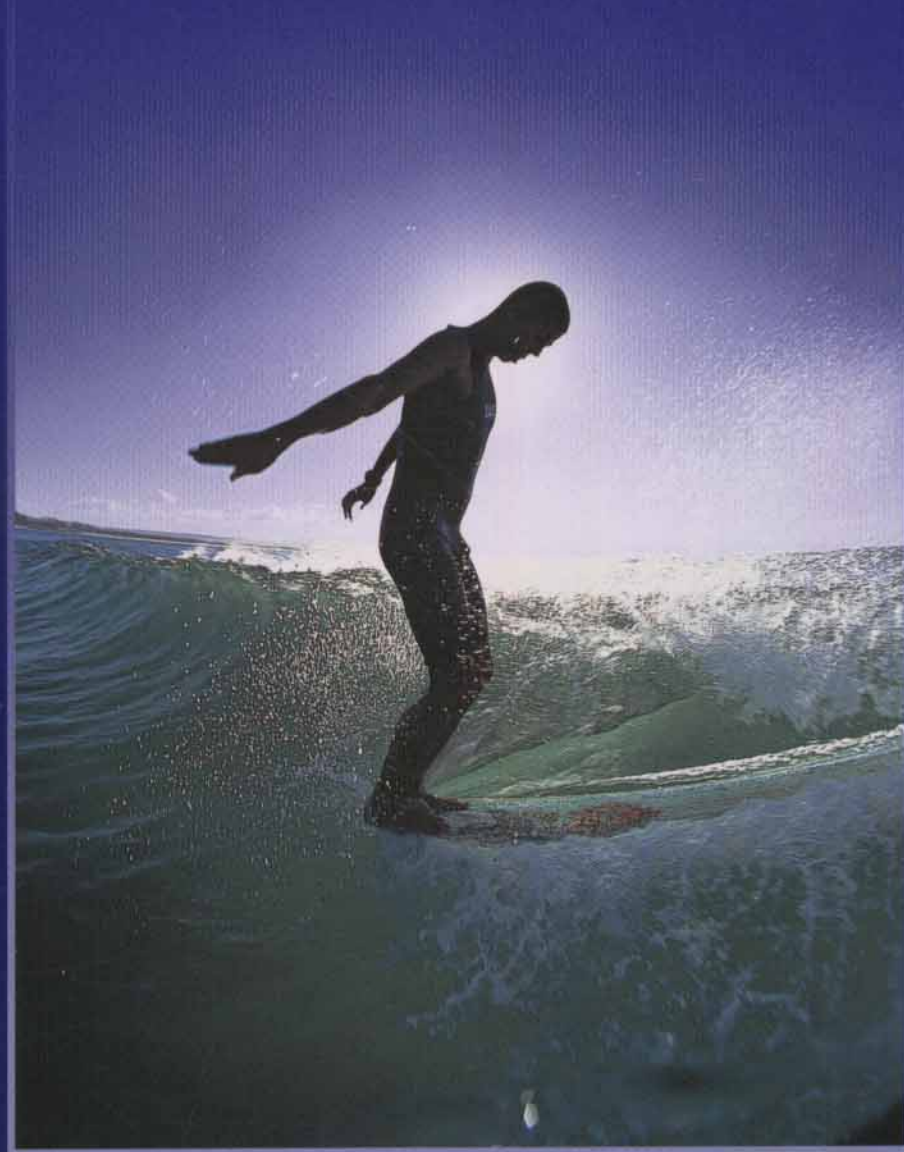


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THE SURFER'S JOURNAL



ADVENTURE Bahia del Tiburon • Surf-Climb Down Under

PHOTOGRAPHY Harbour Chronicles • Kidman • Wedge • A.R. Gurrey 1914

PEOPLE Titus Kinimaka • Donavon Frankenreiter

BY
MARK ANDERS

WITH A VINTAGE SINGLE-FIN UNDER HIS ARM, Donavon Frankenreiter leads me along a Laguna Beach side street and down a set of steep concrete steps to a tiny pocket beach. His stride is quick and purposeful.

It doesn't quite fit his personality, so it catches me off guard and I have to throw in a couple extra steps just to keep up.

After doing a quick survey of a handful of his favorite local spots, we'd settled here. No one out, and although it was looking pretty tiny, the tide was starting to ebb. We were hopeful.

Donavon rubs a little sand on his deck and starts stroking seaward. Just then, as if on cue, a nice chest-high wave breaks on the rock reef and reels all the way to the inside.

As he picks off the first wave of the next set, Donavon draws an undulating course along the face, punctuated by a powerful arc off the lip. A tourist flailing around in the shorebreak stops and stands at attention after this flurry, not sure of what he'd seen.

Donavon has a flow and rhythm that you rarely see on the water, even among the best surfers in the world.

