

# Fit for Kings

Rebuilding the equipment that marked surfing's arrival to the mainland, 130 years later.

On July 19, 1885, three Hawaiian princes paddled 17-foot redwood boards into gentle California surf at the San Lorenzo River Mouth in Santa Cruz. Historians generally agree that these teenage “exhibitions of surf-board swimming” signify the birth of surfing on the U.S. Mainland. The princes David Kawananakoa, Edward Keliiahonui, and Jonah Kuhio Kalanianaʻole shaped their *olos*, monolithic guns reserved for royalty, from redwood milled in the nearby Santa Cruz Mountains. The raw timber was planed on Pacific

Avenue, just blocks from the princes' summer home and a stone's throw from the San Lorenzo River, which may explain how they transported the 240-pound surfboards to the ocean that summer.

One hundred and thirty years later to the day, hundreds watched as The Polynesian Warriors Motorcycle Club labored to carry glassed replicas of the princes' surfboards down Cowell Beach. Created by Santa Cruz master shaper Bob Pearson over three frenzied weeks of work, the two mammoth *olos* were just a small part

of a remarkable quiver. Sleeping two to three hours a night and working through herniated disks in his neck and back, Pearson also crafted a 4'2" *paipo*, a 4'10" bodyboard, a 6'0" *alaia*, a 9'0" *alaia*, a 9'6" *alaia*, a 9'7" hot curl, a 9'8" *alaia*, a 10'7" *alaia*, a 14'2" *olo*, an 11'0" *alaia*, and a 12'0" *olo*. “Three days before the deadline, I started falling apart from the strain,” Pearson said.

The “deadline” was the daylong commemoration of that 1885 session. “I’ve always been attracted to the widest spectrum of shapes and materials,” Pearson explained of his

interest in the project. “When I surfed professionally, I had a 90-board quiver with every fin configuration and shape imaginable. I was doing things like using epoxy in the late 1960s.”

Pearson began making redwood boards with Greg Noll in the 1990s. After research by Kim Stoner and Geoffrey Dunn dredged up details of the princes' 1885 session, Pearson was intrigued. When Mac Reed and Kristen Zamuka discovered two of the princes' boards catalogued in a Bishop Museum warehouse in Honolulu in 2012, he became obsessed. “Once they performed a biopsy of the original boards' wood and determined it was from the Santa Cruz Mountains, I knew I had to do this,” Pearson said.

After taking measurements of the *olo* boards in Honolulu, Pearson decided to tell “the whole story” of surfing's roots. While he remained true to the specifications of the princes' boards, Pearson displayed more creativity with the 11 other pieces. “Despite what some people might tell you, there are no standards for these boards,” he said.

According to Pearson, the single most challenging aspect of the project was simply maneuvering the raw lumber through the door of the factory. “When you're shaping, you're flipping the blank constantly,” he said. “It's hard to build a foam board in three weeks, let alone carve a 240-pound board from a 500-pound



CREDIT

block of redwood.” Pearson used both “efficient” processes, as well as more traditional tools like draw knives. “I was shaping the things in the same way as the Hawaiians as much as possible.”

On the morning of July 19, Pearson joined a handpicked cadre of surfers to test the boards in small surf at Cowell Beach. “I didn't know how they would work,” he said. “Fortunately we had some of the best surfers in Santa Cruz wrangling those logs.”

As for the princes, their historic 1885 session would be, in many ways, the end of a carefree youth. Edward died of scarlet fever in 1887. And neither David nor Jonah were destined to become king: in 1893, the U.S. annexed Hawaii, effectively terminating the Hawaiian monarchy.

Setting another surfing precedent, David and Jonah rebelled against what they saw as imperial occupation and were imprisoned for treason. After their release, the brothers would found the Democratic and Republican parties in Hawaii. And in 1903, Jonah would become the first native Hawaiian elected to U.S. Congress.

