

Coastlines and Creativity

A HEBRIDEAN PHOTOGRAPHY RETREAT ON ISLAY AND JURA

14 - 21 NOVEMBER 2020

WITH

NIALL AND CHARLOTTE BENVIE

FOOD AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREATS™

with the Benvies

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Islay:
The Queen of the Hebrides

The Retreat

Food and Photography Retreats are for people who enjoy a house-party style holiday in a lovely setting where they can immerse themselves totally in photography - and eat very well too.

Niall and Charlotte Benvie's seven day Retreat based on the Hebridean island of Islay offers guests a singular opportunity to learn new skills and deepen their knowledge of photography while enjoying first class hospitality.

The concept of a Photo Retreat is a little different from a tour or workshop. The Retreat has elements of both but the tuition is more structured, the outcomes are more focused and a lot of emphasis is put on creating a relaxing atmosphere in which conversation can flow and ideas emerge. Rather than make vague promises to "improve your photography", we teach particular skills and ways of thinking that guests can use long after the retreat has finished. This, combined with tutorials and feed-back sessions, can help photographers to make substantial progress in their creative lives, all the while enjoying themselves in an inspiring setting.

And when it comes to British coastlines, few can match Islay and Jura's diversity of forms, wave conditions, geology and wildlife.



What's on offer

The coastlines of Islay and Jura provide the raw material for your creative work during the Retreat. Niall's main job is to help you conjure something personal and distinctive, both in the field and in post-production back at base.

During the Retreat, you will learn how to:

- shoot and assemble "Chocolate Bar" collages
- photograph, process and composite white background pictures
- use post-production effects to re-enforce a particular mood or feeling in your photographs
- create Colour Transects

These techniques open doors to creative avenues that you'll be able to explore for years after - the same techniques that have earned Niall his reputation as an innovator.

Our discussion sessions will centre around major themes in outdoor photography including style; the origin of ideas; authenticity; parallels in painting; the important players - modern and contemporary; and holding the viewer's attention. Niall guides these but everyone is encouraged to contribute their own ideas.

The photography, of course, is just one part of the Retreat. Charlotte belongs to the nothing-is-too-much -trouble school of hospitality and relishes the chance to create a delightful space and lovely meals for you.



