

SURFING THE INK

THE HISTORY OF BREAKOUT,
"CALIFORNIA'S SURF MAGAZINE."

WRITTEN BY WENDY HINMAN



A mag writing about a mag. Sounds like cronyism. It's actually way worse. It's unabashed admiration. In the age of the glossies, Breakout Magazine was not just another slick; it was our magazine. It told our stories. HQed in the sleepy little surf town that was Carlsbad in the late 1970s, Breakout dropped in on the zeitgeist and rode that curl until the doldrums of the '90s hit and Quiksilver and Rip Curl were just another brand at any mall in America.

If "Endless Summer" was the movie about surfing's longboard age of innocence, "Five Summer Stories" was the shortboard's, a competitive flashbang of the exploding neon culture of pro surfing (with an excellent soundtrack). Breakout was the "Five Summer Stories" of the 'zines. While Surfer and Surfing magazines were taking on the world—that world being Australia and Hawaii—Breakout was radical localism.

Imagine it's 1978, you're sitting in your last period class at Carlsbad High School and the sun-bleached blond in front of you turns around and says, "A new Breakout is out." Whatever your after school plans were, they just changed to skateboarding to Witt's (Carlsbad Pipelines surf shop) to get the latest issue. Better if your crew comes along. Because then you can point at the picture of Carlsbad's Joey "Sandcrab" Buran as he becomes "The California Kid." Or you can lift the mag to show one of the Stults twins modeling swimwear for Pantique. Or before you open it, you all try to guess what color Paul Barr's wetsuit will be in this issue.

MAPLE AVENUE

What is it about Carlsbad garages in the '70s? Tom Morey built prototypes of his Boogie Board in a garage on Chestnut, while over on Maple, George Salvador's Breakout brainchild was cobbled together by hand. "My partner, Greg Hunter, and I made our own light boxes and we did paste up on them," Salvador says of the old style of getting photo boards camera ready. In our digital age, it is easy to forget there was a day when copy had to be typeset, then cut and waxed and mounted on boards. And film was developed in darkrooms. Salvador says of the first issue, "We printed 3,000 copies at a blueprint place in Oceanside. Every issue sold out at a quarter in two hours. I let the shops keep

the quarter. The next issue we sold for 75 cents and we split it with the dealers. Within a year we had a national newsstand distributor and we sold at all convenience stores, surf shops and grocery stores."

Speaking of convenience stores, Allen Carrasco and Steve Salas walked into Texas Liquor on Elm. Salas grabbed a music mag from the racks and said he's going to be the best guitarist in the world. Carrasco took a surf rag and said he was going to be the best surf photographer in the world. He was tapped on the shoulder by Paul Cauthen, who asked what he knew about photography. At 17, Carrasco started as a photo tech for Breakout. Before then, Salvador says, he'd be at Tamarack and "see someone with a camera and give them five bucks a photo." Lots of free surfers in the mag back then.

STATE STREET

Salvador and Hunter needed to create a team. By the early '80s, they had an office on State Street. Kevin Kinnear started writing and editing. The late Bob Yehling had started writing about surfing for the old Blade Tribune newspaper when he was still in high school. He joined the Breakout team. In the early black-and-white days, Dave Shaughnessy, David Hirschman and Chris Ahrens were also surfing the ink; Ahrens would become an editor. In writing and photography, there was always quite a leaderboard of contributors. "We called ourselves the associates," Carrasco says. From the start, Salvador's job was "managing growth and creating teams." Jerry Caulkins was the first photo editor. Carrasco went from photo lab tech, which meant he was in the bathroom/darkroom for hours and hours, to photo editor.

In those early days there would be surf-adjacent stories on boogie boarding, skateboarding, music. "We were all making it up as we went along," Kinnear says. A few things happened to settle Breakout into its niche within a niche. Guy Motil came on as the conceptual designer, Norm Vitale joined as art director and surfing hit critical mass.

