

While many in the fashion industry may bemoan the lack of inspiration above water, two fashion photographers and one designer/underwater photographer team are bringing their underwater experiences to the forefront, and giving fashion and design a whole new look

H₂O *Fashion*



EVEN IF YOU don't know adidas from Armani, you're probably aware that fashion is a billion dollar industry. And whether it's a haute couture gown or a pair of K-mart sweatpants, the clothes we wear are designed by people who, just like any other creative talent, seek inspiration wherever they can find it.

What you might not realise, however, is that fashion is getting an inspiration injection from the likeliest (to divers) of unlikely sources: the underwater world. What we divers take for granted – the gaudy colours of a nudibranch, the striking patterns on a juvenile angelfish, the quirky nature of being underwater – advertising agencies and fashion designers are just now discovering.

Here are two fashion photographers and a designer/underwater photographer team who have taken their passions in life and brought them to fashion, and vice versa. And in the process, are making some waves that are sure to get everyone's attention.



WINDIARTO TJANDRA



Thirty-five-year-old Windiarto Tjandra's underwater photography career has taken a circuitous route. As a university student in Indonesia, his passion for fashion photography was sparked even as he studied for a career in business. He would photograph models in the high fashions designed by his fellow students and friends.

After graduating, some of these friends became fashion designers and asked "Win" to photograph their latest creations though he continued to pursue a life in business. As years passed he became a very successful businessman but always kept an eye on, and a hand in the fashion photography world.

One day a friend introduced him to the work of Todd Essick, an underwater fine art photographer, and a spark was lit. Win found the inspiration to take his underwater fashion to new heights. Or in this case, new depths: The open water environment.

After an intensive diving education and many dives, he became a PADI Master Scuba Diver in nine months, pursuing underwater photography the entire time. All of which has led to a project from his heart with a vision to share with the world.

Win's latest project has been to use the magic of Bali and Manado's underwater dreamscapes as his canvas, and the fashions and women who model them (most recently Miss Indonesia 2005) as his paints. In the end he has created touching and personal works of art with the heart and soul of his country in every breath and photograph he takes.



What caused you to bring your fashion background to the underwater world?

I love the sea and I love my country, so I wanted to do something that would showcase both worlds' intrinsic beauty. Since I specialise in fashion photography, I thought it would be best to start there. Using friends' designs, Indonesian models, and Indonesia's underwater locations to showcase the beauty of my country and the sea was the perfect choice.

What inspires you?

My country, first and foremost. Indonesia is one of the best dive destinations in the world, but it's difficult to find any underwater photography book by an Indonesian. I wanted to change that.

Which photographer (underwater or topside) is a source of inspiration and why?

I like Patrick Demarchelier, who has a great concept and eye for fashion photography. For underwater photography it's Todd Essick, a man who inspired me to go ahead with my project and make a book. Every picture he takes tells a story; his heart is involved in every shot. Great pictures born from a great man.

Why do you think the fashion world is starting to feature underwater environments and situations more often now?

Underwater environments are completely different from anything we have on land. I think fashion photography has reached its creative limit, really – almost all of the concepts have been explored. In the next two to three years we'll be seeing a lot more underwater concepts used in advertising and fashion; we've already seen some companies (Olympus, Singapore Tourism Board) move toward this trend.

AARON WONG



A commercial photographer for over a decade, 30-year-old Singaporean Aaron Wong (aaronsphtocraft.com) has shot countless advertisements for companies like Sony, Canon, and Levi's; fashion magazines like *Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar*; and international celebrities like Gong Li and Mandy Moore. No stranger to water, he's been "out to sea" and a diver for as long as he can remember.

In 2002, he merged his two greatest passions in life, diving and photography, and took the plunge into the world of underwater photography. Since then, his pictures have graced the pages of dive publications around the region, and he has had several international awards to his name.

In 2006, with the idea of shooting more than just fishes, he started a series of confined water shoots called "Water Colours," where he brings his fashion background underwater. Based in Singapore, he conducts workshops on underwater photography and divides his time between his commercial studio and the exploration of Asia's tropical waters.



What caused you to bring your fashion background to the underwater world?

I guess it was a natural progression for me considering that fashion photography and diving are my two greatest passions.

What inspires you?

In photography I like surrealism, strong colours, shadows and contrast. Creatively, I like crazy people with crazy ideas who are crazy enough to actually do it!

