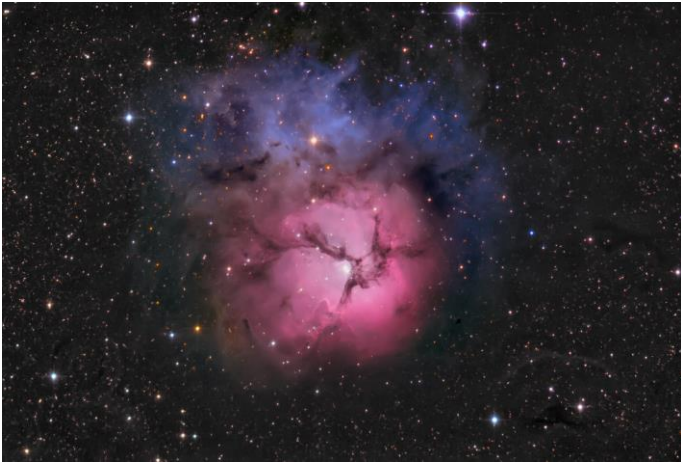


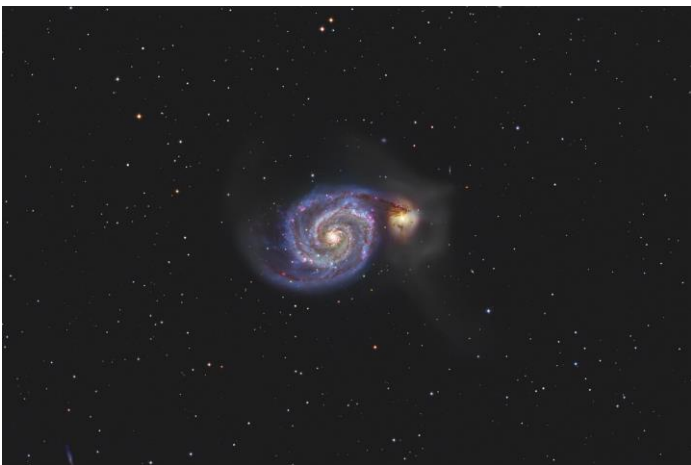
Featuring Astrophotographer Rod Pommier

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.



M20, The Trifid Nebula in Sagittarius

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 crosshair 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. Mine was pictured in an article for Celestron's 60th anniversary in the October, 2020 issue of *Astronomy Magazine*. I housed it in a fiberglass 10-foot ProDome observatory in my backyard in Portland, Oregon and produced scores of deep sky and solar system images with it.



NGC 6960, The Witch's Broom Nebula in Cygnus

In 2023, I upgraded my equipment to a PlaneWave CDK 17 telescope on a PlaneWave L500 mount. I house them in a new, metal 10'6" Ash Dome observatory in my backyard. This is truly my dream astrophotography system.

The CDK17 optics are superb, producing pinpoint stars to the very corners of my large format CCD chip. The fused silica mirror and carbon fiber tube hold focus all night despite large ambient temperature changes. The L500 mount is direct drive with very accurate pointing, no periodic error, and no backlash. The tracking is

so accurate that I don't even have to autoguide my sub-exposures. I can frame my images any way I want without having to worry about finding an adequate guide star for that composition. The dome is automated and always keeps the dome slot aligned with the telescope aperture.



M81 in Ursa Major

Having an observatory provides a wealth of advantages. My system is always set up, precisely polar aligned, acclimated to ambient temperature, and ready for imaging on Portland's rare clear nights. The dome prevents wind from shaking the telescope and shields it from neighborhood lights. I can power up the entire system from inside the house, quickly acquire and focus my target and the system will then take images all night long.



N7635, The Bubble Nebula in Cepheus

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](http://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 appeared in a television episode of "How the Universe Works", produced by the Discovery Channel.



IC 1340 The Bat Nebula in Cygnus

The benefits of having my telescope outside in my observatory does 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

Visit my website at

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