

Silfra Hall Iceland

TIME magazine

UK front cover

By Charles Hood

The big difference between film and digital is that with film predominately your work has finished when the image is captured. However, with a digital image your work has just begun.

No picture could be further from the truth than with this silhouette of a diver (Peter Rowlands) taken in Silfra Hall, Iceland. It recently appeared on the front cover of TIME magazine in UK.

As a photojournalist I tend to shoot jpeg images. This is mainly due to the restrictions of the Nikon D100, but also due to the speed of post processing on my MAC. Let me elaborate.

Jpegs take a fraction of the time to record to Compact Flash compared to either RAW or tiff files. Thus I can shoot a number of shots very quickly. Typically I require up to 20 images of a particular shot to guarantee one perfect one. Also I can download, review, manipulate and store jpegs much faster than using RAW or tiff files. Moreover, the majority of publications are quite happy with jpegs. Having said all that there is nothing wrong with shooting RAW or tiff. Indeed in some ways it gives you more control – it's just the case that I have found shooting jpegs suits my style of photography.

So in this particular situation I ended up with a jpeg master file. The diver and surface where perfectly exposed, however, the dark volcanic rock of the sides, while looking impressive, lacked impact. How did I adjust the shot to make it work? The first thing I did was to copy the file. Golden



rule number one – always keep your original file untouched.

I then adjusted the Levels in Photoshop to suit the correctly exposed segments of the image. This ensured the blacks were black and the blue was nicely saturated. I then saved this as a new file – this is an important step as you will see later. Then I opened this new file and adjusted the levels to suit the underexposed section – in this case the rocks. The secret here is at this stage to still leave it



slightly underexposed. This had to be done carefully so that I didn't alter the colour balance.

It took several attempts going first through the blue channel, then the green channel and finally the red channel. The red channel is the most difficult colour to adjust and is often over done thus doing it in this order I find works best. It is a good idea to use the Info Dropper to check your colours as you do this. I didn't worry about the diver and surface now appearing over exposed. But the new problem



now was that the rocks appeared a bit flat. So I went to the Curves tool and tweaked the contrast just to make the shadows stand out. This is why you leave it slightly underexposed allowing some contrast to be added.

When the rocks looked perfect I then went into the History Undo tool to bring back the diver and surface. This is why you have to work on a saved image from any previous adjustments. The History Undo tool undoes everything. The secret also with using the History Undo tool is to select different opacities. I used

100 per cent for the core parts that need taking right back to the previously saved image. Then near the edges I used around 40 percent and finally around 20 percent at the boundaries where the different parts of the image where merging.

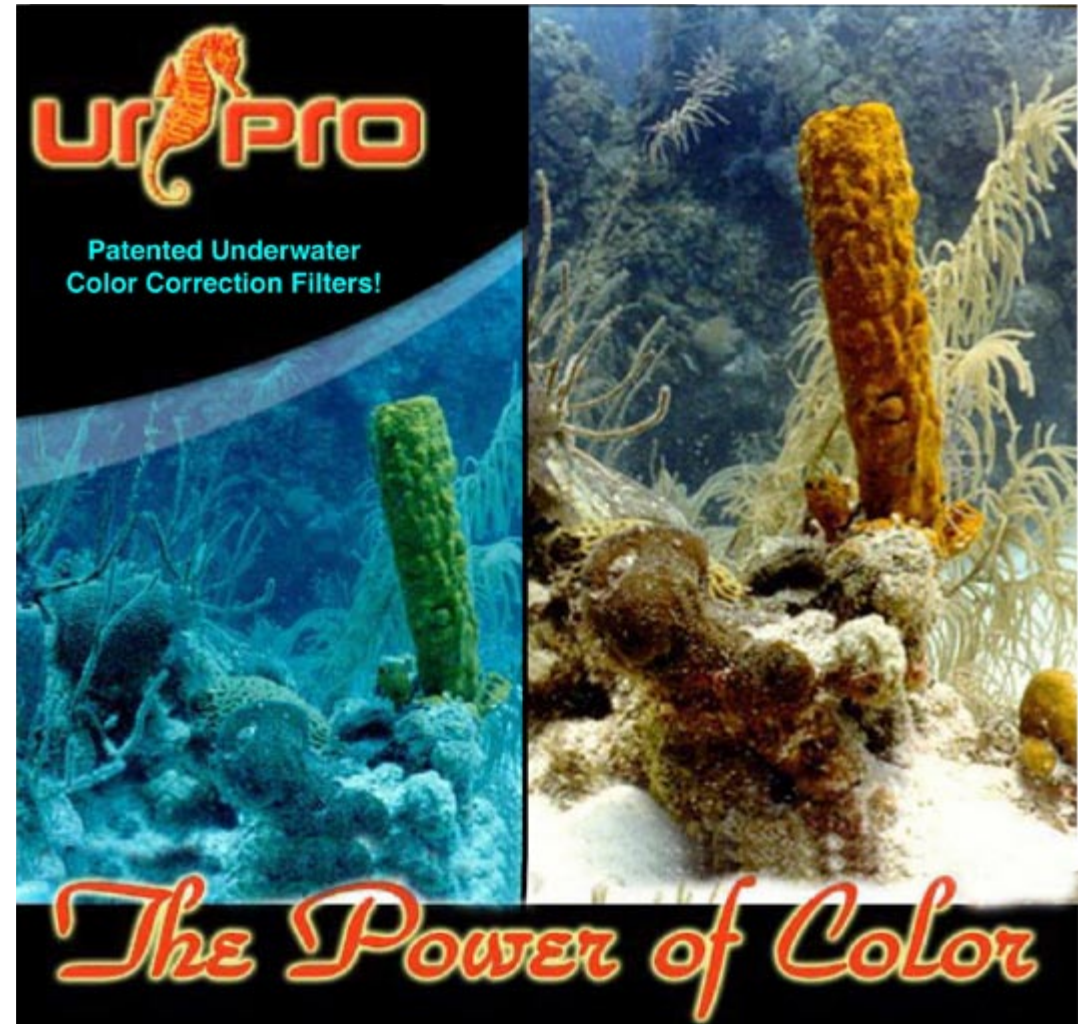
Finally I added nine per cent saturation and a touch of sharpening. Job done.

Food for thought: this is one image. It's always remained one image. It's just that I have adjusted certain sections of it differently. As soon as you add layers technically it's a multiple image. Now there's a debate for the next edition!

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25/41

