

A diver is seen from behind, swimming through a narrow underwater passage. The diver's flashlight illuminates the rocky walls and ceiling of the cave, creating a dramatic play of light and shadow. The water is clear, and the overall atmosphere is mysterious and adventurous.

Contributors' Picks

Epic

UW Photography

Text and photos by John A. Ares, Rico Besserlich, Sheryl Checkman, Larry Cohen, Anita George-Ares, Kate Jonker, Matthew Meier, Brandi Mueller, Gary Rose and Olga Torrey

We asked our contributors what their favorite epic underwater images were and they returned with a diverse selection of photos capturing epic adventures and interactions with marine life in the underwater world. Here, *X-Ray Mag* contributors share their favorite images from the tropical waters of French Polynesia, Pulau, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, the Egyptian Red Sea, Mozambique, Bonaire, Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos Islands, the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Mexico and Hawaii, to the temperate waters of South Africa and the US East Coast.



Photo 1. (left) A pod of dolphins trying to outswim orcas. South Africa. Gear: Nikon D90 camera, Nikon 24mm lens, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 500, f/9, 1/640s

Photo 4. (right) A cave diver uses a DPV to explore the dream-like scene inside a cave. Mexico. Gear: Nikon Z 7II camera, Nikon 14-30mm lens, Ikelite housing, Kraken lights. Exposure: ISO 2500, f/6.3, 1/30s

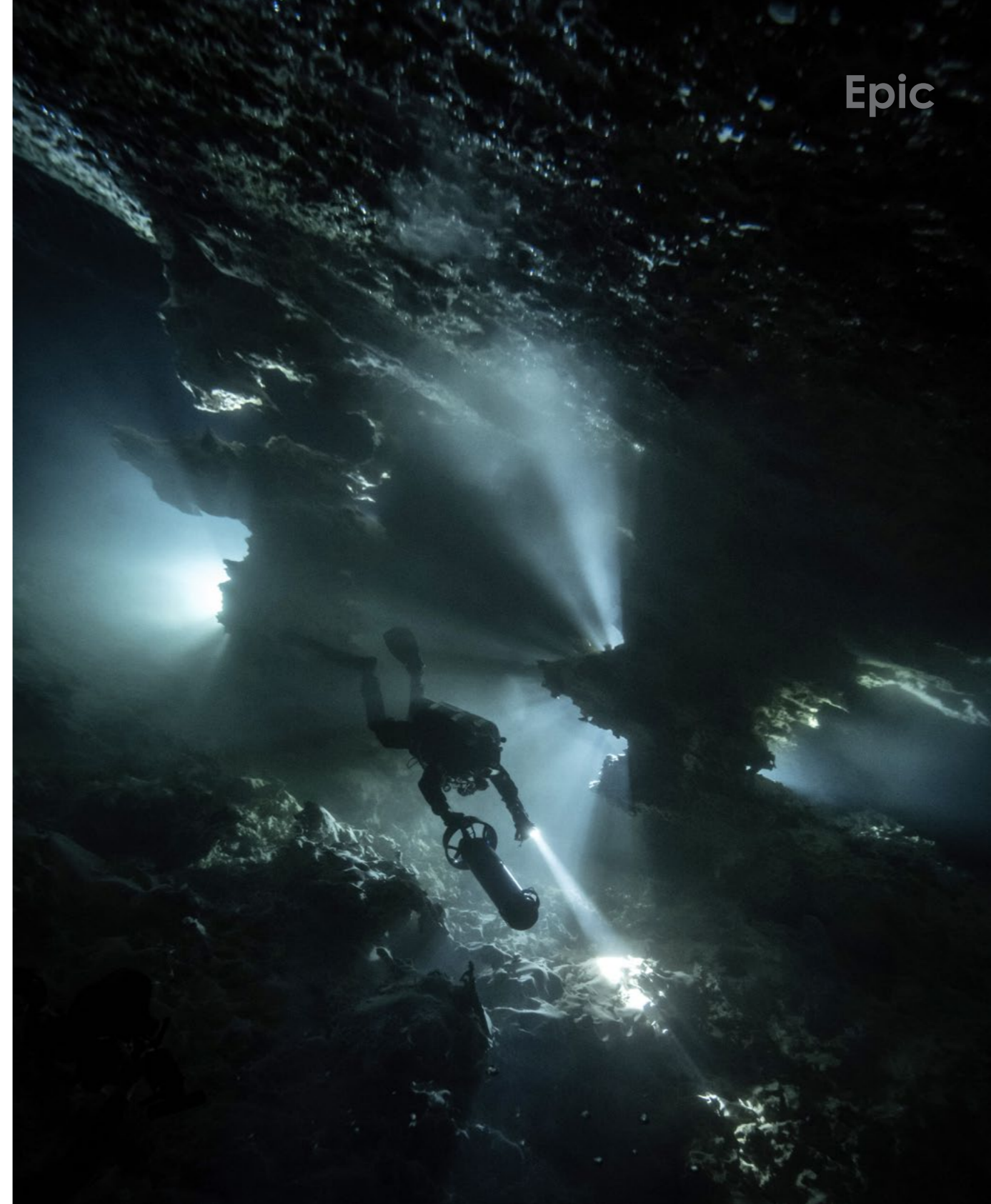


Photo 2. (right) Snorkeler with an orca. South Africa. Nikon D90 camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/9, 1/125s



Photo 3. (previous page) A cave diver swims through a tunnel with smoothed walls on all sides. Mexico. Gear: Nikon Z 7II camera, Ikelite housing, Kraken lights. Exposure: ISO 2500, f/7.1, 1/60s

Unexpected Experiences

Text and photos by Brandi Mueller

When I think about epic shots, my mind immediately starts searching my memory bank for impressive and often unexpected underwater experi-

ences or images that came from a unique environment.

One of my favorite moments in the ocean took place on a trip to South Africa where I was in a skiff of divers, following a massive pod of dolphins, which turned out to be pursued by killer whales (Photo 1). We

watched seven orcas isolate one of the slower-swimming dolphins and play with it before eating it. After that, we jumped in the water for a quick snorkel with the orcas and could hear their loud echolocation as they scanned us with sound (Photo 2).

