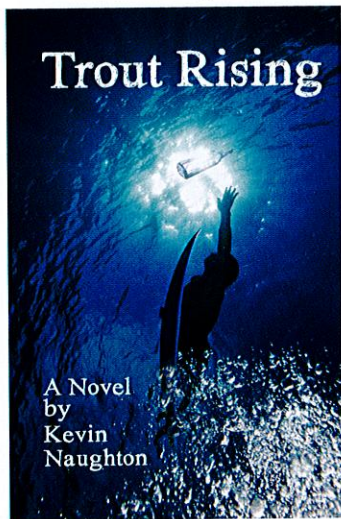


## Ticket to Ride

In terms of physical performance, surfing is arguably a young man's sport; yet, for the legions of devotees too creaky to punt a fakie stalefish but still coming back year after year, swell after swell, the pull of wave-riding offers subtler pleasures that go well beyond gonzo ripping. Lifelong friendships, road adventures, camaraderie, a deep appreciation of nature and the sea, a sliver of sanity in an insane world—it's all there, too. In his first novel, *Trout Rising*, surf-travel luminary Kevin Naughton has wrought a youth's coming-of-age odyssey that straddles both perspectives, astutely blending the hard-core shredder ethic with the philosophical ponderings of the dedicated surfer lifer.



In the surf hierarchy, Skip Trout is a bottom dweller, an avid kook marooned way inland in Chino, California, a two-hour bus ride from his spot of choice, the fabled Huntington Pier. Undaunted, the young teen's stoke is palpable—a good thing when dodging carloads of neighborhood low-riders and enduring the endless taunts and mean-spirited pranks of HB locals. When at last he hits the water, it seems apropos that the hard-luck Trout nearly drowns, but then something truly magical happens: A genie appears—a surfing genie named Jazzwell, descended from a Hawaiian king; and, yeah, the good kind of genie: the *wish-granting* kind.

In the hands of a less-talented writer, a grom-meets-genie tale might have produced cringe-inducing results, but Naughton infuses the story with so much action, energy, and creativity that the reader is instantly sucked into Trout's new world, which he enters like following Alice straight down a watery rabbit hole. And what a new world it is, a place

where Trout can time-travel, unseen, to fulfill his first wish: to surf to his highest capability. He's not alone; in this alternate dimension, Trout surfs with a crew of *menehunes*, a clan of young surfers whose one shared attribute is that in past lives they died in the water. Among them is Dane, an alpha male challenged by Trout's very presence, and Dane's girl, the beautiful Nuvulani, whom Trout naturally falls for in a big way. The early going is drenched in world-class dream sessions, but rather than continuing to surf like a madman, Trout soon recognizes the raw pursuit of pleasure for the dead-end trap it is and wisely likens the *menehunes'* secret realm to a form of limbo. Yearning for more, he begins to seek answers to bigger questions as to where he stands in this new place—and in his own life—and whether he can pull off an escape back to the real world with the girl he loves in tow.

To call *Trout Rising* young-adult fiction would be accurate, if a tad backhanded, for Naughton has crafted a tale told in the unwaveringly pitch-perfect voice of a boy hero that manages to deliver page-turning surfing thrills for teen readers amid a metaphysical foray into the meaning of life ambitious enough to satisfy grown-ups. This is a book crammed with ideas, and through his adventures Trout contends with a plethora of physical and psychological riddles, a dominant metaphor involving life as a labyrinth, ancient Hawaiian lore, a mythic surf guru's teachings, Celtic mythology, and Christian and Buddhist philosophy. The story also abounds with references to great minds—poets and prophets like Blake, Coleridge, Eliot, and Orpheus—and further draws from the symbology embodied in stories, books, and films deeply ingrained in our societal consciousness, including *Aladdin*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Wizard of Oz*.

