CAMERA NOT INCLUDED

The Photography Zine by Ewen Bell



Edition #4
March 2026

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TWO CATS

EWEN BELL



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SETERMOEN

Troms / Norway



THE COVER

Inland from the fjords. Setermoen, Norway.

Twenty-eight degrees Celsius below zero. Cold enough to make it hard to hold a camera for very long. Even through the gloves, the camera body becomes a heat sink and draws away any remaining warmth... making my fingers freeze a little faster.

This patch of Arctic Norway is an in-between place. It's not Tromsø and it's not Lofoten. It's somewhere you pass through on your way to somewhere else. Which is exactly what makes it appealing to me.









THIS EDITION

Calm

Sub Glacial

Slow Snow

Embers In Time

Slow Then Fast

Wider Than Wide

Home Time

March 2026

A very big edition this month. What can I say, winter in the Arctic is absolutely immensely rewarding for photography. It's one reason I keep coming back year after year.

The other reason is the people.

I often give advice that photography is all about the light, because cameras don't see subjects they only see light. But the photographer does more than the camera, and for me the people behind the process are just as important as the light. There are times when I make people the subject of a shot, and there are times when I do not. But the people are always part of the process.

People who share their local knowledge. People who join a workshop and help fund my work online. People who invite me around for pizza on a Friday night because they know I'd otherwise be sitting at home alone by the fire. People who take me on their snøskuter to visit a hut in the wilderness where they think I might enjoy shooting auroras on another night.

I cannot do my photography without a camera. Or without the kindness of people who make my world what it is today. Most of these people do not appear in front of the camera, yet they are always there.

A quick word of thanks to the sponsors who make this publication possible.

As an ambassador for Lumix Australia I enjoy the privilege of using their cameras and lenses for the vast majority of my photography. We have also worked on a few special projects together, often with a view to donating camera equipment to organisations in Asia and the Himalayas.

I also want to thank Peak Design who have been very generous with my projects. I've bought a fair number of their bags over the years, but Peak Design have reached out a few times to let me road test some of their new models. I love their 10L sling especially, as it fits a pair of S9 camera bodies and three lenses, while still leaving room for a water bottle and extras.

Also need to say a word of thankyou to Angelbird, who have been my go-to brand when buying SD cards for so many years now. I have more to say about that later in the zine!



ARCTIC NORWAY

Troms / Norway

CALM

Evenes, Norway.

I didn't realise it until someone pointed it out, when they commented on the "calmness" that dominates my compositions. In that moment I felt seen, and felt like I saw something of myself that I had not yet fully understood.

It makes sense in hindsight. I avoid loud. I avoid crowds. I prefer the subtle over the grotesque. It's no wonder that the photography I enjoy the most is also the photography that expresses how I want to see the world.

I struggle to enjoy shouty photography. I don't like super cranked saturation. I don't like hyper contrast. I don't like "crunchy" sharpness. I don't like it when the photo feels more like bragging than sharing.

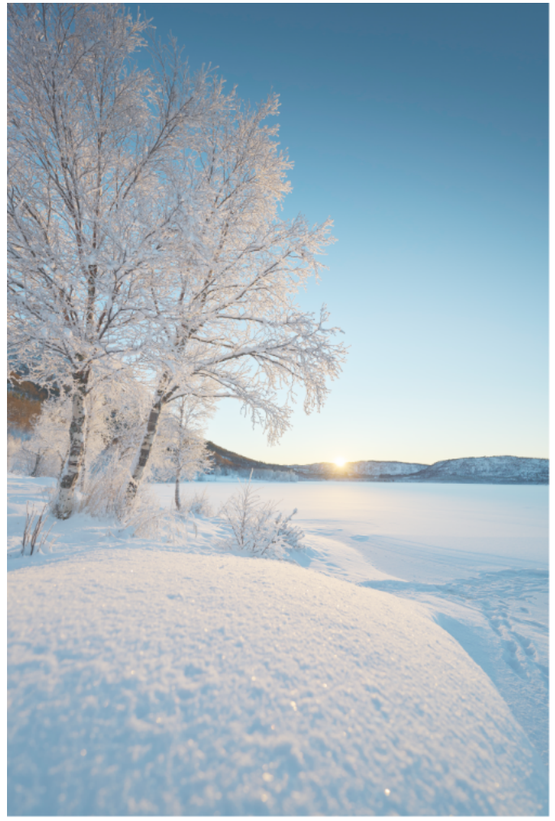
I like calm.

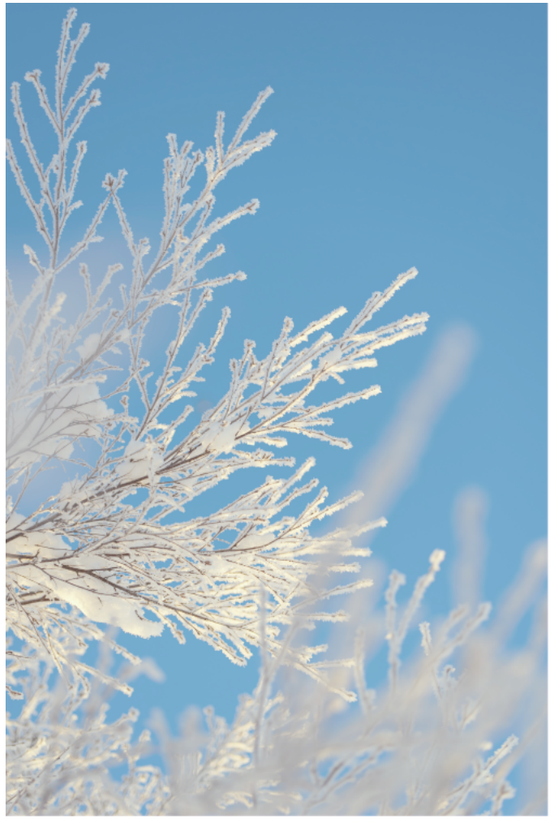
[Images in this series were captured on the
Lumix S9 + Sigma 14-24mm F2.8 + TT Artisan 40mm F2 AF
and Lumix S1RII + Lumix 100-500mm F4.5-7.1 OS]







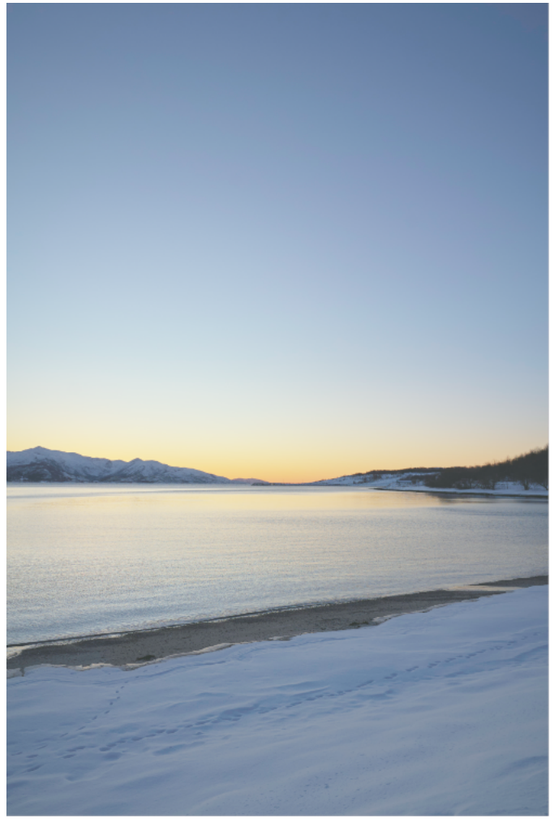




The sun disappears for weeks or months in the Arctic Winter, depending on how far north you are. This day was the first day in over a month that I've had a chance to photograph actual sunlight. Suddenly those golden rays reached across a frozen lake and kissed us on the cheek.

What was a beautiful landscape before the sun arrived turned into a masterpiece of light. I love such surprises, when suddenly a handful of snow flakes and ice crystals turn into jewels.





I find most Social Media platforms are the opposite of calm. They are attention seeking and badly behaved, like toddlers on the floor kicking and screaming until an adult gives them candy. Not just the content, but the editing styles as well.

Social Media and digital screens have effectively conditioned us towards hyper saturation, hyper contrast and hyper perfect images. We have become accustomed to being shouted at.

One of the things that guides me with this zine project is to step away from the shouty, and embrace the calm.