I also think about images taken in

the most epic underwater environment I have ever been in: caves. These shots (Photo 3 and 4) required dives without a camera to find a spot to shoot; followed by above-water drawings and discussions with a team of divers willing to spend an entire dive in an attempt to make

one image; and then carrying a lot of lights and other equipment into the cave to light the scene. Not to mention, it also required amazing models who were willing to hover for over an hour to get the shot. I have some pretty “epic” dive buddies. Visit: brandiunderwater.com



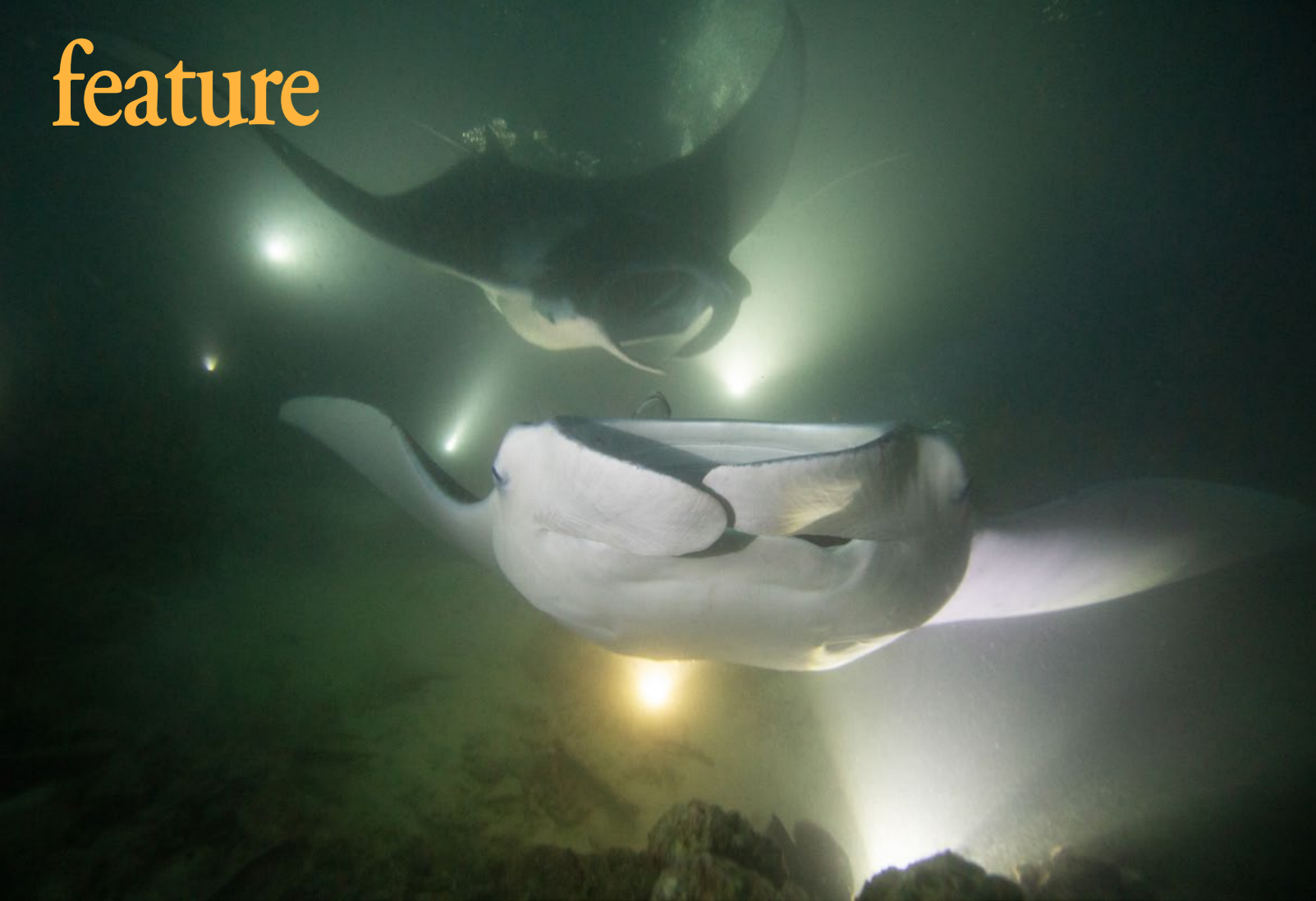


Photo 1. (top left) Manta rays at night, Maldives. Gear: Canon Rebel SL1 camera, Canon EF-S 10-18mm f/4.5-5.6 IS STM lens at 10mm, Ikelite housing, twin Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 1600, f/4.5, 1/60s; Photo 3. (top right) Humpback whales with snorkeler, Silver Bank, Dominican Republic. Gear: Canon F1 camera, Canon 15mm EF f/2.8 lens, Ikelite housing, available light. Exposure: ISO 100, f/11, 1/160s

Big Animals

Text and photos by John A. Ares

When I think about the word “epic” in respect to underwater subjects, I think of both shipwrecks and big animals. Big animals won out for this article.

Photo 1 depicts an epic night dive with several manta rays in the Maldives. While two rays are clearly visible, there is the tail of a third ray on the right side of the top manta. Epic.

Photo 2 is also from the Maldives, where I was “adopted” by a six-foot-long tawny nurse shark. The sharks gather here in groups of one to three dozen, as they are routinely fed scraps

by a local restaurant. Tawny nurse sharks are very docile. This shark posed for its portrait for about ten minutes.

The humpback whales in Photo 3 were photographed in Silver Bank, halfway between the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Dominican Republic. The snorkeler shows the scale in relation to the 15ft-long calf and its 45ft-long mother below.