As for Pearson, his quiver of replicas has received “ridiculously” high offers for purchase and he admits he “can't really afford to keep them.” However, he's also received invitations to exhibit the boards in museums around the world. “It's as much a spiritual legacy as it is a historic one,” said Pearson. “After making these things, I've come to see it as a duty to let these boards be emissaries of something much bigger.”

—RYAN MASTERS



SEAN DAVEY



Caption

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LETTER FROM NIAS

## The Coven

The two of them watch the maps and make the call, arriving at the airport from their distant corners. For a few days, they wait for the swell, enjoying nervous but playful surfs. The third night, the swell starts booming. The caverns in the reef sigh under the force of the waves. They listen to the pounding surf all night. They can't guess what they're in for. It's hard to tell from the echo of the sets bouncing off the reef. He can't sleep, neither can she. He leaves her room and she is relieved. Together, their intensity is smothering. It has always been like this.

She awakes at 8 a.m. The swell has not peaked yet. It's still pushing. She waits for all the uninitiated to either snap their boards or be terrified and disappear. They do. By 10 a.m., the crowd has thinned and conditions are nearly maxing, with a few 10-foot sets thrown into the mix.

There's a pack of chicks in G-strings currently visiting the island, but they are hiding on their balconies today. Since she's arrived, they have been annoying her with their 5'10" quad-fin fishes that they can barely ride, their asses floating just below each wave she paddles for. "Let the waves get big enough and you'll all disappear," she has hoped. And finally she is the only woman out. She's got her ass covered and she's gunned up. She paddles out alone and a wave comes. She jabs the tail under the thick slab-lip, tries to find speed, but three times in a row she fails.

She goes back in to gather her confidence. He walks up to her and asks if she's coming out again. "See you in the water when I get my head on straight," she tells him.



Caption

drop, arriving flat at the bottom with no speed. She watches from the shoulder. He jumps and a 5-foot-thick lip axes him in the head.

The next wave of the set is bigger. It closes out at 12 feet across the bowl. He doesn't come up. The following wave is the same, but now his board is snapped, half of it still tombstoning. She duckdives and then finds that the third wave is approachable. She drops down the face, aims for the tombstoning half-board, and jumps off next to it before the white-water drags her under.

They get sucked back over the falls three times before his body rises, motionless. His lips are blue. He's been down for at least two minutes.

She flips him onto her board, jumps on top of his inert mass, distances the jagged piece of foam attached to his ankle from them, just in time for the next wall of whitewater to hit. She puts all her weight on the tail to take the crush, desperate to keep him flat and stable on the way to the channel.

She beats on him when they reach calm waters, hammers his back, cradles his head. Minutes later, he coughs up a mixture of blood and water and gasps. Her body floods with ecstasy greater than any wave she'd ridden in her decades surfing there. The two float silently for a moment before they paddle the remaining board in together, around the lineup, and back through the keyhole.

Late that evening, he twirls her hair around his finger and asks her why she did it, asks if she loves him. She answers, knowing her affirmation won't change what comes next. His body stiffens. He stands up and leaves. He packs his gear in the middle of the night, jumps on a plane, and flies as far as he can away from her.

—MARA WOLFORD

THE BEST I EVER SAW

## Kevin O'Sullivan

As witnessed by Alex Knost

I was at San Onofre on an average day, maybe five years ago. The waves were 2 feet and the winds were onshore. There were probably close to a hundred people in the water. I remember watching this older guy fading right and going left, getting in early and using his bottom turns to set up the rest of the wave. He was taking these amazing high-lines and putting the board on rail, coming into parts of the wave from way deeper than anyone else. It was early-70s-style power surfing. The way he held his hands was exactly like Billy Hamilton. He had this poise that you just don't see now.

That surfer was Kevin O'Sullivan. He was a really well recognized young surfer from Laguna in the late 60s and 70s. At the time, he was supposed to be "the next big thing" but once the 80s came around he had given up surfing and moved to San Francisco, then New York. A lot of what changed during that time was surfboards. Kevin never rode boards with deep concave and less length, which forced people to adapt in the 80s. You could tell Kevin's approach was much different than anyone who went through a sanded-edge, multi-fin, heavily-rockered era of surfing. Those changes weren't even on his periphery because he had completely stopped paying attention to surfing.