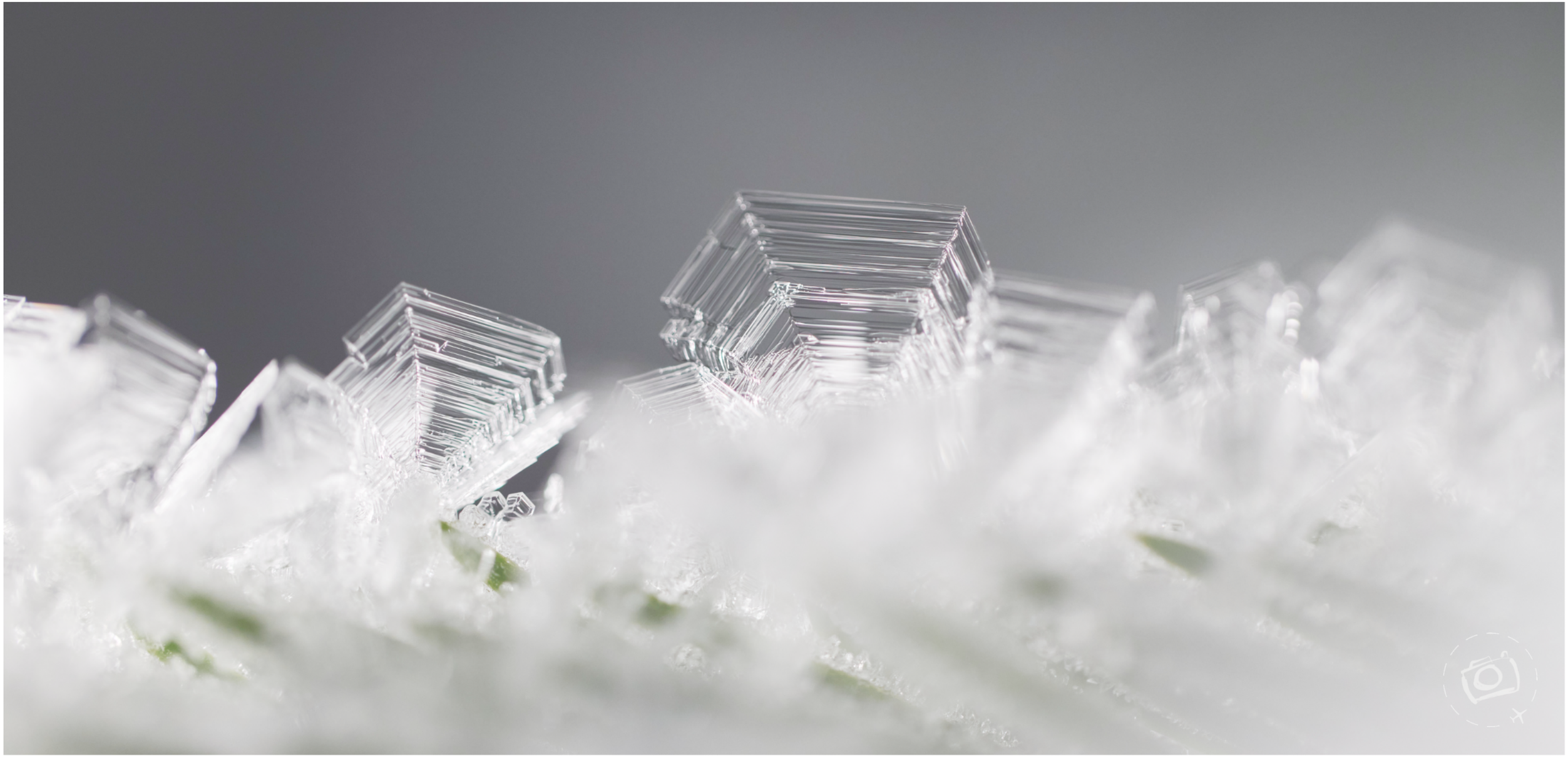




Scale isn't just about "detail", but it's important for context.

I love the feeling of being very very small in a very big universe. I feel liberated to remember that I am so small in the bigger scheme of things. I feel "embraced" when I see myself as part of something bigger. For me, this becomes an antidote to anxiety and a doorway to calmness.





SUB GLACIAL

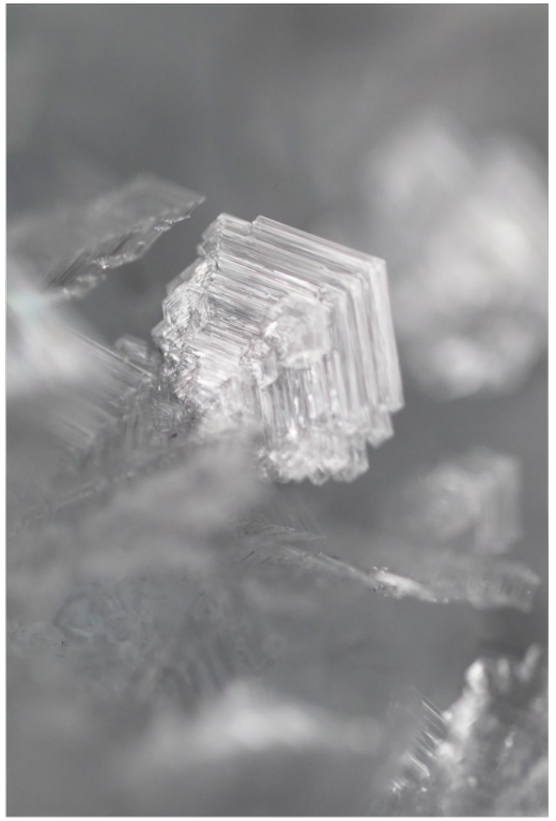
Arctic Circle, Norway.

The natural world around me often gives me cause to stop. So many kinds of beautiful. A path in the woods, lined by frosted birch. The sound of ice crystals under foot. I look a little closer to discover a tiny world full of spectacular moments.

All this magic is revealed with a macro lens. I had taken a few shots with my Sigma 28-105mm F2.8 zoom, but then I came back with the 100mm F2.8 macro lens and an LED light so I could get a lot closer. I'm so glad I did. With my zoom lens I caught only a glimpse of this tiny world, but with a decent macro lens the exquisite detail is revealed.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ Lumix 100mm F2.8 Macro]





I had visited this trail many times in previous weeks, and watched the character of the path changing each time. From deep powder snow that layers every tree and branch like ice-cream, to a glistening hall of crystals that grow silently from those same branches... like tiny little chandeliers.

Millions of crystals. Each one grows like a mathematical equation, but given slightly different starting values. The underlying algorithm emerges again and again, just in slight variations.









These crystals were capture using a Harlowe Blade LED light.

I keep one of these in my camera bag all the time. It's designed to produce clean colours and tones for shooting video, flicker free, but also works for macro stills when you need a little boost in the "Polar Night" of Arctic Winter.

It's USB rechargeable and has a diffusion screen that delivers a decent amount of softness. I've used a few different kinds of these battery powered USB lights over the years, but this one is very easy to tuck away in my bag and forget about... until it's needed.





SLOW SNOW

Arctic Circle, Norway.

There was one other shoot in particular where the Harlowe Blade LED light proved invaluable; capturing the movement of snowflakes just after dusk.

Late into the "blue hour" we started to get some snowfall. For the snow passing close to the light, the exposures are bright and daylight colour-balanced. This helps the background light to come through very blue by comparison.

My setup is simple. I use a light stand to prop up the LED light and then shoot around the scene. The snow is my subject, and the surrounding scenery becomes a more abstract element of the canvas.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ TT Artisan 40mm F2 AF]



In this situation my recipe for ICM movement is very very simple. I just swing the camera with 40mm lens from side to side. That's all.

The variances in direction and depth of each snow flake combine with this simple movement to generate more complex patterns on the sensor.

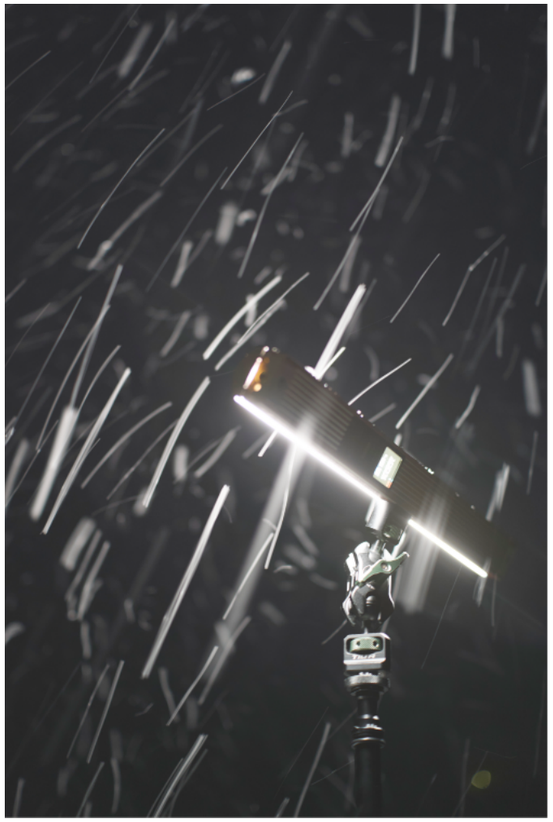


Exposures around 1/4 to 1 second gave me a chance to capture the flow of snow flakes and play with some ICM. This scene was also dark enough to shoot wide open at F2.

And I always enjoy shooting at F2.

That means a few snow flakes trace an exposure that is sharp and clear, while all the others are blurred and puffy. This delivers an additional layer of complexity that I find enticing.







