The hull curve (flatter outer/more curved inner) evident in this perspective was a major Hobie Cat design point that resulted in the proper balance of blade-like penetration and enough volume for proper floatation. This "action" view was taken on the sand in front of Hobie's house on Beach Road by Dick Graham for an early '70s Hang Ten ad while an assistant hosed down Hobie and the boat.

Hobie's Story

Chapters from His Early Years

From a conversation with Steve Pezman
Palm Desert, January 12, 2009

I think of Hobie as the Henry Ford of the surfboard industry, the first (after Pacific System Homes, and later Quigg and Kivlin, who produced a run of a hundred or two Styrofoam-core, plywood-skinned, jig-assembled with shaped balsa-railed boards in Bob Simmons' Venice garage) to engineer a long-standing, volume production line with multiple employees hand crafting high-quality modern surfboards using specialized materials and techniques that became industry norm for decades.

Hobie always seemed to be about practicality. During his '60s production heydays, he could be seen puttering about the "alley of broken dreams" (after obsolete production jigs and prototypes that ended up in the alley between the glass shop and shaping room) in his standard Levi's and T-shirt under a v-neck sweater. By the later 1960s, the sport's new generation knew of Hobie more for surfboards and catamarans than for his surfing prowess. The fact is, he was a top surfer and paddleboard racer and his design sensibilities were rooted in firsthand experience.

As the decades rolled into the '70s and beyond, the Hobie brand, which had been firmly seated as hard-core via Hobie Surfboards, Hobie Skateboards, and the Hobie Cat—the largest catamaran sailing class in the world—applied that credibility to a group of "surf shops" introducing the surf and sport retail concept, plus men's and women's surf wear and swimwear, sunglasses, the Hobie Hawk model glider, and one-man fishing Float Cats. To this day, the surfboard brand operates out of the same Capo Beach location it has occupied since the 1960s.

In the early '70s, flush from successfully investing in prime blocks of land along the fast-developing I-15 corridor between Temecula and Escondido, Hobie was invited to join the original four investors in OP. (Jim Jenks, Bob Driver, Don Hanson, and Chuck Buttner came out of Hanson Surfboards and rode OP up to 3.5 million in sales, then invited Hobie in as a fifth partner, his voting position becoming the tie breaker.) That they so trusted him is something of which Hobie has always been proud.

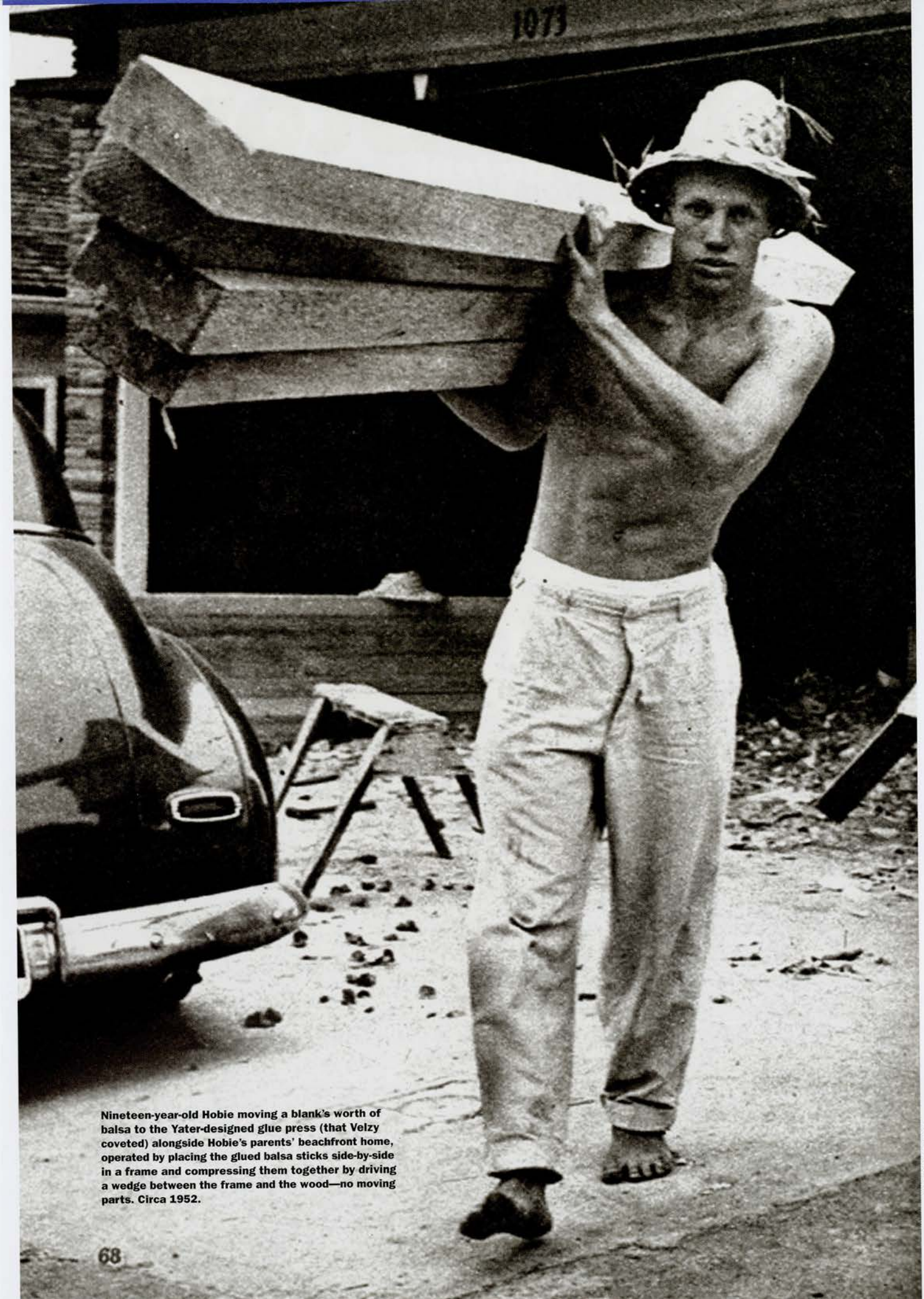
As an incurable fiddler and inventor, which led him to become a somewhat unintentional industrialist, after Hobie Cat, Hobie's sensibilities generally took him down the more passive income path, sacrificing maximum cranked-up, hands-on operating profits for still ample financial success and a more comfortable lifestyle positioned out of the mainstream. As a result, the Hobie empire, which has always enjoyed the brand recognition to go mega, has remained substantial but less huge, serving him more than he it, perhaps lessons learned in the surf: Have fun. Get a good ride. Stay out of the impact zone.

Today Hobie and his wife, Susan, winter on a manicured golf course in Palm Desert, California, where he has, of course, invented a device to improve his golf game in his garage workshop. The couple summer at their dockside home on Orcas Island in Washington state's rustic San Juans, taking cruises north through the inland waterways with longtime friends like Phil and Mary Edwards on Hobie's self-designed 60′ power cat. Now 75 years of age, Hobie has read the autobiographies of several of his surf industry contemporaries, all of whom he feels fondly toward, but that describe certain of surfing's benchmark events and design hallmarks from their perspectives. He's now working on a book of his own with daughter, Paula.

Beginnings

It all just kind of happened, mostly born of necessity. I didn't know Joe Quigg or Matt Kivlin. Anyone! Except I'd met Walter Hoffman and he had the first real surfboard I'd ever seen. There were some guys in Laguna who had redwood balsa boards, like [Peanuts] Larson...but nobody surfed them there because it was mostly shorebreak, and a 60- to 80-pound redwood doesn't do it.

Both my grandfathers were orange growers. My mother's parents were Scottish and they used to come down to the beach. In fact, my mother and her girlfriend once rode their ponies from Ontario all the way to Laguna. It took them two days. They camped at Irvine Ranch



Nineteen-year-old Hobie moving a blank's worth of balsa to the Yater-designed glue press (that Velzy coveted) alongside Hobie's parents' beachfront home, operated by placing the glued balsa sticks side-by-side in a frame and compressing them together by driving a wedge between the frame and the wood—no moving parts. Circa 1952.

HOBIE COLLECTION

where the general store used to be. My grandparents would walk the beach and collect coffee shells. I remember jars of them at home. Our family had a house at Sleepy Hollow on the inland side of the (dirt) highway. Then they bought a lot at Oak Street for $5,000 over where my parents' house is now, which had a hundred-foot frontage (now reduced to 25'). We have an aerial picture of the house taken in 1922. My brother in-law and sister live there today.

When you think about how we get into stuff, well, there's a lot of luck involved. In my case, I picked good parents. If there was ever a spot where you wanted to be: I had Brooks Street right here and Oak Street there, and Thalia down at the other side of us. I mean, that's it! That's surfing in Laguna. Dead center. Best bodysurfing of anywhere around there. That's what we did. A group of us kids grew up bodysurfing and skimboarding and belly boarding. One of them was named Bar Chafey. He had a twin sister named Bardine. Their family rented a little room every summer. Bar was a skinny redheaded kid. After 1941, we were the only ones there because all the older guys had gone to war and pretty soon we were running the show. I figured I was the second best bodysurfer of our whole group. Bar was the best, and if that would have continued on, he probably would have been the best surfer, but Bar died of polio when he was 13 years old. He and his sister both got it; she survived and he didn't.

