

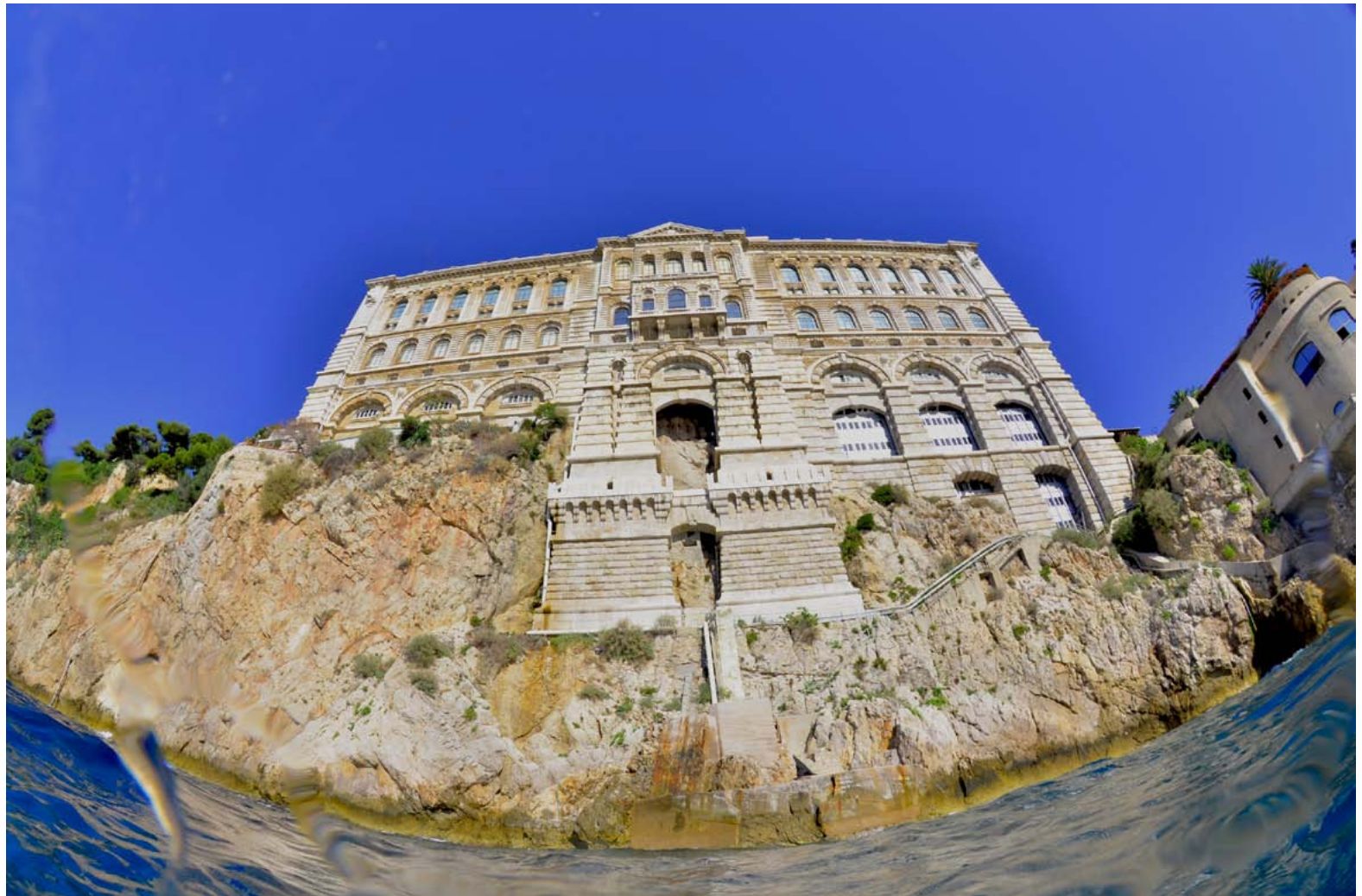
Monaco

by Bassem Jamour

I first discovered underwater photography during my “Discovery Dive” in the Dominican Republic in 2009, using a disposable camera. What a disappointment I felt when the film was developed and I saw the pictures! It was after this first failed experiment that I realized how the art of underwater photography was going to be very difficult and tricky to master. I already imagined the challenges that I would have to face in order to produce an image of good quality and, above all, original. I can say that it was at that particular moment that my passion for underwater photography was born.

