

Don't get me wrong - backscatter is the bane of most underwater photographers' lives and it was even more so in the film days because there was nothing, other than very expensive retouching, which could be done about it.

Enter BackscatterXTerminator - Erin Quigley's collaboration with clever astro AI developers - and you have a Photoshop plug in which removes backscatter at the push of a button without affecting the overall quality of the subject matter.

This is the stuff of dreams and instantly solves a problem which could have taken hours to eliminate manually.

And yet, contrary as I can be, I can't help but wonder that this instant simplicity will lead to a blanket coverage of perfect, clean images - a bit like whitened teeth - and especially in competitions where a judge is looking for images that stand out from the crowd. In this new world of image perfection it would then be the shots WITH backscatter which would stand out :-)

Fortunately BackscatterXTerminator has controls to limit the amount of correction so that you can decide if the backscatter actually contributes to the 'atmosphere' of the image. Very clever.

If you're ahead of the game, you've got nothing to fear

To improve your underwater photography you should look at and study other people's underwater images. There's nothing wrong with that as long as you don't intend to simply copy their images or style.

Some underwater photographers are reticent to divulge their secrets but those who are confident in their capabilities and on top of their game are comfortable imparting their knowledge for the benefit of others. They, after all, learnt from those before them.

Obvious examples must be Martin Edge whose several editions of the book "The Underwater Photographer" are referred to as 'the bible' and this would not be complete without including Alex Mustard whose several books are testament to his talent but his open divulgence of all his techniques in "Underwater Photography Masterclass" and "52 Assignments: Underwater Photography" make him inspirational to so many.

You see, he's happy divulging his

secrets because he's already thinking of and working on new techniques to keep ahead of the game.

Getting it right can be wrong

If you are not interested in the finer vagaries of film making and shooting broadcast quality footage underwater, you can skip this.

I always remember being saddened when I visited the late great Peter Scoones; not because he was a bit unwell, which he was at the time, but because he was working on some of his recent underwater footage and making adjustments to the colours.

This was the man who, singlehandedly, changed the way underwater natural history footage was shot as it emerged from film to video. He saw the advantages of the new electronic format with its ability to adjust all three colours - red, green and blue - to achieve perfect colour balance underwater and all of his (self made) underwater housings incorporated ergonomically placed controls to achieve just that.

The result was that when he surfaced from a dive his footage could

go straight to the editor. No post processing time needed.

That's why I was sad about Peter now post processing his footage. He'd joined the almost universal thinking - they can sort that out in post.

But then I read Roger Horrocks' illuminating responses to my questions later in this issue and it all became clear.

If you are, as Peter was in most of his commissions, the only underwater cameraman, then it made sense to get it right underwater but, if you are one of several on a shoot, then the rules must change to leave the final colour grading to the post production team.

Colour is very subjective, especially in the underwater world where the natural colours vary so much depending on the water and light conditions.

The solution, as Roger so generously revealed, is "Set the white balance to daylight or 5600 Kelvin and leave it there. You shoot everything in RAW and don't do any white balancing underwater. Take a grey card and a colour card down as references and film them in situ. This provides the colourist with a baseline for what the colours actually look like."

It all makes perfect sense to me now.

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