



# Joe Twombly, Class of 1968

*-AND- Inducted in  
2000 ...*

Some people take surfing lessons, some go to special camps, some watch instructional videos, while others get on a surfboard and things just magically happen for them—barely struggling before becoming a seamless part of the ocean's motion. Needless to say, there are fewer of the latter. "I was one of the lucky ones to stand up on the board first wave, and I rode it all the way in," admits Joe Twombly, East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame Class of 2000. "I remember Gary Propper was out, I stood up on this little Styrofoam board right next to him, and he actually grabbed me and pulled me over, saying 'Look at this little guy! He's gonna be a surfer someday!'"

But Joe credits his sister, Betsy, with providing his real instruction to the sport, "I think I would have surfed anyway," he mused, "but my sister was (quite popular) - beautiful girl, homecoming queen, three years older than me. When you look up to your older brother or sister, you do what they do, Betsy and her friends surfed, so surfing was so cool to me."

Joe's father was in the military, which meant the family relocated about once every two years. "Sometimes I get mixed up on the sequence," he admits. "I was born in Tokyo, but we only lived there about a year and a half. Then we moved to Baltimore, California, New York, the Panama Canal Zone, Tennessee... because my father was originally from Maine and didn't like cold weather, we settled in Central Florida once he retired in 1963."



ner."

That was the year Joe got his first real surfboard, a James & O'Hare that he and Betsy shared. "I wanted two things, he laughs, "a motor for the boat and a surfboard. I'll never forget walking in Christmas morning and seeing both of them. I was like, 'Yes! There is a Christmas God!' Back then, everything was in the 9'0" to 9'8" range; there were no 8'0"s or 10'0"s. And they were so heavy we had to drag them, so there would be burn marks on the sides. People made bicycle racks and figured out all kinds of ways to get the boards to the beach. Eventually, Bob McTavish and Nat Young started making the shortboards, the V-bottoms, triple Vs, and everybody went crazy. The creativity just kicked in. It's kind of like dancing; for a while there was just the twist, then another dance came long; now everybody does everything. That's how surfing is. There are funshapes, longboards with thruster [setups] shortboards ... it must be confusing for a beginner."

For a teenager growing up in Cocoa Beach in the 60's, Canaveral Pier was the center of all things happening; the well-tanned guys, the bikini-clad girls, the dances, and of course, the surfing. And that's where Joe Twombly's surfing "career" truly began. He figures he placed 4th or 5th in his first local contest. And thought the competitions weren't very structured, the afforded Joe experience and visibility to the point where Gary Propper approached him in '65 about a coveted slot on the Surfboards Hawaii team. From 1966 to 1968, Twombly made the finals in most of the junior events, winning four at Canaveral Pier plus one at New Smyrna Beach. Paddling was just as integral to the complete surfing package then as it is today; Joe's height, long arms, and cardiovascular strength combined to turn him into the #1 paddle racer on the coast, winning over 20 major events through the Southeast. A four-mile paddle from Canaveral Pier to a buoy in the middle of the channel and back was one example of the stamina these races required. Another was across Long Island Sound, a race Joe won. "Paddle racing was very demanding, so [Surfboards Hawaii coach] Dick Catri was always trying to get me to eat more." Joe laughs. "he'd tell everybody to give me some of their food, saying I needed to keep my strength up for paddling. Unfortunately, there was no money in paddling. But it was still part of [doing well] in surfing competition."

Every summer, the team would load into a van, drive down to Miami, and literally surf their way up the East Coast all the way to Newport, RI. The trip would take weeks, culminating in one big contest in Virginia Beach, VA—the East Coast Surfing Champions (ECSC). Twombly's lock on the paddling competitions, plus his ability to consistently place well in the surfing divisions, helped him catapult his team to stardom. "If your team won all the paddle races and even just a couple surfing events, it added up and you were almost certain to win the whole thing," he explains. "Surfboards Hawaii never lost a team trophy. *Ever*. We were just unstoppable. We had Mimi Munro, Dick Catri, Bruce Valluzzi, Mike Tabeling, Gary Propper ... There was a big team trophy cup back then and I think we won it three years in a row."



