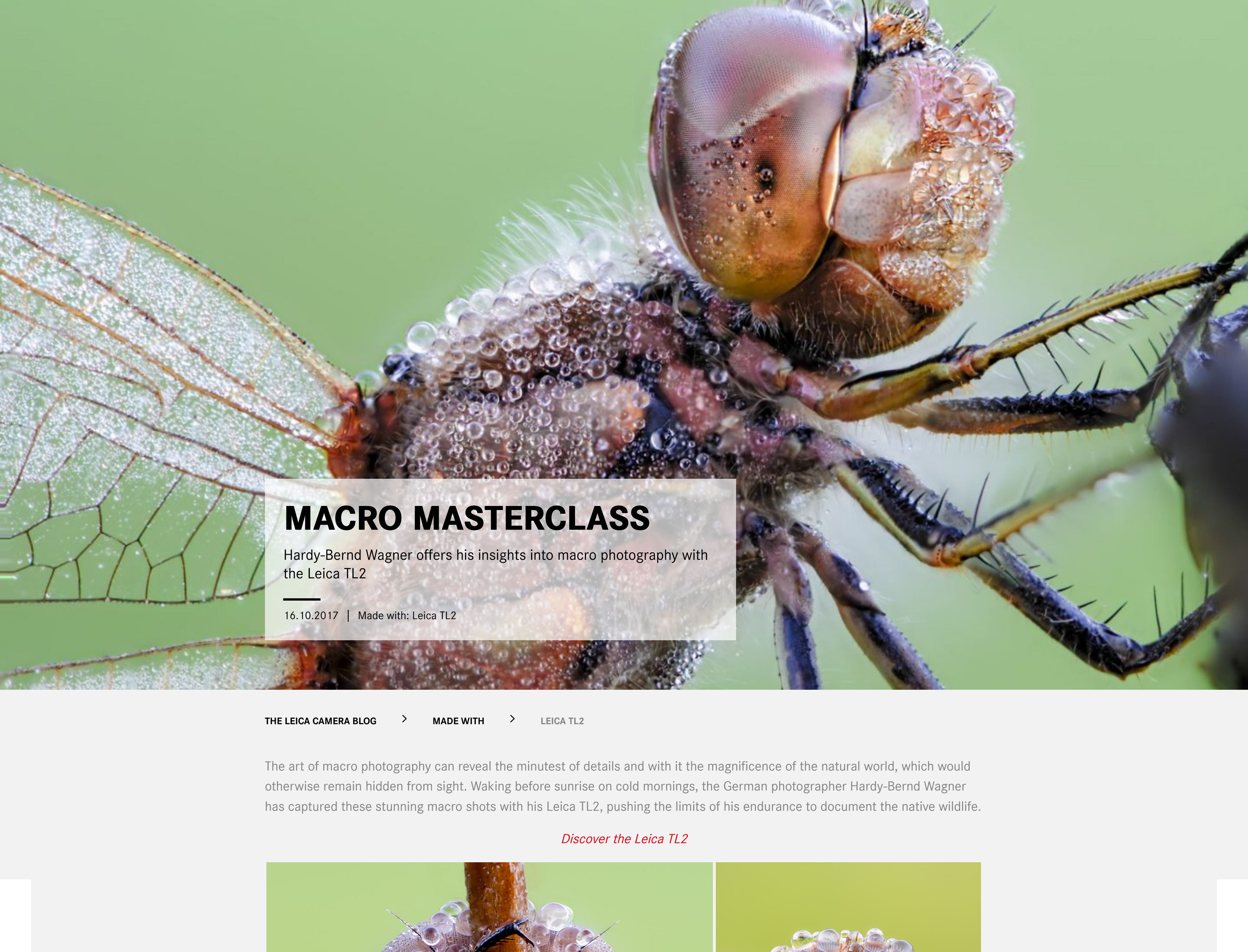
