

surf

&

stay

Lannoo



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**when**

**the waves,  
the swell,  
the blue,  
the power,  
the depth,  
the salt  
and the scent  
of the sea**

**change**

**a person**

*From the Dictionary for the Future, Arita Baaijens. The Dutch writer collects and invents words that express experiences with nature.*



**the heart  
of Surf & Stay  
is female**

**a surf guide  
made,  
researched  
and written  
by a woman**





# Q&A

# Veerle Helsen

Who is Veerle? 'I have just celebrated the big 4-0 (aaaargh), balancing between past and future. I am a travel and architecture journalist, freelance writer for Belgian media, design companies, and outdoor brands. I live in Ghent, the most beautiful city in Belgium, together with my partner Mattias. We have been a couple for over 23 years.'

In the past you had a steady job. You worked for prestigious Belgian media outlets like Knack and De Tijd. Do you ever regret quitting your job? 'No. I earn a lot less now, but freelancing has liberated me. My schedule now follows the forecast, instead of standard office hours. The sea has no idea it's Monday morning.'

How long have you been surfing? 'A little over six years.'

What does surfing mean to you? 'A magic switch. A button that wipes your hard disk clean and erases all your worries.'

What has surfing given you in life? 'The power to pursue my dreams, both in and next to the water. You don't just walk away from an editorial job, and surf stoke pushed me in the right direction. The urge to be better and the realisation that to do that, you have to float in the sea a lot have changed my life. I now follow my own path, and without surfing I might never have found that secret road.'

Tell us something that few people know about you 'When I read a beautifully sculpted sentence somewhere, I pull out a highlighter. I tear out the page and store it in a folder titled 'beautiful sentences'. Clearly, the folder's title still needs a little work.'

How is *Surf & Stay* made? 'The tips in this book aren't simply reportages of 'surf trips'. They're the result of researching, interviewing, digging, delving. Of the 100 places I visit or people I interview, on average I delete over half. What remains is a small but discerning selection. Nobody paid for a mention. *Surf & Stay* is an ode to old-school travel journalism.'

This book was partly created during the corona crisis. It seemed like I would never make it to Cornwall, but I was able to cross the border in the nick of time.

This portrait of me was shot in Holywell Bay by Megan Hemsworth.



How do you select the photos for *Surf & Stay*?

'I shot some of the photos in this book myself, others were taken by local photographers. I find them on Instagram, or meet them on my travels. The selection is made 'by feel'. *Surf & Stay* has a certain style, a DNA that I share, too. Pare down to the essence, but don't forget the poetry, something like that. Quote inspired by Leonard Koren.'

What are you unsure about?

'About my surfing skills, which don't seem to have progressed very much for years.'

What are you proud of?

'Of *Surf & Stay* and the success of the first edition. Sold out in both English and Dutch, translated into German, sold in the most beautiful shops in the world, press reviews in newspapers such as The Guardian. A girl from Belgium wrote a surf guide that connected with readers all over the world.'

What songs do you listen to on the road?

'Currently, Old Sea Brigade's 'Call me when you land, don't think about the future' is on repeat. That's not really the name of the song, but I do sing it that way in my head. There's a *Surf & Stay* playlist on Spotify with a collection of all the songs in this book and then some.'

Mini wave, maxi fun. Veerle on a foggy winter day in Knokke-Heist (Belgium), shot by surfer and photographer Eric Verbiest.



# Surf & Stay has a certain style, a DNA that I share, too. Pare down to the essence, but don't forget the poetry

You're often alone on the road. Do you ever feel lonely?

'I like to be alone. It helps me filter out noise, map out a path. *Travelling solo is finding comfort in solitude.* That sentence comes from my folder.' (laughs)

You also wrote a lockdown chapter on Belgium. Do you have waves in Belgium?

'More often than you think.'

Describe your favourite surf session?

'I can think of several answers to that, but I'll choose one. I love coldwater surfing: fighting cold temperatures, fewer surfers in the sea, hot chocolate with whipped cream as a reward. I'd rather wear a warm wetsuit than a bikini.'

Is the surf industry still lacking woman power?

'Things are changing gradually, but the money behind big brands, surf clubs or surf shops still too often goes only to men.'

What is your ultimate beginner's tip?

Own the forecast. Become a meteo master. Learn to read the sea. If you can predict waves and choose spots yourself, you can surf less crowded lineups. You'll be able to catch more waves there, and that way, your self-confidence grows.'