Underwater photography is a pure challenge as it pushes the photographer’s artistry to the limit in search of the perfect picture. With the loss of light and colors, photographers need to dive holding a “mini studio” between their arms in their quest to capture beautiful and original pictures under extreme and sometimes harsh conditions.

Over the past few years, I have participated in various underwater photography tournaments where I had the honor to meet other photographers that share my same passion. These



All Pictures are shot with a Nikon D7000 in an Aquatica housing AD7000, with 2 x Ikelite strobes D161 (with Ikelite dome diffuser).

competitions are always very exciting, but can also be very stressful, because the diving sites are new and unknown, diving conditions can be harsh and visibility poor, and of course the diving time is limited. So, in order to capture a shot that we usually master,

it can prove to be a very challenging task. In my experience, I have found wide angle shots with a model in a new site to be the most challenging. Communicating to the model what position, angle, view to take is not easy and it requires very good

and constant communication skills between the photographer and the model.

I mostly dive in Monte Carlo, Monaco, a Principality located along the Mediterranean Sea, on the French Riviera, halfway between Nice and



Seabream protected by Barracudas: Nikon Lens 105mm. ISO100 1/40 F13

Spongia officinalis: Tokina Lens 10.50mm ISO100 1/125 F14

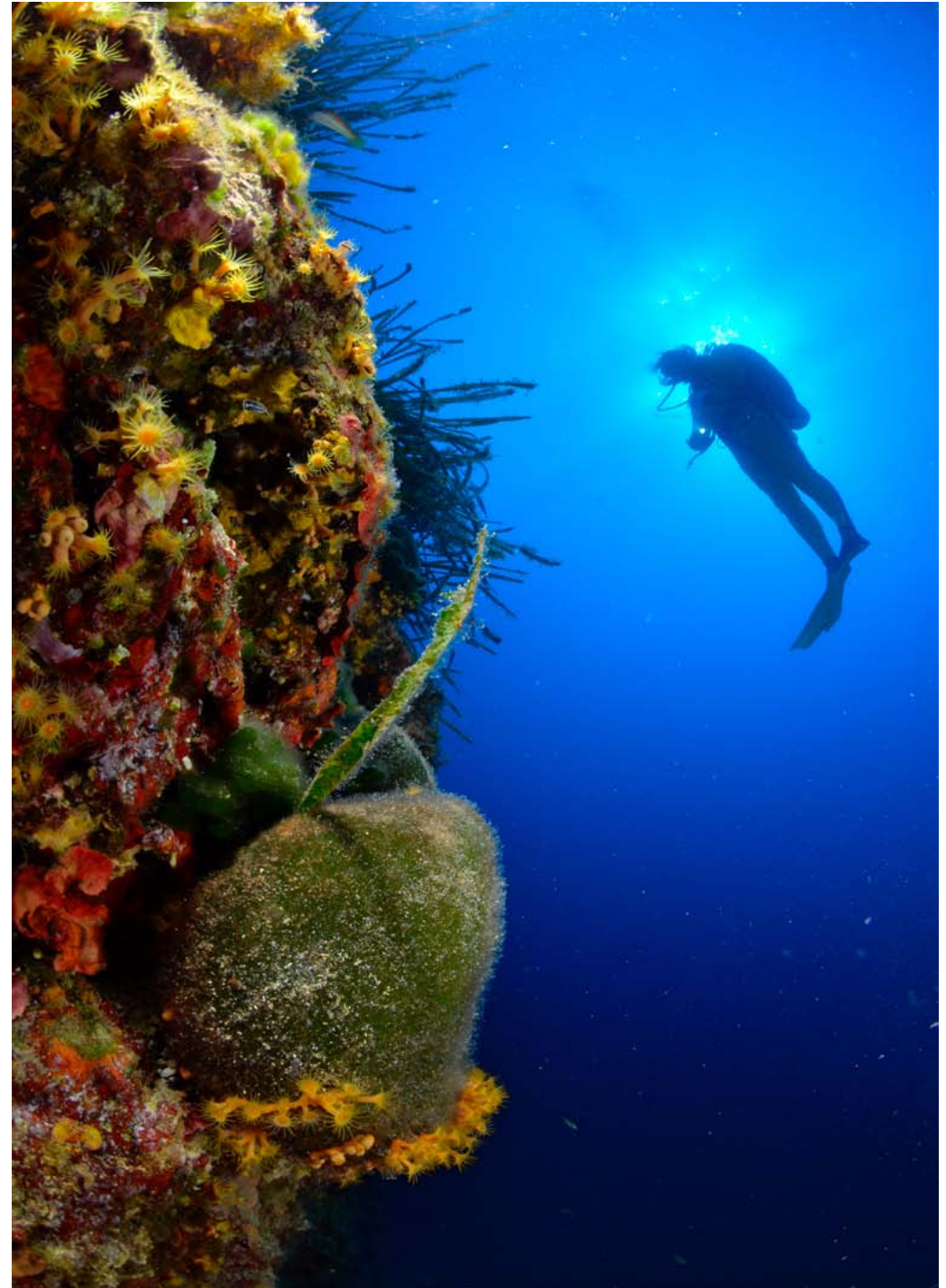
the Italian border. Monaco is the second smallest independent state in the world, after the Vatican. The geographical location of Monaco and its mild Mediterranean climate in the winter make it a very popular destination.

