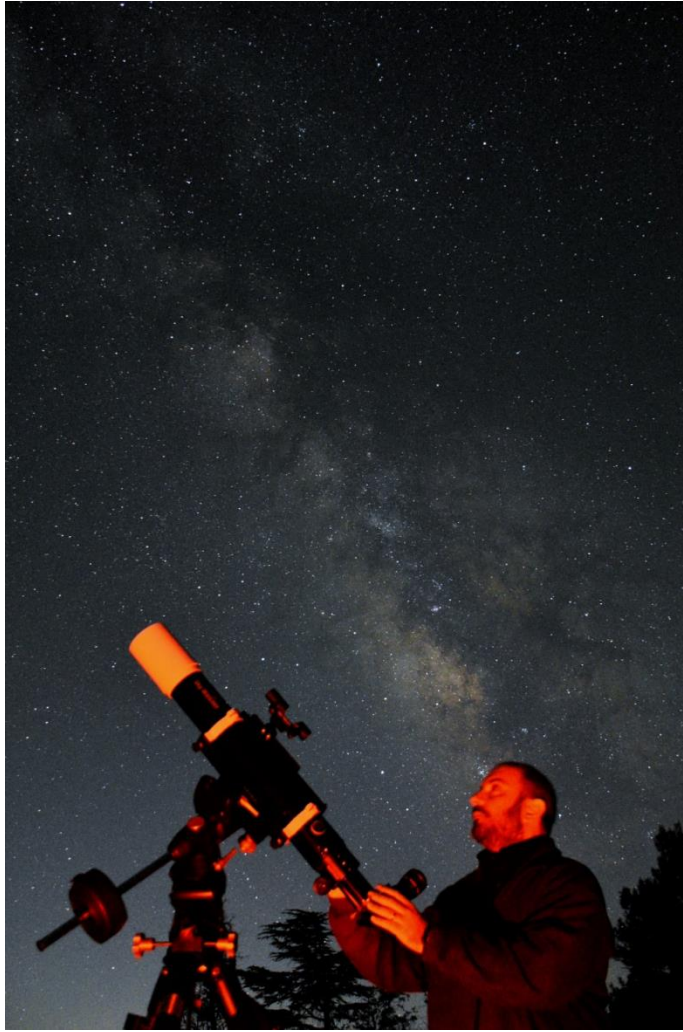


Photonic Cleaning Technologies Presents: Agapios Elia - Images of the Universe, from Cyprus



Observing the starry sky from Troodos mountains

I often get asked how long I have been into Astronomy. The answer is a very accurate and truthful "as long as I can remember". Growing up with my grandfather in a little village in the center of Cyprus, a small island in the Mediterranean, I very quickly found solace in the clear dark and spectacular night sky. We used to spend the afternoons together watching the sunset over the fields and he would always have a story or two to tell about the Moon and the bright stars. I have especially fond memories of watching Carl Sagan's Cosmos with him after school. Soon, he gifted me my first camera – his prized Soviet-era ZENIT film camera – which I promptly used to take my first photographs of anything, the Sky included.

I had never seen a telescope up close, only in books or TV. So naturally, the first toy telescope I spotted in a store as a kid became my obsession.

I had to have it! And so I did, with it I got to see the cratered surface of the Moon, the Pleiades, and I even used it to project a partial solar eclipse on to my school notebook. The all plastic tube and lenses did not last very long, so pretty soon it was time for telescope #2. I found one in a camera shop downtown and I promptly began saving my allowance for it. Before I knew it, the time came that I was bringing home my first "proper" telescope, a 50mm refractor with a diagonal and exchangeable 0.965" eyepieces. The first time I saw Jupiter and Saturn were etched in my memory and remain to this day.

My senior year of high school I started working part-time at the local mall to afford the payments I had agreed with the vendor for telescope #3, which would take me deeper into the depths of the Universe. A 4.5" f/8 Newtonian on an



Jupiter, September 19, 2010

equatorial mount with a motor drive which I used to get my first proper views of nebulae, comets and of course the surface details on the planets.

Somewhere here, I met my wife and life partner, her gifting me of some astronomy magazines further fueling my thirst for better, more advanced equipment.