"The guy has so much natural ability," says Kevin Naughton, half of the 1970s Naughton/Peterson surf-travel writing duo. "Whether he's riding some funky, strange board or whatever, you can see that he's just got this incredible amount of natural ability and talent."

"What I've noticed about Donavon is that because he has an eye for style throughout time, he can replicate a P.T. soul arch better than P.T. could do it—primarily because he has better equipment. And he could go from a classic '70s-style maneuver off the bottom and then transition into a radical air off the top," says Duncan Campbell, co-creator of the Bonzer surfboard design and owner of the venerable Café Haleiwa on Oahu. "To be able to bridge three decades of style on one wave—and I've seen him do it—is just remarkable and a joy to watch. Most surfers are very consistent in their approach, but Donavon has this spontaneity. He may do

something from the '70s or he might do something futuristic. You don't know what you're going to get. And for a guy like me—I started surfing in '65—to be able to see all these influences through the decades and then see this young guy replicate it and do it with style and functionality, it's rare. It doesn't look forced. And it doesn't look posed."

In 1983, while on a trip to see her mother in San Francisco, Jeanne Frankenreiter paid a visit to a psychic. The room was dimly lit with candles throwing shadows across the walls. Soft music played in the background. About halfway through the reading, the clairvoyant began channeling information about Jeanne's 10-year-old son.

"She said Donavon would be very popular in music and surfing. She said he was going to be a pro surfer and retired at 40 years old as a millionaire. She said that he was a special son, motivated, and that he would travel a lot," recalls Jeanne, more than 20 years later. "She said, 'Let him do what he wants to do because you can't stop him. You have to let him go. You cannot hold him down or you'll stifle his personality. He's going to do it and he's going to be successful.'"

Jeanne and husband Marty kept the soothsayer's predictions to themselves for more than a decade—and didn't tell Donavon about it until age 23. They also took her advice and nurtured their son's quickly erupting single-minded interest in riding waves.

Though no one else in the family surfed, every weekend and all summer long his parents chauffeured him from their home in Mission Viejo to San Clemente Pier. As soon as he was old enough, they let him take the bus and, eventually, bought him a car so he could drive himself to the beach. Getting there proved to be the easy part. The real challenge was in the water.

"San Clemente was a very elite place when I grew up. It was very hard to get in. All those guys were there: Archy, the McNulty's, the Beschens, they were all at the pier," he recalls. "At one time, the pier really had a lot of talent in the water. On any given day

BAR CHORDS

Donavon Frankenreiter's
Canyon Life

Photos by Naki

SINGLE

you'd see Dino, Jim Hogan, Andy Fomenko, the Fletchers—the list goes on and on. I grew up watching all those guys surf. And the stuff that was happening out there at that time was magical.

“But it took me a long time, like from age 13 to 17, to actually breakthrough and communicate with those guys because I was the full inland guy,” Donavon says. “I'd get my backpack stolen every day, but I'd keep coming back and keep coming back. And, eventually, I became really good friends with all those people.”

By age 14, Donavon was obsessed. He surfed nearly every day and grew into a gifted contest surfer, eventually winning the 1988 NSSA National Championship in both the Open and Explorer Jr. divisions. Soon Donavon's high school class schedule proved incompatible with his contest commitments and ever-increasing docket of surf-magazine-sponsored photo trips.

“So I went to the principal's office and had a meeting with him and I said, ‘I'm going on this surf trip to Indonesia for two weeks and I need all my homework so I can do it while I'm over there.’ And the guy looked at me and said, ‘You know what? You're going to be a loser, with this whole surfing thing.’ I got really upset and told the guy to fuck off,” Donavon says, with a hint of fire in his voice. “Then they had a meeting with my parents and told them, ‘If you let your son do what he thinks he's going to do, he's going to grow up to be a loser. You guys are ruining his life. He needs to go to school.’ My dad just looked at me and said, ‘What do you want to do?’ I said, ‘You know what I want to do, Dad.’ So we got up and walked out.”

AND BLADES

Donavon happily traded high school for independent studies, and over the next several years he hopped on surf trips for magazines and videos. Soon, his mug appeared in countless photo features—that unmistakable style dripping off the pages. Before long, contest surfing was totally out of his picture. Instead, Donavon was focused on forging a lucrative career as one of the sports first sponsored “free surfers.”

“I think Donavon has shown that surfers don’t have to go the circus route, which is the Top-44 thing,” says Naughton. “That they

don’t have to sign up with P.T. Barnum’s circus routine and jump through all the competition hoops in order to get the recognition that is coming to them. Donavon sort of broke ground in that area.”