It was interesting to see someone like that come back. He wasn't trying to imitate a previous era. That's who he was. He was riding a down-rail Mark Martinson, with a domed

deck and a flat bottom—no deck rocker and a smooth bottom rocker. It was the kind of board you would have seen off the rack at a certain point in time, but by then it was beat up and sun-bleached. It wasn't a cool retro board that someone's lawyer dad would buy them. But the shape was there and it went perfectly with Kevin's surfing—the simplicity of a sleek, organic shape that looked more like a leaf than a spaceship. If you put him on a modern surfboard, which most people regard as easier to ride, his style probably wouldn't interact well. What he knew were those 70s down-rail boards. I hadn't ever seen anything like that in real life. I know that it existed. I've seen it in movies and I've seen a lot of younger kids imitate it. But I remember sitting there and waiting in anticipation for Kevin to catch another wave. He was already in the water when I got there, going up against these 18-year-old kids who ride 10-foot longboards and catch every wave. I watched him from the beach until he came in.

I think I like the fact that no one else in the crowd noticed what

was so majestic about his approach. It was an uncompromising delivery of good surfing. But if you aren't into that kind of thing, you'd probably just see some older guy out there surfing all right. Watching that—and the fact that no one else really gave it attention—solidified what a personal thing surfing is for me.

REGRETS ONLY

## Faded from the Winter

Clark Little on a season-ending blast at Ke Iki beach

It's kind of rare but sometimes the Ke Iki shorebreak unloads onto dry sand. You don't even need swim fins on those days. I was shooting a session like that in early winter a few years ago. It was a long-period swell and all that juice was throwing up directly onto the beach. I'd run down the sand bank with my camera as the barrel was



Caption

heaving over, then let it blast me back up the shore. Sometimes it would drag me a hundred feet. Most spots allow you to get a heavy shot and still punch through the wave without getting hurt but not on those dry-sand days at Ke Iki. It's super dangerous and also really fun. But this one monster came in that day and I immediately got sucked over the falls. I could tell it was going to throw me hard onto the

dry sand. Usually I can tuck my camera and fall gracefully but this wave threw me down and separated my shoulder. I was out of the water for at least a couple months after that. Most times you sneak away uninjured somehow: you sprint down, lay flat on your stomach, stick your camera housing in front of you, and get sucked up the beach. But time it wrong on a day like that and you're finished."