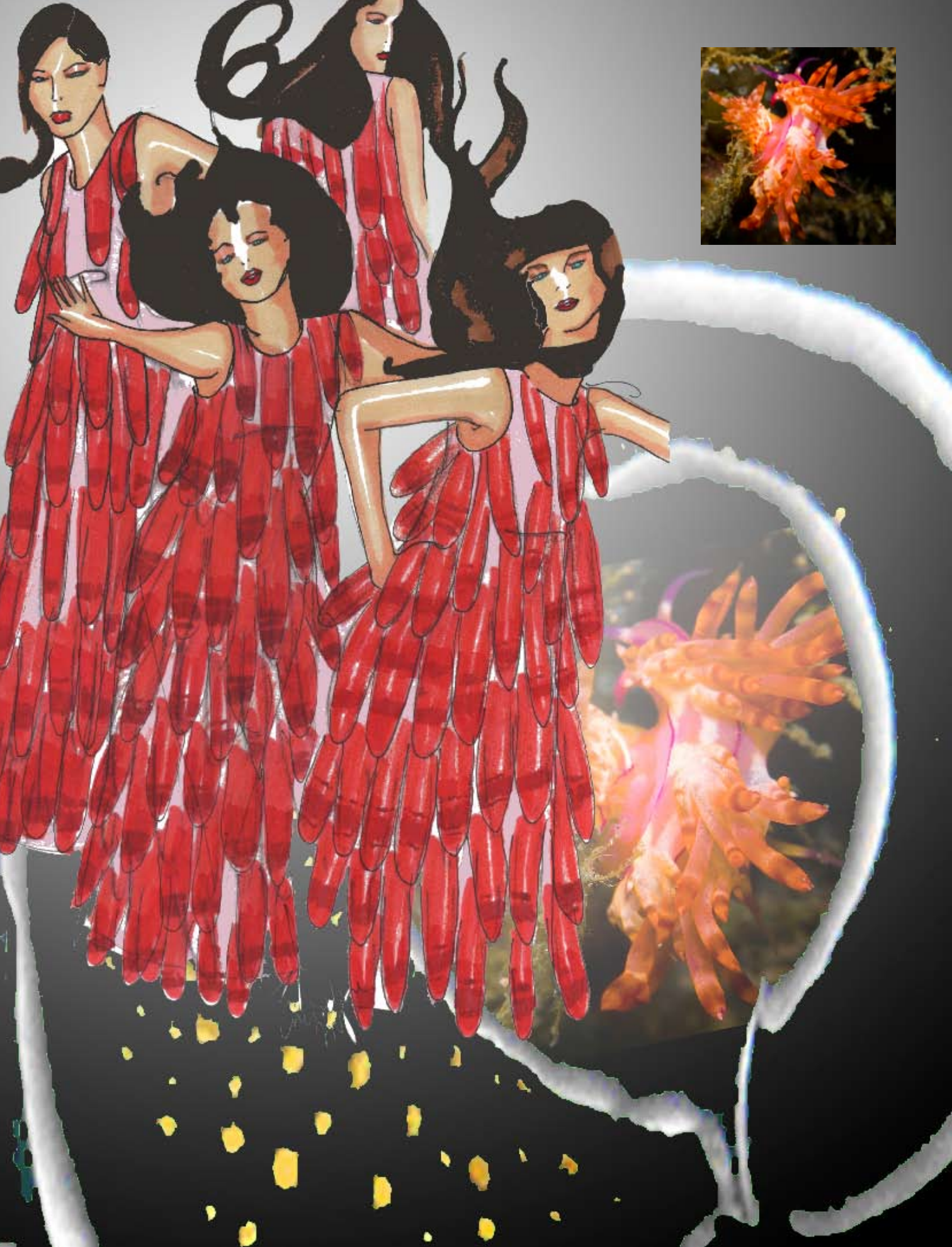
Which photographer (underwater or topside) is a source of inspiration and why?

David LaChapelle, for his eye-popping colours and ideas that are out of this world!

Why do you think the fashion world is starting to feature underwater environments and situations more often now?

Fashion is always looking for something beautiful, something unique, something new – a different way of looking at the usual. I guess the underwater world provides that. Things look more beautiful underwater, and people are now starting to realise that.





MIKAEL JIGMO/JEREMY WEE



Mikael Jigmo started diving in October 2005 with his wife and three children, and has logged nearly 200 dives since then. Though he's managed to also become a PADI Assistant Instructor and PADI Digital Underwater Photographer specialty instructor he is, by profession, the president for a Swedish IT company based in Singapore. He started taking

underwater photos in April 2006, and already has a library of more than 14,000 images.

Mikael's "team partner" Jeremy Wee has been doing fashion design since the age of 16, inspired at an early age by his grandmother and aunts. After obtaining his diploma at Singapore's Temasek Polytechnic, he worked as an assistant designer for a uniform company and then at a tailor's. He spent two years working and travelling in London and Europe before recently graduating with a degree from the Raffles Design Institute, at which time he met and worked with Mikael on a unique project fusing underwater photography with fashion.

What caused you to bring your fashion background to the underwater world?

Jeremy: I wanted to think outside of my natural environment and, coincidentally, came across a copy of *Scuba Diver AustralAsia* at Mikael's home one day. I was fascinated by the amazing imagery the underwater world provided. I asked Mikael about working together on a small project, transforming his images of sea creatures into fashion pieces for my BA project on haute couture at Raffles Design Institute.

Which photographer (underwater or topside) is a source of inspiration and why?

Mikael: Mathieu Meur, Michael Aw, Stephen Wong, and Takako Uno. I've had the pleasure to meet all of them and have dived with Mathieu and Michael, who have helped me improve my technique. Their photos just "speak" to me.

Jeremy: When I saw Mikael's images of sea slugs I was overwhelmed with ideas to create gowns inspired by his amazing compositions and Nature's grand designs.

What inspires you?

Mikael: I'm relatively new to diving so now everything inspires me, from the smallest of the small to the biggest creatures and boldest seascapes. I take a lot of macro now but I'm opening up to wide-angle. When I see something really beautiful, colours or behaviour of various species, I get hooked and can stay at one spot for the entire dive.

Jeremy: I'm inspired by many beautiful things; and found there's so much to offer beneath the water – from the alien worlds of the fjords in Scandinavia, the volcanic environments of the Pacific, to the myriad creatures even here in Southeast Asia. It's a fascinating environment that not many people are exposed to.

Why do you think the fashion world is starting to feature underwater environments and situations more often now?

Jeremy: For me diving was literally discovering uncharted waters, something new at every turn. Like being in a fantasy in which I'm a merman living in this world of such vivid colours and mystery. It's this vision that drew me, and I think it's what attracts the rest of the industry. [SD](#)