Few experiences underwater are as attention-grabbing as coming face-to-face with a great white shark. Photo 4 was shot from a cage at Guadalupe Island in Mexico. The photo was converted to black and white using Nik Silver Efex Pro 2 software. Visit: JohnAres.com



Photo 2. Tawny nurse shark, Maldives. Gear: Canon Rebel SL1 camera, Canon EF-S 10-18mm f/4.5-5.6 IS STM lens at 18mm, Ikelite housing, twin Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/80s

Photo 4. Great white shark, Guadalupe Island, Mexico. Gear: Canon 10D camera, Sigma 11-18mm lens at 18mm, Ikelite housing, available light. Exposure: ISO 100, f/5.6, 1/60s



The Dakota. This is a sunken Douglas DC3 aircraft. In the 13th-century epic poem *Song of the Nibelungs*, the character Siegfried suffered, and so did I. It took me 72 dives at the same place to nail this one shot. Gear: Canon 40D camera, Sigma 10-20mm lens (at the 10mm end), Ikelite housing, ambient light (no strobes), with a “magic filter” attached to the lens. Exposure: ISO 800, f/8, 1/100s



The Skydiver. A juvenile squid hovers just centimetres below the water's surface, looking at me while the sky and the clouds form a unique, almost “epic” background. The sky is reflected in the eyes of the squid. Gear: Canon 40D camera, Canon 60mm macro lens, Ikelite housing, one Ikelite DS125 strobe. Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/125s

Epic Shots

Text and photos by Rico Besserlich

The request to deliver “epic” shots made me think a lot about what “epic” actually means and how it could (or should not) be used in the world of photography. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states: “Epic: A long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation.”

Hmm... is a squid a heroic figure? As I understood it, the *Iliad* and the *Nibelungenlied* (*The Song*

of the Nibelungs) are epic works, but my images are not. My search continued...

Looking at the lingo of the “whas-sup?”, “bbl” and “lol” generation—and let’s not forget ROFL (or “rolling on the floor laughing”)—the Merriam-Webster dictionary then explained to me that the term “epic” has been found used in a highly colloquial fashion, in a manner that is largely synonymous with *outstanding*, *fabulous*, or *impressive*.”

Aha. *Outstanding*, *fabulous*, *impressive*. We are getting closer. However, what is “fabulous” to one may be perceived entirely differently by someone else. *ROFL!*

For me (if I could even dare to place a definition on it), an “epic” image is an image that impresses viewers for longer than just a few seconds, making them think and wonder. Most of all, it should be a visual work that cannot be reproduced, meaning it is special and unique, and thus stands as a powerful milestone of imaging artwork, well beyond the classic notion that an image should “entertain for just five seconds.” To me, something epic is also something timeless... something a photographer can hope to be remembered for. Visit:

maviphoto.com



Photo 1. (top left) Jellyfish, Jellyfish Lake, Palau. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark II camera, Olympus M.9-18mm f/4.0-5.6 at 9mm. Exposure: ISO 250, f/9, 1/125s

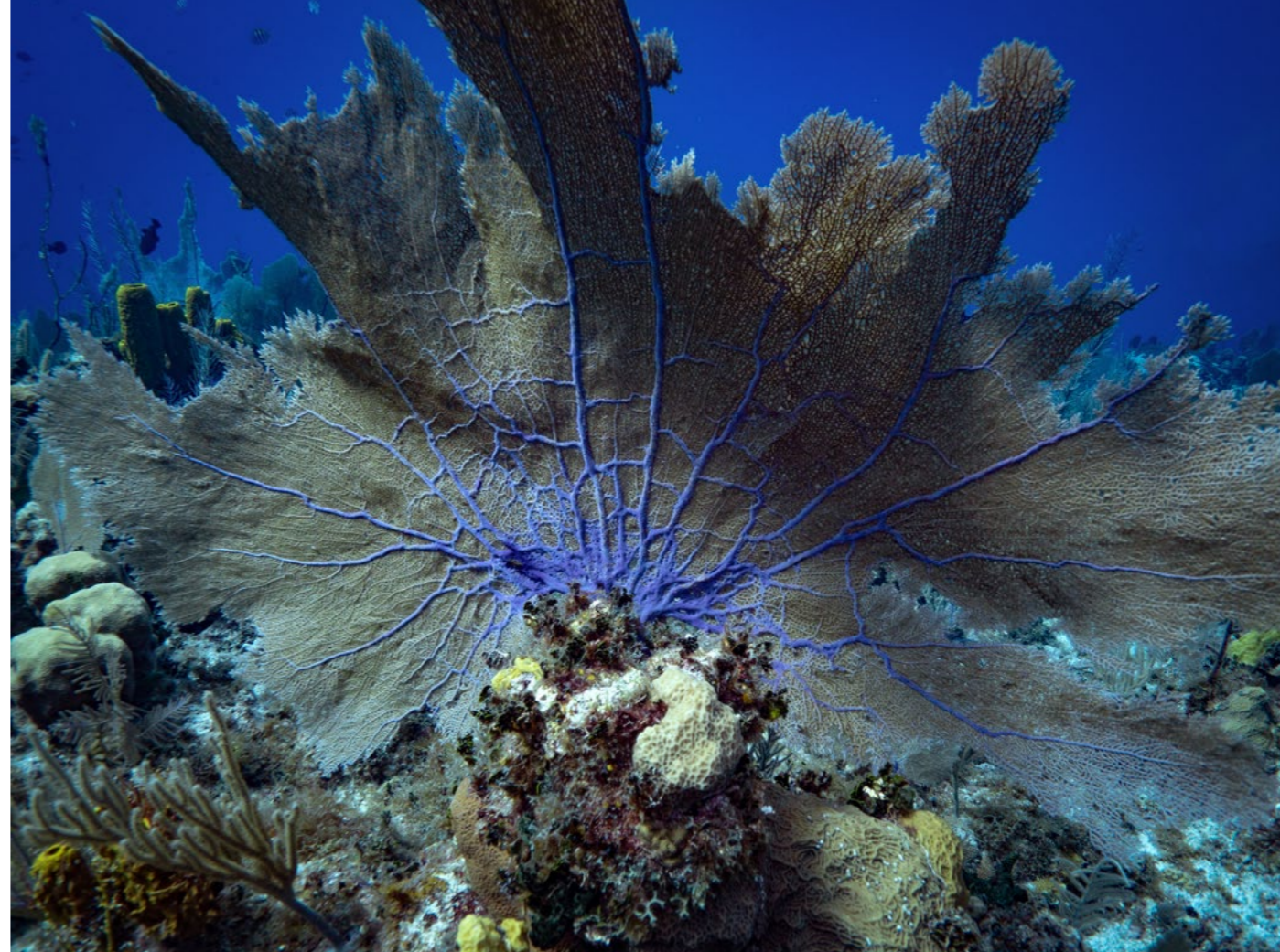
Wide-Angle Proportions

Text and photos by Sheryl Checkman

What makes an image epic? It could be the unique perspective that super wide-angle or close-focus wide-angle can give to a subject or landscape, or the way a leading line brings you into an image so that you feel a part of it.

