

Book reviews

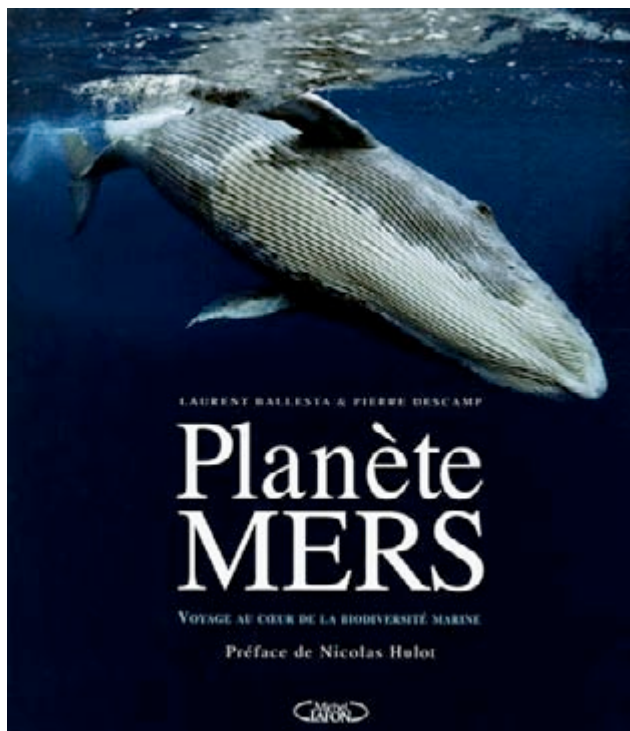
Planète MERS

Laurent Ballesta & Pierre Descamp

I must start with an apology because I am reviewing a book that I have not read! It is in French and I can't read French. But I have looked at every page of this phenomenal book and I just had to tell you about it as soon as possible!

Fans of the Antibes Festival will surely have marvelled at Laurent Ballesta's multi-award winning photography, but outside his native France he is not that well known. This is a pity because, to put it simply, I think he is currently the world's best underwater photographer. His new book, Planete MERS, a collaboration with writings from fellow biologist Pierre Descamp is a large format (330x280mm), 400 page coffee table book, featuring the best of Laurent's images. It is a triumph.

Laurent is a master of balanced light photography, mixing high impact foreground marine life with beautiful depth-giving backgrounds that immediately transport you beneath the waves. His animal portraits, of both large and small subjects, are perfectly composed and full of character. Alongside these achingly beautiful



shots are marine life images of rare and previously un-photographed species and behaviours all precisely lit, framed and exposed. But what sets Laurent apart is that not only does he seek out the ocean's most magnificent creatures he also produces captivating images from the mundane and everyday subjects, such as seagrass beds. The photographs truly come from around the world: Polar - from both the Arctic and Antarctic, Temperate - from Northern Europe (including freshwater) and North and South America, and Tropical - mainly Jordan, PNG and French Polynesia.

I am struggling to think of a negative point, but perhaps the book

is about 5% too long. Such is the impact of each image, that going through it first time from cover to cover is emotionally exhausting. That said 400 pages of lavishly reproduced images seems very reasonable at 39 Euros. This is certainly a book that will continue to reward the reader time after time.

Currently this book is only available in French in France. Laurent and Pierre told me that they are hoping to get an English edition out next year (but despite not speaking French I could not resist buying it now).

Since writing this review the book has gone on to win the Antibes Festival prize for the best underwater image book, which will undoubtedly help this process.

In my opinion there have been two books of underwater images that have stood head and shoulders above what has gone before when they were released: Newbert's Within A Rainbowed Sea and Doubilet's Water Light Time. Maybe we now have a third book to add to this esteemed company?

Master Guide for Underwater Photography

By Jack & Sue Drafa

For anyone who has yet to switch to digital photography this will prove a very useful book because initially it keeps its feet in both camps

– film and digital but then devotes the majority of the book to imparting digital information in a way that is both easy to read and understand.

Everything you need to know is in this book to enable you to take competent underwater photos with your digital camera. It does not, however, cover the post production which is now such an important part of the final image production process. There is a good reason for this. The 2nd edition of their Digital Imaging for the Underwater Photographer is now out and is also reviewed here!

Master Guide for Underwater Photography costs \$34.95 and further details are at

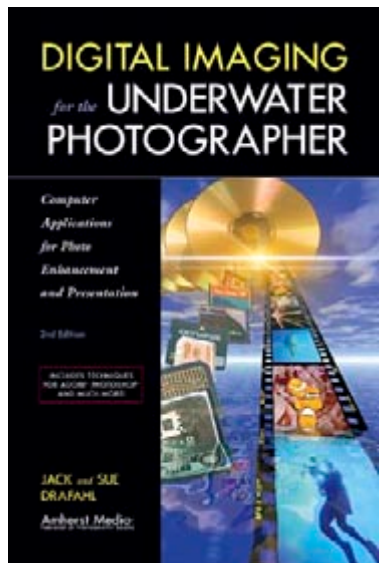


Alex Mustard

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Digital Imaging for the Underwater Photographer

By Jack & Sue Drafa



The fast changing world of digital imaging and manipulation software has led to a 2nd updated version of this useful book.

