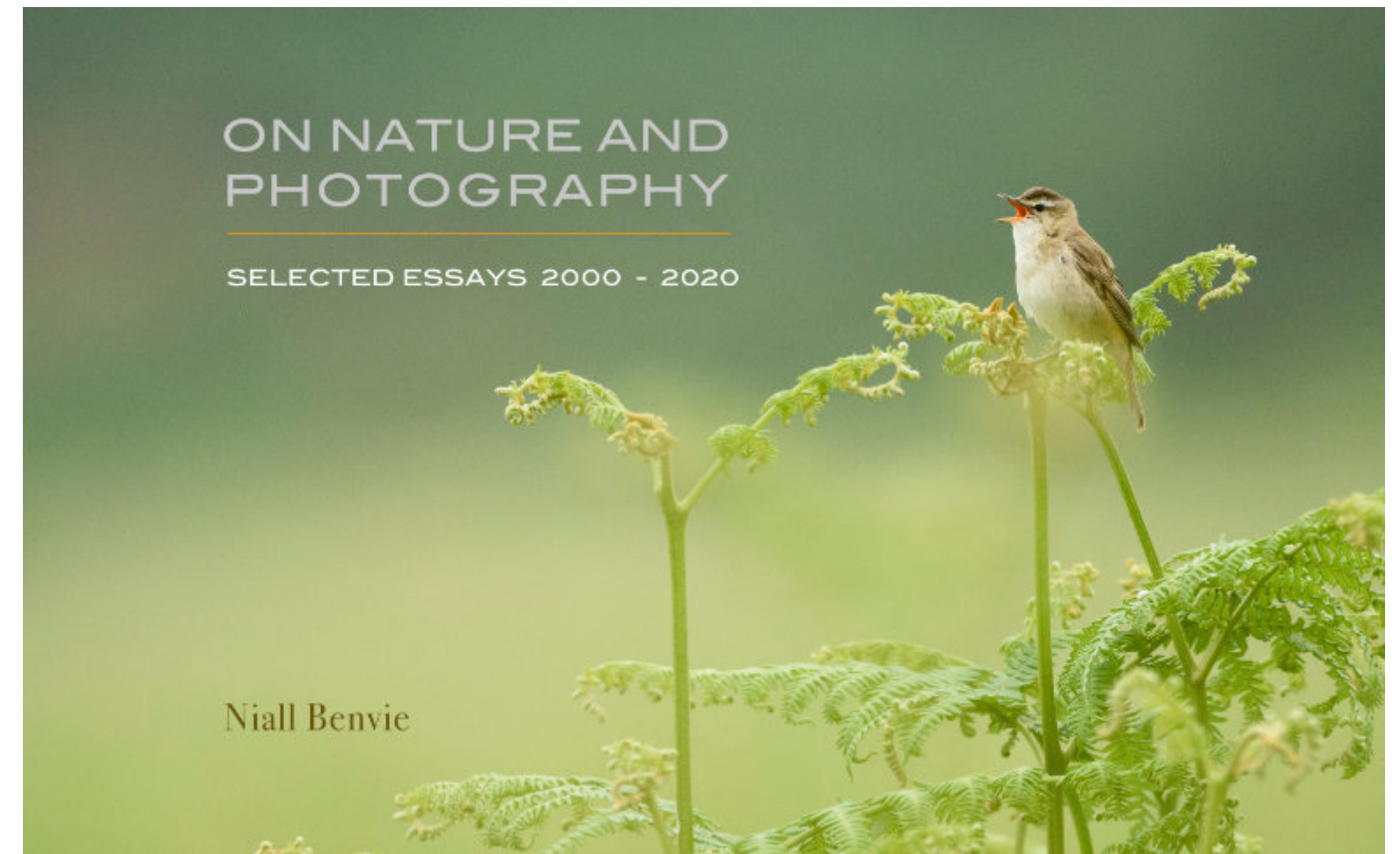
EARLIER THIS YEAR, we launched a new eLearning course on a desktop publishing application that is challenging Adobe Indesign's dominance in this field. If you think that, as a photographer, you've no need of a DTP application, think again. One of my students (actually, a rather well-known *National Geographic* photographer) commented that he is amazed by how often great photographers let themselves down in the presentation of their work, be it in a poorly designed ebook or a painful Powerpoint slide show. We've all seen it.