Which surf quote would you like to share?

'The ocean doesn't give a shit who you are. In a podcast of The Lineup, American surf star Tyler Wright talks about localism and how waves are not 'owned' by someone, and how we as a surf community can do so much more to create equality in our sport.'

What are your future plans?

'Become a better surfer.'

# Q&A

## Connor

- How old is Connor? 'Connor is a 1998 Fiat Ducato. The curtains and the fridge are originals from the '90s.'
- Does the name have a special meaning? 'Connor was the son of Mieke and Madou, two of my best friends. When their little boy tragically died, we all agreed to give the campervan his name. That way, he gets to live a second life, and their Connor has cruised Europe to the rhythm of the sea.'
- Travelling in a campervan, what does it feel like? 'It's as if that Sunday feeling comes tapping on your window every day.'
- Tell us something that few people know about Connor? 'He has *du grand luxe*: a shower with a boiler. And there's heating, so it's perfect for travelling in winter.'
- Are there any disadvantages? 'Too many to list. (laughs) Lack of electricity, which sometimes means I end up charging my laptop in petrol stations or a local McDonald's. The cliché of a *digital nomad* in her campervan, tapping away at her keyboard rarely matches reality. Everything always breaks down, and in heavy rain, the roof leaks. It's also impossible to park. You name it. Connor's anything but perfect, but that's part of the adventure and I'll never get rid of him.'
- Have you visited every region in this book with a campervan? 'No. Was originally the plan, but couldn't happen due to the corona crisis. I visited Tenerife and Cornwall by car.'
- Why are there hardly any campsites in your book? 'I love small-scale campsites in nature, without too many facilities. With lots of trees and shade, and without demarcated 'pitches'. Preferably they're family-run and you can collect eggs from the chickens, or the owner brings croissants to your camper door. Those kinds of campsites are quite rare.'



Do you have a tip for novice camper travellers?

'You can often find the best spots to overnight if you look at Google Maps in earth view.'

Is there anything out of the ordinary in your campervan cupboards?

'I am a collector of beautiful coffee cups. Everywhere I browse second-hand stores for coffee cups. You won't find classic 'camping gear' in my camper cupboards, but old-fashioned porcelain cups and the most delicious coffee blends.'

What is Connor's maximum speed?

'About 52 mph. When he's forced to climb a long, steep incline, his speed can drop to around twelve-and-a-half mph. On a one-lane road, this leads to a tail of impatient drivers stuck behind me. If there's one thing Connor guarantees, it's slow travel.'

All-time favourite camper moment?

'A simmering Bialetti, raindrops hitting the roof. Pancake batter on the mini stove and looking through the window at one-metre-high waves rolling.'

## 01

*Surf & Stay* is a guide for surfers who look further than the waves. This book doesn't just collect surf spots, it also includes restaurants run by surfing chefs, camping tips, boutique hotels or bakeries with freshly-baked pastries. When you take a surf trip, don't just chase the waves; discover the people and flavours that are the essence of a region.

## 02

The first edition of *Surf & Stay* toured Spain and Portugal; this second edition is a collection of tips for seven European regions: Cornwall, West Flanders, Southern Brittany, La Côte Basque, Cantabria, Tenerife and Alentejo. A mix of familiar destinations and hidden gems.

## 03

How does this book work? Like a road trip full of surprises. Each chapter is a scrapbook of a region. You first navigate through paper dream-landscapes and the tips are waiting at the end. You may not arrive at the estimated time of arrival. *Surf & Stay* is not a classic travel guide. The letters float on the page, as if dancing on a shoreline. The graphic design is the creation of the Antwerp-based art director Elke Treunen.

## 04

Each chapter has its own colour, a shade that tells a detail about the region. The mini anecdotes are always hidden in a different place.

## 05

Not all surf spots are listed, so you might want to buy a specialised guide such as *Stormrider*. *Surf & Stay* is an inspiration book, a collection of my personal favourite or most exceptional waves. Out of respect for the locals, *Surf & Stay* does not reveal the details of any secret surf spots.

## 06

Surf info is as wayward as sea foam. Sandbanks sometimes shift, and when they do, they make a spot unsurfable. That's also the reason why I often don't list 'the right tide'. One year, a wave works at mid tide, the next season at low tide. The ocean cannot be captured in a book. Moreover, wave hunting is part of the fun.

