

Featuring Astrophotographer Rod Pommier

I have been an amateur astronomer since age 12, when I read *The Sky Observer's Guide*, a Golden Guide book. The chapter on the moon prompted me to observe it with my Mattel Super-Eyes toy telescope that I mounted on a tripod with hose clamps and search for objects depicted on my lunar globe. I was thrilled by finding those features on the moon, but I was even more enthralled with the pictures of real telescopes, planets, and deep sky objects in the other chapters of *The Sky Observer's Guide*. I saved every penny I earned to buy a real 60 mm alt-azimuth refractor with which I found Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Orion Nebula, the Pleiades, the Andromeda Galaxy and many more objects. Those views ignited my life-long passion for astronomy.



M42 and M43 The Great Orion Nebula

I bought my first large telescope in the middle of my general surgery residency in 1986, a Celestron Super C8 Plus. The views through it were stunning improvements over those with the 60 mm refractor. But what I really wanted to use it for was astrophotography. My dream was to take pictures like those I saw in books and magazines. In those days, astrophotography meant hours of travel to a dark sky site, which required coordination of the phase of the moon, clear weather, and my surgery call schedule. Favorable alignments of all three were rare. I took images on hypersensitized film transported on dry ice. I had to manually guide the telescope by viewing a guide star through a cross hair reticle throughout the long exposures.



M51, The Whirlpool Galaxy in Canes Venatici

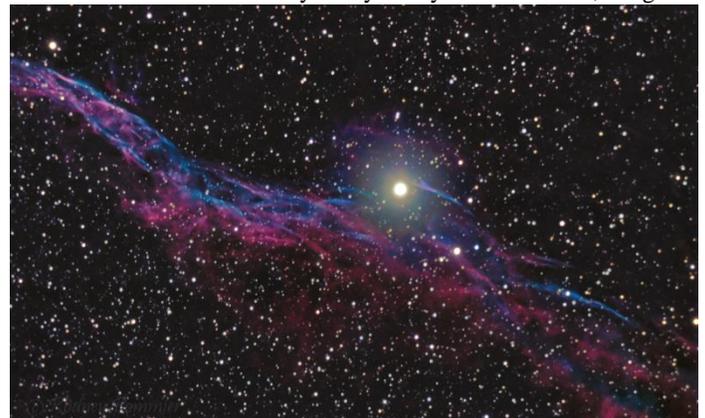
I spent many hours in the cold of night trying not to make even a single guiding error. One mistake would ruin the entire exposure by leaving a trail projecting from every bright star on the image. I was lucky to get a few pictures per year, but I was proud of each and

every one of them. They are all still displayed on my office wall. I was slow giving up film astrophotography, but eventually moved on to first DSLR and then CCD astrophotography with auto-guiding. What finally converted me to digital imaging was the revelation that I could stack multiple short exposures taken in the city and get better results than with film at a dark sky site. That meant I'd have much more time to image.



The Horsehead Nebula in Orion

In the late 1980s, Celestron produced the Compustars, the first computer controlled "Go To" telescopes, and I just had to have a Compustar C14. The Compustars were quite a bit ahead of their time and too expensive, so they didn't sell well and were later supplanted by other less expensive "Go To" telescopes. They are now considered rare artifacts, but those of us who still own them make up a tight-knit community who treasure and maintain them. Mine was pictured in an article for Celestron's 60th anniversary in the October, 2020 issue of *Astronomy Magazine*. It is still my primary imaging telescope and modern accessories help make up for things it lacks because of its age. Adaptive optics, that correct guiding errors up to 8 times per second, make up for lack of periodic error correction and reducer/correctors fix coma inherent in older SCTs. I house it in my 10-foot ProDome observatory in my backyard in Portland, Oregon.



NGC 6960, The Witch's Broom Nebula in Cygnus

The observatory provides a wealth of advantages. The Compustar C14 is always set up, precisely polar aligned, acclimated to ambient temperature, and ready for imaging on Portland's rare clear nights. The rotating dome prevents wind from shaking the telescope and shields it from neighborhood lights.



M16, The Eagle Nebula in Serpens Cauda

I have been writing and publishing articles in *Astronomy* and *Sky & Telescope* magazines since 1991. I have illustrated most of my articles entirely with my own astrophotographs. Most of my other images have been published in either *Sky & Telescope* or *Astronomy*, where they frequently appear in the Reader's Galleries. Many of my images have been selected as Picture of the Day on Astronomy.com or Editor's Choice on Sky & Telescope.org. In addition, professional astronomers have used my astrophotographs as illustrations in their journal publications and press releases about their research. Some of my astrophotographs will appear in an upcoming television episode of "How the Universe Works", produced by the Discovery Channel.



Sh2-171, The Teddy Bear Nebula in Cepheus

The benefits of having my telescope outside in my observatory do come at a price and that is that my optics get very dirty from circulating street dust. While I intensely dislike dirty optics, I fear permanent scratches from rubbing them with cleaning solutions far more. That fear harks all the way back to a harsh warning in the *Sky Observer's Guide* that scratching optics while cleaning them can permanently degrade optical image quality more than a significant amount of dirt. When I found Photonic Cleaning Technologies' First Contact Polymer, I knew it was the solution to that dilemma. I apply it to all my optics, peel it off after it dries, and they are left pristinely clean with absolutely no rubbing or scratches. I can keep my telescope and imaging equipment in the observatory with confidence that neither dirt nor scratches from cleaning will degrade my astrophotographs.



NGC 4565 in Coma Berenices



NGC 2237, The Rosette Nebula in Monoceros

Visit my website at

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