So, yes, for a hyper-stoked grom this kid has got a lot on his mind, and at times the book's weighty underpinnings tend to divert the narrative, as when Jazzwell's mythic Hawaiian back-story is magically plopped into Trout's head so it can be described, word for word, over the course of the next five pages. But, overall, Naughton incorporates his influences into his young hero's quest with a gentle touch. One standout moment comes when Trout, having just survived an arduous test, gets to surf on a day of dreams, yet senses that without the hard work that preceded his epic session, he wouldn't be enjoying himself nearly as much. "If every day is a holiday," he reflects, "[then] there are no more holidays."

That's right—an awkward teen blessed with as much perfection surf

as he can stand maturely reflecting, nonetheless, on the concept of delayed gratification. Genies aside, it's this kind of clearheaded depth of insight that represents the novel's true magic.

—JOHN DECURE

## SURFCRAFT

### Comb Over

Spirare Surfboards shaper and Rhode Island School of Design architecture grad Kevin Cunningham crafts boards that fit just as well into the pit as they do on a gallery wall in NYC.

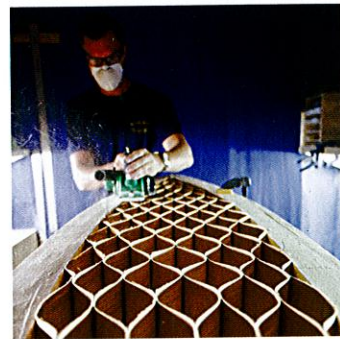
Cunningham grew up in Baltimore, MD, falling in love with the art of surfing while summering in the shorebreaks of Ocean City. He learned the basics of power and hand tools while attending high school at Calvert Hall and refined his technique at RISD. Knowing it would be cheaper to make boards, Kevin took it upon himself to learn the trade. "The first board I shaped was in 2002. It was a 7'6" for the girl I was dating at the time. It turned out all right for a first attempt. It surfed pretty well too. I did a full photo printed on silk inlay on the bottom."

Kevin began working with wood in 2004 while developing his lightweight performance boards. He wanted to get away from using environmentally damaging PU foam so he decided to design a board that was sustainable. "When Clark Foam closed in December of 2005, I put that idea into high gear," Kevin says. "I was working with honeycomb structures for an architecture studio at RISD, and I thought this could work for a surfboard. The idea took five years and lots of money to develop and refine, many boards that did not work for one reason or another. All those mistakes turned out to be fortunate because each time I learned a new way not to make a surfboard."

Building a Honeycomb board is no easy task. In his shop, Kevin fabricates the core of the board by weaving together thin bamboo veneers. He then sets the core into a balsa wood frame, which he



But do they work? From RISD to Rifles, Cunningham's designs are being put through the paces.



The wisdom of bees has been tapped before, but recycled materials take these boards to a brand new place.

also makes from scratch. From there it's almost business as usual adding bottom contours, rail shapes, and rockers just as you would on a conventional blank. The board is then wrapped, top and bottom, in a *paulownia* wood skin before glassing. The whole process takes about 30 hours but is well worth the effort. "Bamboo has one of the highest strength-to-weight ratios of any wood," Cunningham says. "Pound for pound it's stronger than steel. My wood boards can last ten times as long as a conventional board with no reduction in performance over time."

The differences in reactivity between wood and foam are astonishing. Foam has no memory. When it flexes, it remains in that position. A wood stringer can help a foam board retain some flex, but if the board is all wood, the harder you push it, the harder it pushes back.

Spirare Surfboards is capturing the attention of key characters, including two-time world champ Tom Carroll. "My 5'5" Spirare fish thrives on an open-faced wave," says Tom. "She pretty much kicks into gear when wind and bump sends most light/medium weight PU [boards] whimpering to a halt. Felt the benefits immediately on my first go out at Kammiland in gusty trades... the chambered timber construction ate it up!"

When Woodshed Production caught wind that Kevin had been collecting garbage from local beaches and infusing the waste into his boards

—both for practical and artistic purposes—they featured him in a documentary on green design. He has received grants from the Rhode Island Council on the Arts for his work on green sustainable surf craft in 2008 and again in 2010. His boards have been featured in New England at the