"In the '80s everyone was expressing themselves. There was hair music. Oingo Boingo, Stray Cats, Billy Idol," Carrasco says. And surfing was coming into its own, in an explosion of pink and yellow neon over sea-foam green. Timing in business is as important as it can be serendipitous. While Surfer and Surfing were covering the whole world, Breakout strategically focused on California. And Carlsbad, in particular, was making quite a splash in the lineup.

Joey Buran and David Barr were ripping into the pro circuit. They could not go unnoticed. In '84, when Buran won the biggest competition at the time, the Pipeline Masters, "Joey brought back the honor California deserved," Kinnear says, adding, "Tom Curren in Santa



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a) The Breakout crew on, as Carrasco said, "The day we got the T-shirts." (from left): Allen Carrasco, Guy Motil, Kevin Kinnear, David Epperson, Norm Vitale, George Salvador and Greg Hunter. b) Allen Carrasco at the light board photo editing (photos courtesy of Allen Carrasco). c) George Salvador and Guy Motil pondering Breakout layouts. (photo courtesy of Gil Motil).

Barbara finished it off.” Then the OP Pro came to Huntington Beach and Stubbies to Trestles. “That brought the world to California,” Motil says.

“Bob was on the beat with all the competitions and Kevin leaned toward the legends,” Carrasco says. “California surfing,” Motil added, “was going through a huge metamorphosis at the time.”

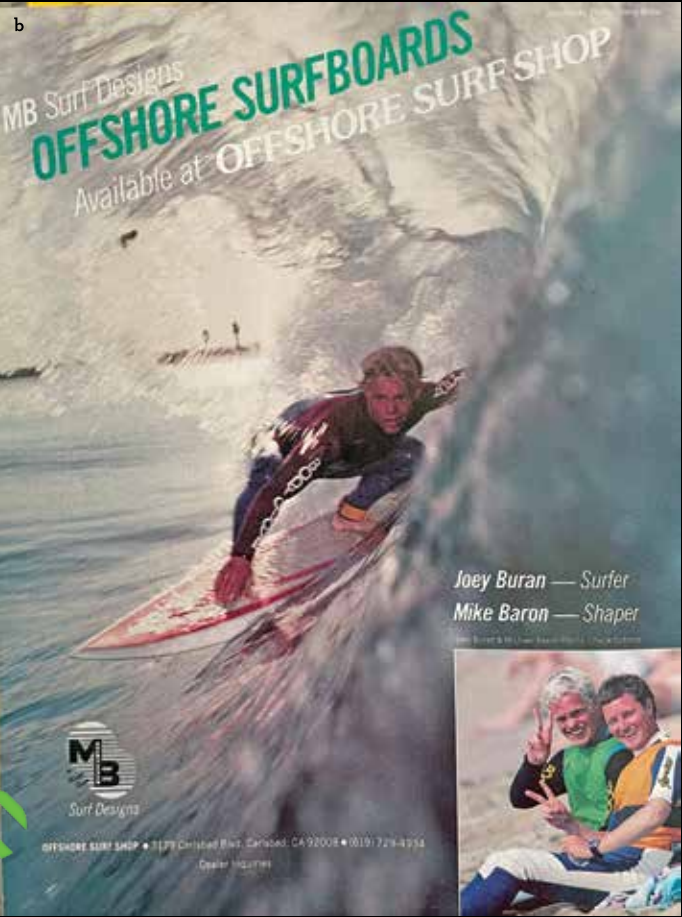
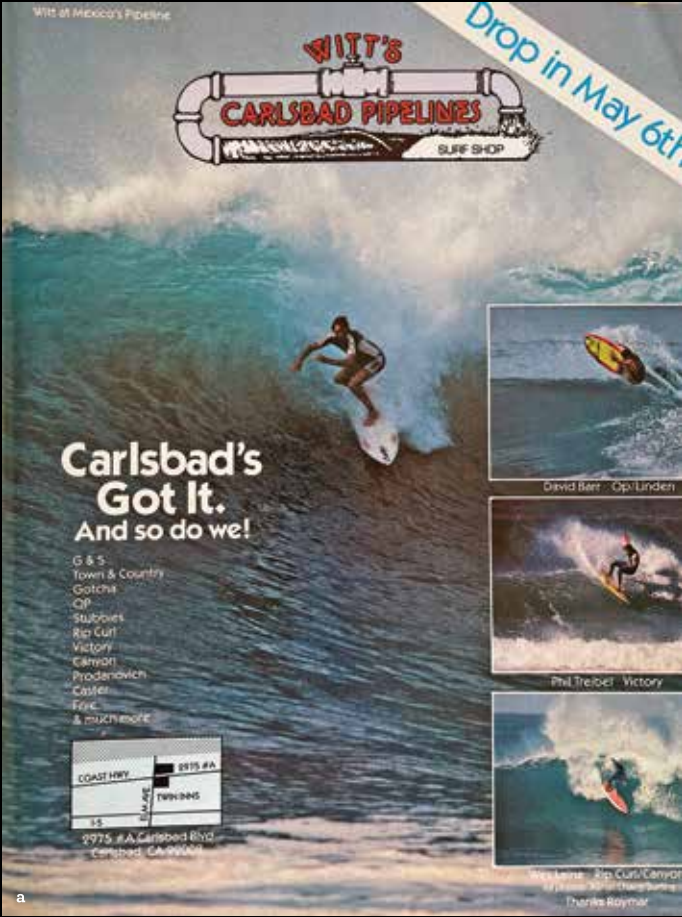
Breakout went from black-and-white to half-and-half and by the time it hit its stride in full color, there was a solid masthead. It became known as “California’s surf magazine.” “Young surfers wanted to see the results,” Carrasco says. This was before the internet. Local focus won loyal readership. The earliest full-page ads were Carlsbad’s Offshore Surf Shop, Carlsbad Pipelines and Eddie Wright’s Sunset Surfboards in Encinitas.

