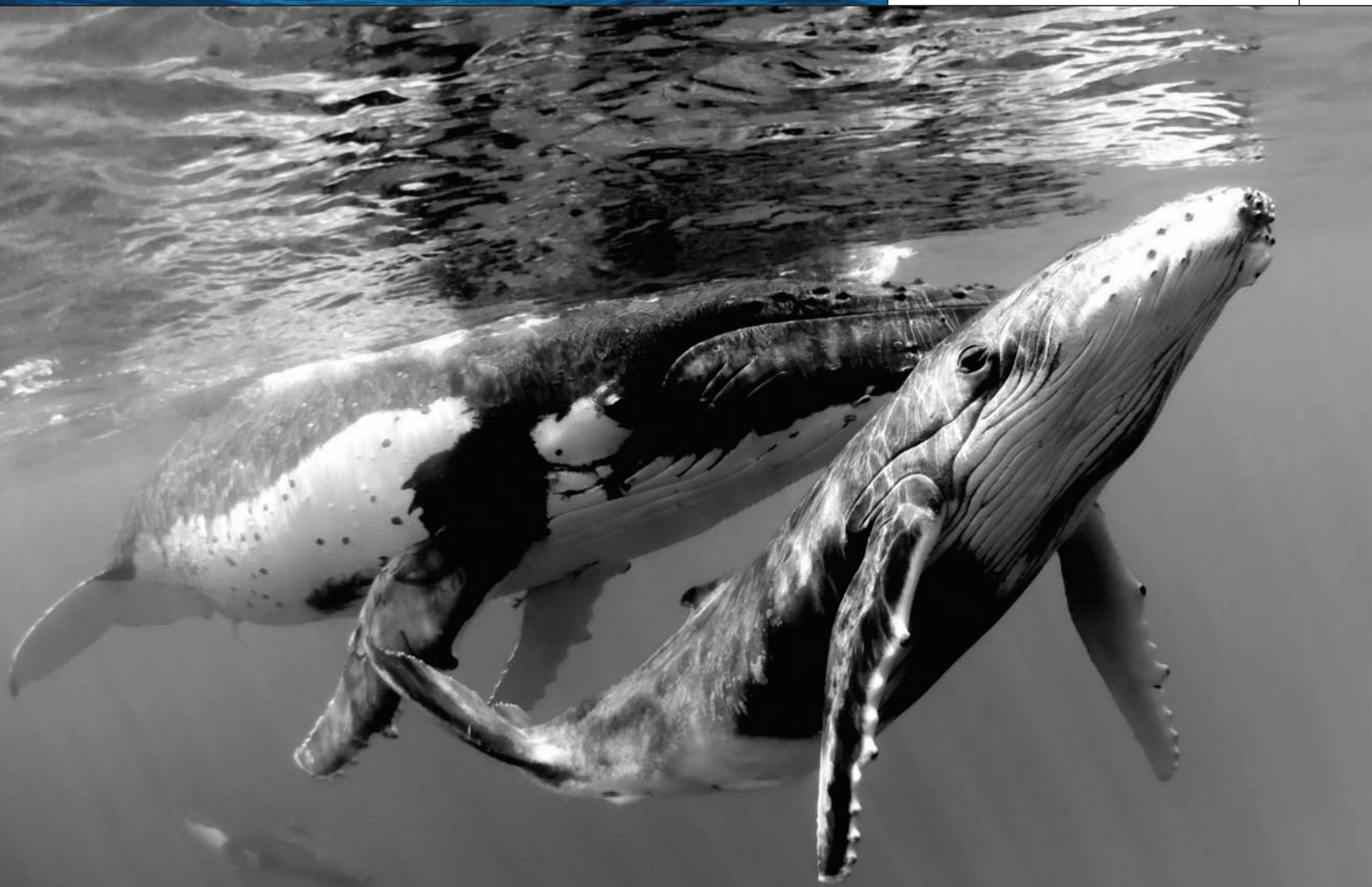


Into the blue

Douglas J. Hoffman sails the Pacific Rim to photograph whales and other creatures of the deep | BY LORNA GENTRY

While snorkeling the warm, clear waters of Tonga in the South Pacific, Douglas J. Hoffman photographed a humpback whale for nearly an hour as it languidly swam 10 feet below. Suddenly the whale twice shook its mighty tail and propelled upward like a torpedo. Breaching the surface, it sailed through the air 8 feet from the photographer. “I lifted my camera to the air and snapped shots as it flew past me. From my angle, the horizon was underneath the whale rather than over it. It was fantastic!”

The awe of that moment is still palpable to Hoffman. For all his underwater adventures over the last 30 years, he still talks about that one with reverence and glee. Hoffman has a stunning portfolio of underwater photographs, which he prints on



aluminum and canvas as large as 30x45 inches. He and his wife, Mieko, run Maui Photography in Hawaii, a family portrait and fine-art photography studio. In addition to commissioned work, Hoffman conducts workshops on underwater, landscape and portrait photography. In September 2012 he'll take a group of six to Tonga to photograph humpback whales, and the following March he'll take a class to Fiji for shark diving. Not much scares him, he says. "For me, it's serene."

The main thing to know about photographing whales is to take it slow, Hoffman advises. In some ways whales behave like dogs, he says. "If you want a dog to come to you he won't, but if you're calm and ignore him then he'll come sniffing around. A whale is no different, except that it's 55 feet

long and weighs 55 tons. Approach a whale with respect, and it will relax and get comfortable with your presence. Be peaceful and let the whale see you're not aggressive." At times Hoffman has been so trustworthy that mother whales have allowed him to babysit their calves while they nap. "The mother is with her baby 24 hours a day and wants a break, but only if she can trust you," he says. "If she can, then she'll take a catnap and let her baby do donuts around you, blow bubbles and provide the most fun on Earth a human being can have. I had one interaction that lasted six and a half hours in the water, but most of our interactions last about 90 minutes."

To see more of Douglas J. Hoffman's work visit douglasjhoffman.com

