



Deep Blue Rendezvous: Submersible Alley

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The [BLUE Ocean Film Festival](#) is a seven-day gathering of filmmakers, ocean scientists, conservationists, and award winning marine photographers and cinematographers. BLUE's primary goal is educational for the most part, but it also offers networking opportunities for underwater and ocean related collaborative projects. A gathering of experts and explorers...and the future of ocean exploration.



Star of the Show, Waitt Institute's Dual Deep Worker at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

I arrived at the [BLUE Ocean Film Festival](#) this past week in Monterey, California to find a lineup of amazing machines, the future of ocean exploration was on display. The submersibles included the [Waitt Institute's](#) Dual DeepWorker Submersible by [Nuytco](#). This state of the art machine is capable of diving up to 600 meters (~2,000 feet) and offers the opportunity to include an array of sensors, cameras, lights and it has a pilot controlled arm for manipulating objects and conducting experiments. I had a chance to get a full understanding of this ocean spacecraft by [Waitt Institute's](#) Executive Director, [Dominique Rissolo](#), and pilot, [Joe Lepore](#)



Joe Lepore, DDWorker Pilot shows a father and son team the beauty of the red machine. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

This amazing submersible has been piloted by National Geographic Explorer in Residence, [Sylvia Earle](#), who has led more than 60 expeditions and logged more than 6,000 hours underwater. Dr. Earle also led the first team of woman aquanauts during the Tektite Project in 1970 and set a world record for solo diving in a [Nuytco](#) suit. More recently, she conducted an assessment of the Gulf of Mexico after the catastrophic spill. It is precisely this type of work that the submersible offers. It can be deployed anywhere around the world with a small crew and put to work conducting surveys and video/photo documentation. The beautiful thing is that it allows a scientist to go on board and make direct observations through its large glass canopy that is equivalent to front row seats to the best show in the ocean.



Sylvia Earle and Dominique Rissolo at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

Another impressive submersible was [OceanGate's Antipodes](#), a submersible with a five-person capacity allowing a real opportunity to conduct educational and collaborative expeditions. Antipodes provides its crew with a spectacular view of the ocean with a diving capability of 300 meters (~1000 feet). Its two 58 inch hemispherical acrylic domes provide a front row seat to the best views the deep has to offer. I had the opportunity to chat with one of their pilots, Erika Bergman, a talented young woman with a great future and a great message.



OceanGate's Antipodes Submersible on display at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

[DeepFlight](#) was also present with the Super Falcon. This high performance deep submersible is the brainchild of [Graham Hawkes](#), who created this fifth generation submersible capable of reaching depths of 300 meters (~1,000 feet). It's designed with wings and two in-line seats with 360 degree views of the ocean. It looks like a jet fighter but it is meant to dive with state of the art fly-by-wire technology. A work of art and a terrific ocean explorer. At the conference, it was common to see explorers and creators working together, as I found National Geographic Explorer [Bob Ballard](#) chatting with Graham Hawkes. How often do you see these pioneers together?



National Geographic Explorer Bob Ballard and Falcon's visionary Graham Hawkes chat about the future of exploration submersibles at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

Last but not least on the Deep BLUE submersible alley is [Virgin Oceanic's DeepFlight Challenger](#). This magnificent submersible was originally commissioned by Steve Fossett who's intention was to complete the first solo dive to the Mariana Trench. This is indeed the only ocean space-craft to be able to go down to a depth of 37,000 feet and stay unaided for up to 24 hours. Sir Richard who owns the ship hopes to use this vehicle to explore the wonders that lay untouched and unseen at the bottom of the ocean.



DeepFlight Challenger on display at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

The Deep BLUE Ocean Festival was an extraordinary event, lots of films, people and ideas. But beyond the display of incredible submersibles, it was the energy of the teams, the pilots and institutions that were there as educators and were thrilled to display their machines and explain their capabilities to everyday folks and special guests such as Edward James Olmos, the Prince of Monaco, Fabian and Celine Cousteau, Jackson Browne and many others who are concerned about the health of the ocean and involved in real initiatives to protect it.



Jackson Browne checks out Antipodes at BLUE. Photo by Fabio Esteban Amador

Given recent budget cuts to NOAA's National Undersea Research Program (which supported the legendary [Aquarius lab](#) and the [Pisces subs](#)), the future of ocean exploration is now more than ever in the hands of creative and inspired individuals and organizations funded by the private sector. Similar to our new quest for outer space, the next step in ocean exploration is in our hands. We have a great future ahead, and best of all, we get to discover our own world.