

Nauticam NA-NEX5 housing for Sony NEX-5

by Phil Rudin

Nauticam officially released their NA-NEX5 underwater housing during the September 2010 Photokina exhibition in Colon Germany creating quite a buzz in the underwater photo community. The NA-NEX5 housing is made for the Sony NEX-5 camera and with the optional Nikonos U/W Nikkor lens adapter can be used with the classic Nikonos manual focus lenses.

Sony NEX-5 camera

The Sony NEX-5 is built around the 23.4 X 15.6 mm APS HD CMOS sensor used in many of today's high-end DSLR cameras that are often twice the price, size and weight of the Sony. The 14.2 megapixel camera has a suggested MSRP of \$699.99/€649.95 with the 18-55 mm f/3.5-5.6 "kit" zoom or the 16 mm f/2.8 pancake lens. The NEX-5 has a magnesium alloy body, records full HD Video at 1080/60i with on demand auto focus. Sony has also introduced the VCL-ECF1 Fisheye equivalent adapter at (\$149.99) which attaches to the bayonet mount on the 16 mm F2.8 (a 24 mm equivalent lens) and the VCL-ECU1 which is a



20 mm equivalent wide angle adapter at (\$114.95). The monitor is a three inch, 920,000 pixel LCD screen which can tilt 80 degrees up and 45 degrees down to improve the viewing position. The APS-C sensor is about the same size as the one used in the new Nikon D-7000 and has about nine times the surface area of the sensors used in consumer cameras like the Canon G-11. The larger sensor produces greatly improved image quality over current compacts and has image quality equal to many current DSLR's.

Nauticam NA-NEX5 housing

The NA-NEX5 is Nauticam's first housing for a non-DSLR, EVIL (Electronic Viewfinder Interchangeable Lens) type of camera and a brilliant fusion of



advanced engineering, innovation, style, ergonomics and compactness. Nauticam's patented port locking system has been designed into the left side of the housing complete with Nikonos V style push and twist release. The locking clasp for this clam-shell style housing is a push button rotary buckle incorporated into the ergonomic right-hand grip complete with mounting points for an adjustable wrist support strap. When using the right-hand grip all of the controls are within easy reach of the thumb and index finger. The left-hand can easily control the zoom/focus dial and the useful up/down control for the camera's pop-up flash. The top of the housing has a cold shoe and standard mounting ball for modeling lights, video lights and other accessories. The rear of the housing has an anti-reflective, scratch resistant LCD



window, controls for all push buttons, a command dial, a rocker switch for image review and one touch video, plus a moisture alarm display window and the pop-up flash up/down control. Inside the housing is a camera tray which mounts via tripod screw to the bottom of the NEX-5 and slides neatly into a simple locking device at the base of the housing. The rear door of the housing leaves room for the large LCD display to be angled fifteen degrees up. During my field tests I found this angled LCD viewing position was much more comfortable compared to a flat screen for shooting in both portrait and landscape. The moisture alarm is located under the camera tray and is powered by a small replaceable battery. This attention to small details is what has attracted so many buyers to the Nauticam brand since its introduction at the



Sony 18-55 zoom at 33 mm, ISO-200, 1/125th, f/13, twin Inon Z-240 strobes.

November 2009 DEMA show in Orlando, Florida. Nauticam uses state of the art manufacturing equipment, machining housings from a solid block of aircraft grade aluminum. The housings then go through a hard anodizing process which makes them impervious to salt water. Marine grade stainless steel is used for all fasteners and the end result is a housing with a depth rating of 100 meters (328ft.) well beyond the limits of recreational divers. My housing was equipped with the optional dual grip tray which I used for much of my field testing. The tray handles are laterally adjustable to allow greatest comfort with or without gloves of all sizes and are threaded to attach strobe arm mounting balls. Two optical flash connectors for the Inon S-TTL and Sea & Sea DS-TTL strobes are located above the port opening and provided reliable automatic flash exposure using S-TTL with my Inon Z-240 and S-2000 strobes.



