



Large bollards remain after the deck of The S.S. Bohemain has long since crumbled into scale. D200, Subal, 2 Ikelite ds125, f6.3, 1/60, ISO 400

dome ports are nice, they let in more light, but you can also open your aperture more before you start to lose the corners. But the biggest benefit is a stable hand and a lens as wide as you can muster. For the DX shooter, I have found (no surprise here) the Tokina 10-17 is a superb lens for the job. Get up close and use what little light you have to its best possible advantage. I like to shoot available light when possible to capture the vastness of a boiler, or the twisted deck of an old steamer. When you

add some artificial light, however, it is amazing how much color presents itself. When shooting with strobes I find I only need a breath of well-placed flash to spread a small amount of even light on my subject. As I swim along I find my excitement building as my eyes tune into what I am actually looking at.

Christopher Hamilton

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An Eye for Detail

by Mark Webster

A familiar conversation on perhaps a Red Sea live aboard amongst non photographers (some people call these 'normal' divers....) is that they have dived a particular site before and there is nothing new to see there. This of course does not only apply to the Red Sea and some photographers might even react this way if they have visited a site several times before even if it is brimming with life. It could be that you have reached the stage where you have a collection of pictures of the most common and perhaps some of the more unusual species and are wondering what to do next. At this point some may lose interest, some may pursue larger blue water subjects, remote and frigid locations or perhaps deep wrecks all of which might increase the technical or physical challenge and be enough to maintain the attraction of photography.

Aside from the fact that you can always improve on the way you photograph a common species, if your attitude has become jaded in this way you might begin to try and visualise your potential subjects with different approach. This is the point where you may move away from images which simply record or identify your subject towards the artistic development of your images. If you are repeatedly diving in similar locations, one of the best ways to develop this skill is to begin to consider the detail features of your subjects and seek different ways of presenting them.



Sand diver - some subjects like this sand diver only offer a portrait shot by virtue of their behaviour. In this case the dark volcanic sand provides good contrast with the subject. Nikon D200, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f16 1/100.



Frog fish portrait - a classic profile portrait of a frog fish with a striking red colour. By composing the fish against open water it is possible to ensure a black background with a fast shutter speed and small aperture for maximum contrast. Nikon D200, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f22 1/250.

Portraits

Most of us start by photographing the fish that we see during a dive and the initial desire is to bring back a picture that we can easily identify the species from. These identification shots are typically side on views which show the whole fish and perhaps some of the surrounding habitat. What's wrong with that I hear you cry?! Well, absolutely nothing and this style of shot will produce some excellent images, but you will soon find yourself struggling to find different subjects and very often the fish in the picture lacks character and does not communicate with the viewer. The secret of a good fish picture is to create a feeling that the subject is looking at or communicating with the viewer and one of the best ways to achieve this is portrait photography. Just as with land photography this term mostly equates with a head and shoulders shot which is normally taken in the 'portrait' or vertical format, but works equally well in the horizontal or landscape format dependant on the shape of your subject.

The way that you compose and frame a shot like this can make all the difference to success and failure. The classic method is to create a diagonal line in the composition and place the eye towards the centre third of the picture. An upward view can

also be very effective and gives the viewer the feeling of being looked down on by the fish. You can vary the background around the subject from jet black, which may contrast well with the colour of the fish, to a more natural blue or green water colour by balancing the power of your flash with the available natural light. If the fish is in the wrong position for your desired composition simply play with the orientation of your camera until it looks right - however, you must also be aware of your flash position and adjust it to suit the composition. If you have TTL then it normally works well in these compositions as the subject will fill the centre of the frame, if not shooting with manual flash exposure and a swift review will quickly produce the correct settings. However you compose the shot the most important feature of a good portrait is the eye of the fish which must be in perfect focus and looking towards the viewer. Other elements can be a little out of focus and still look OK, but the shot will fail if the eye is soft.

Now that snoots are back in vogue there are a number of variants available commercially to replace all the plumbing parts and plastic bowls we used to use. The new innovation of fibre optic snoots also offers a chance to direct the light source more accurately and produce a different mood and feel to a portrait. You will



Bearded scorpion fish - you can vary your portrait presentation by simply using a different lighting technique. In this case a fibre snoot has been used to project a narrow beam of light onto the subject leaving the surrounding negative space black. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash gun and fibre snoot, ISO 200 f11 1/125.

need to find some patient subjects for this technique however and the camouflage and stealth hunters are a good place to start. Aiming the fibre optic snoots is difficult and I find that attaching a small Pelican torch to the end of the snoot helps, but some



