

Digital Lighting

Simple solutions for perfectly lit photos

STORY & PHOTOS BY JACK & SUE DRAFAHL

One of the biggest advantages to digital cameras underwater is that you can see your results immediately. Not only does this make the dive more exciting, knowing that you got the shot, but you can also use the instant results to improve your skills.

You can now see the lighting effect of your electronic flash during the course of the

edge of your framed image. Use the widest angle setting on your lens, or a wide-angle lens adapter, for this test. This enables the flash head to be viewed in the frame so you can see its angle of light.

Find a stationary three-dimensional subject that is light in color. Some of our best subjects have been yellow tube sponges.

Try taking an image at downward, level and upward angles.

Now move the flash head to various positions to see the lighting effect. Try as many lighting combinations as possible.

Preview the LCD on the back of the camera to see how you are doing. Check the angle of the flash at different distances. Discover just how close you can move the flash to your camera before backscatter appears. Investigate new lighting combinations with f-stops and shutter speeds.

At the end of the day, load your test images into your computer and take a much closer look. Check the EXIF file, where valuable information about each digital image you take is stored. This information includes the f-stop, shutter speed, flash settings, lens focal length, image size, focus distance and many other camera settings to help you analyze and improve your photo style.

On your next dive, when you see in the LCD that the lighting isn't quite right, just a few quick adjustments that you learned from the previous dives will make the difference.

The digital camera is a wonderful advancement for underwater photography. You can investigate and create new lighting or shooting styles in just one dive. Best of all, you have an accurate record of how it was done, so it is easy to repeat on future dives.

Join Jack and Sue Drafaahl on their digital dive adventures: May 1-8 at the Second Annual Digital Diving Adventure at Captain Don's Habitat in Bonaire; or July 10-18 when the digital duo will team up with Cathy Church for a photographic week in Grand Cayman. For more information, go to www.jackandsuedrafaahl.com.



A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE Without the inclusion of a touch of light, this moray just blends into the reef, leaving the viewer without a point of interest.

dive. As you preview the image on the LCD viewer on the back of the digital camera, you can modify and tweak your strobe until you achieve the desired lighting effect.

To maximize the full potential of your digital camera, take an entire dive and explore the lighting combinations with your system. First, you will want enough length on your flash arms so the flash head can be placed at

Stretch the flash arm until the flash head appears at the side of your image. Take a couple of shots, analyze the exposure and make corrections. Your goal is to achieve a good balance between the background and the flash. This may result in reverting to manual exposure, which will allow f-stop adjustments to control the flash exposure and the shutter speed to control the background exposure.



Lighting Up the Digital World Ikelite DS-125 SubStrobe

Call most pros who've made the jump to digital, and you'll probably find this substrobe in their photographic arsenal. The DS-125 was designed specifically for compatibility with the newest digital cameras (though it can also be used with housed-film cameras and Nikonos with similar results), and features both TTL and manual settings. Other features include full, one-half, one-fourth, one-eighth, modeling light and slave power settings, with a notable recycle time of only one second when used on full power, and even faster at other settings. The compact 3.75-inch-by-7-inch light has a 90-degree angle of coverage (100 degrees with diffuser), an audible ready signal, an interchangeable NiCad battery (good for 150 flashes per charge), and a "fuel" gauge to monitor the charge. For more information, visit www.ikelite.com.