

A Solidarity Shaped by Surfing



Jill Ocone
Rich Luthringer and John Hale.

There's an eleven foot-long custom surfboard hanging inside the beautiful atrium of the new One Ocean Boulevard condominium building in Seaside Heights. It's officially called a Luthringer 11' ¼" Reverse Rocker Custom Noserider Longboard.

At first glance, it might seem to be a mere decoration, something hung by an interior designer to enhance the building's shore vibe and coastal ambiance.

But this particular longboard is so much more than a hallway adornment.

There's no doubt it represents the laid-back attitude of surf culture, where the dream of the endless summer and the never-ending pursuit of the perfect wave combine to create the iconic and unique Jersey Shore lifestyle.

This custom-designed and crafted longboard is, more importantly, sym-

bolic of a friendship that started with a similar longboard, a friendship that has endured for more than a half century between two like-minded storytellers with a flair for riding waves and an affinity for nostalgia.

Accomplished longboarder John Hale, CEO of Glendenning Mortgage Corporation in Toms River and co-principal of One Ocean Boulevard., LLC (with James P. Anzano), was twelve years old when his family relocated from Connecticut to Toms River. The Hale family's move to the shore in 1965 coincided with the growing popularity of surf culture in the mainstream, fueled in part by the music of such icons as Dick Dale and The Beach Boys and the film, *The Endless Summer*.

The ocean called to Hale at a very early age, and after his very first surfing lesson at a family friend's Mantoloking home that summer, he

was hooked. "I bodysurfed as a child, and before I had my first board, we had those inflatable canvas mats. You'd blow them up, they'd be rock hard, and that's what I learned the basics of surfing on," Hale explained.

He bought his first custom surfboard in 1967 with money earned from his first paying job at The Big Wheel Arcade (today's Coin Castle) on the Seaside Heights boardwalk. It was an inspirational summer for Hale. "I remember that summer of '67... I worked as a change boy, and the Atlantic States Surfing Contest was held at the end of August. I had a birds-eye view of the entire contest because it was held at the beach right in front of the arcade I worked in," recalled Hale. "Nobody knew it at the time, but that was the end of the classic longboard hot-dogging era. The best surfers in the world all came to Seaside Heights that summer, and the waves showed up too."

Watching the likes of longboard legends and champions Gary Propper, Claude Codgen, and Dewey Weber riding his home break left a lasting impression on Hale. Before long, he was gliding in the salt water moving his feet and cross-stepping on his own longboard. "That was an incredible summer for me," Hale said, "After work, I'd get my gear and paddle out for the evening session and surf right up to dark every day."

That same summer, seventeen-year-old Rich Luthringer was getting paid by Lavallette's Custom Surf Shop to ride surfboards with his close friends, brothers Chris and Greg "Grog" Mesanko, who have both been enshrined into the New Jersey Surfing Hall of Fame, and Doug "Toad" Nagel, who only learned to surf two years prior with his cousin in Sea Bright.

"I was a boardwalk cleaner that summer. I'd show up at one o'clock in the morning with Chris. We'd clean the boardwalk up, see the sun rise, and we wouldn't even sleep because we'd go right to the beach

and paddle out into the water,” Luthringer explained. “By the time it was eight o’clock, I was surfing professionally the rest of the day promoting surfboards for Custom Surf Shop.”

The following year, Luthringer was the number-one ranked surfer in New Jersey, which comes as no surprise to Hale. “Rich was and still is one of the greatest surfers to ever come out of this area,” Hale said. Luthringer learned how to craft surfboards shortly after and eventually started his own company called Toad Surfboards, named after his longtime friend, Doug Nagel, who succumbed to cancer at eighteen-years-old.

A series of events in Luthringer’s young adulthood, including a near-fatal automobile accident and the theft of a number of his boards, led to the sale of Toad Surfboards to an associate, and then to an education at Pratt Institute and a successful career as an architect.

Neither the salt water nor his passion for crafting surfboards, however,

ever left Luthringer’s veins. He still creates several custom surfboards a year in his garage and shed, and he’s still an elite wave rider.

The early 1970s brought swift and radical changes to the sport of surfing, with shorter, lighter boards replacing the iconic longboards and “shredding” replacing “drop-knee turning” and “hanging ten.” As design of surfboards evolved, accomplished noseriders like Hale and Luthringer held onto the longboarding form amid scrutiny from many fellow surfers, friend and foe alike.

However, it was a classic longboard that brought these two acquaintances together as friends.