**07**

New: a 'design' icon! Handy for architecture lovers such as myself. Hotels, Airbnbs, restaurants or buildings that are beautiful to look at are tagged with the icon . If you're in search of cliché surf hostels or soulless Airbnbs, you won't find them in this guide.

**08**

Campervan spots and a handful of campsites are indicated by the symbol . The coordinates are shown on a map in Google Maps. You'll find the link on [www.surfandstay.be](http://www.surfandstay.be). Bear in mind that rules about wild camping change rapidly. In exchange for your view of the sea, always treat your surroundings and the locals with the respect that they deserve.

**09**

There is no *Surf & Stay* app or online guide. Print makes my heart beat faster. The paper rustles, the cover dreams. Letters invite you to stroll among still images. The photos sparkle and shimmer, reflect. Like late sunlight on water.

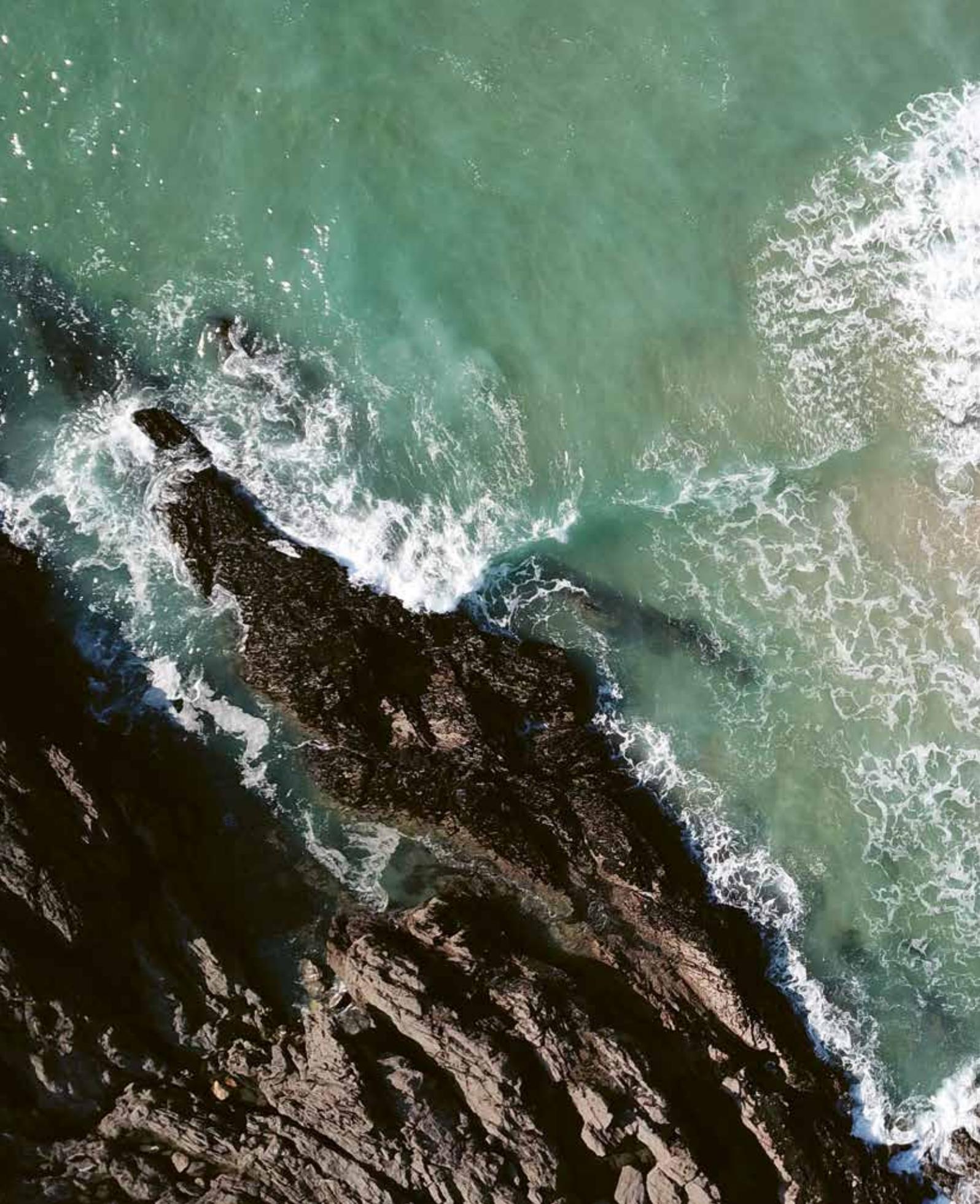
More tips for a road trip à la *Surf & Stay*? Look at p. 252 or follow my adventures via Instagram [@veerlehelsen](https://www.instagram.com/veerlehelsen).

