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May/June 2009



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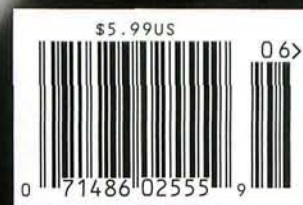
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# The AQUATIC

## Entrepreneur

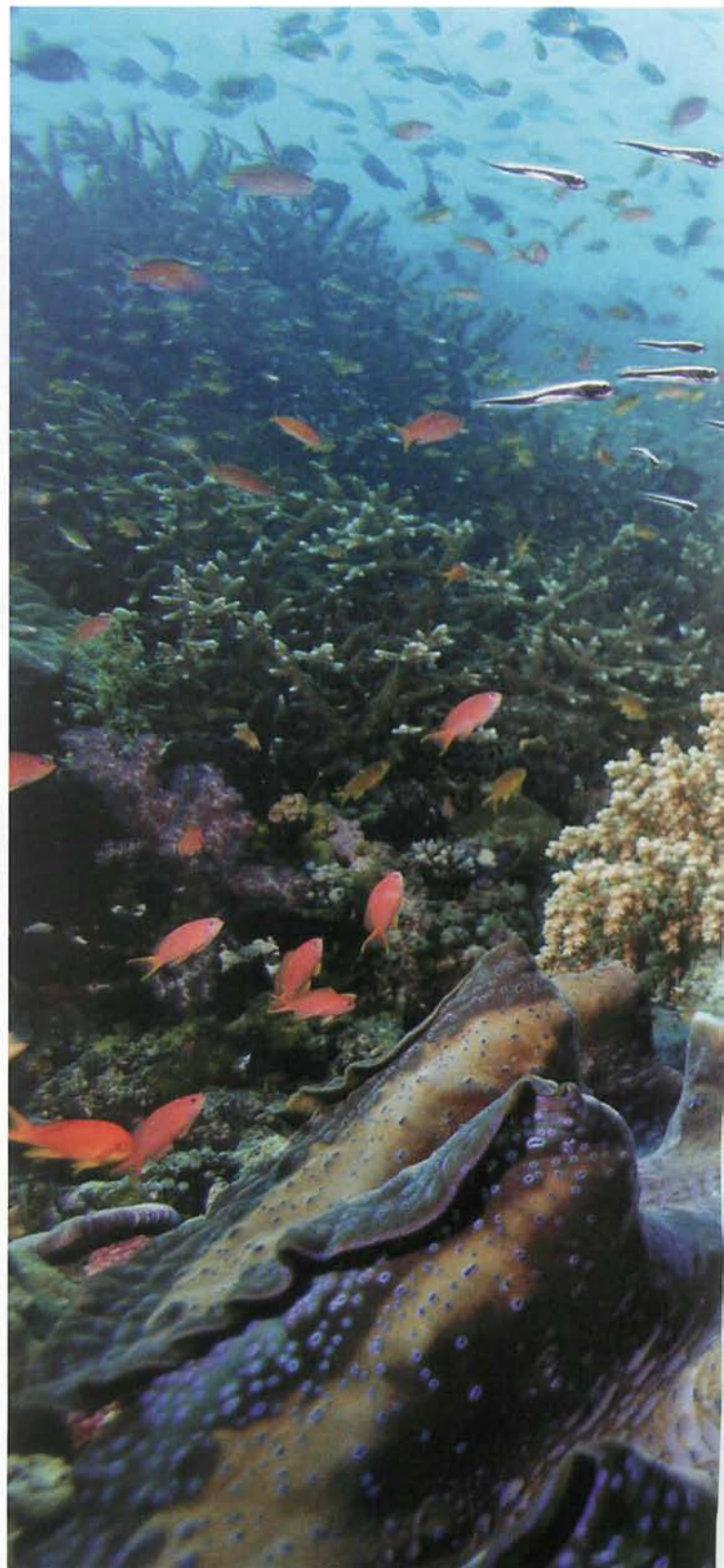
**(W**hen I found out Eric Cheng was a classical musician, it all came together for me. If there's a prototype underwater photographer (or really, any photographer in today's world), then Cheng is it. He weaves constantly between the technical and creative worlds, letting each one influence his images—subtly, overtly, intuitively.

