

< Surfing Goes Underground >

The revolution was diverted almost as soon as it began. Surfing's radical fringe found itself increasingly isolated in the post-psychedelic '70s, as vested interests in the sport regrouped, retooled, and restyled to capitalize on an activity that fed the most exciting and charismatic subcultures on the planet. Surf culture began to look like potential big business, and the capitalists began to move in. As Phil Dexter, visionary president of Big Surf, Inc., who built the first man-made wave machine in the desert of Arizona (1969), would say, "Who needs an ocean?"

Perhaps as an indicator for the species, perhaps simply as misanthrope, Mickey Dora loathed surfing contests and the fascist control they exercised over the surfers, beaches, and waves. He characterized contest judges as "senile surf freaks." At the World Contest in Puerto Rico in 1968, the panel of judges ignored the new aesthetic of free and radical expression and delivered a verdict based on classic old-school criteria: Hawaii's Fred Hemmings Jr., a former Makaha champ, rode the biggest waves for the longest distances to win a hairsbreadth decision over Midget Farrelly. In the midst of it all, diminutive Dick Brewer—protege Reno Abellira administered a future-shock speed-surfing performance but wiped out several times. The failure of the new school of surfing to win recognition in Puerto Rico dovetailed with a generational rejection of authority and a growing apathy towards competition.