[Publisher](#), along with Photo and Designer, is part of Serif's suite of low-cost, industry-standard creative applications that work seamlessly together. Currently selling for just €27.99 (no subscription) Publisher has to be the software bargain of the year. It is an indispensable tool for any photographer who wants their work to be taken seriously, to

be noticed. It's for photographers who have chosen to "extend their creative practice" beyond merely creating a nice photograph. In my case, that means designing this newsletter and its little sister, MENUette, actual menus and workshop notes, gift cards and CVs. I've used it to create booklets for clients and PDF content for websites, not to mention my recent eBooks and slides for my webinars. It's also a lot of fun doing this and another string to your creative bow.

I discovered too - and this may interest those of you who dislike Adobe's subscription model, that I can do pretty much everything I need to do in Photoshop in Publisher, especially since I also own the equally inexpensive Affinity Photo application. The composites on pages 2, 4 and 5 were made this way.

The five hour course takes place over 3 weeks and, it seems, is the the only one-to-one of its sort. Find details [here](#).



*My most recent eBook, [On Nature and Photography](#), was created in Affinity Publisher. Running to 147 spreads, this PDF document presents 22 essays I've published between 2000 and 2020, along with 95 pictures. In his review on [ProVideoCoalition](#), Jose Antunes wrote,*

*Niall Benvie's work reflects that search [for an alternative to generic photography], and his words and photographs mix to share messages that have not just beauty, but context, something missing from much of the photography shared on social media. [Order here.](#)*