When I went to Jellyfish Lake in Palau, I was blown away by the sheer number of stingless jellyfish that surrounded me. I had so much fun with the endless possibilities for photographing them that I did not want to get out of the water! For this article, I chose a close-focus wide-angle shot of a single jellyfish in the foreground (Photo 1), its epic proportions in relation to the background makes it look like a spaceship flying through space.

Photo 3. Spearfisher, Blue House, Alor. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark II camera, Olympus M.9-18mm f/4.0-5.6 at 13mm, Olympus PT-EP13 housing, Sea&Sea YS D-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/80s



Epic

Photo 2. (left) Sea fan, Joy's Joy, Little Cayman. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark II camera, Olympus 8mm f/1.8 at 12mm, Olympus PT-EP13 housing, Sea&Sea YS D-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/200s

Photo 4. (below) Bluestripe snapper, Sherwood Forest, Mozambique. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark II camera, Olympus 8mm f/1.8 at 12mm, Olympus PT-EP13 housing, Sea&Sea YS D-1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/6.3, 1/125s

The sea fan (Photo 2) that I shot on the Joy's Joy dive site in Little Cayman was shot super wide-angle with my 8mm fisheye lens, making it appear larger than life.

At the beginning of a dive on the Blue House site in Alor, Indonesia, I looked up to see a freediving spearfisher suspended in the water (Photo 3). Another diver, on scuba, looked up at him from the depths below. To me, the juxtaposition of these two divers, from my perspective, makes this an epic photo.

The curved line of bluestripe snappers (Photo 4) schooling through Sherwood Forest in Mozambique was a truly magical sight, as they weaved their way through the "forest" of green, tree-like coral. This super wide-angle view leads the viewer right into the entire scene. Visit: [Instagram.com/sherylcheckman](https://www.instagram.com/sherylcheckman)





Bernadette Carrion entering a restriction at Minotauro (above). Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mark II camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/4.0, 1/80s; Michael Netto entering Cenote Carwash (top right). Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mark II camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 1250, f/5.0, 1/40s

Magical Cenotes

Text and photos by Larry Cohen

Diving in one of the flooded caves in the Mexican Yucatán is as close as one can get to being on a different planet while still on Earth. As a photographer, capturing images in the dark is challenging, but capturing nature's light show in the cenotes offers many possibilities.

A cenote is formed when a cave ceiling collapses. When this happens, a pool is created that becomes an entrance to the underworld. Tourists

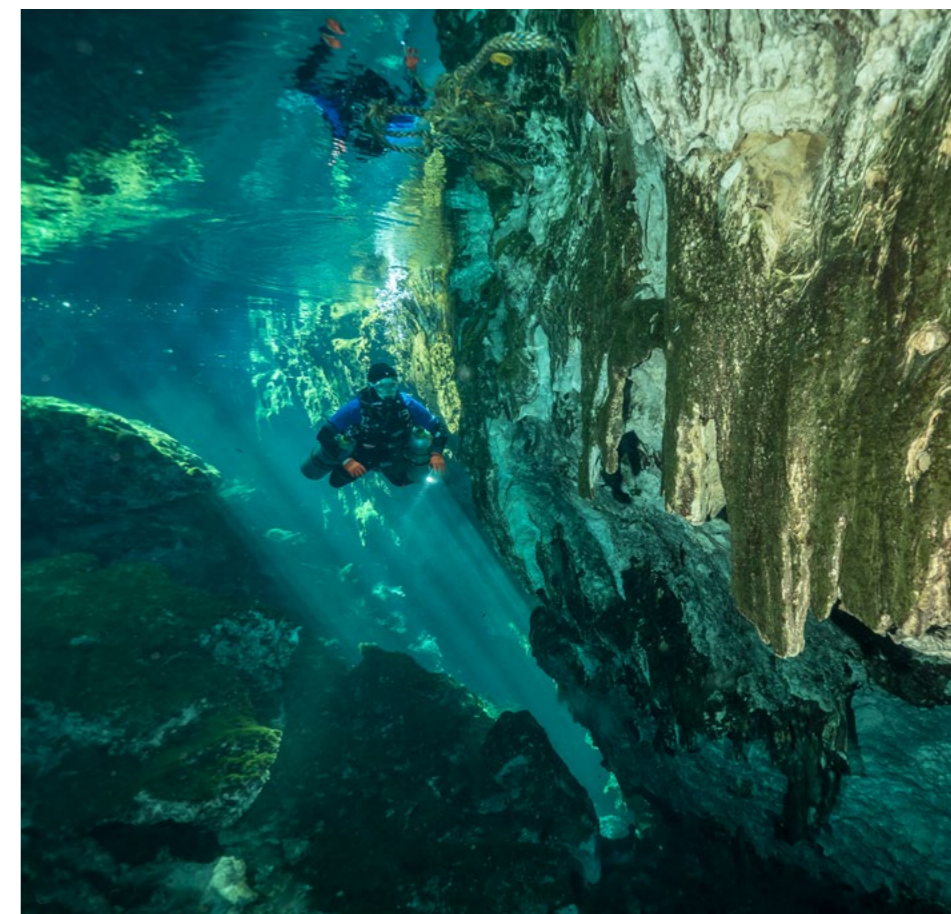
and locals use these pools to escape the heat; for cave divers, it is the entrance to an adventure.