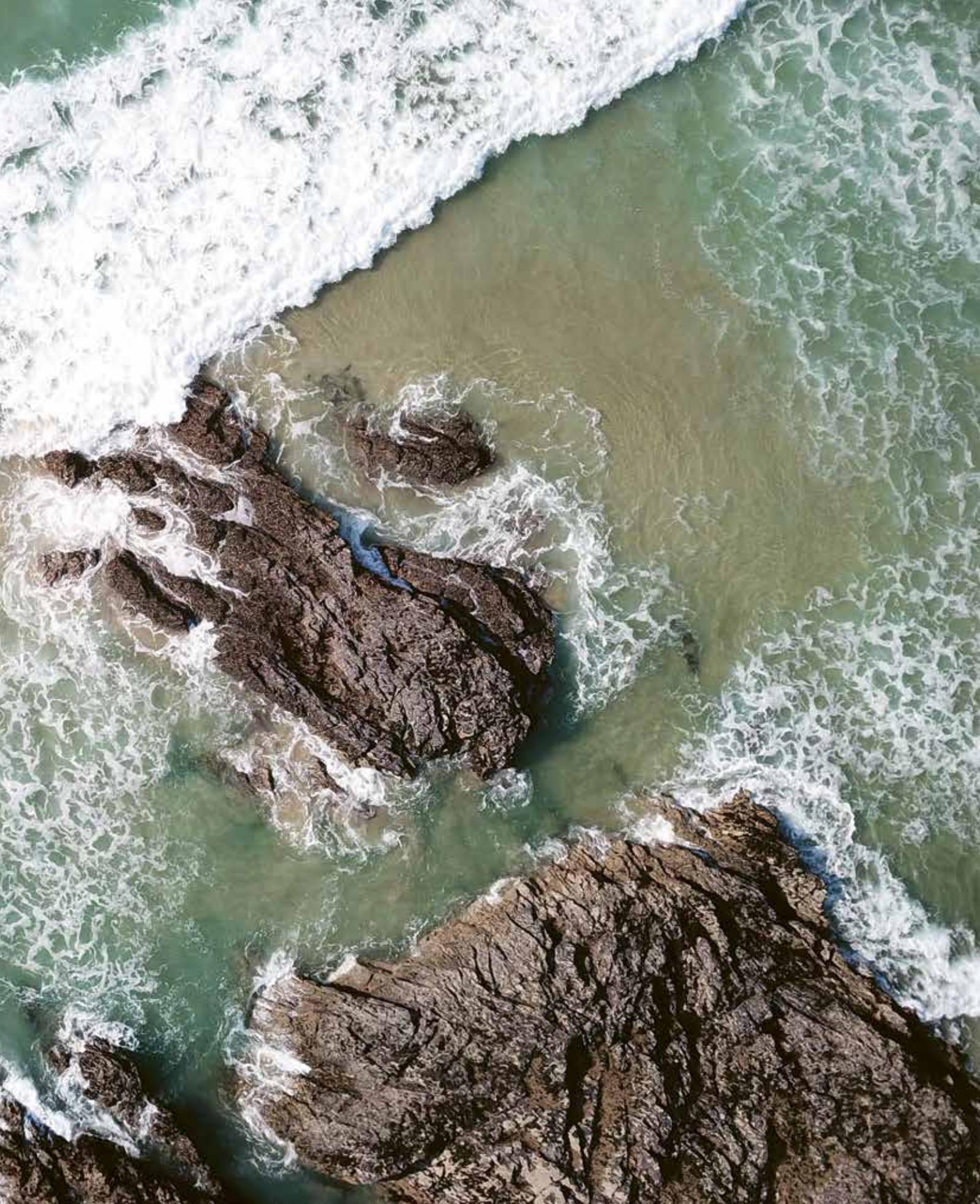
# camper design surf & stay



Love the camper + design accommodations combo. One night spent dreaming in five-star bedsheets, the next counting stars through Connor's skylight.









They surf, hike, love wild swimming, bake the best cake, always drink delicious coffee, rarely serve disappointing dishes, live in a microclimate with palm trees and call everyone 'love': Cornwall and its people will steal your heart.

# Cornwall

Finis  
terrae

