

European Wildlife Photographer Of The Year 2023 - Cat 6 Underwater

The blue planet: 71% of its surface is covered by water. Oceans, rivers and lakes accommodate an infinite abundance of life. This category gives us an insight into a hidden world with its animals, plants and habitats both in fresh and salt water.



*2nd place Runner-up, Flamenco Pose
by Magnus Lundgren*



Winner Catherine Holmes, UK. Mobula rays at night with slow shutter, Baja, Mexico



*Finalist, Rays at Sunset by
Mike Korostelev*

Marelux 45 Degree Viewfinder

by John Horn

Over the last 12 weeks I've been using the Marelux 45 Degree Viewfinder over a series of about 50-60 dives. I paid full price for the viewfinder from Marelux and they have no affiliation with this review. I wanted to share my experience in hopes of providing information to other people that I would have loved to know up front.

All my testing was done with a Canon EOS R7, Marelux housing, RF100mm F2.8 L MACRO IS USM lens and dual Backscatter MF-1 Strobes.

Having bought a handful of things from Marelux in the past, I always enjoy working with them. They are easy to chat with, super responsive and they ship fast. This purchase was the same, seamless from start to finish.

When the viewfinder arrived, I followed the Marelux instructions to install it, but I could not remove the original eye piece on my housing. I emailed them and after getting a very quick response, I learned that the eye piece that came with my camera was glued on. In the process of trying to remove my original viewfinder I bent the tool that came with the new viewfinder, by applying too much

pressure to the glued eye piece. They told me to use a hair dryer to warm up the area and try again and they offered to send me a new tool. After warming the glue with a hair dryer on low heat, the viewfinder screwed off easily and I was able to install the new one. Since original installation, I have switched between both viewfinders, easily with no problem.

Once it was installed, the first thing I noticed was how big it was, how much it protruded from the back of the housing, and how it covered a good portion of my screen. This is not a big issue for me since I hardly ever use the screen, but may be an issue for others who do. This can be partially remedied by rotating the viewfinder to either side like you would for portrait photos, but it still covers part of the screen.

The original eye piece is only viewable at a size of .66 whereas the Marelux 45 Viewfinder is 1:1. What this means is the image you are looking

Pacific Agile Chromis. Canon EOS R7, Marelux housing, RF100mm F2.8 L MACRO IS USM, Backscatter MF-1 Strobe, ISO 500, f/10, 1/250



Viewfinder Side View - You can see how far the viewfinder protrudes off the back of the housing.



at is much larger. It creates a very bright, beautiful view and it is much easier to see detail once you get used to it. Even the most boring underwater creatures look pretty in the viewfinder!

While the viewfinder is nice to look through it is hard to get it centered perfectly. This has been the hardest thing to get used to. There is a very small window within which you can actually see what you are shooting. If you move your eye too much in any direction you cannot see anything. It's similar to looking through a microscope. This may not sound too bad, but it is more challenging than it sounds. It is very hard to keep your eye exactly where it needs to be on the viewfinder to keep it centered. Even after all the dives I have done, I still find myself frustrated at times because I am not perfectly centered and am only seeing black nothingness, or a small part of the image. It is more manageable in mellow dive conditions, but add in a little surge and it gets extra challenging.

One of my favorite things about the viewfinder is how I am able to change my body position in more comfortable ways. When shooting low in the water, it allows me to easily stay off the bottom. I was able to do this with the original eye piece, but my neck and back would hurt by the end of the dive from all the arching. The 45 degree angle also lets me get below my subject in some scenarios creating some nice shots. My body has thanked me for this more relaxed position I am able to obtain while shooting.

While the ergonomics of using the viewfinder are nice, it does take a long time to get used to the new 45 degree angle. For a while, you will have a hard time finding your subject. Macro shooting was the quickest to figure out. I'm using my hand as an anchor and am able to aim my



Portrait Mode - Covers less of the screen, but still intrusive.

lens exactly where I want to go. For fish portraits, it has taken some major practice and frustration along the way. I still find myself thinking I am lined up perfectly, looking into the viewfinder and not finding my subject. The amount of times this happens is diminishing, but I was hoping it would be nil after this many dives. I don't shoot much wide angle, so I can't speak on this style of shooting with the viewfinder.

Something odd to think about is that the length of your arms may affect your ability to shoot macro depending on your strategy. I like to anchor one finger near my subject and use that hand to hold the front of the camera to find my subject. Because the new viewfinder sticks out far behind the housing it may be hard to get your eye lined up properly in the viewfinder. I have barely enough arm length to make this happen and I am 5'7". If you are much shorter than I am, use a long lens, and have this same strategy, it might be extra challenging for you.

I didn't think the viewfinder would have



Kangaroo Nudibranch. Canon EOS R7, Marelux housing, RF100mm F2.8 L MACRO IS USM, Backscatter MF-1 Strobe, ISO 160, f/9, 1/320

affected how I carry my camera to and from the water, but it has. Before the viewfinder, I would tether the back of the setup to my chest with two snap hooks so I could walk to the water with my hands free. The viewfinder does not allow this



Front View - It covers the majority of the screen.

because there is no longer a flat surface to put against my chest so I find myself mostly carrying the setup. On a positive note, because I have been carrying this heavy piece of equipment, my lady friend has been commenting on my growing arm muscles (mostly kidding).

If your vision is not perfect, you can also adjust the diopter with an included tool, but I have not had to do this so cannot share my thoughts. It's a great feature and I imagine many people will find this useful.

In summary, here is the list of Pros and Cons:

Pros:

- Beautifully big, bright, clear picture.
- Helpful to keep your body off the bottom when taking shots of things close to the substrate.
- Allows for a more ergonomic body position for most shots.

Cons:

- It takes a long period to get used to it (very long).
- It covers the majority of the screen on my setup, but that can be partially remedied by rotating



Goby. Canon EOS R7, Marelux housing, RF100mm F2.8 L MACRO IS USM, Backscatter MF-1 Strobe, ISO 500, f/10, 1/250

the viewfinder.

-Could be challenging to use depending on body size and type.

-Makes the setup bigger and heavier and may not fit in your bag. It should be removed during travel to prevent damage.

-You may have to alter the way you carry the camera to and from the water.

The viewfinder extends off the back of the housing 3 inches and comes in at 368 grams so make sure you have some extra flotation to make up for it.

Would I recommend this to others? I hate to say it, but 'it depends'. If you dive enough to be able to practice and get used to it, then I would recommend it. Once you get to see the new big, bright image, it will be hard to go back to the original eye piece. If you only get to dive on occasion, you should try getting to a pool to practice using it underwater before your first actual underwater photo journey. This will prevent a ton of hassle underwater and save you from a



Locust Nudibranch. Canon EOS R7, Marelux housing, RF100mm F2.8 L MACRO IS USM, Backscatter MF-1 Strobe, ISO 125, f/20, 1/320

combination of missed shots, frustration and probably a lot of bad language.

Even though it is not perfect, I love using it and couldn't go back to the original setup.

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