

The BEACH BREAK

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News

Hot Tunes and Black Coffee

By Judd Handler



If you live in Encinitas and drink coffee, chances are you've gotten a good buzz at Java Hut, a surf-friendly caffeine and smoothie oasis located on the 101 across from Swami's Café. It's the antithesis of corporate coffee culture. The anti-Starbucks.

Weekday mornings a Java Hut employee stands curbside on the 101 waving to all the commuters who drive by, tempting them with a friendly smile and promise of a percolating cup of bliss.

Java Hut patrons can also buy surf wax at the cheapest price in town: 48 cents. What most people don't know about Java Hut is that the owner also runs a record label from an office in the coffee shop's backyard.

Dave Kaplan started Surfdog Records about 15 years ago. A former three-piece-suit-wearing C.P.A., Kaplan lived and surfed for a decade in L.A., managing the books of a merchandising company.

Kaplan, 46, used to play guitar in a band called Mayhem and eventually got into artist management, forging his business skills with his love of music. He has managed or currently manages UB40, former Metallica bassist Jason Newsted, Brian Setzer and Freddie Mercury.

Kaplan, who moved to Encinitas in

the early '90s, has built Surfdog into San Diego's most commercially successful label with a roster that includes the Brian Setzer Orchestra, the Stray Cats, the Butthole Surfers, and Pato Banton.

But Kaplan does a lot more for our community than sell records and killer coffee. He's been instrumental in promoting environmental awareness. Surfdog's slogan isn't "Music for the Masses" instead, Kaplan chose to adorn Surfdog merchandise with the phrase, "Please Help Preserve our Oceans."

"I could be doing so much more than I am for the environment," said Kaplan in his office that looks more like a Fijian surf holiday shack than a record label.

In addition to promoting ocean awareness, Surfdog has thus far released three compilations entitled "Music for Our Mother Earth." Proceeds benefit Surfrider Foundation. Beck, Paul McCartney, No Doubt, the Beastie Boys and Pearl Jam are some of the acts that donated their time and music for Surfrider's benefit.

"I feel so blessed to live in Encinitas and work with so many amazing people," said Kaplan who hired Pierce Flynn, the former executive director of the Surfrider Foundation. (Flynn was the executive producer of the three M.O.M. compilations and also directs Surfdog Entertainment, which serves as a corporate consulting firm specializing in action sports.)

Kaplan also does his part for environmental awareness by creating fun demonstrations at Rancho Santa Fe School, where his two children attend.

"When I get the children excited

about creating solutions to cleaning up the oceans, it's a bigger rush than selling records," said Kaplan, who uses music to create "stormdrain soufflé," which demonstrate to kids various run off ingredients that end up in the storm drains and ultimately, the ocean.

"I'd like to see the program expand into other schools," said Kaplan, who also has established Java Hut as a drop-off water sampling station for Surfrider.

Kaplan first moved to San Diego in 1981, leaving his childhood home of Phoenix where. Believe it or not, he surfed. There's no ocean in Phoenix, but there was a Big Surf Wave Pool where Kaplan hung out with a rat-pack surf crew. Some have moved to San Diego and go on surf excursions with Kaplan in the South Pacific.

Kaplan considers himself lucky and blessed even though music downloading is a viable threat to the existence of his business.

"I'm not militant against downloading," said Kaplan, "but because of it, half of the potential revenue is cut off. We've signed fewer bands and hired fewer people."

Illegal music downloading hasn't caused Kaplan to be a penny pincher. Surf wax is still 48 cents and always will be. "I buy the wax for more than I sell it," he said, "and you know what, in the year 2020, it will still cost 48 cents."

Above: Dave Kaplan. Center: Pierce Flynn. Bottom: The Kaplans: Mark, Dave, Suzie, and Jaime. Photos: Judd Handler (except Kaplan family portrait).