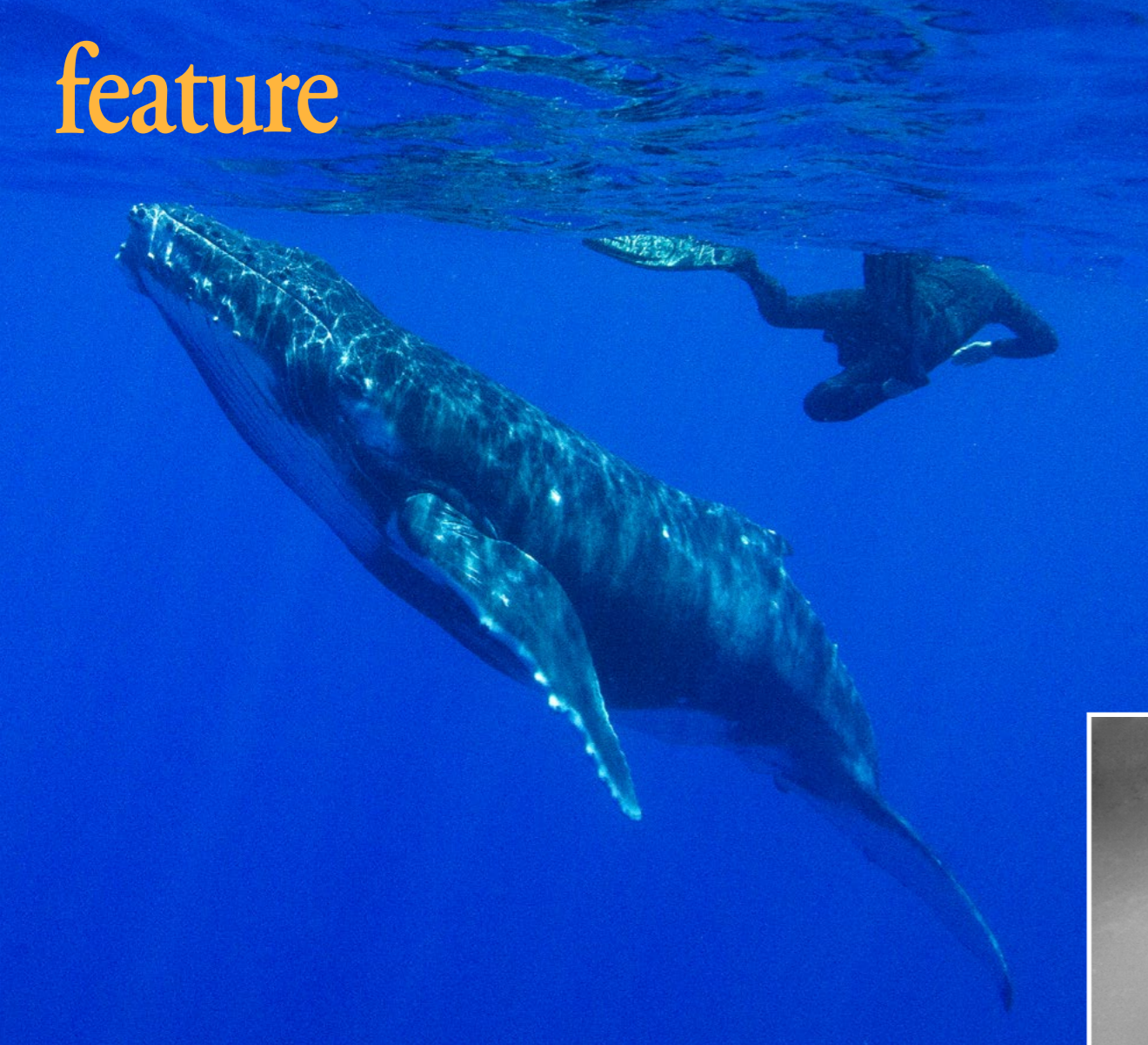
On sunny days, light streams into the dark area of the caverns, creating patterns and sunbeams that are breathtaking to the eye. Capturing this light can produce an epic photograph.

It is good to have a diver model in the image and use just enough strobe light to open up the shadows and capture details in the subject. It is essential not to use too much artificial light, so that the ambient light effects are not overpowered. Visit: liquidimagesuw.com



Olga Torrey photographing Aydin Dinc at Garden Eden (above). Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mark II camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 1000, f/4.0, 1/13s; Olga Torrey entering Minotauro (right). Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mark II camera, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Aquatica housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes. Exposure: ISO 1000, f/4.0, 1/80s





ANITA GEORGE-ARES



ANITA GEORGE-ARES

Photo 1. (left) Great white shark, Guadalupe Island, Mexico. Gear: Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi camera, Canon EF-S 10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 USM lens, Ikelite housing, available light. Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/80s

Photo 2. (far left) John Ares and humpback whale calf, Moorea, French Polynesia. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S 10-18mm f/4.5-5.6 IS STM lens, Ikelite housing, available light. Exposure: ISO 1600, f/20, 1/200s

Photo 4. (center) Manta ray, Maldives. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S 10-18mm f/4.5-5.6 IS STM lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/60s



ANITA GEORGE-ARES



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Photo 3. John Ares and whale shark, Oslob, Cebu, Philippines. Gear: Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi camera, Canon EF-S 10-18mm f/4.5-5.6 IS STM lens, Ikelite housing, available light. Exposure: ISO 400, f/4.5, 1/1250s

Epic Encounters

Text & photos by Anita George-Ares, PhD

For me, “epic” means experiencing an awesome encounter up close with a big marine animal. The image of the great white shark in Photo 1 was shot from a cage. It was easier to shoot with available light than to use my big Ikelite strobes in a cage with several divers all on hookah rigs.

Strobes and scuba are not permitted when shooting whale sharks in Oslob and humpback whales in Moorea. In order to take the image of the calf in Photo 2, I slipped into the water quietly from the boat, then snorkeled on the surface for 300 yards. Government rules prevent boats from approaching closer than 300 yards to mothers with calves.

Freediving and the wearing of weight belts are not permitted. Calves need to frequently come to the surface to breathe, so there are still plenty of opportunities to take images.

The whale shark in Photo 3 was in a vertical position as it was surface feeding. This behavior occurs as the whale sharks at Oslob are fed shrimp by the local fishermen. In recent years, Oslob has become overcrowded with tourists. This image was taken in 2013 when there was not such a high density of tourists in the water.

The Maldives are known for their reef manta rays and manta cleaning stations. Mantas continually circle a reef area in order to be cleaned by small

fish. I like the diagonal composition and feeling of motion that this manta ray image (Photo 4) conveys.

