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Surf Craft: Design And The Culture Of Board Riding (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Surfboards were once made of wood and shaped by hand, objects of both cultural and recreational significance. Today most surfboards are mass-produced with fiberglass and a stew of petrochemicals, moving (or floating) billboards for athletes and their brands, emphasizing the commercial rather than the cultural. Surf Craft maps this evolution, examining surfboard design and craft with 150 color images and an insightful text. From the ancient Hawaiian alaia, the traditional board of the common people, to the unadorned boards designed with mathematical precision (but built by hand) by Bob Simmons, to the store-bought longboards popularized by the 1959 surf-exploitation movie Gidget, board design reflects both aesthetics and history. The decline of traditional alaia board riding is not only an example of a lost art but also a metaphor for the disintegration of traditional culture after the Republic of Hawaii was overthrown and annexed in the 1890s. In his text, Richard Kenvin looks at the craft and design of surfboards from a historical and cultural perspective. He views board design as an exemplary model of mingei, or art of the people, and the craft philosophy of Soetsu Yanagi. Yanagi believed that a design's true beauty and purpose are revealed when it is put to its intended use. In its purest form, the craft of board building, along with the act of surfing itself, exemplifies mingei. Surf Craft pays particular attention to Bob Simmons's boards, which are striking examples of this kind of functional design, mirroring the work of postwar modern California designers. Surf Craft is published in conjunction with an exhibition at San Diego's Mingei International Museum.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone interested in design or surfing or both cannot fail to be enchanted by this beautiful book.... High-quality photographs of the exhibited boards, both traditional and modern, are accompanied by Kenvin's thoughtful commentary on the history of surf board design. (Fiona Capp Sydney Morning Herald) In his gorgeous and learned new book, *Surf Craft: Design and the Culture of Board Riding* Richard Kenvin makes a strong case that surfboards should be considered works of art. (John McMurtrie San Francisco Chronicle) Richard Kenvin traces the history of surfing from an exclusive pursuit of Hawaiian royals -- the 1% scored the most bouyant boards -- to the post-Gidget era of big-money competition. Where long or short, wood or fiberglass -- all gorgeously photographed here -- surfboards have retained their basic uplifting function. Readers may be surprised at how many funky variations board designers have produced over the years -- and how beautiful they can be. (The Wall Street Journal) A beautiful coffee table book stuffed with stunning images of the boards on display from the exhibition. It's worth buying simply for the photos alone, but *Surf Craft* also includes a thoughtfully-written 40-page introduction by Kenvin that traces the evolution of surfboard design, and also explains how meticulous handcraftmanship can inform modern high volume commercially-made surf craft; it's a well-reasoned take on how ramping up surfboard production in the '60s didn't necessarily kill the beauty and art of surfboards. (Surfer Magazine)

Richard Kenvin is Director of the Hydrodynamica Project. He writes for *The Surfer's Journal* and is the guest curator of the *Surf Craft* exhibition.

Watching my father lovingly turn page after page and remark, "Hey, I used to ride with him!" or, "He shaped my first board!" or, "My brother rode one just like this in '68!", and turn with tears in his eyes to remark it was one of the best birthday gifts an old shaper/surfer could get, well, that made the whole purchase pretty much perfect. Don't expect bikinis and two-page spreads of 30'+ reef breaks... the boards (and their shapers/history) are the stars here.

This is a wonderful book. I bought it for my son who is a surgeon, and also an avid surfer. The illustrations are beautiful and the book is very informative in a pictorial way, rather than wordy. I noticed he has it on the table in front of his sofa, easy to pick and look at when he watches TV. I would recommend this book as a gift for any surfer who would enjoy the illustrated history of all the different types of boards.

Purchased as a gift for my father, who shaped boards in his youth and still rides. He loves it and greatly enjoyed reminiscing :)

I bought this for my father in law who is a surfer and he was impressed with all the new information he was looking at in this book, and he was able to identify every single type of surfboard on the cover! best gift for a surfer!

Awesome history of the surfboard - excellent pics and descriptions

Bought as gift for someone who not only surfs, but just started shaping his own boards. The content of the book is basically a wealth of ideas and history for the reader and was well received by the crew at the surf shop.

I am not a surfer, but I purchased it for someone who is. I found the book very attractive, and I felt it covered much history of the surfboard - both handmade and commercial. This was purchased as a birthday gift, so I'll have to wait until September to get the surfer's take!

Excellent book. You forgot about the campbell brothers and the bonzer! They were decades ahead of time

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