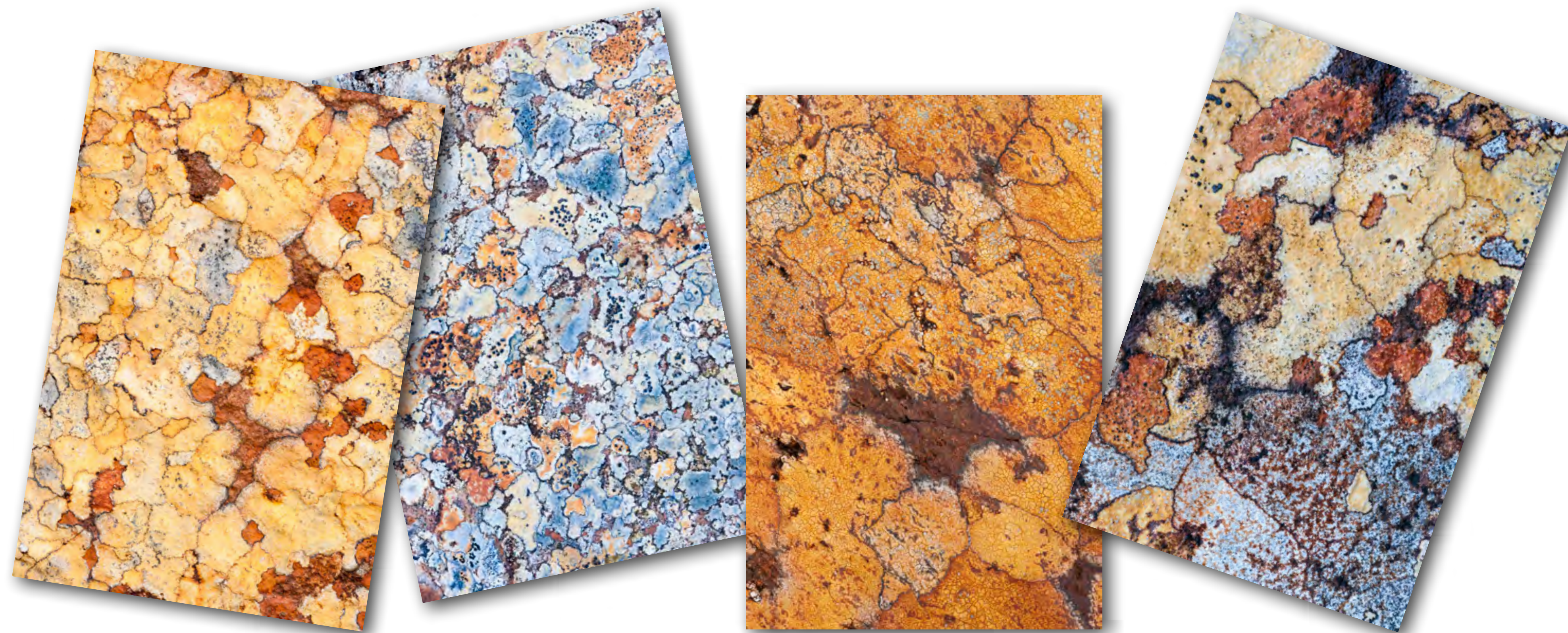
Skills

Shoot and assemble "Chocolate Bar" collages

These images are all about diversity where people expect there to be uniformity. It's a highly versatile technique that is effective in holding the viewer's attention and encouraging closer examination of the subject.

Islay has some wonderful exposures of extravagantly patterned slate and these provide great "harvesting spots" for the elements for our collages. But other shoreline details, as well as those of bog, mountain and moor, are abundant.

We provide Photoshop templates to make assembly a breeze, whether or not you're familiar with the application.