Anyway, we bodysurfed and picked black abalone at low tide, spear fished, and on my 15th summer I wanted a surfboard. My dad intended to buy it but we couldn't find one, so he went to Hoagie Sporting Goods in L.A. and found a 12-foot paddleboard. A couple of my other friends had their own boards too. One had a shorter one he'd cut the end off of. We paddled around on them. We had Owen Churchill swim fins, but you couldn't get rubber during the war so they were made of black synthetic rubber that wore holes in our feet. We'd wrap cloth around them, tape, everything. There were even some wood ones on the market then, but they didn't look like they worked very well.

At low tide the waves would break out a little farther and we could ride them, but we had nothing to go on. If there were surfers around in Laguna, I never saw any. Keyhole and that group of older guys went to Doheny, Salt Creek, and San Onofre.

Early boards

Everyone in our group came to Oak Street. That was the surfing place. There were the local kids and then our group who all lived inland and came down with our parents. We went in the water more than the locals because we were more on it. One day, I was out by myself riding my paddleboard at Brooks Street; at high tide you'd get a shoulder. Out comes this big guy; it's Walter Hoffman, and he has a Simmons' foam board with plywood decks and balsa rails with a black border outline on it and the word "Malibu" on the nose. Being typical Walter, he paddles right up to me, "I used to have one of those. You ought to have a real surfboard. Here, try my board." This all just happened—bam! So I got a ride on his board and, wow, that was too easy. (He did spinout on my paddleboard when he caught a wave on it.) He told me, "I will make you a board or I'll tell you how to make it." I'd been making models, so I said that I'd like to try making one myself. I ran home, got a paper and pencil and wrote down what he told me: Thalco Fiberglass on Hobart Street in L.A. (I always remembered that name) and General Veneer in South Gate.

Roger Bellknap was another friend of mine. He also bodysurfed and had a paddleboard that he spear fished from. He got a 75-pound bat ray once. There was this older guy called the "Question Man" who would ask us kids questions, and if we could answer it he'd give us a quarter. He offered a prize for the biggest fish and Roger won. Roger wanted a board too. He knew what I was doing and he didn't have the money right then, but he had a job. I told my dad and he said he'd loan him the money, so we went up and bought wood for two boards. Back then it cost about $45 for all the material for one board. I sold them for $65. I was making boards in the garage and it felt like I had a $20 profit, but when the chain broke on my Maul planer it would cost me $20, and that happened about every fifth board. That thing had a chain drive and was heavy, but it worked. I glued mine up and Roger glued his up; we did everything down at my house. I decided I'd take mine down to the lumberyard because they had a big planer and a big sander and I figured I'd run it through them once; start off with it mowed down a bit. Walter had told me that if I got it glued up he'd come down and let me copy his board. His folks had a summer cottage above Crescent Bay [North Laguna]. As it turned out, I couldn't get Walter's board for a day or two and Roger was impatient, so I said, "OK, let's do it." We bought a drawknife and a jackplane and he started hacking. Roger wasn't much of a craftsman, but we got the outline hogged down—he did most of the work—I helped him a little, and it was pretty ugly. Then Walter finally came by with his board. Roger was still getting his roughed down and Walter told him, "Oh, you're not using your drawknife right. Roger said, "I'm bringing the back down." Well, on the Simmons board, that [the aft deck curved down to the tail bottom] is what you'd get, but the blank was on the sawhorse upside down! In today's world, that tail rocker

would have been right. But for what we were trying for, it was *wrong*! I made a scooped nose on mine. Walter sawed the piece off the bottom and scarfed it onto the top so he had enough wood for a scooped nose. I did that. It was 24″ wide by 10′4″ and pretty light balsa. So, I'm sawing and Roger begins glassing his board, and once you get the sun on it that sun-cure resin goes off instantly. It was pretty messy.

While all that was happening, Walter was making a board for Hank Lass. At Thalia Street there was a group of cottages down by the beach and the elderly lady owner rented to some older surfers, Parky Cosby, guys like that. Walter went down there and glassed that board all in one day. That was a scene in itself because there were five or six guys drinking beer and wine while Walter's doing all the work. It was the first time I'd seen glass itch. I can still see Walter's stomach, all tan and sparkling in the sun [laughing]. The shape was *very* nice. I was shaping mine down there too and had his to copy. I figured I'd watch how he glassed it. He set the board on top of a 50-gallon trash drum and almost had it done, but the old lady who owned the place had a guy raking leaves and she needed it to burn the leaves in. It was her property, so she got the trash barrel back and began burning. Ashes were blowing all over the sticky board when Hank announced, "I'll sell it for the price of materials right now!" He had no takers and Walter finished it off and everything worked.

After that, I went home and glassed mine. It came out and didn't have bubbles or anything. It was a decent board, but Walter did a great job on the board he'd built. He was a *good* shaper and the best surfer I'd seen at that time too. Historically, he isn't regarded as a shaper, but he was *very* skillful.

I rode my board that summer and then went back to high school at Chaffey (in Ontario).

Transition time:

Dick Davidson from Ontario, one of my close friends, was one of the guys playing on paddleboards with me and he wanted to buy my board. He told me if I ever wanted to sell it, to give him first call. I said OK, but didn't really want to sell it. Then, in 1950, I made a redwood-railed plywood board in woodshop. Our woodshop teacher was trained in something else and they had dumped him into the woodshop. I helped him with how some of the tools worked and he gave me the run of the place. The board I built was something like the foam/plywood sandwich Simmons: Styrofoam core, plywood decks, with balsa rails that you shape. Well, I did mine with a redwood block, carved out the middle and put a plywood deck on it, then shaped the rails and glassed it. Our teacher had never heard of fiberglass. In those days, there probably wasn't a person in Ontario who knew about it, although there were little fiberglass boats by Glaspar and Wizzer out then.

I made that board because I'd really gotten into surfing, and I was going to Salt Creek and San Onofre, all those places. We were riding light boards while Lorrin and everyone else were still on redwoods. The balsa board I'd made was 30 pounds. It was glassed with a finer cloth than the normal "boat cloth," that we called "surfboard cloth." We both glassed our boards with it and that's what kept the weight down. We eventually shifted to boat cloth, but I did a lot of them with surfboard cloth. That's what everyone else was doing too, but the thing was, we were riding chips and the older guys were still riding planks—some had fins, some didn't. A few had smaller redwoods that weren't quite so heavy, but we could instantly surf better than almost anyone else because of our balsa boards. We had been bodysurfing for the last seven years and looking at the ocean. We weren't beginning surfers, so we jumped right to the top, just like that. Of course, there weren't many balsas around that first year. Roger and I had ours, and then there were a couple of other guys that showed up with them. Walter, of course, and he had a buddy, Richard Jaeckel, the actor. He always played sidekick to the star like he did in *Guadalcanal Diary*. He was a good surfer. But, still, the old guys were always telling us, "Wait till the surf gets big," and when it did we were even better. But in the meantime, I'd made this heavy board thinking, "OK, this will be my big-wave board for Salt Creek and all those spots when it got big."

That was my evolution during that first summer, and what I did in woodshop the following winter.

In business!

The beginning of the next summer there was a guy named Dave Monahan who lived in Laguna. I didn't know him, but he came by and wanted to buy my board, said he'd give me $65 for it. I thought, "Oh, man, that's $20 more than I paid for it. I could make another one." So I told him, "Well, OK, but I'd better check with Dick Davidson." Dick said, "No! I want it!" So I sold it to Dick, and then built my first surfboard for somebody other than myself. That was the beginning of summer and, I mean, before I got that one done—I didn't even have a surfboard myself—a whole bunch of other guys wanted them. It was a business! I don't know how many I made, normally about 20 those first few summers. I'm not sure how many I did that first summer.

I got a rubber stamp made. It's been said it was, but it wasn't, Velzy who influenced that. I hadn't heard of him

yet. I did know of Joe Quigg and Matt Kivlin by then. I *had* heard that there was a guy at Manhattan Beach Pier, so I finally went to see Velzy's shop. I think it was the only shop that existed. I was still in my garage. He had a little storefront with surfboards lined up, but I never thought too much about him at the time. I've also heard it said that Dale was the first to put a name or brand on his boards too, but what about Pacific Home Systems? I think I had my first stamp made at Mariner's Stationery in Laguna the next summer. I had gotten the artwork over the winter, a silhouette of a surfboard outline with the Hobie inside. Later, around 1962-'63, I wanted an outline around it. I always liked Yater's logo, and the diamond outline that he used fit very well over my name, so I adopted his triangle, straightened his top curved line and that's been my logo ever since. I remember a magazine titled *Reef* (that included pictures of girls in bikinis that now look like overcoats) ran the first story (about me building boards) that got in a magazine.

We had a patio in front of the house where we'd work and where everybody kept surfboards on a rack. At some point, somebody came through there one night and ripped us off for 18 boards. That was the end of the rack.

First fiberglass

Yater's folks had a summer house in Emerald Bay. He wanted to build a glue press for balsa boards at my house, I guess because he couldn't do it at his. I have a great picture of Renny standing on the steps (down to Oak Street beach) holding a redwood/balsa hotcurl he'd made. He'd glassed the nose and tail and varnished the middle (this was '51 or '52). Brant Goldsworthy is the godfather for the use of fiberglass on surfboards period, and he was a surfer. I'd heard a story that at Cal Tech they were making a casing for the atomic bomb and that's where Simmons learned about fiberglass. Later, I was visiting the museum at Los Alamos, and I finally got the curator aside and asked about that. He said, no, that couldn't be, that the case was aluminum, but that the bomb-bay doors had to be enlarged and they were modified with fiberglass in 1945. But it was Goldsworthy who introduced it to surfing several years later.