For Donavon, however, it wasn’t the higher purpose of legitimizing free surfing that motivated him. It was more base and instinctual than that: “I just had more fun going on trips and seeing things and places than doing contests. Before I turned pro it was always, ‘What are you rated? And that’s how much we’re going to pay you,’” he says. “Nobody had ever heard of: ‘You don’t need to



surf contests to make money, bro. Just get these sponsors to pay you and let's go do surf trips."

And that's exactly what he did. For four straight years, Donavon traveled the planet on one huge protracted surf trip. In 1992, at age 21, he found a likely traveling partner and fast friend in ex-pro tour standout Brad Gerlach. The duo made stops in places like Hawaii, Norway, France, Sweden, Amsterdam, Argentina, and Japan. Sometimes surfing was the focus. Other times, partying and playing music was their siren song.

Gerlach and Donavon turned their backs on the contest scene entirely and were living like rock stars. They dressed the part: long hair, beards, bell-bottoms, fur coats, capes, dark sunglasses. Their exploits during those years—the drinking, the music, the groupies, the nude surfing—are the stuff of legend and have earned both a spot in modern surf lore.

Surfers don't come much better rounded than Donavon. He can ride most any kind of board—from potato chip to longboard—with equal aplomb, and he excels in virtually all surf conditions. The only real chink in Donavon's surfing armor is big waves.

"He doesn't like really large waves. He doesn't want any part of that. Doesn't want to surf really big Todos or Waimea," says Gerlach. "He'd rather surf eight-foot Backdoor, which is gnarly, too. He just has a certain range and then after that he's like, 'Nah, that doesn't sound fun.'"

While traveling in Hawaii with Gerlach in the mid-'90s, they woke one morning to 20-foot waves at Waimea. It was huge, and though Donavon had second thoughts, Gerlach was determined to get them both in the water.

"He said, 'Don't worry, I've got a board for you. You're going out.' And he pulled out this old board from under this guy's house," recalls Donavon. "This thing had so much Hawaiian brown dirt on it, it had to have been under there for at least five years. It was a pretty epic single-fin though—Ben Aipa might have shaped it when he rode for T&C—it was a classic."

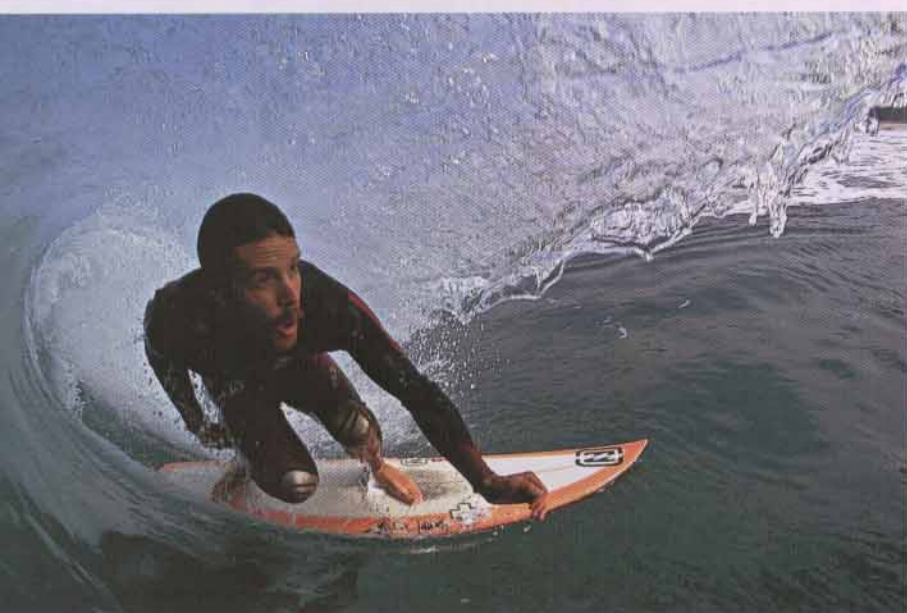
"I washed it off with a hose and threw it on the car," continues Gerlach. "And he's still mumbling as we're driving down Kam Highway—he's still trying to semi-wiggle out of it."



(above) Hanging with son, Hendrix, down-home Laguna Canyon style.

(left) Savoring the single-fin existence, somewhere in the Laguna environs.

Although Donavon had never surfed a board that large or waves that large, they paddled out. Gerlach first, then Donavon. He reached the lineup just in time to see Gerlach spin and drop into a solid 18-footer. He got completely lip launched and pitched over the falls. His board tombstoned for what seemed like an eternity and then Gerlach came up for air. "Donavon says, 'Are you fucking serious, dude? I'm out of here.' And he just paddled in," says Gerlach.



(top) An island of soft-tops, occupied by the students of Donavon's first-annual surf camp for the groms of the City of Laguna Beach, 2002.

(above) Moustache ride: a bit of Magnum P.I. flavor at Salt Creek.

(facing page) "It's like a shrine. A living museum. Nearly every board is yellowed, with dirty wax and proud dings. I've ridden them all."