Cheng first came into my field of view via a shot of a baby loggerhead turtle. Two things stood out to me with this shot—he had exquisitely captured a moment, and there was a depth to the image, a story that I wanted to discover.

As someone who has spent his life searching the four corners of the globe for top underwater photography, it's rare to find a photographer who approaches photography wanting more than just proper exposure and composition, wanting to breathe life into his images. And that's firmly rooted in curiosity, creativity and that most exquisite of photographic talents, a

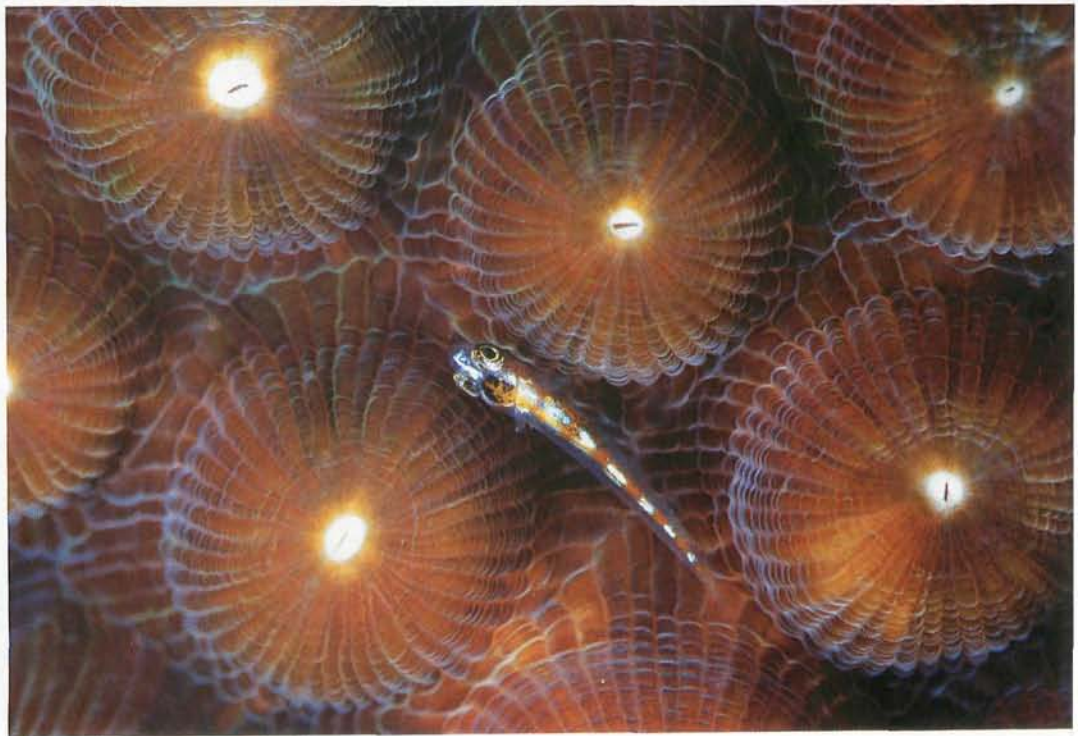
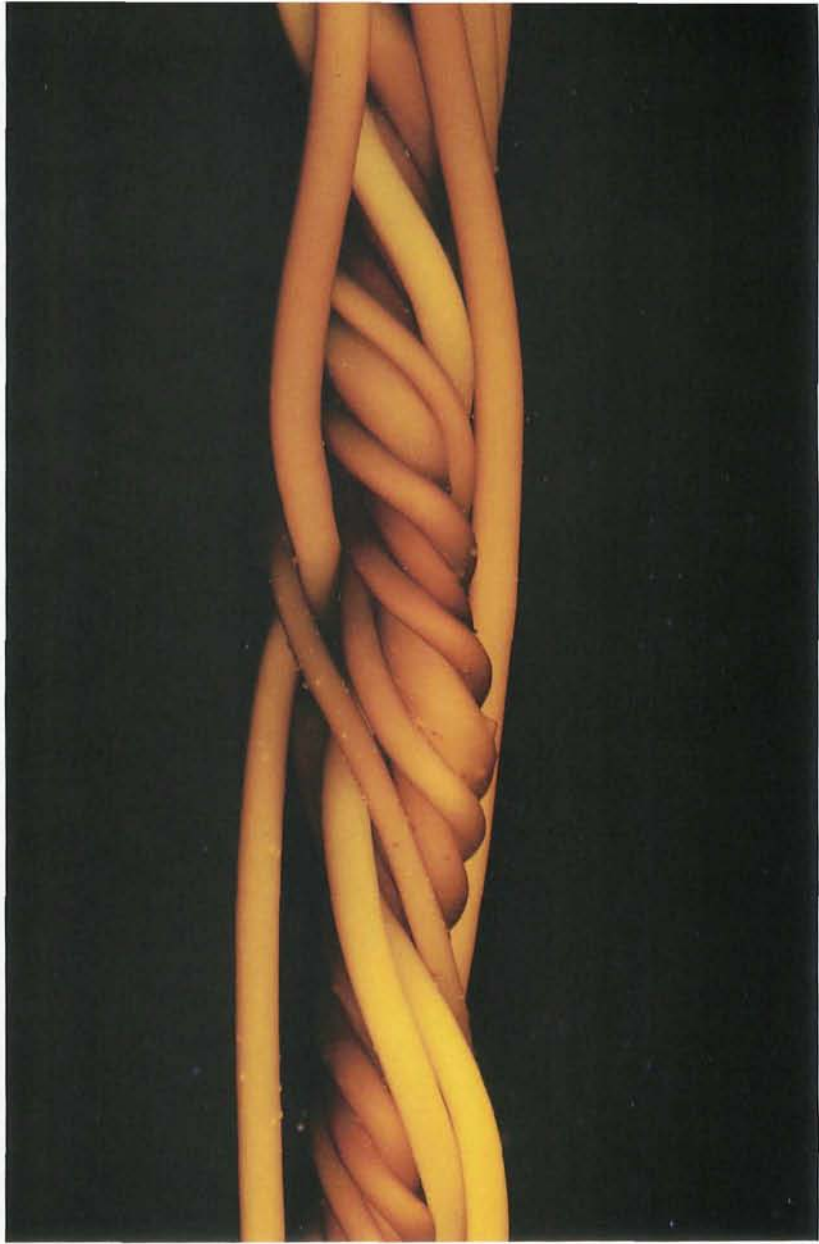
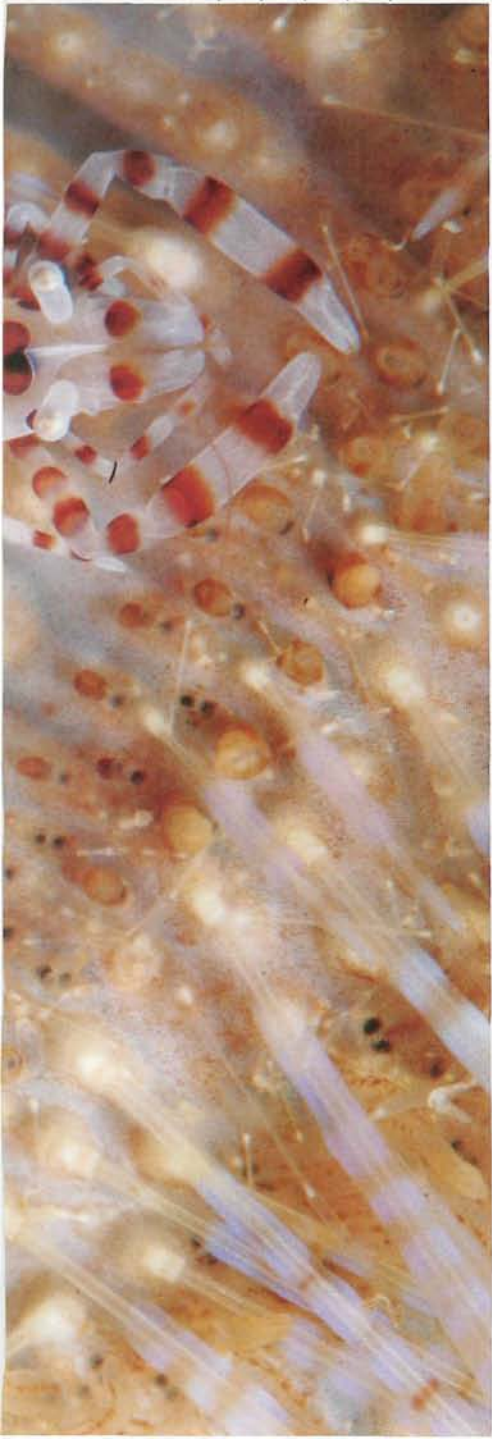
**Eric Cheng has distinguished himself as a top underwater photographer, leveraging that niche endeavor into a multimedia business**