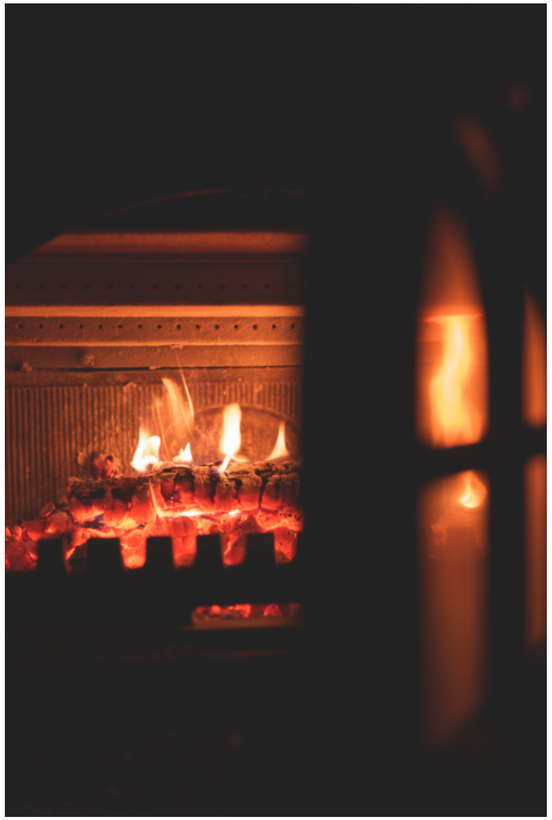
EMBERS IN TIME

Arctic Circle, Norway.

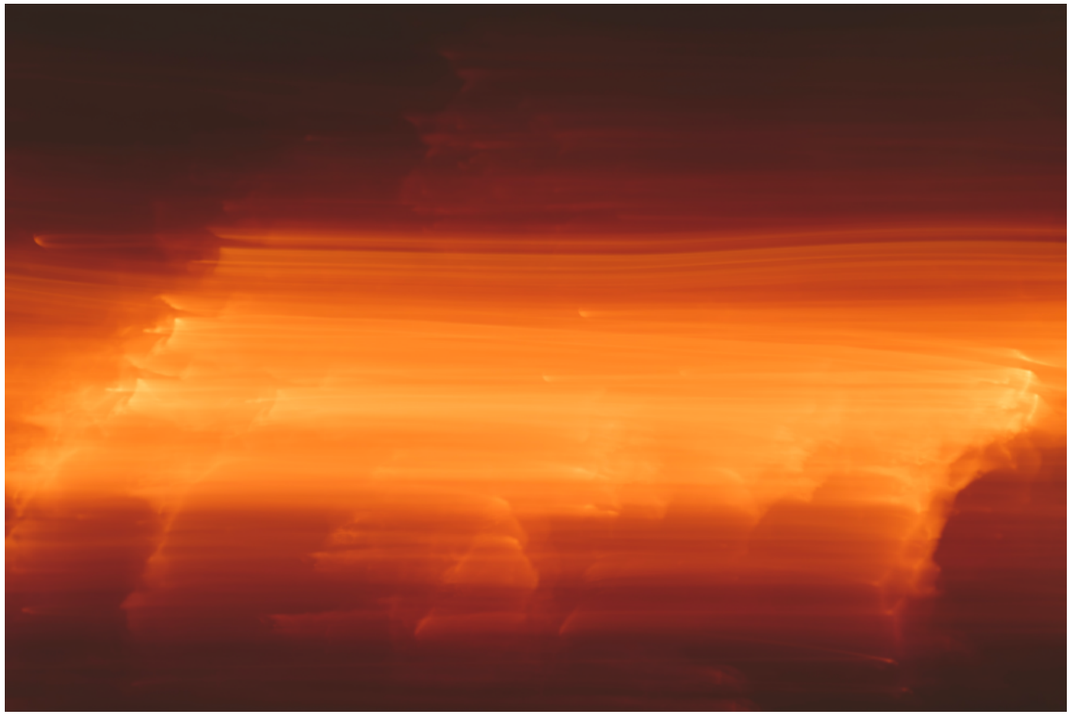
When the wood fire dies down there are no longer flames rising into the air, just a glow of heat as oxygen is drawn over the remaining coals. It's a subtle and inviting canvas for practising some Intentional Camera Movement (ICM).

4 seconds at ISO 100.
I adjust the f-stop to adjust how bright the exposures are.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ Sigma 28-105mm F2.8]



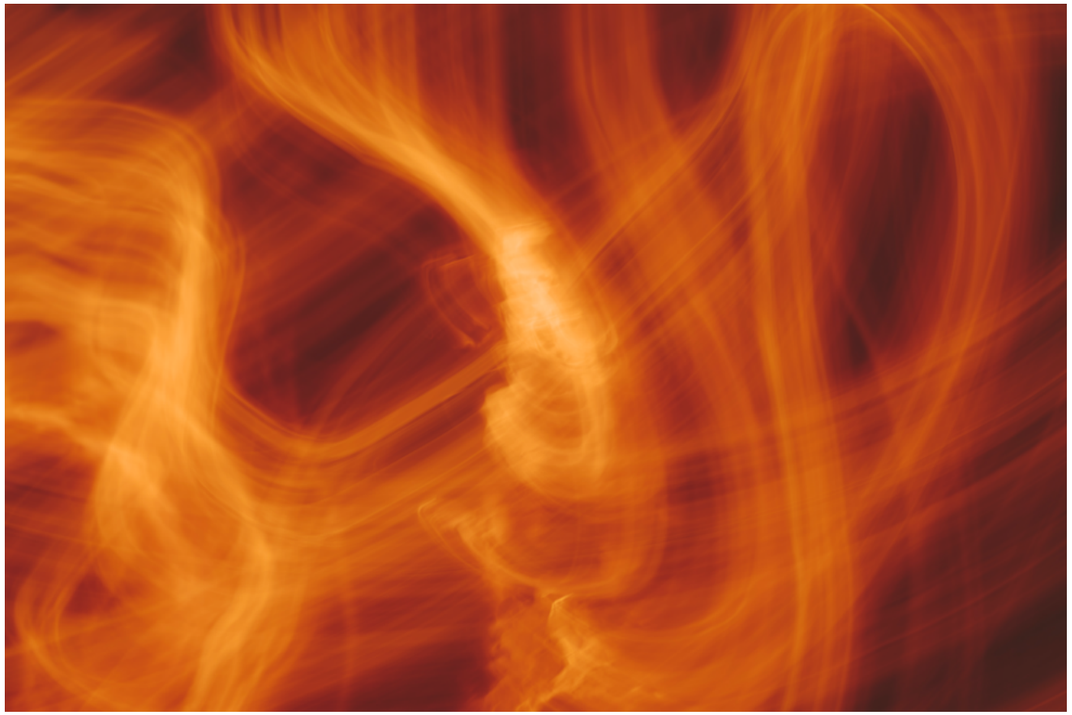




The magic ingredient to ICM as a technique, is your hands.

Not because one photographer is more perfect than another, indeed quite the opposite. It's the analogue element of human imperfection that makes all the difference. It's the way we introduce our unplanned errors and misguided wanderings into a shot that makes it wonderful.

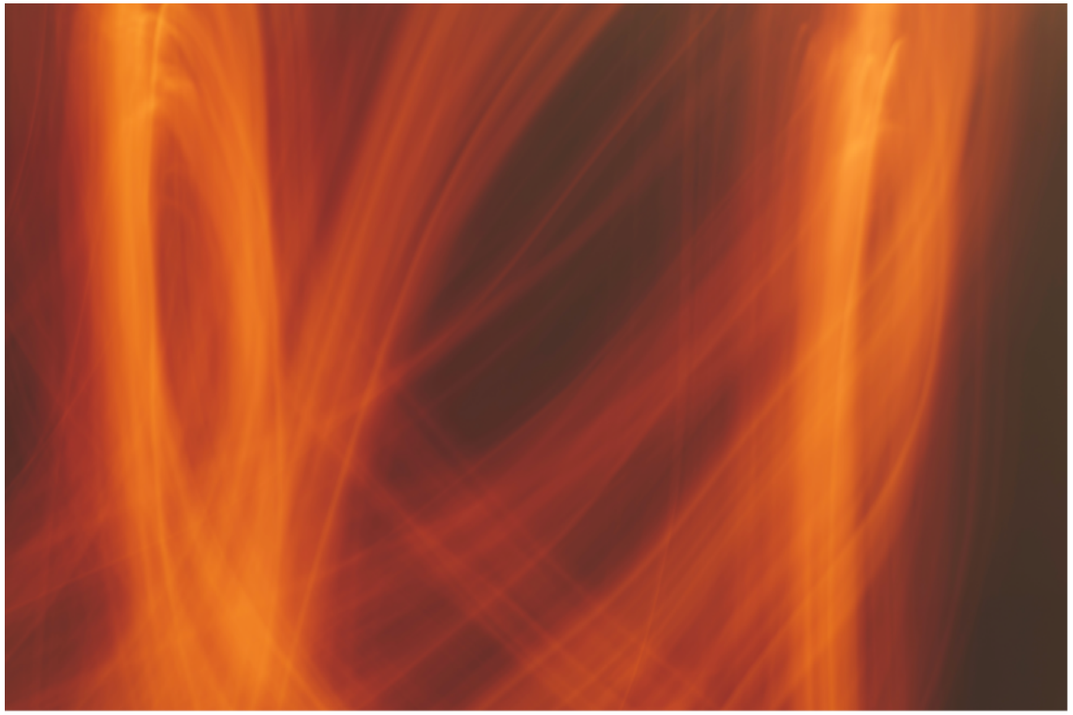
ICM is not a task of trying to find the perfect circle, or perfect swing from side to side. It's a leap into the imperfect.