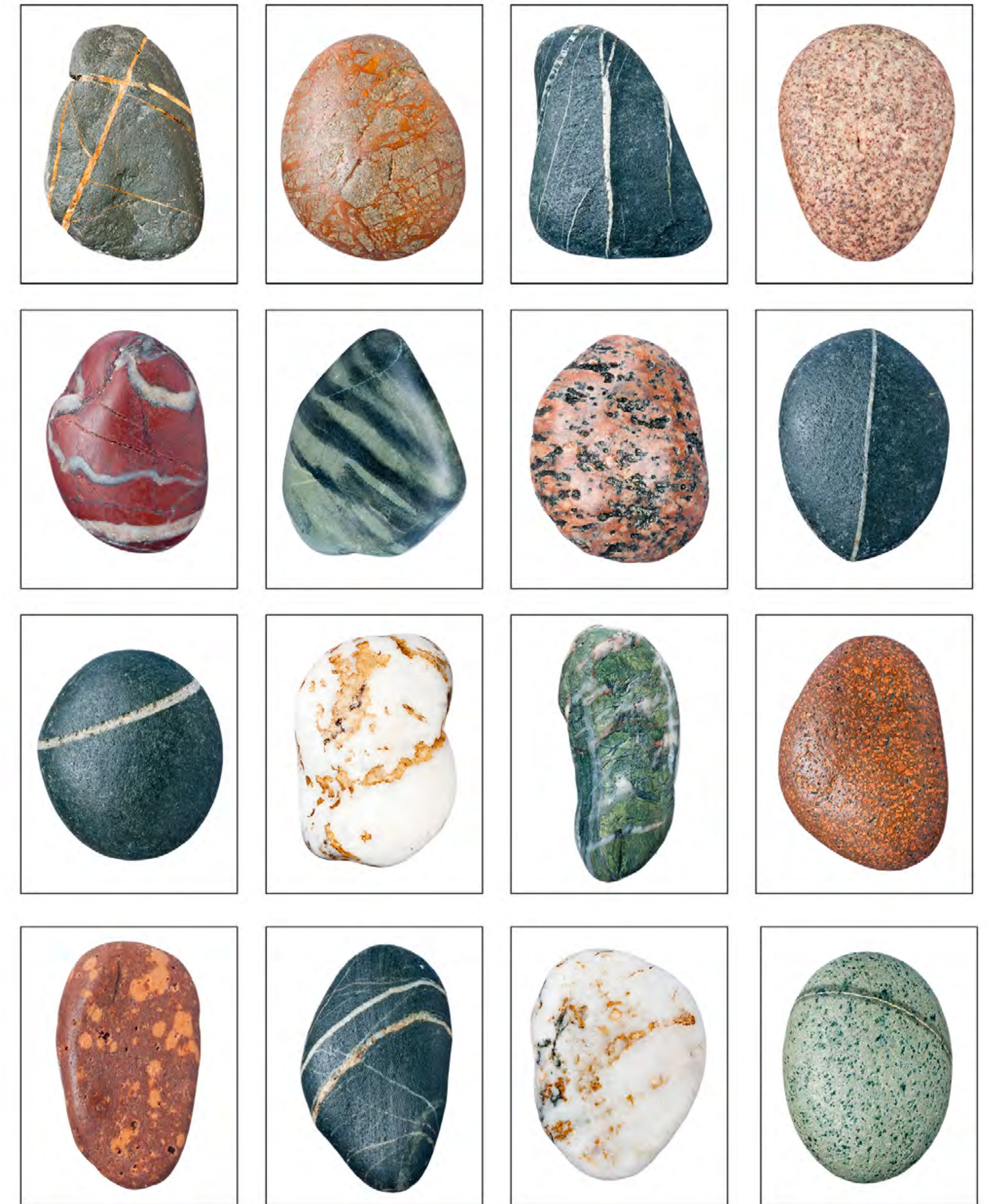


Skills

Photograph, process and composite white background pictures.

What started in 2009 with two flash guns and two pieces of plastic has evolved into a worldwide photographic initiative: Meet Your Neighbours, now with several hundred participants. Niall has been instrumental in describing and sharing the technique. You will learn how to make these striking, backlit images, on location with wild subjects; the specific way to process these photos; and how to assemble composites.

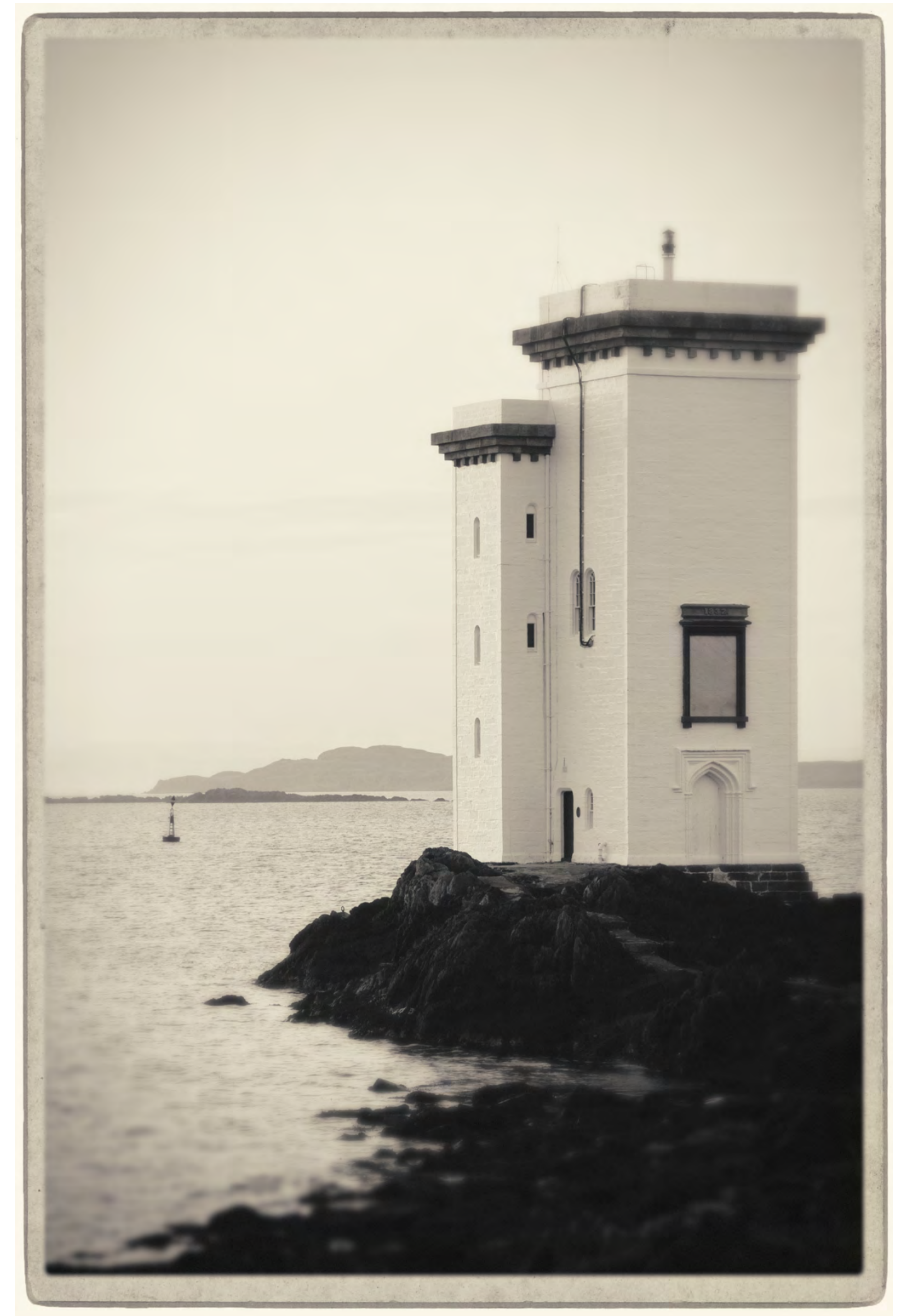
As well as objects we find, cut flowers will also be provided to photograph so that the scope of the technique can be appreciated.