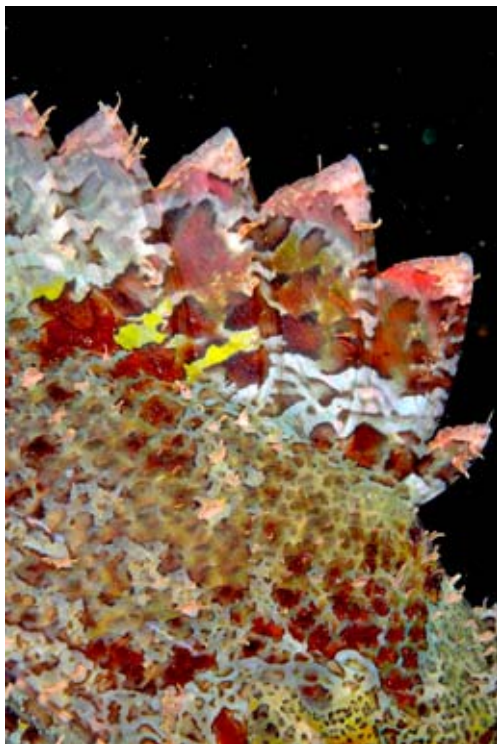
Tompot blenny - this image demonstrates how you can subtly vary the portrait presentation of your subject by using a different lens combination. Using a fish eye zoom with a teleconverter will produce a forced perspective image with the impression that the fish is moving out of the image towards the viewer. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/125.

species are less tolerant of this light source approaching them.

Most portraits can be taken with a macro lens dependant on the size of your subject. A short range zoom like the Sigma 17-70mm will also work well at the longer focal length. Some species will allow a slow close approach, whilst others will not endure it and only trial and error will reveal those that will.

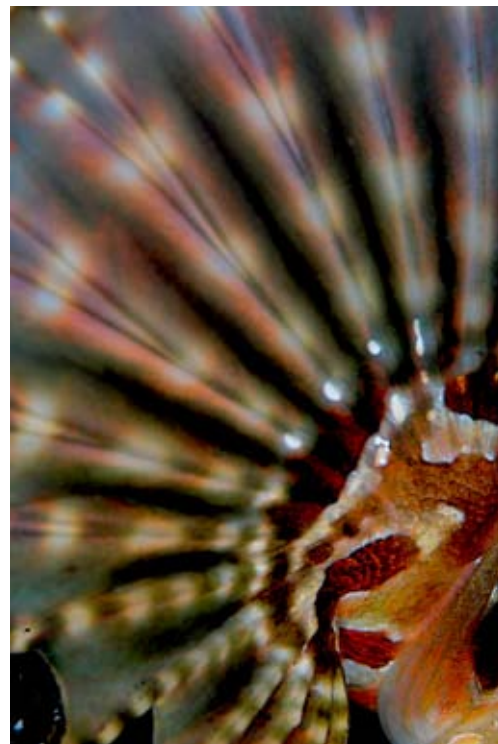
Texture and Patterns in Fish

An alternative to the fish portrait with a macro lens is to move in closer still to capture details or particular features of your subject. Many fish, particularly in the tropics, have dazzling colours, textures and patterns which look wonderful and sometimes surreal in close up. To capture this sort of image you have to get really close to your subject and to begin with it is perhaps easiest to target sessile subjects like scorpion fish or crocodile fish, who are convinced of their own camouflage. Diving at night is also a good way of making a close approach to fish whilst they are sleeping or you can position yourself close to a cleaning station and wait for clients to arrive and hold still for a wash and brush up. As with most things in nature photography, patience is the key here and you may need to wait a little while for your subject to accept you and gradually get closer. Once



Scorpion fish dorsal fin - when you have a docile subject like this scorpion fish try and work all the angles and capture all the abstract opportunities and lighting options. Nikon D200, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f16 1/125

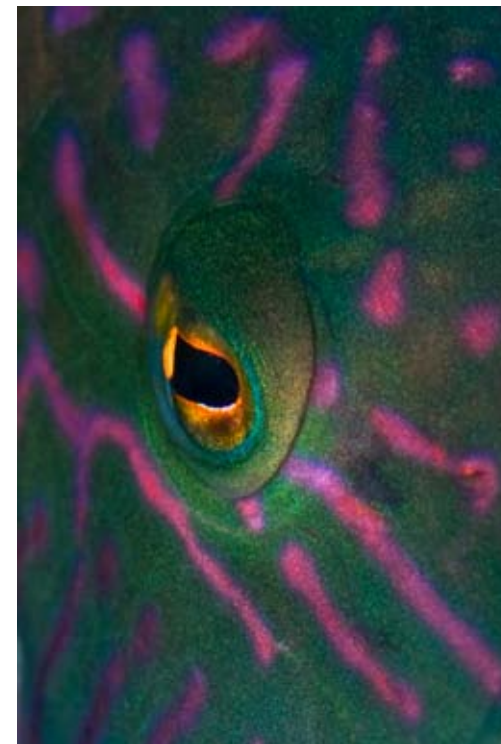
again, think about the composition as you view the subject, and move or reorient your camera to gain the best effect and check the result on the preview screen. By concentrating on the finer detail of your subjects you will begin to see commonplace subjects in an entirely new way.



