

UwP

Interviews

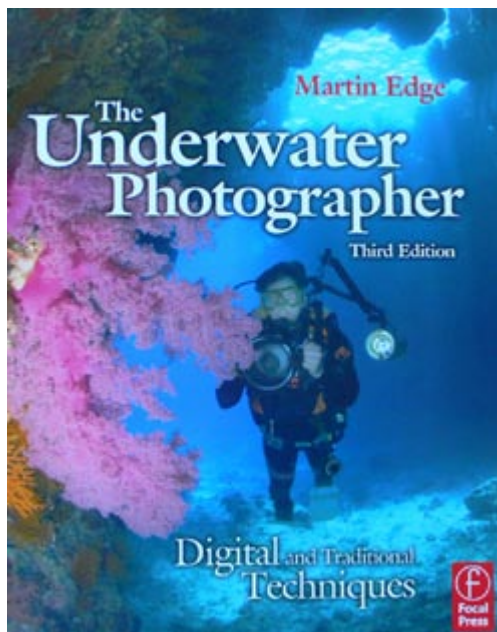
Martin Edge

UwP:

Underwater photographers are familiar with your previous books but how did this 3rd edition come to fruition?

ME

The 2nd edition of 'The Underwater Photographer' published in 1998 had become somewhat dated, particular with the popularity of digital photography over the last four to five years. In 2004 I started planning two new books, both digital. One book was to look at the basics of digital underwater photography, the second was to concentrate on lighting, wide angle, close up and composition. This series was to be called 'The Underwater Photographer Goes Digital'. My publishers of the previous editions - Focal Press, were very enthusiastic but had their own ideas about the title. They wanted to maintain the name of the previous editions and retain a reference to the medium of film. In a management meeting we agreed upon the "Digital and Traditional Techniques" sub title.



They wanted two books with the lighting wide angle, close up theme etc, as a follow up title. I wrestled for some time with the content and structure and came to the conclusion that I wanted to include everything I could in one big book. I persuaded them to increase the budget to accommodate an additional 220 pages whilst maintaining a retail price of £24.99. They agreed and in May 2004 I spent the day at Starbucks coffee shop in Bournemouth where I first put pen to paper.

UwP:

How were you able to combine both books?

ME:

I decided on 5 Parts. The Basics,



Of all the underwater photographs I have taken this particular shot has the most significance. I could describe it as the moment when photographically, the 'lights came on' for me. At that time I was a very happy snappy scuba diver but I knew I

wanted more out of my photography. During an Easter weekend dive trip to Cornwall, UK I came across a jellyfish which had been stranded in a large two metre deep rock pool. I instinctively knew that the circumstances would provide an opportunity

to take a very good picture. I surprised my fellow divers and 'excused myself' from the afternoon boat dive on a well known wreck. They thought I was crazy to miss a dive in favour of snorkelling in a rock pool. That weekend, jellyfish were in abundance. So, why not shoot one in the sea after the dive? My 'gut' feeling indicated that the rock pool was the right decision. The word that continually came to mind was 'Potential' this opportunity had great potential! My buddy and I spent an hour or so in the pool and I came out with this natural light shot taken on a Nikonos III with 15mm lens. It was soon after this picture that I first labelled the features of the TC system. It all fell into place and I never looked back. Shallow water environments have always been a strong feature of my photography since that time



I have seen and shot numerous fireworms, but rarely have I see one situated on such excellent negative space. I took several shots before it crawled into a 'Nike' logo shape. The colours of both subject and background are similar however it is the texture of the fireworm that helps contrasts against the colourful sponge. Nikon D100. 60mm macro lens. Single Inon flash gun. F32 @ 180th second

Digital Revolution, Using SLR's, The TC System and the 5th and final part designed to incorporate all of my ideas from the intended 2nd book. This last part, although I had no label for it at that time, came to be known as 'The Big Four' and to all intents and purposes became a book within a book.

