

2014
GEAR
GUIDE

IMAGING

➔ If you want to bring your camera underwater, you'll want a housing to keep it dry, even in bone-crushing depths. With today's wide array of sizes, pricing and features, there's never been a better time to try your hand at underwater photography.

CONTROL BUTTONS

The housing's control buttons are used to activate features on your camera. Top-of-the-line housings incorporate buttons for every feature of your camera, while less-expensive housings usually sacrifice access to the more esoteric functions to keep prices down.

HANDLE BARS

A housing's handles are used to both hold the housing steady during operation, and also as a way to attach strobes or other accessories to your system. SLR housings usually have built-in handles, but many compact-camera housings require you to purchase a tray and handle system separately.

CASING MATERIAL

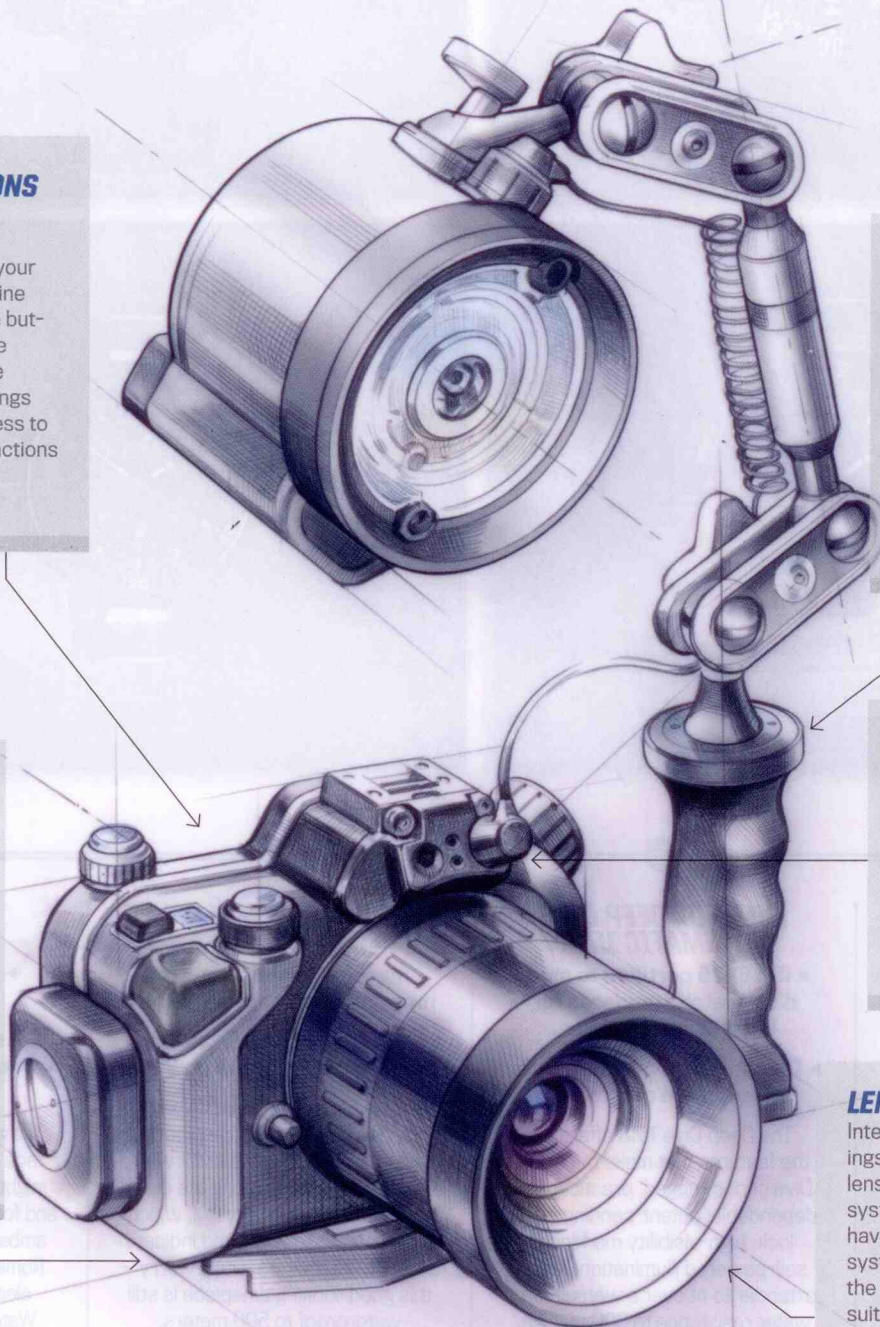
Underwater-camera housings are generally made from either plastic or aluminum. Plastic housings are both durable and capable of being taken to recreational-diving depths while being relatively cheap. Aluminum housings can be more expensive but are lighter and usually offer top-notch ergonomics.