Nauticam ports and lenses

Nauticam has introduced two optional ports with optically coated glass and an acrylic dome port. The flat port and zoom gear for the 18-55 mm f/3.5-5.6 zoom which has an angle of view of 76 to 29 degrees and focuses to 0.25m (9.8"). A flat port for the 16 mm f/2.8 pancake which has an 83 degree angle of view, focuses to 0.24m (9.4") and is quite small. The third optional port is the 110 mm (4.33") optical grade acrylic dome for the 16 mm pancake lens used with fisheye attachment lens. All three optics provided quick auto focus performance and excellent image quality for the entry level cost of the lenses. The ports locked securely into place and were extremely easy to change. The lens release on the camera body can be accessed from the front with the port removed to allow lens changes without removing the camera from the housing. A 67 mm adapter is also offered to mount items like the Inon UCL165M67 close-up lens.



Sony 16 mm with Fisheye conversion lens, ISO-200, 1/160th, f/7.1, twin Inon Z-240 strobes.

Nikonos lenses

A unique feature of the EVIL cameras is that just about any lens can be mounted to an adapter and placed on front of the camera. This feature made it possible for Nauticam to design an optional lens adapter which mounts to the patented port



locking system and sits over the camera's sensor allowing the entire line of bayonet mounted Nikonos manual lenses to be used with the Sony NEX-5. The Nikonos lenses were the gold standard for many amateur and professional underwater film photographers for decades offering superb optical performance for both macro and wide angle. I located an old set of Nikonos extension tubes I had stuck in a drawer years ago and stacked two tubes together with the Nikonos 35 mm lens for a test of the system's macro ability. I then headed to the Blue Heron Boulevard Bridge in Palm Beach County, Florida for a nostalgic flash-back to 1968 when I bought my first Nikonos II with a 28 mm lens. By the end of the dive I had reacquainted myself with all the ups and downs of shooting with extension tubes. Like most manual lenses I ended up with more softly focused images than I would have gotten with an auto focus lens but the well focus images were razor sharp and a testament to the quality of the Nikonos lenses. The Nauticam housing system is so small it reminded me of shooting with a Nikonos RS but without all the extra weight of the Nikonos RS system.



Nikonos 35 mm+ extension tubes, ISO-200, 1/160th, f/22, twin Inon Z-240 strobes.

Conclusion

Without question the Nauticam NA-NEX-5 housing is a professional quality system with many advanced features. The Nikonos lenses adapter is more than just a test of Nauticam's design ability and should prove very useful. We should keep in mind that the Nikonos lenses were designed for the 35 mm film format and as such will have a crop factor with the NEX-5's APS-C size sensor. The outstanding Nikonos 15 mm (94 degree AOV) will have an angle of view equal to about 72 degrees. If you are shooting subjects like sharks that fit into that AOV range of the lens results will be outstanding. The Nikonos 28 mm lens and 2:1 extension tube will produce a 3:1 image without need for tele converters, extension tubes or magnifiers and should surpass any like DSLR macro system for image quality. Sony's E-mount 18-55 mm and 16 mm lenses along with the 20

mm and fisheye adapters provide a wide range of shooting possibilities in a very compact and high quality system. With the acrylic dome port and fisheye adapter I was able to focus within inches of my subject allowing great opportunities for close-focus wide angle. Because of the unique design of the EVIL cameras the possibility for additional lens and dome port combinations is almost endless. The Nauticam NA-NEX-5 housing has an MSRP of \$1550.00/€1140.00 which well exceeds the cost of the Olympus polycarbonate PT-EP01 housing system I reported on in the last issue of Underwater Photography Magazine. I believe that the Nauticam NA-NEX-5 is well worth the price and more than competitive with the other all aluminum housings built for the Panasonic and Olympus M4/3 cameras.

Phil Rudin

Phil Rudin is Senior Photographer for Dive Chronicles Magazine/US Dive Shows and a full-time freelance writer/photographer located in West Palm Beach, Florida, USA. He will be teaching (two) three hour underwater photography workshops during the Florida Dive Show, December 3&4, 2010 in West Palm Beach, Florida. Phil will also be teaching during the one week Hasselblad Underwater Photography Workshop at Cobalt Coast Dive Resort in Grand Cayman January 22-29, 2011.

philrudin@me.com

or

tropicalone@bellsouth.net



50 years ago underwater photography was something of a dark art practised by a handful of pioneers. Fast forward to today and thankfully things have changed. Now you can capture your adventures in vivid colour with a compact and easy to use outfit that won't cost you a kidney. Where can I get such a wonder? Cameras Underwater of course, we'll even show you how to get the best out of it.

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Thank you: The Underwater Studio and Steve Warren