By Ty Sawyer >>>  
Photography By Eric Cheng





The AQUATIC Entrepreneur





passion for discovery. There are plenty of people who can take a wonderful photograph, but only a few transcend technique to push beyond the confines of a photograph. And underwater, it's even more difficult to exercise this kind of creativity.

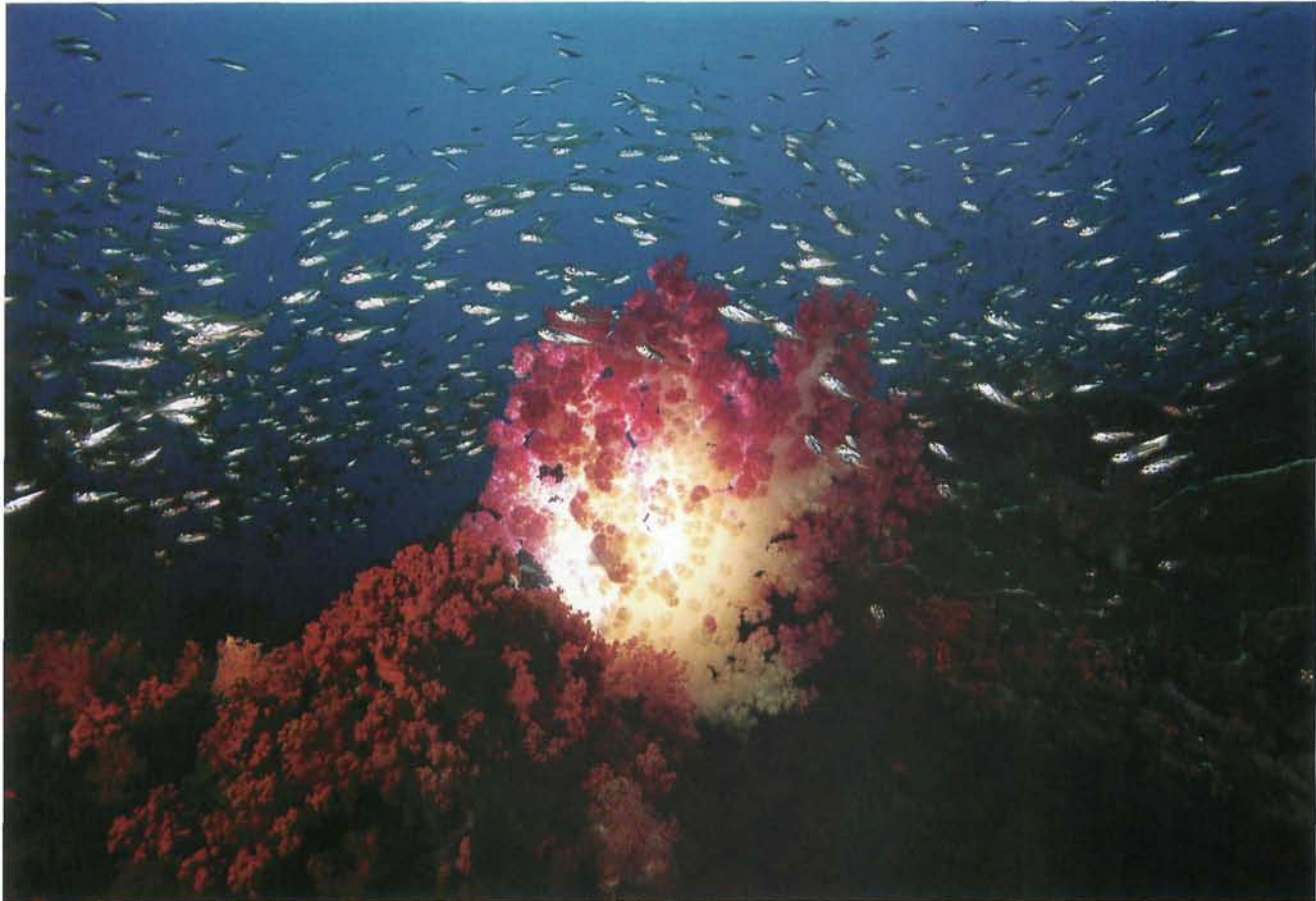
When you shoot underwater, you have limited time, subject matter that rarely sits still, let alone cooperates, and exposure that changes moment to moment. It's a place where you have to constantly wrangle light, composition, subject and depth, and then find a way to be creative. I've seen many a famous professional wildlife or travel photographer try to shoot underwater with disastrous results. It's perhaps the most difficult corner of our natural world in which to try to make great images, constantly challenging on equipment and skill. It's a place where Cheng has both found a home and excelled.