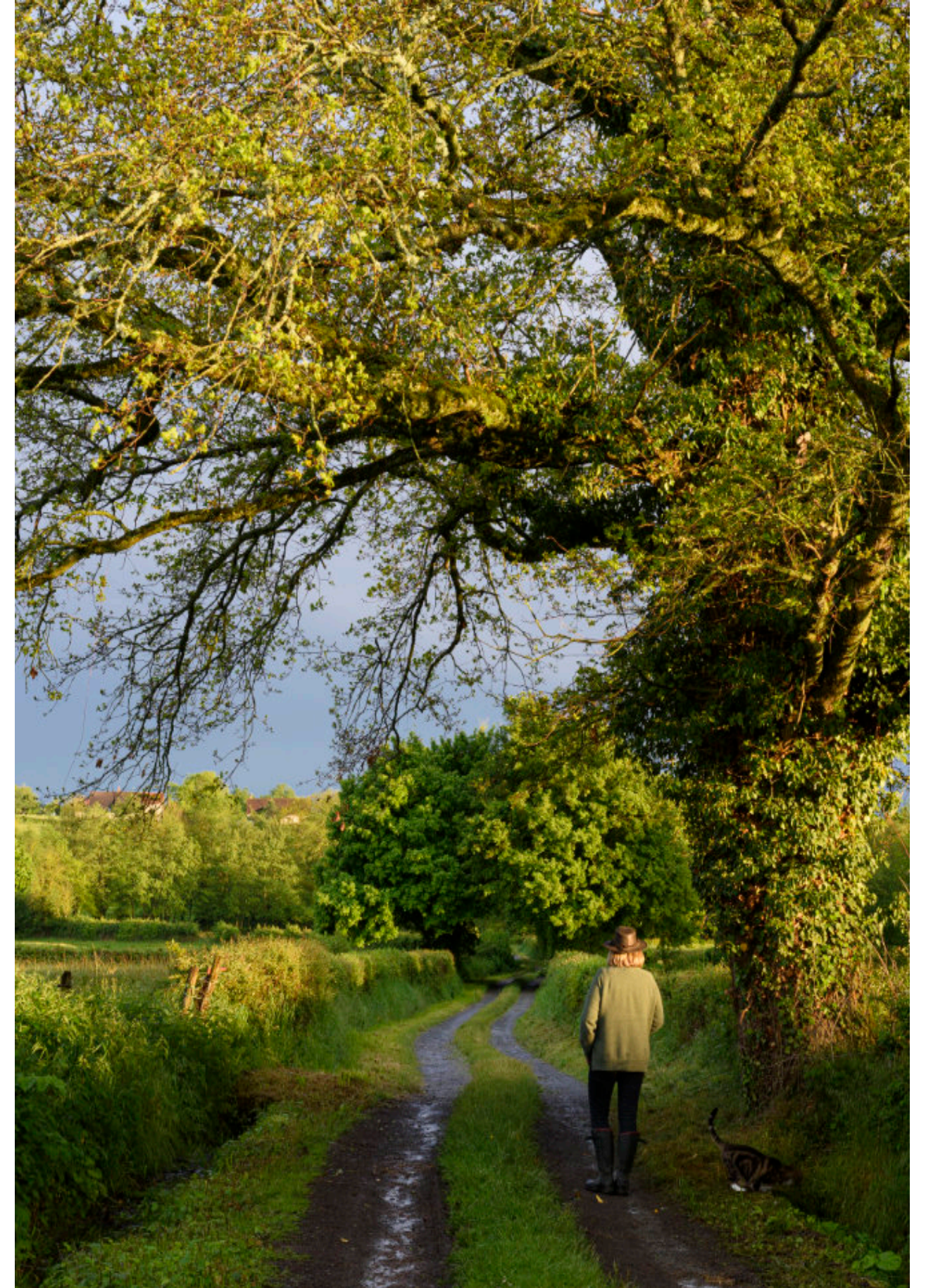
## BURGUNDY, FRANCE

FOR THE FIRST OF OUR NEW RETREATS, we're looking forward to welcoming you to our very own corner of Burgundy in the southern Morvan, right in the heart of France. This is a rolling, traditional landscape of small fields and dense hedgerows, scattered orange-tiled farm buildings and winding green lanes, white cattle and very sleepy villages. It's our home and the venue for a deep exploration of a landscape that has largely disappeared elsewhere in Europe. We're in no hurry.

As the countryside changes from summer to autumn colours, we will visit the spots Niall has discovered for the best views of this landscape and go there when the light is at its most flattering. Since Charlotte works meal times around photography, we have no fear about missing out on the light. Misty mornings, too, are possible and if the day is nice, we can have breakfast on location. Evening meals will be taken at our house, *Les Saumais*, where you have access to a fabulous library of photography books. If the evening is warm, we will eat outside.

Your [accommodation](#) is a *gite* in the village, just 1 km away with great views overlooking the *bocage* landscape. No guarantees it will be warm enough to use the swimming pool, though! For more information, please email us and we'll set up a call with you.

**25<sup>th</sup> September - 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021, £2200**, includes transfers to and from TGV Le Creusot/Montchanin, all meals, accommodation, guiding, tuition and transport during the Retreat. No single room supplement.





## ISLAY AND JURA, SCOTLAND

ISLAY REMAINS OUR FAVOURITE SCOTTISH ISLAND, and one we've visited more than 20 times since the mid-1980's. It's the mix of cultural landscape and wilderness, of bright green pastures abutted by moorland and a coastline worried ragged by the Atlantic, that make it so enchanting. That, along with huge skeins of barnacle and white fronted geese, seals, goats and choughs, keeps drawing us back. Oh, and there are the distilleries and lighthouses too.

During the Retreat, we'll visit all of our favourite haunts, at just the right time of day—or night. There is almost no light pollution away from our base near Bridgend in the centre of Islay, providing good conditions for astro-photography, with an old chapel as a foreground to boot. We'll also do some light painting at dusk as well as visit a tiny bay with some of the most exquisitely patterned rocks in the Hebrides. Weather permitting, we will spend a day on the neighbouring island of Jura to try to photograph the plentiful red deer there.

Islay Estates is providing us with fabulous en-suite accommodation at [Ceannloch House](#) and an adjacent property from which is it easy to access all parts of the island within half an hour. For more information, please email us and we'll set up a call with you.

23<sup>rd</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021, £2000, includes transfers to and from Port Ellen-Post Askaig, Islay, all meals, accommodation, guiding, tuition and transport during the Retreat. No single room supplement.





