

INSPIRATION

Underwater photographer Dr Jens Hartmann: 'Blue water, blue sharks, no ground below me'

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by Charlotte Thomson-Morley

Dr Jens Hartmann is a PADI instructor level diver with a passion for underwater photography, with thousands of hours of diving experience around the world.





Jens currently has 1375 logged dives (about 1025 hours under water) and countless additional hours for training purposes. He also has a published book of marine photography and biology. He manages to fit this in around his position in the biomedical sciences department at Danube University in Krems Austria and being a father of three. When he 'comes up for air', Jens uses Affinity Photo to process his beautiful images. We chatted to him about how his unusual hobby came into being...

How did you first get into diving and marine photography?

I've just come home from Croatia, and the number of dives has increased to 1400+. Just kidding. During my first dive back in 1986, it was during my holidays with my parents in southern Spain when I was 16 years of age, and I took an analogue camera with me. However, to be honest, this wasn't a good idea and the results were horrible. During the following years I had to learn that underwater photography is quite different from photography above the surface, and my equipment grew according to my needs and available pocket money.

What specialist equipment do you use to take your underwater photographs?

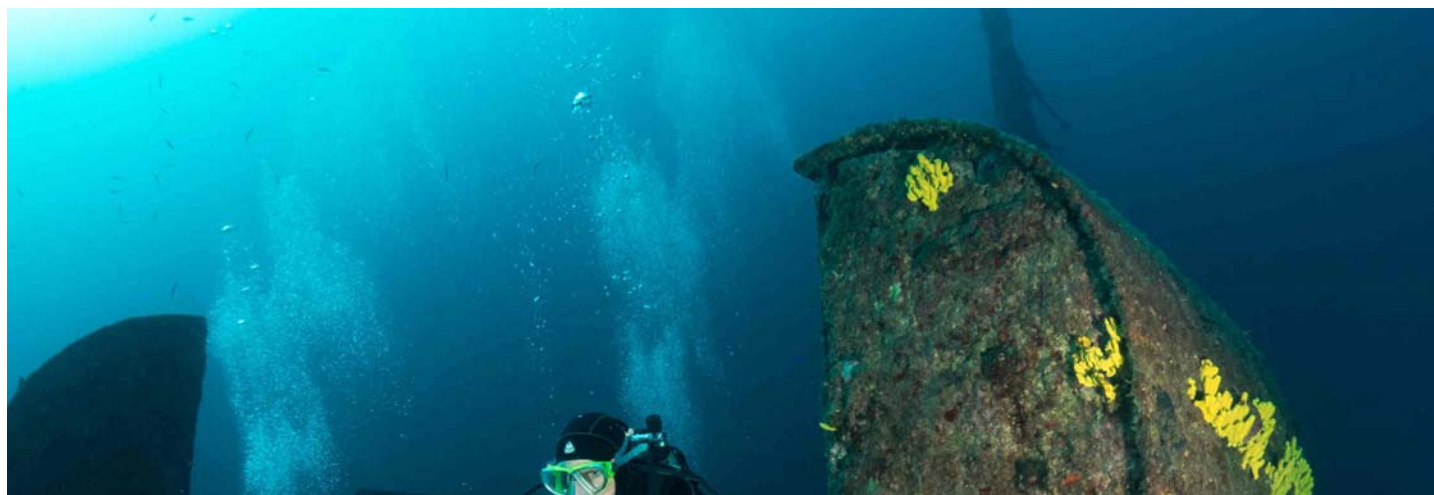
Currently I work with the Olympus OM-D E-M1 in a carbon housing from BS Kinetics. In order to bring light into my pictures, I use two flashes, the Subtronic Pro 160. Additionally, to enable a fast autofocus under difficult light conditions, I use one or two LED torches which offer the option to switch from white to red light (red light is invisible to most fishes).