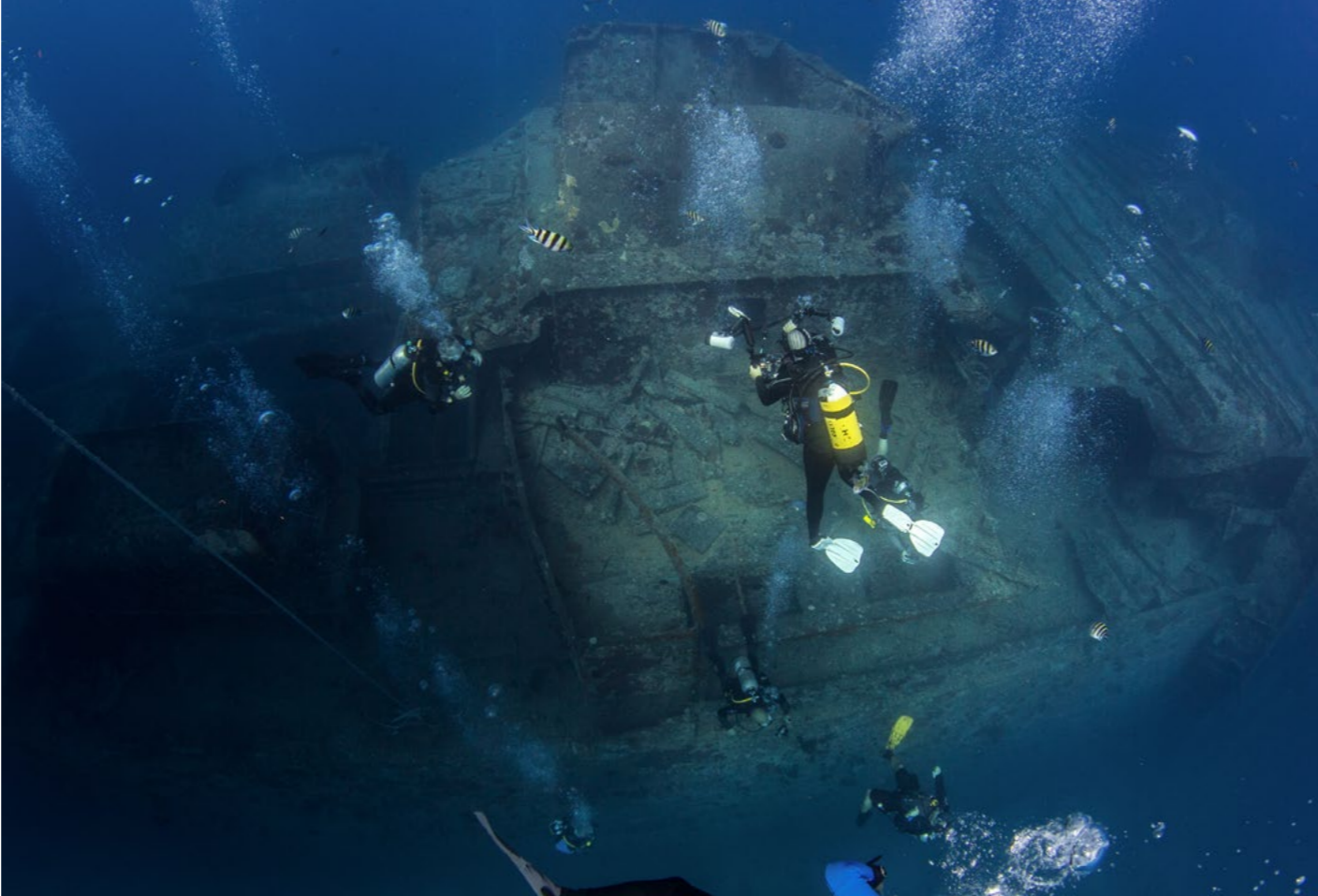
Images were converted to black and white using Nik Silver Efex Pro 2. Please visit: [facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016947967639](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016947967639)



On clear days, capturing the underwater landscape's horizon adds a sense of depth, and including the surface texture adds to the dimension of the scene. Sodwana Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (below). Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Sea&Sea housing, dual Inon Z240 strobes. Exposure: ISO 320, f/11, 1/160s



Adding layers of interest, such as the profile of a reef, a school of fish or the surface of the water can highlight the vastness of a reef. Shark Reef, Ras Mohammed, Northern Red Sea, Egypt. Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Sea&Sea housing, dual Inon Z240 strobes. Exposure: ISO 160, f/10, 1/160s



The sheer magnitude of a wreck can be captured by looking down at it and adding divers in the frame to give a sense of perspective (above). This is just a tiny section of the mighty SS *Thistlegorm*, Northern Red Sea, Egypt. Gear: Canon EOS 600D camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Sea&Sea housing, natural light. Exposure: ISO 100, f/6.3, 1/100s; A diver is dwarfed inside the huge cargo hold of the *Salem Express* wreck, Northern Red Sea, Egypt (right). Gear: Canon EOS 600D camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Sea&Sea housing, dual Inon Z240 strobes. Exposure: ISO 800, f/5.6, 1/40s

Vast Scale & Perspective

Text and photos by Kate Jonker

Epic underwater photography captures the awe-inspiring beauty of the vast underwater landscape. It is about exploring magnificent towering reefs and giant shipwrecks in crystal-clear waters, and conveying their "epic-ness" through the lens of a camera.

Traditionally, underwater photographers are taught to "shoot up," but breaking this mould can create stunning images that truly convey the scale and magnitude of shipwrecks. Shooting from high above the wreck using a wide-angle lens and natural light to illuminate as much of the wreck as possi-

ble can give viewers an eagle-eye view, making them feel as if they are flying above it.

When photographing reefs, using a wide-angle lens can help capture the grand scale of larger portions of the reef, going beyond what the human eye would normally see. Adding a school of fish or a diver in the frame, with the dark profile of the reef in the background, can add depth and a sense of magnitude.

Including a diver in the shot can give the viewer a sense of perspective, highlighting the immense size of the reef or wreck. The sheer size of many wrecks with a tiny diver next to them can create a feeling of solitude, making a diver seem

small and insignificant in comparison.

On clear days, capturing the underwater landscape's epic proportions is easier. Adding the surface of the water, and possibly even the dive boat above, can help add an extra dimension to the shot.

