



it's a
small
world

Andy Small has turned his passion for photographing plants and flowers into a vibrant business, **Ben Brain** reports

ARRIVING at Andy's Small's country cottage in the heart of Hampshire, it's easy to see why he enjoys working from home. It's a glorious day, with a spring chorus in the air and the delights of the season bursting into life everywhere in his impressive garden. He is busy printing images, stretching canvases and packing greeting cards in preparation for an art show in a few days. He has a stand from which he will sell his sumptuous images of plants and flowers.

Andy, 48, has always been fascinated by the structures, shapes and textures found in

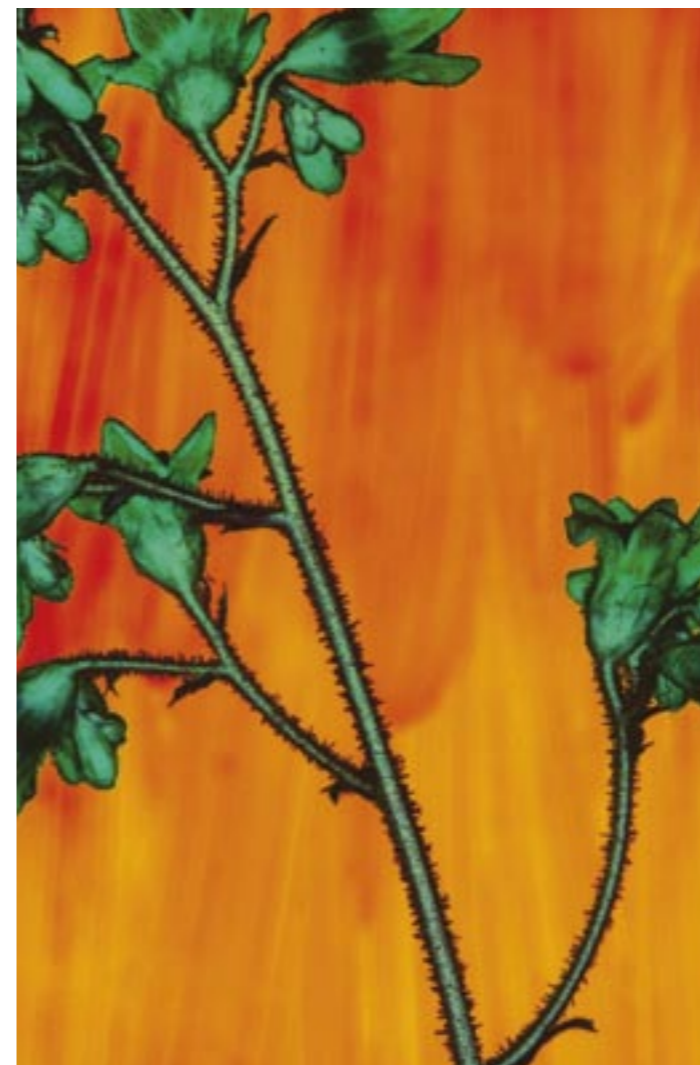
nature. It has been a central motif of his work since studying fine art at Bristol Polytechnic (1977 and 1981). 'I didn't specialise in photography, but I did have a 35mm Zenit and was always taking pictures,' he says. 'Many of my paintings and prints were based on photographs.'

After graduating, Andy became an art teacher but continued to paint and take photographs in his spare time. 'My wife and I had a year in Australia in the early 1990s on a teacher swap,' he continues. 'That got me back into photography. When I returned to the UK I bought my first macro lens and began looking at nature

