

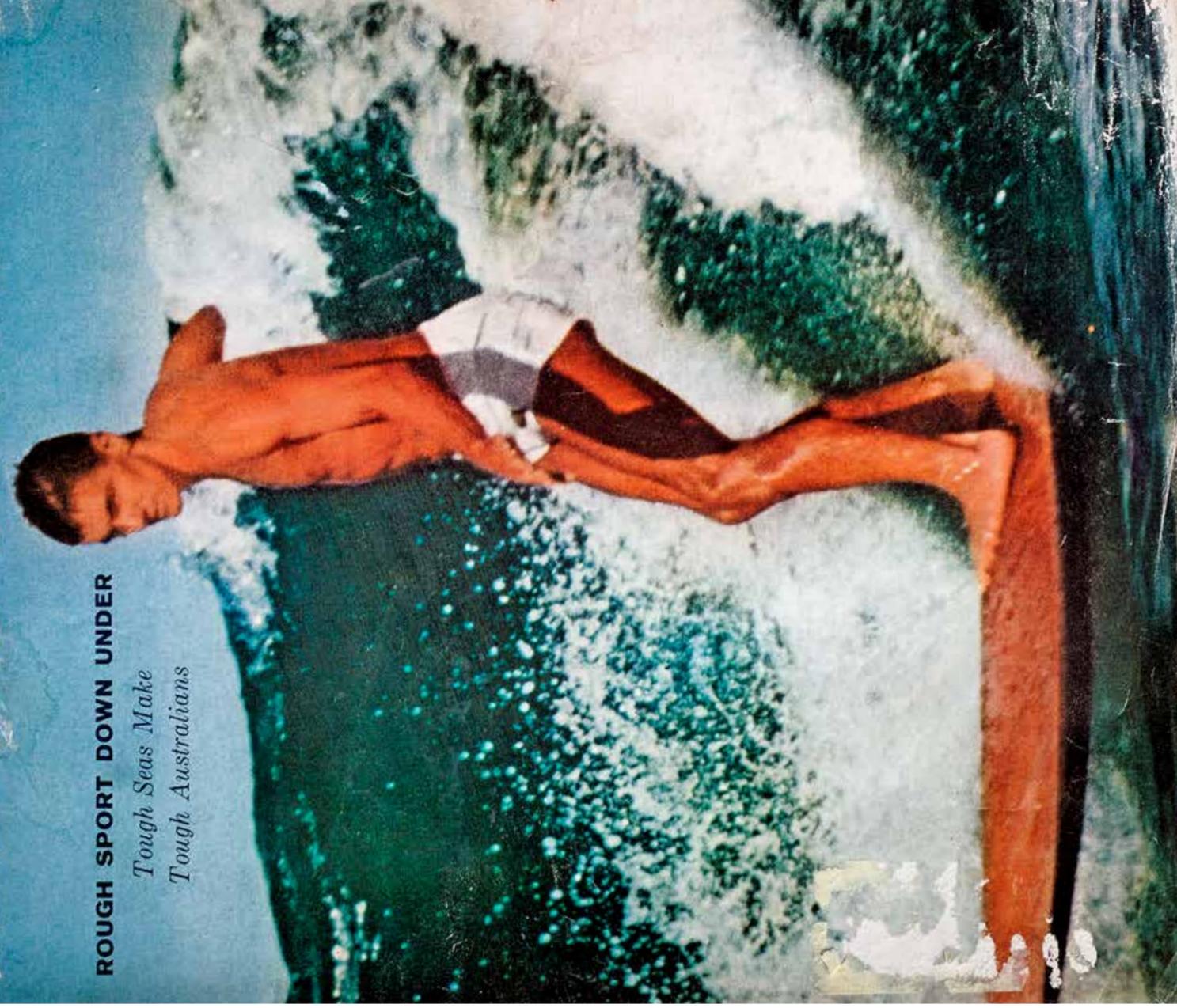
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

MARCH 10, 1958
America's National Sports Weekly

25 CENTS
\$7.50 A YEAR

ROUGH SPORT DOWN UNDER

*Tough Seas Make
Tough Australians*



I've gotten to meet every famous athlete, swimsuit model, US President who has ever graced the cover over 30 years of collecting... stated the email from Scott Smith, New Jersey, that landed on my screen in May this year.

Scott collects magazines, has over 13, 000 signed copies of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. He started his collection in 1982.

I know what he wants.

It's up the road in Avalon.

However let's go back to winter 2005, when I got an unexpected phone call from Ross Renwick, up the road in Avalon. Ross wanted to collaborate on a photography book on the *Angophora Costata* tree. This was my introduction to a large, faded print of a magazine cover, framed quietly on the living room wall.

Each visit I was drawn to the cover and its story. And for 28 years Scott Smith of New Jersey had been trying to figure out how to identify the Australian surfer on the same cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine from March 10 1956, with a cover price 25 cents.

Let's go further back. Forty nine years earlier, American Photographer George Levins was in Australia to photograph the surfing and SLSA culture. He asked around who he should shoot for the boardriding.

Renwick's name came up.

Ross told me. "Levins had the first underwater camera made of wood with rubber gloves inside, it seemed well-made, but Levins didn't swim well".

Levins asked Ross to "Go straight towards me and turn" - which Ross did about 20 times, on a reasonably average day at Biggola Beach. As Ross remembered: "Biggola was crap surf but it was the beach in the fifties. Biggola was the beach for girls."

Ross didn't know how, or where, the photo would be used. Luckily the Australian Rugby Union team toured America later that year, and a few who knew him brought back a copy of the magazine. Otherwise he never would have known.

Renwick started surfing the Bower in 1954, using a sixteen footer, 21" wide. "Jacking off way behind surge rock, if you didn't get past surge rock you were in ghostly trouble and many times it happened, they were terribly fast and a big crowd was only five people.

"Six or seven of us guys from Sydney's North Shore rented a one-bedroom house on the hill overlooking Newport and we lived there at weekends.

"In 1957 there was a surf carnival at Avalon the yanks were there on balsa. I had a sixteen foot board, some had eighteen foot boards. I was in Avalon Surf Club and



THE MAGAZINE COVER

BY BRUCE USHER

had dislocated my shoulder and wasn't competing. My arm was strapped, and the doctor said I would never surf again! I took my bandage off and they gave me Greg Noll's balsa board and I went and surfed, it was head high and really easy."

Renwick went to Hawaii about 10 times. "Maybe more. Sunset was fabulous, fantastic, I surfed Makaha several times, first in 1958. It was a big slingshot of a wave, beautiful. Fortunately I never had it at 25 foot. I got it at 15 foot and it was pretty scary.

"I normally stayed on the North Shore with Greg Noll and kept in touch with him for a long time by correspondence. My last year was '63, '64!! I was ruined physically by then, my shoulders!

On July 27 2012 a parcel of 30 Ross Renwick, *Sports Illustrated* covers arrived back in New Jersey signed for Scott Smith and other US collectors. Renwick was one of only a handful of surfers - including Phil Edwards and Kelly Slater - to grace the *Sports Illustrated* cover.

Eleven days later Renwick's daughter phoned and said that Ross was home in palliative care. I visited Ross one last time, lying peacefully in bed overlooking the North Avalon "Hole in the wall" cliffs and rock platform, with his cat by his side.

Editor's note: Ross was co-founder of Sydney design firm Billy Blue Creative. For three decades Billy Blue was one of Australia's most influential design companies, respected especially for creative originality. Ross was voted by AdNews magazine as one of 12 legends of Australian design. Ross and business partner Aaron Kaplan also established the very successful Billy Blue College of Design.