



*Atlantic Salmon* by David Miller, for whom nothing beats getting up close and personal with fish to see how they live

# Fishing for compliments

Nick Hammond meets an artist who's prepared to go the extra underwater mile when it comes to capturing his piscatorial subjects on canvas

**W**HEN I speak to David Miller, he's enthusing about snorkelling in a Cotswoldian lake. In January. The oil painter goes to great lengths—not to mention depths—to study his quarry and, months later, bring it back to life in his West Wales studio.

From his mind's eye, David re-creates, in exquisite detail, breathtaking images of game and coarse fish—even down to the unique spots on an Atlantic salmon. 'How can you draw fish without going underwater?' he asks, rhetorically. 'I don't see how you can faithfully capture behaviour, habits and lifestyle from specimens. So I dive, take photos and video and try to learn a little bit more about a species each time I go under.'

If you're a fisherman, you'll have seen David's work grace the current credit-card-style rod licence or perhaps recent Environment Agency advertising campaigns. His work is becoming increasingly collectable and David now secures commissions

**‘How can you draw a fish without going underwater? I even dream about fish’**

from across the globe. The vivid colour, movement, realism and dramatic tension in his paintings capture both the eye and the imagination.

'I must admit, I do dream about fish,' David laughs from his studio, which he shares with his artist wife, Lisa. 'Ever since I was a lad, I've fished and been around water and, when I was an art student, one of my tutors encouraged me to don a snorkel and see for myself what it was like down there. I've never looked back. I've taken nearly 100,000 images of fish since.'

Sometimes snorkelling, sometimes diving, David crosses both fresh and saltwater

boundaries and loves being around water today as much as he did as a fishing-mad schoolboy.

'There's that wonderful quote from Ratty in *The Wind In The Willows* about the river: "What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing"—that pretty much sums up how I feel. Friday comes round and I'm genuinely disappointed it's the end of the week and I have to stop work. I'm usually back at it by Sunday.'

David's recent commissions have included a magnificent sailfish for a Middle Eastern client and a predatory gang of perch cruising along reed margins. 'I have a stock of frozen fish in the freezer for close-up study, but nothing really beats getting in the water with them and watching how they live,' he says. 'Seeing moments of their alien lives is what excites me. Those are the memories that I play back in my mind at night.'

For more information, telephone 01994 453545 or visit [www.davidmillerart.co.uk](http://www.davidmillerart.co.uk)