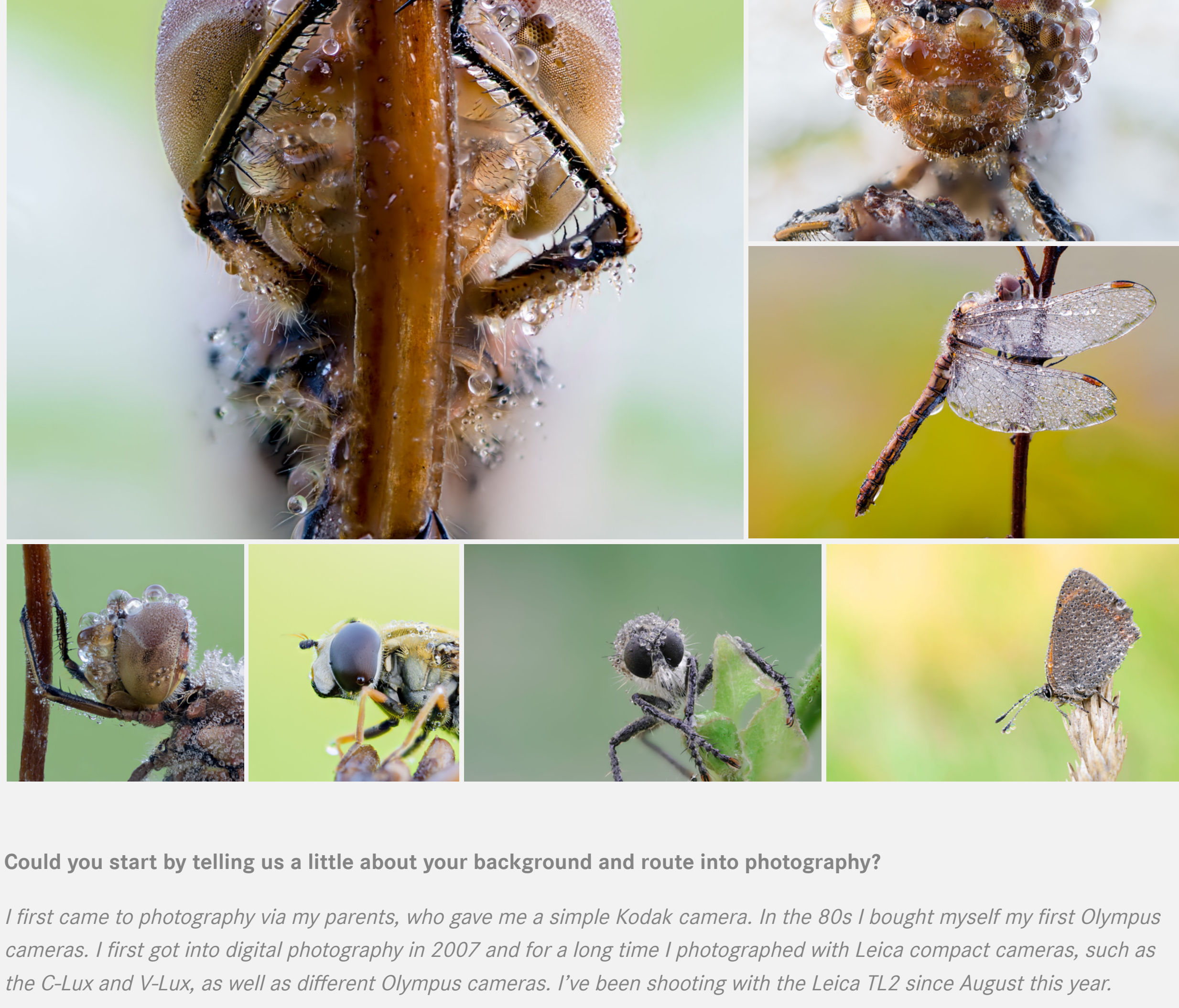




