

# A Profile of an Underwater Photographer

by Kristin Ingram

Norbert Wu's coworkers are fish. Instead of putting on a business suit and driving to an office, this underwater photographer puts on scuba gear and dives into the ocean. Norbert travels around the world to photograph all kinds of strange, beautiful, and even dangerous creatures. He'll photograph just about anything that lives underwater, but he especially enjoys difficult projects.

On a shoot near Isla del Coco, Costa Rica, he held his breath while kicking furiously to swim beneath a huge school of hammerhead sharks. He had to wait until after he took the photo to exhale, because the cloud of bubbles would have scared the sharks away. In the Bahamas Norbert had to swim quickly to keep up with a group of wild dolphins. They zipped and dove while playing tag and passing seaweed back and forth.

Norbert doesn't always race around underwater. Sometimes he must keep as still as possible so he won't startle a shy animal. Once in the Caribbean Sea he found a blenny living in a hole in a coral reef. Whenever he tried to photograph it, the fish popped back into its hole. Finally it got used to him and let him get close enough to take the shot. Norbert's work isn't always dangerous and exciting. He spends lots of time in his California office doing paperwork and fixing up equipment. The watertight cases, called housings, that protect his cameras must be free of leaks.

Underwater photos need strong lighting, so Norbert attaches strobe lights to bendable arms on the housings. When he tests his equipment in Monterey Bay, it looks as if he's carrying a miniature spaceship. Curious harbor seals and sea lions follow him around. Sometimes they even nuzzle Norbert's camera. How did Norbert become an underwater photographer? As a boy his favorite summer activities were swimming and scuba diving. He continued these hobbies through college and added underwater photography to the list.

During his years at Scripps Institute of Oceanography in San Diego, Norbert discovered that he had a talent for taking good underwater photos. And he realized that with them he could help people see and understand the ocean the way he did. Although Norbert has seen marvelous sights, he has also witnessed many sad things. Pollution has damaged fragile ecosystems such as coral reefs, and over fishing has reduced the populations of some

oceans. By taking pictures that show how interesting and beautiful sea animals are, Norbert hopes he'll inspire people to help protect them. Perhaps one day you, too will dive into Norbert's underwater world and share his delight at its wonders. Even if you prefer to stay dry, you can always count on him to bring back incredible photographs.