

Digital Techniques Workshop

with Alexander Mustard

The Northern Red Sea it at its best in late June – the strong winds of winter have died away, the water has warmed to a pleasant 26°C and large schools of fish gather at prominent divesites, such as Ras Mohammed in spawning aggregations. I was first introduced to the wonders of the Red Sea in this season in 1998 on Peter Scoones's charter to film for the coral reefs episode of the BBC series Blue Planet. And ever since I returned each year at exactly the same time.

This year I thought it was finally time to share these wonders with a wider audience and decided to run my Digital Techniques Workshop with the help of Peter Rowlands of UwP Magazine and in collaboration with Tony Backhurst Scuba. The Red Sea in summer has always been a popular time for Red Sea workshops and if I was to join the party I only wanted to get involved if we could offer something a bit original.

For starters we chose the very spacious and luxurious liveaboard MY Typhoon (regularly voted one of the top boats in the Red Sea). It has loads of space for camera gear, charging and laptops, and plenty of space on the dive deck for kitting up without falling over cameras!

Photographically I always wanted to encourage the group to experiment and take the pictures



Everyone had their favourite school, but mine are always the Bohar Snappers – each of these fish is 70cm long. Photo by Paul Carre. Nikon D200 + 15mm. Ikelite housing. Magic filter. 1/100th @ F5.

they wanted, rather than the shots I did. So rather than teaching underwater photography as simple formulas for macro shots, close focus wide angle etc, I started more from the first principles of lighting, story telling, composition and filter



The week started with wreck photography. We made 3 dives on the Giannis D, timing each to get the sunlight illuminating the best features of the wreck. Here Mike Brodbelt lines up on the classic stern shot. Photo by Alex Mustard. Nikon D2X + 10.5mm + Wratten 22 contrast filter. 1/40th @ F4.5

techniques. The intention was to provide the knowledge so that the gang could figure out how to take their images, rather than just plug in camera settings I told them. And of course be able to take



(Above) The schools were out in force at Ras Mohammed. Here a ball of Bohar Snappers gather at Shark Reef. Panorama photo by Peter Rowlands. Two images stitched together. Nikon D70 + 16mm. Subal housing. Magic Filter. 1/90th @ F2.8.

(Right) Sunlight streams in the portholes of the Giannis D. Photo by Ralph Mortimore. Nikon D100 + 10.5mm. Sea & Sea housing. 1/8th @ F4.5.

great pictures on their next trip when I won't be there! The downside of this approach is that it requires a bit more thinking time underwater, so we devised a diving schedule that got us the maximum amount of distraction-free time underwater.

Diving-wise we were totally focused on photography. There was no group diving and everyone was encouraged to find their own space underwater. We didn't try and see all the sites and instead concentrated on repeat diving the handful of places we knew would be most productive. We did two days on the wrecks, two days on reefs and two days concentrating on the schools at Ras Mohammed. With Peter and I on board many people got stuck into filter photography and a few compact users even tried our new secret Auto-Magic Filter (it will be launched in the next issue of UWP). Red Sea diving is ideal for filter photography with clear

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We even managed to squeeze in a snorkel with dolphins between dives at Abu Nuhas. Photo by Martin Foulkes. Nikon D200 + 16mm. Sea & Sea housing. Magic Filter. 1/90th @ F6.3.



Dusk dives were a big part of the week. Lionfish are particularly cooperative at this time of day and can be a lot of fun to shoot with wide lenses. Photo by Anders Petersen. Olympus 7070. Anthis wide angle lens. Strobe. 1/100th @ F5.6.



The group produced some stunning images. This picture was taken by our youngest diver, 15 year old Daisy Foulkes on only her second dive with a camera. Olympus C40, Inon WAL. 1/60th @ F5.



There were also two schools of barracuda hanging out helpfully in the shallows. This smaller school, being watched by Samantha Bean, was only at 8m. Photo by Alex Mustard. Nikon D2X + 12-24mm. Magic Filter. 1/50th @ F5.6.



Throughout the week I tried to encourage everyone to experiment and try new ideas. Tony Stannard really surprised me with this picture of one of the crew tight rope walking at dusk. Nikon Coolpix 7900. Sea and Sea wide angle lens. 1/120th @ F2.8.

water and sun on every dive. General consensus was that filters were by far the best technique for both the wrecks and the schooling fish.

Because we were repeat diving so many of the sites dive briefings were kept to a minimum and this meant that I was able to give my 8 photography talks in short 30 minute focused lectures just before



I (Alex) do a spot of modelling above the bow of the Carnatic. Morning dives here ensure that the sunlight is illuminating the distinctive bow of this wreck. Photo by Timo Ahomaki. Nikon D70s + 15mm + Magic Filter. Hugyfot housing. 1/30th @ F5.6.

people jumped in the water. This also meant that evenings, the traditional lecture time on photo-weeks, were entirely free for reviewing images and providing personal feedback.



The large plasma screen in the saloon allowed me to give lectures during the day, so tips were fresh in peoples' minds when the jumped in the water. This also left evening free for reviewing images.

We also decided not to have any sort of competition during the week, to encourage everyone to share ideas and help each other. I have always felt that one of the biggest benefits of trips like this is the osmotic learning that comes from seeing how other photographers work both below and above the waves.

I have to say that we were particularly lucky too. Nearly all the divesites we dived were really at their best when we dropped in. Only The Alternatives disappointed with poor viz. At the wrecks on Abu Nuhas the weather was so glassy calm that we were even able to shoot the bow of the Krisoula K without any swell. At Ras Mohammed the schools were out in force with Bohar Snappers, Batfish, Barracuda and Unicornfish all there in

impressive numbers. And at Small Crack I have never seen so much fish spawning on one dusk dive. I do a lot of dives to photograph fish spawning and I have never seen as many fish (1000s) spawning with this intensity. Wow. Dusk diving was a big part of the week as this is when lionfish come out and pose, and it is also the ideal time for shooting moody sunbursts. We even had (fleeting) encounters with sharks and dolphins during the week.

Anyway, all that remains is to thank the gang for making it such a great week. The group and their cameras were: Alex Mustard (D2X Subal), Peter Rowlands (D70 Subal, Panasonic FX01), Timo Ahomaki (D70 Hugyfot), Andy Barker (D70 Seacam), Samantha Bean (D70, Sea & Sea), Mike Brodbelt (5D Subal), Jarret Brown (D70



The gang on the upper deck of MY Typhoon.

Subal), Paul Carre (D200 Ikelite), Martin and Linda Foulkes (D200 Sea & Sea), Daisy Foulkes (Olympus C40), Anthony Holley (F90X Subal, Ricoh G3), John Leslie (DX 8000g Sea & Sea), Ralph Mortimor (D100 Sea & Sea), Jane Ossman (D100 Sea & Sea), Anders Petersen (Olympus 7070), Tim Priest (D70 Nexus), Peter Regan (D60 Subal), Tony Stannard (Coolpix 7900) and Martha Tressler (D100, Subal). And finally many thanks to the crew and dive guides (David and Tracy Allen) on MY Typhoon for their large part in making it such a fun and successful week.

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