To date, that's Donavon's last and only real experience with monster surf. "I wouldn't say that I'm a big-wave surfer at all. I think anything over 20 feet is huge," says Donavon. "I think big-wave surfing is a thing—you don't fuck around with that shit. You're either full gung-ho with that and you're really serious about it, or you get the fuck out of the water and don't get in people's way when it's big."

Spanning the entire back wall of his Laguna Beach home, Donavon's surfboard collection is mammoth. Endless single-fins, ranging in size from six- to 10-foot, stand proudly together at one end. On either side of the barbecue grill sit stacks of retro shortboards, twin-fins, single-fins, and a few first-edition thrusters. A dozen assorted longboards and large single-fins lean lengthwise along a low wall, including his latest go-to board: a green 9' 6" Gordon & Smith Midget Farley, circa 1967 or '68. It's like a shrine, a living museum. Nearly every board is yellowed, with dirty wax and proud dings. "Some people would hang these boards on the wall because they are pretty classic," explains Donavon. "But I like to ride them. I've ridden them all—and I've dinged them all."

He slowly walks me through his collection, pulling out favorites and randoms along the way, peppering each with a story: "This is the very first single-fin I ever got," he says, pulling out a seven-something-foot Plastic Fantastic with light blue rails. "I've taken this everywhere around the world: Tavarua, Teahupoo, J-Bay, France, Hawaii, Australia. This is the first one that taught me how to actually ride a single-fin. I found it in Florida. Some old guy had it and it still had the original balsa tops and the original balsa bottoms to it."

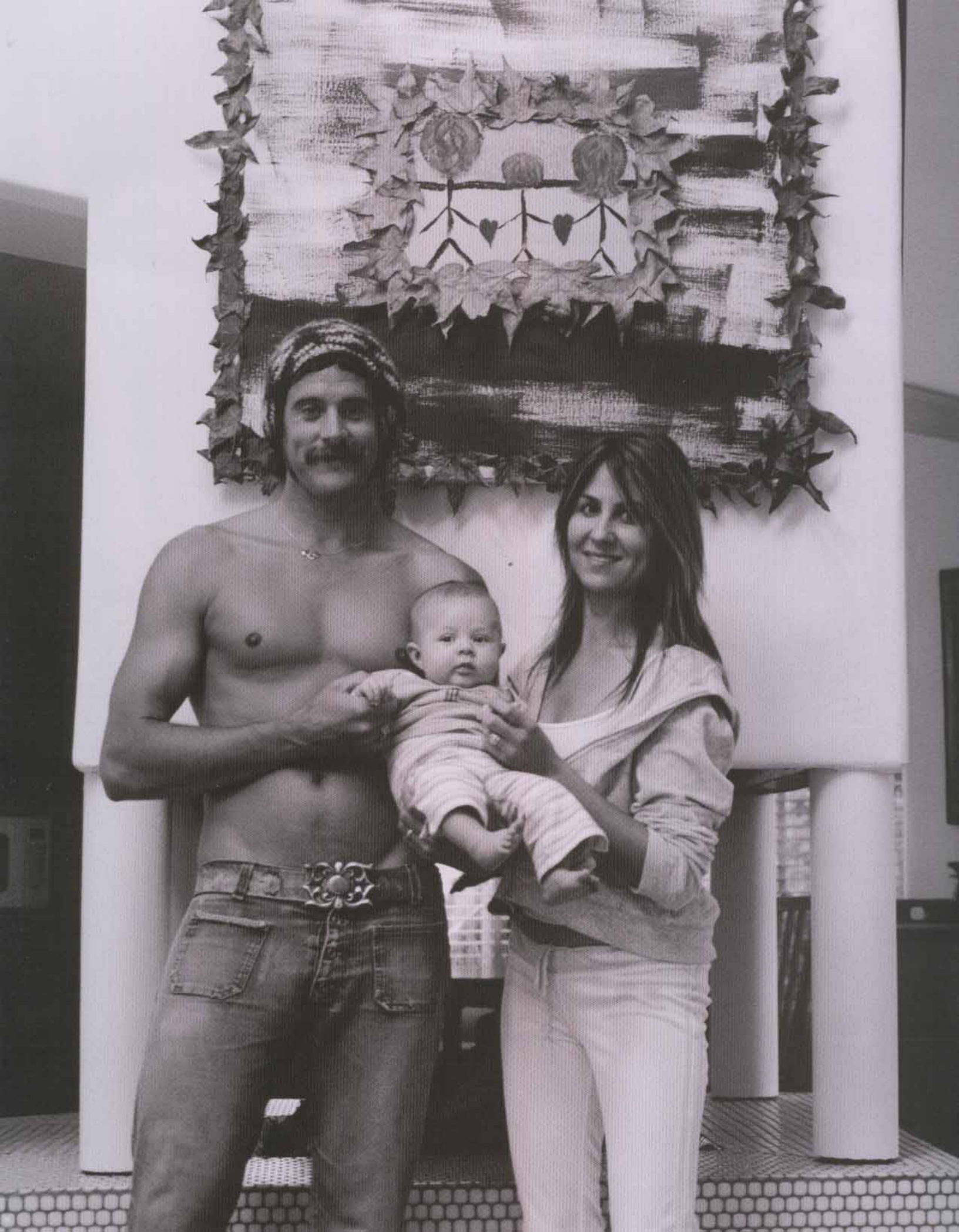
Next, he sidles up to an ungainly looking yellow longboard with thick blue and red stripes and a huge Infinity Surfboards logo on the deck. "This board was hanging on the side of the Infinity surf shop off the 405 freeway for like 30 years. Then the shop closed down and I went over there and said, 'Hey, can I have that?' The owner said, 'I'll give it to you for 40 bucks if you take it down off the building.' So I did and I've even ridden it a few times."

