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Norththing Instinct

BY PETER INTERLAND ■ PHOTOS BY SETH STAFFORD

“They call it the Norththing instinct, as in north latitudes,” says the man from Maine. His tanned face, salt-and-pepper hair, and tough, leathery hands inform you that he is a man who has weathered his fair share of storms. His entire being—his air, his poise—seem maritime by design. The look in his blue-gray eyes simultaneously reveals his keen sense of humor and a sharp intellect. You don’t need to be told that he is a captain: you just know it. Following in the wake of his Norwegian ancestors, John “Jeb” Stuart is a modern-day Viking.

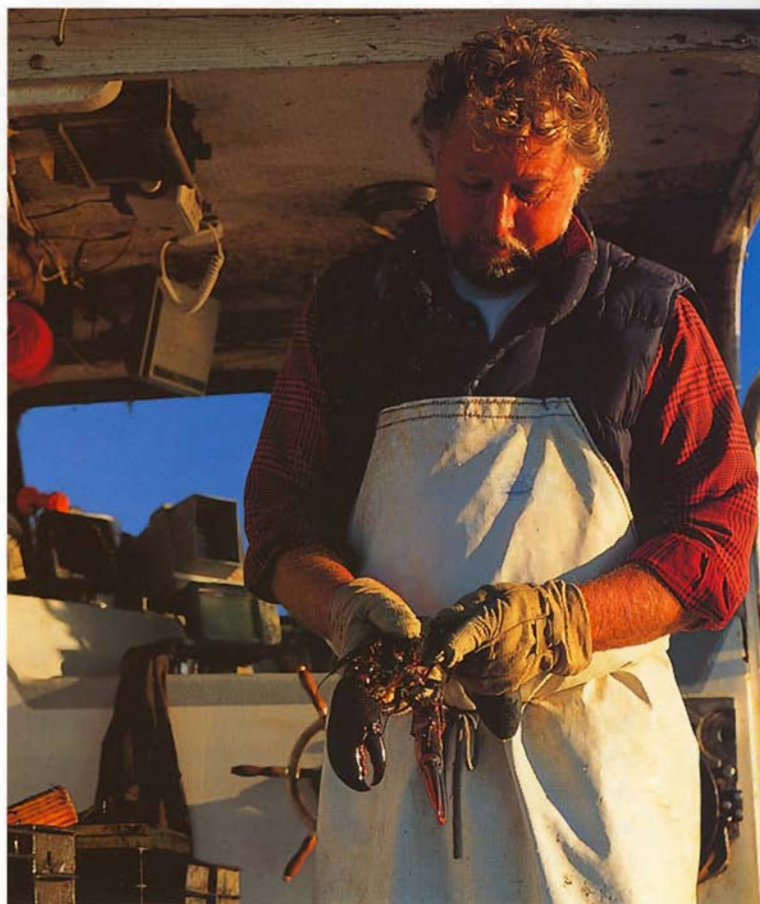
“I picked up the concept in a book I read by Peter Matthiessen. Basically, he said that the initial inclination of a human or animal population would prefer to be in a warmer, temperate, comfortable climate, as long as there’s enough food and basics to sustain us. But, as those areas become more densely populated, fractions of the population will move out to the edge to have a little bit more food, more space; put a little distance between themselves and the masses. You can’t go south—so you have to go north to get away; go north to find those places that are undiscovered. Blue fin tuna do it. They’ll move all the way up to Prince Edward Island in Nova Scotia. By nature, we would much rather surf in Montauk or Sebastian in trunks or shorties than surf in 4/3 wetsuits. But, when you have to deal with 200 people at the Inlet or at First Point or you can surf reef breaks with a handful of people, you go north. It’s been happening for multitudes of generations. Indians have done it. European settlers did it. Surfers are doing it. Fish do it. I did it.”

Latitude 40.92N

Born in Ridgewood, New Jersey in 1951, Stuart and his dad, Jack, a former paratrooper in the 101st Airborne, and his mother, Margaret, a Depression era Norwegian immigrant moved to the distinctly blue-collar burbs of Nassau County, Long Island. His father was an avid recreational fisherman who sold advertising for the New York Daily News. His mom was a secretary, a school bus driver, and a decent fisherman in her own right.

“Every year for my August birthday treat, my mother or father would take me out on a party boat and we’d go deep sea fishing. The fishing began for me when I was about five or six. My dad was pretty good at it and I learned a lot of tricks from him. I got a good feel for how to catch fish by myself.

The first time I saw the ocean, I knew I liked what I saw. I liked the energy of it, the dynamics, and the fact that it was moving. Its currents, its waves, its winds. Fishing was in my life



Jeb (opposite) finds a moment to himself at the local beachbreak between sessions on the *St. Peter* (above).

before surfing, but over the course of my life they’ve both had a sort of a yin and yang effect on me, each one at different times having more power than the other.

There’s a strong current of saltwater in my family, that’s for sure. I’m the third generation of sea captains in my family, all on my mom’s Norwegian side. My grandfather worked on the tugboats, my uncle, Einer Andresen, was a sea captain. I remember going on his ship as if it was yesterday. I was eight years old. He was captain of a Norwegian American lines freighter docked in Brooklyn. My mother dressed us up in our Sunday best to go see him. We came down the pier and there