



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 is 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 canvasses and packing greeting cards in preparation for an arts show in a few days. He has a stall from which he will sell his sumptuous images of plants, flowers and delicate forms of nature. 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 1990's 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



Water tank on
Water Street,
South Street
Seaport



← began looking at nature 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. 2002 was 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 little bit of a profit - I wonder how we did looking at what we do today. Now we attend about 18 arts, craft and flower shows a year and sell everything from large-scale canvasses to greeting cards.'

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

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Technique bits and bobs

Andy uses Fujifilm Velvia, loaded in a Contax N1 and 100mm macro lens - he plans to move digital in the near future. 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 bring out the best from a subject. Andy uses a backlight to enhance the delicate structures and he

manipulates the light using reflectors

2 Highlight the interesting aspects of your subject. Contemplate the 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 some of the flower will



'I never know what to say about my pictures. It's like describing music. Unless there are pictures,

commerce site', 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 the key-phrases and content to be positioned on the front page of 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 and then making sure you put it 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 with just 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.

Visit Andy's stall at this year's **Chelsea flower show**, Tuesday 22-Saturday 26 May 2007 and enjoy some spectacular floral displays while you are there To see Andy's work online visit: www.andysmall.co.uk



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