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Enhanced viewfinders for EVF cameras

by Phil Rudin

In the past three years the mirrorless camera market has exploded world wide with what seems like a new model offering coming almost monthly these days. Mirrorless cameras now come with excellent sensors that produce image quality every bit as good as the top APS-C DSLR cameras. Auto focus speeds have improved greatly assisted by new high quality lens offerings and dramatically better LCD screens. With the introduction of the Sony NEX-7 and Olympus E-M5 cameras a new level of quality has also been reached with the newly designed Electronic Viewfinders, (EVF_s). When first introduced the mirrorless cameras were looked upon by most as a way for consumer compact (P&S) users to step up from entry level cameras to the more versatile interchangeable lens verity. Still most users were dealing with finding sharp focus on the LCD screen and longer shutter lag times than current DSLR model cameras. These issues are no longer a concern for the recent crop of mirrorless cameras. The old LCD_s have been replaced with much

improved units and shutter lag is no longer the issue that it once was.

Now with the over 2 million dot EVF finders, focusing through the viewfinder is as easy as with any DSLR camera. EVF cameras also have some real advantages over optical viewfinders especially in sub 35mm sensor cameras. With optical viewfinders the size of the image in the finder is reduced as sensor size is reduced. This is not the case with the EVF_s so when you look into the viewfinder on the NEX-7 or E-M5 the image that appears is much larger than it would be had the same sensor size been used with an optical viewfinder. With the NEX-7 the images size is slightly less than that of a full frame 35mm camera and it covers a full 100% of the image being recorded. In addition the image in the viewfinder changes as the cameras settings are changed. So if you over lay a full range of camera information it will show in the viewfinder. If you change F/stop or ISO you will see the change from lighter to darker happen in real time. You can add grids (think rule of thirds) and they will appear in the



Jawfish with eggs, NEX-7, Nauticam NA-NEX-7 housing, 30mm macro, Athena ring-flash, ISO 100, F/10, 1/160th

viewfinder. If you apply any of the “ART” filters like black and white or high saturation the effect will be seen in the viewfinder before you snap the shutter so you will know what the finished image will look before it is taken. If you apply in-camera stabilization you will see the effect

in the viewfinder. The down side to all of this technology of course is a greater drain on the camera battery. Using the EVF full time on the NEX-7 I have shot over 275 images without killing the battery while shooting macro. The viewfinder also shuts down to conserve battery life when



Nauticam NA-NEX-7 housing with the 45 Degree finder, note that it blocks part of the view to the LCD screen

not used for several minutes while looking for the next great subject to photograph. This is a minor issue to me as it turns back on almost as soon as you hit a button. If I were shooting fast moving subject I would switch to the LCD screen to pan with the subject. To complement the EVF housings are now being designed which make use of the outstanding enhanced viewfinder from Nauticam. The Nauticam NEX-7 housing has a replacement LCD window which will accept both the Nauticam 45 degree and 180 degree viewfinders. This is a user installable LCD window that can be changed in the field to replace the pickup finder window which comes with the housing. The 45 and 180 degree finders can then be installed into the new window in under thirty seconds. As always I strongly recommend that a dunk test be done after installing the LCD window and viewfinder. This should be done BEFORE the camera is placed into the housing to check for any leaks from improper installation. The Nauticam enhanced 45 and 180 degree finders



Mantis Shrimp, NEX-7, Nauticam NA-NEX-7 housing, 30mm macro, Athena ring-flash, ISO 100, F/22, 1/160th

provide a clear and bright undistorted 1:1 image of the camera's viewfinder. The advantage of this viewfinder is to assist in precise accurate focusing and allow for better image composition. To assist with personal vision issues the Nauticam finders sport an external knob for diopter adjustment inside the viewfinder. This allows long-sighted and short sighted photographers to make adjustments while underwater. I prefer the 45 degree finder for macro and the 180 degree finder for faster moving wider angle subjects. The 45 degree finder allows the diver to stay above the camera while shooting near the bottom or near fragile subjects. In this position above the subject the photographer is less likely to cause damage to the subject and its surroundings.

These enhanced finders are the same ones being used world wide on many makes of DSLR housings. When mounted on the NEX-7 housing the viewfinder appears very large compared to when mounted on the mostly larger DSLR housings. Even with the enhanced finder the total size of the



Sharptail eel, NEX-7, Nauticam NA-NEX-7 housing, 30mm macro, Athena ring-flash, ISO 100, F/11, 1/160th

housing package is quite small compared to most DSLR housing. This is one of the many reasons that the mirrorless cameras are well suited to U/W photography. I found the NEX-7 OLED viewfinder and Nauticam 45 degree finder worked very well together. I was able to see detail in subjects not possible with the stock pickup finder provided with the housing. I have used the Inon 45 degree finder for years with my DSLR and I found the NEX-7 combination to be better in several areas as a result of both the excellent OLED EVF and the Nauticam viewfinder. With the arrival of the Olympus EM5 I would expect to see more housings coming into the market which will take advantage of these enhancement finders for EVF's. The Nauticam NEX-7 housing lists for around \$1850.00 in the US, the LCD replacement window is \$240.00, 180 degree viewfinder \$1150.00 and the 45 degree viewfinder is \$950.00.