

# UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

A Key to Keeping Divers Interested



"NOW I'VE GIVEN YOU UNDERWATER CAMERAS SO YOU CAN HAVE FUN PHOTOGRAPHING EACH OTHER, AND TO USE WHEN WE PRACTICE THAT ALL IMPORTANT, "OUT OF FILM" EMERGENCY SWIMMING ASCENT!"

The key to creating a successful continuing education program for your scuba students is understanding just what keeps divers interested. Once they have their c-cards in hand new divers often look for more challenging activ-

ities underwater. If the dive center or instructor fails to provide the challenge, they may eventually lose the divers to other sporting activities. We have found that underwater photography is a key to keeping divers' interest high.

instructor tips

By Jack and Sue Drafohl



Photography gives divers something tangible to show from their diving experiences. Photography allows divers to safely interact with the undersea world and share their wonderful underwater experiences with others. It allows divers a creative outlet and a sense of accomplishment. When they show their pictures to family and friends, the beauty of the sea is brought forth in living color, which often sparks additional diving interest.

Once divers become "hooked" on underwater photography they increase their bottom time, add new dive equipment and generally keep a very active diver status. The more they dive, the more they want to travel to dive exotic locations. The more they take pictures, the better the results — and the more they dive.

Get the picture?

### Getting Started

The first step in creating a photo-wise dive center is to organize under-

water photo courses. If you have professional underwater photographers in your area, contact them and set up some beginning classes.

If you are an instructor with a talent for photography, find out what it takes to obtain an Underwater Photography Instructor rating from your certifying agency. The agency can supply course outlines, textbooks and videos designed to make your photo course informative and easy to teach.

A great time to plan an underwater photography class is before or during an exotic dive trip. Most people who invest money on travel also want to bring home the memories above and below the water. Try to plan a pretrip get-together so your group can become acquainted, but be sure to organize a post-trip evening so everyone can share their pictures. Keep the excitement high, and before long you'll see a demand for more advanced and specialty photo classes.

The most critical part of the evening is to show potential new students that underwater photography is fun and easy.

## I think like a fish.



I am a water based lifeform. I glide beneath the still surface of reality to my own private universe. I am the conqueror of a silent landscape where I rule. The ocean is my office, my living room and my playground. I swim like a fish. A big fish in a big pond. I am not hung-up in the mainstream net hoping for an adventure to happen to me. I'm grabbing life by the fins and shaking it loose.



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## Recruiting Students

OK, you've got a course curriculum, but now you need some students! You must get the word out that you will be conducting underwater photo classes. Use a newsletter, shop notices, announcements at local dive club meetings or whatever communication you can think of to let the public know about these upcoming classes.

If that doesn't bring them in droves, another excellent way to motivate interest is to provide an evening of visual entertainment. This is a sure-fire way to get a group motivated, because when divers haven't been wet in a while, they are a primed audience for enjoying the visual magnificence of the underwater world. You should keep the whole show to less than one hour, and no single show should be longer than 10 minutes. You want to keep them wanting more — not leave them counting the minutes until the end.

In addition to sharing your own images, consider inviting a guest speaker with a varied photographic background and films, videos or slides to illustrate his or her work. Or, gather up some visuals from divers in your community. Preview all the materials and organize them into a tray, remembering that entertainment is the goal. Try to select materials that sell underwater photography, not the equipment, as that will come later. Place underwater prints around the room to add flavor to the evening. This will spark everyone's interest and allow you the chance to sign up your new students.

The really important part of the evening comes when you introduce your new underwater photo program to your captive audience. Be extremely organized — know how much the class will cost, the class schedule and topics covered in the instruction. Have preprinted sign-up



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forms. Allow a few minutes to field the audience's questions.

The most critical part of the evening is to show potential new students that underwater photography is fun and easy. They need to know that all levels of divers can do it, and that they don't have to invest a lot of money to get started. Show some basic underwater photo systems and pictures made with them as proof.

**A Class Act**

Once you have conducted your first series of classes, have each student fill out an evaluation form to help you make the upcoming classes even better. One way to keep the ball rolling is to have the graduates of your photo class help put on the next evening's entertainment when soliciting new students. This creates a challenge for these new photographers and encourages potential students to become involved, too.

If someone asks you questions regarding underwater photo equipment, he expects intelligent answers. You must be more knowledgeable about photography than the customer. If your dive center does not sell photo equipment, help the customer decide what and where to buy photo equipment.

Be sure you remain current on all underwater photography-related equipment, and read everything possible on underwater tips and techniques. If possible, attend professional seminars and classes designed to provide you with the latest equipment innovations.

When we started teaching underwater photography classes in our area, the interest level jumped from zero to 10 in the first beginning class. In order to accommodate the demand, we began conducting advanced classes as well. We continue to lead photo classes to warm-water diving locations and see the interest in underwater photography skyrocketing, so you can capitalize on it, too. Underwater photography is a prime opportunity for you to rejuvenate diver interest — the key to diver retention.

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