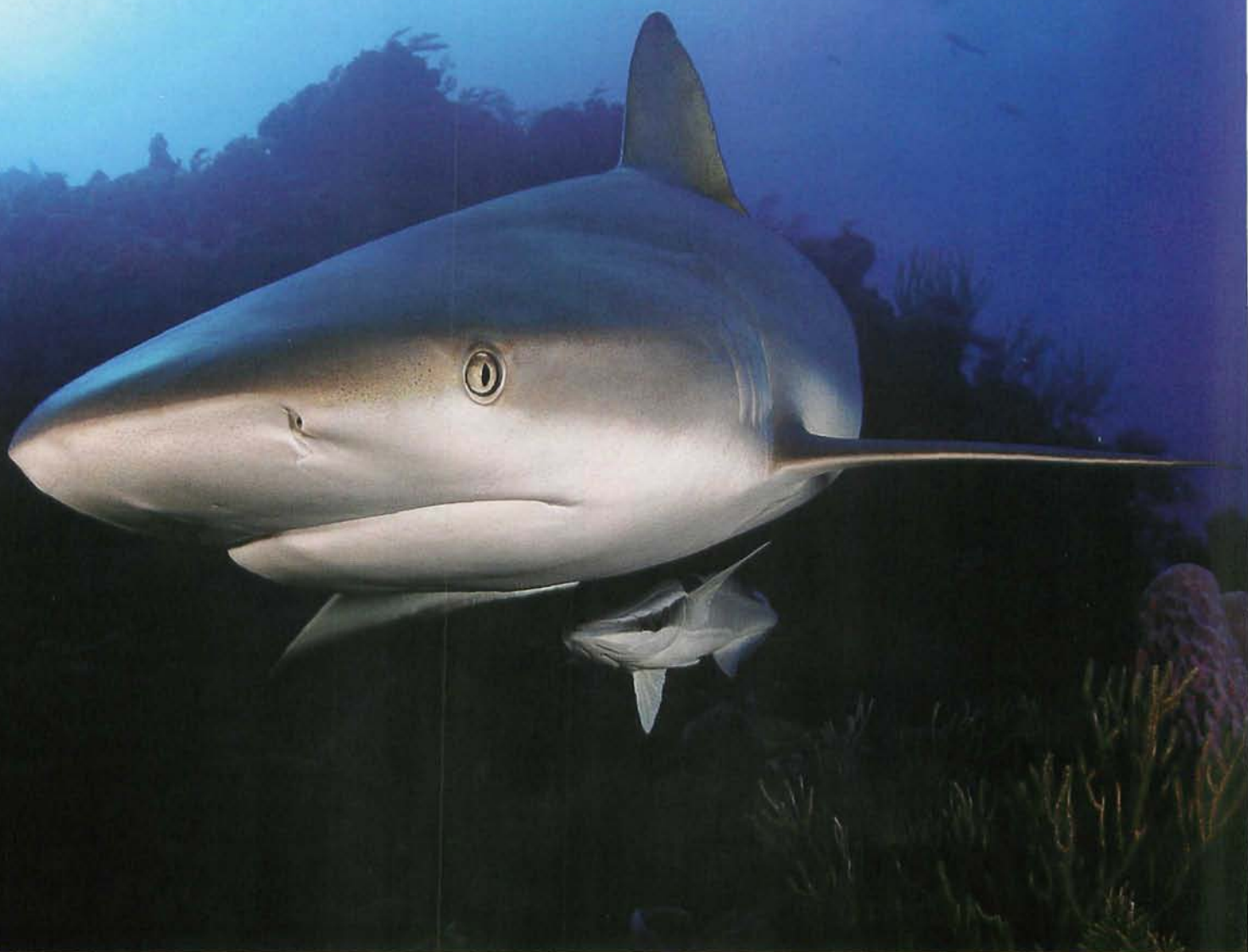
**>> More On The Web**

See amazing work from other pro photographers by visiting the Profiles section of our website at [www.digitalphotopro.com](http://www.digitalphotopro.com).