Skills

Post-production for mood and feeling

The right post-production is essential for projecting the mood you are aiming for in your work and is standard practice in commercial work. So, we'll go beyond simple image development and explore the tools available to create an image more personal to you. It will help if you are already familiar with Lightroom and Photoshop, even at a basic level. You'll also be introduced to AlienSkin Exposure X - arguably the leading software for this kind of work.



Skills

Colour Transects

Niall started to create this style of image in 2017 and they have been widely published since. A “Colour Transect” consists of a photograph and colour swatches presented as a single piece of work. The 27 swatches are sampled from the photograph, sometimes highlighting the diversity of colours in the image, sometimes the variety of different hues of the one colour. The object is to simplify and clarify the image’s colour content for the viewer.

The concept of the transect is borrowed from ecological sampling. A line is defined through a habitat and samples taken or records made at regular intervals along that line. The exercise can be repeated at different times on the same transect to introduce consistency to the sampling process. In a Colour Transect, lines are drawn across the image at the post production stage and colours sampled to create the swatches. To make the creation of these images simple , even for Photoshop novices, we provide templates.



ISLAY AND JURA

AND OUR VENUE



The Islands

Islay's blend of improved grassland, wild moor and a coastline gnawed raw by the Atlantic make it an intriguing proposition for the photographer. The cultural landscape enhances, rather than diminishes, the island's natural wealth, attracting huge numbers of wintering barnacle and white fronted geese and providing a home for many brown hares. The chough, that iconic crow of the Celtic fringes, is favoured by the presence of cattle on coastal pastures and even corncrakes have returned to slink between the irises that crowd damp field edges and disturb light summer nights.

It is on the coast, however, that we find real wilderness unmediated by people. The island's geological and glacial history have given rise to the whole gamut of coastal geomorphology from cliffs and arches; to stacks and geos; to sandy beaches and mudflats. Rich in texture, form and colour and constantly worried by the Atlantic, the dynamic coastline of Islay is spellbinding.

Jura is a different, wilder and more inaccessible proposition. The skyline is defined by the Paps, three conical mounds of quartzite rising to over 700 metres. Below them, rolling moorland hosts over 5000 red deer. Weather permitting, guests spend a day on the island.



Our venue

We use the lovely [Saddlers](#) House over-looking Loch Indaal in the charming village of Bowmore. This provides a comfortable, well-appointed base for our travels and tuition - not to say relaxation and meals too. Each room has en-suite facilities and there is wi-fi throughout the house.

Meals

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. Niall and Charlotte eat largely vegetarian food at home but the range broadens to encompass all tastes on Retreat. You can see some sample menus at the end of this document. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively when notified in advance on the booking form. Expect to eat well, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And in between times too.





General information

Retreat Price: 2020: £2200

What is included in the price of the Retreat?

Seven night's accommodation on Islay; dinner on day one, 14th November, until breakfast on the last day, 21st November 2020; travel around the islands by mini-bus; foot passenger ferry fares between Kennacraig (mainland) and Port Ellen/Port Askaig (Islay); the ferry to and from Jura; a distillery tour; tuition from Niall.

What is not included in the price of the Retreat?

Travel between your home and the Kennacraig Ferry Terminal; alcoholic drinks; insurance for you and your possessions during the Retreat; additional entrance fees we may incur.

