

“In-Conversation”

February 2008

Featuring

Margaret Pang

Underwater Photographer

Interview conducted by

PhotoVivo.com



ABOUT MARGARET PANG

In 2006, Margaret started her first dive with a compact camera and instantaneously fell in love with photographing the underwater world. She made more trips to dive sites mainly in North Sulawesi, Sipadan, Bali and Maldives. In February 2007, she bought her first DSLR camera, Nikon D80 together with a Sea & Sea Housing and strobes together with other accessories. From then on, there was no turning back as she got hooked on underwater photography.

Mesmerised by the beauty of the underwater world, Margaret is enthusiastic to share with others who do not dive and especially those who do not realise that such beauty exists in the underwater world. When she read about the financial plight of SAVH in the media, she hatched the idea of holding a fund-raising exhibition in aid of the Association and at the same time, enabling her to share with others the beauty of the enchantment of the sea captured on her camera. The exhibition titled ‘*Enchantment of the Sea*’ shall be held at the atrium of Paragon Shopping Centre from 22nd to 24th Feb, organised by Photovivo.com and Merlin Frame makers.

Margaret was a volunteer worker some 30 years ago for the Singapore Association for the Blind, now known as the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH). Her concern for the visually disabled people propelled her to launch this project, hoping not only to be able to raise a substantial amount but also to bring in long term sponsors and donors for the Association.

Although a minimum donation is set for the framed exhibits, she hopes that those who could afford more would donate generously. In order to enable as many donors as possible to participate in this fund-raising exhibition, she has also published a book titled ‘*Enchantment of the Sea*’ as well as printed some of her favourite photos on greeting cards.

Questions:

1. How did you get your start in photography?

It was through a friend, Marcus Lim, who is an avid photographer both on land and underwater. When he heard I was going to Maldives for a fishing trip in early 2006, he insisted that I must dive there. He practically dragged me to buy my compact camera with its underwater housing. Although I drowned that camera on my first dive, I bought another one. The day I developed my photos on hard copies and looked at them, I got hooked. In order to improve,

I took up a PADI basic course in underwater photography with Eugene Sim of Dive Atlantis Centre. As I did more dives with the compact, my craving gets bigger for better photos. I started looking at William Tan's photos (William is a well known underwater photographer in Singapore), and that gives me the push to want to do better. Then in February 2007, I bought my first DSLR NIKON D80 with Sea & Sea Housing, strobes and accessories. I took up a basic course on land photography with my DSLR under the guidance of Steven Yee, PhotoVivo.com and Mr Hui Man Yan of PSS. My first dive with my DSLR Nikon D80 was in February 2007 in Manado. From then, I was addicted and did 8 diving trips in less than 10 months.

2. What made you choose underwater photography as your specialization and what do you think is most difficult or challenging in underwater photography?

While under the guidance of Steven Yee, he told me that I should concentrate more on my underwater photography as he said he liked my style. At that time, I was 'popping' around on land photography also. I thought about what he said and started really to look critically at my underwater photos and yes I really love taking them and yes I find it very therapeutic under the water with its own sound and scenes. And yes I feel wonderful when I am surrounded by the beauties and enchantment of the sea.

Most difficult or challenging? Well when the current is very strong and that's where you find the big 'boys' – sharks, mantas, – it can be tough just getting there to that spot where you might find them. Finding the small subjects you want for macro can also be tedious and for this you need the help of divemasters of that area. For very small macro subjects like the pygmy seahorse (actual size 0.5cm) I would never be able to spot them by myself especially when they are so well camouflaged in the fan corals.

Patience is needed and certain amount of dive skills involving your buoyancy is a must. If you cannot control your movement and be steady when taking shots, then it is quite difficult to get sharp pictures.

3. Is underwater photography safe?

Like in any sport, as long as you observe the safety rules, yes it is safe. But of course, unlike land photography, in underwater photography, one has to observe time, depth and amount of air left. Sometimes I can get so carried away that I didn't even hear my computer beeping signalling me that I must start to move to shallower grounds. That's why I never dive without my coach, Eugene and if he is busy with other divers, he would assign a dive master just to look after me.

4. What is your usual equipment which you will bring for your underwater shoot?

As mentioned earlier, I have Nikon D80 body and my lenses are 60mm, macro 105mm and fish eye 10.5mm

5. You have been to many diving spots. Is there any one that has captured your heart?

Oh, very difficult question – there are many spots that more than captured my heart like in Sipadan and Manado and I can do the same spots over and over again and yet find it different each time I am there.

6. What do you want people to see in your photograph?

The beauty, the enchantment, the serenity, the colours - and most of all LIFE

7. What is your most interesting experience during your photo shoot which you would like to share?

Oh that was in Sipadan in October 2006. I was on a one to one trip with my coach Eugene Sim and although October was not the peak season for that area, we had wonderful encounters with big school of jacks, barracudas and bumperhead parrot fish as big as myself. It was wonderful swimming with them and I watched the video that Eugene took of me over and over again without getting bored by it.

8. How do you get your inspiration?

My first spout of inspiration was when Eugene gave me a book “Gorontalo – Hidden Paradise” with photos taken by William Tan, Stephen Wong and his wife, Takako Uno. When I look at the photos, I went “wow” and I said to myself, I want to be able to take that and that... Of course, I am no where that level .

Also, after each trip, I would developed my photos and put them in albums. I believe in hard copies as I find that looking at them on the computer screen cannot be compared to looking at hard copies. The colours and sharpness tell much more on hard copies, in my opinion anyway. From looking at them, sometimes I get another idea of how to shoot that subject. But most of the time, I find that my ‘nice’ photos are actually what my mother used to say ‘the blind chicken catches the worm’ – in other words, fluke shots!

9. Which photographer inspired you most?

William Tan ! When I first met him in Manado with Eugene, I was pleasantly surprised. He was so humble and even share with me some tips. He even offered to accompany me on my first dive with my DSLR. Of course, on that dive, I didn’t do very well with my buoyancy as the DSLR with its housing was heavy (about 9kg) and I was nervous . But he was most encouraging and shared with me some of his shots.

10. How does photography enrich your life?

When I share my photos with my friends and family and see their faces going ‘ooh’ and ‘ahh’ and ‘are you sure these exist in the sea!’ I love telling them of my encounters and sometimes the story behind a photo, like how long I have to wait for that shot, sometimes as long as 15 minutes without moving an inch, just lying there, ignoring the cramp on my fingers, just staring at the subject till the right moment. These are more for macro shots but for wide angle on big subjects like manta rays and sharks, visibility and luck counts a lot.

11. As an advice to beginners, how can they get started in underwater photography?

First, take a basic underwater diving course. Second, you must know the fundamentals of photography. Take up a DSLR photography course. It cuts a lot of your wastage time then when you are trying on your own. And do not look down on a compact camera – you can take very nice shots too.

Works