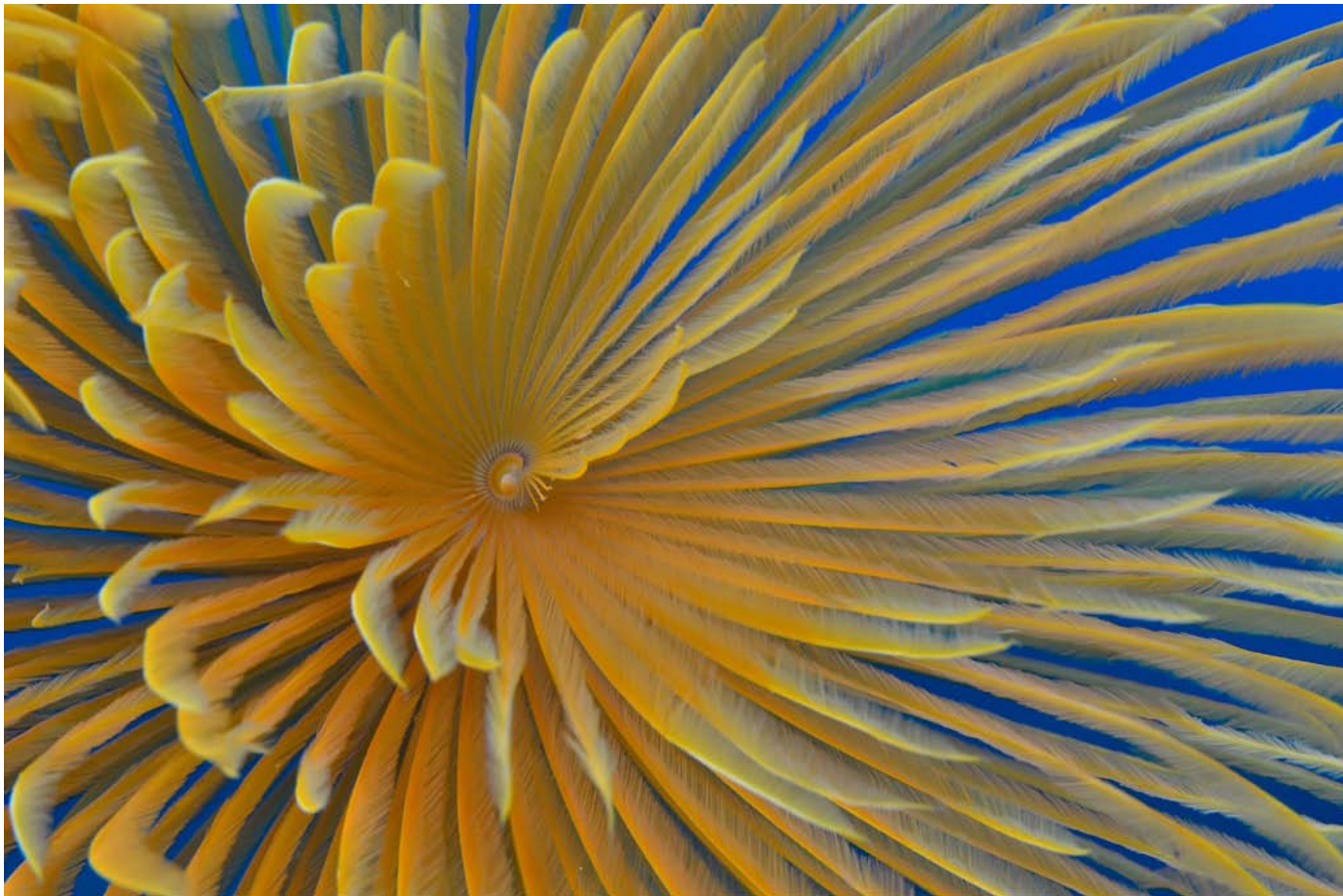
Monaco is famous for its glamorous life, its Formula 1 race and its casinos. But below all the noise lies a secret underwater world. A world that is very well hidden and only known to local divers and to a few divers from the region.