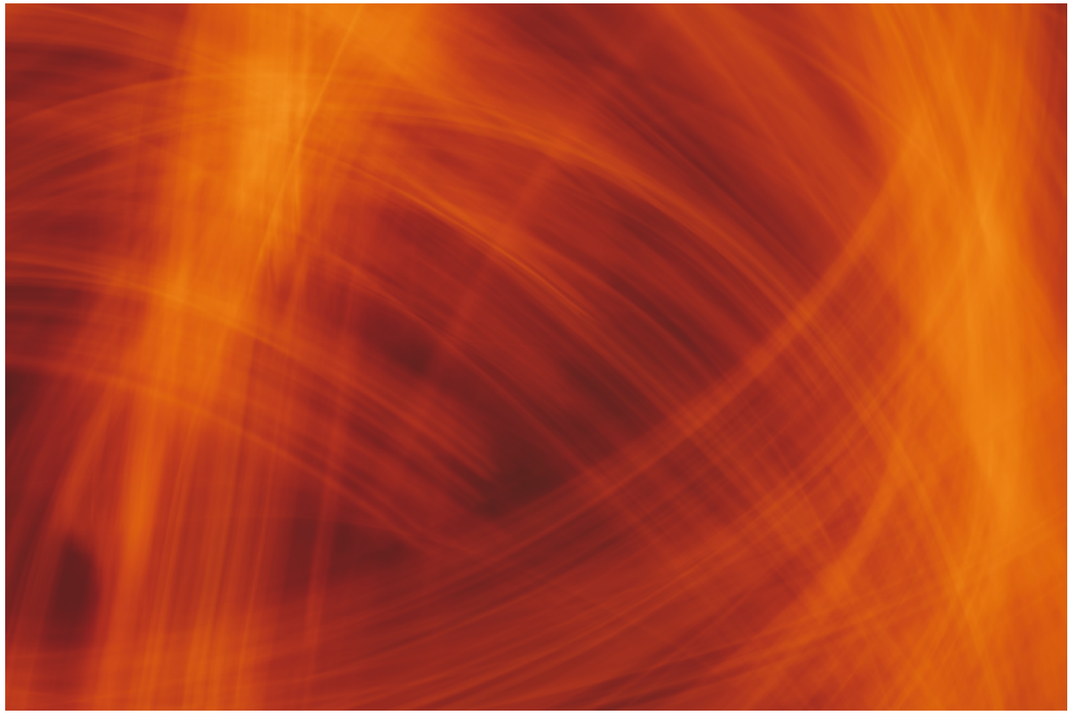


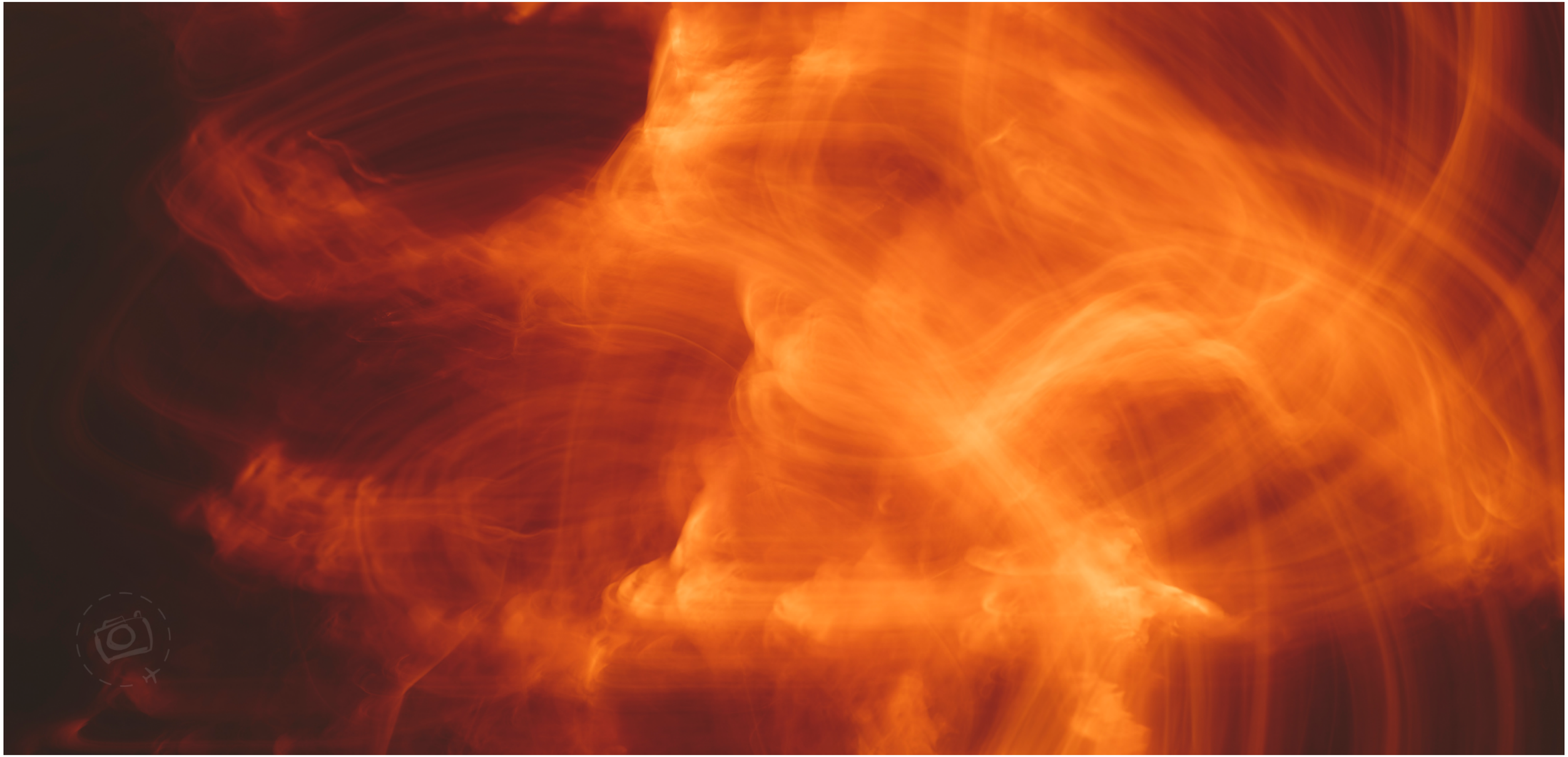
I like the flow of light across a sensor. Most of all I like when a simple twist in my controlled movement creates a pattern I had not imagined.

Serendipity is my favourite word in photography.

So long as there is an element of uncertainty and discovery in the process, I will persevere and explore. Once I get familiar with a movement, and how it forms in a photo, my interest wanes. It's the unknown results that get me excited.



