

Saga Zoom Effects Filter

by Phil Rudin

During the first week of November 2012 my wife and I attended the 39th World Festival of Underwater Pictures in Marseille France reported on in this issue of Underwater Photography magazine. While I was at the festival I had a chance to drop by the SAGA Diving Technology stand to meet with Jose and Patricia Garrido the owners of SAGA Diving.

I always looking forward to seeing Jose and learning what new and ingenious products he has developed during the year. You may have seen or remember the fiber optic ring flash from SAGA displayed at DEMA 2011 or several of his other custom products made in his plant near Barcelona Spain. I was first shown a new concept snoot designed for use with a number of common strobes like the Inon Z-240 which I will report on later in the year. Also in development is an optical glass lens that works much like a kaleidoscope to produce up to nine images within the frame of the same subject.

I also managed to carry away a new filter designed to create a zoom effect while shooting with a port or flip holder with 67mm threads like

the excellent SAGA flip holder I reviewed in UWP issues #68.

This new product takes a Cokin Radial Zoom #185 filter which is square and made for the Cokin P series filter holders. The radial filter measures 85 X 85 mm and is cut by SAGA and then custom fit into a round 67mm circular polarizing filter ring mount. The end result is a filter which features numerous rings that are etched concentrically around a clear, one centimeter center spot. This causes the bright highlights originating in the clear center spot to be stretched out to the edges of the image.

This effect results in an image much like one taken with a zoom lens while the lens is being “zoomed” during the exposure. For best results the filter should be used against a colorful background rather than a blue water or blacked out background. The colorful background will help to emphasize the appearance of the zooming effect and help create a more effective transition between the in focus center and the out of focus edges of the frame.

While I am sure that there will be some photo purists that will scoff



*Blue Ribbon Eel,
Olympus E-M5,
Olympus 12-50
in macro mode,
Two InonZ-240
strobes, ISO200,
F/14, 1/250th*

*The SAGA Zoom
Effects filter
attached to an
Athena Ring
Flash.*



at such trickery I found the filter to be quite a lot of fun and friends viewing the images thought the effect was quite “cool”. Like the Art filters in many of the cameras from Olympus and others the effect is live in the EVF or OVF at the time of capture so it is not at all like adding the effect in post using a photo software program. In the water I was able to get a good idea of what the end result would look in the EVF on my Olympus E-M5.

I shot the filter using the Olympus OMD E-M5 and the Panasonic 45mm macro in a Nauticam housing with the Nauticam 45 macro port and the Athena ring-flash for this review. Other lenses I would recommend would be the Olympus 60mm macro or any macro lens for current underwater camera systems. I think it would also work well with many of the current kit lenses that use a 67mm port or port adapter.

Shooting the filter did not reduce light transfer to the sensor by much at all so your current system for getting a proper exposure should work quite well with the filter. Also just about any type of lighting system, single or twin strobes, ring-flash, snoot, video light and more could be used with this filter effect. Every filter degrades image quality a bit but I did not find this to be much of a concern with this filter because most of the image is out of focus anyway. Many of the filters I have seen used underwater have been adapted from top side photography use and this one is no exception. Graduated natural density filters have been used extensively for years to balance light in over/under photography and I am sure we will continue to find new and clever ways to adapt top side techniques to our underwater work.

One of the noticeable up sides to using this filter is an almost complete lack of any backscatter within the image since all but the center of the



Triple Fin, Olympus E-M5, Pan/Leica 45mm macro, Athena Ring-Flash, ISO200, F/9.0, 1/250th.

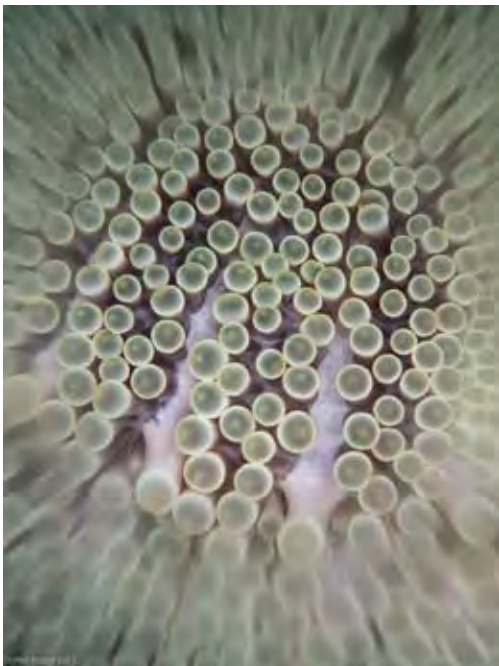
image is defocused. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the point of interest in the center of the image making the corner sharpness irrelevant. This is good news for those using less than stellar quality lenses. Like fisheye and circular images a little bit of this filter can go a long way and I would not care to sit through a presentation which included only zoom effect images, but as a transitional shot within a quality show I think a few zoom effect images will be quite well received by even a jaded audience of experienced underwater photographers. The bottom line is that this is another relatively inexpensive tool to help build a diverse portfolio of unique underwater images.

I will offer a few words of caution regarding using this product starting with mounting the filter to the port. If the filter is mounted to the port above water it is unlikely that the area between filter and port glass will fully flood without taking the filter



Hermit Crab, Olympus E-M5, Olympus 60mm macro, Two Inon Z-240 Strobes, ISO200, F/8, 1/250th.

off underwater. This will cause an air pocket which will degrade the quality of your results. Second the ring part of the filter that screws into the 67mm threads on the port is very thin and hard to grasp when you want to remove the filter. I threaded my test filter too tightly onto the front of my Athena ring-flash which has plastic threads and is part of the flash defuser. The result was that I was unable to remove the filter during my entire dive. After the dive I had to use two thin plastic zip ties synched together and wrapped around the knurled mounting ring to get enough of a grip to loosen the filter and remove it from the ring flash. This will not be as much of a problem with a port because the threaded ring can be reached more easily from the sides. I would still recommend not tightening down too hard on the threads, as you will want to be able to get any trapped air out of the system by loosening the filter.



The Saga zoom effects filter can be ordered at sagadive.com for 50 Euro or from your local SAGA dealer. Thanks again to Jose for use of the filter and to the fine staff at Atlantis Dumaguete, dive resort where these sample images were taken. If you intend to dive the Philippines Atlantis Dumaguete and their liveaboard M/V Atlantis Azores are both excellent choices.

Phil Rudin

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