

Nauticam 0.8:1 viewfinders review

by Phil Rudin

It has been over ten years since my review of “enhanced viewfinders for EVF cameras” appearing in uwpmag.com issue #66. Since then the mirrorless camera market has exploded worldwide with what seems like a new model offering almost monthly.

Mirrorless cameras of all sensor sizes have completely overtaken the now all but dead DSLR camera market. They are now the mainstay of the interchangeable lens camera market with sales beginning to dig out from the Covid downturn and the onslaught of cell phone competition.

Everything about mirrorless cameras has improved dramatically over the past ten years including lightning fast auto focus for many of the top cameras, large electronic viewfinders with resolution in the 3,69M dot to 9,44M+ dot range, high frame rates in the 30 FPS range with electronic shutter, large raw file sizes in the 45 to 60MP range, higher flash sync speeds in many of the cameras with mechanical shutter and much much more.

I am sure we would all agree that one of the best ways to improve image quality is to be able to see bright and highly detailed images in the viewfinder. Being able to see focus detail is key to better focus and image quality.

Nauticam has always continued to improve with age because as their mission statement says they “Think beyond what has been done before and never rest on past accomplishments”. My first Nauticam housing review for uwpmag.com was

for the NA-NEX5 (for Sony NEX-5) and dates back to issue #57 in late 2010. I am always amazed to see the subtle improvements introduced with each new generation of housings and accessories which brings me to this review of Nauticam’s latest generation of exceptional straight and angled viewfinders.

These viewfinders replace the housing’s pickup finder to improve critical composition which reduces the need to crop in post processing and also allow you to check pin point focus accuracy prior to releasing the shutter. This is accomplished by magnifying the view into the EVF or DSLR optical viewfinder. These viewfinders also make it easier to review both stills and video without the issues associated with viewing an LCD screen in bright conditions.

I have used the original Nauticam 45 degree finder for over ten years and have found it exceptional for shooting macro subjects. The 45 angle allows you to look into the viewfinder while the camera is at a very low and slightly upward angle. This improves subject separation from the background and allows you to be above the housing and away from fragile flora and fauna.



Nauticam’s new 45° 0.8:1 viewfinder



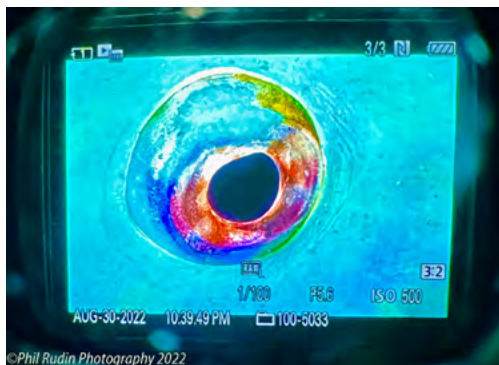
Nauticam’s new 180° 0.8:1 viewfinder

(Left) The new 180° 0.8:1 viewfinder on a Sony A1 housing

The straight or 180 degree finders are great for fast moving subjects, reef scenes and other wider subjects. The 45 degree finder has a greater learning curve and is frustrating for some. The issue of the 45 degree finder verses straight is a subject of heated debate in many forum chat rooms. My choice for macro for ten years has been the 45 degree configuration, However, now that I shoot blackwater macro, the straight finder has become a better option for the eye level, fast moving subjects found while blackwater diving.

Nauticam’s new Full Frame straight and angled viewfinders now fill a niche not covered by the original line of viewfinders. This is to accommodate the larger EVF’s beginning to appear in high end mirrorless cameras with the new 0.64 inch EVF’s found in cameras like the Sony A1, A7s III and newly released A7r V.

With these new viewfinders you can chose



The Nauticam collar adapter allows the new viewfinders to be fitted on smaller MIL housings

Cell phone image into new viewfinder

between the original 32°/1:1 or the new 40°/0.8:1 options.

When the announcement for these new viewfinders was first published I noticed some confusion in chat rooms over the meaning of these two choices. First they have nothing to do with the angle of the viewfinder, your choices are still 45 or 180 (straight) degrees but because photographers have different or changing needs, Nauticam has offered a new choice.

With the original 32°/1:1 finder you maximize magnification while preserving the image field and surrounding data on most EVF cameras. The level of detail rendered is industry leading and quite impressive for both EVF and DSLR finders.

The new 40°/0.8:1 finder is for those challenges found with the larger EVF's in cameras like the Sony A-1 and A7s III. For these cameras the 40° finder gives slightly less magnification with uncompressed corner to corner

sharpness and as equally tack sharp detail as the 32° version. You also get maximum working room on the EVF to easily see all of the settings information along with world class playback detail.

All of the original Nauticam viewfinder perks are still included like the excellent in-water dioptic adjustments and hassle-free installation without the need for any tools. Like the older viewfinders the new versions are double O-ring sealed, pushed into place and then secured with a third O-ring. The process of removing the pickup finder and installing the new viewfinder can be done in under sixty seconds.

If a picture is worth a thousand words then the improvements over the older viewfinder will be evident as soon as you look into these new viewfinders. I have been using the current viewfinder on my Nauticam NA-A1 housing (Sony A1) for about a year. The new design allows a completely unobstructed view of the

cameras LCD screen even when the screen is tilted.

A big advantage with all optical viewfinders is creating distance between your face mask and the back of the housing. I have set the diopter on my camera's viewfinder for best results but I was able to increase detail even more by adjusting the viewfinder dioptic settings. Results will vary depending on individual vision needs so if you have a chance, try before you buy.

Once the housing was fitted out with a macro lens I took my first look through this new viewfinder and I was more than impressed. The image detail behind a mask was impressive while retaining full corner to corner sharpness. Shooting information that I struggled to see with the old viewfinder was crisp and in view without needing to reposition my eye in the viewfinder.

The new viewfinder is a few grams heavier than the older 180° but in water I didn't notice a difference in weight or balance versus the older 180° model. Even if you don't have the newer larger EVF found in the Sony A1 these new viewfinders can provide significant advantages over the older versions on both mirrorless and DSLR cameras.

These viewfinders are not just for expensive full frame cameras either, with the Nauticam #32215 viewfinder

collar adapter the smaller MIL housings for APS-C and M43 cameras including the excellent OM-Systems OM-1 camera (large EVF) and MIL NA-A7C housing can take advantage of these high quality optics.

The older viewfinders were sold in two sizes, 45° and 180° for large Nauticam housings and 45° and 180° for the smaller MIL housings. Now you buy one finder and it can be used with both styles of housings using the viewfinder collar adaptor for MIL housings. This allows you to use the same viewfinder when you upgrade to a larger housing system.

All of these extra features come at a premium with the 180° finder selling for \$1970.00/£1730.00 and the 45° selling for \$1816.00/£1595.00. The older finders are still available at \$1670.00/£1466.00 for the 180° and \$1379.00/£1211.00 for the 45° the collar adapter for MIL housings is \$144.00/£127.00.

For more information on selecting the proper viewfinder for your needs contact your local authorized Nauticam dealer or go to nauticam.com for more details. I would also like to thank Nauticam USA for technical assistance for this article.

Phil Rudin
Instagram