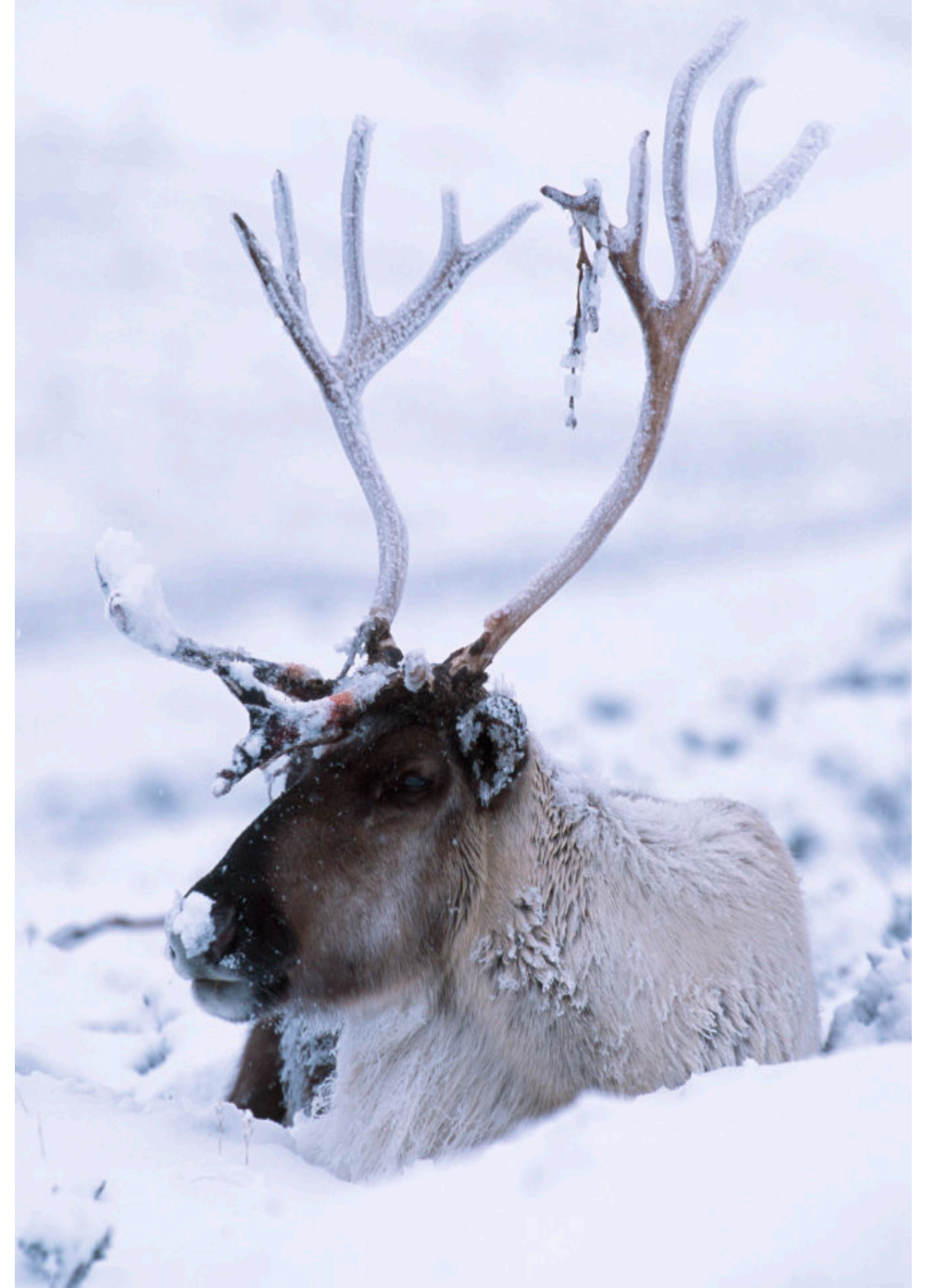
## CAIRNGORMS, SCOTLAND

**W**E'RE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME BACK well-known German photographer and teacher, Willi Rolfes, who will join us as we explore the mountains, native pinewoods and lochs of the Cairngorms National Park, based in the rapidly re-wilding Glen Feshie. Our stay coincides with peak autumn colours in the valleys, always with the possibility of a sprinkling of fresh snow on the mountain tops. There will also be an opportunity to photograph red squirrels at a feeding station in the pinewoods and, weather permitting, the reindeer herd that lives on the open hill.