The rise of Breakout ran parallel to the surf industry. And that industry was based in California. Besides board shapers and wetsuit makers, the surf apparel business boomed. O’Neill’s, Hang Ten, OP and Stussy were all trying to drop in on the swelling surf market. Even the Australian Quiksilver and Billabong were headquartered in California. “The sport, the retailers and manufacturers supported us,” Salvador says. Breakout needed to sell ads, and this surging industry needed name recognition.

INK BEGETS INK

Breakout had an 11-year run. That’s a good life in mag years. In the late ’80s, surfing hit its apogee. By the ’90s, it dropped back from being THE sport to watch to being a sport. The market fluxed and trade wars hit. “It was gnarly,” Salvador says. And there was a new kid on the block with a rising groove. Transworld Surf, Skate and Snow appeared as Breakout was closing its last page. Salvador saw Transworld’s Larry Balma and Peggy Cozens at Fidel’s (now Norte). He hooked them up with his printer and distributor. Kinnear would end up with quite a snowboard writing career with Transworld Snowboarding. Others drifted over as well.

When Carrasco was just a young photo editor in his 20s, Salvador told him, “This is the threshold to your future.” And it was for so many. “We were just kids back then,” Kinnear says. Motil went on to Longboard Magazine for 16 years. Matt Warshaw did The Surfer’s Encyclopedia. “The thing about publishing is the ink gets into your bloodstream and it never really leaves,” Salvador says. He’s at it again with Surf West Coast, an Orange County surf tabloid. Tim Wrisley honed his skills at Transworld until starting Carlsbad Magazine 21 years ago. OK, OK, enough with the cronyism. Just hats off and glasses held high for those exceptional days of Breakout Magazine.



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a) Witt Rowlett dropping in on a full-page display ad. b) Every surf shop back then needed a ripper and a shaper; Offshore's were Joey Buran and Michael Baron (photos courtesy of Breakout Surf Mag). c) Tom Curren and Joey Buran, golden boys repping the Golden State. d) Norm Vitale rocking the T-square (photos by Allen Carrasco). e) From the early black-and-white days to Kodachrome color, Breakout Magazine was California's surf pride (photos courtesy of Breakout Magazine).