UwP:
The Big Four sounds interesting, tell us more.
 ME

Whilst teaching underwater photography for sixteen years I have become aware that four main topics dominate peoples thirst for knowledge. In no particular order they are lighting (both flash and



Unlike many other fish, if you adopt a frontal angle on puffer you will see that both eyes are visible and pointing forward. The peak of the action is when they revolve their eye sockets and look directly at the camera. This provides strong eye contact and impact. Notice the compositional format and the eye level angle of view. My housing was on the sand. By using a 200mm lens (300mm taking into account the digital conversion) the puffer fish is unaware of my presence and totally at ease. Nikon D100. 200mm lens F11 at 180th second. Two Inon X220's each side of the macro port pointing outwards towards the side of the puffer

ambient light). Composition, Close up - Macro and Wide Angle. More than half the books, 220 pages are dedicated to these four topics. Hence the title 'The Big Four'. I set out to discuss these four topics in as much detail as possible. As a visual aid I drew 'mind maps' on a flip chart and listed as many related themes

as I could think of. As a result - Composition runs to 26 pages, lighting has 36 pages, Close up and macro 60 pages and wide angle, a whopping 65 pages! My aim was to keep it easy to read, thorough but most of all informative. The readers will be the judge of whether I have succeeded or not.



There are many mangrove swamps in Sulawesi. I knew of one in shallow water which produced vivid reflections. Equipped with a 10.5mm fisheye lens I snorkelled into the inlet with just fins and mask. I took forty minutes and composed a number of reflections using tree branches against the backdrop of dark volcanic sand. Nikon D100. 30th second at F 4. Natural light

UwP:

Digital photography has developed so much during the time you were writing. What challenges did this present?

ME

Part 2 'The Digital Revolution' proved to be 'difficult' to say the least. I wrote a chapter about Memory Cards but by the time I had finished that chapter the size capacities of cards had all doubled in size!

Another prime example was my

aim to discuss and illustrate a simple digital work flow idea for a typical uw enthusiast. I used the current edition of Adobe Photoshop CS but as the book was submitted, Photoshop CS2 had been launched. I realised that I could not maintain the speed of digital developments in my writing but I could try and anticipate progress and changes. From the early stages of their release I thought the Nikon D70 and the Canon 20D would be popular DSLR's for the future and I



A tiny light coloured shrimp situated in a small but very accessible hole on white coral sand. I was using a ring flash, which I knew would illuminate everything in the shot. I set F4 on my 105mm lens in order to reduce the D o F to a fraction and create blur (see the chapter on Bokeh). I composed the subject, ensured that the eyes looked sharp in the viewfinder. I set my shutter to an arbitrary 125th second and took three shots. I was hopeful that the eyes would be sharp but I took three shots to make sure, given the minute D o F. It as well that I did, only one shot out of three had the sharpest point of focus on the eyes! The magnification of the lens was at its maximum. Nikon F100. 105mm macro lens in a Subal housing. Edge Sullivan ring flash on TTL. Ektachrome VS 100.

took every opportunity to use them. Several days before the book went to print I had access to the recently released Nikon D200. I borrowed a Nikon D2x, rented studio space for an hour and photographed both cameras side by side. I anticipate that the

Nikon D200 will become one of the most popular DSLR's for underwater photographers for some time to come. I have 'nailed my colours to the mast' with this but only time will tell.

UwP:

There is a chapter in Part 1 regarding the environment and diving techniques when taking pictures. I believe you use this approach when conducting photo workshops abroad. What is it all about?

ME:

I wrote this piece three years ago always intending it to feature strongly from the outset. I am totally committed towards reef and marine preservation but I do feel that underwater photographers come in for more than their fair share of criticism. The codes of conduct and rules generally state 'what not to do' I wanted to re-address the balance and discuss 'what you can do' to get the shot whilst maintaining all due respect to the environment and its creatures. For instance, the ultra close macro shots of seahorses are achieved by getting physically close, but rarely is it discussed how to accomplish this. I use these techniques as a briefing guide at resorts which host our photo workshops. Participants and dive-guides understand where each other are coming from. It's discussed topside and employed underwater. It reinforces photographer/guide relationships and demonstrates the respect which we all have for the environment.

