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FIRST
HANDTHE FUNCTIONAL
ART OF PAIPO GLIDE

Andy Bick's paipos are all about tube time, style and staying power.

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Cornish-Hawaiian hybrid bodyboards. Mark Sankey feels the Paipo Glide.

Some surfers follow the crowd, some question the way they ride waves and the equipment they use. Andy Bick is a questioner.

Unhappy with modern boards and the consumerism embedded in contemporary surfing, Andy set about making his own particular style of bodyboard, a more environmentally friendly, long-lasting board that better reflects and respects surfing's Hawaiian history. Andy, who's based in Cornwall though he grew up on the Pacific island of Vanuatu, came up with his own take on the ancient *paipo*, a bodyboard widely used in Polynesia in the past. He calls them his Paipo Glides and they incorporate a mix of

modern shortboard and bodyboard design, fused with the ancient Hawaiian paipo style.

Some historians say paipos were the first surfboards. They were usually 3'-5' long and made from the same woods – Koa, often – and using the same techniques as the *alaia* and other original Hawaiian surfboards. Later the paipo – which means “to surf the waves headfirst” – played a big part in the re-birth of Hawaiian surfing and many of the great Hawaiians of modern times cut their teeth on paipo boards – people like Rabbit Kekai and then Reno Abellira, Larry Bertleman and Buttons Kaluhiokalani whose radical, surfing had its roots in paipos. Still today in Hawaii and around the world, there's a cadre of paipo riders, most of whom claim they ride the fastest boards in the water.

Andy uses a hollow board-building technique developed in the 1920s by Hawaii transplant Tom Blake. First, a skeletal framework is constructed from wood. An outer skin of timber is then glued on. Extra wood is then layered up on the rails before the whole structure is shaped. Once he's happy with the rails, bottom contours and outline, Andy wraps it all in a layer of fibreglass and epoxy resin. Thereafter it

is finished in the usual way aside from the addition of vent plugs (it's hollow, don't forget) and a leash plug.

“My first board was just an experiment,” says Andy. “It was much too wide and thick, but it worked.” Since then he's honed his techniques. Surprisingly, he doesn't even use Hawaiian paipo templates. “Nowadays I start with rudimentary sketches but make changes as I build the board depending on what the wood does,” he says. “I don't want to replicate history, I just want to be influenced by it,” he explains.

Since that first board five years ago, Andy has developed his own blends of rocker, foil, rails and concaves to achieve the combination of drift and performance he's looking for in a prone position. According to Andy, normal foam bodyboards just don't compare. “These boards are really fast,” he says. “And personally, I just love the feel of a wood board – they're that much more in tune with the ocean, plus they look good.”

As an artist, Andy wants his boards to be more than just functional. He wants to make functional art, and he wants it to last. “In ancient Hawaii a surfboard was cherished, unlike today when boards have no longevity. Pro surfers can go through 30 or 40 boards a year. With the durability and longevity of wooden boards, I'd like to think of my boards being ridden for generations,” says Andy.

In the future, he hopes to be producing boards made only from natural products. For now, he makes his own wooden leash and vent plugs out of recycled timber and wine-bottle corks and he's embracing neighbouring Homeblown's evolving bio foam and resin. “It's important to source materials as locally as possible, so with Homeblown just down the road it would be stupid for me not to use bio-foam,” Andy explained. He has a steady flow of orders but the cost of these boards and their uniqueness will always limit demand,” says Andy. “But these are boards which I just have to make,” concludes Andy. “The stoke from this is incredible.”

For more information go to www.paipoglide.com