Though he's collected a broad range of boards over the years, single-fins dominate the landscape. Donavon says it's simply the ride that's at the root of his compulsion.

"With a single fin, the enjoyment is to try to get a nice-sized wave and do a great bottom turn. Sometimes on a thruster, things happen so fast that all you really feel is the off the lip. It's like, thwack-thwack-thwack-thwack! Then another turn. On a single-fin, I try to slow it down to where it's fun to surf from rail to rail and not just be flat on the board and be bouncing and hopping, trying to get speed and wanting to get to the next section," he says. "The best thing is to just get on a really good wave, do a great bottom turn and not have to hit the lip. Just come up and hang midway in the face—enjoy the moment a little longer. Trim for a while and get your fingers in the lip, and then carve back down. Those moments to me are the best, where you go, 'Okay, I'm going to stop right here, mid-face, and look around and just play with the lip.'"

Only three or four of Donavon's boards are lucky enough to live inside his house, protected from the elements. Among the fortunate few: a new Lightning Bolt single-fin, still unwaxed and unridden, shaped by Terry Martin. Donavon says he's waiting to surf it in Hawaii when Backdoor is going off. The other notable inside board is a seven-footer with photos glassed on the bottom. "That board I gave to my wife, Petra, for a wedding present. It has photos from the first eight months I knew her, traveling all around the world and all these trips we went on. She loves to surf, so I shaped that for her and put all the photos on there and I had it for her at the reception," he says. "I've surfed it. She's surfed it. We've all had a go on it."





I ask Donavon how many boards he has now. "No idea," he shrugs. So the counting begins: 75 in all. Of course, Donavon is quick to point out that not all of his boards are actually here at the house. Like a bumblebee scattering pollen, Donavon picks up boards on his travels and then leaves them under fellow surfers' porches around the globe. "Wherever I go, I always bring a couple and leave them so I always have boards everywhere," he explains.

Donavon started collecting vintage surfboards in his early twenties while hanging out with Gerlach. "We were going to thrift stores all over the place when we were staying together on the North Shore," says Gerlach. "We were getting out of the car and running in there trying to get the best shit. Just trying to outdo each other with funky '70s shit. We started finding old surfboards, and then Donny just fucking went AWOL with it. Fully obsessed. He just started buying every old surfboard he could find, which is pretty rad."

Thrift stores, pawnshops, garage sales, backyards, dumpsters—it didn't matter. And it wasn't only single-fins he was after. Donavon is uniquely open-minded. Whether it's a longboard, a Bonzer, a high-performance potato chip, or an experimental futuristic shape, if it's a surfboard, Donavon's interested.

"I'd just look for the shape and the design—just for the most crazy, different thing I could find," he says. "And price? When I see a board for 20 bucks, I'm like, 'Great. That's perfect.' You get the most enjoyment out of that 20 dollars than you would out of anything else because surfboards last forever."

"He has an unreal collection of boards," says Naughton, who used to live nearby. "I just drool when I go through there. And I laugh, too. Each board I pick out brings back a little memory of a certain era of surf history. He's got such an eclectic mix of boards and he just picked them out because he saw them as the unique time capsules that they are."

Maybe it's because he refuses to fix the dings or change the wax on those old boards, or because he literally stands in the footsteps of his surfing elders, but Donavon has developed a tangible connection to those who've come before him.

"We're generations apart, but I can relate to him a lot better than most every other guy from his generation. He's just got a really good sensibility as to the overall purpose of the surf life," says Naughton. "It's not just you get a bunch of ratings and cash in and go for the glamour. I think his sensibilities run deeper."

Look at that eagle," Donavon says to me in a soft voice reminiscent of those old Mutual of Omaha wildlife shows. "She's going to land there. She's got babies in that tree."

