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# WEEKEND BREAK

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## PLAYING WITH LIGHT

Photographer captures beauty of  
North Coast restaurants, businesses



Melissa Righero

Food from Good to Go.

By NATALIE SKOWLUND

**O**n her website, a photograph of a light and spacious dining room with a simple wooden table sits beside a close-up shot of a layer cake with white icing, floral orange decorations and small pine twigs.

Astoria photographer Melissa Righero seeks out the freedom to play with still life shots for North Coast restaurants and businesses, including Frite & Scoop, Good to Go, Chariot, Street 14 Café and North Coast Food Web.

She has also shot for North Fork 53 in Nehalem and Adrift Hospitality hotels across the river in Long Beach, Washington. Her photography of Adrift's historic Shelburne Hotel was featured in the design-focused Gray Magazine.

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit the North Coast, Righero has found ways to give back. She's offered free photography to both returning and new clients. She also shot some female-owned businesses around Portland.

"I just wanted to do something this summer because I think people are stuck at home, not able to do much," she said.

Righero plans to offer her first-ever natural light photography class via Zoom



Fawn DeViney

Melissa Righero is a photographer in Astoria.

in August.

Her work spans food, product, interior and travel photography, but her favorite photographic style is still life, especially of food and small objects.

"(It provides me) a canvas I can play with. I start with a blank table and I paint it with product and different tablecloths,

flowers, whatever. I have fun," Righero said. "It gets my creative juices flowing too, making something beautiful."

### Letting nature set the stage

Righero's photography is striking in its use of natural light. Unlike photographers who set the scene with staged

lighting, Righero prefers working with nature. Using natural light means Righero only photographs during the day and has to work with weather patterns and lighting.

"In the Pacific Northwest, natural light photography can be tricky, but I kind of like the overcast lighting here. It's a natural catch-all light to me, rather than direct sunlight," Righero said.

Righero approaches her photography as a form of play.

"I kind of have tunnel vision during the process. I like playing with organic materials: crystals, feathers, flowers. Food, especially," she said. "There are a lot of chefs here that like to play with flowers in their food. I'll try to pop it with a tablecloth color to bring it out a little more, depending on the vibe that the chef wants: dark and moody, light and bright. It could be vivid, even."

### From spa to still life

Righero has always been interested in photography but her original love was painting and illustration. She studied art in college and dreamed of becoming a children's book illustrator.

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