

INSPIRE

Kathryn Conway discovers that the majestic Highlands of Scotland serve as the perfect destination for an artistic retreat



Hauntingly beautiful, dramatic and wildly rugged, the Scottish landscape has captivated the hearts and minds of artists, writers, poets and composers for generations. Sir Walter Scott was inspired to write his poem *The Lady of the Lake* after holidaying in The Trossachs, J.M.W. Turner took sketching tours of Scotland and captured the power of nature with his atmospheric depictions of the waterfalls on the River Clyde (*The Falls of Clyde*, 1801, and *Falls of the Clyde*, 1840), and Felix Mendelssohn's tempestuous overture *The Hebrides* is the perfect ode to the surging power of the sea around the island of Staffa and its famed Fingal's Cave. Come autumn, Mother Nature conspires to add a touch of magic to the region's already beguiling vistas – trees are awash with seasonal colour, sunsets blaze a purplish hue and the wildlife is a hive of activity. Put simply, there is no better time to indulge in a Highland adventure, particularly for those with an artistic passion to unleash.

Karen Beauchamp knows this only too well. A trained architect and noted wallpaper designer – she was the brains behind Cole & Son's Archive

Traditional collection and the company's collaborations with Fornasetti and Vivienne Westwood while serving as its creative director – Beauchamp turned her attention to canvas and paint in 2011. A move from London to Scotland was facilitated by her daughter choosing to go to university in Glasgow and it wasn't long before the two of them were, as Beauchamp herself notes, "shopping for a new home".

The Arts & Crafts property in Tarbert on the west coast of Argyll that Beauchamp and her daughter uncovered – a former hunting lodge built by the White Horse Whisky dynasty's Peter J Mackie – couldn't have been more perfect for someone looking for a creative hideaway. Beauchamp theorised that others, too, might benefit from all that the house and surrounding area had to offer.

"I wanted to share this place with people – its glorious views, its pretty walled garden and spectacular surrounding landscape," says Beauchamp. "The notion of an art and design holiday, particularly as there weren't many artistic retreats on the west coast of Scotland, seemed like the perfect enterprise."

So, following the conversion of the attic space into a light-filled studio, the Whitehouse Studio was born.

EN PLEIN AIR

Unlike some retreats which rely on outside tutors and hotels or self-catering accommodation to teach and house guests, Beauchamp does it all: leading courses, putting up guests in her home and indulging their every whim with her convivial hospitality. "This is an artist's house, it's full of inspirational things. It's also a house dedicated to art, so it offers a totally different environment from other holidays," she says. "I'm involved in absolutely everything and our guests appreciate that I go that extra mile – they often say they feel nurtured, which is lovely to hear." As the house can only accommodate a maximum of eight people, Beauchamp's retreats are deliberately small, providing ample opportunity for one-to-one tuition.

This autumn, from October 1-7, Beauchamp will lead a Creative Landscape Art course, combining studio sessions with time out into the field, *en plein air*, in order to, as Beauchamp says, "unravel the

intricacies of colour and shape to form an image." While vivid and appealing to any lover of pencil or paint, Beauchamp reveals that the landscape surrounding the studio doesn't adhere to one's traditional picture of Scotland. "We're more coastal here," she says. "Tarbert, for instance, is a traditional fishing village with wonderful vernacular architecture. There's also the Crinan Canal, which as a totally unmodernised Victorian canal is very special." One of the highlights of Beauchamp's course is a boat trip to the Isle of Gigha.

At seven miles long and just a mile wide, this tiny Hebridean island is home to secluded bays and beaches that look out on to turquoise waters to rival those of the Caribbean. "On a good day, when the sun is shining and the sky is blue, there are few better places to sit and paint," says Beauchamp. "It can be quite a challenge detaching yourself from being a tourist and turning yourself into an artist. But, on Gigha, one can eliminate the irrelevancies and focus on the thing you want to paint – a fishing boat moored in the bay, an interesting rock formation

SUNRISE OVER GUILVEN AND CUL MOR, ASSYNT © COLIN PRIOR

HAVENS OF CREATIVITY



or amazing flora and fauna, for instance,” Beauchamp adds. In short, anyone stuck in a creative rut is sure to find the necessary inspiration here. But, Scotland doesn’t just provide a wealth of opportunity to paysagists alone; those behind the lens also find that they are in their element here.

THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER

Colin Prior has been photographing Scotland’s wild places for decades. Garnering an international reputation for his panoramas, his passion has not only taken him around the world but has also seen him win awards, write books and, most recently, become the subject of a TV documentary about his attempt to capture three iconic mountains in north-west Scotland. “Living in Scotland provides access to some amazing wild places,” comments Prior. “People may use the term ‘wilderness’, but there’s no real wilderness in the world any more. Wilderness to me is more a state of mind. I prefer the term ‘undisturbed places’ and it is these undisturbed places that we visit during many of my workshops.”

Prior began offering workshops as the democratisation of photography grew, a development that has inevitably proved to be a double-edge sword for professional photographers like Prior. On the one hand, images are now freely available, fulfilling a demand that once could only be provided by those skilled enough in the art of great photography, but as digital camera technology advances, more and more people are seeking instruction on the compositional

skill and technological expertise required to take exceptional photographs. “Of course, there is no doubt that some people have a natural ability to see a shot – which is innate – but in photography there is a lot that can be learnt and people do improve,” says Prior.

The numerous repeat clients that Prior sees attending his workshops perhaps demonstrate the appetite for learning, and they are spoilt for choice when it comes to the photographic opportunities they are presented with. This October, Prior is hosting a five-day trip to Glencoe (October 11-15), and another to Assynt and Coigach (October 18-22). Both are designed to take advantage of the relatively short autumn period when, as Prior notes, “the Scottish landscape is at its finest.” Even on an overcast or wet day, which some people may view as a write-off in photographic terms, “there are some locations that come into their own when it’s been raining,” says Prior. “There is also the opportunity to photograph what I refer to as the ‘intimate landscape’. These tend to be much more intimate images showing the relationships between elements in a small area.”

One of the many highlights of the trip to Assynt is a pre-dawn climb up Stac Pollaidh. “The colours that come up behind the mountains are absolutely amazing,” says Prior. “We’re there when the rut is on and when you’re standing up there and you can hear the stags roaring in the moorland beneath, you can feel the hairs on the back of your neck standing on end. It’s a wonderful experience and one that my clients never forget.”