

Photography for The Art Of Diving

UwP interviews Alexander Mustard

The Art Of Diving is a new book which is reviewed on page 53.

Since Alex is a regular contributor and friend of UWP he happily agreed to give us a few honest insights into this project.

UwP: Congratulations Alex, your first book *The Art Of Diving* looks fantastic. I am sure many readers have ambitions to do books. How did this project start?

AM: Actually Nick Hanna (the writer) contacted me. He had seen my photos in a selection of winning images from the Antibes Festival and had the idea for a feature, *The Zen Of Diving*, and emailed me to see if I wanted to photograph it. I have always thought it was appropriate that the French Riviera had a hand in bringing us together, as it was there in the 1930s that Cousteau and Hass both first experienced the underwater world.

Anyway, I was in Cayman when I got Nick's email and that afternoon took a few shots while I was out experimenting with filters at Stingray City and emailed them

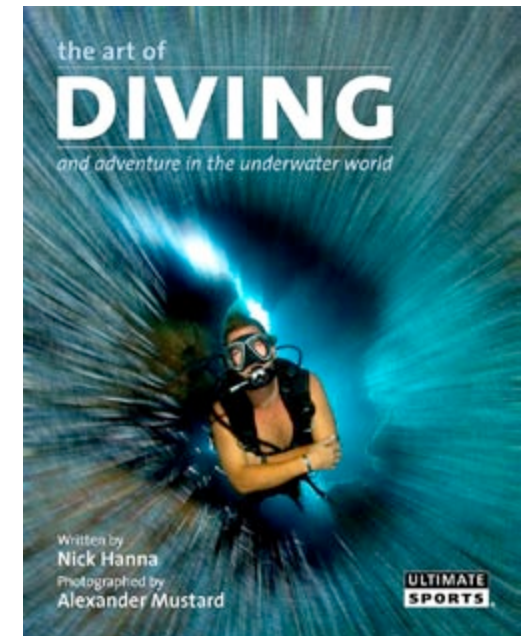
to Nick. Luckily he loved them and one of them is actually the opening spread from Chapter 6. Later that year we went to Dahab in Egypt to shoot the feature, which was published as a cover story in the *Body And Soul* section of *The Times*, and later syndicated in several dive magazines around the world.

UwP: So how did this feature grow into *The Art Of Diving*?

AM: One thing that really came through in Nick's interviews was that there is a consensus amongst divers that "diving offers something more than simply a sporting challenge. It conveys you effortlessly into another dimension, a liquid world... whose magnetic allure draws you back again and again". We certainly felt that there was a book in exploring why divers love to be underwater, reporting on what recreational sport diving is really about these days and the new directions it is taking. Also Nick felt that my images were certainly deserving of publication in their own right. So by bringing these together we would have a strong project.

It took us a while to hone our ideas and our initial submissions based solely around yoga and diving didn't get much interest, but as soon as we broadened our thesis *The Art Of Diving* the project was signed up by the first publisher we approached – Ultimate Sports Publications.

A few people have commented that it is unusual to have a book by two people, but it made perfect sense to me. As a marine biologist I would always collaborate with physical oceanographers to solve complex questions about ecosystems that I couldn't solve on my own. It just made sense to combine our skills. I am very proud to be involved in this project with Nick and the publishers Ultimate Sports.





UwP: So how much input did you have into each others work?

AM: A lot more than you might expect, because away from the book I write and Nick is a successful land photographer – so we knew a lot about each others departments. Nick suggested many ideas for me to try and obviously appears in a number of shots. And I had a lot of input into the content of the book and the quotes we used and the people Nick interviewed. But I should be clear that Nick wrote all the words and I did the colouring in.

UwP: The book isn't really a coffee table book, is it?

AM: No, it isn't. Deliberately so. Although I hope it does end up

on lots of people's coffee tables! From the outset I was clear that I did not want this to be just another underwater photography coffee table book. There are already plenty of great ones out there. I think too many photographers look at existing books, think my pictures are as good as X's or Y's, so I should do a book too. Their motivation is emulation not innovation. And these projects are often self-financed and rarely commercially successful. But to contradict myself I would like to do a purely photographic book in the future, but I would prefer to expand the range of my portfolio first.

So with *AoD* I wanted to add something new and different from what is already on the shelves, which



A walk on the wild side

There are other ways to change your perspective, to make that slight shift that takes you from one zone to another zone. One is to slip out of your fins and give a tug. No! Take an underwater stroll. Why not? It's not normally done, swim, swim, find a nice big sandy patch or a light grey smooth, sand, take off your fins, but then under your arm and give it a go. This is called 'moon-walking' and with good reason, since you become awkward on the seabed just like an astronaut on the moon. You can't dig your legs and outcrop that wonderful, then floating sense of weightlessness. Moon-walking is exact if you're negatively weighted, so take extra. Normal weights may give you just a bit less buoyancy, and there is the risk of an uncontrolled ascent. Most confident divers will get the hang of it after just a tug or two. But try to avoid areas with strong topography or strong currents. If it's dark, correct your dive goals and practice under supervision. Taking off your fins can be a very liberating experience. Conversely putting them back on again afterwards is also

