

Book Review

Underwater Photography

by Tobias Friedrich

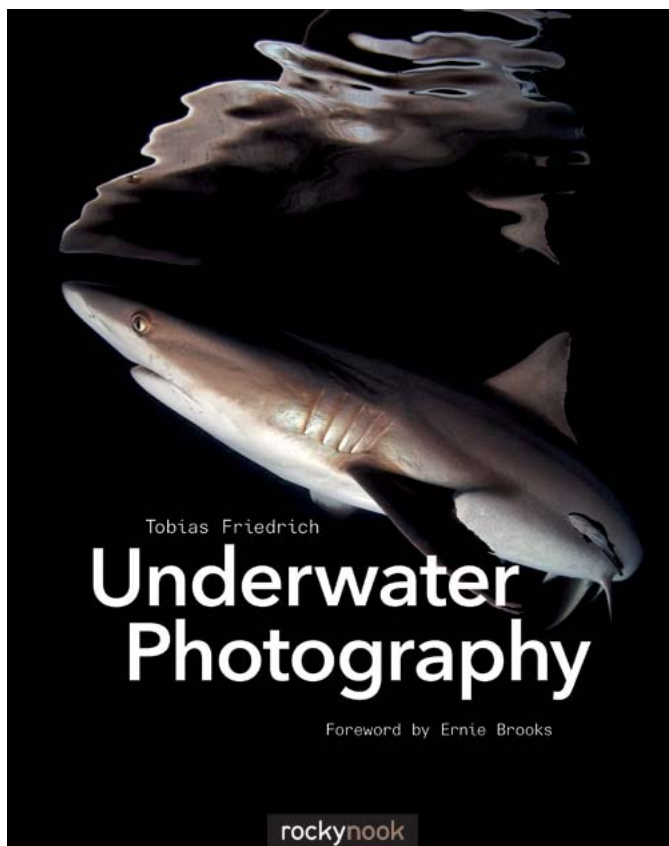
by Dan Bolt

From the outset this lavishly illustrated book hits you with some stunning underwater imagery. The cover shot, aptly titled 'The Dark Knight' is just the beginning, with a beautiful two-page split-shot of a humpback whale coming just a few pages later and the quality of photography continuing at that level throughout all 200+ pages.

In Tobias' enthusiastic introduction he says that the best way to read this book is from front to back – and he's also correct to point out that you will read about terms and concepts in the early chapters that are not fully explained until later in the book. If you didn't know this and just chose, for example, to judge the book by simply reading the opening chapter on Equipment, then you would indeed think it was missing a lot of explanatory text to describe some of the fundamentals of photography beneath the waves. It is only when taking the book as a whole that all the pieces fall very neatly and concisely into place. In fact this book is definitely one of those publications that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

Following the well proven formula for such books, the chapter list starts out with a look at Equipment and progresses through the Basics of underwater photography and on to Composition. Additionally there are specific chapters on Wide-angle and Macro photography and the usual finishing pages about Image Editing.

It is worth noting at this point that its not until



page 21 that you discover who the book is aimed at. To be honest though the opening line in chapter 1 (Equipment) gives a large hint at to the target audience: 'A compact camera produces passable images above the water, but below the surface of water its pictures are dull and boring'. So, plainly this book is aimed at DSLR users. In-fact you could go one step further and say it was aimed at relatively inexperienced underwater photographers who have just purchased a full-frame DSLR. The few times compact cameras are mentioned it is mostly in negative terms, with no mention of large-sensor compacts like the Sony RX100 series at all. Micro Four Thirds gets even worse treatment and is



Unexpected moments sometimes force you to compose an image on the fly; the risk of failure sometimes gives way to particularly attractive pictures
Seacam Canon EOS 5D Mark II • Canon 8–15mm fisheye lens • 1/200 s • f/18 • ISO 800

only mentioned in a comparison of sensor sizes.

One nice touch in the Equipment chapter is the emphasis on choosing wisely and prepare for a long relationship with your camera. Tobias is proof



Even when you use the best possible technique with artificial light, floating particles inevitably show up. Fortunately, image editing can take care of this problem.

Seacam Canon EOS 5D Mark II • Canon 8–15mm fisheye lens • 1/50 s • f/10 • ISO 400

that selecting the right camera and housing will lead to a very fruitful photographic partnership. Take, for example, the beautiful and varied images used to illustrate this book. From wide-angle to super-macro, and with just one single exception, every single image used was taken on a Canon 5DmkII. This is surely the best way to prove the point about kit selection.

Authors of books such as this face a choice about how to cover the potentially complicated issue of lighting our images. Tobias chooses to forego a dedicated chapter and instead uses a section within the Wide Angle and Macro chapters to explain how to light those specific types of image. I was a little disappointed with the lack of detail on lighting, but with a strong emphasis placed



Nudibranchs are favorite subjects for macro images, and they are easy to photograph because they move slowly

Seacam Canon EOS 5D Mark II • Canon 100mm macro lens • 1/125 s • f/20 • ISO 200

So called cleaning stations present great opportunities to capture well-composed photos while cleaner fish perform their service (although patience is required)

Seacam Canon EOS 5D Mark II • Canon 100mm macro lens • 1/125 s • f/18 • ISO 400

on experimentation to see what works best I guess the point is that there is no single set of rules on lighting. In fact this is how Tobias puts it: 'There is no right or wrong way to use flash, just optimal and less optimal strategies...'. This is probably true if you choose to shoot only in clear waters, but take it from me there are some very wrong ways of using flash in low-visibility scenarios!