# MACRO MASTERCLASS

Hardy-Bernd Wagner offers his insights into macro photography with the Leica TL2

16.10.2017 | Made with: Leica TL2



Could you start by telling us a little about your background and route into photography?

I first came to photography via my parents, who gave me a simple Kodak camera. In the 80s I bought myself my first Olympus cameras. I first got into digital photography in 2007 and for a long time I photographed with Leica compact cameras, such as the C-Lux and V-Lux, as well as different Olympus cameras. I've been shooting with the Leica TL2 since August this year.

How long have you been interested in macro photography and what was it that inspired you to enter this field?

In the 80s I visited a night school, where a dedicated biology teacher introduced me to the microcosm of diatoms and rotifers. I got myself a microscope, which I used to explore this world for several years. The joy and curiosity for this microcosm of an unknown world has never left me. As I began to explore digital photography more intensively, macro photography discovered me, not the other way round. I didn't deliberate for long; I went out into the meadow straight away and began photographing insects as close up as possible.

You used the TL2 for this series, which might seem an unconventional choice for macro photography. What do you consider to be the advantages of using this camera?

I don't think the choice of the TL2 is so unconventional. I love the pure design concept and menu navigation. The camera also has four very decisive advantages for capturing my kind of images:

1. It's a good compromise in comparison to the larger Leica cameras because it doesn't break the bank and you still get an excellent, beautifully designed camera.
2. It provides the opportunity to use a viewfinder, which in my opinion is essential for macro and architecture photography.
3. The corresponding macro lens really appealed to me because, as far as I'm aware, it's the first Leica macro lens with a magnification ratio of up to 1:1. The lens delivers excellent sharpness and details, even at maximum aperture. Beforehand I was shooting macro photography with the micro 4/3 sensor. The larger APS-C sensor of the TL2 provides better noise results and wonderful colors. In addition to all this, even 100% crops are of an excellent quality.
4. I love the bokeh of the Leica APO-Macro-Elmarit-TL 1:2,8/60mm ASPH.

What additional equipment did you use to capture these images?

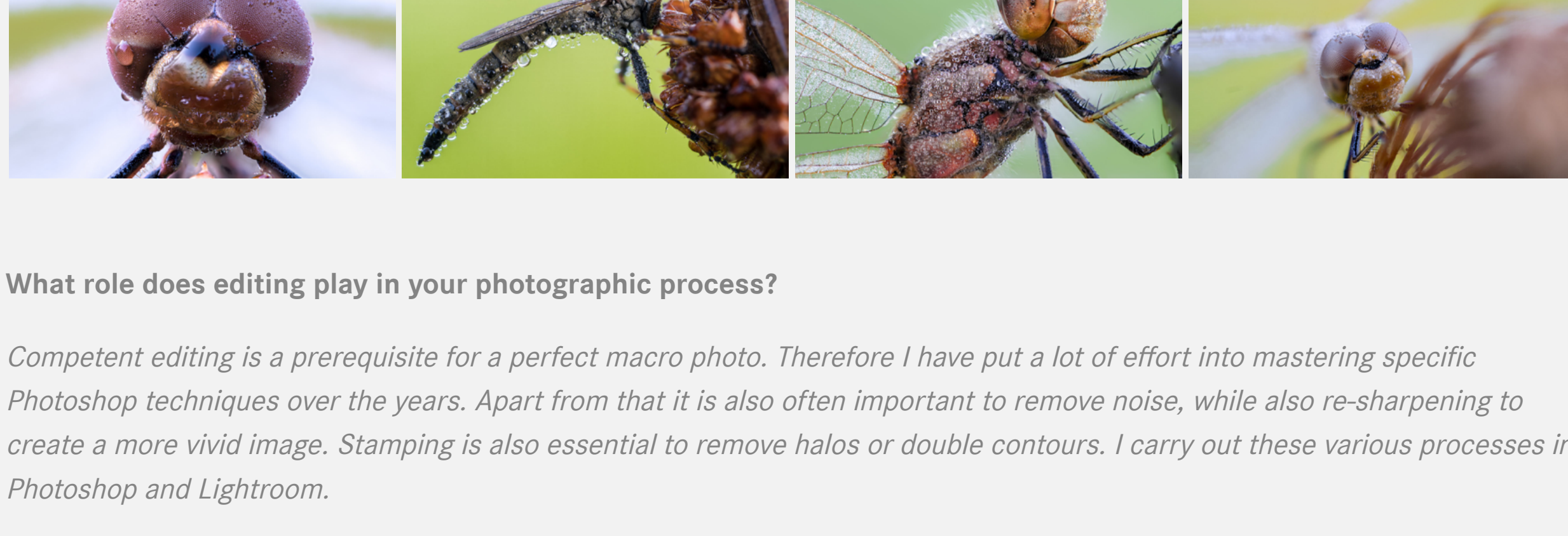
In addition to a Berlebach 733 Report tripod with an Arca Swiss Z1+ head, I also use a Wimberly clamp to fix stalks of grass and twigs in the wind. For very small insects and extreme close-ups I use the fantastic Raynox Macro 150 and 250 conversion lenses. For creating the stacks I use the Helicon Focus software.

