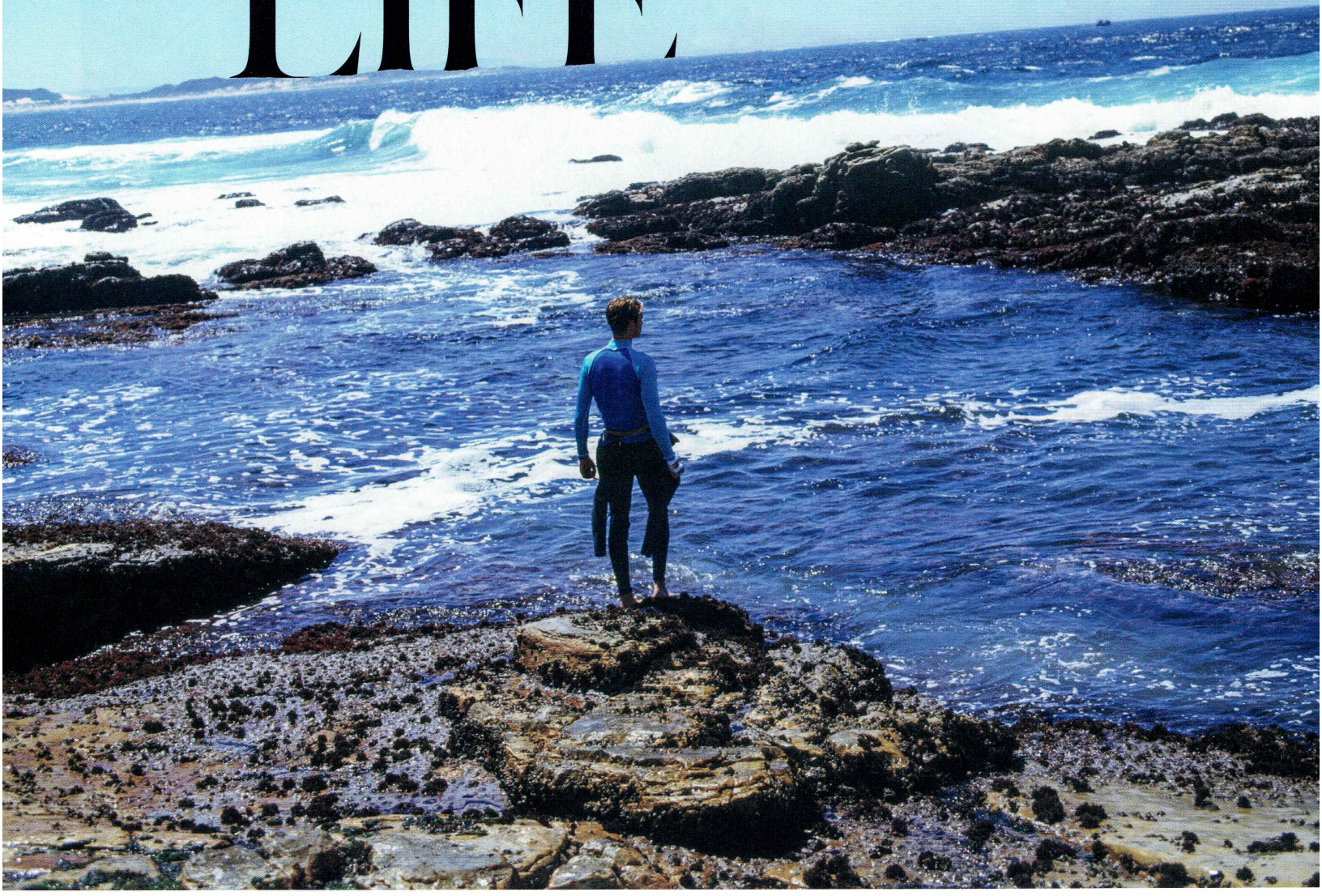


FIRST CAME *EXTREME SKIING*. THEN IT WAS
MOUNTAIN CLIMBING. NOW, WHEN THE RICH
WANT TO *FEEL FIERCE OUTSIDE THE BOARDROOM*,
THEY GET ON A DIFFERENT KIND OF *BOARD*.