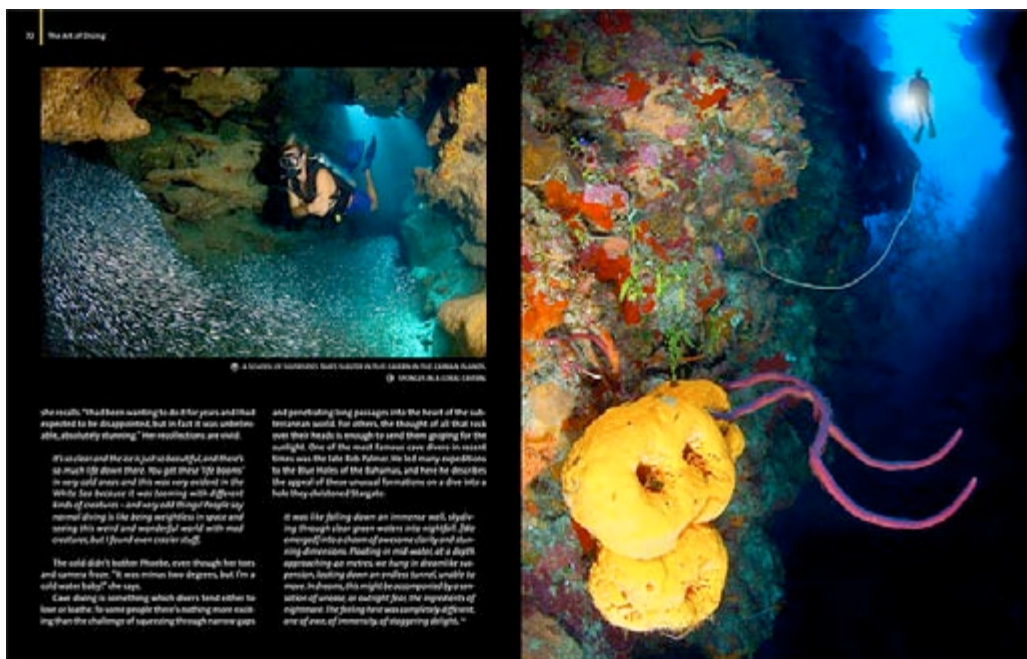
illuminating, giving you a new appreciation of just what wonderfully efficient tools dive fins are for underwater propulsion. Making this switch – from finning to walking and back again – increases your awareness of the way in which you move through water, as well as the power of finning. It's a great exercise in fin diving. One of the immediate advantages of walking on the seabed is that you are able to control your movements more precisely both in terms of how and where you place your feet, and how quickly you can stop. When swimming, there's a motor force behind your movements, which can make it tricky to slow down if you get an interesting creature. By contrast, walking allows you to stop dead in your tracks – and the creature will be less afraid of you, since you are not a swimming, guffing, and diving monster. Just breathe calmly, and watch what's going on right in front of your face. It's a room, you can drop onto one knee, or kneel down altogether. This is something you can do much easily than while wearing fins, you can't raise to survey what's just behind you, you're sitting behind you, you can't see a much wider space with less disturbance.

totally justified its publication. So *The Art Of Diving* doesn't have a hard cover or the most lavishly expensive paper and printing. But it does have a strong thesis, theme and lots to say. It is illustrated by original images, which also have a strong visual theme as a collection. Plus, not going down the lavish coffee table book route, also means it is also very reasonably priced at £20, for a large format, 300 page full colour book - available from all good book stores! Being serious for a moment, I think the book fulfils on several levels, not only is it a nice selection of images, but it really does have something original to say, and has engaging and informative text to indulge both the diver and non-diver.

UwP: As you say the book does have a strong photographic style, was that a conscious decision?

AM: Yes, absolutely. It was something that I spent a lot of time thinking about and discussing with the team, both before shooting it and in the design stage of the book. As an overall look we wanted the underwater world to look bright, colourful and inviting. I hope that the pictures remind divers of great times underwater and make non-divers want to give it a go. The underwater world lends itself to moody, mysterious lighting, but this is something I chose to avoid in the most part as it didn't as they don't fit the main theme of the book.

Because the book is about



photos” in the photographic notes at the end of the book. There is actually one of Nick dusting the sand off the mirror with a paintbrush, which I find very amusing. See it was a true collaboration!

UwP: What was the main camera equipment you used?

AM: We decided not to include in the book any shooting data about the photos, really because it is not first and foremost a photography book. Instead we chose to put this information on the companion website (www.artofdiving.com), along with lots of other goodies. But having compiled this information I can give you all the stats! Nearly all the pictures were taken with Nikon SLRS in Subal housings, primarily Nikon D2X, D100 and D70 cameras, as well as some older film shots taken with the F100. As for lenses, I used 9 different ones, although a massive third of the images were taken with the 10.5mm FE. And if I add together the 10.5 and 16mm they account for half of all the images in the book. Also of interest the 105mm produced twice as many pictures as the 60mm macro lens. I also used the 17-35mm and 28-70mm quite a lot. Lighting was either with strobes (a pair of Subtronic Alphas) or available light with filters (Magic and UR Pro filters for colour images and orange and blue

filters for black and white).

UwP: And finally what's next?

AM: Obviously I have ideas for other books particularly something that expands on my reef behaviour photography and exploits my background as a marine biologist. But I am not in a rush. I am really excited about releasing AoD and seeing how it is received. That said, I have already contributed sets of images to two more forthcoming dive guide titles from Ultimate Sports Publications. Plus, as you know, I have the UWP Digital Photo Workshop in the Red Sea in June. I certainly don't have any ambitions to become an underwater photography teacher, but I really enjoy doing one or two workshops a year as long as they are with the right partners and offer something special. And to be honest I have been really enjoying shooting for smaller editorial projects, and being free to vary my photographic style.

UwP: Thank you, Alex, and good luck with *The Art Of Diving*.

www.amustard.com

www.artofdiving.com