I particularly liked the Composition chapter.



You might remember the last book I reviewed was dedicated to the subject, and I was a little concerned that actually too much detail was included for the average reader to turn it into useful, practical, advice. Tobias' attempt to explain what makes a pleasing image however, I feel, is spot on. Using yet more aesthetically pleasing photographs he describes the concepts we all use (consciously or not) to make the decision about when to take a

photograph. Further endearing me to the book were the two sections about Exceptions and Creativity also included in the Composition chapter. You can read all the rule-books you like, but without experimentation and creativity all our images will look the same.

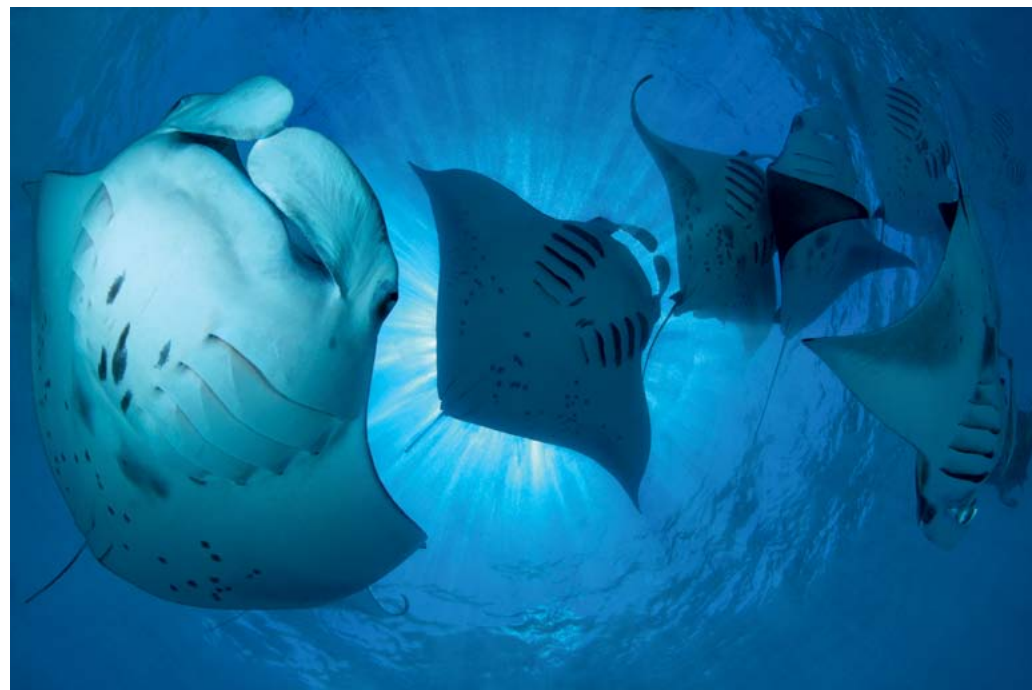
Half-way through the chapters there are five Guest Photographer Galleries where some of today's most respected and creative photographers have contributed images and text, each demonstrating differing styles and subject selection. I won't spoil the nice surprise that these galleries are, but I will say that it was pleasing to see some images from the UK and I was even more surprised to realise that I am actually in one of the guest's photo's too... I will leave it up to you to guess which one is me.

The two chapters on Wide-Angle and Macro discuss all the relevant points about kit, subject selection, lighting, camera settings and different techniques that you would expect from a detailed book such as this. I did smile while reading about which colour wetsuit to ask your model to wear, but the point being made is perfectly relevant – too much black kit on your model can kill an otherwise perfectly good photograph.

Chapter number 6, the last one, is titled Image Editing but it actually covers quite a few more subjects that



just how to finish off your photos using post-processing techniques. There is also an informative section about getting your workflow honed into a smooth operation so as to save you time and effort, but I very much liked the section where Tobias explores Selecting And Evaluating Pictures. He specifically emphasises the point about choosing images; it is all about the image itself and NOT the emotion you personally might attach to the photo. Other people (including competition judges) will not know just how hard you had to work to get an image, or that it might have been taken on the best dive of your life. The image should be selected because



***Manta rays (Manta alfredi). Hanifaru Bay, Baa Atoll, Maldives, October 2011
Seacam Canon EOS 5D Mark II • Canon 8–15mm fisheye lens • two Ikelite DS125 strobes • 1/320 s • f/9 • ISO 50 • flash at full power***

of, and judged solely on its merits as an underwater photograph.

This review will finish, oddly, at the beginning. In Ernie Brooks' foreword he mentions his own mentors who shaped not only his enthusiasm and photographic skills, but passion, love and care for the marine eco-system. In Ernie's case he cites Hans Hass in that role, but aptly Ernie predicts that Tobias will assume

that role to many aspiring underwater photographers in the future. To be honest, I would have to agree with Ernie on this point, and would further argue that actually that future is not too far away for Tobias.

Dan Bolt

www.underwaterpics.co.uk

www.rockynook.com/shop/photography/underwater-photography

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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.