BY HOLLY PETERSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE WEBER

SWIMMERS LIFE



EVERY SURFER LOOKS THE SAME IN THE WATER.

BUT HEAD TO A BEACH RIGHT NOW in Malibu or Southampton, and that Sesame Street song “One of These Things (Is Not Like the Others)” might pop into your head. There’s a guy rolling up to his lesson in an impossible-to-find \$90,000 vintage Land Rover Defender. And there are post-surf Missoni cover-ups, hints of Rolex Daytonas gleaming in the sunlight, and flip-flops with a discreet but telltale Gucci red and green ribbon. Once the status symbols that tend to define us on land are shed, these surfers could be any of the other seals out there in black neoprene on waxed-up, dinged-up boards seeking the same rush. Surfing’s equalizing force, its ability to make even the hardest-hitting titan of industry just another person battling the elements, may be one reason why a breed of one-percenters is becoming as addicted to surfing as the hippie dude in straggly hair who has always believed “blue chip” meant something you dunk into a bowl of guacamole.

Is it mere coincidence that Daniel Loeb’s Third Point hedge fund is named after the farthest break off the famous Malibu pier? Or that Eva and Olaf Guerrand-Hermès are habitués of the world’s most far-flung surfing locales? Music business savant Matt Pincus is known to have more surfing stamina than anyone in the waves off the Hamptons, and it’s not hard to see why art dealer Adam Lindemann’s Montauk retreat hangs over one of the best breaks in the East End, or to imagine the gusto with which financier and philanthropist Dirk Ziff and partners plan to expand the competitive scope, and fan base, of the World Surf League, which they recently purchased.

What exactly is it about the church of surfing that gives all its disciples—from Venice Beach surf rat to activist investor—the same mesmerized spirals in their eyes? That thrill you feel down to your toenails, whether you’re carving figure eights on fresh backcountry powder, hammering that drive straight

through the middle of the fairway, or riding a bike down a hill for the first time in second grade—cube it, and that’s where surfing takes you. I know because I’ve been there.

I first put my toe into the surfing world at age 40. One day, while I was jogging in the haze of an impossibly humid August, surfers teaching kids in the Atlantic and laughing out loud caught my attention, and I made a mental note to give my 10-year-old daughter a surf lesson as a gift. When the instructors took her much farther out than I felt comfortable with, I grabbed a foam board and jumped in, Mama Bear-style, and paddled after them. When I failed to make any progress amid the swirling currents, a kind instructor not only rescued me but offered to help me catch my first wave by pushing my board into the gentle swell at just the right time. Suffice it to say that that first ride, when I sort of, kind of stood up, hooked me so profoundly I could be seen in December of that year in dirty 45-degree water off Rockaway Beach, in Queens, wearing a 6mm wet suit complete with hood, face mask, booties, and gloves.

That neighborhood is populated by generations of blue-collar Irish Catholic cops and firemen who are pretty relentless about getting their waves. Changing into a wet suit on a freezing sidewalk is not something that fits my urban working-mom persona, in which I’m usually seeking the dirtiest martini, the highest heels, or the most luxurious blowout. I have since surfed in many places around the world: the Maldives, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Brazil, as well as tamer territories closer to home, including Vero Beach, Florida, and Southampton. But no matter where I’ve been, I’ve recognized more and more type A high-net-worth professionals around me.

Unlike other sports, surfing gives you no stable ground beneath your feet, no semi-predictable, immobile ski slope or mountain bike path on which you can rest and assess the steepness or figure out how to get around a

tree. Once you go over the edge and commit to riding a wave, there’s no way to gauge how many somersaults your body will turn if you wipe out. Without any notice at all, even the best surfers find themselves under four feet of crushing whitewater when a barreling wave suddenly envelops them from above, below, and all sides. Under all that water pressure you can’t even figure out which way is up.

Someone used to getting his way by methodically climbing the ladder of success can be flummoxed by the constantly changing ocean dynamics. Food Network host and author Katie Lee, who has been surfing in Southampton for six years, enjoys witnessing those around her trying to master the sport. Most of them quickly find that surfing is a lot more difficult than acing your nemesis from Harvard Business School on the Maidstone Club’s grass courts. “I try to push them to take a lesson in Southampton, where I learned. I rarely convert anyone to the church of surfing, though I do feel evangelical at times.”