By the Summer of '67, the team was attracting a lot of attention, including that of board building icon Hobie Alter. "We were taught at a young age that this was a business," Twombly reflects. "All those trips up the coast, the meals—they all had to be paid for. Hobie was expanding his space in California and wanted to do the same thing here."



By the Summer of '67, the team was attracting a lot of attention, including that of board building icon Hobie Alter. "We were taught at a young age that this was a business," Twombly reflects. "All those trips up the coast, the meals—they all had to be paid for. Hobie was expanding his space in California and wanted to do the same thing here. We were the go-to team to pursue. Some wanted to stay with Surfboards Hawaii, but we needed money for travelling, and Hobie made us a better offer."

While star players Tabeling and Valluzzi partied ways with the team around that time, Hobie still got a hell of a first string. And with the Vietnam War escalating, a college deferment became highly desirable for young men, so Twombly left the beach in 1969, with Hobie footing the bill. "Before I started surfing, baseball was my big thing," Twombly says, "I thought I might play in college so when I started surfing for Hobie, I asked if he'd pay for my education and he agreed. Surfing actually took a lot of guys from other sports. Mike Tabeling was into track & field, Claudie (Codgen) was a baseball and football player. We all left those sports to surf."

After receiving his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Florida Technological University in Orlando (now UCF), Twombly actually headed in the opposite direction, figuring if he were to actually use his degree, he'd need to go back to law school. He also dreaded living inland in Orlando, where all the public relations jobs were. So he started working construction and making shell and resin tables in his spare time. Over the years, his business evolved, but Twombly maintains they're still a small company, although the accounts are major league, with more than 30 Carnival Cruise ships, and over 250 restaurants featuring Twombly's Nautical Furniture. "The resin is impervious to water and salt," he chimes, "they have a distinctive look, and everybody likes them. It started as a hobby and just got bigger and bigger."

Although Twombly never returned to competitive surfing, he has remained an active support and component of the whole East Coast contingent. He credits Dick Catri, Jack Murphy and Gary Propper with instigating the recognition and organization of the rare and special phenomenon that is the East Coast surfer. "I think the key word is 'energy'," Twombly says. "There's just so much energy here. This is the irony of it: Our waves are so small that when we get in good waves, we just go nuts!"



For all his contributions to the Right Coast surfing legacy, it was only fitting that Joe Twombly receive official recognition by being inducted into the East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame. "In October of '99, Cecil Lear called me up and said, 'Congratulations! You've been inducted into the 2000 Hall of Fame!' It's quite a thrill, and I'm very proud," he says. "Since then, I've been privileged to call Jeff Crawford and Pete Dooley and tell them they've been inducted. That's such an honor in itself, everyone is always stoked when they learn [they've gotten in]."

Twombly also serves as Vice President of the Hall of Fame Board of Directors. "We wanted to organize it more and get a stand-alone building, which we're still working on," he says. "So we formulated things and elected officers. Cecil Lear is President, I'm VP, Mike Meyer is Executive Director, Bill Yerkes, Sam Gornto, Peter Pan and Dick Catri are officers, plus we have board members."

June 2008 was a landmark month for Joe Twombly as he and his wife Sue celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. And 35 years ago in June, Twombly's Nautical Furniture was first issued its business license. Like so many other East Coast luminaries, Joe has managed to create a life and livelihood with links to the sea, designing and building products he calls "indigenous," as they're made of resin along with sand, shells and other ocean materials. But not too many days go by without the surfboard coming out. So has that natural born gift of effortlessly standing up and riding a wave changed for Joe Twombly? "Well, I don't compete anymore," he says thoughtfully, "and I respect that there's a pecking order now. So when I go out these days, I try to find a pack of eight-year-olds and start kicking ass! Then I take their lunches away from them," You know just to keep up my strength."



*EDITORS NOTE: Joe has also been integral in the effort to add a surfing license plate to the many vanity tags available in the State of Florida. The money raised from the sale of these surfing license tags will be earmarked for the East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame.*