Hale’s story goes like this: “I remember one day, it was somewhere around the summer of ’76 or ’77, I was on the beach with Suzan, whom I was eventually lucky enough to marry. I see this guy out in the water and I said, ‘Man, that really looks like Rich Luthringer out there,’” Hale said. “At that time, almost nobody had a longboard anymore here on



Morgan Fitzpatrick

Longboarder John Hale drop-knee turning his 11’ Luthringer noserider on New Year’s Day at Porter Avenue beach in Seaside Heights. The board he’s riding is very similar in design to the display board at One Ocean Boulevard.

the East Coast, and nobody rode that way anymore either. His form really captured my attention. This was a really accomplished, classic longboarder who was masterfully stalling, cross-stepping, and trimming on the nose in a style that was completely different for that era.”

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The Luthringer 11’ 1/4” Reverse Rocker Custom Noserider Longboard, designed and built by Rich Luthringer, hangs in the atrium of the new One Ocean Boulevard condominium building in Seaside Heights.

Jill Ocone

BEACHCOMBER

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the people they care about the most. Their mutual love of longboarding has led to innumerable surf sessions together as well as with their children and families, and other lifelong buddies. "We have a kind-of fraternal order of friends that we call the Sand Town Surfboarding Society, and Rich has been one of our co-captains since our inception," Hale said with a smile. "Surfing is the glue that holds us together."

The group derived its name from a mid-1800s map of the Barnegat Bay region, which shows the area between Ortley Beach and Seaside Park as "Sand Town," the name used for today's Seaside Heights before it was incorporated into a municipality.

The society boasts an impressive roster. In addition to Hale and Luthringer, it includes East Coast surf legends and hall of famers Greg "Grog" Mesanko, "Big Jeff" Deron, Jimmy Purpuri, and drop-knee turn style master and team co-captain, Buck "Buckminster" Walters. All of them (minus Hale and Deron) were featured in Catherine Brabec's award winning 2013 film *A Life*



courtesy of One Ocean Boulevard

The new One Ocean Boulevard condominiums in Seaside Heights.

It was Luthringer.

When he emerged from the water, Hale went over and began a conversation with him. "I said to Rich that he couldn't leave the beach unless he sold that surfboard to me because you couldn't find longboards anywhere, and Rich had made this board in his garage," said Hale. The sale of that eight-foot, eleven-inch Luthringer mini-longboard, which was the first of countless boards that Luthringer has built for Hale, led to a close friendship and years of fond memories.

Through the evolution of surfing, things have almost come around full circle with regard to techniques and styles here on the East Coast, from classic longboard hot-dogging, to body boarding and body surfing, to short board shredding, and now, to the ever-popular stand-up paddle boarding movement.

And Hale believes that Luthringer is a master of them all, which is quite unusual.

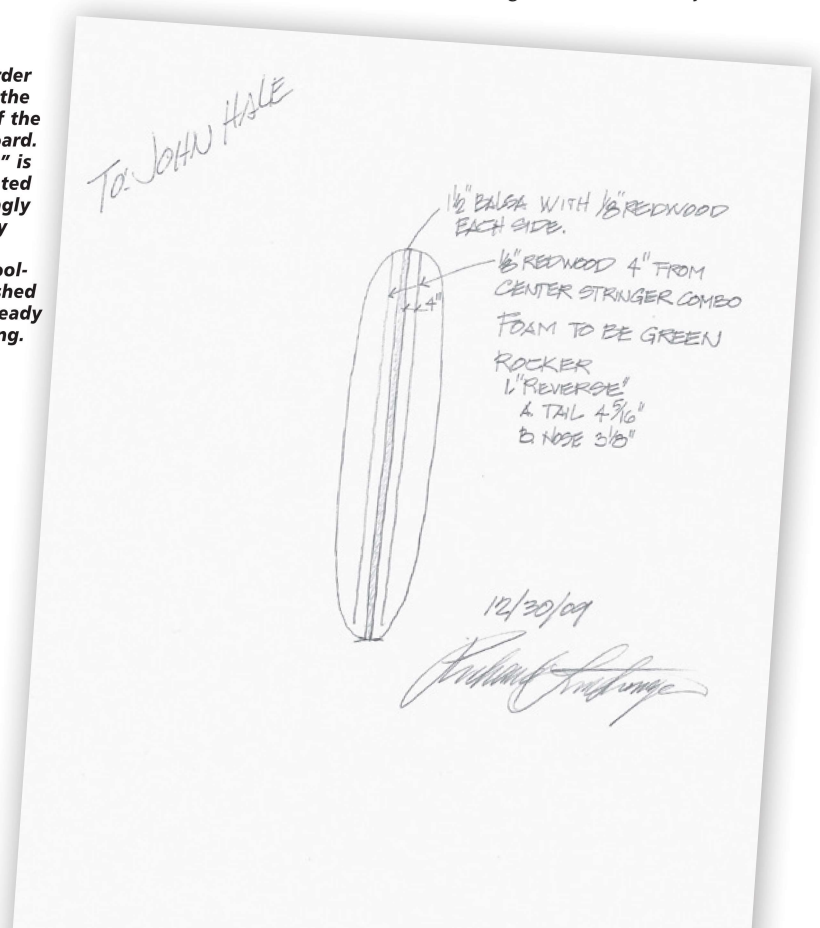
"Rich is very unique in that he can cross surfing genres and excel in each, whether its classic longboard hotdogging, or short board shredding, or bigger wave riding, or stand up paddle boarding, Rich is a master in each one of those categories and can seamlessly toggle back and forth between them on any given day," Hale said. He explained that the equipment, skills, and timing

