Glossy Waves, Diminishing Lineups

Smooth mollusk-shell-littered beaches, the infamous concrete seawall, sandpiper sanctuaries, countless beach and bathing clubs, all make up the backbone of the East Coast of Central Jersey. In its little nook lining the Atlantic, fearless surfers are often found trudging from beach to beach in search of that perfect section of swell.

Seaweed and barnacle-speckled jetties separate the quaint plots of seemingly endless beaches, while the grassy dunes elegantly flow up and down the rear. Each one of these little bits of paradise draws in the select few individuals in the state determined to face the ever-changing conditions in the water. One week, the waves might be a disappointing height of one foot with a lousy North Eastern wind. Alternatively, with a quick check of a swell report, these lucky surfers will find themselves escaping their villages towards the coast quicker than a seagull diving headfirst for an unattended french fry.

Looing upon the beautiful blue-greens of the ocean, I see longboards, shortboards, piloted by young and old characters, each carving on the faces of every unknown set that rolls in. I immediately get butterflies in my stomach and a shiver down my spine. My board of choice is a 6’6” egg intertwined with stiff carbon fiber stringers and an epoxy resin protecting it from all the elements thrown at it. Years of surfing experience and a well-established relationship with the temperamental Atlantic ocean have adequately prepared me for these sessions.

On any given day, I’m able to drop everything for even the shortest dip in the water. Growing up along the coast, I was privileged to learn how to properly surf and swim with the lifeguards at my beach club. I received a small foam Morey Board from my parents, but I look back now and realize I was the only kid at my club, in my family, even in my friend group who surfed. To this day, I find myself traveling the short distance, board strapped atop my car, and various surf supplies neatly nestled in my passenger seat. Each trip, I find myself smiling at the friendly yet unknown faces in the parking, then formerly meeting them after applying a fresh layer of wax to the twin fin egg.

How does this happen? Why are generations like mine, a mere 5 miles from the beautiful Jersey shoreline, left to surf with a handful of strangers rather than a core group of friends? The sport of surfing, though readily accessible, regarding location, has proven to be out of reach for those not committed to buying a board, pulling on a wetsuit, or simply putting time into learning the art.

Billabong, Quiksilver, Roxy, Catch Surf, Vissla are some of the most influential surf style brands in the world today. Surf and skate shops are consistently flooded with their garments and accessories. Many products cater to the average customer searching for a taste of that classy yet sporty surf look. But it aches me to see how the beloved surf shops sell these products but have little to no involvement in growing the communities around actually surfing.

At the end of the day, the art of surfing has endless variations of cultural identity, style, and ability of those who take part. Pointing fingers at who should be in charge of determining the building up of Jersey surf culture is ultimately the wrong approach. Surfing is about feeling free and unattached to the structures of life back on land: floating on a near perfect-shaped piece of

foam, surrounded by people that share that same love for the ocean, amidst the jellyfish, skates, and dolphins.

Surfing balances the dynamic of serenity and vigor. A simple yet fulfilling past-time. Will more New Jersians soon find themselves ditching their high-strung lives of continuous work or school? Take that long overdue “chill pill” and ride some of those irresistible glassy waves? Who knows? Only time will tell.

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