UwP:

There are many images in the book, which equipment did you use?

ME:

I have four years worth of digital photographs taken with a Nikon D100 in a Subal housing. I have also drawn on my stock of film work taken since 2000. Since the book took shape I have taken the opportunity to use different DSLR's in various housings. The Canon 10D and 20D, Nikon D70 and D2x in Subal, Sea & Sea, Ikelite and Nexus housings with a variety of lenses and flashguns. There are so many digital compact cameras and housings on the market at present I found it difficult to keep pace with the sheer number to choose from. For compact illustrations I opted to use the popular Olympus 5050 and 5060 with various flashguns.

UwP:

Do you have a favourite system?

ME:

I only used it on a handful of occasions but I was smitten with the Nikon D2x. I am of the opinion that the Nikon D200 is set to take the uw photo market by storm. I have recently purchased the D200 and I anticipate that this will be my first choice of camera for the foreseeable future. I just hope that it lives up to the performance of its big brother

UwP:

For many years you have promoted a philosophy of picture taking which you call the TC system. This also forms part of the book. How did this transpire?

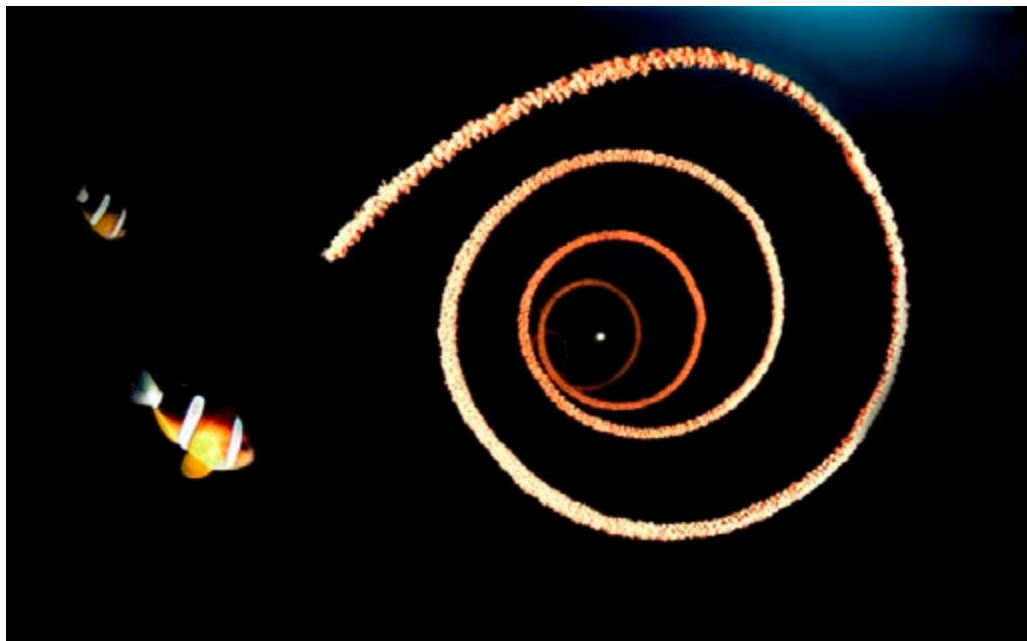
ME:

I wrote the TC system on the back on a car-park ticket in the late 80's. I had given a presentation to BSOUP in London and had been asked quite a profound question from a member of the audience regarding my mindset process when I enter the water for the purpose of taking pictures.