We're in Donavon's backyard. His house is warm and homey, but it's the location that's most striking. Unlike the majority of SoCal homes, which are cookie-cutter-built, one upon another, this house is siddled up next to a large expanse of protected wilderness.

"Donny, there's that eagle again," his wife Petra calls down from the wide deck. Their one-and-a-half-year-old son, Hendrix (yes, after Jimi), grabs her leg and gives a little yell of his own. "Da-da!"

"That's a baby eagle right there," says Donavon, pointing up into the tree. "It hasn't flown away yet. Once they fly away, though, they fly away for good and go and make their own nests."

Some of his old friends told me that as soon as Donavon met Petra, he gladly traded in his days as a groupie-dripping playboy for down-home life in Laguna. This scene was proof positive.

"Petra doesn't give a fuck about the Donavon that's a surfer or a musician," he says, when I ask him about his relationship with his wife of four years. "She's for real and she really helps put me in my place."

And this place, where Donavon is now, seems like a good place.



(above) A man and his garage. With Donavon's quiver living outside, there's plenty of room for his other passion: vintage guitars and old-school amps.

(top) The music room, where Donavon does his song writing, listens to old 8-tracks and LPs, and drools over his cherry Lighting Bolt single-fin.

(facing page) Donavon, Hendrix, and Petra with a painting Frankenreiter slapped together for their first Christmas.

Though he's been playing guitar and toying around with music since age 15, even playing in a marginally successful party band called Sunchild, Donavon's life took a major turn in 2003, when rock star and former pro surfer Jack Johnson gave him his first big break in the music world. Johnson came across a homemade four-track recording of Donavon's singing and song writing and promptly offered to produce his first album.



With Johnson's backing and the wheels of publicity now in motion, Donavon seems to be on the front end of what may be his own rise to rock stardom. It's funny though: now that he's actually becoming a rock star, Donavon is living less and less like one. He still dresses the part, but his favorite groupies are now his wife and son, and he brings them along on tour whenever he can.

Though Donavon's still surfing (even if admittedly not as much as he'd like), the majority of his energy is now focused on his music and the fulfillment of another childhood dream: "When I was a kid at 15, I never thought I'd be doing this—it was kind of a dream to get paid to surf, and then on top of it to be able to play music and travel and have a record—I feel really fortunate."

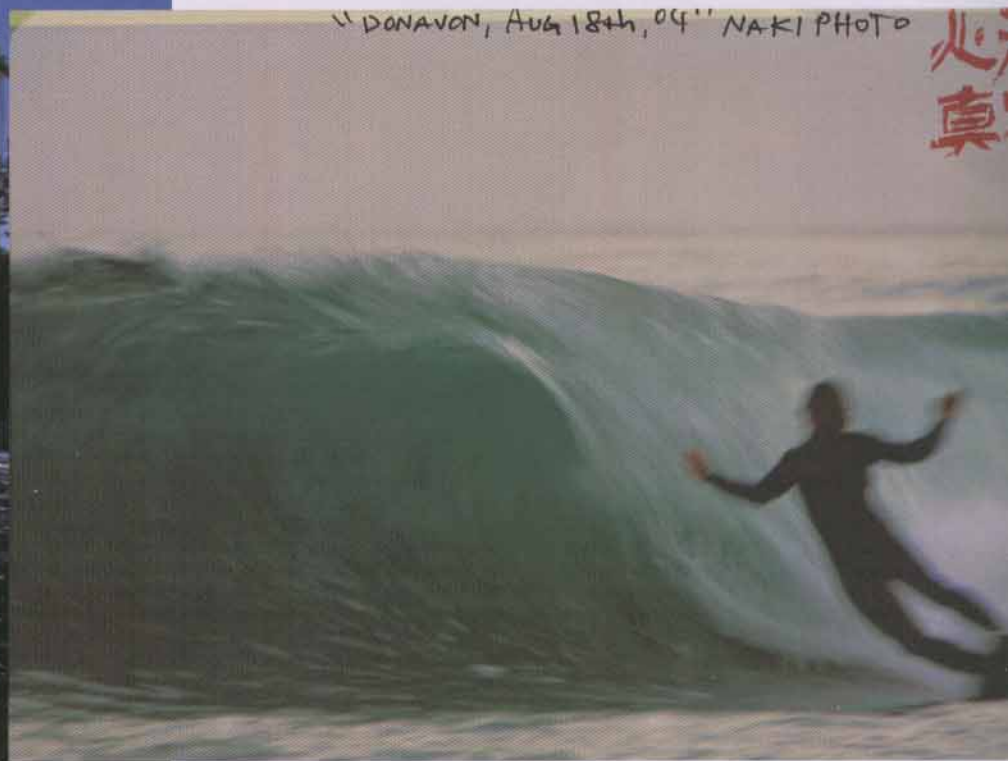
“**H**onestly, it's frightening to think if he'd just focused on contest surfing. I've seen what he does on those boards that are archaic. If he had just stuck with it within that mold, he would have been a Slater or a Curren. I think his talent is that deep,” says Campbell. “But he chose a different path. And I'm glad he did because we need people like Donavon to represent surfing.”