In the end, the key to capturing epic underwater images is to think beyond traditional photography techniques and experiment with creative angles and lighting. With practice and patience, you can capture the majesty of the underwater world and create images that will leave your viewers in awe. Visit: katejonker.com

Epic

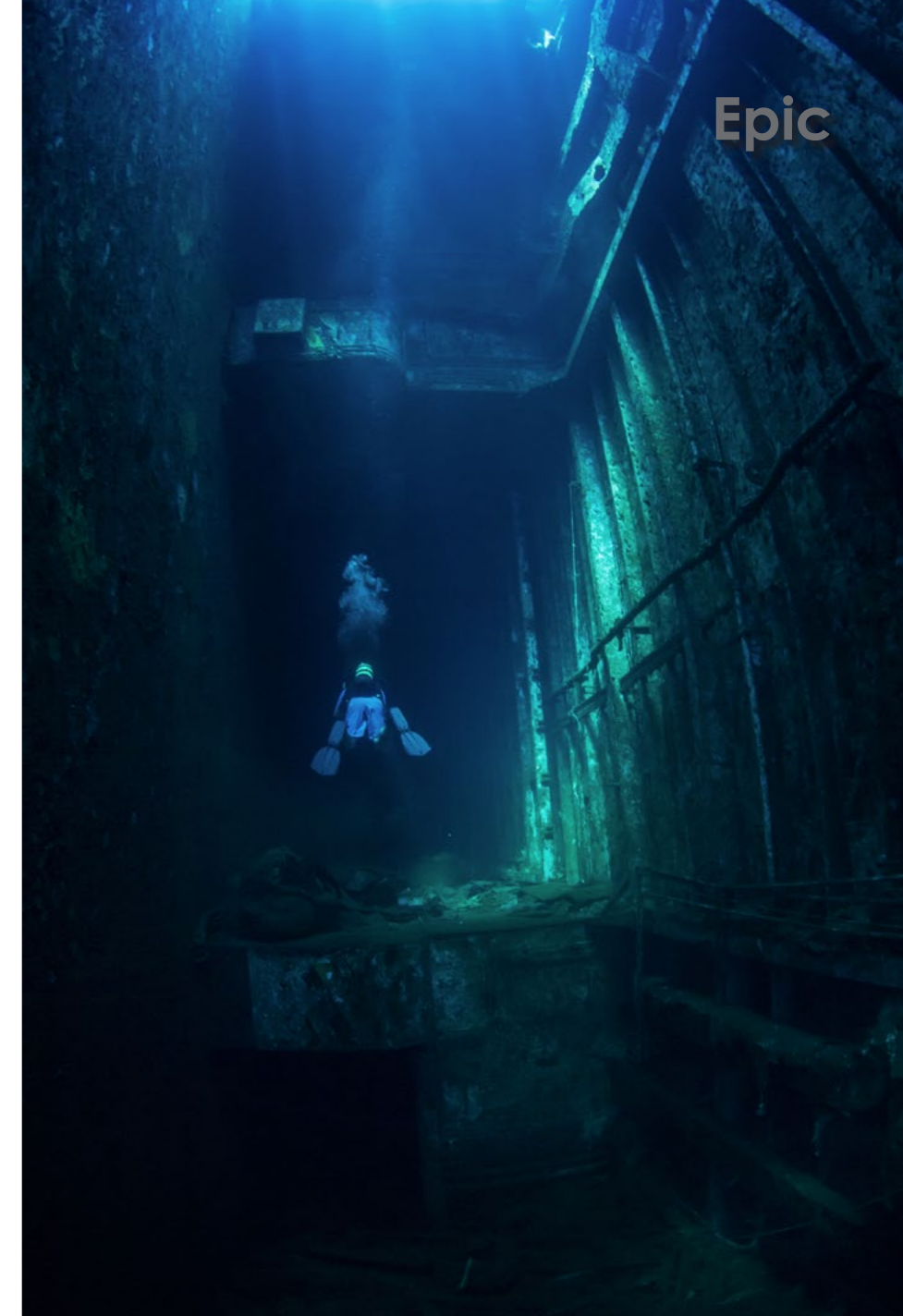




Photo 1. (right) Polarized school of creole wrasse, Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles. Gear: Nikon D3 camera, Nikon 24-85mm lens at 40mm, Subal housing, two Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/7.1, 1/40s; Photo 2. (top left) School of blue and gold snapper, whipper snapper and burrito grunts fill the opening of a large underwater cave, Cocos Island, Costa Rica. Gear: Nikon D3 camera, Nikon 24-70mm lens at 28mm, Subal housing, two Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/6.3, 1/60s; Photo 4. (top right) Schools of golden sweeper and glassfish swimming amongst the coral reef, Tanjung Papisoi, Indonesia. Gear: Nikon D3 camera, Nikon 17-35mm lens at 22mm, Subal housing, two Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/160s

Epic Fish Encounters

Text and photos by Matthew Meier

With so many ways to interpret the word “epic,” I decided to relive a few of my awe-inspiring interactions with massive schools of fish. On my first trip to Bonaire, I happened upon what I now realize was likely a spawning migration of creole wrasse (Photo 1). For over 20 minutes, I watched as a constant stream of fish swam past a deep portion of the reef heading for destinations unknown.

A few years later, I had two very memorable moments at Cocos Island. The first

involved hundreds of snappers and grunts, pulsing in the opening of an underwater cavern, as the heavy surge pushed us 10 to 15 feet in either direction (Photo 2). Then, later in the trip, I swam out into the blue, chasing a huge shadow off the pinnacle at Dirty Rock, to find a gigantic tornado of bigeye jacks twisting nearly to the surface from 60 feet down (Photo 3).