Experimenting with shapes

The evolution of wide tails to narrower tails happened naturally. We narrowed them because we were now riding boards in tighter places than they were with their redwoods, and we didn't want to spin out. A shallow fin on a wide tail is not going to bite. It seemed to me a natural evolution. Of Quigg and Kivlin: Quigg seemed to be the more conservative of the two as he modified things.

BEV MORGAN

Hobie slalom testing an experimental model during the clay wheels era, Street of the Golden Lantern in Dana Point, circa 1964.

Kivlin seemed to be a little more radical. He had dropped his rails down starting from the tip of the nose and blending to the middle of the board. They were thinner-railed boards. The Makaha board had the sharp edge on the back. That makes a board bigger when you do that. It gives you more area. Really, rounding up the rails was a mistake. If you have a little board, you don't mind if you make it ride bigger, but with a big board, you might find (low, hard edges) gave you too much area. I always rode a 9′3″. Back then, if you were a *real man* you rode a 9′6″ or 10′, and then there was Phil with his 10′6″. Of the early chips, Quigg's were the most forgiving. A story I tell and Quigg tells the same: The best boards we ever made in those days were for girls. We made them a little shorter and lighter and they'd ride looser. I was constantly borrowing boards that I'd made for some girl. Leslie [Williams] was considered the fastest turner on the coast, and he rode a real small board. Phil Edwards began on a little fat board (the Sylvester the Cat board) when he was a kid. Then, Velzy did the pig board. I think the pig board was a *pig*, but no question, it had an influence. It brought the hips back. We had been riding more boat-shaped-boards, wider up front. The pictures they show in the books aren't as radical as most of Velzy's pig boards actually were. He had moved the width back to an exaggerated point. It was a bit of the sensational and it worked. If you didn't have very much nose hanging out there, and the boards were already built a little too big, it made them act and respond like a

HOBIE COLLECTION

A lineup of new Hobie balsas, sporting fairly pointy noses, wide tails, and shallow-disc fins, circa '52-'53.

smaller board. So it worked, but it didn't stay around (remember this was '57-'58). If you look at what lasted, it was low rails in the back and 50-50 in the middle of the board.

The new, smaller boards opened up Laguna's beachbreaks. You could move; you could cut back.

The Makaha Model:

The Makaha-style board (1953-'54) came from Woody Brown. In fact, I always give credit to Woody, Wally Froiseth, and George Downing collectively. We didn't really know them, but we used all those words together when it was about who did what. I called Flippy recently to ask him, and he said it was definitely Woody Brown. The real Makaha board had a square tail about this wide [holding his fingers about two to three inches apart], a big belly, no tail rocker, but it had sharp edges [indicating the trailing edges] and a round bottom, not flat. It was all about keeping the nose out of the water and water running fast off the back. Flippy took some butcher paper and drew (Woody let him) an outline of Woody's board and the bottom curve, then came back and had me make him a board. I began shaping it and everything was going along fine. I was bringing the deck down to the still square mid-rail around the plan shape, and I'd done the top and I was starting toward the bottom back and he suddenly laid over the back of the board so I couldn't touch it and said, "You can't touch these edges!" It *was* very smart! You'd never take a boat and put a rounded edge in the back; it just sucks water. Generally, all the early boards had soft, round edges back there. Today's little boards are low edged all the way around. The dropped rails on the Makaha board, (which came from Woody Brown) plus Matt Kivlin's thin rails, might have had more influence on today's small boards than anything else. But for me, it really was Woody Brown's deal. I hadn't heard of Quigg's pintails. (Joe built experimental pintails around the same time.) The thing is, surfing was getting invented simultaneously in several places, and the communication wasn't very good between Santa Monica, Laguna, and Hawaii. Hawaii was still on the heavy boards until Walter and those guys went over. It was Walter, Flippy, Quigg, Kivlin, and Simmons. People come to me with different opinions about what happened first. Truth is, there were lots of one-offs. I made one with a narrow tail and I dropped the rails and flattened the bottom, out of life raft wood. Those things were heavy. You had to shape them with a sander. In fact, I made it for Ralph Parker who ended up being my shaper and one of the first production shapers ever. But things happened like that. When I did that one I was thinking about what Kivlin had done with his bottom and his sharp edges. That board for Ralph was the best nose rider I had made. I rode it a bit but it didn't register on me. I didn't go on with it. Things like that happened everywhere. People tried something and then moved on.

The Makaha model is an example of that. It didn't really evolve beyond what it was. It fit into a groove of its own. It was a great paddling board, too. The San Onofre guys liked it because of the flat wave and it was a glider. Usually we made them bigger boards so they could paddle with their feet up. They were an older group, heavy-board guys. Keyhole, all of those guys who lived in Laguna went a year or more into it with their heavy boards—with light boards all around them—until it registered on them and they started going to the light boards themselves.

I'd heard the same of Simmons. Then I met him once at Brooks Street and he wanted me to take him to WindanSea. I said I'd like to but I had to go to work, and he (railed) at me, "You're no surfboard manufacturer. When the surf's up you've got to go surfing!" He was weird. That was it for me with him, but I did see him ride big Brooks Street. He had guts.

Transitions:

I think...let me say this right...there was a time when not too many people older than me could surf as good. There were guys coming up underneath me; those were the guys that could surf better. Everyone has a moment. During

"At some point, somebody came through there one night and ripped us off for 18 boards. That was the end of the rack."

The surfboard rack behind the Alter house at Brooks Street reflects the transition then occurring from laminated plank to fiberglassed balsa, currently worth enough to put your kid through college.

Phil's time period, he was *much* better, and it lasted longer. I think that at my time I did okay: finished second the First Annual Brooks Street Contest, won the next one, finished third at Makaha, the next year fourth. Later generations only knew me as a board builder rather than a surfer. One guy published I was a marginal surfer and that I was a tandem surfer and paddler. I did like paddling and tandem because it kept me involved. Not many of the manufacturers participated by then, and it kept me in tune with what was going on. But I didn't like what he said; it wasn't very kind. But it was an era when the quality of surfers was going up fast and leaving you in your place. When you're starting off, you're starting from a higher point than the existing surfers started from, and you cut off most everyone below you right on the spot. Surfboards and surfers are improving; standards are constantly higher.

On contests: "It seemed to me that the really hot surfers of that time, the upper echelon, the Deweys and Phils, that the farther up the line they got, the less they were interested."

Going big:

I opened my store on Coast Highway in Dana Point in February 1954. Actually it opened in January, but I started keeping books in February. Velzy had his shop in Manhattan for a couple of years before that, but mine was the first building custom built to hold a surfboard business. I shaped every balsa board I made. A mistake I made was to not pursue Yater when he left in 1957 to work for Velzy. He'd been working for me, glassing and making boards outside me, too, but he was more into abalone diving and lobster fishing. Velzy got him down there, glassing and shaping. If you ordered a Hobie board, you knew I shaped it. That held me down volume-wise. I glued up blanks the first of the week. Then I had Dick Hazard (who went on to become lifeguard captain in San Clemente) rough out the boards for me, mainly the bottoms, cutting the meat off of the noses and tails. I had a router jig mounted overhead that I'd bring down to do the cross section and bottom rocker, and, eventually, some work on the decks. The balsa blank already had the (rough) surfboard shape. After a while I gave the router up because it was somewhat dictating what I was doing. But you started with this big square thing, and you had to outline it and then mow down the nose and tail. You had to carve that whole surfboard shape that was floating somewhere inside that block. So the jig helped me keep that process squared away. It got me close, then left enough that I could go from there.

I'd do the bottoms and the tops and then Phil [Edwards] would block sand. With balsa you did cross sanding, first one way then the other. That took out the planer marks. He did a good deal of those; then you'd come back around the rails and finish the board off. Then I had the glassers: Yater was glassing, Grubby too. Sixteen-year-old Jimmy Lomas swept the floor. I was only 21 myself.

Foam cometh:

After seven years of balsa, we started working on the foam board. A guy named Kent Doolittle came by the shop. He lived in Three Arch Bay in Laguna and was a fiberglass rep from Reichhold, which was where we bought our resin and cloth. He came down one Friday afternoon with a small chunk of foam. "I think you'd better look at this." I was thinking that it was Styrofoam or something. Everyone always had something they wanted us to look at. He said, "This is pretty tough." I asked, "Acetone won't dissolve this?" He said no, but I'm thinking "bull!" I took a bucket of acetone, dipped it in. Nothing. *Nothing*! I put some resin on it. Nothing. "Jeez that's good. What's the price of it?" He gave me the price per pound and I thought, "That's doable." We'd seen Styrofoam that acetone dissolved, and a guy brought some "struts" by, which is a Styrofoam product. It had a three-and-a-half pound density that felt pretty good, so Yater and I each shaped a board out of it. There were two ways that people handled Styrofoam: Either they glassed it with epoxy or sealed it with Weldwood glue, then glassed it with polyester. He did one and I did the other. Neither one of them worked very well, but Joey Cabell rode the one I did for a long time and said he liked it. He liked light boards. Of all the good surfers, he probably had more sense about what he rode than anyone else. As soon as guys got hot they demanded longer, thinner, this and that. Joey was much smarter on what to do and probably one of the best athletes. You ever see him ski? I skied with him a few days in Aspen. We went with him one morning. The girlfriend went up ahead of us on the lift and was waiting for us when we got off. She said she left her sunglasses on the gondola. We got down to Copper Bowl together. It's a nice, big, steep bowl. She was still worrying, so, finally, Joey said to meet him at the bottom and off he went, disappearing down Copper Bowl at speed in long, fast carves, so smooth, unbelievable! He was hot on skis and, now, snowboarding, and on any kind of snow he's carving deep turns.