“The music thing for him is a really good direction to be moving in,” says Naughton. “You know, there's only a certain shelf life you get as a surf star. And that's not a particularly long shelf life. So I'm stoked he's pursuing the music because that's what his passion is. Life is all about pursuing your passion and that's what he's doing.”



(left) Seconds of pleasure, minutes from home at Laguna's Rockpile.

(below) "The soul arch bottom turn is one of my favorite moves: It's just really fun to get way out in front of the wave and do that."



And I think it's going to work out for him for that reason alone."

Of course, some see Donavon's transition away from surfing and into the music profession as a mistake. Brad Gerlach: "I told him, 'You're in the upper one-percent of the world in your sport, and in music you're not even close. That's fun and everything, but dude, you're kind of walking away from a legacy that you can leave in the sport, that you could still leave in music later in life.' I told him that, but when someone's focused on something, they're just focused on that. And that's okay. But inside him is a fricking really, really talented surfer. He rips. If you took him away from his music and said, 'Okay, you're not fucking playing nothing but a ukulele and you're going on a surf trip for six months and you're not going

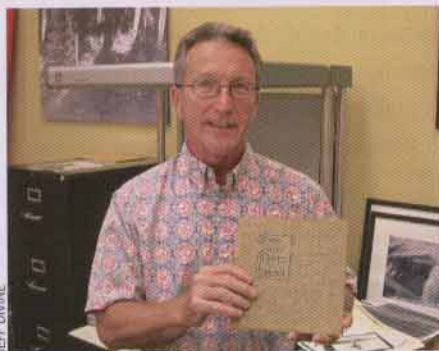
to bring any of those stupid retro boards.' If he'd only surf shortboards and he'd let me train him," Gerlach continues, "I'd put him up against any of the best pros in the world right now. He's 31, so he's right on the edge there, but it'd be an interesting experiment. It'd probably blow some people away with how good he surfs."

Trestles and San Onofre flash by at 80 miles an hour as we race to San Diego for Donavon's gig at a local radio station—just one of many things to tick off his rock-and-roll to-do list today. There's swell in the water and Donavon and I both crane our necks for a peek. Then I turn to him and start describing Gerlach's mad scientist plan to get Donavon back into contest surfing shape. He looks my way with a sharp glint I've yet to see in his eyes. "Yeah, that'd be really fun," he says, a wry grin still lingering on his lips.

Then Donavon turns and gazes back out the window at the azure lines marching in on the horizon. "And I don't think it would take six months." ♣

This issue's first torpedo? An Australian travelogue by Jeff Johnson, accompanied by his heavy-water pal Chris Malloy. Johnson—occasionally confused with the oceanfront-Pipe patriarch of the same name—grew up in the Bay Area, lifeguarded at Waimea, and now bounces between Oahu and Ventura. His recent works in TSJ have included a study of mysto-man Eric Haas and crisp vignettes describing real life on the North Shore. Jeff doesn't back down when sketching the seamier side of the surf ghetto, so if you prefer a more wholesome, Pollyanna perspective, look elsewhere...as he does with "Lost in the Fun Park," which finds him in more bucolic, less pressured surroundings. In a unique twist, Johnson has found big wall rock climbing a solid analog for surfing, supplementing the stoke quotient without the water—or the crowds. In the interest of full disclosure, take note that Johnson and Malloy are both in the employ of Patagonia—one of our six advertisers. As a reader-supported pub, we revel in operating outside the pay-to-play, product-placement realities of so many consumer publications. That said, when the "real" arrives, we shun perception worries and run with it.

All right: Who was the first-ever surf photographer? I suspect that if we posed that question to a quorum of editors, photographers, and trivia wing-nuts, we'd end up with a variety of answers, many of them calling out Tom Blake as the seed stock. Until Joel T. Smith queried us with this issue's A.R. Gurrey piece, I would have been among the misinformed (familiar territory, trust me). Smith—a gentlemanly Palos Verdes



JEFF DIVINE

Joel T. Smith

surfer, writer, and Hollywood producer—has become a go-to source for archival discoveries, and we enjoy passing on his investigative work.

