

Lars van de Goor Woodland

1. You are a self-taught photographer — how important has ‘finding your own way’ been in your work technically and creatively?

Yes, that's right, however I wasn't looking for a particular style or trying to find my own way, it just evolved playfully. To have no expectations and do freely what I wanted, not limited by any rules or knowledge, that's where my own style could arise. Of course I had to catch up with the technical side of photography later on. When I started 10 years ago, I stepped right into the digital age of photography. Because of the quality of my first camera and the lack of any technical knowledge of photography, I started very early on with editing my images to make them look better. Colours are of great importance to me. By changing the colours you can make a scene look very surreal and yet it's familiar because it's a real picture. I always aim for an image that could both be a painting or a photograph.

2. What is the key ingredient in a successful landscape image composition?

Most important in any image is; Is it appealing to the viewer? As in landscape photography it is the same. Do we spot something we haven't seen before. Does it stimulate the senses. If you look for the first time at whatever image of Patagonia, you will be in awe. Have you seen dozens of it, you will demand a more spectacular view to give yourself that same feeling you had with the first one. What I am saying is, not only the ingredients like composition or a particular editing style will determine how an image is experienced.

When I started with photography I never heard of the rule of thirds, I composed my images the way I thought they looked best and although using the rule of thirds works pretty well, I still do it the way I started. For me personally I need the perfect light. I do a lot of scouting and when the light is right I know my spots. For woodland pictures I prefer fog or early morning soft light. So the top ingredients are: locations and light.

3. What do forests and woods offer a photographer creatively that can't be found elsewhere in the landscape?

I would say the magic. Forests, particularly covered in fog, do have a magical feel to it already. It inspires to create fairytale images. Mankind and forests go back a very long time. The connection we have with forests is still there. Old woods and forests do speak to our imaginations. From fairy tales to scary stories.

4. How do you maintain your creativity when shooting the same locations again and again? Or: Woodland interiors are renowned for being chaotic environments – how do you find and achieve order and balance?

What do you mean by same locations, forests in general? I use the same themes, but not the same locations. Woodland photography is a different discipline. For example, during my workshops we drive to a beautiful forest location and I ask the student to take a picture of it. Most of the time they all take out there wide angle lenses. Like you mentioned, woodlands are chaotic. First of all get your zoom- or tele lens out. By zooming in you get rid of the useless information to the left and the right. Try to find some rhythm, harmony, a characteristic tree, some balance etc. Keep it as empty/simple as possible, not too much information. Also avoid the sky. You don't want to give the viewer too much information to look at. Lead his eye to what you think is most interesting.

5. What are the particular technical problems of shooting in woodland environments?

Wind and the lack of light. While I don't mind a dark forest, when there is too much wind, a longer shutter speed is useless and too much noise is often a no go. As I mentioned, I prefer a foggy forest. This is hard to predict and I have found myself many many times in dull and dark forests. So you need some luck too. Some years have been great, others not. In some countries or regions you will have more changes, but be prepared to be unlucky.

6. What techniques do you use to achieve the ‘dreamy’ look of some of your images? & 7 What post-processing do you do to create the particular look you strive for in your work?

You need some pleasant light to start with. Also fog is a perfect ingredient for a dreamy feel to it.

Using a shallow depth of field is another way. By focusing on the first trees, for example in a tree lined alley, you will have that nice paint like blur in the background.

In post processing I often intensify the contrast between the sharp and blurred parts.

I work very intuitively, besides some standard adjustments in Raw, I very much like to approach my images with fresh eyes. When editing I would like to be surprised by what a certain filter will do. It must inspire me to go on. Sometimes, or better said most times, an image dies, so to say, in the process and will not be worked on any further. It doesn't mean the photo is not good, but I can't uplift it at that moment. Therefore I almost never throw away my images. Years later, you might approach that image with whole new and other skills.

8. What single piece of kit (equipment or software – it doesn't even need to be photographic) is most useful in your work?

Well, that's a tough question, since all components are nothing without the other. But if I have to choose one thing it would be my pen tablet. I can't even work 10 minutes with a mouse.

9. As a master of landscape photography, what is your motivation to continue making photographs?

The same as where I started with, walking around the corner and be amazed what Mother nature has to offer. It's the childlike wonder, I am after, being surprised by nature's beauty, but also being surprised by whatever will arise during an editing process. September 2017, me and my wife will exchange our house for a mobile home and will travel Europe for some years. It's important for me to discover new places and interesting situations. Our travel experiences and images can be followed on a blog later this year. Information will be on my website.