

Snoot craft

by Mike Bartick

It wasn't too long ago when Keri Wilk swept the competitions with his stunning macro images created with a snoot. At a time when only a handful of people even knew what a snoot was, he produced some show stopping images that were as ahead of the curve then, as they are today.

Very few tools can actually add a new layer to your portfolio as effectively as a snoot can, they are relatively inexpensive, hard to break and travel quite easily. Infact, buying a snoot should be thought of along the lines as a lens buy as they will add that much of a new dimension to your portfolio and skills.

What is a snoot? a snoot is a device that is used to control strobe flash in an image. Snoots don't produce light but help to channel the light for dramatic placement and effect. Often times its not whats in the image with snooting, but whats not in the image. In other words, using a snoot also helps to eliminate a fussy background or confusing substrate by illuminating just your target, isolating them, while the rest of the frame remains dark.

They can also be used for backlighting, fill lighting or surrounding your subject with light,



its really up to the user to apply their own creative mojo to see how much juice can be squeezed out the image making process. One thing is for certain though, that once you begin to use your snoot effectively, the habit will be hard to break, and soon, everything must be snooted!

There are basically two types

of snoots on the market, fiber optic snoots and optical snoots. Both have a base that fits over the strobe head and function in similar ways. However both have distinct differences in ease of use and effect.

A few question i would ask when researching to buy a snoot:

- Ease of use-Is the device easy to put

on and take off underwater.

- What is the scope of use, can I shoot with a wider angle of view and super macro
- Will I be able to operate the device on my own and not have a guide hold it
- Do I like the quality of light that it delivers at higher F-stops



*Cyerce nudibranch. Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F32 @ 1/200
1 YSD2-J strobe, Retra snoot, 1 Kraken Hydra 1k torch for backlight*

Mastering the basics before mastering your snoot

The basics for using a snoot can be broken down to a single simple phrase, “controlling the light.” For the best results, use the following settings:

Jump Settings for using a Snoot:

ISO-100/Low ISO to control ambient light

Shutter speed 1/200-Further eliminates ambient light and keeps the image sharp.

F-Stop- F18 and higher-Controls

the color, depth of field and ultimately the light quality.

Strobe power- 3/4 power-if the strobe power isn't strong enough, open the aperture slightly. For super macro images, increase the ISO from 100 to 360. I don't recommend using your snooted strobe on full power as the strobe head becomes quite hot. Taking a break for a few minutes during intense use, will also help the strobe to perform better.



*Flabolina . Nikon D7100, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F29 @ 1/320
1 YSD2 Strobe. Retra snoot*

On Camera and setting up to shoot:

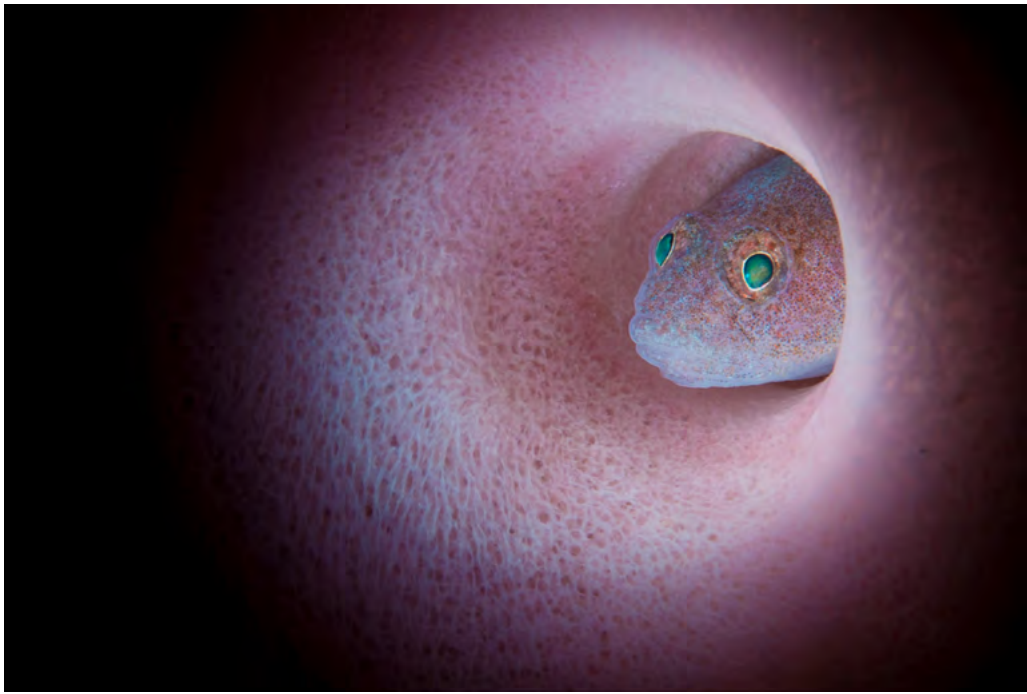
I've recently changed to using fiber optic cables to fire my strobes. This allows me to unplug one strobe and plug in another while underwater. Many times, I'll keep a third strobe on me or attached to my camera with the snoot attached to it. I also use a long FO cable so that I'm able to use my strobe off camera with a lot more freedom.

