

Remembering Martin Edge

by Alex Mustard

I am sure that most of you have heard by now the sad news that Martin Edge has died. He will be sorely missed by our community. Few underwater photographers have felt as well-known to so many as Martin because even those who never met him, felt that they had through his disarmingly personal teaching from the pages of his books. Ah, the book, it is fair to say that most people had at least one edition of his celebrated book, *The Underwater Photographer*, on their shelves during the book's 30+ year and 5 edition existence. It must surely make Martin one of the best-known British divers ever, certainly from an international perspective.

What set Martin apart was that he was one of the first to really teach that there was more to underwater photography than equipment and settings. As Jim Church commented he was the leader of a new generation of underwater photography writers. Martin's revelation came from acknowledging he was using the same settings, the same gear and shooting the same subjects as the best. But rather than having an over-inflated opinion of his own pictures he was able to honestly appraise his work as slightly inferior to the top dogs. And he set out to work out why.

Martin was underwater photography mad, and a natural born coach. He loved sharing his knowledge on any subject and he loved helping people. His day job was Police detective, and that gave him the enquiring mind and ability to dig through people's words and understand their real motivations... And in 1983 all this arrived at BSoUP

– the British Society of Underwater Photographer – which was both a hothouse of international UW photo talent, but also had a tradition of openness and sharing of information.

“All the famous names were in attendance,” said Martin recalling that first meeting. “I recognised their faces from their photographic achievements in the dive magazines. [Over the years] the BSoUP ‘gods’ were so very generous with their information, but it was up to us to ask the right questions. We so admired the work of Peter Rowlands, Peter Scoones, Warren Williams and Mike Valentine that any opportunity to ask these guys questions was a bonus. I began to realize how little I really knew, but what did sink in was the fact that photography underwater was less to do with f-sops and shutter speeds but more about light and opportunities. I waited in line to ‘interview’, no, I mean to ‘ask’, Peter Scoones a question and he went on to explain the notion of finding great ‘light’ and then just looking for something, anything to put into that light.” Martin gave a host of other examples, concluding “Their answers opened our hearts and minds into how the very best shooters approached their own photography.”

Today's new underwater photographers are taught early to not simply take photos on a scuba dive, but to dive for their images. You are encouraged to take more shots of less subjects; to seek out great light, if you want it in your pictures; to work opportunities. These approaches were what all those leading shooters were doing when Martin

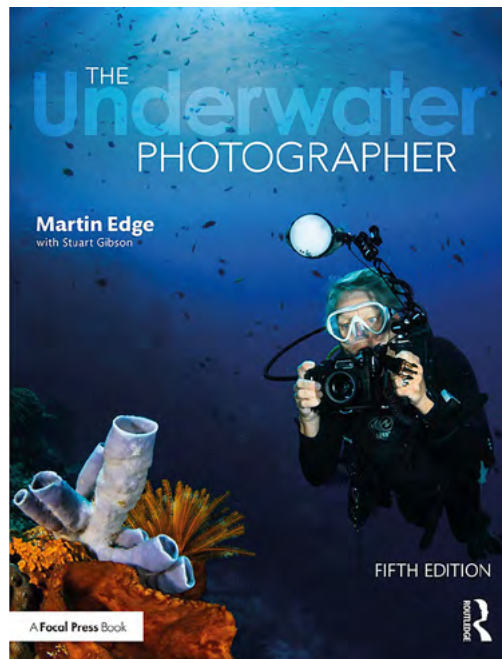


started out. For many these were things they did naturally or through experience, but most had never thought to talk about it. Martin took the time to extract the information and then found the words to teach that knowledge and more to the community. Many of the key lessons of the underwater photography mindset started here.

“People would pay thousands to be a fly on the wall today,” Martin would always say when the three of us (myself, Martin and Peter Rowlands) gathered

for UPY judging. And it is these magical times that my minds return to when I think of him. We worked damn hard, there was only time for straight talking, but faced with 1000s of the best underwater photos in the world, it was a privilege and an education to dissect them and uncover the winners. Judging UPY definitely improved my photography, as the discussion raged, with some pictures castigated and but most exalted through detailed arguments. There was no-small talk, just hardcore photography chat, well, until the evenings, when a few glasses brought out wonderful tales from the past.

As judges, we actually had quite different tastes, which meant plenty of debates but this ultimate enriched the UPY collection each year. And the dynamic worked because the three of us had a friendship based on strong mutual respect. Peter had been Martin's photographic hero when he started and then Peter was the first to publish Martin's teaching in UP, the original Underwater Photography (print) magazine. I knew of them both from my early 20s years, but got to meet, dive and learn much more from Peter. I've been fortunate to dive around the world with Peter, from the Browning Pass to Triton Bay, and Peter also encouraged me to share my knowledge, and I cut my teaching teeth writing articles for UWP.



I didn't get to really spend time with Martin until later, but fate brought us together 20 years ago during those exciting early days of digital. And from there we both treasured our chats (Martin often recording them – you can take the man out of the police...) and distilled them for his books. The two of us operated independently most of the time so we always had loads to discuss when we met for an exchange of information and cross fertilisation of ideas. And, both being self-employed, we'd even have a "work Christmas lunch" together at a New Forest pub! I also wrote different chapters for the 3rd, 4th and 5th editions of The Underwater Photographer, and the foreword of the



5th Edition (Peter wrote the foreword for the 3rd Edition).

What is often not mentioned enough is Martin's own photography, which won plenty of contests back in the day and sold well as prints. Although celebrated as a teacher, for me, Martin's style was not technical, but heavily artistic. He loved to experiment and play with ideas. He loved shallow water and working close to the surface, and once he switched to digital he'd regularly run out of air as he became caught up in the creative process! I'd never meet him without there being a new idea he was enthusing about. Some became well known techniques, others

stepping stones to something new!

I also always remember Martin as a great family man. The first thing he'd say to me is Sylvia says hello. And I was heartened that he was surrounded by them so much over these last few years. Sylvia and Martin had only recently celebrated 51 years together, and I am sure it is very tough time for them. Martin's loss definitely leaves a big hole in the underwater photography family too, but his contribution to making everyone better underwater photographers will be celebrated for years to come.