So, I went over to Keyhole's that night. He was a fireman, and on the Friday nights he didn't work there was always a party at his house. Everybody just showed up, and I got a little drunk and was saying, "This is *it*! This is what all boards will be made out of." Really, it was the first thing I'd ever seen (that was plausible to replace balsa).

DICK METZ

1954: Hobie Surfboards opened on Pacific Coast Highway in Dana Point; the first custom-built surfboard manufacture/retail-related structure. As originally designed, a classic example of mid-century architectural style, now rebuilt to house Taco Surf.

You can't believe what a shock it was after Styrofoam didn't work. That was the first I had seen of urethane foam. After that, I had a belly board mold that I tried to foam up. I went up to Reichhold and did it right in their lab. They didn't do it very good. Then I started to make a surfboard mold. Grubby was glassing for me then, but he'd been gone for a couple of weeks, and when he came back he immediately told me, "You've got the right idea here." He suggested: "I'd like to work on it too. You've still got your business to run. Why don't we get a shop off to the side and we'll work together on the foam?" I didn't pay him. He lived at our house and we went for about six months working at that first foam shop in Laguna, in a hole right across from the Festival of Arts, first driveway over the drainage ditch. Different guys worked there with me. No one was allowed in except a few friends and guys we could trust. We started working on pouring a half board at a time, on edge, rail down. I liked the idea because the first place foam goes to is always the densest and you like your rails to be a little denser.

People talk about foam "blowing up." Now, the (water-blown urethane) foam we were using, versus what came out later—the Freon foam—had more pressure but wasn't as user-friendly. You have to pour something that wants to foam beyond the cavity you're pouring into and then contain it. You can't just pour it in and have it fill perfectly. As it starts to go off, it goes through stages from a liquid to a jelly, and through all of that it keeps expanding. If you pour more in one place than another it will surge to the lower density. If the skin goes off quicker, the inner mass can move and then you get a shear problem. You had to get it to foam up evenly to a certain level and then hold it there until it was stable enough to cure. Then you could pull it out of the mold.

To build the molds, we poured a thick slab of concrete with tapered troughs running lengthwise that we could fit long wooden boxes into that we could drop the mold plug down into. Then we poured plaster around the plug to form the actual mold. We ended up putting polyethylene in the mold so it would release the part, then we'd pour into that cavity. The epoxy (plaster mold material) doesn't want to harden gradually. In big amounts it wants to go off really, really fast. The bigger the pour, the hotter it goes, so we'd have five buckets, all lined up with the right amount of plaster in each. We'd pour the right amount of water into each bucket, and we're mixing all five buckets at the same time, then we'd have a bucket brigade passing plaster. We'd pour 700 pounds in five minutes! Can you imagine the mess if it went off on us?

We kind of knew what we wanted to do with the foam and how we could contain it by early 1958. By June we were getting acceptable pours and ready to go into business.

The goal was to make a board easier to shape. Also, getting good balsa was becoming a real battle because by then there was Gordie and Velzy and Greg Noll. I'd run into a guy who was making model airplanes and I got him to bring in better balsa for me than I was getting at General

Veneer. Velzy discovered where I was getting it and he got in there too. I told Velzy, "Let's keep this quiet." Then Greg Noll wanted to buy some and Velzy told him, "No. Hobie and I are Jewish!" Like we were family and Greg was an outsider. [Laughter] Velzy told him that, and Greg actually bought it. It's in Velzy's book.

It was really the supply of balsa that drove us to foam. For a while we could pick the good stuff out. Then that got hard and it was hard to shape and it soaked water, while everything looked good about foam. There was a time when we considered molding a finished board, but foam didn't look good like wood did, and the more I thought about it I just dropped that thought because it wasn't going to be a good deal—we'd have a pop-out thing—although the word "popout" hadn't been invented yet.

We went for a shaping blank. So now, how did we get the foam to flow right, and into the proper pouring of it? One big argument between Grubby and me was that he wanted to pour close to the perfect amount so it wouldn't over-expand. I was for over-pouring so it wanted to overfill but make it a lower density. That way we were guaranteed of filling the mold. We were filling the cavity with a two-pound foam and holding it, and when it reached the top of the mold it went up to four-pound density because it wanted to foam up to twice that size.

Grubby came up with the way to make the thing work and do it as cheap as possible, and that's where the foam blank ended up, to a certain extent. It wasn't meant to be the finished product. It was about getting a shape that we could work with.

Later, Grubby formulated it back down to where he got the amount close, because if you didn't pour perfect it wanted to surge and you'd get a lot of tearing. You could have it all full with a lid on it and it could still be denser in one place than it was in another. In the end, it was an even distribution of the pour that kept it from surging. It was hard foam to work with. We'd get air bubbles near the surface because we were using a plastic film as a release that didn't let the air bleed through. We'd have to putty a lot of boards. That's why all our first foam Hobie boards were colored. There was the Freon foam, but it was not as good as our foam, so we stayed with ours, thinking, hey, this is the best. Let's make it work.

While this was going on, Grubby was in bed for a year after a back operation, and he still ran the foam operation from bed. He had different guys running the thing, and finally he wanted to go on his own. By now, Walker and Foss were doing the Freon-blown foam. That was the difference: They were doing the Freon and they were pouring flat and with paper. They weren't trapping air under the paper because it was porous. They were getting clear boards and we couldn't. We didn't want to change foam, so all our molds had to be changed to flat pours down the middle of the mold bottom of a top and bottom "clam-shell." My dad came up with it, and he really went out on his own to do that. He wasn't a carpenter or engineer or anything like that, but he wasn't too dumb. He thought about how we could keep (the pressure) from blowing the mold up. Finally, he suggested a round pipe frame to hold the mold closed. With a circle all the (outward) pressure goes into tension, so it's pulling against itself. We hinged the mold and put bar latches all along the open side to hold it closed. It was essentially a big steel pipe filled with a concrete mold.

Grubby and Hobie split:

Grubby offered to have me go in with him, but it was time for us to do our own things and the surfboard business was getting so big; we were really starting to grow up. I did 250 to 260 boards a week at one point. I had 15 shapers and all those boards in process at one time. I still did them by the week, color-coded. The red cards all had to be done this week. The yellow cards were behind them, so you had blanks in the shop that didn't get mixed up and you could tell where they were. If the red ones were stuck back here, okay, they were a week behind. Everything was a custom order, and it couldn't be late.

The other side of the foam scene was, with Gordie and Velzy and everybody else buying from Walker, now their total production was bigger than we were and probably none of those other guys would ever buy our foam if I were part of it. We all got along, but I don't think they'd buy their blanks from me. The division worked and Grubby really expanded it into a great business.

So, that's how we got into using good foam rather than balsa. That foam formed the core of the surfboard industry from that point forward.

Hobie's first shaper:

As soon as we got into foam the demand grew. I couldn't shape them all myself, and, if I was going to hire someone to shape, I wanted someone really good. I talked Joe Quigg into coming over from Oahu for a month to see if he liked it. He had been working as a porter at the Moana Surfrider. Quigg stayed with me for about a year, then moved up to Newport and started his own shop. Eventually, I assembled a crew of really top guys like Ralph Parker, Phil, John Graye and Terry Martin.

When we decided to go that way, I had 170 boards in stock. I had run an inventory that winter so I could keep the guys going. Then all of a sudden we decided to pour flat (to eliminate bubbles), and I was going to have to get

the new (clear) boards. So, one weekend in February I had a sale and knocked $20 off a board; instead of $85 it was $65. I ran an ad in the *L.A. Times* and sold the entire inventory that weekend and had more orders for February than I'd ever had in the past. The sale didn't hurt my business; it actually increased it. Guys arriving to buy and finding we were sold-out stirred interest.

I'd just really gotten into the surfboard business. Now we could make some boards. This is about 1960. The *Gidget* thing was coming on and we were going as fast as we could. Also, we found out about the East Coast. Bruce's [Brown] office was just around the corner from my shop on PCH, and I'd go over there to see what he'd shot. He'd gone back to the East Coast, to Miami and up the coast. The water was warm; there were guys trying to ride the waves—one of them was Jack "Murph the Surf" Murphy.

East Coast run:

Boscoe [Burns] and I took some of the information Bruce had given us along with Jack Murphy's name and went to Melbourne to look up Jack. When we got there we called information and asked for his phone number, and the operator said he wasn't home right then, that he was probably at the beach bar down at the end of his street. Talk about a small town! We caught up with Jack and had a great time, and Jack gave us the name of Gauldon Reed, an early surfing figure who had the beach services in Daytona. Reed grew up a beach guy, tall and lanky, and had been to Hawaii. Some of those older East Coast guys who surfed had gone there, but they didn't bring surfing back with them too much. They had the paddleboards. That was the main thing. Almost no one had a real board, but there were groups of beach guys all along the East Coast. Jack Murphy had originally been an Oceanside guy, and he had brought boards back East and was making boards too, so there was a little bit going on.

