ACCOMMODATION

SPRING WRITERS’ RETREAT WITH SUSAN ELDERKIN

30th April - 4th May 2018 at Pennard House, Somerset
JUST ADD SALT:
How to write irresistible prose

MAKING a mouth-watering meal is all about appealing to the senses: creating enticing smells and delicious flavours and textures which those sitting around the table can’t resist. Writing a really engaging book is no different. Conjure a sensual feast – with arresting, vivid images, and things to hear, smell, feel – and we hook our readers in, overriding the sensual experience of whatever’s going on around them and replacing them with those in the story. This is, essentially, what’s happening when we feel “transported” by a story. And, as with the food on our plate, the more salt, spice or sugar, the more we want to keep eating…
During this five-day Spring Writers’ Retreat at Pennard House in Somerset, we’ll explore how to write visceral prose that re-evokes the sensual experiences of being alive. Whether you already have a writing project on the go (and it can be short stories, a novel, a memoir; or something in between) or are searching for a new one, the retreat will allow you to fully immerse yourself in your writing. You’ll have a peaceful room of your own, all your meals prepared for you, the structure of a daily workshop and free time in the afternoons – plus the inspiration and support of a dedicated group of like minds, all scribbling away around you.
WHERE YOU’LL BE STAYING

Pennard House is a family-run estate which offers the perfect mix of luxury and comfort – the sort of place where you can pad around in your slippers, then share a candle-lit meal around an elegant dining table with various ancestors glowering down from the walls. The home of Harry and Gi Dearden and their two small children, Charlie and Adalie, the house has been in Harry’s mother’s family since it was built in the 1600s. Bedrooms are beautifully furnished in quintessentially English style, many with lovely views over the gardens and hills beyond. Most are also ensuite.

The Retreat will be organised around daily workshops which will take place each morning in the Drawing Room. At meal-times we’ll gather in the Dining Room, where we’ll be served healthy home-cooked food made with delicious local produce. Afternoons are left free for you to spend as you wish – walking in the apple orchards (just coming into bloom in May), or perhaps finding a corner of the Conservatory in which to write or curl up with a book. We get the full run of the grounds while we’re at Pennard, so bring your waterproofs and wellies or a stout pair of walking boots to make the most of it.
HOW THE WORKSHOPS WORK

If you’ve come to any of Susan’s workshops before, you’ll know the fundamental tenets of her approach: to discover the story as you go by exploring character and place; to show rather than tell; and to become familiar with aspects of the craft such as point of view, narrative voice, dialogue etc. so as to use them to full effect. It doesn’t matter whether you write fiction or are more interested in memoir; the same techniques apply to both.

Workshops will start at 9.30 and go on till lunch (except for the first day, when we’ll plunge in after lunch). Expect to be asked to write in the moment, read out what you write, and listen to the work of the others in the group. (Don’t worry, everyone gets the hang of this very quickly – the supportive, encouraging environment is what makes these weeks work so well.) Expect to see your prose rise to a whole new level. And also to drink lots of coffee and occasionally eat cake...

In addition to the workshops, everyone is offered a one-to-one tutorial with Susan in which you can discuss your on-going project plus any particular issues you have with your writing. (Guests are invited to send some of their work to Susan in advance of the course to form the basis of this tutorial – Susan will email you once you’ve booked to let you know how and what to send.) Afternoons will be left largely unstructured, leaving you with time to write by yourself, or go for a walk, or just hang out with the other writers.
WEDNESDAY EVENING GUEST SPEAKER

A highlight of the week is always the visit from the Guest Speaker on the Wednesday evening. We’re thrilled this week to be joined by someone on other side of the writing fence – Jon Woolcott of the independent, Dorset-based press, Little Toller Books. Jon (right), who has 25 years in the book world under his belt, will talk about how Little Toller grew out of a desire to revive the great books of rural landscape and nature writing for a new generation, and how it has grown to claim a coveted niche all its own. He’ll introduce us to some of the illustrious names on their list – from classic writers of the past such as JA Baker (The Peregrine) and Clare Leighton (Four Hedges, Country Matters) to contemporary voices such as Richard Maybe and Horatio Clare – and explore the approaches they take to evoking the natural world. Be warned: Jon will come armed with some of their gorgeously produced books. You might want to go away with a few under your arm.
DAILY YOGA SESSIONS

On previous Pennard retreats, the feelgood factor of the week has been multiplied many times over by early-morning yoga sessions with the wonderful Sarah Constantinides (left), an experienced Iyengar teacher who also lives and teaches in Somerset. Sarah brings a boyancy and playfulness to everything she does, and these sessions are highly recommended for stretching out those muscles that have been held prisoner by a laptop for several hours a day. Yoga is optional and offered only if there’s enough demand, so please let Susan know at the time of booking if you’re interested. (Note that yoga is charged separately – for more on costs, see below.)
There are now nine beautiful bedrooms at Pennard House, each with its own distinctive character. Most have a double bed, one has twin beds; most have en suites, two a shared bathroom. All are sole occupancy, unless of course booked by a couple. In addition, there is one self-contained bedroom with full ensuite and a private garden a short walk away belonging to Harry’s sister, Venetia (this is Carpenter’s Yard in the table below) which will suit someone who likes a bit more privacy. The total price of your retreat depends on which room you choose – see the table below – and whether or not you opt to do yoga. Rooms are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis – please specify a choice of room at the time of booking. For more descriptions and photographs, visit www.pennardhouse.com, or contact Susan (hello@susianlderkin.com) with any questions.
THE COST OF THE RETREAT

The retreat is all-inclusive, except for the yoga and wine/spirits which are pay-as-you-go from the bar (you can run a tab and settle at the end of the week).