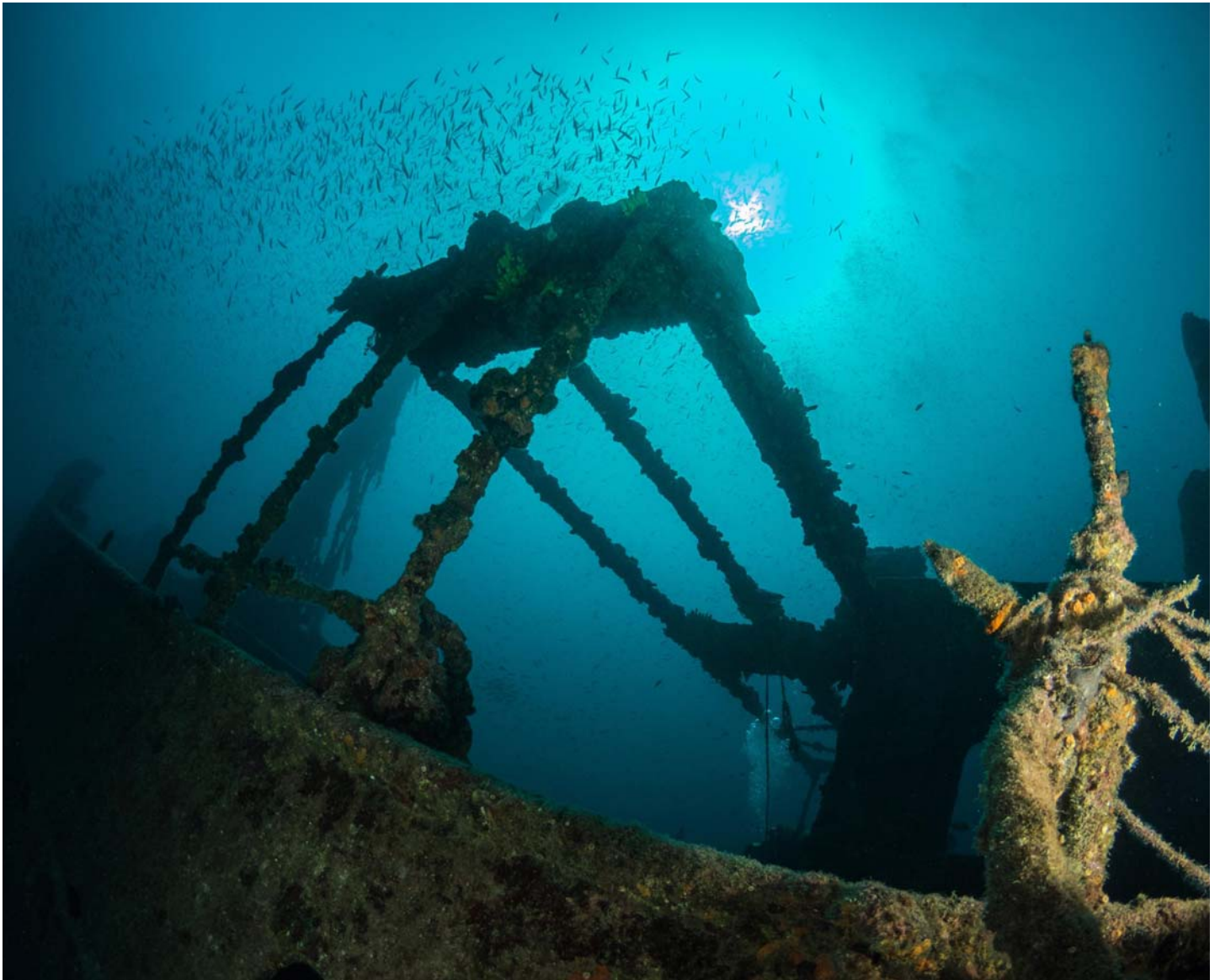
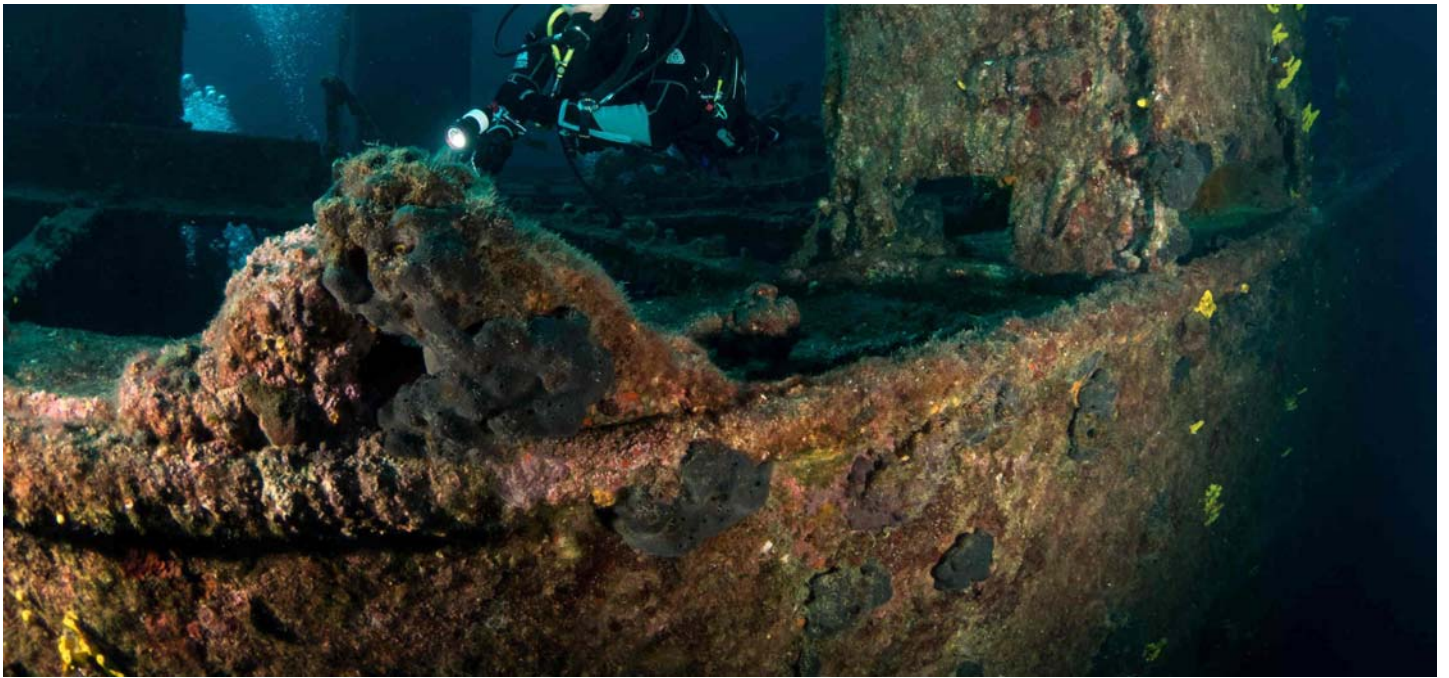
For wide angle photography, where your buddy is your model, a torch for your buddy is a must. For some “special effect” pictures, I mount a slave flash on the tank of my buddy or inside a wreck.