Telescope #4 a modern go-to 8" reflector with a hefty equatorial mount meant I now was ready to really get things going and even dabble into astrophotography with my then camera, a 3 megapixel compact digital. With it, I managed to shoot my first star trails, capture the Moon in vivid detail handheld through the telescope (I didn't get my hands on an adapter until much later) and even have my first dark sky trips in the mountains with fellow stargazers. And that's when things really took off. The ability to capture the Universe with a capable telescope and the act of sharing actual images of the night sky that I could take myself became a huge driver for my foray into Astrophotography.

Soon, a friend pointed me towards the internet for inspiration and I quickly found my astrophotographer mentor – Damian Peach. His images of the Planets were a huge inspiration for me – and still are to this day. I quickly began scouring for resources and started saving up for telescope #5 – the reputable C9,25. Once that dream was realized in 2009, I quickly picked up my old SPC900 webcam and immediately began attempting planetary imaging, furiously trying to learn as much as I could about "Seeing", "Collimation", "Stacking" and so many other variables. I spent night after night keeping note of every setting and every weather forecast whilst comparing the results on the camera to match predictions with conditions and better understand what leads to what. Some time later, all factors came into play and in August 2010, I snapped my first high resolution view of Jupiter. I was ecstatic! Planetary imaging became my #1 focus and soon I found myself upgrading cameras and gathering TBs of data, slowly building a nice image library. A personal website soon followed (www.agapioselia.com).

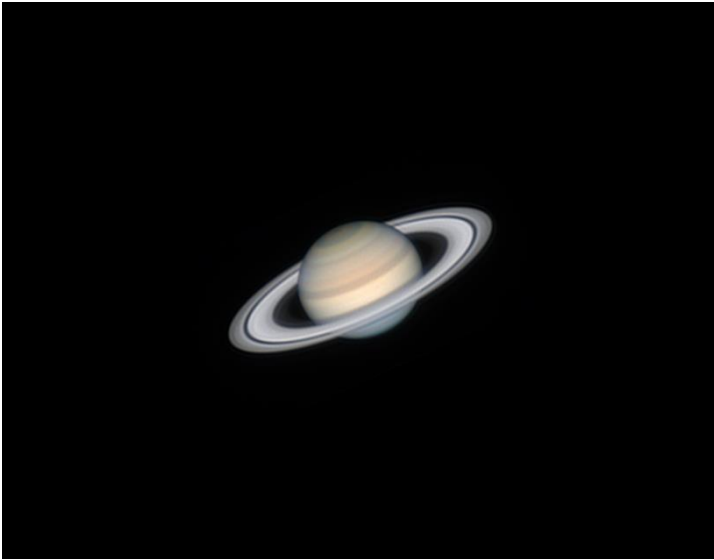
Things took a more serious turn in 2015 when just a few days before the birth of our daughter, I acquired what is generally



Jupiter with GRS and Callisto, June 11, 2019



Jupiter with the GRS under excellent seeing, September 17, 2022



Saturn, August 16, 2022

considered the most successful planetary imaging camera of modern times, the ASI224MC. I managed my finest results with it, still using it as my main camera at the time of writing this.

Living on the island of Cyprus means I have unlimited access to clear and dark night skies. I am well aware of this gift and try to make the most of it, as time and life allow, with frequent trips to the mountains of Troodos where the starry sky really puts on a show. Being in the forest in the dark with the milky way arching overhead is a unique experience, the smell of the pine and sounds of the crickets & owls in the night providing a beautiful soundtrack. All this being a nice contrast to the comfort of the backyard where I spend a large number of nights/early mornings shooting the planets and watching the sunrise.



Mars at Opposition, with Olympus mons. October 9, 2020

As the years went on, Saharan dust, pollen and other contaminants built up on the corrector plate of my excellent C9,25 and a cleaning attempt was soon in order. Although I have cleaned plenty of telescopes of all types using the traditional methods, I was hesitant at the idea of disassembling this particular SCT I am currently using. I remembered that I had seen some videos of First Contact online somewhere and more recently, I had watched a very informative presentation on the product by David Giesen at the Astroimaging channel. After an excellent exchange with him, my package soon arrived and it was show time! It took me 45 minutes to remove 5 years of contaminants and return my prized telescope back to its factory clean condition. I was and still am amazed at how well the product works! It is as perfect as the professional approach provided by David & Debra in their exchanges as well as the very thorough documentation and perfect packaging that the material ships in.



Venus in false color, April 11, 2020

Are you a First Contact Polymer user and Astro Imager?

Contact us at sales@photoniccleaning.com for the chance to be selected as a featured guest in an upcoming issue of Amateur

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