

Beach:
MODERN LUXURY



Curl Power

By Micah Abrams | Photos: Morgan Maassen | BEACH MAGAZINE - July 16-29, 2014



Award-winning photographer and filmmaker Morgan Maassen captures Quincy Davis attacking a wave.

“I had to leave Montauk two days ago, and it was one of the hardest times for me,” says Quincy Davis, who’s no stranger to leaving her hometown. “I just wasn’t ready.”

The 19-year-old surfer is on the phone from San Clemente, Calif., where she's been preparing for an upcoming competition in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. San Clemente is home to a surf break called Trestles, which is the closest thing this country has to surfing in the Olympic Training Center. Halfway between San Diego and Los Angeles, it's a subtle bulge in the coastline that focuses Pacific Ocean swells into fast, perfectly shaped waves demanding aggressive turns and radical maneuvers. Any given day at Trestles, there's a lineup packed with the biggest names in the sport. It's just the place for Davis to work on her technique and strategy—the Los Cabos Open of Surf won't be so crowded, but it'll be every bit as competitive.

This isn't even the halfway point of Davis' yearlong pursuit of a berth on the World Championship Tour, the apex of surfing's competition circuit. The sport's ranking system is a little like tennis or ski racing, with points accumulated at events all over the world. It requires a healthy tolerance for jet lag and serious sponsor support to even get started—just this year, Davis spent much of February in Australia and a chunk of April in New Zealand. The results have been middling, she admits: “Nothing outstanding, but I'm OK with it. I made a few rounds in Australia, and it's all learning.”

Even without a big result, Davis sits at No. 33 in the World Qualifying Series ranking, which means she can make one pretty significant claim: She's the highest-ranked female surfer in Montauk history. But the only part of that title that's on her mind right now is Montauk itself.



“I've been traveling so much,” she says with a hint of homesickness in her voice. “It's such a special place in the summertime.”

Montauk is 3,000 miles away from Trestles, but the vibe—both in and out of the water—makes the once-sleepy fishing town at the far end of Long Island feel like another world altogether. It's plenty crowded—Montauk's been a popular summer getaway for generations of New Yorkers—but in the past 10 years it's become more of a surf culture enclave than a budget-friendly alternative to the Hamptons' pricier towns. Still, surfing at Trestles is to surfing in Montauk what working on Wall Street is to working in, say, Bushwick, Brooklyn. The former is ruthless, organized and competitive; the latter... not so much.

The geographic heart of the town's surf scene is Ditch Plains, a beach not quite 3 miles east of downtown. The waves here roll with a gentle slope that encourages groovy communion with the ocean—which is a pretty good way to describe the scene on the sand too. On any given summer weekend, Ditch is an amalgam of old-school locals, second- and third-generation grommets just getting their sea legs, and a certain salt-encrusted contingent from New York City's Creative Class—here's Liev Schreiber and Naomi Watts, there's Julian Schnabel.

One person you won't likely spot at Ditch, though? Quincy Davis.

“I try to stay away in the summertime,” she admits. “It's too hectic for me. I sneak off to other waves people don't know about, which aren't as crowded.”

If that sounds like circumspection on her part, that's because it is. The unspecified “other waves” Davis frequents aren't that far from Ditch Plains, but any nonlocal surfer who's gone hunting for them can confirm they're almost impossible to find. That's due in part to the way Montauk has developed: Between the huge bluffs that buttress much of the coastline and the vast private estates that dot them, access simply isn't available to most people.

It's also due to a vigorous code of silence Davis has learned from those who've come before her. This is the surf scene behind the surf scene, and compared to Ditch Plains, it's a different animal altogether.

"The older generation, they had that 'localism' feel to them. They were pretty protective," Davis says. She knows of what she speaks—her father, Paul, was one of that generation's best surfers, helping to establish a raw, aggressive style that still today is as much a reaction to mellow Ditch Plains as it is a necessity for performing in the inhospitable conditions that strafe this coast two-thirds of the year. There's nothing mellow about surfing in a snowstorm, but it's the nasty weather that often brings Montauk the best surf.

This is the style of surfing at which Davis excels, learning as she did from her dad and her older brother, Tyler, as well as Leif Engstrom, who's on any short list of the best surfers Montauk has ever produced. It's aggressive, focused on big carving turns that generate speed and power, which allows for explosive moves at the top of the wave and even above it. Engstrom, 26, used it to blaze a trail out of Montauk, making a name for himself competitively on the World Qualifying Series and in magazines and movies, which regularly featured him boosting huge airs.

"It's been cool watching her progress over the years," says Engstrom, who's known Davis most of her life. "Some surfers, when they're young, you can't tell how good they're going to be, but Quincy took off from day one. Girls are starting to do stronger turns and even airs, and she's right up there at the top."

Out at the surf breaks beyond Ditch Plains, there are plenty more where Engstrom came from—guys like Austin Eckardt and Tyler Maguire, who could easily hold their own on a packed day at Trestles. But it's Davis who just might end up putting Montauk's stamp on surfing's international competition circuit.

At the Los Cabos Open, Davis pulls a tough draw in her very first heat: World Tour surfer Pauline Ado, and Alize Arnaud, currently ranked 14th on the World Qualifying Series. For much of the heat she trails the two Frenchwomen before battling back in the final minutes. It's a good effort, but not good enough, and just like that her event is over. She flew all the way to Mexico and has little to show for it but a tan and some valuable experience.

This is how it goes for surfers chasing a World Tour berth, and Davis barely has time to worry about it. Next month is the biggest surf contest in North America: the Vans US Open of Surfing, in Huntington Beach, Calif. That's followed by another World Qualifying Series event near San Diego; then it's time for the WQS European leg in France and Spain.

Davis is less than two hours south of LAX, but she isn't going back to California just yet. First, she's flying home, where her family, and Engstrom, and all the surfers tearing up the waves out past Ditch Plains will welcome her back from Mexico like a champion, regardless of how she did.

"It's a little family out there, and they've always been so supportive," she says. "I have to go back—I can't not be in Montauk in the summer. It's the best place ever."

THE BREAKOUT STAR

A few of the talented Miss Davis' favorite spots

Favorite Hamptons meal?

Harvest, or the Clam and Chowder House, which is on the dock so you really get that Montauk feel.

Local accommodations?

The best way to go is to rent a house because there aren't too many hotels. The Montauk Beach House is in town, and that has nice rooms. Ruschmeyer's and The Surf Lodge are pretty trendy—that's a good word for them. They get really crowded, but they're different and that's cool.

Favorite shopping spot?

There's isn't too much in Montauk, but there's always Main Street in East Hampton. I like it out there, but it's *really* expensive.

See more at: <http://www.modernluxury.com/beach/story/curl-power#sthash.V8mNqavx.kEP7tRr6.dpuf>