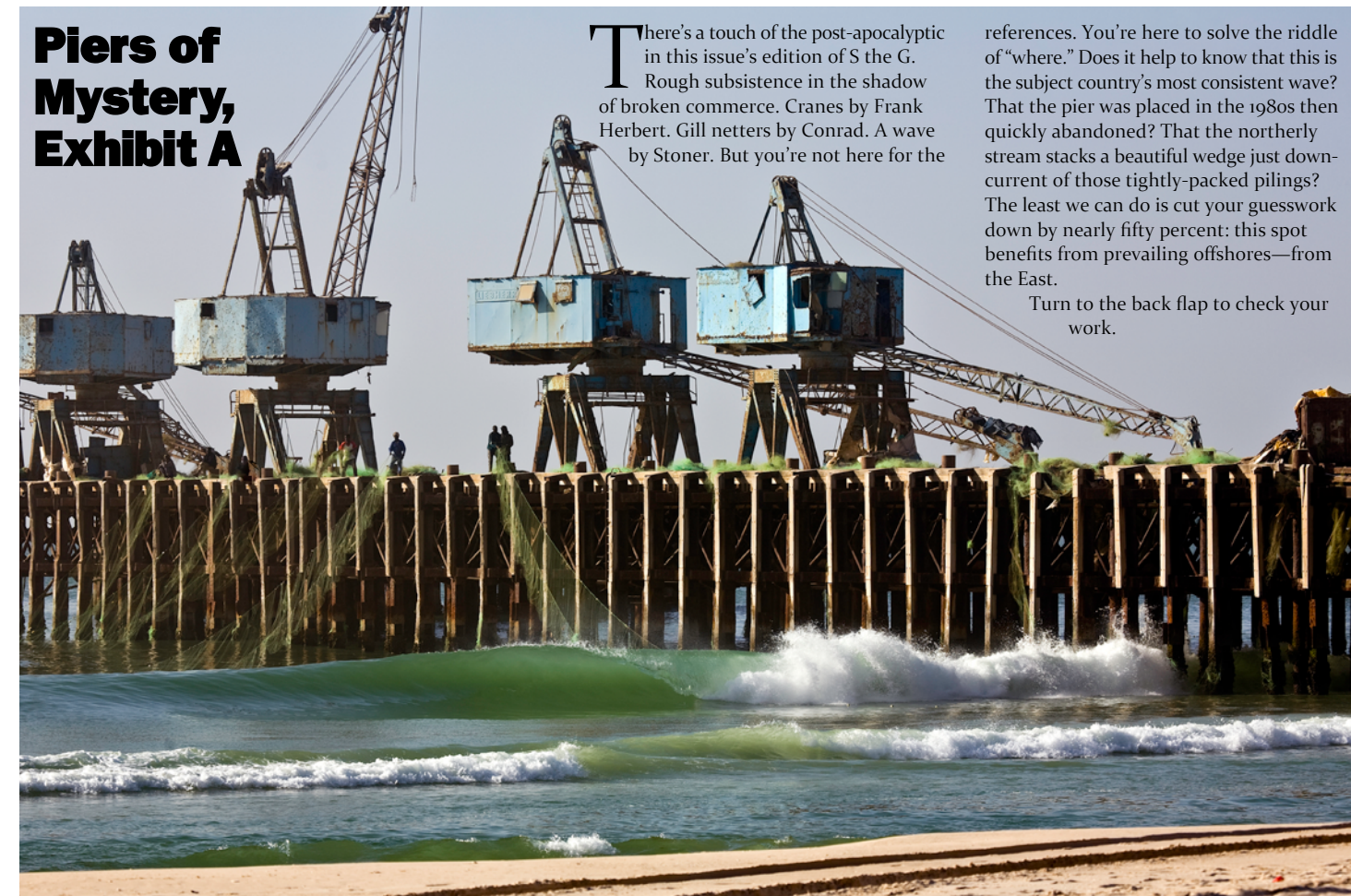
SPIN THE GLOBE

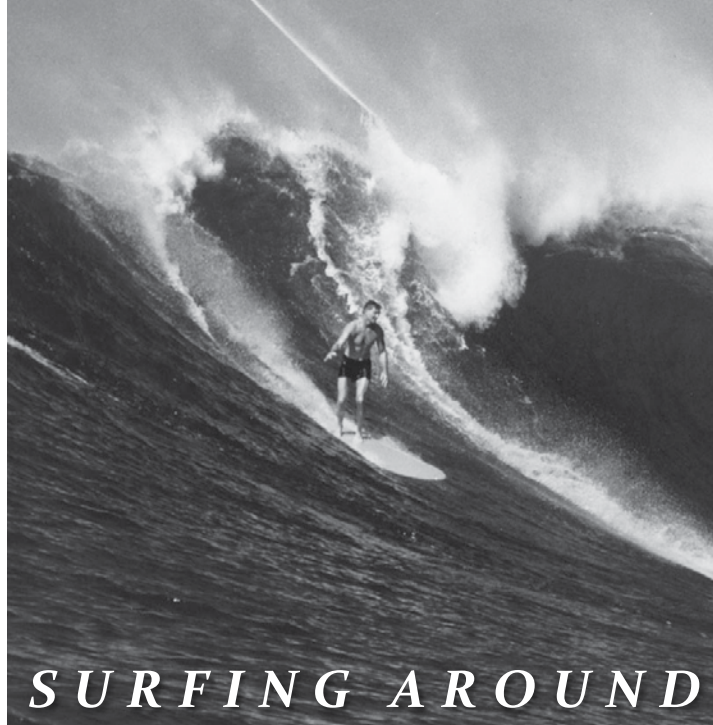
## Piers of Mystery, Exhibit A

There's a touch of the post-apocalyptic in this issue's edition of S the G. Rough subsistence in the shadow of broken commerce. Cranes by Frank Herbert. Gill netters by Conrad. A wave by Stoner. But you're not here for the

