

Still on board after five decades

Sacred Craft Surf Expo honors Doug Haut's fifty years of surfboards

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When Doug Haut began building surfboards in his Sequel barn in the early 1960s, Santa Cruz was a sleepy retiree community. Back then, 41st Avenue was a two-lane road with cow pastures on both sides, and the University of California had just opened a small college up on the hill with a few hundred students. There were only a handful of surfers on the coast who regularly braved the frigid local waters, and surfboard manufacturing was truly a cottage industry.

"It was a pretty tight community," said Haut. "There were about four or five guys making boards in Santa Cruz at that time. You could probably count them on one hand."

This spring Haut, now 71, will be the guest of honor at the Sacred Craft Consumer Surfboard Expo in downtown Santa Cruz, where 75 surfboard builders and hard goods manufacturers are scheduled to showcase their wares. The two-day event is expected to draw thousands of surfers from across Northern California.

The growth of surfing – and the metamorphosis of the surf industry into a multimillion-dollar business – is beyond anything Haut could have imagined when he first started building surfboards for his friends around Santa Cruz.

"I never expected it," said Haut. "It started with surfboard makers who started promoting the sport, guys like Bing, Dewey Weber, Greg Noll, Jacobs, Gordon & Smith. Another big shot in the arm came later with all the clothing companies that spun off the surfboards and the lifestyle. They really made surfing popular. They had the money to do all the exposure and advertising. The surf industry took off because they put a lot of money into it."

While there have been a few attempts over the years to gather surfboard manufacturers in Santa Cruz under one roof, Haut said the Sacred



Doug Haut with a power planner, one of the tools that changed the face of the surf industry.

Craft expo provides a unique opportunity to connect the people who design and build surfboards with the people who are riding them.

"It gives the public a chance to get in there and really see what's going on with surfboards today, without getting brainwashed by the big labels," said Haut. "All the other surf industry trade shows are exclusive to dealers, so the public is left out. This is a cool venue for the average person to come in and see what we (shapers) are up to. There's a lot of up-and-coming talent in this town. There are some really good craftsmen."

Doug Haut streaks across a winter wave at a local surf spot.

By Leo Maxam

Haut's work will be honored during the highlight of the expo, the Tribute to the Masters Shape-Off. Five professional surfboard shapers – Mark Angell (Hawaii), Ward Coffey (Santa Cruz), Steve Coletta (Santa Cruz), Bob Pearson (Santa Cruz) and Wayne Rich (Santa Barbara) – will each have two hours inside a shaping bay to attempt to replicate a classic Doug Haut design. The anonymous, sculpted blanks will then be judged by Haut and a panel of surfboard experts to determine a winner.

According to expo director Scott Bass, paying tribute to Haut for the first-ever Sacred Craft in Santa Cruz was a no-brainer.

"Whenever you go into a surfing region, there's always one surfboard maker you know about," said Bass. "You don't even have to think about it. You go to San Diego and it's like, Skip Frye, he's the guy. There's a ton of good shapers in Santa Cruz, but for the first expo there, Doug was the obvious choice."

Haut's surfboard odyssey began in 1959, when he and two surfing pals from Santa Cruz made their first surf trip to Hawaii. It was on Oahu where Haut met Mike Diffenderfer, one of the premier shapers of the time. Haut lived with Diffenderfer in Hawaii and the two worked together at the Inter-Island surf shop in Honolulu, during which time Diffenderfer schooled Haut on the fundamental elements that go into shaping a good board.

"He was the shaper and I was doing a lot of fabrication work," said Haut. "I sanded all his boards, and later I started glassing, so I learned every step of the process."

During those early years in Hawaii, Haut also surfed many of the now-famous waves on the North Shore of Oahu. Back then, said Haut, the North Shore was mostly pineapple fields.

"There was nobody there," recalls Haut. "The first time we went up to the North Shore we were looking for Sunset Beach and drove right past it. We couldn't even find it."