We started up the coast picking up dealers and ended up in Virginia Beach where we met Bob Holland. I'm talking to Bob and he says, "Jeez, I just got ten Jacobs boards that came in yesterday." There they were laid out on his garage floor. I convinced Bob we'd be a better deal for him, so he sold the Jacobs boards and then he and Pete Smith opened Smith & Holland in Virginia Beach with our boards. Jacobs got those ten in there and that was it!

We kept on going into New York and up into Cape Cod, so we got a pretty good start on the dealers and they were all exclusive. I had reasons for that. If I went back there to promote my business or they were going to promote me, why mix people up? This is the guy who has the Hobie boards. That way I could invest in helping them sell my boards.

BRUCE BROWN COLLECTION

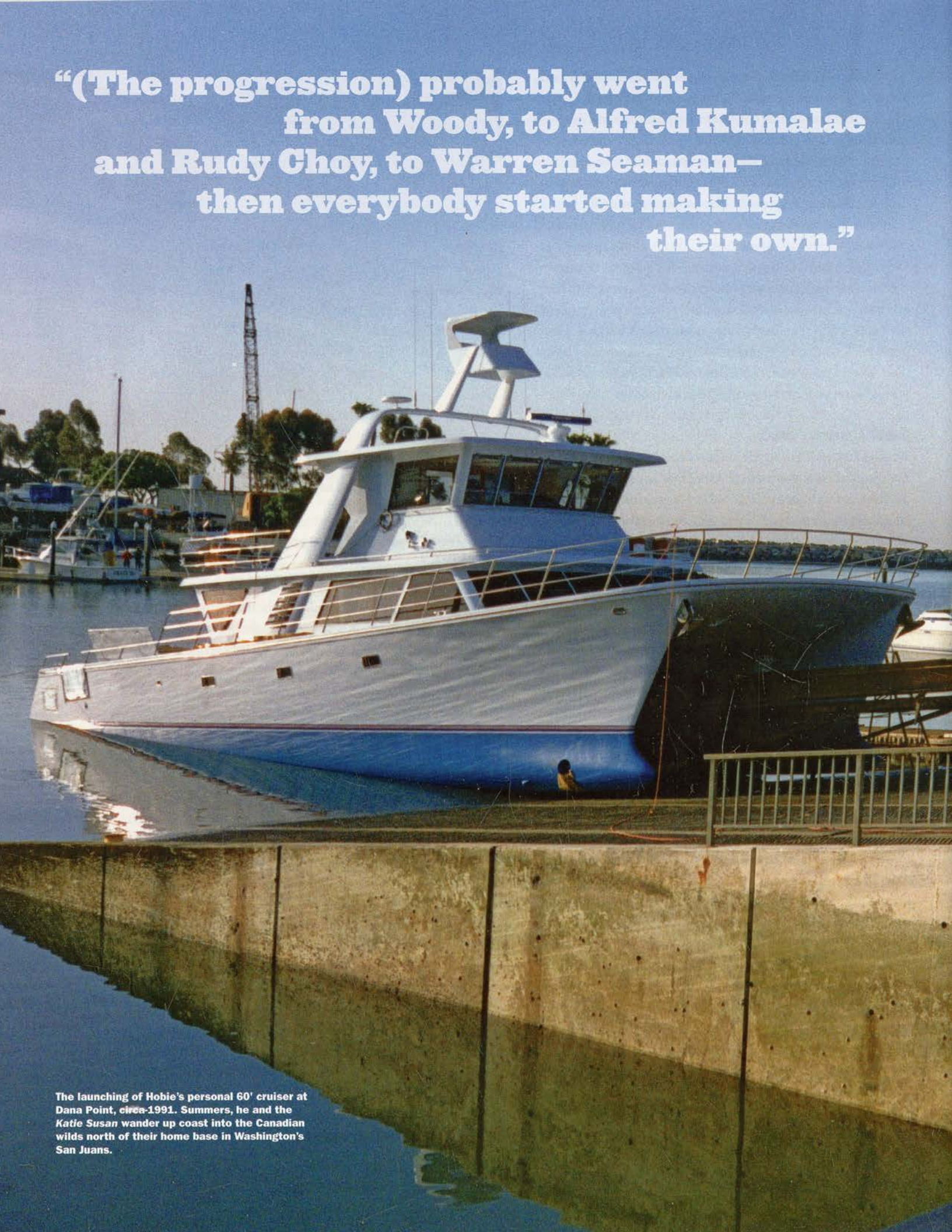
(back to front) Mike Hynson, Patty and Bruce Brown, Joey Cabell, Corky Carroll, Hobie and Sharon Alter, Heidi and Phil Edwards departing on the East Coast promo tour.

The great traveling promo show:

That's where the *Endless Summer* tour came in, in 1964. I'd seen Bruce's movie and it was *really* good, so I asked him if I could put together a run down the East Coast, giving surfing demonstrations and doing eight showings. I'd cover all the costs. We'd split the take with the local shops that put on the showings. Bruce had his premiere showing in a theater on Hollywood Blvd., and then got on a plane to Oklahoma City to catch up with us. We were driving non-stop. In three days we were in New York. We had a big Ford Condor bus with Bruce and Pat, Phil and Heidi, Corky, Mike Hynson, Joey Cabell, Sharon [first wife] and me. We packed 20,000 people at Gilgo Beach. We'd sent R. Paul Allen ahead to set up and get the PR going, and then we'd pull in with the bus. It was fun. Joey bailed out in New Jersey and then Bruce flew home after the last show in Miami. Phil and I did most of the driving. Corky wasn't old enough, but I think I let him drive on some open road. In New York, Paul had arranged to get us on the *Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson. We had the first skateboards with us in 1964, and Corky rode one on TV!

Now, backing up just a little bit, Larry Stevenson started Makaha Skateboards, and he is the one that kicked off the big skateboarding fad. He had the team riders and the clay wheels—real skateboards. All of us had skated on 2x4s with roller skate wheels and the box nailed on the front, but the first real skateboard was from Larry. I get credit for stealing his team. Originally, I was going to make them and then Baron Hilton called me. His kids,

"(The progression) probably went from Woody, to Alfred Kumalae and Rudy Choy, to Warren Seaman—then everybody started making their own."



The launching of Hobie's personal 60' cruiser at Dana Point, circa-1991. Summers, he and the *Katie Susan* wander up coast into the Canadian wilds north of their home base in Washington's San Juans.

Davey, Stevie, and Barry were skateboarding Santa Monica with George Trafton and Torger Johnston—all those hot surfer guys—and Baron owned Vita Pak, an orange juice company in Covina, along with a few hotels. They made the Super Skater, a roller skate that broke apart and clamped back together to make a skateboard. It was a hot little item with kids but they wanted to make real skateboards, using my name, and I said fine. I was just getting ready to do it myself but it was a blessing that I didn't, and so I got a royalty from that. The first skateboards arrived the day before we left on the bus trip. None of us were familiar with skateboards, so we became acquainted with them on the trip. Every gas station we stopped at we checked for the quality of the asphalt. Nobody had seen it. One place in South Carolina (it was during the time of the civil rights movement down there) people wondered if we were part of it: "No, we're surfers."

Back to the bus, we're rolling along and there was this banner across the road that said, "Hagerstown Chicken Fry." We thought, that'll be cheap and good. We'll get dinner. It was Bruce's idea. So we parked the bus and skated over to where the chicken fry was going on, had our dinners, had fun talking to people, got back on the bus and headed out of town. Here comes this guy in a car, honking at us, and I said, "OK, who didn't pay for their dinner?" The guy says, "No, no, no. I heard about you all, you're the most famous people to ever come through Hagerstown!" Ended up he was a reporter and he did his story and off we went.

At each showing we did a surfing demo during the day. I would tandem surf with Sharon and Joey, Mike, Corky and Phil would ride a few, the next night we'd show the movie—then boom! That night, on the bus, down the road to the next stop. We got to New Jersey on the 4th of July, and I really shouldn't have been gone that long. When I was leaving Dana Point everybody was telling me, "What are you doing? You're taking your shaper? You're taking off for ten days?" So we were moving all the time. It was dynamic in that bus...but the point I was making was that all of the shops were exclusive Hobie dealers, which allowed us to do this giant promotion. Kids would say, "That was great. I'm bringing my friends back tomorrow night." I'd say, "Tomorrow night we'll be in Asbury Park."

My dealer in New York's parting comment—he had taken on Dewey Weber—was, "Now I've got to do something for Dewey!"

"Here I've just come back here and done the biggest promotion right in front of your store, attracted all these people, and taught you how to sell, and you tell me you've got to do something for Dewey?"

That was the big bus trip.

Surf biz:

The business was in good hands with (manager Jim) Gilloon there. That was in 1968. I was riding my dirt bikes a lot, fiddling around, and business was going good. There was a thing in Velzy's book about him going bust in the early '60s. He's pretty accurate on that. We couldn't figure out how he survived. God, he was giving boards to everybody and he's got all these Hawaiians down in the shop—they were good guys—the Patterson's and that (when they came up we got them: Bobby, Ronald, and Raymond) and he was driving that 300 SL. Then, this guy Bernard, he came to me first and I sold him 50 surfboards. He was going to take them to Hawaii. I was to ship them to San Francisco C.O.D., freight collect, and when they got there he wouldn't pay the freight. I said, "Oh, shit, that wasn't the deal." He said, "Well, I changed my mind." I said, "OK, just pay for the boards," because I didn't want to ship them back again. Well, right after Velzy went broke, Bernard got into Velzy, took the shop, and Velzy's name. We all felt bad for Dale.