references. You're here to solve the riddle of "where." Does it help to know that this is the subject country's most consistent wave? That the pier was placed in the 1980s then quickly abandoned? That the northerly stream stacks a beautiful wedge just down-current of those tightly-packed pilings? The least we can do is cut your guesswork down by nearly fifty percent: this spot benefits from prevailing offshores—from the East.

Turn to the back flap to check your work.





## SURFING AROUND

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### Passings

**Wally Froiseth**, 96, June 30, 2015, Honolulu, Hawaii. A couple of decades ago, George Downing took me to visit Wally Froiseth's modest post-war cottage located in the residential neighborhood behind Diamond Head. After we parked, George directed me through a hinged, wood-slat door into a lattice-enclosed, dirt-floored space under the house's elevated front porch. Wally had established a workshop there, where for 60-odd years he built his and his kid's surf-riding craft. The space was cluttered with tools, templates, fins, and boards from all the eras, materials, and shapes, including body boards and *paipos*. Most, if not all, of

the boards he had surfed through his life were in there, stuffed back under the house or up in the rafters. It immediately struck me that, if anywhere was, this was hallowed ground (much like the storage area in back of the Downing family's surf shop a mile away), containing such priceless pieces as Wally's redwood hot curl "Super Castle," the lot containing the significant stages of the evolution of Hawaiian surfboards, all having been hand-made and ridden by one of its primary architects. To the unknowing, they might seem obsolete if charming, dust-covered, inanimate objects rather than historic wings of flight that enabled man to ride ocean waves. I don't know if

they're still there under the porch. If so, maybe they should stay there.

A seminal figure in the advancement of big wave surfing through the 1940s and 50s, Wallace Froiseth was an alpha-male amongst others of the same ilk, comprising a tight South Shore group including Fran Heath, John Kelly, an older Woody Brown as mentor, and George Downing as the kid hotshot. In 1934, Froiseth became the co-originator, along with Heath, of the revolutionary "hot curl" shape. That breakthrough featured a radically-narrowed tail that finally allowed previously-wide-tailed solid planks to hold a tight trim across the wave. The still finless hot curl bottom sported a soft vee that, like a fin soon would, allowed the board to both hold-in and roll out, introducing the climb and drop movement to traverse the wave face. The inspiration arose out of their frustration over repeatedly "sliding ass" when pulling in on a big day at Brown's on the South Shore. Taking a break after a swim in, the two retreated to Fran's home where Wally took an axe to the aft plan shape of Fran's wide-tail plank, then went back out and tried it. The revision worked: it held in on an angle. Later, witnessing the effectiveness of Wally and Fran's handiwork at Castles with some size, the entire crew adopted the design and it spread from there.

That simple outline and bottom contour revision added tight trims to the surfing vocabulary. So armed, many breaks around the island, previously too difficult to even think about with the wide tails, suddenly came into play. Realizing their horizons had expanded, while the hot rod Waikiki regulars mostly kept to their waves, Froiseth and the hot curl crew began exploring for new big waves to ride. When John Kelly noticed Makaha's waves during a diving/camping trip, it became the primary testing ground for the birth of modern big-wave riding. As things turned out, the hot curl's "pulled" tail later cross-pollinated with the light, shapeable materials and glassed-on fin of the Malibu Chip, and became the basis for the modern high performance board, in particular the big-wave versions.