What do you do to prepare for an underwater shoot and how long does it usually take?

The preparation itself isn't too complicated, it only takes a few minutes. The choice of which lens to use depends on the type of dive. For wreck diving, I take a fisheye behind a dome port. The dome port is necessary in order to preserve the sharpness in the edge of the pictures. For most other dives, I take the 60mm macro lens behind a flat port. Always remember to charge everything, and check all O-ring sealings twice for dirt and hairs! I once partly flooded my housing because there was just one single hair from my dog on an O-ring. Well, let's agree it was from the dog.

“I once partly flooded my housing because there was just one single hair from my dog on an O-ring. Well, let's agree it was from the dog.”





Underwater photographs of diving the Wreck of the Lina in the Mediterranean Sea, depth 28-55 meters. Sunk in the year 1914.

How do you approach lighting when taking photos in such unique locations?

Lighting is among the most important, and most difficult issues when shooting under water—especially when the visibility is bad. Poor visibility can be due to plankton or inorganic particles. Imagine driving your car through a snow storm with high beam—that's what your pictures look like when your flash (or multiple flashes) is too strong, or is in the wrong position. Although Affinity Photo offers very good tools to remove these fine particles, the better solution is to avoid particles in the picture. You can do this by aligning your flash so it is not pointing directly towards your subject. Turn it a bit outwards in order to reduce the 'snow storm'.



What technical challenges have you encountered taking photographs underwater?

The challenge regarding lights was already discussed, therefore my primary advice is: be an experienced diver before you start to use a camera down there!

Collect 100, or even better, 200 dives. (I did it completely wrong, see my answer to question one).

Furthermore: the deeper the dive, the shorter your bottom time. Be familiar with your equipment. Diving in strong currents in coral reefs can be very challenging. Sometimes it might be wise to leave your camera on the boat.

What are your favourite underwater subjects to photograph?

Wrecks and makro (snails!)

Do you travel a lot to get the perfect photo and where in the world is your favourite place to shoot?

Well, there are so many nice places... I enjoyed my dives at the Azores a lot. However, the conditions are quite difficult there. Maldives are great! But also the cold lakes in the mountains of Austria are splendid, especially in winter below the ice. This is beyond all description.





Diving with blue sharks

You've been diving with sharks, wreck diving and diving under ice. Which has been your most dangerous underwater shoot?

As a biologist, allow me to stand up for the sharks: although the blue sharks at the Azores came close and touched myself and my camera, they were not dangerous at all. The most dangerous part of these dives might have been the strong currents and the fact that it was a so called 'blue dive'. The ground is >1000m below you and you must have your buoyancy under control. I gladly remember the very thrilling situation of this dive: blue water, blue sharks, no

ground below me, heavy equipment, strong current, and bait 'raining' from the boat above in order to keep the sharks near us.

“blue water, blue sharks, no ground below me, heavy equipment, strong current, and bait ‘raining’ from the boat above in order to keep the sharks near us.”

It might sound pretentious, but most of the sharks at the Maldives are cowards. You have to be among the first divers in the water in order to see them. Usually, when they see divers, they disappear. After several hundreds of dives at the Maldives I was not able to shoot at least one really good picture of a shark.

Diving with sharks is NOT dangerous. (Rare) exceptions confirm the rule. By the way, did you know that more people are killed annually by falling drink dispensers than by sharks? No kidding!

Now let's come to your question: I cannot remember a time when I was in a really life-threatening situation while taking pictures under water. When you make appropriate preparations, you can reduce the risk for theoretically dangerous dives such as dives under ice or inside wrecks to a minimum.

However, I was once under heavy attack from a Titan Triggerfish. They are well-known for causing ugly wounds when they defend their territory during parental care. Although you should never touch or hit living objects under water, in this case I had to help myself with my heavy photo equipment (once again: exceptions confirm the rule).



Video footage of Jens' dive with blue sharks in the Azores

Which of your photographs are you most proud of and why?

As an underwater photographer, it is always nice to win a contest. However, I do not participate too often. I am proud for my 1st place in the well-known German journal TAUCHEN with a picture from a perch eating a pumpkinseed.



Jens' award-winning photo of a perch.

The pictures of the blue sharks which I shot at the Azores are among the ones I personally like most.

I am especially proud of the pictures I shot for my book “[Stille Welten – Faszination unter Wasser](#)”, because I offer a lot of very interesting and new information on ecology about all shown organisms in the book. The pictures ‘tell a story’.

How did you hear about Affinity Photo and what most impressed you about it?