Which locations do you favor for macro photography and which general conditions tend to produce the best results?

My favorite location is a disused gravel pit, which now has a lake, as well as an area of wild grassland. The grassland is home to a wide variety of flowers, which attract an array of different insects and, in particular, butterflies. The predators of these insects also appear in turn, namely various species of dragonfly. The best time is just before and during the sunrise due to the light conditions and because the insects are asleep or have fallen into torpor. In this state, it is easiest to photograph them.

How do you cope with the less obliging subjects and how does a normal shoot usually play out?

I wait for the perfect conditions, in particular for stacking photos. This requires a lack of wind (over 8 km/h is already too much for most shots) and cool temperatures. From 12°-13° Celsius upwards most of the insects move around too much. Under these conditions most of the insects sit very still and barely move, if at all. The skill is then to wait for the perfect moment. When shooting a stack, which creates an extraordinary extension to the depth of focus, you can often end up taking more than 100 pictures. During this time the insect should not move, otherwise you won't be able to fit the images together.



What role does editing play in your photographic process?

Competent editing is a prerequisite for a perfect macro photo. Therefore I have put a lot of effort into mastering specific Photoshop techniques over the years. Apart from that it is also often important to remove noise, while also re-sharpening to create a more vivid image. Stamping is also essential to remove halos or double contours. I carry out these various processes in Photoshop and Lightroom.

Can you go into more detail regarding your use of image stacking?

My main fascination with macro photography lies in revealing the details of insects, which otherwise remain hidden from the human eye. To do this I need to get as close as possible and use a large depth of focus. This is only truly achieved via the method of stacking. As I mentioned before, good stacking photos necessitate certain conditions. Firstly, the insect is set in front of the chosen background at the optimum perspective. It's then important to scan the object with the focus, in order to settle on a chosen framing. There's nothing more infuriating than having a cut off feeler or head on the final picture. Then you can set the depth of field. Where should the focus begin and where should it end? It's important when doing so to observe the object with the naked eye, in order to see which part of the object is closest to the lens. If you don't do this, you can have out of focus elements in the final photo, which can ruin the entire shot. Once I've taken care of all that then I set the aperture and exposure time. Then the stacking begins, that means the macro slide adjusts itself, for example by 1/10mm and the self-timer shoots at 2 second intervals, so that you avoid any wobbling. The closer you are to the object, the higher the quality of the photos. If everything goes well, you can marvel at the fascinating pictures once at home and you've compiled the images, for example in Helicon Focus, or you're frustrated because you didn't notice the tiny movements during the stacking process, which have ruined the image.