Mark Anders is a new contributor to these pages, touted by Steve Barilotti, who described him as a turnkey, full-function freelancer with solid reporting skills. I spent an hour with Mark, asking him to hit me with some ideas. Such sessions occasionally yield areas of crossover where a writer or photographer's interests merge with subjects we've had in the back of our minds. When Mark suggested a Donavon Frankenreiter profile, I sort of blanched. Didn't we already know him via 15 years of *Surfer* and *Surfing* stories and ads—music guy, Allman Brothers

hair, thrift-store maven? If we deigned to deploy, we'd need to have a more Journal-esque angle of attack—avoid the cult of pop celebrity and show the sort of surfing life he's grown into by dint of marriage, fatherhood, and many clicks on the odometer. After all, he rides like many of us wish we did—arms artfully arranged, a gift for unique line selection, and a knack for finding anything remotely resembling a tube.



COREY RICH

Mark Anders

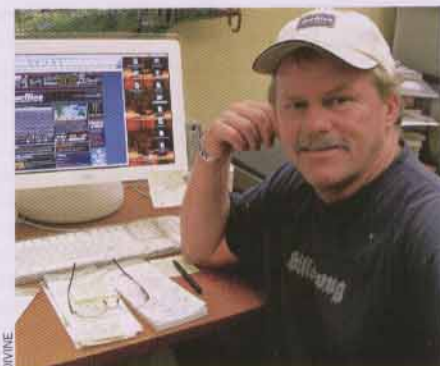
Donavon's friend, Naki, is perfectly suited to articulating DF's surf stylings via his offbeat, Pacific Rim Zen, earning the sole photographic credit for "Bar Chords and Single Blades."

"The Harbour Chronicles" showcases the venerable shaper's documentary skills, bringing together a couple dozen of his more memorable team snaps. Rich has an eye, historically evidenced by his marque's sweet curves and glass work. His Cheater Model—a takeoff on Renny's Spoon—was as crisp a noserider as you could envision, most often finished with a luminous, ruby red tint. His photo compositions continue the theme—check the slice-of-time arrangement in the shot of Martinson going off the lip while a fellow surfer scrambles across a mussel rock after his board. My mind isn't as encyclopedic as some, but I suspect that Harbour's famous '60s Rich Chew center-spread was one of the only large-use shaper's photos published in a major. Steve instantly knew which off his cronies to tap for caption stories. This time, it was his sophisticated, artfully debauched pal Roy Crump.

TSJ has become the principal chronicler of that difficult-to-define genre, Surf Art, through a blend of design and default. Pezman's a closet painter and latent graphics guy, Girard has an obvious and natural affinity for line and space, and I indulged my interests (and dodged more treacherous waters) by minoring in Art History and running with painters. One of my more humbling lessons came when I complained to my friend, B, "God, how sweet it must be to paint compared to writing—to see your composition appear right in front of you, just the way you plan it." He shook his head and said, "You don't have a very clear grasp of the creative process, do you?" Like all great stylists, a good painter just makes it look easy. The fruit of our curatorial "power" comes to bear each issue when we

select a candidate for inclusion in our Gallery feature. The overarching goal is range. Over the course of a year's issues, we feel we've done our job if we can give you a look at a straight-ahead, "representational stoke" painter; a bold, top-of-his-game landscape specialist; a blockbuster, balls-to-the-walls, art world heavyweight who crosses over due to an interest or background in surfing; an underground surfing hipster who obliterates the "Dude, that so looks like Cardiff" archetype; an academic, conceptually-engaged thinker; or a mid-career, talented cherner with a long history in the surf scene. If indeed we must classify, this issue's Rick Rietveld falls into the latter category.

A year or so back, Andrew Kidman wrote me about an American fellow he'd met in Ireland, Christian Beamish. Beamish had been riding his bike down the coast with his board, and had bumped into Jesse Faen at a Master's event in Bundoran. Faen invited him along to Scotland for Derek Hynd's experimental *hukilau* in the Outer Hebrides, where Christian let on that he was a writer. "Well," Kidman told him, "You should send something off to The Journal." We ran Christian's study on living and surfing at a North Coast lighthouse a few issues back. During the process of captioning that piece, the two of us fell into an easy rhythm



DIVINE

Sean Collins, Bahia del Tiburon chronicler.

of surf rap, lit-babble, and caffeine philosophy. "This dog will hunt," I remember thinking, and arranged a meeting with the Pezmans. "Caffey Road," his seamless little fiction, emerges from the back files for this issue.

Macs are great, but it's the old-school whiteboard on the wall that I'd grab if the bad boys ever light off the nuke plant at San 'O. Now that we've added an issue, long-range planning—never my strong suit—is clutch. The good news is that we're staring at six framed-out editions of TSJ for 2005. Now comes the rewarding part—tuning, upgrading, fining out, and hoopnetting for surprises. Bimonthly? It's like looking down the line at a drawing, surface-tensioned point wave and seeing six appropriately-spaced bowl sections: you just know there are some views coming if you don't catch an edge. Thanks for whistling us in.

—Scott Hulet, Editor, The Surfer's Journal