For my favorite gear setup I use two float arms on both sides of

my rig, a 6 inch arm and an 8 inch arm, longest first to give me distance and the shorter arm on the end for better articulation. I mention this as it's important to have the extra reach when it's needed.

Use your snoot on the left strobe so that you can make adjustments to light placement with your left hand while looking through the viewfinder and adjusting your camera settings with your right hand. This will also help you to balance the rig underwater and gain stability.

The higher your snoot tip is from your subject, the wider the beam



Barrel Sponge Goby- Using the snoot to direct your light and further shaping it with the masks provided with the Retra snoot, you can begin to create more than just a ring of light around your subject. The tight beam of light can also be used for shooting a bit further and in a more controlled fashion while delivering the intensity needed for clarity and sharpness in the frame. Experiment..., Nikon D7100, 105mm, F22 @ 1/320, 1 YSD2 with Retra snoot.



Janolus- sundown effect. Using a high shutter speed and low ISO while using a snoot we create black negative space in the frame. For me, I see an opportunity to add something else back into the frame as if it is a blank canvas. I tried this on several subjects to see what I could come up with with mixed results. Experimenting can lead to interesting results. Nikon D7100, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F25 @ 1/320

cast will be and with less intensity. Moving the snoot tip closer to your subject shrinks the light pool and increases the intensity.

When mounting your snoot onto your strobe head, try to place it exactly the same way every time. You will further gain muscle memory when using your strobe and be able to concentrate on the more important things, like shooting.

The Optical snoot offers a sliding mask that will allow you to shrink the light pool that surrounds your subject without moving the snoot up or down. Take a few test shots and make your adjustments then move on to creating the image you like. Watch for shadows on your subject in the foreground and be diligent when reviewing the image underwater.

Nudibranchs are one of my

favorite targets when using a snoot as they usually move relatively slow, are beautiful and colorful. A typical snoot shot surrounds the subjects with light, while keeping negative space within the frame. The idea is to see the snoot working and the skill of the shooter.

Using a quality fiber optic snoot like the one made by Reefnet also has its advantages. The light quality is different enough for me to justify

owning and teaching both. The FO base can utilize two snoot's at the same time, enabling the shooter to deliver light at a different angle and if so desired, different sizes or different areas in the frame.

The quick advantages for the FO snoot are backlighting, super macro and off camera lighting. The disadvantage is that its hard to know here the snoot will flash prior to



Hairy frogfish. The light quality differs from one snoot to the next. While an optical snoot delivers a sharp contrast in the fall off of light, the FO snoot create's a softer edge with less highpoint contrast.

Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F18 @ 1/200, 1xYSD2-J strobe



Backlit hairy frogfish. Off camera lighting is quite simple with the FO snoot. it isn't buoyant so setting it in the sand or on a small tripod is a snap. For this shot i simply handheld the strobe with the snoot curving around from behind my subject. Backlighting with the intensity of a strobe flash is far more effective then a torch if it can be done.

Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F22 @ 1/200, 1xYSD2-J FO snoot



Snake eel. Backlighting can often times leave a shadow on the important features of your subject, in this case the eye. A snoot will help to add the light back into the frame in a way the doesn't overpower the backlighting effect. The negative space here being on the eel itself in addition to the rest of the frame. Flashing just the eye, I was able to bring back some color where it was needed the most.

As your skills grow you will see how the light can be applied with surgical precision.

Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F18 @ 1/200, 2x2800K Kraken video lights for backlighting.



Sweet purple hairy shrimp. Keeping the snoot tip in the frame will also create different effects. Making macro images rather then just shooting an image now comes into play. Thinking of the frame as a a blank canvas and creating something completely different is alot of fun. Although not everyone will like the images, they are still fun to create.

Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 60mm, CMC diopter, F36 @ 1/200

The Reefnet Fibre Optics (FO) Snoot is available for a variety of strobes including Sea & Sea YS-D1/D2, YS-01/02/03, YS-250, Inon S-2000, Z-240, and Ikelite DS-160/151





Mating Thecacera picta nudibranchs. Snooting the subjects from above and introducing light from behind helped to illuminate the docking station of these amorous slugs. Lighting can either make or break an image. In this case if I used forward strobe flash, the transparent portions of the slug would be lost. Instead, I snooted from the top and backlit them with a torch. Its not uncommon for me to spend an entire dive working with a single subject. Not to say I shoot the entire time but waiting for the right moment often pays off.
Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, F22 @ 1/200. 1xYSD2-J FO snoot, 1xHydra 1K torch backlighting

releasing the shutter. There are easy workarounds for this and it quickly becomes a non issue.

At the end of the day, there really is no magic bullet to learning how to use a snoot. The best way to learn is by doing. Don't let yourself become discouraged and don't be afraid to

experiment. Most importantly, be kind to the critters and always have fun!

Mike Bartick

www.saltwaterphoto.com

www.diveCBR.com



Supermacro- Goniobranchus sp. For supermacro, simply train the snoot tip directly over your diopter or set up the snoot off camera. Once the snoot is in place, then you can concentrate of creating the image rather than concentrating on light placement.
Nikon D500, Sea & Sea housing, 105mm, Kraken +13 Diopter, 1xYSD2-J with FO snoot





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Mike@DiveCBR.com

WWW.DiveCBR.com