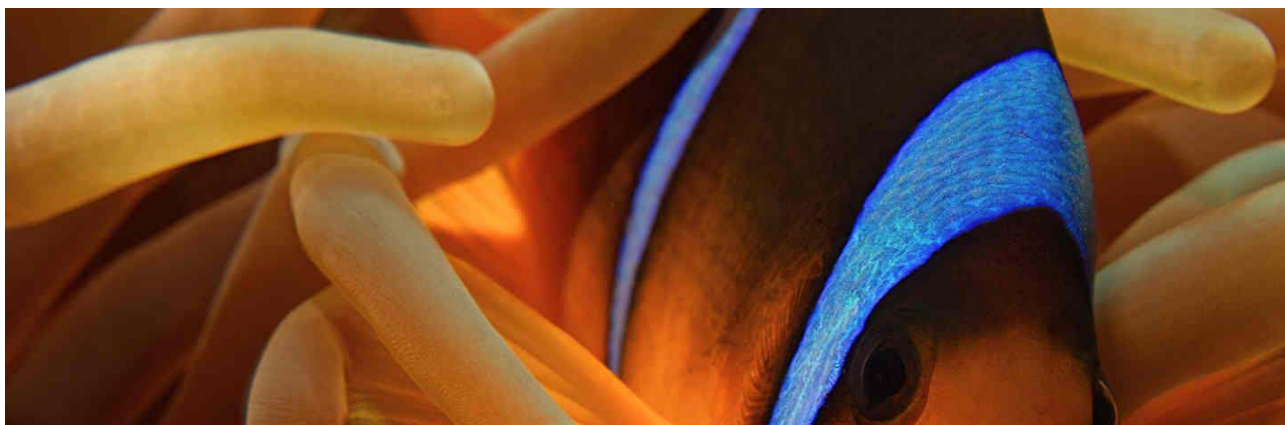
The way other companies have chosen, namely that customers have to rent their software packages on a monthly or annually base, is an absolute no-go for me. Some months ago, when I was searching the internet for potential alternatives, I found Affinity Photo mentioned as a very good alternative in several discussion forums. I am impressed that it is a very good alternative for Photoshop AND Lightroom for a (more than) reasonable price. To be honest, I would have paid more, but don't tell this to the marketing guys.

What tool in Affinity Photo do you find yourself using most often?

Most often: beyond question, it's the Healing function to remove dirt particles from my underwater pictures at bad visibility or with the wrong flash placement. Sometimes 1000 times per picture. Nice work for long, boring winter nights.

On my iPad, the RAW development of my pictures when I am on holiday. This is so much faster than it was previously on my Notebook using Lightroom. I saved hours and hours during my last stay in Croatia. That's awesome!!

On the desktop computer, Affinity Photo is a very good software to substitute Adobe Photoshop. Working with layers, merging several pics too one or changing colours for special effects works like a charm.





Tell us about your book ‘Stille Welten: Faszination unter Wasser Well’ (Silent worlds: Fascination Under Water)

Well, it was back in 2008 when I came home from the Maldives and showed my best pictures to a few workmates—three of them agreed that I should write a book. At first, I didn’t like this idea, but during the next few days I started to think about it, and a few weeks later I started to write the first chapter about whale sharks.

Since I wanted the book to become a ‘more than average’ book, and also because I did the whole writing besides my full time job at an Austrian University, it took me some time. I think it was at the beginning of 2014 when I thought I finished the book and contacted the publisher, not expecting the hell of work to fine-tune the chapters together with the editor. In January 2015, I held my first copy in my hands. An incredible moment.

“In January 2015, I held my first copy in my hands. An incredible moment.”

What tips would you give to anyone starting out as an underwater photographer?

Collect experience under water, don't start to take pictures before you have your buoyancy 100% under control. Don't start with a high-end camera and two flashes, but start with reasonable equipment and extend it from year to year depending on your needs. It's going to be a quite expensive hobby. Therefore, be blessed (as I am) with an understanding wife who loves you.

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You can see more of Jens Hartmann's incredible photos at www.jens-hartmann.at. His book is available (in German Language) [Stille Welten – Faszination unter Wasser](#).

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Charlotte Thomson-Morley

Artist relations

Charlotte is an illustrator and arts lecturer who is passionate about the creative industries and is now part of our artist relations team. Her interests include mid 20th century inspired design, comic books, board games, movie memorabilia, baking cakes, feminism and yoga. She shares her 1960's home with her graphic designer husband and her toddler son who likes to hide her iPad. [Get in touch](#) with Charlotte if you have work you have made in Affinity apps to share with us, or tag your work with #madeinaffinity in the usual places.

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