There are several popular

dive sites in Monaco which are of particular interest, such as the “Loews”, the “Tombant du Port Hercule”, the “Oceanographic Museum” or the “Saint Nicolas” just outside the harbor of Fontvieille. These sites offer a very rich life and the diving depth varies from 10 meters to 60 meters.

A special mention should be made about the site of the Larvotto Reserve, a protected marine reserve, which is a little corner of paradise, completely unknown to most divers and which is under the protection of





Blenny: Canon G11 with Subsee +10 ISO400 1/80 F8

Spirographe: Nikon Lens 105mm. ISO100 1/40 F16

the “Association Monégasque de la Protection de la Nature”, a Monaco association responsible for the protection of nature. Recently, “The Toulonnais” a wreck of a 27 meters tug, weighing over 300 tons, was sunk opposite the Oceanographic Museum and is currently sitting at a depth of 30 meters. Also of notable mention, “The Catalina”, a 1972 seaplane that had technical problems and missed its landing, is currently sitting at a depth of 58 meters near the coast.

All these sites are accessible with two diving clubs in the Principality of Monaco. The

“Club d’Exploration Sous-Marine de Monaco”, C.E.S.M.M., is located at the entrance of the harbor of Fontvieille and is open all year long. The club was created in 1951, at a time when people started to discover diving thanks to Captain Cousteau and his famous red cap. Commander Cousteau impressed many people, particularly in Monaco, where he left on his boat, the Calypso, for his worldwide underwater explorations. From 1957 to 1988, Captain Cousteau even served as director of the Monaco Oceanographic Museum.