We will be staying at the very comfortable [Ballintean Mountain Lodge](#), chosen for its secluded location, proximity to several good locations and spaciousness. It's an ideal place in which to learn and relax, with ensuite rooms for all.

The weather in the Scottish Highlands is, of course, unpredictable but between Willi and Niall, there is a huge storehouse of ideas and strategies to keep you engaged and productive through the whole week. Thanks to Glen Feshie's distance from the sea it, and other glens in Speyside, often conjures up fog at this time of year and we'll make sure we've got you in the right place if this happens.

6<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> November 2021, £2150, includes transfers to and from Inverness airport/railway station, all meals, accommodation, guiding, tuition and transport during the Retreat. No single room supplement.





*Charlotte makes*

# STRAWBERRY TIRAMISU





## STRAWBERRY TIRAMISU

I love using ingredients in season and now the markets are full of locally-grown strawberries. This recipe is perfect for people who love the idea of Tiramisu...but don't love coffee. It will make six to eight individual portions (served in a dessert glass dish) or one larger Tiramisu in a shallow serving dish. (roughly 18x28 cm).

*You will need:*

- a selection of bowls to measure out your ingredients in advance and also an electric whisk. You need to whisk egg whites and yolks separately so that means two large bowls and separate whisk attachments. I use my Kitchenaid for the egg whites and a hand-held electric one for the yolks;
- a medium-sized pan;
- various utensils for mixing and stirring;
- a small sharp knife for the strawberries;
- a grater, if you want to add chocolate decoration as a finishing touch;

**This recipe contains raw eggs.**

*Ingredients:*

- 500 g of fresh strawberries;
- 500 g of mascarpone;
- 4 large egg whites;
- 4 large egg yolks;
- 75 g of caster sugar;
- 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract or 1 teaspoon of vanilla bean paste;
- 250 g of ladyfinger boudoir biscuits or Savoiardi biscuits;
- 4 tablespoons of sweet white wine such as Monbazillac or Sauternes;
- 3 full tablespoons of strawberry jam;
- 200 ml of water;
- White chocolate and fresh mint sprigs for garnish.

### How to make the Tiramisu

Set out your chosen serving dish or dishes, and measure out all your ingredients.

1. Firstly, put the egg whites into a dry, clean, grease-free bowl with 3

tablespoons of the sugar and whisk to stiff peaks.

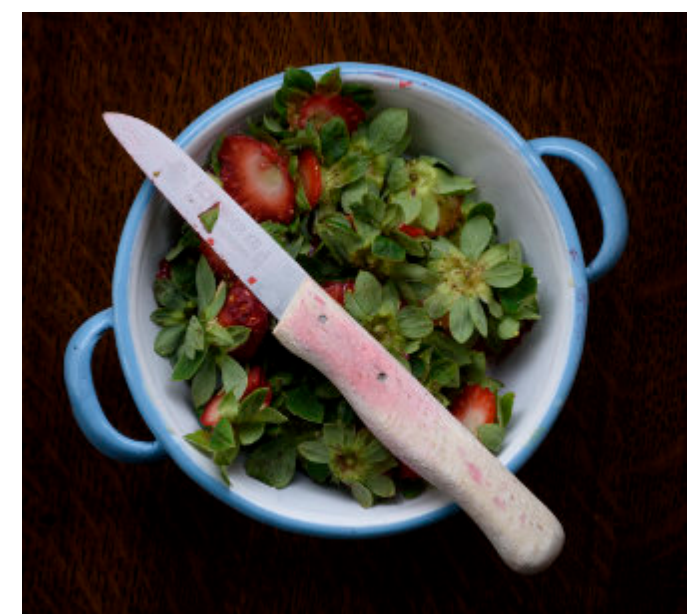
2. In a separate bowl whisk together the egg yolks and 2 tablespoons of the sugar, until it is light and creamy and doubled in volume.
3. Add the mascarpone to the beaten egg yolks and whisk until the mixture is smooth. Add 2 tablespoons of the sweet white wine and stir gently to mix.
4. Fold in the whipped egg whites using a large spoon, being careful not to knock too much air out of the mix. Keep folding gently until the mixture is all well incorporated. Set aside.
5. Take the pan, put in the strawberry jam and water, and bring to the boil. Pour into a shallow bowl to cool and then stir in 2 tablespoons of the sweet white wine and mix well.
6. Take the strawberries, slice them, and set aside.