Hobie goes Hawaiian:

Back in the early 1960s, the word was out that Velzy was going over to Hawaii in two weeks to sign up George Downing as his dealer. Now I wanted a dealer in Hawaii, and Grubby and I agreed that George Downing would be the best deal. Grubby says, "You've got to go tomorrow!" So I did. Got on a red-eye to Hawaii, met George, showed him what we had, what we were doing, got him as my dealer, and got an order out of him and was back before Velzy even got there.

(When I went to foam) Velzy, being the next biggest board maker, bought my glue press for balsa boards. He always admired it, so I sold it to him once I knew that was it, no more balsa wood. In the meantime, the wood users were calling my foam boards "Flexie Flyers" and "Speedo Sponges." I think Greg Noll was the best at coming up with those names. Anyway, George was my dealer for a year, but he was into other things and we both realized we had to end it. We remained friends through the whole thing. That's when Dick Metz rented the building on Kapiolani in Honolulu, and in two-and-a-half weeks I went over and built his Hobie retail store. The first batch of 17 boards came in the day after I left, and Metz sold them all that first day. It's funny, he wouldn't admit to any of his friends that the store was his, so they wouldn't hit him up for drinks at the Outrigger.

The First Model:

The Hobie Phil Edwards Model was the first surfboard marketed as a signature model and started that whole

period of surfboard marketing. We eventually added Corky Carroll, Gary Propper, and Joyce Hoffman models. Soon after the Phil came out, everyone had a model or three. We gave Phil's distinctive offset stringers, a reverse pin-fin, and a gold-foil-stamped Hobie label with Phil's signature. I needed to keep Phil there, and he wasn't going to be a speed shaper, so it was a way he could make more money per board...and put out a good, good board. Phil didn't really want to be in the surfboard business, so to speak, and he did that up until 1967. I remember (as a 15-year-old) Phil rode Killer Dana on a really big day where it was lining up outside the rock. It could have been the day Simmons was killed at WindanSea. I remember Herb Nolan [Laguna surfer and realtor] went down there on that swell and we heard about Simmons before Herb did. But one day, Dana Point really was big and all the older guys were out and, of course, going right. Phil took off and went left. It put everybody in shock! He went left then turned back and came through it. That was unheard of on big days; you have to realize where surfing was at then. That moment exposed the heavy board farce, that you needed a heavy board to make waves. That was only one area. I'm sure it happened in other places with other people as well.

"The better girl surfer of today is better than the very best guys were back then."

Sailing, then dirt bikes:

The cat thing on the West Coast started with Woody Brown and the beach cats in Waikiki. Woody was a surfer. He wasn't a "hot" surfer, but he rode big waves and his background with gliders influenced his surfboards. He did things, and he was smart. He liked to take surfers out for rides because he could go out and really push that sucker off of Diamond Head and have some fun. Most of the time he was taking payloads out, which he also probably pushed a little more than he should have [chuckle]. So the multi-hull thing began to spread out. I got a ride on Woody's; it was fantastic. Then there was Warren Seaman up at Latigo Canyon (north of Malibu), and, of course, Joe Quigg. Seaman did the Malibu outrigger. (The progression) probably went from Woody, to Alfred Kumalae and Rudy Choy, to Seaman, then everybody started making their own. I started an outrigger, then it sat out in the yard, just a plywood thing, didn't have its lid on and it would fill up with water. A ranger at Doheny told me he'd finish it if I gave it to him and I could use it when I wanted to. I didn't know how to sail anyway. Then the sailing thing kind of died off and I got into the motorcycle deal. Bruce [Brown] started us on it when he got two Honda 50s so we could race each other. We started up in Dana Point, and then rode on top of the hills above town, then back behind (it was all open ranch land then). Then Dick Stein got a 90cc. That was a *big* one, and after that Reed Price got a 650 Triumph and was racing in the desert. Then I got a 500 Matchless, and, boom, it was desert races every weekend for about three years. Reed became the number one plate! At first Reed hung drywall, then he did some shaping for me until Grubby stole him and taught him how to manage the stuff he was doing. Reed was a sharp guy. He was our closest friend for years when we were going through the motorcycle kick.

Ensenada Race:

Phil built his first *El Gato,* 20′ x 10′ beam, and put a Star rig on it. It was a fast boat and way ahead of its time: a stripped-down machine compared to what was out there. I sailed the Ensenada race with him. In those days cats weren't legal. We'd sail up to Newport and start just outside the fleet. We were at the Coronado Islands when it started to get dark, then the *Ikani*, which was the lead boat, passed just in front of us headed out to sea, but we stayed inside the Coronados. The next morning it got light. I was dead weight on the damn thing, hanging on to the centerboard, keeping it down. I had no knowledge of sailing. Phil was doing all of it. It started to get light, and all of a sudden there were boats everywhere around us and the wind died. Everyone's clumping together, and then an offshore came up and we had to be going *zero* down the beach. That was new to me. The other boats were going maybe seven to ten knots at best, and guys on the other boats were hooting and screaming watching us go right through the whole fleet! Out of 400 to start and with 75 boats ahead of us, we were fourth to finish. That short, fast run in smooth water just off the beach got me a little excited.

Catting around:

Sandy Banks was sanding and gluing boards for me when he and Phil made a little cat out of a couple of tandem blanks, 11′ long with a solid little wing and a small rig on it. They had it down at Wayne's (Wayne Schafer's on Beach Road in Capistrano Beach), and at that same time I'd bought a secondhand P-Cat (by Carter Pyle, built in 1963 in Newport Beach) and had it down on the beach there. I was learning how to sail, and they had the little boat of Sandy's. It was sensitive but was just too small for us. One person could drag it up and down the beach, and we all used it because it was so convenient. So, with that, a guy named Art Hendrickson came by who later was my partner. He had a friend that he was watching out for, who had more money than he knew what to do with, and the friend

wanted to buy my surfboard shop. I didn't have it for sale and I didn't know if I wanted to sell it. The mother of this guy made him take Art with him and we talked about it. I think I said, "OK for $250,000." Carter [Pyle] had sold his business by then. Bruce was kind of retired from the *Endless Summer*...and I'm still working! I figured I wouldn't mind if I could get the money and invest. If I could've gotten enough money, I probably would have sold it to him.

Art asked me what else I could do. I told him I ran the company but I didn't really like doing it. I liked building things more. I told him I thought there was a market for a small catamaran. If I had time, I'd work on that; that would be my goal. If I came up with something good, fine. If not, I'd come up with something else. The investor guy was happy and he went home. Art came back a few weeks later and said, "You know, this surfboard business wouldn't be any good for that guy." I said, I knew, but if I got that much money for it I was going to take it. He said, "Let's talk about that little cat you want to build."

The group that hung around Wayne's on Beach Road was always looking for small cats you could sail off the beach. The Aqua Cat was kind of a plumber's nightmare—all pipes; for the price it wasn't a bad little ride, but it wasn't going to go anywhere. I mean, as far as "go," Aqua Cat sold 5,000 boats, while Carter sold 300 P-Cats, even though it was ahead of its time. Then the Catfish came out made by Alcourt. They made the Sunfish as well. We thought it looked pretty good, but it had a solid wing that was too low. Then Quigg made his Cal Cat. It was a pretty boat and the best thing out there in that size range. That's why we chose it as our test boat. Quigg and Carter had both made outriggers, and they had become close in their sharing of ideas. We respected both their boats and their hull designs had similarities. I'm not sure, but I think we all used a 1957 Chevy headliner for the deck textures on our molds.

East/West:

There was the West Coast surf scene side generating cats, and then there was another side to it, the A-Lion, B-Lion, and C-Cat coming out of England. They were all on the other side of the country, and they had staged the Little America's Cup with the C-Class boats that were 25-foot. We could see that they were more refined, fast-trim boats. Then Phil built his 26-footer. After that, he kind of slowed down on boats, and we turned to making model airplanes.

I had Phil (working for me) and I wasn't interested (in the boats) before Art showed up and asked what else I could do. Prior to that I had asked Phil if he wanted to try to make something, and if we came up with something we liked, I'd produce it and give him a royalty. So he started,

GRAHAM

Hobie aboard the 16': "Kick-up rudders, controllable by the skipper from the tramp, no dagger boards, one sheet line, then one guy could single-hand it from the beach and have some fun." Circa 1972.