In answering, I used the analogy of driving a motor car and having to make instinctive decisions, continuously whilst behind the wheel. Overtaking, indicating, pulling out, turning left etc. When you learn to drive these decisions are very conscious and thought-out. In time, they become intuitive and you just do it. When I became interested in underwater photography I had to learn all the nuts and bolts. Apertures, shutter speeds. It was a brand new language altogether. Unfortunately, I was not blessed with flare, imagination and creativity. I had to consciously think about things but in time my mindset became quick and natural, like when one drives a car. I began to achieve underwater images



Taken in the southern Red Sea with a Nikon D100, I composed the branching soft coral with the sun burst directly behind it to avoid it causing gross over exposure. I chose the colour of blue water by selecting a frame which looked most natural in my LCD review. With those camera settings I went to work. Using twin Inon flash guns with manual power settings and diffusers, I maintained the same composition but adjusted my flash angles to give an even spread of light. A flash both above and below my dome port close to the housing but pointing both above and below the coral branch respectively



I had been searching the reefs around Manado, Indonesia all week for whip corals with a perfect spiral. I took a snap shot with my digital SLR and showed Sylvia who was happy to model for me. Instinctively she took up a position at the rear of the spiral and pointed a Kowalski dive light towards the camera. I was pleased but very surprised when I viewed the LCD screen to see that two clown fish had swam into a prefect position to balance the entire composition. Complete luck!

Nikon D70. 10.5 mm fisheye lens in Subal housing. F16 at 125th second. Two Inon Z220 flash guns placed very close to the dome port just behind the two side shade constructions. The foreground is no more than 8cm in front of the dome

which pleased me and I became aware that instead of shooting away blind and snappy, I was giving thought to topics such as 'where to place my flash guns'? Do I choose a portrait or landscape composition? When to press the shutter to achieve the 'peak of the action'?

I used to suffer from the

syndrome which I know plagues numerous underwater photographers. Brain malfunction! That inability to remember anything about photography once I was underwater. I had all these ideas of what I would do with this subject or that subject. But once my head had sunk below the surface. Pow! All my knowledge and



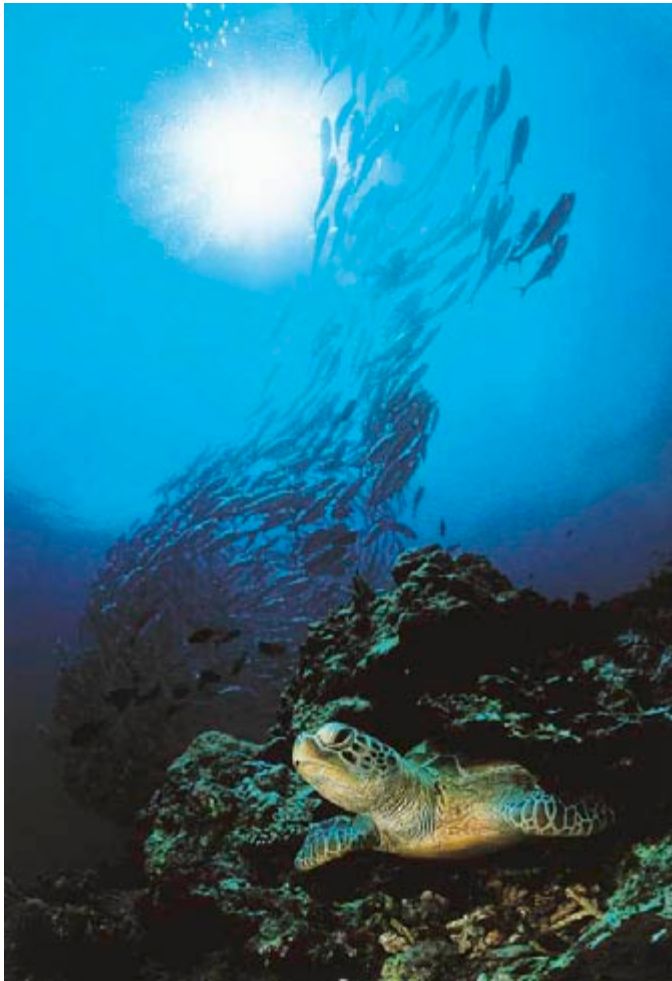
This wreck of a Russian cargo boat at Rocky Island in the Red Sea is ideal for photography. We entered the water whilst divers from another boat were beginning their 'deco stop' on the shot line. I took this opportunity to select a strong composition and a series of natural light 'Polaroid's' gave me feedback on the best exposures so as to bring out detail of the wreck. The divers left the water; I took a series of shots with and without a model. Compositionally, I choose a landscape format with a diagonal orientation of the stern leading the eye left to right through the frame. Sylvia my model swam at various angles over the wreck. I shot 'cloudy' WB and adjusted it in the Raw converter with the white balance sampler tool.