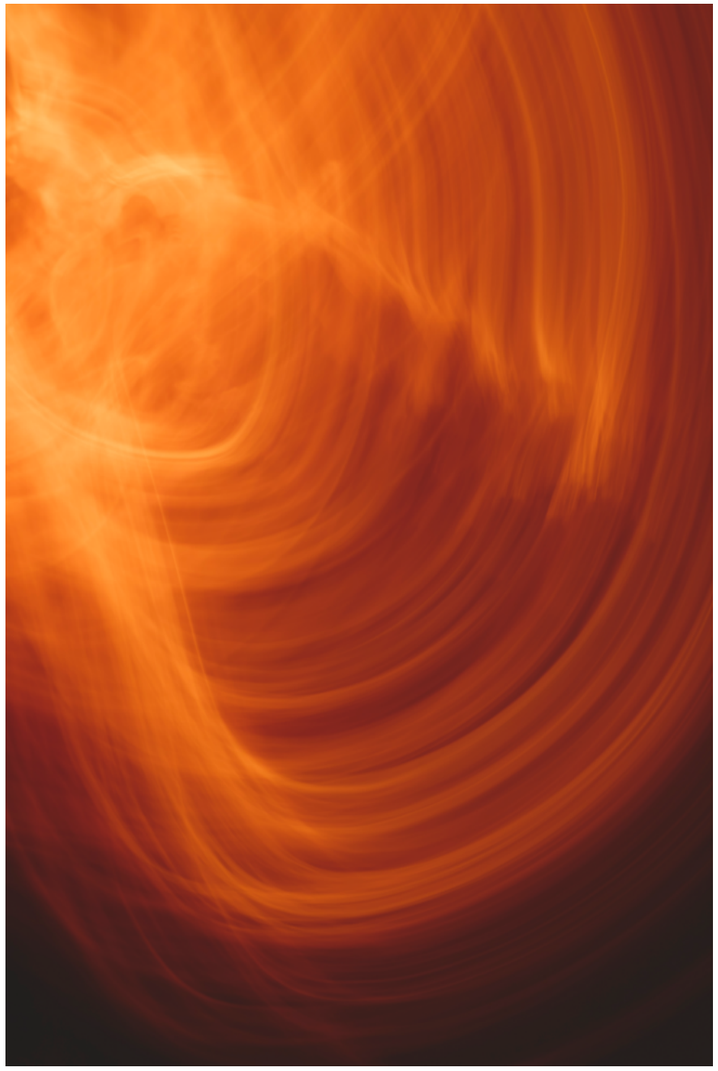






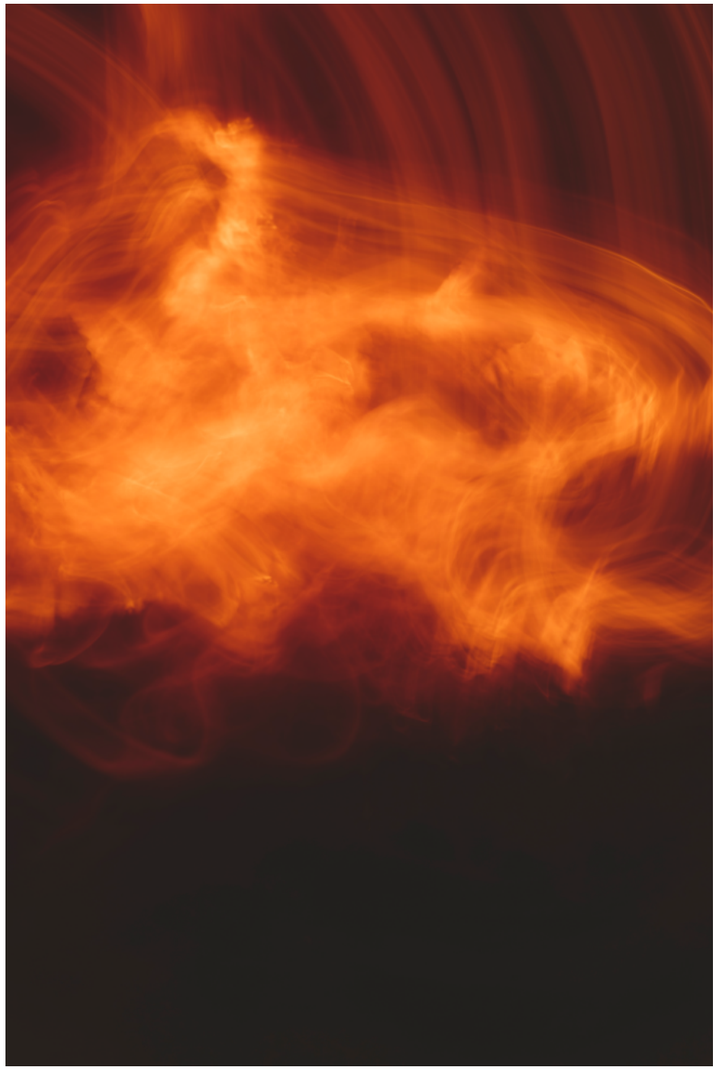
I look for smooth, but not predictably smooth.

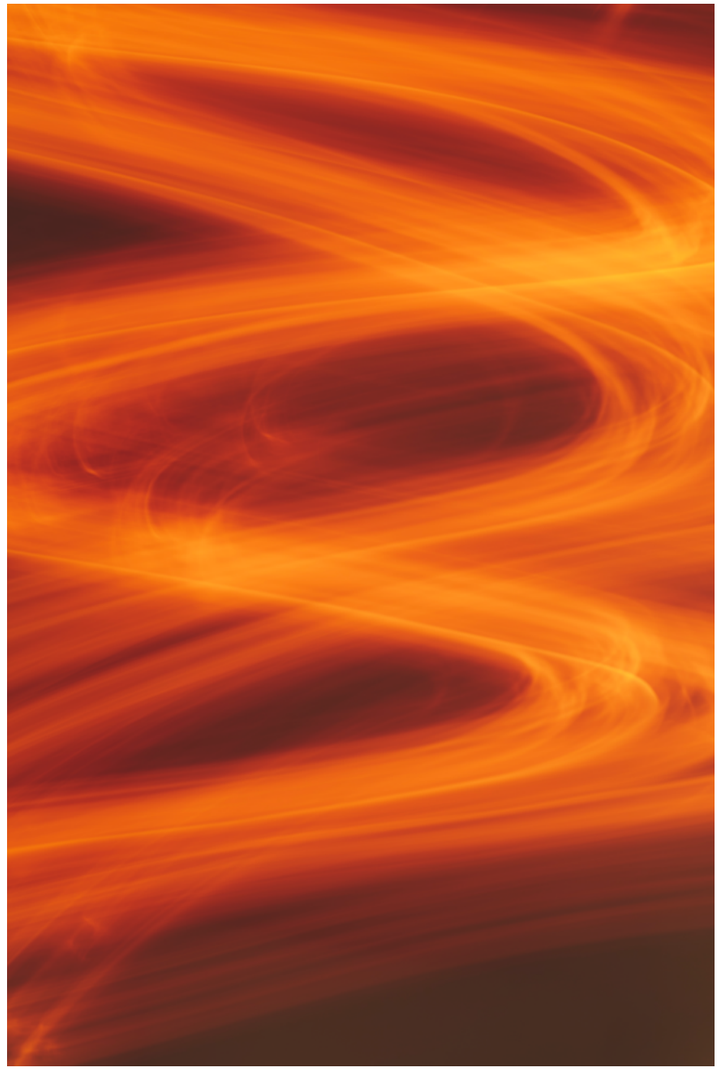
I don't like jaggy ICM, in the same way I prefer soft snow to hard chunks of ice. ICM is like a snow storm, but with light that gets blown about with each press of the shutter.



Somewhere in the back of my brain there's a bunch of math going on when I play with ICM. Something deep in my mind knows what's going on, but just refuses to tell the rest of me. So I keep quiet and let my hands do what they think is best.

And nobody is more surprised and happy to see what comes of the photo than me.






“What I love about ICM is the way
a simple scene can be transformed
into such depth and complexity.”

EWEN'S WORKSHOPS

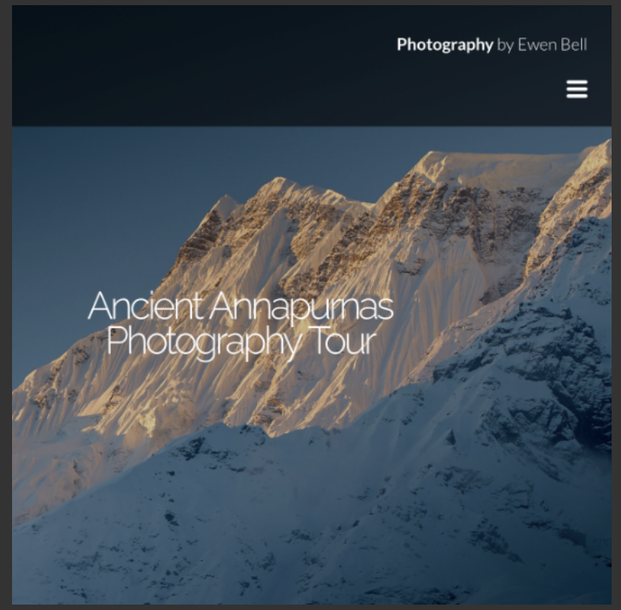
Intimate photographic experiences with Ewen Bell

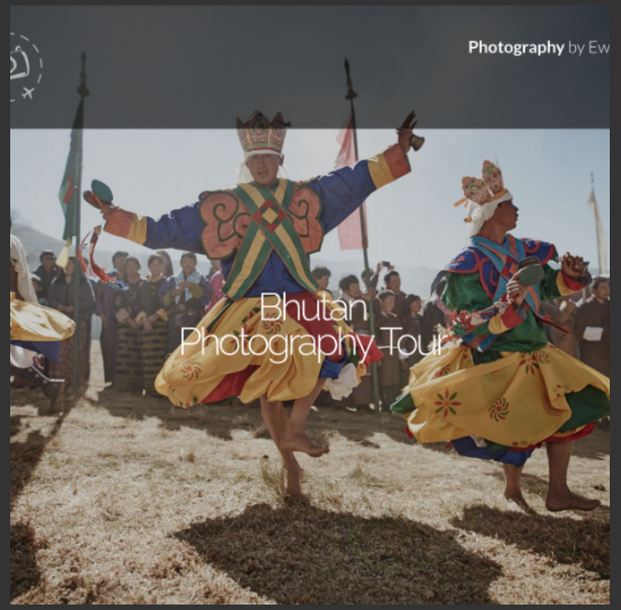
Every year I run a handful of workshops and photo tours in various parts of the world. I have been doing this for twenty years now, and every year I try to find ways to make each experience more rewarding. It's never the same workshop twice.

I run my tours in places I know very very well. I don't outsource my expertise. I care about these places and believe they offer something special to my companions. We learn about the cultures and landscapes, as much as we do photography.

Visit the website for more details.

ewenbell.com/tours









THIS PAGE IS SPONSORED

Thankyou Angelbird

Angelbird make a bunch of high performance memory card, and now also some excellent USB/Thunderbolt cables. My journey with this brand began in 2020 when we started making recipe videos at home. Shellie did the recipe development and styling, and I did the video and editing. We quickly realised that “sustained data rate” was way more important than any maximum speed a card night claim to offer. The max speeds you see on the labels tend to drop off after a minute of shunting data onto the laptop.

Anyway, back then I scored a killer deal on some 256gb micro SD cards by Angelbird, and I've been buying their stuff ever since. My minimum spec for SD cards now is V60, which means 60MBytes/sec (480mbps). This gives me enough grunt for shooting 6K 10bit video, or for high speed continuous burst when shooting birds or festivals. And it's fast to download at the end of the day. That matters when you're on the road.

Angelbird also supported us on the Tashi documentary project, with their affordable yet impressive SE range of CFExpress cards. I'm still using these in my Lumix S1RII, and still using my Angelbird SD cards in my other cameras. So I'm super happy to have them as a sponsor of this publication.





SLOW THEN FAST

Arctic Circle, Norway.