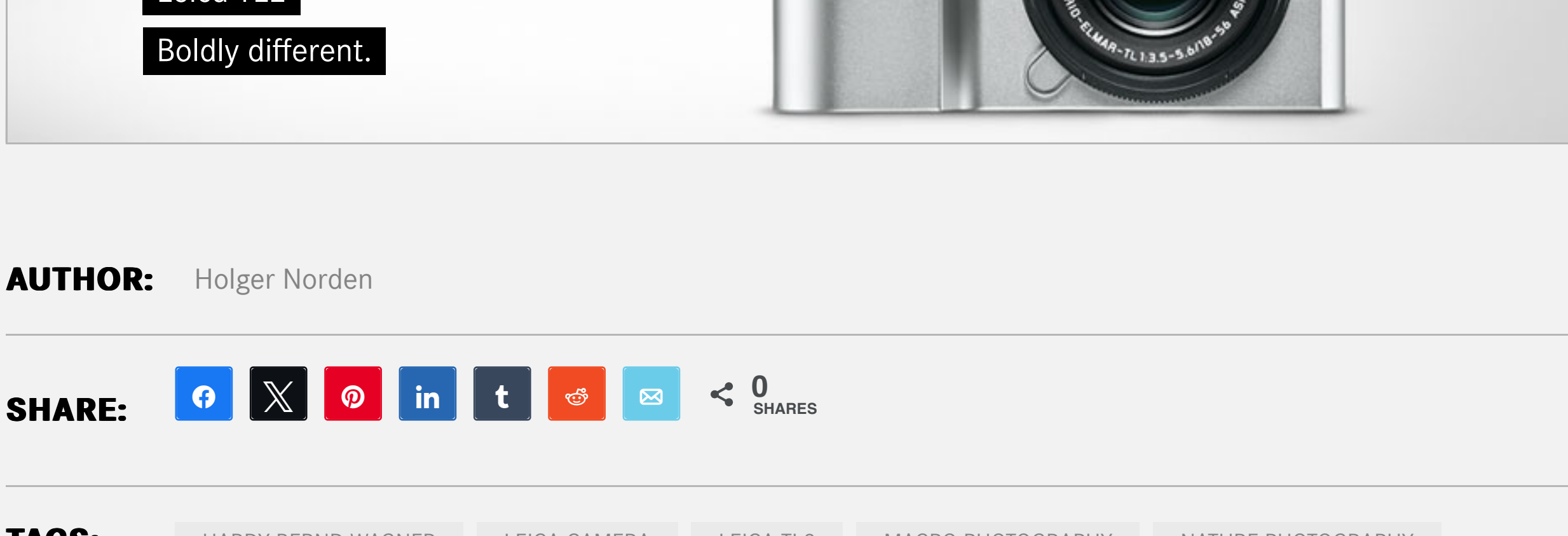
What advice would you offer to other photographers interested in macro photography?

The first thing you need for macro photography is a good location. It can also take a long time to find one. Just don't give up! It requires stamina, a high level of tolerance and the ability to stick at it. Apart from that you need to be willing to get up very early and sit in front of your chosen object for an hour or so even if it's very cold. A good macro lens is also essential but if you manage all that and stick at it, you can discover new worlds and the search for the tiniest motifs will never let you go.

How long have you been shooting with Leica cameras and equipment and how has your relationship to the brand evolved over time?

My first Leica was a C-Lux in 2007. Then came a V-Lux in 2010, which was already a very capable camera and took excellent photos for a compact. Leica was always a very special brand for me. Especially when I saw the pictures Cartier-Bresson took with his Leica. When I saw the TL2 for the first time I fell in love with the design and when I saw that Leica had developed a macro lens for the L-bayonet, I realized a dream I'd had for a long time and bought myself a Leica. Among other reasons, the fact that I could afford this particular Leica camera, due to the excellent quality for the price, played a big role. I look forward to every photo session with the TL2 and I'm blown away by the quality of the images.

You can see more of Hardy-Bernd Wagner's excellent macro photography, as well as his architectural work, on his [website](#).



Leica TL2  
Boldly different.

AUTHOR: Holger Norden

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