

The poster that changed Orange County

By: Tom Berg



Artist John Van Hamersveld created one of the most iconic movie posters of all time -- The Endless Summer at The Surf Gallery during the last day of his showing in Laguna Beach.
KEN STEINHARDT, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Back then, no one knew.

No one even suspected how huge this would be.

So in November 1963, they made a little deal. In a Dana Point cafe. And it changed the face of Orange County.

One of the young men was a local filmmaker's assistant; the other an art student.

Can you make us a poster? Sure.

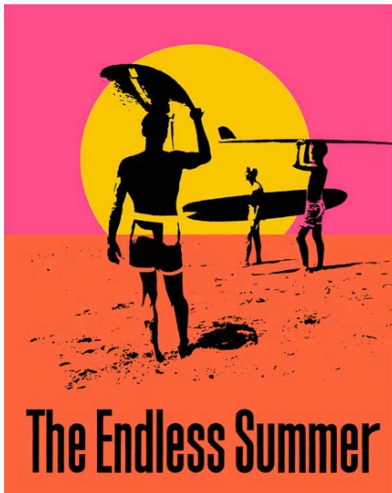
The price was \$150. Good money for a struggling student.

So John Van Hamersveld agreed to make a little poster for a little movie called "The Endless Summer."

"It was a, 'Hey-could-you-do-this?' thing," says Van Hamersveld, 67, of Santa Monica. "I had designed his business card and he liked it,"

Van Hamersveld had seen other posters around Dana Point for other movies made by Bruce Brown. They were low-budget surf movies; made with friends; and shown in high school gyms. No big deal.

That winter Van Hamersveld made his poster. And forgot about it. Until two years later when his classmates at Chouinard Art Institute in L.A. huddled around him:



Did you see it?

What?

Your poster's in The New York Times!

Van Hamersveld had no idea the movie was about to premiere in New York City. Was perched to become the biggest surf movie of all time. Or that his poster would become one of the most iconic images of the 1960s.

But today, as he celebrates his 50th year as an artist - still working 16-hour days, seven days a week - it's clear he found a way to live his own Endless Summer of youth.

GUYS AT THE END OF THE STREET

Van Hamersveld was a surfer before he was an artist.

At age 10, his family moved from Maryland to Palos Verdes. Outside his door were some of the sweetest waves in the country.

By age 15, he was riding up and down the coast with older surfers. Sleeping on beaches. Smoking. Surfing with the likes of Miki Dora, Lance Carson and Phil Becker - captains of their day.

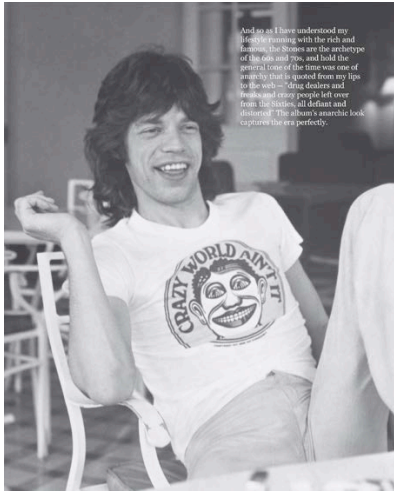
"The language of the 1950s would fall out of the mouths of the surf guys at the end of my street," he says. "My parents provided what they wanted, but down at the end of the street I learned everything my parents wouldn't tell me. What was sex? What was exciting? What was adrenaline like?"

High school was another story. His math and English grades plummeted. His parents discovered he had dyslexia (a learning disability) and his principal agreed to a novel approach: give him two art classes a day.

It was the equivalent of a miracle drug.

"I choke up a little," Van Hamersveld says, recalling his El Segundo High School art teacher, Al Tahti, who gave him the freedom to explore art. "I think he's the whole reason."

Tahti, 81, of Lincoln, insists, "I just opened the drawers and gave him paint, brushes and canvas. He started cranking out great paintings."