Eric Cheng's passion for underwater photography has helped fuel his rapid ascent to the top of the profession. He's as much a student of the environment that he photographs as he is an image maker of that environment. Seeing a market that had business potential, Cheng founded the *Wetpixel* website and, more recently, *Wetpixel Quarterly*. He has built a successful business beyond strictly taking pictures.

The  
**AQUATIC**  
Entrepreneur





**When you shoot underwater, you have limited time, subject matter that rarely sits still, let alone cooperates, and exposure that changes moment to moment. It's a place where you have to constantly wrangle light, composition, subject and depth, and then find a way to be creative.**

Cheng mixes that laser-focused technical acumen with his wonderful inquisitiveness. And since photographers not only battle light and shadow and pixel and try to make them bend to their will, but also try to find a way to get to the pulse of a moment, the heartbeat, it's imperative that they find new ways of seeing each and every time they release the shutter—especially underwater photographers, who by their very disposition need to show the underwater world in a manner that reflects nature, not the studio, or even an idealized interpretation of the world.

Cheng also has the mind and drive of a true entrepreneur. His award-winning website, [wetpixel.com](http://wetpixel.com), has become a hub and essential stomping ground and forum for anyone endeavoring to shoot underwater, see images from the world's top shooters, find photography expeditions or just stay up to date on marine issues. And he even has ventured into the realm of publishing, putting out a quarterly magazine, *Wetpixel Quarterly*, which showcases images from the best underwater photographers in the field.

Perhaps the most inspiring thing about Cheng's rise in the field of underwater photography is that he took his first photo in the year 2001. Since that time, he has

LED Camera Light with Continuous Output

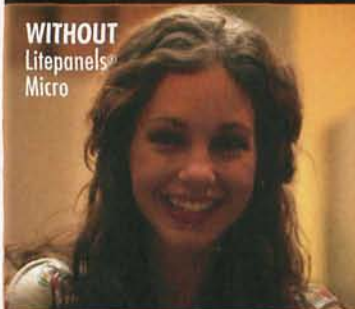
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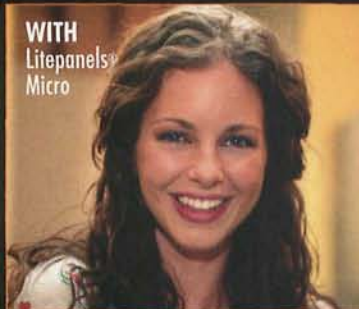
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completely immersed himself in the field, found showcases for his images in a wide variety of publications and has become one of its strongest voices and advocates. Part of this comes from his passion, part from his strong need to share. It's that strong need to share that keeps him in high demand around the globe for seminars, lectures, workshops and to lead photographic expeditions. He even has given his time as advisor and photographer for the ocean conservation organization, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

But, for me, it all comes back to the image. I want to see an image that I can experience. That I can come back to again and again and discover something new. I want to see the ocean and its inhabitants in a way that both surprises me and sends a shiver of recognition up my spine. And in a world where being derivative has become an art form, where you can throw up 20 images of a great white shark and they all look remarkably similar, as if taken by the same hand, it's an extra breadth of thought that separates the great from the exceptional. And whether it's notes of music, a passion for conservation, the technical inventiveness or a combination of all these elements that lift Cheng's images above the top underwater shooters today, there's an enviable depth to his photography. A story that he seems to see, or feel through his lens, then entwine into reality. A moment that comes and then is gone. And Cheng's photographs have found, in the most challenging of photographic fields, the moments that exist beyond the eye. DPP

To see more of Eric Cheng's photography, visit [www.echeng.com](http://www.echeng.com). You can learn more about Wetpixel at [www.wetpixel.com](http://www.wetpixel.com). Ty Sawyer is the editor of Sport Diver Magazine and the editorial director of Islands Magazine.