The other club in Monaco is the “Ecole

Bleue”, located on the Larvotto beach, founded and led by the world champion freediver, Pierre Frolla. Pierre is very dedicated to the training of young scuba divers and free divers. Ecole bleue is an international reference in the field of child diving. It is dedicated to the discovery, respect and preservation of the underwater world. Pierre Frolla, a very charismatic figure in Monaco, has transmitted his love of the underwater world through his passion and dedication.

Monaco’s sea waters are rich in flora and fauna and have a good visibility. There are plenty of



Axinella polypoides: Tokina Lens 10.50mm. ISO100 1/30 F13

interesting subjects to photograph in wide angle or close-up.

Photographers equipped with wide angle or macro lenses will be well rewarded. There are very nice drop-offs, wrecks that are gorgeous to photograph, batteries of barracudas, and schools of groupers at the Larvotto Reserve. There are also morays, sea bass, scorpionfish, John Dory, Seaweed pipefish, and for the lucky photographers, seahorses that have been seen recently spotted in the reserve by some photographers. In winter, with a little luck, a photographer can also come face to face with a monkfish.

The local club C.E.S.M.M. organizes a yearly underwater competition that attracts photographers from different parts of Europe. Over the past 13 years, the Monaco Underwater Competition has gained in fame and attracted many followers, due to its prestigious location. The dive sites face the beautiful and glamorous city of Monaco and the majestic Oceanographic Museum of Monaco. The awards ceremony is held at the Museum itself, and sometimes the awards are handed out by His Serene Highness, Prince Albert II of Monaco.

The C.E.S.M.M. also organizes



"Fried Egg" jelly fish: Nikon Lens 105mm. ISO100 1/50 F14

Cuttlefish: Tokina Lens 11mm ISO100 1/125 F13





Gorgone: Tokina Lens 13mm ISO100 1/60 F13

an underwater contest for children that takes place at the same time as the yearly Monaco Underwater Competition. This new competition was launched 3 years ago and has proven to be extremely successful with the local children.

In 2015, the “C.E.S.M.M”, under the tutelage of the “FMAS - Fédération Monégasque des Activités Subaquatiques” created an underwater



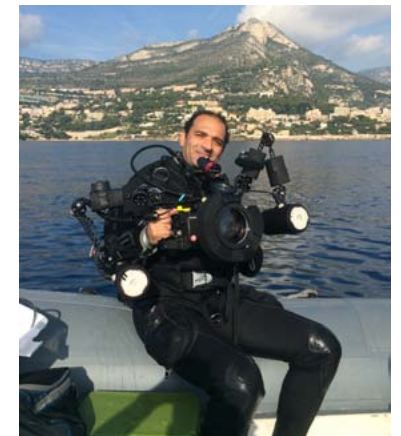
Pinna nobilis: Tokina 10.50mm. ISO100 1/60 F13

photography school, the “Ecole de Photographie Sous-Marine de Monaco”. Its objective is to introduce underwater photography to the scuba divers of the Principality, and help them develop their skills for the underwater art. The aim is to also raise the consciousness of divers to our surrounding ecosystem and to convey, through pictures, a message related to environmental protection.

Since its inception in 2015 by Mr. Pascal PARRY, the “Munegu Photo Sub Academy” (as it is called in the Monegasque language) has met a great success. Already, over a dozen young photographers have obtained their “Level 1” license as Underwater Photographers. The training classes consist of theoretical courses and application dives. The courses are provided by various local accomplished photographers under the supervision of both Mr. Jean Lou Ferretti and Mr. Michel Dagnino, who are both very well-known and highly respected and accomplished underwater photographers.

Children will soon be able to follow special underwater photography classes during their school year. The classes will also be provided by the “Munegu Photo Sub Academy”. The goal is to increase children’s awareness to the sea life and protection of the environment, so that they can present their knowledge in an educational framework within their respective schools and contribute to promote marine environment preservation.

Bassem Jamour
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White Balance

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards. These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

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