Van Hamersveld's mother, herself a painter, encouraged him - taking him to museums and sharing her art studio. And so all the elements of an artist began swirling inside this young surfer nicknamed *The Hammer*: A rebellious spirit. Confidence. An outsider's perspective.

"I felt part of the ocean mythology - a mystery man far from the world these high school kids knew," he says.

His world was about to intersect with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Andy Warhol. He was about to create some of the most memorable surf art, rock posters and album covers of all time.

Who knew that it hinged on a \$150 deal over lunch?

THE NEW IMAGE OF EDEN

The world's most famous surf poster began as a photograph - shot at Salt Creek Beach in Dana Point.

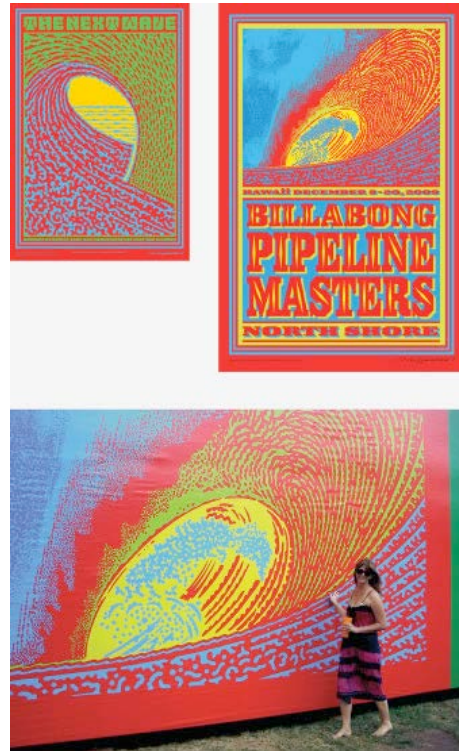
Van Hamersveld arranged the shoot in January 1964, after filmmaker Brown showed him the film's opening scene on an old Moviola editing machine.

"On this little, tiny screen, there he is with the board on top of his head," Van Hamersveld says. "I said, 'I can take that and do a poster.'"

He positioned Bruce Brown in the foreground, surfboard on head. Between him and the setting sun stand the film's two stars: Mike Hynson and Robert August.

Van Hamersveld had learned a new technique at the Art Center School of Design in Pasadena where he took night classes. He'd experimented with it as art director for Surfer magazine.

He turned a photo into an abstract design by reducing each color to a single tone and giving each image a single, hard edge. He did this at his kitchen table in Dana Point, slicing the photo to bring its three surfers closer together; buying Day-Glo paint for the silk-screening (in someone else's garage); and hand-lettering the words "The Endless Summer" at the bottom.



"He quantified the entire surf culture in that one image," says Dave Tourjé, a colleague and director of the Chouinard School of Art in L.A. "The movie's great but I believe the image is more powerful and more enduring than the movie itself."

Two images have defined Orange County over the last century: One is the orange-crate art of the late 1800s that beckoned folks west to a rural Eden of fruit groves and bean fields. As that Eden gave way to modern subdivisions after World War II, no single image reflected the *new* Orange County.

Until The Endless Summer.

Suddenly bands like the Beatles and Beach Boys, films like The Endless Summer and even our then-new President, John F. Kennedy, signaled change. Eden no longer meant toiling in fields. It meant youth and leisure - the good life. It was embodied in The Endless Summer's plot: carefree young men, in the prime of their lives, traveling the world in search of a summer that never ends.



And it was captured in one Day-Glo image that hung in snowbound Minnesota dorm rooms, in hip New York City flats and sweaty Army tents in the jungles of Vietnam. The image became a symbol of eternal youth.

And so would the man who created it for a \$150.

***Tomorrow:** John Van Hamersveld bounces from the Beatles to the Rolling Stones to Fatburger and then goes digital to reinvent himself in a new century.*