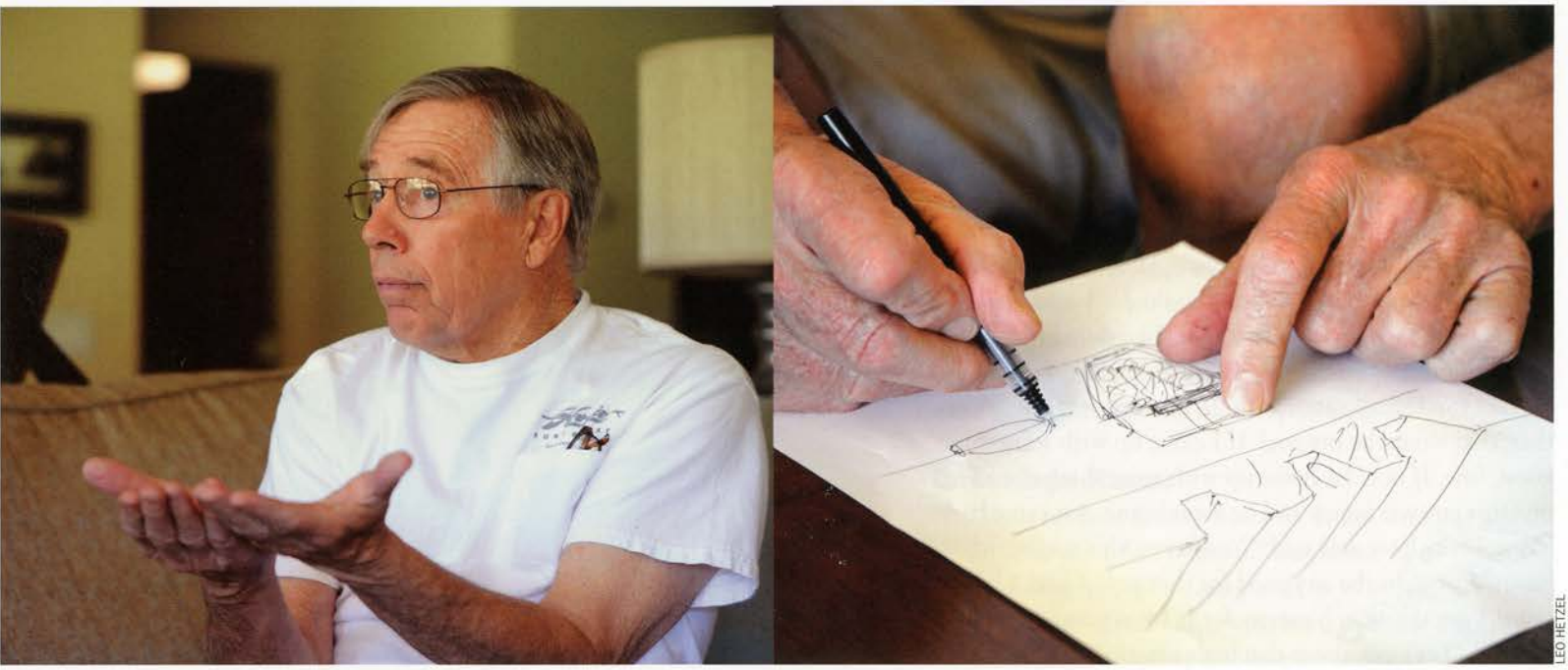
but it was toward the outrigger, a flat-sided boat. He really didn't like what he was doing and I didn't either, so we just kind of let it go and he went to Hawaii (with Boscoe Burns) and built some boards over there.

Boscoe, who I had to fire, was probably one of my best friends. He was my shop manager, but he was too into the dirt bikes. He just wasn't getting it done. He was a little too young, and finally I told him I'd give him any other job he wanted in the shop but running it. And he couldn't handle that, so he went to Hawaii and started a glass shop to glass Phil's boards. I went over to visit them one time. I asked where's Boscoe, and Phil said, he's not here. Then he called later and said Boscoe had climbed out a back window. We were really close friends; I'd gone on that first trip to the East Coast with Boscoe.

He finally came back from Hawaii and we were doing the Hobie 18′ by then, and he wanted a job at the boat company. Fine. No problem. He stayed and worked there until the project in R&D came to an end, and I told everybody I was going to cut down and who would have to leave, and Boscoe wasn't cut. I told him I wanted him to stay. Then he told me that he was leaving anyway; he had just stayed on to see if he could make the cut. He went back to Hawaii, and years later he died over there. Everyone liked Boscoe.

Back to the Hobie Cat:

Art wasn't a boat guy at all, but he could network for info that we needed and, with great retention, bring it back to



LEO HETZEL

Hobie describing the intricacies of pouring surfboard blanks and sketching to explain their first experimental cement and plaster molds constructed in Laguna Canyon in 1958.

us, and that was very helpful. When I told Art I thought I could build a boat he suggested we each put $5,000 in the bank and get started and see what I could make. If we made something right, we'd keep going. If we didn't, we'd quit. Joe Quigg's Cal Cat was the best thing to look at, so we bought two Cal Cats and made the first boat. That took six days. We put a boat together: took a Cal Cat rig and Cal Cat rudders and put them on our hulls. That way we had an A/B test. When you build something in six days it's very crude, but that didn't matter. As long as the weight and proportions were close, when we got on the boat we'd know in five minutes if there was wind. Did it turn? How did it feel? In an hour we would have it all down if the conditions were right. The first one we made kind of stayed with the B boat, but it wouldn't tack. This was with an asymmetric hull that we were still trying to get to work. On the little beach cat it worked, and this one was a little more in that direction, so I changed, went to a deeper bottom, flatter outer hull side, and more curved inner side. Compared to Woody Brown's beach cat, his hulls were very fine (narrow). The tiny one Sandy Banks had made was more a squatty little box. The one I made had gotten too fat as well because we knew we needed buoyancy to float it, but what I learned was that if we had too much buoyancy the hull wouldn't get down in the water enough. The second hull was better, and now we could beat the Cal Cat. We figured this thing tacked as well as it was going to, and it didn't have dagger boards. Now, a single-handed boat with dagger boards and rudders that weren't real manageable, that wasn't a good deal as a beach boat. So we needed kick-up rudders, controllable by the skipper on the tramp, no dagger boards, one sheet line, and then one guy could single-hand it from the beach and have some fun. That was our goal.

A third boat:

I wanted to put a solid deck on it, but I tried it and it was just too heavy. There was more area in the deck than there was in the hulls, so I had to throw that out. But we kept the hulls. We'd been making low hulls and keeping them raised. That was the Aqua Cat's deal. Then, the fact that we had raised the tramp up on pylons became more important than we thought. I was trying to save weight, save money, and those pylons got you up and off the water line (and drier). We learned it's not what's in the water that gets you wet; it's more what's above the waterline.

Then we had to make that look decent, so we used foiled extrusions instead of round tubes, and they provided something a little flatter to sit on out there on the sides. We dressed it up and made hulls close to what we had done here. We had it finished at that point. We felt the boat was successful. Our rudders weren't working yet, but all the other things were, so we didn't need the Cal Cat anymore, and we went into making the plugs for the real boats. That process had started in June, and by the first of October I was making the molds to build boats with. I remember that because the sun was low and the Quonset hut we

were working in had these windows down along the sides. Well, I had the two plugs all made out of foam and ready to make a mold off of, and the afternoon sun got to one and heated the black [coating]. We used black so we could see imperfections, and it warped. We had to match it back, so I had to take a big meat saw, the hull shape is really a triangle, and we cut this way, that way, this way, down the line, routed grooves (along the length of the hull), straightened it out, put rebar in (the grooves), puttied them over, and finally got it all done and ground it down. Even then, when I made the mold, stuff shrinks on you, and though we had made it perfect, the little imprint of the seams were in there. We sanded that mold out but those imperfections followed us for a while. I think it's gone (the mold's been retired) now.

"The yacht clubs were really down on the catamaran because here was some guy with a little investment going faster than they were in their million-dollar boats!"

Meanwhile...

I had Jim Galloon and later Danny Brawner running the surfboards. The first year I was in the Quonset hut that I'd used to keep my motorcycles in; the shaping shop was right beside it, and the glass shop right across the alley between the two. In fact, we robbed the air and electricity from the surfboard shop. When we were doing something new with the surfboards, I'd set it up. I had Dovetail (a local craftsman who owned a cabinet shop) put in a new glue press for me, the whole thing, with air cylinders and everything. Then there was the jig for putting acrylic beads on laminated wooden fins. But when everything was going good, I'd play with my motorcycles.

On what drives him:

I like designing stuff, making a better toy, like the little golf thing [his newest gismo—an adjustable jig you place at your feet to help your address, aim the ball where you want it to go, now on the market]. It's really a nothing deal, but, hey, it's better than anything out there, and it solves all of the problems. The Hobie Hawk: We were flying gliders and I was making one for myself. The idea was to make a three-piece fuselage instead of the standard fiberglass one-piece with a molded nose cone that could handle the wing rods. I ended up investing in a nickel mold for that. It's seeing if you can do something that's better. I like doing it and I needed one for myself, like...this here [picking up the golf apparatus]. I could have had one of these just for myself, but my friends wanted one and it's a lot of work making them. But, yeah, you see the hole and make a product for it that you hope will stay around. I made the Float Cat for (Hobie Cat licensee) Coleman, which I think is still a good little float for fishing. The Hawk is a famous plane now. I went to the model show yesterday and if people remember any one plane it's the Hawk. It came ready to go. Before that, to get any decent plane that was a good flyer, you pretty much had to build it. The model shops resented it. All those planes you see on the wall of our garage come as finished planes; it's beautiful work they do on them too. We sold over a thousand Hawks out of the Dana Point store; 600 out of my surfboard dealer in Miami. The model shops sold maybe four or five. It didn't work there.

The chicken or the egg...

Occasionally I'll file for a patent for something I'm doing, not so much to keep others from doing it, but to keep someone else from coming along and trying to keep me from doing it. Bing, in his book, I like Bing, he put that he invented the concave nose. Well, in my book that was a combination of Mickey Muñoz, Phil, and myself for the Tom Morey Nose Riding Contest in 1965. It was a goofy-foot and regular-foot deal, and we won both sides; Corky won one and Mickey the other. People tried all kinds of stuff. One even had a 2x4 sticking off the tail with bricks on it as a counterbalance. That's where the concave nose rider came from. Simmons had already tried the concave—on the tail. He did a slot rail too that was interesting. It didn't really work, but it was the thought. It's always the thought.