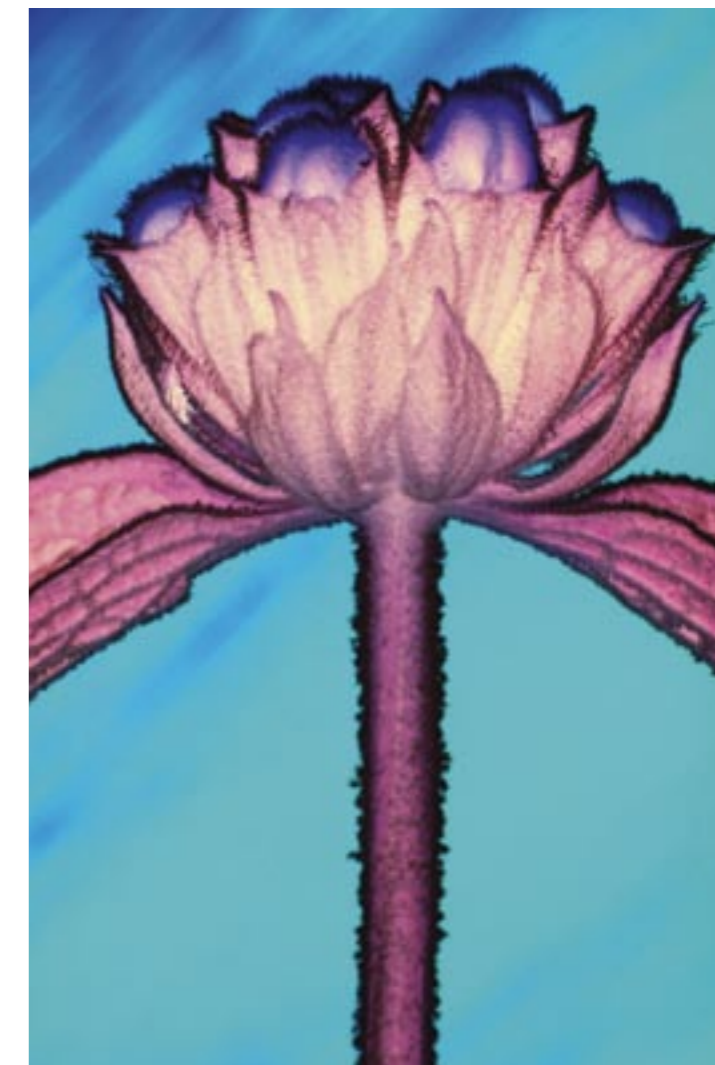


An allium against one of Andy's yellow paintings





◆ Nasturtium against an 'inverted' blue background



◆ A coral flower stands out in contrast against one of Andy's abstract paintings

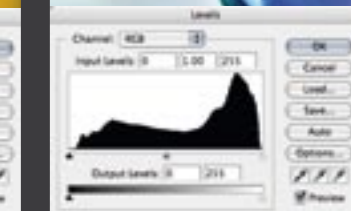
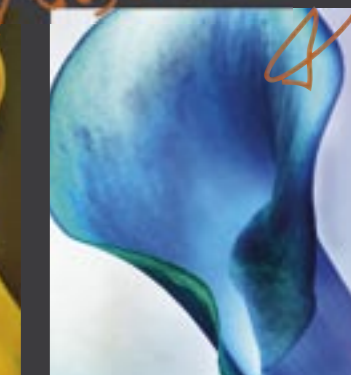
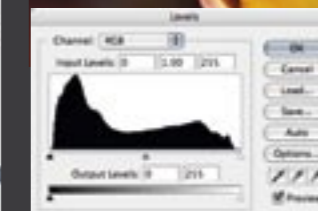
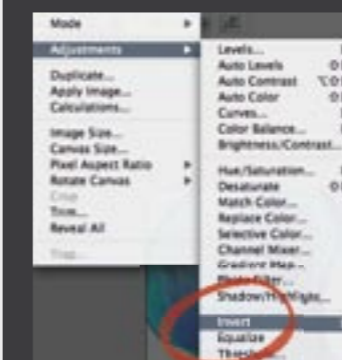
◆ The shapes and colour of a Jerusalem Sage work well for this technique

Colourful negatives

For some of his images Andy has developed a unique technique to create funky colours in his shots. He first got the idea when he saw an 'interneg' of one of his slides being made. He was immediately impressed by the reversed colours and tones and saw the creative potential to build on his portfolio. However, when he made a print, the results were too dull so he set about exploring other ways to exploit the characteristics. He found a solution by copying his original slides onto colour print film and then recopying them onto slide film. This process gave him the contrast he was seeking

Create this effect in the digital darkroom

With a digital darkroom you can recreate this effect in a few simple steps. To make a negative image in Adobe Photoshop go to Image> Adjustments>Invert. Then it is simply a case of tweaking the levels and dodging and burning for final effect





more closely. I found the close-up world fascinating. It's amazing when I bring a subject into the studio and look at it through the macro lens.'

Most of Andy's subjects are from his own backyard. 'Moving into a house with a garden was another catalyst in my nature photography,' he says. 'Nearly all my subjects are from my own garden.'

In 2003, Andy gave up teaching and dedicated himself to creating and selling his floral masterpieces, and turned his passion into a vibrant business. 'When I started I spent ages trying to get my work into galleries,' he says. 'Then I decided to sell it myself. In 2002 I had my first big craft show. It cost £600 to rent a space. I thought it was a risk, and I wasn't sure if I would get any of it back. But it worked and we even made a profit – looking back, I wonder how we managed it, given how we do it today. Now we attend about 18 arts, craft and flower shows a year and sell everything from large-scale canvases to greeting cards.'

The internet has also proved a valuable resource for Andy's business. 'I couldn't do it without the internet,' he declares. 'I have an e-commerce site,

◆◆A dandelion (above) and an echinops (below) have been recorded on Agfa 50 colour negative film and appear as they would have looked in negative



Technique bits and bobs

Andy uses Fujifilm Velvia loaded in a Contax N1 and 100mm macro lens. Despite the film capture, his workflow is fundamentally digital, and after shooting he has the film processed at a local pro lab. He then scans the film on a Minolta 5400, which gives him good quality files for output on his Epson 7600 printer

Andy's Top Tips

1 Lighting is the key to bringing out the best of a subject. Andy uses a backlight to enhance the delicate structures and manipulates the light with reflectors

2 Highlight the interesting aspects of your subject. Contemplate your subject before you start working and then exploit its key characteristics, such as using coloured backgrounds to complement the subject. Andy often uses his paintings as backgrounds, incorporating his love of painting into his photography

3 Use the composition to create a strong and dynamic image. Don't be afraid to crop tight, even if it means that sections of the flower will be out of the frame



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that brings in a lot of business. I designed it myself, but when I integrated the shop I had to get some help. I put a lot of work into writing key-phrases and content for the front page to ensure it gets picked up by Google. It's a case of working out what you want people to search for and trying to predict what they are going to write, then making sure you put those words on the front page.'

Despite his thriving business, Andy doesn't want to compromise his image making just for profit. 'I don't take anything solely with a view of selling it,' he says. 'It's not a route I would be happy going down. The images would suffer.' Building on his extensive archive, he is hoping to extend beyond the realms of his idyllic corner of Hampshire and is keen to photograph the flora and fauna of South Africa. **AP**

Visit Andy's stand at this year's **Chelsea flower show**, Tuesday 22 May to Saturday 26 May, and enjoy some spectacular floral displays while you are there. To see Andy's work online visit: www.andysmall.co.uk



Honesty seeds, shot on a light box to highlight their delicate structure