used for each type of surfing vary quite widely, which a lot of people might not realize. While there are exceptions, a surfer who masters one stylistic genre rarely is able to transfer those skills to another because of the vast differences.

The exception though, according to Hale, is Luthringer.

There's nothing either of them love more than sharing the waves with

The original order form showing the basic design of the display longboard. A foam "blank" is custom fabricated and painstakingly transformed by hours of hand shaping and tooling into a finished board that is ready for fiberglassing.



Just Horsing Around

Outside, which documented not only the change to the famed Casino Pier break in Seaside Heights after Superstorm Sandy's 2012 wrath, but more importantly, the personal journey each one of these legendary surfers has taken through the waters of the ocean and the tides of life, the connections they've made, and the lessons they've learned along the way.

While surfers might be stereotyped as being extremely cut-throat competitive, these buddies encourage, inspire, and gain inspiration from each other. "There's nothing like surfing with friends, with people you've been surfing with for fifty-two or three years. You look out for one another and have a code of sharing with one another," Hale said. "I get as much joy from watching Rich, or Buck, or my son, Nash, or any of our gang on a wave as if I were riding it myself."

"It's not an out-do you thing," Luthringer added. "It's a celebration."

Like a surfboard that evolves from a large, rectangular blank with careful precision and a passion for crafting, a friendship also evolves and is shaped over time.

Hale decided to display a longboard designed and crafted by his very close friend in the One Ocean Boulevard building as a way to incorporate a part of the Jersey Shore's surfing soul into its design. Luthringer's creation, the Luthringer 11' ¼" Reverse Rocker Custom Noserider Longboard, with its center stringers and classic design, contains enough reverse rocker in its tail so that any surfer can experience the pure exhilaration that is derived from gliding across the face of a wave with ten toes wrapped around the nose!

But the board is so much more than an encapsulation of that Jersey Shore magic. It embodies a celebration of a beautiful friendship and serves to remind us all of such friends in our own lives.

—Jill Ocone



Andy Kazie

Monmouth and Ocean counties have dozens of stables where you can learn to ride and pursue a variety of equine activities. Horseback riding provides health and wellness benefits, and furnishes a new way of looking at the world while allowing relaxation and a return to the natural.

The Jersey Shore and the outdoors go hand in hand. However, there's an outdoor activity that's commonly overlooked, something visitors and residents alike can enjoy: horseback riding.

Not only does horseback riding provide health and wellness benefits (such as improving balance, coordination, and core strength), it furnishes a new way of looking at the world while relaxing and returning to nature. Horseback riders experience a sense of freedom that's quite different from other hobbies or athletics.

Linda Marciante of Bountiful Blessings Farm in Howell said, "Jersey Shore vacationers should spend a day horseback riding to experience New Jersey's beautiful parks and farms."

Each riding encounter is unique in its location and personnel, but what they all collectively share is fun. "Our riding program is designed to be instructional, exhilarating, relaxing, and a memorable experience for everyone," said Linda Fazio of Chariot Riders in Manchester. Fazio said that both farm and trail riding can enhance any Jersey Shore vacation.

Before heading to the stables, it's always a good idea to "know before you go."

First, decide which style of riding you'd like to try: English or Western. English style uses a smaller "tack," or saddle and equipment, which result in closer contact between the rider and the horse. Western style uses a larger saddle, which is designed for more comfort and stability, with a saddle horn and longer stirrups.

The second-most important thing to do is to find the stable or farm that offers the type of lessons you desire. Some farms and trainers only offer horsemanship riding lessons, while others offer lessons geared towards learning the basics of trail riding. Do the research beforehand so that you find the perfect instructor and stable for you.

Advance reservations are a must at most stables. Inquire about rates, schedules, availability, and to shore up reservation details. Ask if the stable has helmets for riders or if you are expected to bring your own.

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