Robert Weaver (nickname Wingnut) is a former pro surfer who is endlessly intrigued by the wealthy people he guides on glamorous surf trips around the globe. “On a mountain you can do it again and again until you get it right,” he says. “With the ocean, every wave is different. The tides, winds, and swell change in minutes out there. It’s a shifting dynamic that makes it all the more fun when you succeed.”

Wingnut, who charges his clients \$2,500 per day of surfing, is an expert in the psychology of this particular group. “The bankers have conquered every other sport; they want to try this one. Then they find out it’s much harder than they thought, and it’s good for them. I have clients who try it for the first

FISH OUT OF WATER

On land, the flash of a Rolex Daytona and the ribbon of a Gucci sandal are telltale signs of the new breed of surfer. Here, Palm Beach, Florida.



in triathletes over the last few years. It's really about self-competition."

The trend of power brokers challenging themselves mentally and physically, sometimes in harsh conditions, isn't necessarily new, but the surfing angle may be. We all remember when a group of New York A-listers made a disastrous attempt to climb Mount Everest. The bare-bones Ashram retreat charges \$5,000 a week for a no-frills recharge. Clients endure spartan meals and arduous hikes in the name of detoxing but also as a sign of inner toughness, a badge that says money hasn't made them soft.

Tony Caramanico, a surf guide who takes publishing, media, and financial types to breaks in St. Bart's and Tobago (where he has a home), says, "There is surf all over the world, in weird places you wouldn't expect, like Egypt, Japan, Vietnam. There's a certain adventure in surfing that leads to what we call feeling 'stoked.' Stoked is the sense you get riding a wave, when you feel elated but drained. You get that smirk on your face that says you're so happy with what you just did. It doesn't affect other people. You're just happy for yourself." An added benefit: These days, when people's eyes are glued to screens 18 hours a day, there's no pocket for your phone out on the water.

Sokolin points out that having the wherewithal to surf the world's best places doesn't mean anything once you put your body in the water. "These guys might be initially attracted because it looks cool or they would like to envision themselves as laid-back guys enjoying nature," he says. "But the ones who stick with it are pretty much like any other surfer, despite pulling up to the beach in a Mercedes G wagon."

Most of the time, anyway. Wingnut admits that there is a period of acclimation to the local culture—and to the mellow culture of surfing overall—when he takes clients to far-off spots. "New Yorkers have a personality type that doesn't deal well with service people and with certain issues on timing. I have to constantly remind them, 'Hey, you're in Mexico. There's a certain pace here.'"

For those who insist on having accommodations and service on a par with their high-end expectations, a few resorts have risen to meet the challenge. Tropicsurf offers packages at various resorts for people seeking a high level of comfort but with virgin waves and paid surf guides giving them undivided attention. The company's Maldives locations have offshore trade winds that make the waves consistent and smooth as glass, regular swells that pump out large waves, and breaks for all ability levels.

The Nihiwatu resort on Sumba, in Indonesia, was recently bought and overhauled by

Chris Burch, the New York entrepreneur who co-founded Tory Burch and C. Wonder. The property also happens to sit atop one of the best left breaks in the world—and the waves are reserved for hotel guests only. The pop star Pink can sometimes be found here, as can William van Cutsem and his wife Rosie (a.k.a. Prince William and Kate Middleton's closest friends), as well as Jawbone designer Yves Béhar and Place Vendôme jeweler Lorenz Bäumer.

When I visited the hotel (it took me four days to reach it, starting from Manhattan), a host of glamorous Europeans had taken it over. No question they were serious surfers. Halfway through my visit, communal meals on the veranda became strained: A cosmetics CEO and a banking scion didn't speak for 48 hours because part of the group had snuck out at 6 a.m. to battle a glassy 12-foot swell without inviting the others.

No one wants to miss any of the action on Sumba, known for its glorious bungalows, waterfalls, and spa safaris. Surfing heaven and luxury mecca combined, in other words. A big chunk of the resort's profits (as well as the guests' generosity) helps feed kids in the island's schools, dig wells, and buy books. Because of these efforts, Burch says, "there's a high degree of respect for our guests. Our wave is particularly private, and locals make sure guests get first shot at it." Eva Guerrand-Hermès, a former Harvard varsity tennis player and co-owner of the LOLE brand of women's athletic gear, often visits Nihiwatu. She says she is lured back by the opportunity to surf in distant, unpopulated places. "You've gone to the end of the world," she says, "to lift yourself to another place through this sport."

