

Book Review

Winning Images With any underwater camera by Paul Colley

By Dan Bolt

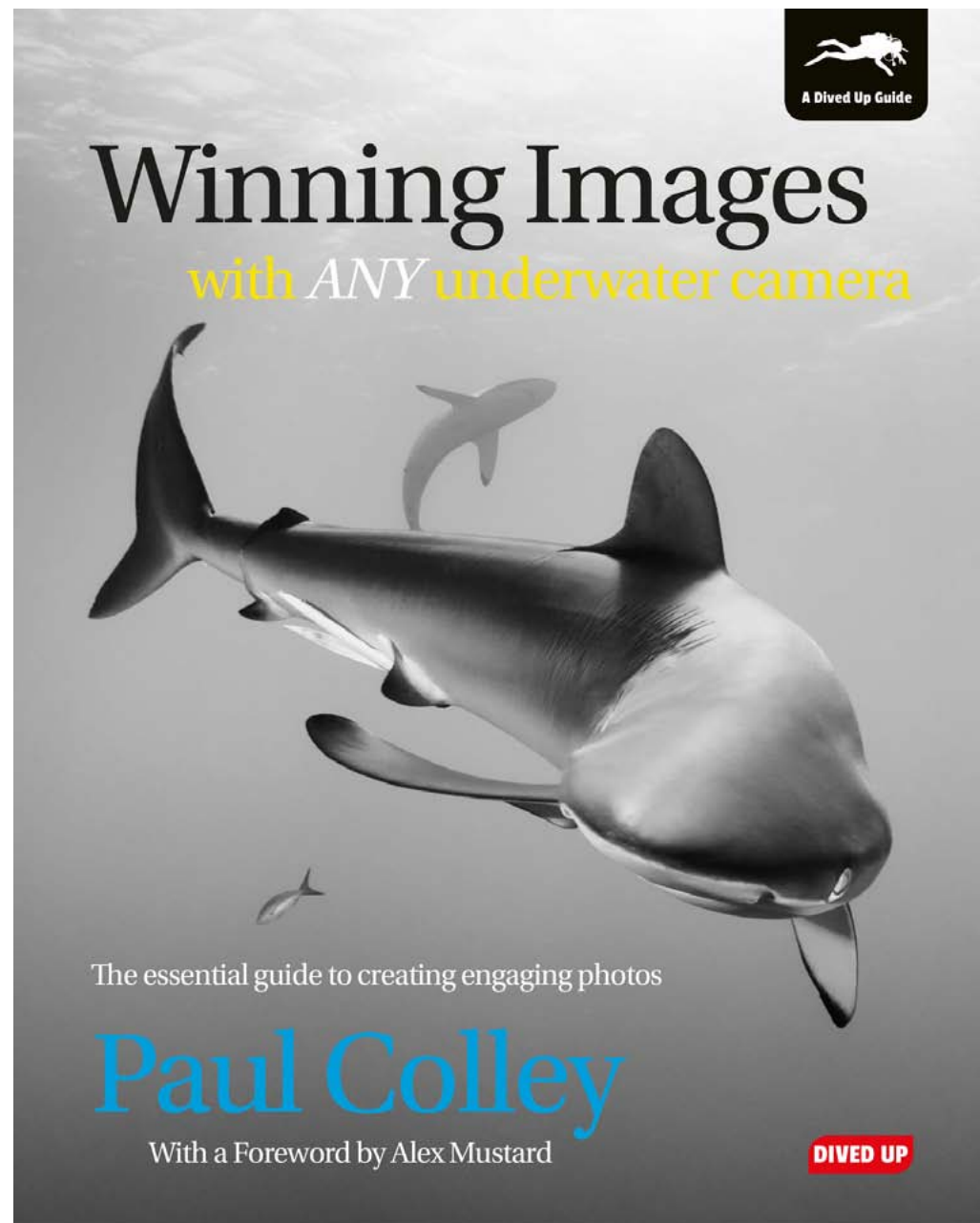
Another edition of UWP; and another book review by yours truly. This time it's Paul Colley's publication 'Winning Images With Any Underwater Camera', a book that concentrates solely on why some images 'win' and how the human brain perceives what a 'winning' image might be therefore composed of.

