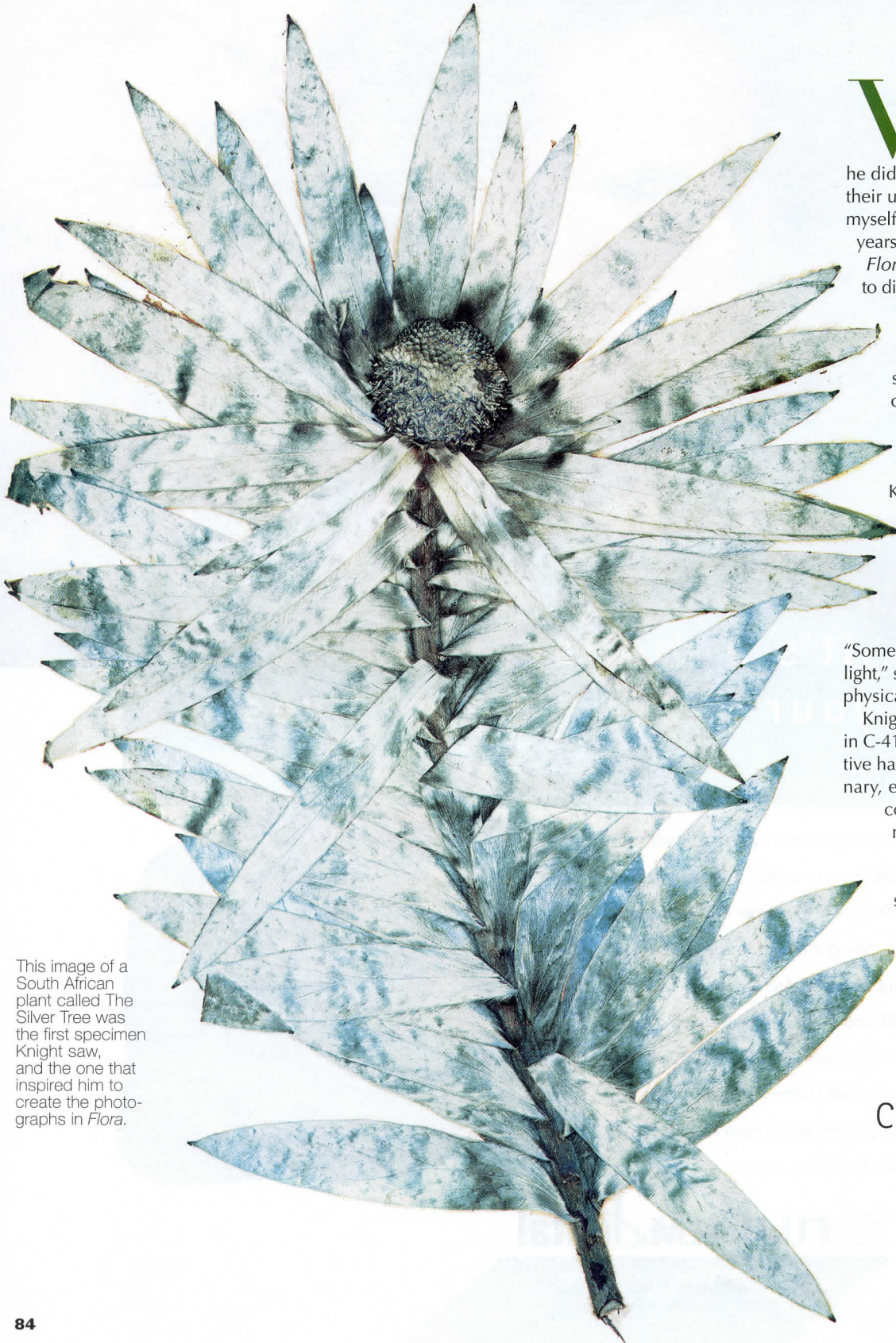


# FLOWER POWER



This image of a South African plant called The Silver Tree was the first specimen Knight saw, and the one that inspired him to create the photographs in *Flora*.

When Nick Knight set out to photograph plant and flower specimens from the massive herbarium at London's Natural History Museum, he didn't want to impose his own artistic ideas on their unconventional beauty. "I wanted to remove myself from the image," says Knight, who spent four years on the project that became his new book *Flora* (Abrams, \$30). But despite his best efforts to disguise his technique, his pictures manage to be both delicate and boldly graphic.

Knight kept his lighting simple to avoid overpowering the subjects. He shot each specimen, which came mounted on a white card, against a lightbox. This eliminated any detail in the area surrounding the plant and also caused some light to pass through it. To light the front of the plant, Knight placed a strobe head "on axis"—as close to the lens as he could get it. "In effect, it was like a ringflash," says Knight.

The real trick of Knight's lighting was to balance the output of the two strobe heads so that their relative proportion brought out the particular qualities of the specimen. "Some needed more backlight, some more front-light," says Knight. "The mix depended on the plant's physical substance and transmissive qualities."

Knight cross-processed his 8x10 transparency film in C-41 color negative chemistry. The resulting negative had more contrast and saturation than ordinary, enhancing both textures and colors. It was contact-printed with traditional darkroom manipulation to create a master print that was sent for reference, with the negative, to the printing plant. There, the negative was scanned and the image digitally manipulated to create a file for reproduction. "I recently went back to the museum and compared the reproductions to the original specimens," says Knight. "I was amazed at how much we'd changed them." ■

HOW NICK KNIGHT  
CREATES DELICATE PLANT  
STUDIES WITH  
GRAPHIC STRENGTH.  
BY RUSSELL HART