Travelling to and from the Retreat

The Retreat starts at the Kennacraig Ferry Terminal, Whitehouse, Tarbert, Argyll, PA29 6YF. You can park your car here for the week, currently for free. You can take a train as far as Glasgow then the coordinated bus service from Glasgow's Buchanan Street Bus Station to Kennacraig. This is operated by [Citylink](#). Niall will meet you at Kennacraig with your foot passenger tickets for the ferry. There are currently two daily flights to and from the island (ILY) from Glasgow International Airport (GLA). Charlotte will collect you from Islay airport if you choose to fly in. Flights are operated by [Loganair](#).

Daily routine

Each evening at dinner we publish the plan for the next day and what we will be doing. The days in November are relatively short (sunrise is about 0800 hrs and it sets around 1600 hrs), so we tend to spend most of that time outdoors, sometimes with a picnic lunch, sometimes eating at home. You can participate in as much or as little of the teaching and tutorials as you like - and that goes for a travel partner too. We realise first and foremost that you're on holiday.

Your safety during the Retreat

We treat your safety seriously on our Retreats. While most of the locations we visit present few difficulties to those with even average fitness, where particular hazards - such as slippery foreshores, drop-offs, boggy ground or large waves - present themselves, you will be properly briefed first so that you can make a decision about how to proceed. Most of the walks we do are under two kilometres, on fairly level terrain. We issue everyone with a two-way radio and hi-vis. waistcoat. For more adventurous groups, we may make an 8 km hike over boggy ground to a spectacular section of coast to photograph the Soldier's Rock and neighbouring formations.

General information

Insurance

It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/delays. Bookings are accepted on completion of our Insurance Indemnity form.

Weather

Hebridean weather in early winter can be windy and wet, but thanks to the influence of the Atlantic, it is always very changeable. It is important that you come dressed for the weather so that you can enjoy your time out of doors. It is often very wet underfoot so if you can bring a pair of Wellington / rubber/neoprene boots, you'll get the benefit of them. The daytime temperature is likely to be in the range of + 4 - 10 ° C.

Clothing

We recommend: a polypropylene/thermal base layer; wool or fleece mid-layers; a down jacket; and a waterproof shell (top and trousers.) You will also need fold-back mitts and liner; an insulated hat; YakTrax (Pro) in case it is icy; walking boots or waterproof ones; slippers/indoor shoes for the Lodge.

Equipment

If you are travelling by air, you may be concerned about the 6 kg baggage allowance on Loganair flights. The way round this Niall has used for many years, with many airlines, is to pack as much gear as you reasonably can into a photographer's waistcoat. This counts as a garment, not hand luggage and you can still have your 6 kg bag separately in a bag. That will just about cover your notebooks, laptop, drives and power cable. With regards to equipment you'll need during the Retreat (we provide the light modifiers and studio flash gear):

- If possible please bring a laptop loaded with Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop/Elements. A flash drive is useful for getting the documents we'll give you onto your computer.
- You could use any lens between 16 mm (for beaches) and 500 mm (for geese and deer), but a macro lens, a mid-range zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use.
- We have a couple of spare tripods but would urge you to bring your own.
- Please pack a head torch or hand-held one, for safety and navigation.
- A walking pole or staff is useful when crossing boggy ground.
- All the chargers, cards, batteries and backup media you need, plus UK power adaptor if you're travelling from abroad.
- A polarizing filter and graduated ND's, only if you have them.

General information

About us

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad Niall and Charlotte Benvie established Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our offer combines the teaching of particular skills in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for over 25 years with a massive publication record including six books and hundreds of articles. He has been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last decade, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION.

For 28 years, Charlotte combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too and can also assist with Lightroom processing. She is a trained chocolatier.

Contact us

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Sample menus

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

Dinner

Tuesday 30th January, 2018

Icelandic lamb goulash
served with couscous

Carlotta's Chocolate mousse
served with home made snowflake

Coffee and Carlotta's Chocolates
Kilchoman Whisky bonbon

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

Dinner

Saturday 14th February, 2019

Roasted figs with goat's cheese
and Parma ham
served on a bed of leaf salad

Salmon salsa verde en croûte
served with baby potatoes and green bean

Carlotta's Chocolate pots
served with fresh berries

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

Dinner

Sunday 17th May, 2019

Venison pie with sweet chestnuts
and banana shallots
served with clapshot, braised cavolo nero
and oven roasted potatoes

Apricot brioche pudding
with crème fraîche

Coffee and Carlotta's Chocolates
dark chocolate bonbon

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

Dinner

Wednesday 27th January, 2018

Chicken and chorizo casserole
served with oven roasted potatoes
and green vegetables

Assiette of miniature desserts
with a lemon theme

Coffee and Carlotta's Chocolates
truffles