

EMERALD COAST



PLUS

Your 2016 Best of
The Emerald Coast
Reader Ballot
is on Page 138

STAGING AREAS

Audiences kick
back, chill at
amphitheaters

FLORIDA LOBSTER

Nothing goes
any better
with butter

FASHION PLATE

Chef Levi savors
coastal lifestyle

NEXT IN LINE

Millennials
transform
world of work

Underwater Wonders

ACCOMPLISHED PHOTOGRAPHER KEVIN DODGE
BRINGS MARINE CREATURES INTO SHARP FOCUS



Spearited *PURSUIT*

Marine photographer Kevin Dodge employs spearfishing techniques in capturing stunning images of subjects with fins and flippers

story by **STEVE BORNHOFT**
photography by **KEVIN DODGE**

A sailfish of about 70 pounds re-enters the water after jumping during a battle with an angler. "I got this shot the second the fish hit the water and it immediately looked right at me," Kevin Dodge said of the fish photographed in the Gulf Stream off Miami. "If you asked someone to go get that shot, they could spend a lifetime and never get it."

"I saw two green sea turtles while snorkeling south of Cozumel, Mexico, and I wanted to focus on just one," said Dodge. "You want to shoot up rather than down to get the play of the light in the water. When one turtle headed for the surface, I got that chance. This, for me, is a cool shot. With his flippers extended, the turtle appears to be flying. It's like a bird against the sky."



Kevin Dodge, for years following his success as a pitcher at Florida State, entertained second thoughts about not going pro. No longer. Dodge has launched a business that combines his passions for photography and free diving and has been swamped by waves of raves.

Regrets about baseball never have been further from his mind and, for that, he may have a shoulder injury to thank.

In February, Dodge publicly exhibited his photos of fish and other marine creatures for the first time at the Miami International Boat Show. The response to his work was terrific and the contacts gained, invaluable. Meanwhile, he had applied to become an exhibitor at the Art Expo in New York City. He exited that experience with business cards from a hotel developer in Mexico, an international luxury automobile manufacturer and others with an interest in his work.

Privately, Dodge had told himself that he was elevating marine photography to an art form. Now, others were offering him the very same assessment of his images. Metaphorically, he is taking to the high seas.

A long time ago, Dodge injured his shoulder — a torn interior labrum — at FSU and had it repaired in Birmingham, Alabama,



A brilliantly colored mahi-mahi (or dolphin) turns its body in an effort to resist efforts by an angler to reel it in. "This is about a 20-pound bull that I photographed off Summerland Key," Dodge recalled. "It's a tough shot. Dolphin are very fast. I like the presence of the lure and the line in the shot. It makes for nice composition."



A pod of dolphins — spotted and bottlenose — ply the waters off the Berry Islands, just south of Bimini. “The dolphins in the photo were part of a huge pod of 1,000 or more individuals,” Dodge said. “Dolphins can be skittish and, when I hopped in, I didn’t expect to have much of a chance to shoot them. But they were playful and hung around, and it made for a neat, neat moment.”



A silhouetted reef shark surveys its surroundings from its perspective as a top-of-the-food-chain predator. "This shot is from Exuma in the Bahamas where they have the most pristine water I have ever seen in my life," Dodge said. "I like the way this photo unites one of the most dreaded creatures in the ocean with the sun that has given sharks life for millions of years." Dodge respects sharks, but he is especially wary of swordfish. A swordfish once took a run at him and left him with a hole in his board shorts, which Dodge later placed in a box frame.


by Dr. James Andrews, a surgeon before whose name the word, “renowned,” typically appears.

“The surgery was successful and my arm was probably as good as it ever had been, but being away from baseball for a time, I kind of lost the fever,” Dodge said. “To move from playing at FSU to the minor leagues, the caliber of player is really about the same. Jumping directly to the major leagues wasn’t going to happen, so I went home and regrouped instead.”

Dodge, a third-generation native Floridian, is from South Miami. He resumed a modeling career that began when he was a kid and eventually went to work as a commercial photographer, handling primarily advertising shoots. That pursuit has served him well for 20-plus years — he graduated from FSU in 1985 — but, as time permitted, he also added to a growing collection of offshore photos, an effort that intensified two years ago after Dodge visited an art show and found there nothing comparable to what he does.

“I am doing extreme stuff,” Dodge said, “not in the sense of extreme sports, but in taking photographs that are more than just pictures. They are artsy and cool, and elements like the right light are very important to me.”

Dodge uses a Nikon D-4 camera encased in a watertight, custom housing made for him by AquaTech. The housing is smaller than usual, which makes view-finding difficult, but Dodge needs to travel light underwater. A large housing would impede his ability to swim hard and fast after fishes, often in swift current.

“To get the shots I want, I have to anticipate a fish’s next move; wait on it, and it’s too late,” Dodge explained. “Spearfishing taught me how to do that. I was born a freak in the water, and I’ve loved spearfishing my entire life. Now I get to do that for a living. I’ve just traded a weapon for a camera.” 

Bonefish, joined by a blue runner, cruise flats off Exuma. “Bonefish are incredibly spooky,” Dodge said. “I waded and waited and waded and waited for hours before I finally got this shot. Among the photos that I have put on display, this is one that people really remark about. If you know anything about bonefish, you can appreciate how hard a shot like this is to get.”



Kevin Dodge lives in South Miami. He sells his high-end, museum-quality prints one at a time. Discover more about him at dodgeocean.com.