Prices shown below include:

• Accommodation at Pennard House or Carpenter’s Yard from Monday night to Thursday night inclusive
• Five 3-hour workshops with Susan
• One 30-minute tutorial with Susan
• All meals, starting with lunch on Monday and finishing with lunch on Friday
• Guest speaker on Wednesday night

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GETTING TO PENNARD HOUSE

If you’re coming by public transport, the nearest train station is Castle Cary. Trains to Castle Cary from London Paddington take under two hours and if you book in advance you can get tickets for as little as £17 each way (highly recommended as they go up quite a lot nearer the time). At the time of sending this out, the best trains to catch are the 10.35am on the Monday (arrives 12.08), returning on the Friday at 14.24 (arrives 16.21). If you travel on these trains, lifts to and from the station can be arranged; otherwise a taxi will cost around £15.

If you’re coming by car, East Pennard is about 2.5 hours from London, an hour’s drive from Bristol, and an hour and twenty from Exeter. Let Susan know if you’re happy to take passengers. You can download a pdf giving directions here: Driving Directions to Pennard House. The address is: Pennard House, East Pennard, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6TP.

USEFUL NUMBERS AND EMAIL ADDRESSES:

Pennard House (Harry and Georgina): 01749 860 700
Harry’s mobile: 07767 487554
Harry’s email: info@pennardhouse.co.uk

Susan’s mobile: 07981 924315
Susan’s email: hello@susanelderkin.com
Susan Elderkin (right) is the author of two critically-acclaimed novels, *Sunset over Chocolate Mountains*, which was awarded a Betty Trask prize, and *The Voices*, which was shortlisted for the Ondaatje Prize. In 2003, she was listed by Granta magazine as one of Britain’s 20 best writers under 40. Her most recent two books, co-authored with her best friend Ella Berthoud, are *The Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies*, which is published in over 20 countries around the world, and *The Story Cure: Books to Make Kids Happy, Healthy and Wise*. Herself a graduate of the MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, she started her own writing workshops after teaching on some of the country’s top MA courses, including Birkbeck, Goldsmith’s, City University and Manchester University. She’s also taught more than two dozen Arvon courses and has run workshops and retreats like these for over a decade. She recently relocated back to Somerset with her husband and son after living in the States for six years.
WHAT PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS HAVE SAID

Previous participants on Susan’s courses include: Annabel Leventon, whose memoir *The Real Rock Bottoms* was published in 2017; Gill Oliver, whose novel *A Backwards Glance*, was published in 2016; Sarah Leipciger, whose novel *The Mountains Can Wait* was published in 2015; Peggy Riley, whose novel *Amity & Sorrow*, was published in 2011; and Ashley Dartnell, whose memoir *Farangi Girl*, was published in 2011.

Here’s what others have said about Susan’s courses:

“Brilliant planning, encouragement, and fun ambiance. I’ve come away feeling great.” Lindsay.

“I was truly enlightened by everyone’s thoughts and writings and inspired by their diversity and creativity. I have today stopped reading about screenwriting and making notes and starting reading my notes and writing my actual first draft!” Dee

“I so enjoyed it. We were buzzing with ideas on the way home. There was a lovely, supportive atmosphere and we learnt lots.” Juliet

“Thank you so much for this inspirational week. I finally picked up my novel again after six years of delay tactics. I was so nervous about attending as I had convinced myself that I wouldn’t even be able to write my name, let alone anything else. I really appreciated your gentle, persuasive approach.” Sarah
HOW TO BOOK YOUR PLACE

To book a place on the Spring Writers’ Retreat, email Susan at hello@susanelderkin.com. Please specify which room/price bracket you would prefer. The retreat is limited to 11 participants and bookings are taken on a first-come first-served basis. To secure your place, a 50% deposit is required at the time of booking, with the remainder due on 23rd April 2018. Susan will tell you how to pay once your place is confirmed. If for some reason you need to cancel, Susan will do her best to find a replacement; this is usually possible, but payments are non-refundable if your place is not filled.

We look forward to welcoming you to Pennard!

Photos: Harry Dearden, Susan Elderkin, Mara Levitt
A SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

MONDAY 30TH APRIL

• Arrive between 12 and 1pm for a welcoming lunch at Pennard House in East Pennard, Somerset, giving yourself time to settle in to your room, meet your fellow participants, and get the lie of the land.
• The first workshop will run from 2.30pm - 5.30pm.
• Pre-dinner drinks will be served at 7pm and supper at 7.30pm.
• After supper we’ll gather briefly in the living room to discuss how to get the most from the week.

TUESDAY 1ST MAY

• 7.15-8.15am Yoga (optional but highly recommended)
• 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
• 9.30am Workshop starts
• 1pm Lunch
• Afternoon: A group walk, perhaps, or if you prefer you can find a quiet place in the house or garden in which to do some writing, read, go to sleep... If you’re feeling adventurous you could take a trip to a nearby attraction – Wells cathedral, East Lambroke Manor Gardens or Lytes Cary Manor.
• 5.30-6.30pm One-to-one tutorials with Susan will be on-going at this time every day - you’ll sign up for a slot on Monday night.
• 7pm Drinks
• 7.30pm Supper

WEDNESDAY 2ND MAY

• 7.15-8.15am Yoga
• 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
• 9.30am Workshop starts

THURSDAY 3RD MAY

• 7.15-8.15am Yoga
• 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
• 9.30am Workshop starts
• 1pm Lunch
• Afternoon: free to spend as you wish
• 5.30-6.30pm One-to-one tutorials with Susan
• 7pm Drinks
• 7.30pm Supper
• 8.30pm Guest speaker (to be disclosed nearer the time...)

FRIDAY 4TH MAY

• 7.15-8.15am Yoga
• 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
• 9.30am Workshop
• 1pm Lunch
• 2-3pm Fond farewells and carriages