Longer exposures of auroras let you fill in more of the sky with light, and dial down a little of the contrast that comes with the night sky. Softly softly. I like my auroras to hum rather than scream.

Sometimes the auroras have other ideas. They are mostly gentle, but not exclusively. When a band of nordlys moves quickly from East to West the speed of the light can be startling. I often stand back and just watch, unsure what to make of such energetic outbursts, let alone the photographic moment.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ TT Artisan 14mm F2.8 MF
+ TT Artisan 11mm F2.8 MF]

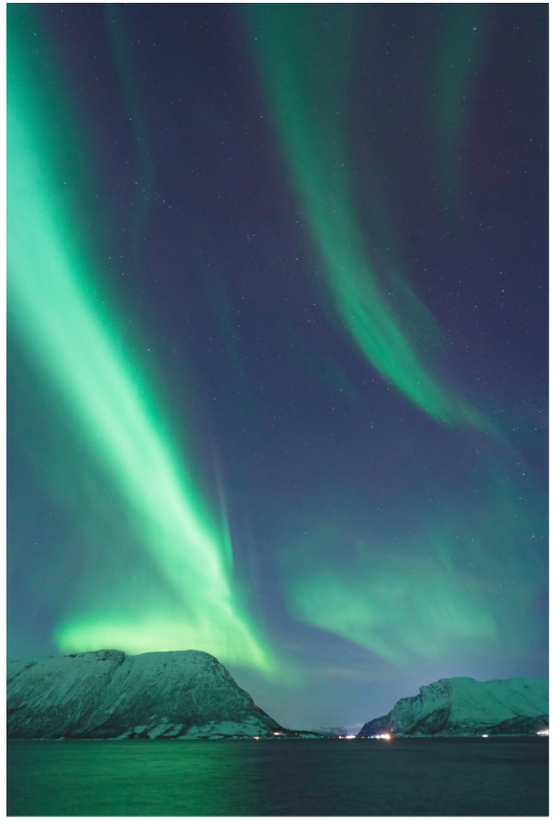


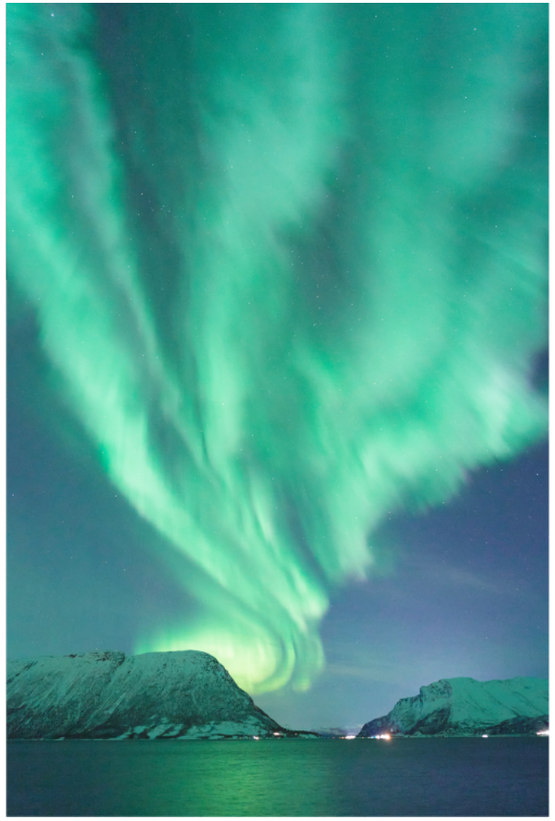




I've spent too much of my Arctic pursuits trying to minimise the shutter, when in reality I am happier with slow and smooth. 10 seconds are nice. 30 seconds is nice too. The sensor gets a lot more light to work with, and as the auroras move they fill-in more of the night sky. A sharp landscape with a soft dance of light.

There's an added benefit of smoother water when shooting in fjords. Short exposures around 2-4 seconds aren't usually enough to remove the texture of the water. That surface turns silky and glassy once you get closer to 10sec.





Things change so quickly. One moment the auroras are waving slowly from the other side of the fjord, and the next they are crashing overhead in a burst or rage.

I try not to chase compositions as the auroras moves from one part of the sky to another. I pick a nice scene and just wait for them to dance through the shot.

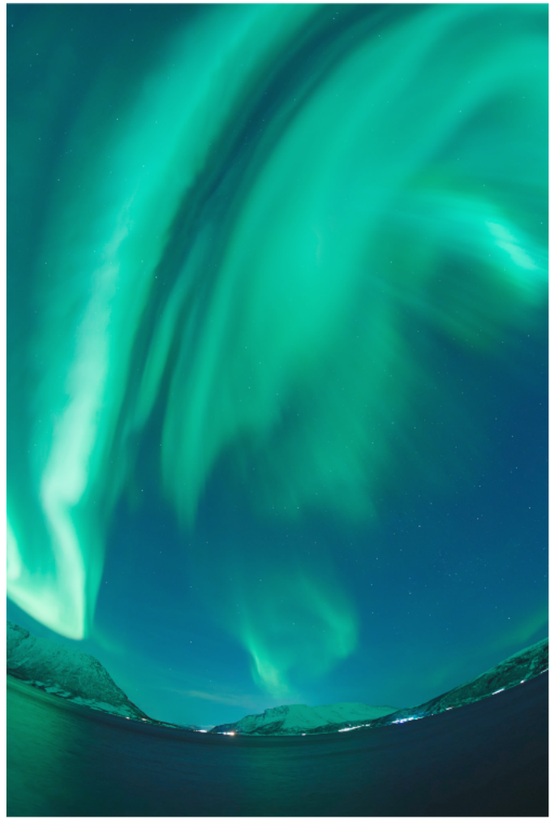
It helps to have some experience with a location, and appreciate what phase of the event you are in. Knowing if the nordlys are just starting in the north and working their way south, and being aware of the east-west line through which they stream overhead.

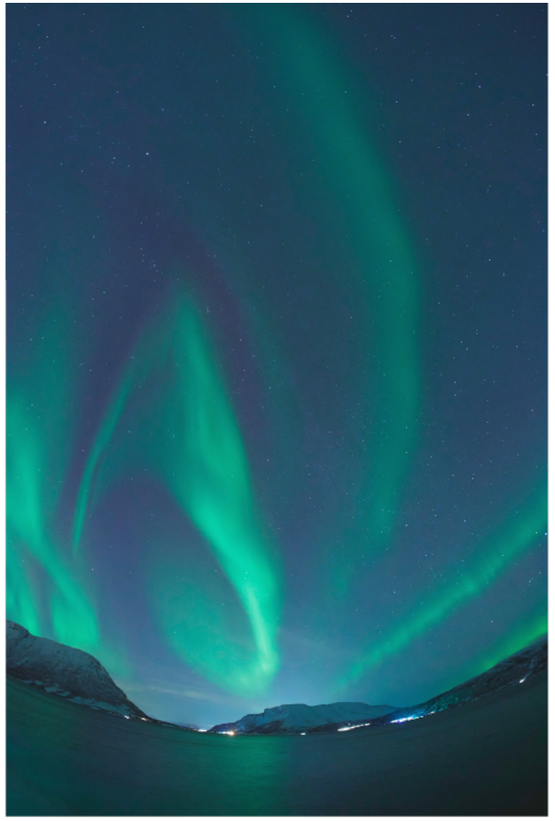


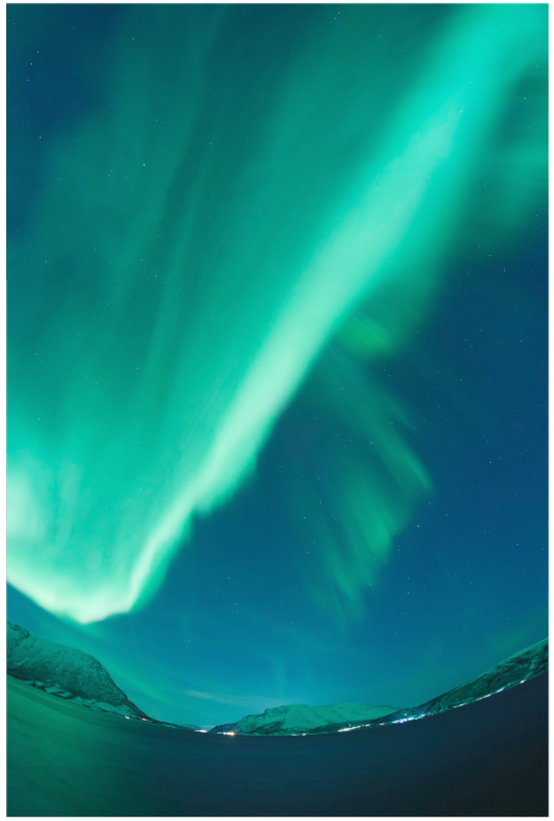


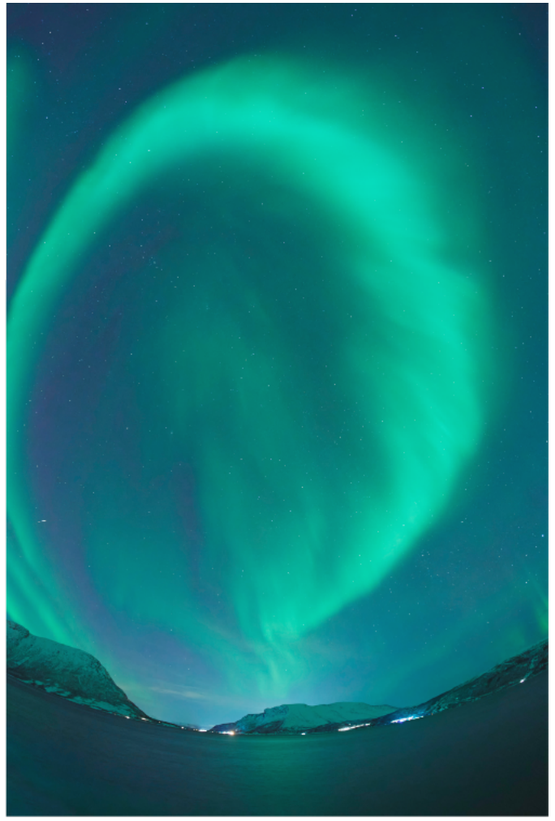
On a moonlit night the exposures are easier to hit. There is just more light to work with, and a little less contrast. You can still see lots of stars, but you also get more detail in the landscape.

