

AOI Port System For Olympus Pen Housings

by Jussi Hokkanen

Olympus is a weird sort of company. Some of the stuff they bring out is brilliant and then the next design can be downright bizarre. A good example is their underwater housings, especially the mirrorless camera ones. It's almost like there are two guys fighting at the top about where to take the housing designs next.

There are many examples, including a funny port light system that only appeared in one housing and then got forgotten. Another good example is the PEN port system. Olympus can't seem to make their minds up what kind of ports to use with their housings. It just makes no sense. Randomly some housings use the larger aperture port system and the rest the smaller, which the company does not even officially support at all... and do not even think should be changed...although it can be... trust me, it's a mess.

Luckily there are a few 3rd party companies that have come to the rescue. For some time now at least Zen Underwater and Anthiis have supported the PEN housings with

ports. If you were able to find (and afford) these ports they offered a good option especially for wide-angle use. During my latest trip to Indonesia I was lucky enough to test the new AOI port system that covers all lens and port mount options. Moreover the AOI system covers all budgets as the basic ports start from way under £200, at least here in the UK.

AOI port compatibility

AOI is a Far East design and manufacturing agency that major brands like Olympus, Fuji, Sea & Sea, Fisheye, etc... use to design and produce all sorts of underwater photography kit. They basically have made the housings that are sold as Olympus around the world. No wonder they have an industry insider view of the ports desperately needed for the system.

Apart from making the Olympus branded products they have come up with a port system that carries their own name. The AOI port system will finally complete the Olympus micro four thirds housing system and make





them a serious contender against more advanced competitors.

With the current AOI port system you can use the following lenses:

- Olympus 12-50mm
- Olympus 9-18mm
- Olympus 60mm
- Olympus 8mm Pro
- Panasonic 8mm
- Panasonic 45mm (unofficially)

OK, here comes the confusing bit. The AOI ports will work with all current PT-EPx housings with both port aperture sizes. There are three ways of using these ports. Firstly the simple PEN ports that fit natively on the small aperture housings that include at least the PT-EP051, 061, 10, 12 and 13. For these “small” ports you can get a port adaptor AD-LP-01 that allows you to mount them on the two remaining current PEN housing that still uses the larger diameter

port system, the PT-EP08 and PT-EP11. There are also ports that will fit natively on the large port aperture housings but as the future is uncertain for this size I would advise stay on the smaller size that can always be adopted to fit the large size. You will not be able to convert the large ports to fit any of the small aperture housings.

Which port?

So what AOI port suits which lens then? I have made a small port chart that will try to clear this issue. As said earlier the company have decided to make various material versions of the ports to suit every budget. The cheapest one is a plastic bodied acrylic port for the Olympus 9-18mm lens. This costs in the UK only £175.00... which is a massive reduction from the other



brands like the ZEN whose only available 9-18mm port costs £420. These two ports are of course not fully comparable as the ZEN port body is aluminium and the dome is glass. But hold on... AOI actually has made 4 versions of this port: polycarbonate body with acrylic dome, polycarbonate body with glass dome, aluminium body with acrylic dome and ZEN equivalent aluminium body with glass dome (priced at £175.00 / £250.00 / £300.00 / £375.00 respectively). Take your pick!

All the Olympus housings are plastic anyways so accurately

manufactured plastic port will be perfectly fine.

AOI also offers a fisheye dome port for the Panasonic 8mm f3.5 and for the new Olympus 8mm Pro lens. The stubby Panasonic will fit straight into the fisheye dome, there are two to choose from again; an acrylic or a glass dome. The Olympus 8mm Pro lens, being quite a bit longer, will need a 24mm extension. The acrylic port will cost £450.00 and the glass one £600.00. The extension currently retails at £130.00

Finally there is also a port for the Olympus 60mm macro lens. This



small and thin flat port is crucial for the housings like the PT-EP12, which comes with a short flat port as standard and where the lens does not fit in at all. I would change the massive port of the PT-EP13 for the AOI port also just to make it easier to use, although you can fit the lens inside. The AOI flat port has a 67mm port thread for those important dioptre lenses and trust me, you will need them in places like Lembeh, where I used Inon UCL-165 lens on top of the 60mm lens. For the standard Olympus PT-EP13 you can also buy a plastic snap on 67mm dioptre holder but the large port and the adapter are quite unwieldy and with the slim-line port

you can actually see where your port/lens is positioned. This AOI port will also unofficially house the excellent Panasonic 45mm macro lens.

AOI has also thought of the EM5 MKII users by producing a small button replacement kit for the PT-EP13 housing. The RK-01 kit replaces the overly protruding front dial knob of the housing and allows the use of the fisheye ports. Very considerate of them.

Due to their low cost and high quality the AOI ports are the perfect companion for the PT-EP housings. The availability of these ports makes the Olympus PEN cameras a truly serious underwater camera system.



You don't need to hunt the almost non existing Olympus ports high and low anymore or pay through the nose for the other 3rd party products. The only thing currently missing from AOI port range is the Panasonic 7-14 port. If you are planning to use this pricy lens you will still need to get a port from ZEN Underwater.

If Olympus finally ditches their old port system it would make life easier for everybody. For a second it seriously looked like they would as even the new EM5 MKII housing uses the smaller aperture system whereas the EM5 MK1 still used the large bayonet. Typically for Olympus they have now thrown a spanner into

the works by releasing a new large aperture port, the PP0-EP02, for the PEN 8mm Pro lens. This port will fit only the older housings and none of the new ones unfortunately. I would not bother with this £700 port as you might not be able to ever use it again with your next Olympus housing. Buy a small aperture AOI port instead and you will always be able to use it... unless of course Olympus decides suddenly to make a 3rd port system, which could easily happen knowing their track record.

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