Dwarf lion fish pectoral fin - this lion fish fin looks to me very like a ladies fan from the Victorian drawing room era. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f16 1/60

Eyes Only

The complex patterns and colours on many fish often includes the eye with stripes and swirls radiating from it making a very striking feature. So concentrating on just the eye opens up another range of possibilities and also leads you



Rainbow wrasse - the subtle colours and patterns around the eye of some reef fish will produce a powerful and punchy composition when photographed with a macro lens. Nikon D200, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f11 1/125.

to think beyond only fish. You can extend your search to crustaceans (crabs, lobsters, shrimps), shellfish (clams, scallops, triton and helmet shells) and cephalopods (cuttlefish, octopus and squid) which increases your options on every dive. Once again sessile species are the way to

start and then begin to hunt for other patient and approachable subjects and for opportunities at night. Many crustaceans only emerge at night and you will mostly see squid, and often octopus, during night dives particularly when they are attracted to feed by lights from a boat on the surface. Many fish sleep in small cracks and fissures in the reef at night so a longer focal length macro lens with your DSLR is often the best choice for filling the frame. Compact cameras are at an advantage here being both small and having good zoom range as standard. Cuttlefish are often found during the day partly buried in the sand and will allow a slow close approach, perhaps convinced you cannot see them. The same applies to many species of flatfish and rays so there is almost an endless choice no matter where you choose to dive.

If you have a snoot then eyes offer another opportunity to produce something a little different. Keri Wilk's well published shot of a star gazer's eyes lit by dual snoots should provide inspiration, although there are not many subjects that will stay patiently in place whilst you work close to them. Some crocodile fish or angler fish (or Monk fish in the UK) may allow you to set up and work very close and most frog fish will ignore you. So you will need some

patience to find a suitable subject and set up a shot like this.

Abstracts

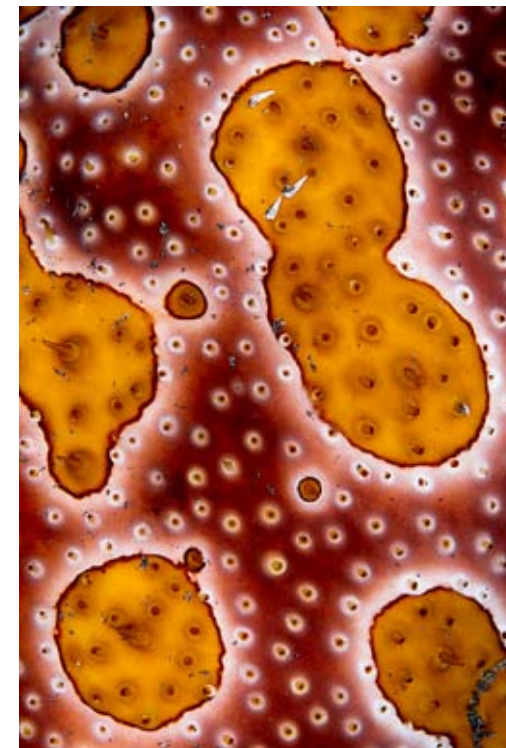
Many would argue that all photography is art although with underwater photography we may tend to consider the technical challenges primarily. However, once you get your eye attuned to the colours and patterns in fish, cephalopods and crustaceans you will begin to realise that almost every creature has graphic potential and does not need to be photographed in its entirety. Many corals, sponges and invertebrates have stunning colours and patterns which are not always apparent with a passing glance and only become obvious when you concentrate your gaze through the lens and perhaps apply a bit of lateral thinking. Begin by looking for strong colour contrasts and then examine the detail for perhaps the perfect shape of a coral polyp or a strong compositional form. Try not to see the subject as an animal or plant but more as a combination of colours and shapes which will attract the viewer's eye.

In the tropics subjects like gorgonian fan corals, anemones, sea urchins or giant clam mantles often produce striking patterns. Where the position of your subject allows you can try to vary your lighting techniques to produce different



Crocodile fish - these fish have the most fascinating eyes with the camouflage system passing across the eye ball to ensure they remain hidden from prey. It also makes them one of the most approachable species for eye photography. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 100 f16 1/125

effects. Small apertures and fast shutter speeds will produce a black background which will contrast well with pale colours or use a slower shutter speed and wider aperture to produce a blue or green water background which will contrast



Sea cucumber detail - many sea cucumbers in the tropics have fascinating and complex patterns on their surface. A gentle waft with your hand will remove most of the sand to reveal the pattern. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f16 1/60.

better with darker colours. You will most often need to photograph these subjects at life size reproduction (1:1) or perhaps with greater magnification of 2:1 (twice life size) or 3:1 (three times life size) to get the desired effect. This can be achieved with