

# How to Get Started in Underwater Photography

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

**W**hen the initial enthusiasm has worn off, a newly certified diver will look for additional challenges. A logical step is underwater photography. You long to capture the vivid colors and elusive critters, but where do you start? Who do you ask for advice? What equipment should you buy? What is the best film for underwater photography? How much is it going to cost?

One of the first things you need to analyze before you get too involved is your purpose for taking pictures underwater. This may sound like a simple question, but it is critical to your direction in underwater photography. Often, beginning underwater photographers want images for their scrapbooks, snapshots to show their friends, prints to hang at the office, or maybe to put together an underwater slide show for the local dive club. Whatever the reason, it should be clear in your mind because it makes a difference when selecting your underwater camera equipment.

We recommend your first contact be with a local dive shop that teaches beginning underwater photography. They have a vested interest in keeping you enthusiastic about the underwater world. They will also be there when you have questions. There are also a few courses that specialize in beginning photography. Check them out and, in the meantime, read all you can about underwater photo techniques.

First on the equipment agenda is the camera. A few years ago it was hard to find beginning underwater cameras that matched a beginning

budget and still provided good quality. Today, more than a half dozen companies specialize in manufacturing entry level cameras. We will be providing some product reviews and prices in an upcoming article, so stay tuned.

Find a shop that carries cameras, make a trip and get a demo of whatever is available. Make sure you indicate what you plan on doing with the photos, and that you are a beginning photographer. Most shops understand this and will try to set you up with a system that lets you get acquainted with underwater photography.

Some of the larger camera stores may also have these systems, but be aware that often the sales clerk may not be familiar with the needs of an underwater photographer.

So, what type of film and brand name do you use in your new camera? We recommend using color negative print film. Brand name really doesn't matter. All the film manufacturers have brought their color negative films to such a high level that the quality difference between them is negligible. Color negative film is a great learning tool, especially because it is so forgiving when it comes to exposure—several times more forgiving than slide film. When you first start taking pictures, you don't want to lose any images due to exposure. You need to concentrate



A diver aims his easy to use, point and shoot camera at a brilliant plume of soft coral.

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your efforts on framing and focus. We also recommend the use of ISO 400 film over the slower films. The quality of these films today is excellent, and your increased depth-of-field and focus give you that extra edge.

Before you go on that expensive trip to test your new-found hobby, you should run some pool tests. This ensures that your camera works, and you are getting the desired results. If at all possible, try to schedule a photo class before you go on your trip.

When you get your first pictures back, analyze them and learn from your mistakes. If possible, show them to a photo instructor who specializes in beginning underwater photography. Show your family and friends, both the good ones and the bad. Use them to introduce new divers to your underwater world.

One last word of warning: underwater photography is habit forming. Once you start taking underwater pictures, every dive will be a scavenger hunt for that elusive photo. Don't get discouraged, because it takes time to hone your skills. Enjoy the learning process and take the underwater photography plunge. 🐟



## Skin Diver EXPANDS Its Photo Department!

Internationally known photographer **Marty Snyderman** has joined as a Contributing Editor of *Skin Diver* and will share his photographic insights each and every issue. Beginning in the August *Skin Diver*, Marty's column, "Ask the Pro," will answer photography questions sent in by our readers.

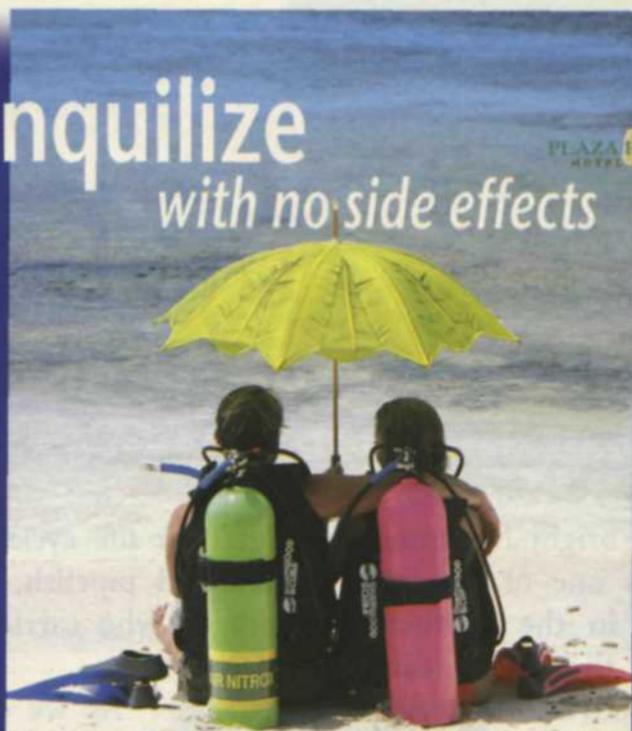
To get photographic advice from Marty for a future issue, send your questions to him via e-mail at [martys@connectnet.com](mailto:martys@connectnet.com).

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