After several years bouncing back and forth between Hawaii and the mainland, Haut returned to Santa Cruz and began shaping for local surfboard and sailboat designer George Olson at his 7th Avenue boat works shop. In 1965 Haut started his own label and moved his shaping operation into an old barn in Soquel that once belonged to fellow board builder Gale Yount. Haut sold his finished boards out of a showroom, which constantly shifted locations but always centered on the Pleasure Point area. One of his first board shops was located on 41st Avenue, right next to the spot where Santa Cruz Surf Shop now operates.

In 1969, Haut moved his factory to its current location at 345 Swift Street on the Westside of town. He's been making beautiful boards there ever since. Haut shared the building for several years with fellow shaper Steve Schofield and slowly took on more of the property as business grew, eventually opening a showroom and surf shop in the front half of the building. Today the Haut shop is an iconic establishment in Santa Cruz, steeped in surfing history.

"Doug's boards and surf shop are legendary in Santa Cruz," said defending Sacred Craft shape-off champion Wayne Rich. "They're part of the fabric of authentic surf culture here in California."

Above all, the Haut shop is a surfer's surf shop - heavy on surfboards and equipment, light on clothing and fashion. You can smell the resin curing on the freshly-glassed boards in back while you browse the new boards on display in the front or admire the walls of historic photographs. All transactions are still done with an old-fashioned cash register and receipts are still written by hand.



Photo: Doug Haut Collection

The guns of Sunset Beach 1963: Doug (left) with his brother Dan (both standing) with North Shore pioneers Paul Gebauer, Sammy Lee, and film makers Bud Browne and Bob Bagley.

"He refuses to put a computer in here," said shop manager Jeff Langston.

Four decades after his start, Haut continues to build some of the most sought-after boards in Northern California - but these days he's making them for several generations of surfers.

"I see new people coming into the sport, and I've been building boards for some customers for 40 years," said Haut. "Some of them will come back to the shop with their kids or grandkids. A lot of guys put the board down at some point and get serious about work. Then they get back into the picture because their kids get into surfing. It just keeps going." 🌊



Photo: Dan Coyro

Doug Haut and laminator Doug Fletcher put the finishing touches on an Amgen Stage 3 cycling event trophy board.

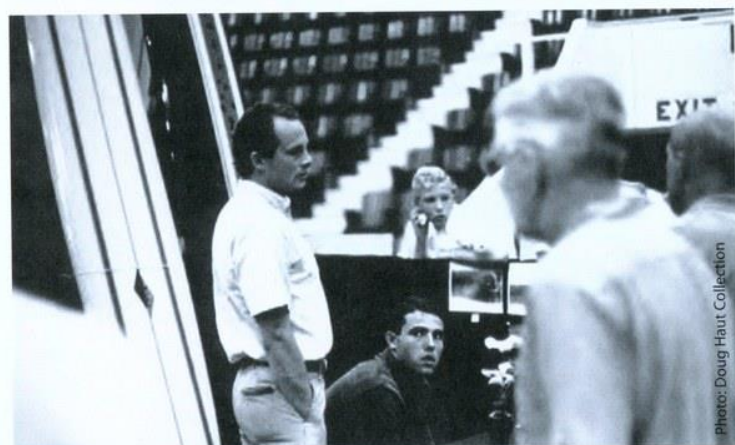


Photo: Doug Haut Collection

Doug Haut at his booth at the 1966 Santa Cruz Surf Fair. Doug (left) with two of the hottest surfers of the era Davey Sultzer (dark shirt) and Bruce Phillipy (background).

IF YOU WANT TO GO

What: Sacred Craft Consumer Surfboard Expo

When: March 19-20;
Sat. 10am-6pm; Sun. 10am-4pm.

Where: The Rittenhouse Building, downtown Santa Cruz.

Admission: \$10 at the door includes *Surfer* magazine subscription and door prizes including surfboard giveaways.

Online: www.surfboardshow.com.