How do hardcore locals feel about this invasion of bankers and rock 'n' rollers? Doesn't it decrease their stoke? For sure, many don't welcome the newcomers—although, Wingnut says, the best surfers are mostly concerned with everyone's safety, and they give each other proper right of way and respect. Charles Fulford says that somehow the water, and its ability to disconnect us from every hassle on land, has a way of serving as an equalizing force, no matter where you come from or what you do. "Many breaks may now have a few people coming from high finance," Fulford says, "but anyone who lumps every person that works in a specific sector into a set personality type doesn't get surfing. They're the one with a bad vibe." ●

OFF THE LEASH

Perhaps the top reason surfing has become so trendy? No iPhone pockets in wet suits, and no conference calls in the ocean.

TIPS & TACTICS

RIDING THE WAVE

Eager to give surfing a try? Here are the people to call and the places to go. And even if you're just tagging along with the young at heart, there's no shortage of non-surf activities at these fancy enclaves.

LEARN

COREYSWAVE, MONTAUK

Ditch Plains, near the eastern tip of Long Island, is only a two-and-a-half-hour drive from New York City, but it offers some of the best surf on the East Coast. It can be challenging, but Corey Senese and his team of experienced instructors—many of whom grew up riding these breaks—are well equipped to teach beginners of all ages how to manage the waves. *From \$175 for a 90-minute private lesson, coreyswave.com*

HANS HEDEMANN SURF SCHOOL, HAWAII

"In most cases our students are able to stand up on their first wave," this school's website proudly proclaims. With four locations, in Honolulu and on Oahu's north shore, it's a convenient option for an afternoon activity during a Hawaii vacation. *From \$150 for a two-hour private lesson, hhsurf.com*

PASKOWITZ SURF CAMP, MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Founded in 1972 by Stanford-educated physician turned star surfer Dorian Paskowitz, this is the oldest surf school in the United States. Classes are available in Cabo San Lucas and San Diego. The late Paskowitz (who had nine children with his third wife; his son Izzy now runs the school) was immortalized in a 2007 documentary, *Surfwise*. *From \$1,250 per week, paskowitz.com*

STAY

MUKUL BEACH, GOLF & SPA, NICARAGUA

Thirty-five villas and stand-alone huts, plus a compound that can be rented, sit on 1,670 acres at this private beach destination (*mukul* is Mayan for secret) created by Nicaraguan billionaire Carlos Pellas. There are 17 surf breaks within a 45-minute drive of the resort, including the much-admired Manzanillo Point, which is directly in front of Mukul's beach club. (Classes are run by the Australia-based Tropicsurf.) In addition to the golf course and spa, there are tons of non-wave-related activities in the nearby historic city of Granada. And tastings of Pella's family-produced rum, Flor de Caña, are always available, as are helicopter trips to visit the distillery. *From \$500 per night, mukulresort.com*

