

SUMMER 2009

ABOVE

MAGAZINE

Beauty Will Save the World

*The Energy of
Bobby Kennedy, Jr.*

*Stella McCartney
on Design & Ethics*

*Roberto Saviano on
Life After Gomorrah*

*David de Rothschild's
Anti-Plastic Pacific
Adventure*

*Jacques Cousteau's
Underwater House*

Deep Ecology

*Philippe Parreno's
Post-Apocalypse*

Sustainable Sushi

*The Missing Link
Between Fashion & Fish*

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HEAD
ABOVE
WATER

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Orchid by Ron Agan

It all started with the jellyfish - millions of them swamping the bay of Saint Tropez in June of last year.

I began to notice them as I was embarking to go visit American artist and photographer Peter Beard, in Cassis, near Marseilles. I had never seen so many. It looked like the omen of an approaching apocalypse, like one of the seven plagues of Egypt. The entire bay, from the harbor to the casklets of the peninsula, was dark and threatening, carpeted with jellyfish. Soon thereafter I learned that the disappearance from the Mediterranean of tuna, sharks and turtles - all species that feed on jellyfish - was, along with global warming, a case of this largely unprecedented, terrifying phenomenon.

Then it occurred to me how many fewer fish I had seen recently. While cruising the Mediterranean, it occurred to me that I wasn't seeing dolphins as often as I used to, whales even less frequently. Tuna and maulin were no longer jumping around the boat the way they used to during my often solitary crossings from one end of my beloved Mediterranean to the other. It seemed as though the marvelous sea, that of *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Greece, Italy, Egypt, France, Spain and Turkey; the mythical kingdom of Neptune - without which there would be no Capri, no Portofino, Saint Tropez, Villefranche, Monaco, Aeolian islands, Cyclades, Ionians, Naples, Genoa, Barcelona, Nice, Athens, Casares, Beirut, Alexandria, Balesares - that beautiful big blue sea, was dying before my very eyes. And that thought devastated me.

But at the same time, as we were smoothly cruising toward Cassis on the most placid, gentle, silver-colored waters I had seen in years, an idea came to me. I decided to turn the fashion magazine I had just acquired into a publication entirely dedicated to the beauty of the world and to the absolute, vital need to preserve it. A magazine devoted to the environment, but without the self-righteous, preachy clichés that are such easy, angle fodder for a "green" publication. It would all be about saving the beauty of the world through hard, factual reporting, of course, but also about art, fashion, architecture, travel, lifestyle and all the usual topics we enjoy reading about in magazines, but with a clear, unequivocal sustainable angle. Some might call it presumptuous, or even utopian.

Could such a magazine make a difference? After all, ecology and the environment are now the "in" things. Most corporations across economic sectors are coming up with "green" products. "Green" is on everyone's lips to the extent where one worries that it might prove just another fad, a new gimmick for turning the survival of our planet, which is undeniably at stake, into a huge business opportunity. Then again, to quote Andy Warhol, "so what?"

What if it works and makes things better for our planet? Doesn't the end justify the means? In this case, the end means survival for all.

Our goal is to become the destination publication for information and, hopefully, inspiration, about how to save beauty and preserve the environment on both collective and individual levels. Since I made that decision, many wonderful contributors have rallied to the project with admirable and heartwarming enthusiasm.

The encouragement and primary source of inspiration for creating this magazine came from the great Peter Beard. During my visit to Cassis last June, I told him about the jellyfish in Saint Tropez. He half-jokingly compared that occurrence to human overpopulation, which, if unchecked, would make the planet inhabitable. "That is what your magazine should be all about", Peter said when I told him of my project for a publication about the environment that would also include fashion. The concept somehow seemed so obvious that it instantly appealed to a host of remarkable contributors who joined forces with the handful of extraordinarily devoted individuals that helped me make this project a reality. I want to thank them all in my name and that of Above's team.

But upon reflection, the wheels were really set in motion over 35 years ago, when I first saw the 1975 science fiction movie *Soylent Green*, in which the irreplacable Edward G. Robinson, the sole surviving witness of our once (and still) magnificent planet, decides out of despair for what the world has become, to go end his life in a secret "termination center". As he lay on the table of death, with his only friend Charlton Heston watching in tears, magnificent images of a disappeared world pass before his old, desperate eyes on a giant panoramic screen, images of clean oceans, ponies galloping in green pastures, breeze-swept wheat fields, and multicolored flowers, by now all but gone and living only in his dying memory and as a digital reminder of what our destroyed world once was: a paradise lost.

Nicolas Rachline



Portrait by Sabine Van Waaarden

IN FULL BLOOM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
RON AGAM

The French-Israeli artist photographer Ron Agam became known for his intensely vivid yet deeply mysterious portraits of religious Jews in Meah Shearim, the nearly impenetrable ultra orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem. Agam also documented the first hours following the September 11 tragedy and published a powerful portfolio of the men and women from the New York fire and police departments who reached the apocalyptic scene in the immediate aftermath. This *In Full Bloom* portfolio, it seems to me, serves as a highly potent antidote to the horrors Agam witnessed at Ground Zero. "His" flowers, as he likes to call them, are the very essence of nature; beauty, purity, diversity and perhaps the last remnants of the Garden of Eden.

www.ronagam.com

Nicolas Rachline