In 1947, George, Wally, and Rus Takaki hopped a ride across the Pacific on a returning TransPac yacht, landing in San Diego. There, the three caballeros purchased a Model T in disrepair. All having grown up being fix-it guys, they got it running, then toured the West Coast, visiting all the major breaks and their attendant

clans. It was during their pause at Malibu that Bob Simmons introduced the use of fiberglass as a patching and reinforcing material to George and his two buddies from Hawaii.

When Wally and George got home, membership in the Outrigger Canoe Club was exclusively reserved for *haole* elite, and in response, the Hui Nalu was formed for native Hawaiians exclusively. In response to both, Wally, George, and crew created the Waikiki Surf Club, headquartered in the basement of Uncle Woody's beachfront Waikiki Tavern, and featuring a more-liberal membership policy that included Asians, Jews, and visiting Mainlanders. Under the Club's aegis, Froiseth founded the Makaha International Surfing Championships in 1954. For several years following, it served as the first and only global contest in the entire surfing world, run by Froiseth until its conclusion in 1971, when the North Shore upstaged Makaha as providing the benchmark waves.

As international competition bloomed, both Froiseth and Downing volunteered to travel as coach/mentors with the Hawaiian members of the U.S. contingent, engaging in "creative" trouble-shooting to keep their stable of young charges safe and sound. In the 1980s, Froiseth, a finely-skilled woodworker and hull designer, was the primary figure in the development and care of the twin-hulled *Hokulea*, a replica of an ancient voyaging canoe that sailed from Hawaii to Tahiti using traditional non-instrument navigation techniques, which contributed to an upwelling of the rejuvenated Hawaiian pride. In spite of his prominent role in the sport while existing at its center, and the immense respect in which he was held, Froiseth remained a self-contained man, absorbed in creating craft that allowed him to pursue the ocean feats that challenged him. —S.P. • **Ryan Dotson**, 68, July 20, 2015, of liver cancer. Originally from La Jolla, CA, Ryan was known in the Islands throughout the 1960s into the early 1970s for both building boards and as a charging surfer. A few years ago, we discovered that Dotson had ended up abandoning his surfing life to disappear into the heartland of the American Mainland. It turns out that over the years following his disappearance, Dotson had become a bank robber, doing something like 30 banks in and around Illinois and adjacent states before finally being caught, sentenced to and serving a long stint. When Dotson gained his

freedom, understandably loaded with pent-up surfing angst, he wrote and submitted an article to us about his experiences at Pipeline during his North Shore days. It was informed, but in a naïve sense, comprised of familiar rhetoric, and never saw the light of day. What had interested me was the story of what happened when he left surfing, but he wasn't eager to write about that. In the end, it was early-1970s era *Surfing Magazine* editor Richard Dowdy who wrote a story about his wayward friend, "The Surfing Bank Robber," which ran in *Ocean Magazine*. Adds Dowdy, "We worked together in '66 and '67 at Hansen's and Surfboards Hawaii making boards. He sanded, I glassed. [Ryan] had a checkered life but was a good friend and great surfer and shaper." —S.P.

### Benchmark

*Surfing Heritage's* donation to *Smithsonian* Under the leadership of Executive Director Paul Strauch Jr., the San Clemente-based Surfing Heritage and Cultural Center has made a major effort over the last year to acquire, exhibit, tour, and promote the "Bruce Brown *The Endless Summer* Collection," which was acquired by SHACC last year largely through the efforts of board member Keith Eshelman on the occasion of the film's 50th anniversary. The keynote of the effort: SHACC's donation to the Smithsonian Institute of a specially curated selection of *Summer* artifacts, along with a 16mm print, plus a series of "prime example" surfboards selected to represent the evolution of surf craft.

All of the above was conducted with suitable pomp and circumstance, as orchestrated by SHACC's Smithsonian Committee Chair Glenn Brumage. As a part of the celebration, the day before the actual collection donation ceremony, SHACC hosted the first National Luau, attended by Washington D.C. luminaries and prominent surfers from the film, plus past and present legends representing various bastions and regions of the sport.

