

Strobe Positioning

The Rabbit Ears Technique

by Julian Cohen

Strobe positioning is one area of underwater photography that is rarely touched upon in manuals or tutorials. To me it is just as important as the camera and strobe power settings. The direction of the light allows the emotional content to be expressed in the photo. As photographers we are capturing the light, and as underwater photographers we are often creating that light, so knowledge of how to place your strobes is essential. For this article I would like to illustrate one technique that I use quite regularly that works in difficult lighting situations. I can't claim the technique as mine, it was taught to me by Alex Mustard on a Red Sea workshop last year, but I will claim the name: even Alex calls it the "rabbit ears".

The technique is best used in dark areas where you want to cast light over a distance, deep into the frame, and yet stop the strobes from burning out the foreground. It is especially useful on the inside of wrecks, such as the Thistlegorm in the Red Sea.

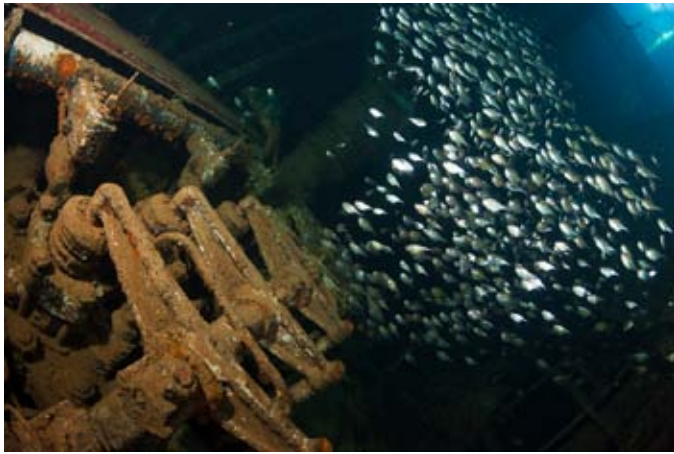
I took the shot on the right last year just after Alex had shown us the technique. The strobes are high above the camera and facing slightly downwards (hence the name rabbit ears) which allows a pool of light to fall onto the bonnet and the cab of the truck.

It also stops the flash from blasting onto the windows and reflecting back into the image. I like to place some blue water in these types of shots to create some depth and to direct the viewer's eyes around the scene. Apart from the presence of the fish, it also helps to define it as an underwater photo.

The photo on the bottom right demonstrates the strobe positioning for the "rabbit ears". Quite simple really, just raise the strobe arms vertically and aim the strobes forwards and if needed, slightly downwards.

(Top Right) 1/5th sec at f13 Nikon 16 mm ISO 250 NIKON D3 Spot-Meter Mode Subal Housing 2x INON z240
(Right) 1/125 sec at f13 with the same rig.





*1/10th sec at f9 Nikon 16 mm ISO 1250 NIKON D3
Spot-Meter Mode Subal Housing 2x INON z240*

The above shot is on the wreck of the Giannis D in the Red Sea. Inside the engine room at about 18m there is no natural light when you look straight in front of you. In fact there is no light at all!

There is some ambient light from above, so I have included this in the shot. Strobes up above the camera in the “rabbit ears” technique but this time I have angled one along the engine block and aimed the other one at the school of glass fish. I adjusted the strobe power constantly referring to the LCD screen on the back of the camera to make sure that I had the look I was after.

The top centre photo is inside the wreck of the Thistlegorm in the Red Sea. There are the remnants of trucks carrying motorbikes, guns and ammo, and supplies like this boot. This time I have put a snoot on the left strobe and aimed it down to cast a small pool of light onto the boot, that sits there on the broken back of the truck, as it has done for over fifty years. The right strobe is dialed down to its lowest level in order to provide a kiss of fill light so



*1/5th sec at f13 Nikon 16 mm ISO 640 NIKON D3
Spot-Meter Mode Subal Housing 2x INON z240*

that the whole scene is not too black. I believe that these types of photos, in a chiaroscuro style, suffer if the dark areas are totally black.

The principle behind chiaroscuro is to leave the light parts as they are so that they can be seen clearly and to darken the “obscure” parts (defined as the parts the photographer deems less important) so that they will not distract the viewer. Since we are creating the light in these situations, we can effectively reverse this principle, and leave the darks as they are, and lighten the parts we want to highlight.

There is another area where the “rabbit ears” technique works beautifully and that is when you are shooting a subject on the sea floor, and want to cast a soft pool of light outwards and downwards.

The photo of a stingray (top right) shows how the “rabbit ears” technique has allowed me to catch the ray with the edge light of the strobes which imparts a soft even light that really makes the blue spots glow and doesn’t burn out the underneath of



*1/200 sec at f8 Nikon 16 mm ISO 200 NIKON D3
Spot-Meter Mode Subal Housing 2x INON z240*

the ray around the mouth.

I hope you can find a use for this technique and please write to me to let me know if you find any other areas or situations that you have used it in with success.

Julian Cohen
cohen.julian@gmail.com





Seahorn Snoot Award Winning Images!
by
Kay Burn Lim
1st Prize in Portfolio Category
Timor Leste Dive Photo Contest 2010



Scuba Symphony- Your Ultimate One-Stop
Diving and Underwater Imaging Solution!
S103A Centrepont Bandar Utama
47800 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: +603077107197 Fax: +603-77251197
Email: scubasympphony@gmail.com
Online Shop: www.scubasympphony.com

Seahorn Snoot are now available from:

Reefphoto & Video, USA: <http://www.reefphoto.com>

Fotosub, Italy: <http://www.fotosub-shop.it>

Onderwaterhuis, Netherlands: <http://www.onderwaterhuis.nl>

Scuba Supply Sweden: <http://www.scubasupply.se>

Digital Dive, Germany: <http://www.digital-dive.de>

Underwater Visions, UK: <http://www.uwvisions.com>

Cameras Underwater, UK: <http://www.camerasunderwater.co.uk>

Splash Underwater Imaging, Philippines: <http://www.splashuwimaging.com>

Oceanic Focus, Singapore: <http://www.oceanicfocus.com>

Diver Channel, China: <http://www.diverchannel.com>