I had another two experiences with large schools of fish during a trip through Raja Ampat and Triton Bay. While shooting a colorful section of reef near Misool, I was overrun by a monstrous aggregation of fusiliers, dam-

sels and anthias, which nearly blotted out the sun. I only wish I had been shooting with a fisheye lens to capture the full spectacle. Finally, near Tanjung Papisoi in Indonesia, I came across the largest schools of golden sweepers and glass fish I had ever seen (Photo 4). They filled a huge gap in the reef, moving in unison with frenetic energy, and I spent a large portion of that dive observing and photographing the spectacle. Visit: MatthewMeierphoto.com

Photo 3. Massive school of bigeye jacks form a swirling tornado, Cocos Island, Costa Rica. Gear: Nikon D3 camera, Nikon 17-35mm lens at 17mm, Subal housing, two Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Exposure: ISO 800, f/7.1, 1/160s





Gear used for all photos: Nikon D500 camera, Tokina 10-17mm lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z330 strobes. Photo 1. (left) Tiger shark, captured while shooting straight down with a wide-angle lens, demonstrates isolation and size. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/125s; Photo 2. (right) Great white shark, with deep blue negative space, demonstrates dramatic movement and depth. Exposure: ISO 320, f/11, 1/125s; Photo 3. (top right) Great hammerhead shark. The “sfumato” effect emphasizes the solitary subject. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/125s; Photo 4. (top center) Diver and sandbar shark. Color, contrast, perspective and lighting combine to enhance a haunting beauty. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/125s



Why Epic?

Text and photos by Gary Rose, MD

The word “epic,” as a noun, refers to “a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition... or the history of a nation.” As an adjective in underwater photography, “epic” refers to shooting to the extreme and using techniques that emphasize the subject—such as wide-angle, extreme perspective, sfumato and isolation. My definition of an epic photo is one that evokes strong emotion upon viewing, and then lingers in the mind for hours or days. These are some of my favorite techniques to use for creating dramatic photos, which are the images that I often exhibit in galleries and shows.

Sharks are my favorite subjects for epic photographs. Just the very subject—sharks—inspires me to create.

The tiger shark is easily recognized (by most viewers) by its gorgeous markings and inherently huge size. Photo 1 demonstrates isolation and size. Viewers always ask me, “How did you get this photo?” Well, I used a very wide-angle lens and literally shot straight down between my legs as they straddled her in the frame. If my legs were not stretched to the max, you would be able to see my diving fins. It is Epic.

Photo 2 is a close-up of a great white shark, taken at an angle that emphasizes size, strength and movement. Most viewers are used to only seeing photos of great whites from cages or on the surface of the sea. The beauty of this photo is that it was not from within a cage (implying hidden danger), but in open water, against a salutary deep blue negative space, which highlights the magnificent coloring of the great white shark. When I display this photo,

I cut it into a triptyc (in homage to Damien Hirst), which further emphasizes dramatic movement and depth—Epic.

I love great hammerhead sharks. I get excited every time I see them and photograph them. They are unusual and exceptionally photogenic. As demonstrated in Photo 3, I used an Italian Renaissance technique called “sfumato.” As you can easily see, the lighting is very soft, and all is out of focus except for the subject—the great hammerhead. This is also an extremely close-up wide-angle photo, which enhances the beauty of the sfumato effect. This is one of my favorite photos and is prominently displayed in my home.

Photo 3 appeared in my article on minimalist photography in issue #117. In the minimalist version, the stark white background produces tension, creating an effect where the great hammerhead appears to nearly pop

right out of the photo. In contrast, as an epic photo in full color, using sfumato, the lighting is very soft and out of focus, except for the subject, engendering a feeling of peace and calm.

The color, lighting and unusual perspective of Photo 4, as well as the subject of an encounter between diver and shark, propel this photo into the realm of Epic. The contrast of dark and light, with the shark at the transition, emphasizes the ageless story of human-animal encounters. The cathedral lighting also enhances the symbolism of this encounter. I consider this encounter as a hauntingly beautiful epic.

Photo 4 previously appeared in my

article featuring black-and-white photography in issue #110. As a black-and-white photo, the emphasis was on the play of light—the sunburst and corona encircling the shark. In contrast, as an epic photo in full color, it draws the viewer’s attention to the subject—the extraordinary encounter of diver and shark.

Whenever I look at my raw photos, I try to “feel” what I am seeing. I shift from left brain to right brain, or hover in the middle. Then, the magic happens. Visit: garyrosephotos.com





Photo 1. (left) Corals and sponges form an underwater arch in Cozumel, Mexico. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes. Exposure: ISO 250, f/6.3, 1/50s

Photo 2. (right) Night dive with giant Pacific Ocean manta rays. Big Island, Hawaii, USA. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Panasonic 8mm fisheye lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes. Exposure: ISO 1250, f/6.3, 1/250s

Photo 3. (bottom left) Face-to-face with a sand tiger shark, North Carolina, USA. Gear: Olympus XZ-1 camera, wide-angle conversion lens, Olympus PT-050 housing, dual Sea & Sea YS-01 strobes. Exposure: ISO 100, f/4.5, 1/30s

Photo 4. (bottom right) *Phyllodesmium magnum* is a type of aeolid nudibranch in Malaysia. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Olympus M. 12-50mm lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes. Exposure: ISO 250, f/11, 1/80s



Grand Impressions

Text and photos by Olga Torrey

In Cozumel, Mexico, I dived sites with grand underwater arches formed by corals and sponges. I swam among these healthy reef walls, pinnacles and beautiful tunnels and had to use a fish-eye lens to show the enormous size of the arches (Photo 1).

When I first visited Kailua-Kona Island, Hawaii, in October 2019, I went night diving with giant manta rays. I settled on the bottom with a group of divers in a large circle. Inside the circle were bright lights that cut through the water with powerful beams. The light attracted the plankton, and the plankton attracted several giant mantas gliding through the water, making graceful turns and flips (Photo 2). The mantas provided a mesmerizing experience and showed Kona's nightlife at its best!

In July 2013, I dived on the *Aeolus* shipwreck for the first time. The vessel was part of an artificial reef in North Carolina, USA.¹ The dive was enjoyable because of the many sand tiger sharks inside the wreckage. These animals look ferocious with their jagged teeth to help with their big appetite! Sand tiger sharks are not aggressive towards people but should not be provoked. I descended on the wreck and faced the giant fish with curiosity and admiration. The sharks did not disappoint me and made excellent photo subjects (Photo 3).

The *Phyllodesmium magnum* is a type of aeolid nudibranch with a sophisticated arrangement of densely branched digestive glands perfectly positioned toward sunlight (Photo 4). The shape of the glands reminds me of the artwork of Columbian artist Fernando Botero whose signature style is exaggerated and voluptuous. Visit: fitimage.nyc

¹ WIKIPEDIA.ORG