On SHACC's part, the effort was a step in its ongoing effort to grow the perception of surfing as a unique and valuable aspect of human culture, significant especially since the Smithsonian is the definitive, national archive of all aspects of American society. It also represents SHACC's "coming out" on a national stage as it continues to work to grow members, attract sponsor support,



and further advance its collections, outreaches, and programs.

"We greatly appreciate the generosity of the donors who provided a rich foundation of surfing objects to the national collections," said Jeffrey L. Brodie, the Deputy Director of the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the National Museum of American History for the Smithsonian Institution. "That is a remarkable and lasting legacy. I also thought the panels and discussions were lively and dynamic and did receive many positive comments from audience members who heard new ideas. It was definitely an inherent challenge to focus the conversations with the strong and ebullient personalities of Bruce, Mike, Robert, Greg, Tom, and Fred. But the conversations touched on some important aspects of innovation in surfing and laid the groundwork for deeper discussions in the future. Panel discussions take on a life of their own, but these captured the attention of the audience—so overall, a very successful event." —S.P.

### Errata

A few moving parts broke down in our photo tagging in issue 24.5. On page 35, we mistakenly credited a photo that appeared in our Cabo piece, which was actually shot by Fabiana Badie, not Damea Dorsey. We also misspelled Damea's name, further compounding the issue—a mistake within a mistake, or something of the like. Surfers were the aggrieved in The Murph Bar piece. On page 95, we labeled a thoroughly-tubed Anthony Tashnick as Adam Replogle. Apologies and repentances to all.

### Off-The-Lips

"Surfing is a secret garden, not easily entered." — Bill Finnegan in his memoir, *Barbarian Days*.

## L I N E R N O T E S

Pacific Ocean Park is baked into the lore of California surfing. The beach at Santa Monica has never been known for quality surf, but its foreshore is incalculably rich in surf history. Duke Kahanamoku, George Freeth, and Pete Peterson all famously rode here. The pier and its pleasure park evolved into a peg on which to hang stories, and it works as a rickety avatar for Southern California itself: hucksterism, boom-and-bust cycles, fiscal hubris, celebrity culture, overpopulation. All were evident in the P.O.P. story.



California piers have a magnetic attraction, acting as gathering points for forces both happily populist and incredibly dark. Families treading the planks by day disappeared at dusk as the sketchy winos, hustlers, bikers, and garden-variety malcontents made their entrances. In the 1960s and 70s, the effect was amplified. In pre-gentrification coastal SoCal, urban beach towns were a bit like pre-Giuliani New York City: dirty, dangerous, endlessly layered and fascinating. The life cycle of P.O.P. engendered all of that and more.

As a business enterprise, it was a boondoggle and quickly fell into receivership. It then suffered from neglect, in turns besieged by the ocean and lit off by firebugs. Area

surfers adapted with characteristic skill. Wave riding artist types moved into the ruins, establishing studios and performance spaces. Miki Dora became a regular attendee during swell events, slaloming through the pilings as he came to terms with the newer, shorter equipment. Young Dogtown punks earned their stripes, working as attack dogs for the older locals, picking off interlopers both in the water and with airborne assaults launched from the structure itself.

The P.O.P. is gone now, the beach a bureaucratic and antisepic assemblage of concrete, turf, and bum-proof benches. But thanks to the documentary efforts of Craig Stecyk, John Orlando, and the recent volume excerpted in this issue, the tales spring eternal.

On the book front, readers unfamiliar with *Waves and Beaches* by Willard Bascom are urged to read Steve Barilotti's feature on page 90 and then to order a copy for their own edification. A foundational volume written by one of the oceanographic world's primary ballers, *Waves and Beaches* offers up actionable lessons on surf scouting that hold up well even now, in the Year of the Ferret.

Barilotti is a research hound, tending to invest his time only in projects worthy of his considerable faculties. A monk dedicated to the tenets of "live cheap surf deep," Barilotti has trimmed his life down to the essentials, allowing him to say no to any project or request that doesn't hold his interest. Office-and-family-bound colleagues vacillate between howls of indignation over his self-imposed vow of austerity and

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