Of all the book reviews I've done this has been the toughest so far, as you know I like to read the subject matter upon which I'm asked to have an opinion about, and this one was, at times, quite hard going. Definitely not because it is poorly written; Paul's writing style is clear and concise and he has an ability to communicate complicated ideas well, but because the very subjects chosen for inclusion require a detailed analytical turn-of-phrase to adequately describe the concepts to the reader. [much like that last sentence!]

From the outset it is plain to see that behind these 200+ pages lies a huge amount of detailed research that Paul is at pains to impress upon the

reader. From the quotes taken from famous (and not so famous) people at the beginning of each chapter, to the neurological (almost sociological) workings of the brain's perception of form, shape, perspective and beauty with regard to aesthetics; this weighty tome applies a great deal of scientific thought (both ancient and modern) to the problem of 'making' images that will do well in competitions.

Here I feel I should include a public health warning – if you are after an easy read to help you master the fundamentals of taking photos then this book is not for you! In fact, if you were a beginner to the underwater photography world then just reading the opening chapter about 'Aesthetics and Photographic Intent' might just be enough to make you take up a far easier sport... something like entering a Grandmaster Chess tournament for example. This is by no means a criticism of the book, I just feel that the target audience needs to be defined: those of us who know how to take a photo of an engaging subject that is in focus, with little backscatter



and reasonably well lit but want to take our 'image making' to a new level and who are prepared to really start thinking about our photography. If that's you, then this book could just be the key to unlocking a new level in your photography career.

With that said; there is something in this book for all U/W photographers who want to get ahead of the game in shooting images for competitions. The 17 chapters cover areas from 'real world' topics such as selection and lighting, and progress into more subjective areas like Shapes, Vectors and picture organization. There are two chapters at the end dedicated to post production too, one to help 'rescue' compositional 'errors' in your images, the other on Image Manipulation – possibly the only chapter I thought was a little out of place seeing as this book is about 'winning' images and many competitions do not permit the techniques covered by these closing pages.

The depth to which each chapter covers its subject is quite stunning, and it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest if this book became a reference piece in its own right for future researchers. Sometimes though it can feel a bit like a PhD thesis. For example when Paul discusses the application of the Fibonacci series to 'create a natural geometry

and harmony in an image'. If you are clever enough to think about the application of proportions between multiple fast-moving subjects within a frame while diving and taking photographs then you're a much less dumberer person than I am. HOWEVER, this technique might come in handy for selection which image to enter into competitions and turning it into a 'winner'. What you get out of this book will largely depend on your desire to succeed and your current shooting style and to a lesser degree technical competence.

Paul has carefully chosen images to represent the complex ideas in the book and each does its job perfectly. Being another well-travelled Brit he has a large portfolio of images to pull on from all over the world. Some of the more technical areas (such as colour spaces and contrasts) benefit from superb illustrations, charts and diagrams that help to get the point across. If you are a macro photographer, or low-vis shooter, then you might be a bit surprised to see that all but a few images are shot in clear waters using wide-angle lenses. Yes the concepts discussed still apply, but sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words (and in this book that is most certainly true) so the omission of more macro or low-vis examples to back up the theory left me disappointed.

In keeping with the title; a good number of images in the book were shot on an Olympus XZ-2 compact camera. This goes to prove that the concepts discussed are largely 'kit' neutral and proof that you can't blame your camera anymore!

I am certain that this book will help many underwater photographers to improve their success rate in shooting 'winning' images. I would like to have seen much more space given to the 'art' of selecting which image to submit to competitions. You can have many hundreds of photographs from your latest holiday to the newest photo-destination, but if you make a poor selection of images to submit to competitions your chances are still limited. From a personal point of view I won't enter certain competitions because of the way they may be judged, or who is doing the judging – this isn't being pompous, I just don't like the 'style' of images that some competitions seem to favour; it's a personal integrity thing.

In the same vein, you might find as I have, that following someone else's 'rules' leads you to taking photographs that you are not happy with yourself – only you

will know if/when that happens and if you are Ok with it.

In summary then, 'Winning Images With Any Underwater Camera' is a detailed publication about the finer points about how to take more engaging, and hopefully award winning images underwater – the clue, as they say, is in the title. Reading it cover to cover as I have can be tough, but using the chapter list and the detailed introduction to elect area of interest will lead you to a finely detailed discussion of that particular topic which could very well have a huge impact upon your photography.

'Winning Images With Any Underwater Camera' costs £25

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Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards

Subjects - Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 144dpi

Size - Maximum length 20cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 20 cm wide and verticals would be 20cm.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.