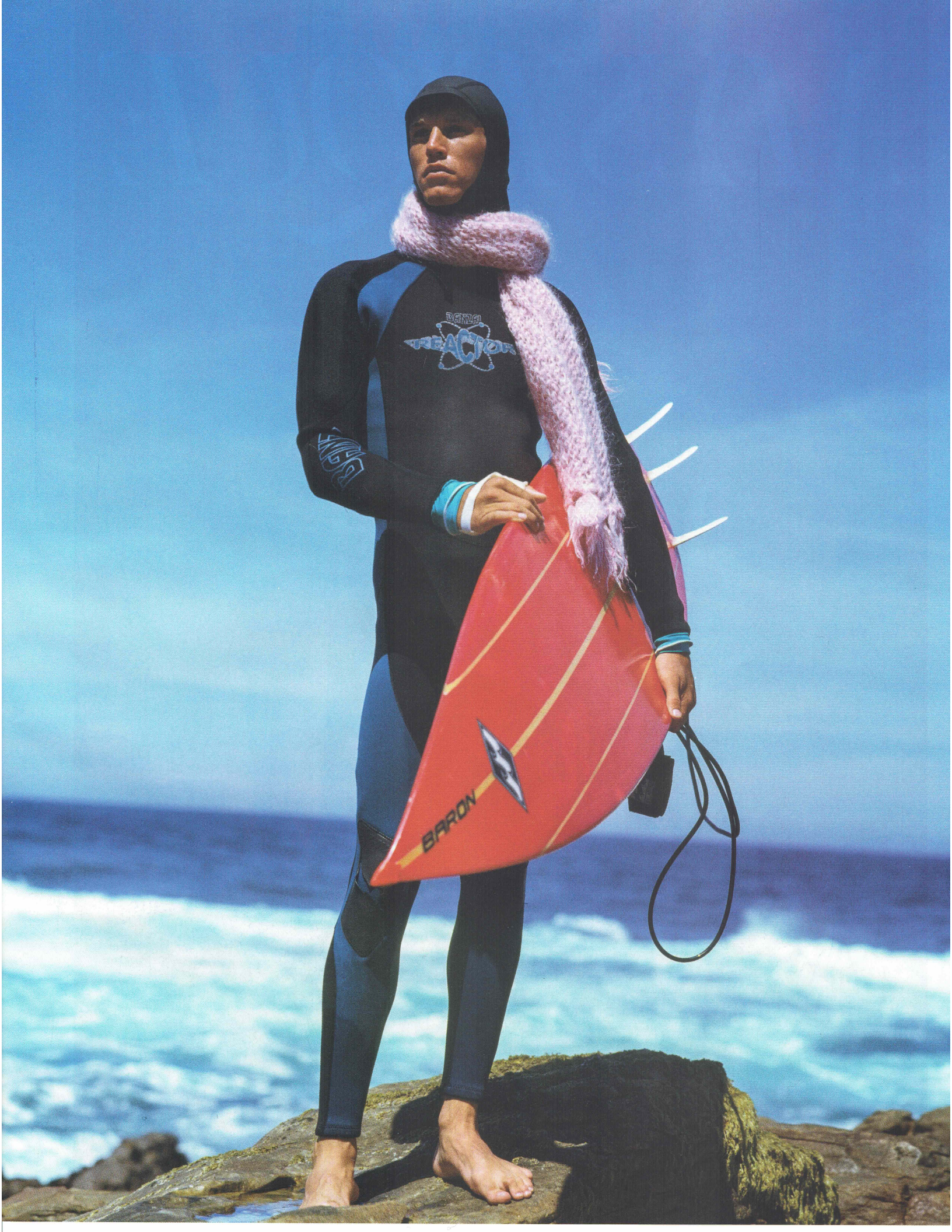
NIHIWATU, SUMBA, INDONESIA

If there's a resort that excels at combining first class accommodations with unparalleled surfing, Nihiwatu is it. Opened 15 years ago on Sumba Island primarily as a destination for surfers (thanks to its proximity to Occy's Left, a break that's limited to 10 surfers per day and has been called one of the most consistent in the world), the resort has recently been revamped by entrepreneur Chris Burch and hotelier James McBride (who used to run New York's Carlyle hotel). It currently has 21 villas; 13 additional guestrooms are scheduled to open this summer. Non-surfers can choose from paddleboarding, spearfishing, kayaking, and scuba diving, among other activities. Guests rave about the locally inspired meals and the sense of calm the remote location affords. *From \$900 per night, nihiwatu.com*

PINNACLES ON TELO, INDONESIA

The latest property slated to open this spring from Pegasus Lodges and Resorts, Pinnacles on Telo capitalizes on one of the best right breaks in the region. The island resort is being built in response to the overwhelming demand for Pegasus's nearby eight-surfers-only Telo Island Lodge; it includes eight bungalows and caters to non-surfers with such activities as cooking classes and kayaking. *From \$7,000 per surfer for a 10-day trip (non-surfers who tag along pay \$3,000), pegasuslodges.com*

SAM DANGREMOND



BARDON
REACTION

BARDON

MARKET CRASH

Is surfing's recent allure about self-competition or keeping up with one's cohorts? The game is on at Jeffreys Bay (a.k.a. J-Bay), South Africa.