University of surfing:

Thinking about my last surf, I think I know enough not to go back right now. I'm 75, and I haven't surfed in a long time. *60 Minutes* did a thing on me and wanted some footage of me surfing—it had been ten or 15 years. I said, let's go to Brooks Street. Not the easiest wave to ride but I knew it from my childhood. So we went there and it was about four foot. I took off on the first wave, and I did the first thing that a beginning surfer does (off the back). They got it all. I remember thinking that I'd never been quite so scared in my life. Shit! What was I going to do here? And then I got another wave, got up, turned, and rode it. It wasn't anything great, but it got the job done and I came in thinking, "I'm out of here!" Still, I would really like to paddle a bit, do a lot of things...to go back and surf. If there was a place no one was around...it's not someone looking at me, I just don't want to get in the way...and not with a bunch of kids. We didn't want a bunch of old farts around when we were surfing. I've been skiing 60 to 70 days a winter until the last two winters when we moved here. I'm missing that. Skiing is much easier than surfing. The

mountain's not moving. It's way, way easier to come back to. You make a couple of turns and then your rhythm starts going again. On Orcas [Island, where he summers] between the boat and the shop is an 80-foot elevation change. That's a three-story house. I've got an elevator that we use to send the groceries down and the trash up. Maybe I'll use it someday, but going up and down those stairs is a great workout. Jeff and Hobie Jr. run the Hobie brand from Capistrano Beach. The surfboard business is building a lot of stand-up surfboards.

Women's swimwear is still doing $3-5,000,000 a year. We've kept the name in the right groove. A clean name in clothing is very important. I owned ten percent of OP. Jenks [co-founder Jim Jenks] thought we'd get one hundred million for it. I thought 60 would be really fun. By the time we did sell, it cost us $20,000 each to get out of it. Years earlier, Buttner wanted to get me off the board because I was involved in my own clothing company. I didn't care. I didn't want to screw anyone up, but I asked for one thing: I wanted to put Don Hanson who had sold his stock, in my place. [Laughing] He was way worse than me. I love Hanson, but he can be a pain in the ass when he gets after people.

I went into surfing not knowing anything, and as I did a few things I learned a bit more, but it wasn't a business where I could copy someone. We all originated it and brought it up to where it went. And being the larger manufacturer, Velzy had some years in there, but I was the largest (of the '60s), I got first call to deal with people whether they were companies or foam products or whatever. I had Baron Hilton calling me and going into the skateboard thing with them. Bruce Brown being right there, you end up socializing and having something in common, all of it; it's your own little school. Look at the guys like Joey Cabell and Buzzy Bent who did the Chart House restaurants, and Dick Wandrock and Pete Siracusa who founded the Ancient Mariner restaurants, and Jim Jenks who did OP, and John Creed who was taking orders for me at the shop and went on to take Chart House public, and Warren Miller (who went on to produce ski films), and Walter and Flippy Hoffman (Hoffman California Fabrics). Walter was a big factor in the surf wear boom. He mentored Jenks and Creed and myself. We all grew up in the surf business, saw how it worked, saw how to market things, and all the things that go along with it.

McGregor Sportswear licensed my name back when I had Herbie Fletcher on my team and a bunch of little kids. Of course, they wanted to do surf-style swimwear. At the time, Hang Ten was still just doing a few million, McGregor was doing 90 million with their clothing line, and so I drew up some pictures to show them what a real surfer line would look like. Well, they thought about it a little bit, but they couldn't use the same weight of cloth, and they couldn't cut the leg quite that long. When I went back to New York I was the hero, but their guys had to put their hand in it and screw it up. Even so, they quadrupled their swimwear business because they weren't doing much. Then they decided to go with some guy in Australia and put his logo on their stuff, and then they finally decided to give it up. Hang Ten was little and OP hadn't even been thought of. All they had to do was get some guys who understood the business and put them into their thing and they could have had it. OP went to $350,000,000 before we started going the other way.

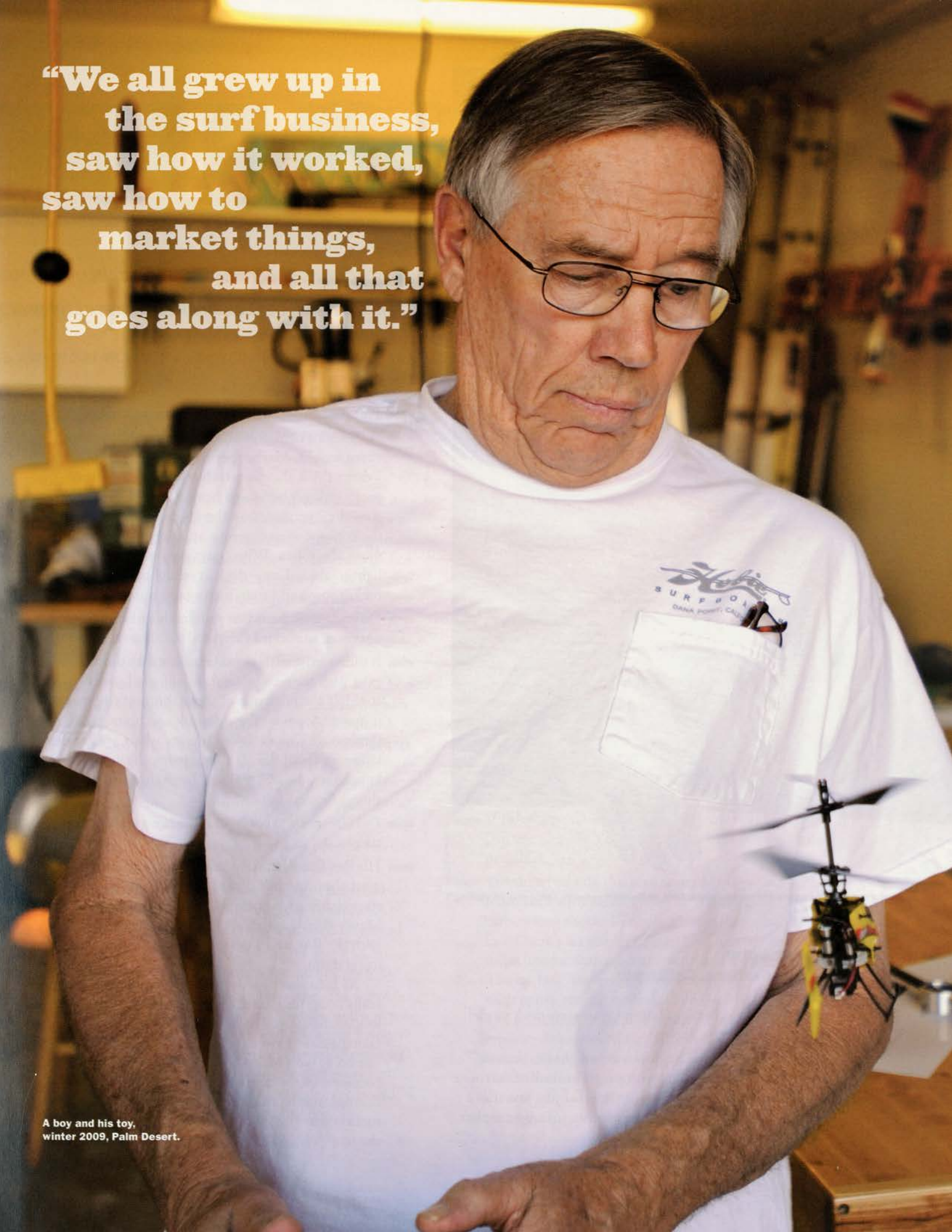
The big companies are hard to deal with. You have to grow up and live with something to understand it. Pete Siracusa and some guys ended up buying our retail stores. They all had lots of money by then, but they really didn't run it very well. I even told Pete, "You were in those restaurants every night. You knew the business. You knew the people, the employees. Now, you hire a manager and go to Hawaii to go windsurfing for a month, come back, and the manager didn't do as much as you wanted, so you beat up on him for a day or two, then go back to Hawaii."

Metz stayed there in the store and ran it and worked with everyone. Do you know how many times we've sold the stores and bought them back? Once it was to an investor group that included Dodger pitchers Don Sutton and Andy Messerschmitt; their agents were helping them invest. They failed and we bought it back for next to nothing. Then it was some guys who had invented a ski boot warmer, which was the hottest thing for a while. They bought it, then both businesses screwed up, and we bought it back from them. Now Mark Christy, Jeff's [the younger of Hobie's two sons] wife's brother's got them and he's doing a great job.

Hobie Jr.'s [the older son] deal was the sunglasses. We worked that up from nothing into a business, and then sold it to Bill Blackburn. It takes a bunch of money to inventory what you needed to and we ended up licensing instead of manufacturing. We like licensing anyway because you receive a percent and don't have to plow money and time into running the business.

Hobie's wave:

My life takes me into different things, areas of involvement that I have fun with. I do the toys for myself; sometimes they end up requiring so much to develop that it only makes sense if you turn them into business opportunities. I just hand them off to my kids. It's great having Hobie and Jeff continue the business, running the surfboard shop and our brand. It's been my life; now it's theirs.



A boy and his toy,
winter 2009, Palm Desert.