### Now to compile the Tiramisu

1. Dip the biscuits in the cooled syrup liquid and line the bottom of the

dish(es) in one layer ( break the biscuits to fit where necessary)

2. Top this layer with half of the mascarpone mix and spread evenly.
3. Next add a layer of sliced strawberries and a grating of white chocolate.
4. Repeat this process, finishing with the rest of the mascarpone mix, topped with the sliced strawberries.
5. Cover with clingfilm and place in the fridge for at least 4 hours, longer if possible.
6. Decorate with some shavings of white chocolate and a sprig or two of fresh mint.





*introducing*

MARC WYNEN



“ I never break into these abandoned places. I may open a window or climb on a wall but leave them exactly as I find them. ”



THE FIRST “URBEX” (urban exploration) photographs I ever saw were probably Freeman Patterson’s of the Namibian mining town of Kolmanskop, in the late 1980’s. His pictures of once elegant rooms overwhelmed by sand drifts were startling for what they symbolised—but also because they were unexpectedly beautiful and the scenes strangely serene.

Urbex could easily be characterised as a reaction against the saccharin, generic landscape photography that occupies centre stage on social media. But there is so much more to it than that, so many questions the work poses, so many dystopian undertones it contains.

For Belgian photographer, [Marc Wynen](#), though, such questions aren’t uppermost in his mind as he quietly slips into an abandoned building, accompanied by an exploration buddy or model. For one thing, there may be security staff to



“work round”. And there’s always an element of danger when you move around somewhere with rotten floorboards or collapsing ceilings.

Yet, the urgency and caution that necessarily must accompany this type of work aren’t evident in Marc’s photographs. Yes, he works only with available light, so that’s a lot faster than setting up strobes. And no, he doesn’t spend time rearranging elements for a better composition - all is photographed as found. Nevertheless there is a level of care apparent in his compositions—what is shown and what is only hinted at; corrected verticals and managed distortion—that takes a lot of experience to execute swiftly. After 13 years of specialising in this type of photography, his mastery of the process (and that includes sympathetic post-production colour grading) not only allows him to do that but leaves space for some playfulness, too.



In his book, [Pure Silence II](#), we are taken on a bizarre tour of derelict sanatoria and forgotten churches, abandoned industrial plants and ruined hospitals many in Belgium, Italy and Georgia.

In several of the pictures, we meet a range of equally bizarre characters - usually played by Marc himself - seemingly oblivious to the devastation all around. But these characters, rather than being sinister, are actually highly comedic. That might be in the shape of the lugubrious Addams Family extra leaning over his document-strewn desk demanding "Coffee. With milk. Now," or the optimistic swimmer poised to dive into a moss and glass-lined pool. I can't recall another set of pictures and captions where the photographer's sense of humour (and Marc's is deeply ironic) is so clearly on display and the context for it so unlikely. Urbex. Can be. Funny.

You can order [Pure Silence II](#) [here](#).







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## FERAL GOAT, ISLAY

**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY, the goat has been the coloniser's best friend: it is easy to transport in a boat; provides meat, skin and milk; it's cheap compared to a cow and, when you arrive on unfamiliar shores, you can be sure it will find something it likes to eat. What's not to like?

But goat history has a dark side too: how they hastened the end of early Mediterranean civilisations by destroying the vegetation that held fragile agricultural soils together; rendered previously forested areas of Iceland into denuded barrens; how their wrecking behaviour imperiled giant tortoises in the Galapagos



In Scotland, though, where (now) feral goats live on several of the Hebridean islands, in Galloway and parts of the Highlands, hunting and the weather put a brake on population growth. Lacking sheep's natural lanolin water-proofing goat kids, born as early as February, are especially likely to succumb to winter downpours and storms.



# MENU

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