STROBE BULKHEADS

Traditionally, SLRs are equipped with electronic bulkheads that send electronic signals from a camera to your strobe. There is a recent trend in fiber-optic cables that allows your camera's internal flash to trigger your strobes.

LENS-SUPPORT SYSTEM

Interchangeable-lens camera housings allow you to connect different lenses through a removable-port system. Compact-camera housings have a fixed port but often offer a system to add wet lenses that make the camera's built-in lens more suitable for use underwater.



Out of the Box

1 Assemble your housing to make sure you've got all the parts and that everything fits correctly. Put your camera in the housing to ensure that all the control buttons are operating correctly and nothing is misaligned.

2 Test accessories, such as focus lights, strobes and wet lenses, to ensure that everything is working. Make sure your strobes are properly connected to your housing's bulkheads, and take a test shot to double check that they are firing and properly synced with your camera.

3 Take out the camera and set up your housing with the proper pre-dive maintenance. This includes completely submerging your housing to check for any leaks. Especially cautious photographers might even take an empty housing on the first dive.

4 Familiarize yourself with all the controls; you should be comfortable operating the system before you ever enter the water. Being distracted by your underwater camera often means you will miss the shot, and it can even be dangerous.

5 Test your settings by taking photos indoors or in your backyard (keep in mind that focusing will be easier on land). Take as many practice shots as you need to feel completely comfortable.

HOW TO CARE FOR A CAMERA HOUSING

► **MAINTENANCE** for your housing starts before you go diving. At the start of a trip, it's a good idea to remove the sealing O-ring from its groove and apply a small amount of the supplied O-ring grease.

► **IT'S IMPORTANT TO CHECK** the O-ring for any hair, sand, lint or other debris that might interfere with creating a seal. This should be done while applying a light coating of grease to the O-ring, and every time you open and close your housing. While doing so, confirm that the O-ring is seated properly in its groove.

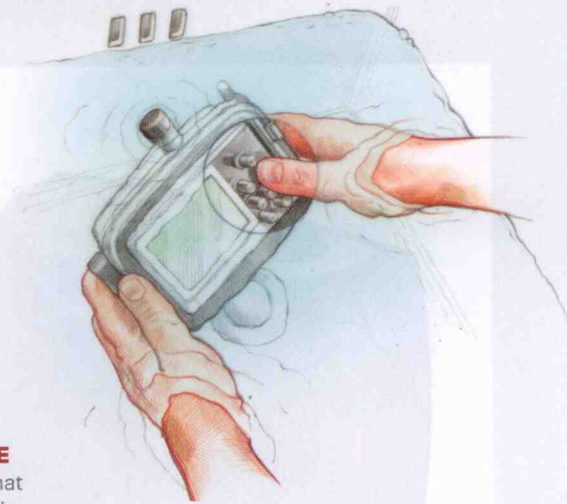
► **KEEP YOUR HOUSING OUT** of the sun to prevent camera fogging. The best sunscreen for your camera system is a damp towel – if you're out in the hot sun, just place the towel over your housing. Always keep a couple of desiccants in the housing to help prevent it from fogging.

► **NEVER LEAVE** your housing in the camera-only rinse bucket

unattended, as this is where a surprising amount of flooding occurs. People often throw their cameras in the bucket or will mishandle your system to make room for theirs. Both can lead to leaks. If there isn't enough room for all the cameras to fit without stacking them, ask the crew to find another rinse bucket.

► **AFTER YOUR DIVE** is over, it's important that you rinse your housing in fresh water to flush away all the salt water. Dip your housing in the rinse bucket of fresh water, and depress the control buttons in order to make sure all the salt is removed from the small crevices. This prevents hardened salt crystals from forming in your housing.

► **ALL HOUSINGS REQUIRE** some long-term maintenance. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for routine maintenance, such as replacing the O-rings and sending the housing in for a checkup. This should help you avoid costly repairs.



What You Need to Know About Cameras ...

Compact cameras are the solution for divers who don't want to pay extra baggage fees for an SLR rig. Compact housings are smaller, and lack the interchangeable-port system, requiring less prep and maintenance time.

DSLR cameras are the cream of the crop when it comes to professional underwater photography. With ever-increasing megapixel counts, the option to switch between specialty macro and wide-angle lenses, and super-quick autofocus, SLRs remain the must-have tool for the advanced amateur and professional underwater shooter. SLR housings, weighing upwards of 5 pounds, often requiring positively

buoyant arms or flotation devices to make them more manageable underwater.

Mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras are blurring the lines between compacts

and SLRs. Don't be fooled by their surprisingly slim figure — although this new breed of mirrorless cameras might be just as small as other compacts, they also offer a megapixel count and image-sensor size similar to professional SLRs. Many mirrorless housings also feature a selection of ports to complement the interchangeable lenses offered for these hybrid compact-SLR systems.