Nikon D100. 10.5mm fisheye lens. F8 at 90th second

ideas had vaporised into thin air. I figured out that I was so preoccupied with the dive or loosing my buddy or flooding my camera that I could think of little else. So I worked on reducing my preoccupations and increasing my concentration. As a result of this question from the audience I

effectively labelled how I approached my photography and when I began to write 'how to' articles and teach I used this method as a way of communicating how it was done.

I wrote an article and called it 'The TC System'. Meaning TC - Think and Consider. Just a few simple



The potential of an opportunity is very subjective. For instance – over the years I have shot numerous images of turtles and schooling fish which are both in abundance on Sipadan Island. I no longer have the inclination to shoot turtles with the same enthusiasm that others may. During my last trip, whenever we found the large schools of either jacks or barracuda, I began to check the reef immediately below them for subjects which I could include in the foreground whilst the schooling fish would occupy the negative space. The image below is one such encounter. I

found the schools first and took advantage of a sleeping turtle which I knew the school would swim over. I only managed to take two shots before the turtle swam away. Nikon F90x 16mm fisheye lens, two Sea & Sea flash guns set to TTL

things before you press the shutter. It stuck from thereon and if I look back now I realise it was the start of my vocation towards showing others how to take underwater photographs.

UwP:

Which other photographers have influenced you the most?

ME:

The teaching gurus who were huge in the 1980's, Jim and Cathy Church. Howard Halls first book 'Successful Underwater Photography' was very influential.

Like many others I was entranced by David Doubilet's wide angles and Christopher Newberts close ups and abstracts. I studied their individual styles and I know I have been influenced by them in my own picture making. In the early 1980's, BSOUP was an exciting place to be and I was inspired by the work of Peter Scoones, Kevin Cullimore and others. Not just by what they produced but their dedication, patience and persistence in the water plus their eye for light and composition. Light and the effects of underwater light have always influenced my own work and the kind of images I enjoy taking the most.

UwP:

What is your next project?

ME:

My first priority is to continue to promote the

book. I want to ensure that it reaches underwater photographers wherever they may live. I am pushing for translations; I would really like to see it in a Japanese version, the interest in underwater photography in Asia and the Far East is vast. On the UK front - I will continue offering one 2 one underwater photography tuition and running workshops to sunny climates. I may even enter a competition or two, though competitions have rarely featured in my list of 'things to do'.

UwP:

And finally, what advice would you give to an enthusiastic photographer who is intent on improving their ability?

ME:

My obvious answer is to buy the book, but on a more serious note the best way to hasten the learning curve is to join a workshop or an organised trip of other underwater photographers. It's not all about learning from a teacher. It's being in the water with fellow enthusiasts and watching others go about their business. How they dive to take pictures, how and why they choose certain subjects, why they discarded other subjects. On organised trips you get to repeat successful photo sites, you go diving for wide angles when the sun is in the right place. You can work a school of fish in the morning and shoot the same school after lunch. You compare your results with others which often encourages other ideas and ways of doing an opportunity differently. One of the great advantages on these types of trips is that you don't have to follow the dive guide unless you choose to!

Thanks, Martin, and every success with the book

What links these sites?



London's premier watersports centre

11 - 14 Northumberland Avenue,

London, WC2N 5AQ

Tel: 020 7930 5050 Fax: 020 7930 3032

email: info@oceanleisure.co.uk

www.oceanleisure.co.uk