Effectively it takes up where the Master Guide leaves off. This book is all about what you can do to the image – both film and digital – after it has been taken.

Photoshop has become the standard software in this area it is covered here in good detail. It would be very easy to make such a capable piece of software become overwhelming but the authors achieve a good balance between factual,

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logical information and practical tips with plenty of screen grabs and handy hints. They also cover third party plug ins which are applicable to underwater photography.

Digital Imaging for the Underwater Photographer is for those who want to take their images further and do more with them than just view them on a screen. It is comprehensive, well illustrated and easy to follow. It costs \$39.95 which is par for the course and is a small price to pay for improving your shots.

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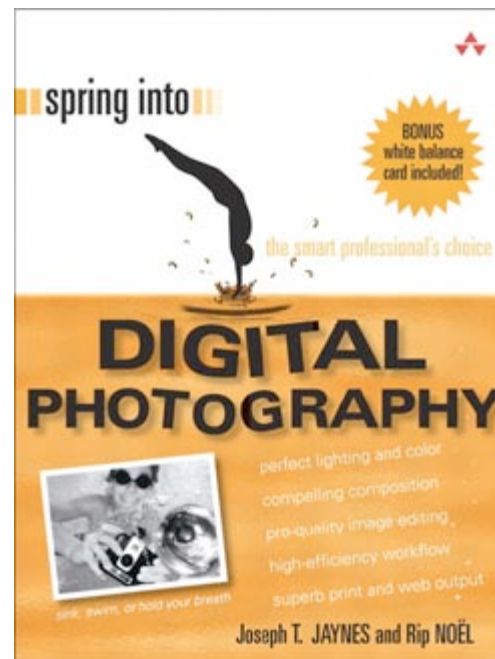
Peter Rowlands

Spring Into Digital Photography

Joseph T. Jaynes & Rip Noël

The instant feedback and the cheap running costs of digital cameras have transformed many from happy snappers into keen and accomplished photographers. This book is aimed squarely at these new enthusiasts.

The main strength of *Spring Into Digital Photography* is the holistic and realistic approach it takes to photography in 2005. Unlike other books on Photoshop techniques this book begins by teaching the basics of photography: focus, apertures,



shutter speeds, composition and most important of all lighting. The authors argue that capturing the perfect image with your camera is the key to great digital images and the first section of the book is designed to help the reader avoid the “garbage in, garbage out” condition. I couldn’t agree more.

The other three sections of the book deal specifically with the digital issues of understanding and managing colour, optimising images for screen and print, and organising your workflow. Experienced digital photographers will learn little here that they did not already know, but these sections are a real treasure trove of practical solutions for experienced film photographers tackling the transition to digital. This book covers

the whole process from capture to optimisation in Photoshop to output thoroughly.

The book is laid out cleanly and simply with many before and after images that clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the techniques being described. The modular structure means you can read it cover to cover or dive in at almost any point to learn a technique or solve a problem. Obviously this is a land photography book, and the only reference to underwater photography is a double page spread that only really says it is possible. However, photography is photography wherever you do and there isn’t much that isn’t relevant.

Also with a bit of thought there are many techniques described in the book that can be easily adapted underwater with exciting results.

At \$35 USD this 300 page book is perhaps slightly over priced if you are already well versed in digital, but if ones and zeros of digital leave you baffled *Spring Into Digital Photography* is a sound and useful investment.

Alex Mustard

La photo numerique sous-marine - Guide expert

By Isabelle et Amar Guillen



A few months ago, in UWP25, I shared my experience of Isabelle & Amar Guillen's practical guide to underwater photography. I had liked the book a lot, as a 'get to grips with your underwater camera' guide, but thought it might have been lacking a bit of in-depth knowledge.

And guess what, the 'Guide Expert' has now arrived! This book

is full of very valuable information for both experienced underwater photographers and novices who have read the 'Guide Pratique'.

A lot of technical data has been compiled and you will find good advice on how to choose your equipment. Although most readers will probably own their cameras and housings already, it could come-in handy when you consider upgrading your set-up and buying more toys. I particularly liked the chapter dedicated to strobe lighting, where concepts such as Guide Number and strobe angular coverage are explained in detail, although I probably won't remember all the maths.

Other subjects covered include white-balance, the use of filters, dome ports, flat ports, teleconverters, dioptres, etc. Some concepts are not immediately useful, but will add to your general photography knowledge.

But 'La photo numerique sous-marine - Guide Expert' isn't just a mine of technical data. It also describes various shooting techniques that can be used in situations such as wreck diving, tropical environments, low visibility green water, or even moving subjects. The authors go further than just describing how to position your camera to compose a good picture. They also talk about the diver's attitude and explain how the photographer should approach the

subject.

The section dedicated to post-processing is smaller than in the previous manual. In the expert guide, it only covers RAW processing and DNG the new Adobe file format.

All this information was probably available in the myriad of books that have sprung on the anglo-saxon market, but France was somewhat lagging behind when it came to digital underwater photography manuals. This situation has now been rectified with examples of photos taken in Brittany! Like its predecessor, the book is only available in French, which might limit the number of people who could benefit from reading its pages. I am informed that the Guillens might be on the lookout for a publisher for an English version.

JP Trenque

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