In these frames the moon itself is barely one-quarter, but that is plenty bright enough to bring light and colour to the night sky. There's a more gentle nature that comes through when the moon has joined the party.











The experience of speed and light is greatly affected by how close you are to the Aurora Oval.

Standing underneath the aurora itself, when it's literally right above your head, the light emissions are between 100km and 300km high. That same event will look very different from 500kms away on the Bay of Finland.

Even modest events look special in Narvik or Tromsø, hence the "Aurora Oval".



Most aurora photos you see online are from the big nights, when they dance overhead and fill the sky. So you'd easily make the mistake of thinking that's what it's like all the time. All night every night!

But only a few aurora events are like this.

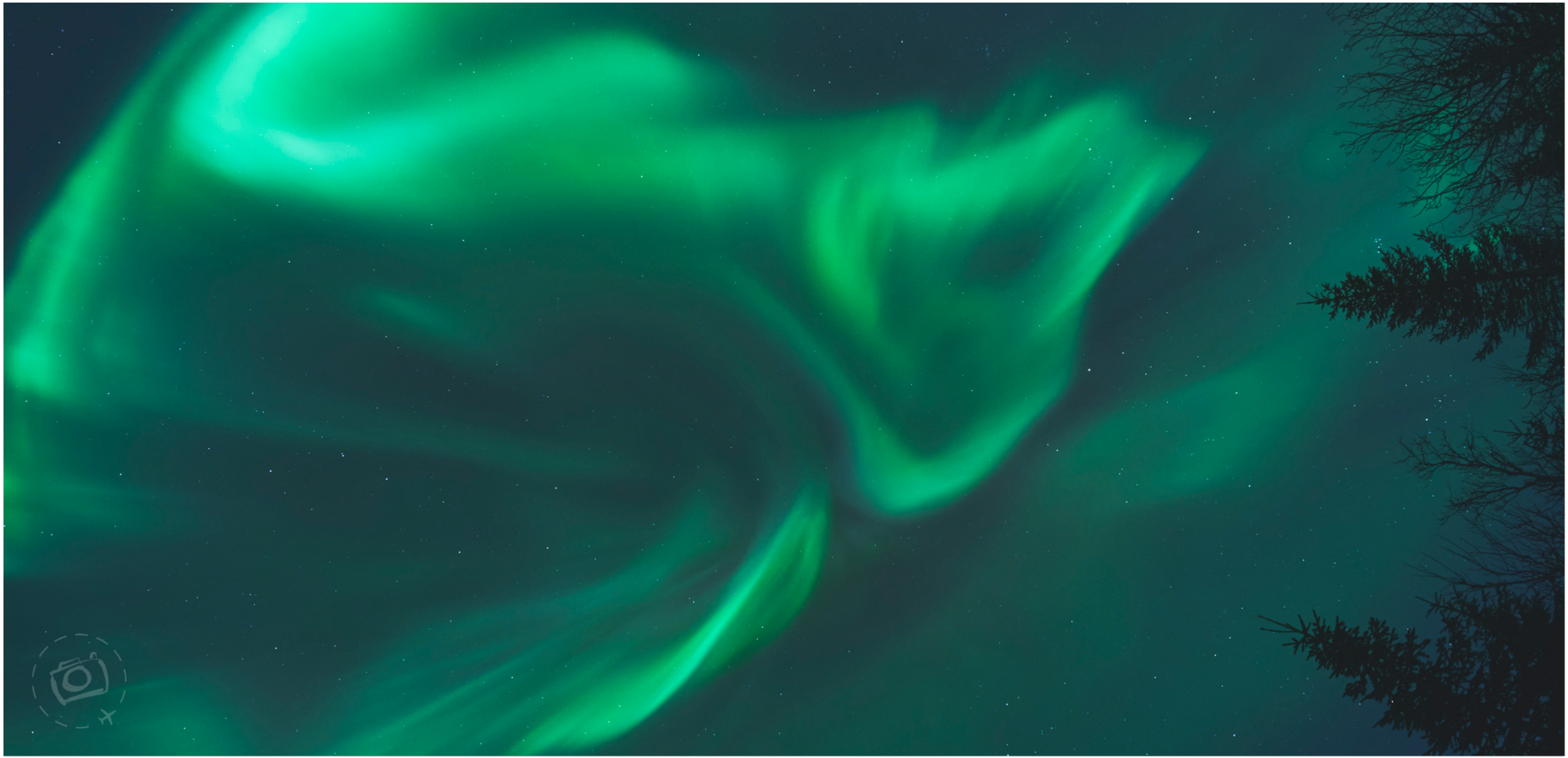
More common is the slow burn to the north, as a modest solar wind breaks into the Earth's magnetosphere. Or maybe the big kick has moved through earlier and what remains is a gentle arc between east and west. There are gentle hours in between the sudden explosions of drama.

My favourite aurora photography are the bits in between. Not totally sedate, but also not screaming at me from every corner of the sky.



Some moments the nordlys burn so bright you have to adjust exposure. On this evening I was initially shooting at 4secs, which is fast enough for a decent time-lapse. But that exposure was way too slow to avoid blowouts during the brightest bursts.

I was just starting off a new time-lapse when I noticed a fresh aurora burst come through. And it was intense. It moved fast, and moved bright. I ended up back at 1sec exposures (ISO 2000 and F2.8) for a little while. The intense burst lasted a few minutes, before returning to a slow burn.



WIDER THAN WIDE

Fisheye Lenses for ultra ultra wide auroras

Fisheye lenses are quirky, awkward and difficult to tame. They represent the widest end of the wide-angle spectrum, and are often at a bargain price. I was keen to shoot a few auroras wider than my usual 14mm, and the fisheye lenses were an affordable way to experiment.

I had a chance to shoot with both the 10mm F2.8 MF by 7Artisans, and the 11mm F2.8 MF my TT Artisans. Would 10mm vs 11mm make such a difference?





For both the 11mm and 10mm there exists a sweet spot where the horizon is centred in the frame. This puts 50% of the scene above the horizon, and 50% below. It works great with shoreline locations, where the foreground and reflections across a fjord are important to composition.

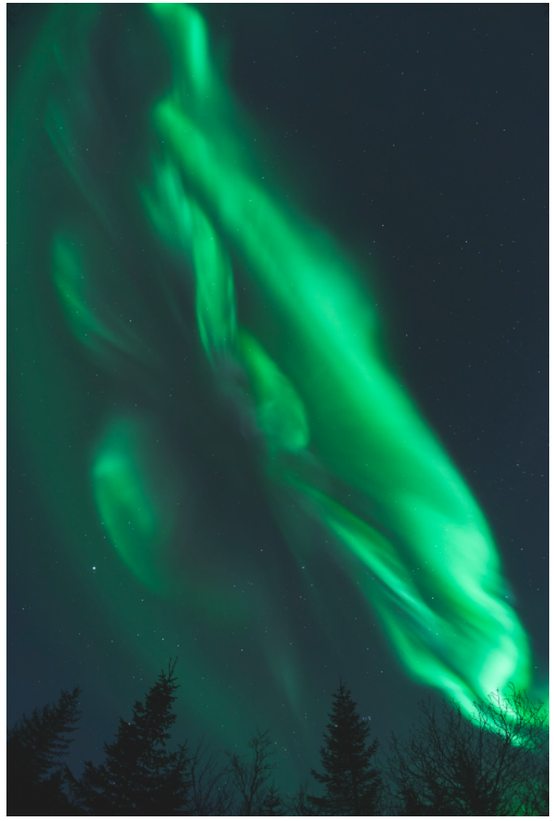
In the forest, I found this far less appealing.

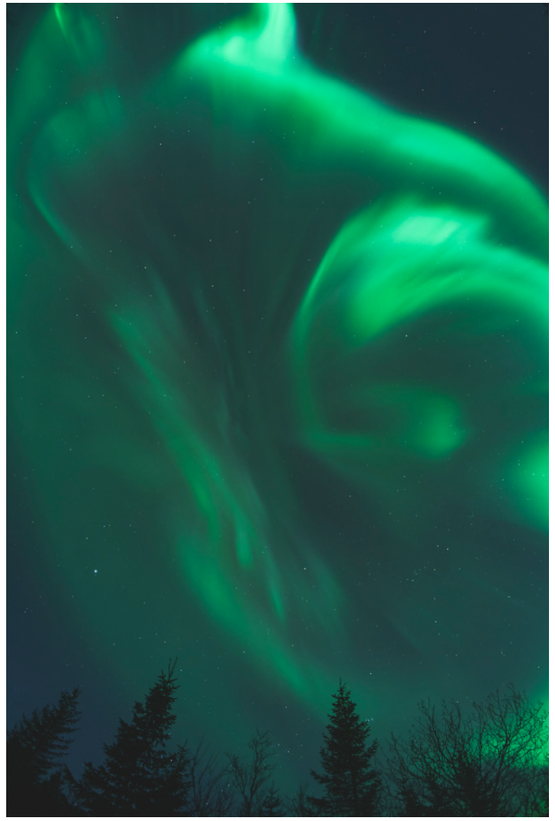
[Lumix S9 + 11mm TT Artisan F2.8 MF]

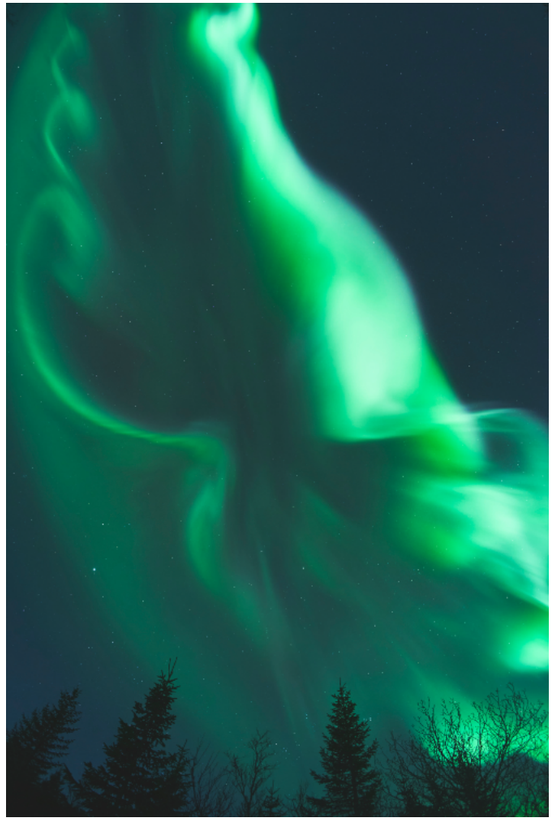


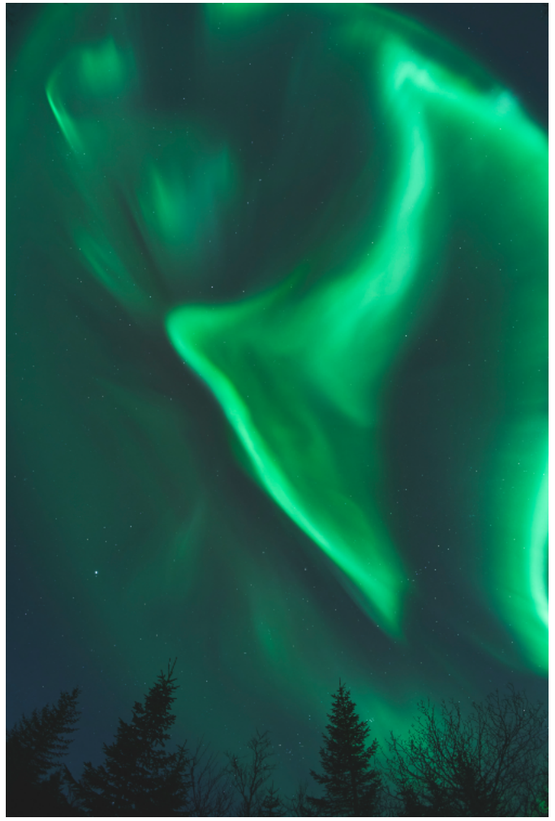
There are limited times when the 50/50 split of an fisheye will appeal. The entire draw of the wider lens for me was to bring more of the sky into my compositions, so sacrificing so much to the foreground is generally less appealing. However, In the shallow water of a fjord at slack-tide, the 11mm full-frame equation delivered excellent value.

[Lumix S9 + 11mm TT Artisan F2.8 MF]









[Lumix S9 + 11mm TT Artisan F2.8 MF]





All of the fisheye shots you've seen in these zine pages so far were captured with the 11mm F2.8 MF by TT Artisan. Some of them are clearly fisheye, but many are well disguised. I routinely found myself able to grab one corner of the horizon with the 11mm and then embrace the rest of the sky. Indeed my entire draw to the 11mm perspective was to capture more of the sky than a 14mm will allow.

In comparison, the 10mm fisheye made it much more difficult to exclude both horizons. When pointing high to the sky, something always creeps into every corner. It's very hard to tame.

Fisheye forces you to get a little more creative with composition, Unless your subjects are dead centre in the frame, they will bend to the will of glass.

[Lumix S9 + 10mm 7Artisan F2.8 MF]



My very first night shooting with the 10mm F2.8 MF was easily the biggest night of the season. Some were watching the event as far south as Paris. Here in the Arctic we were seeing some remarkable displays during an intensely dynamic evening, with flames of red the likes I have rarely witnessed before.

I had stepped off a plane, unboxed my 10mm and raced out to shoot. It was exactly the sort of night you want something wider than 14mm.

The fisheye effect is not something I would normally strive for. I find it distracting most of the time. But in this context of a huge aurora event, the bending and distortion that comes with fisheye is also informative. It reminds us of the scale we are observing, of how high into the sky the auroras are dancing compared to the vast fjord below.

[Lumix S9 + 10mm 7Artisan F2.8 MF]



HOME TIME

New life for an old house

In the middle of Arctic Norway, on the edge of a quiet fjord, we rent a small house to rent every winter. Most people prefer to visit this region in summer, for the fishing and hiking, so the winters are very very quiet. Which is exactly how we like it.

This house was a family home for many generations, and in need of repair. Some friends of ours bought it and fixed all the things that needed fixing. They kept a lot of the original furniture, to maintain a connection to it's former family.

For a few months of the year Shellie and I get to call this home. We watch for auroras and moose, and test recipes.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ Sigma 14-24mm F2.8
+ TT Artisan 40mm F2 AF]

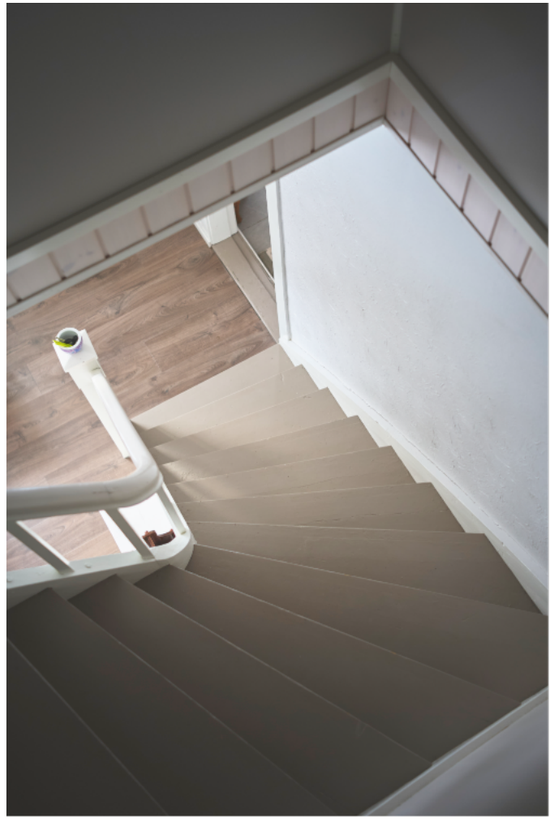


Winter is too short in the Arctic. I wish January could last for another three months. By the end of February the morning light arrives too early. By the end of March the night sky is barely dark.

My favourite days are when the snow doesn't stop. Big fluffy clumping snow flakes that blanket the landscape. Snow arrives in silence, and dampens all other noise. It's like magic from the sky.

And the only thing better than a snowy day outside, is sitting inside by the fire and watching it arrive.



















This collection of photos is from a larger collection I am gathering for our friends who own the house. I want them to have a record of the charm and character that we experience. I want them to appreciate how this house makes us feel, embraced by it's soft moments. The balance and calmness of being in this home is an immense gift to myself and Shellie.

It's a cosy place that sits quietly in the corner of a village. It a place we can step away from our working lives and find rest.





WHO MADE THIS?

Meet The Author

My name is Ewen Bell and I'm a photographer based in Melbourne, Australia. I've been very lucky in life to had the opportunity to make a career from photography.

For over two decades I've been travelling and shooting, which is why I have this photo of me in Bhutan when I was MUCH younger and better looking than I am now :) You can tell it's an old photo because I'm holding a DSLR camera.

Photography has changed my world, so I want to help others find their voice with the camera as well. I love sharing my photos, but also love sharing my knowledge about taking photos. That's why I'm making a zine, in addition to my blog and my YouTube channel.

ewenbell.com



#EWENTUBE

I share a bunch of photos and ideas on my YouTube channel. You can also watch them on the Fediverse via PeerTube for those who prefer ad-free viewing

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CAMERA NOT INCLUDED

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