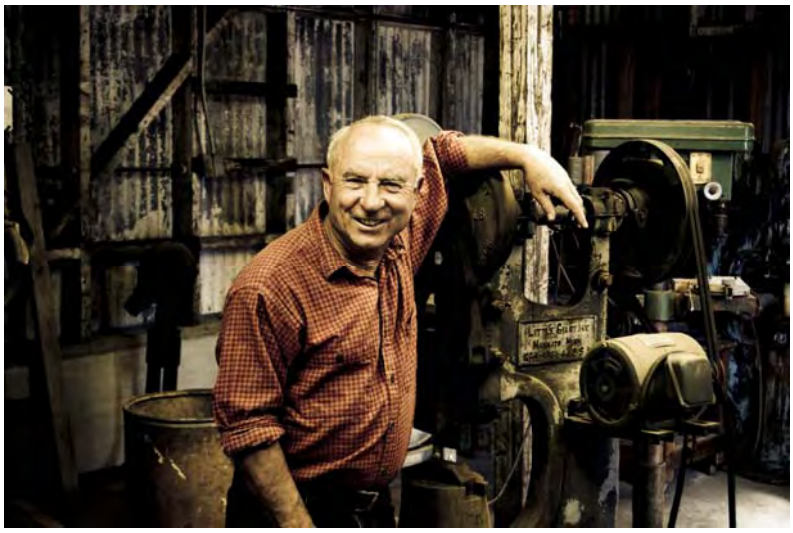
**Yvon Chouinard – Biography**



**Yvon Chouinard** is founder and owner of Patagonia, Inc., based in Ventura, California. He began in business by designing, manufacturing, and distributing rock climbing equipment in the late 1950's. His tinkering led to an improved ice axe that facilitated the French ice climbing technique and is the basis for modern ice axe design. In 1964 he produced his first mail order catalog, a one page mimeographed sheet containing advice not to expect fast delivery during climbing season. Business grew slowly until 1972 when Yvon added rugby shirts to his catalog and his clothing business took off.

In the late 1980's, Patagonia's success was such that Yvon considered early retirement. In some ways he would have preferred to disappear into the South Pacific with his fly rod and surfboard. However, he decided to continue directing Patagonia's course, in part to use the company to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis. As part of this goal, Patagonia instituted an Earth Tax, pledging 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of the natural environment. In 2001, Yvon, along with Craig Mathews, owner of West Yellowstone's Blue Ribbon Flies, started One Percent For The Planet, an alliance of businesses that contribute at least 1 percent of their net annual sales to groups on a list of researched and approved environmental organizations.

Yvon spends much of his time in the outdoors and serving on the boards of numerous environmental groups. "I work every day of my life. My job is to be the 'outside' man, studying lifestyles around the world, coming up with ideas for new products, new market trends, seeing that Patagonia stays relevant in a rapidly changing world."

**A bit of history:**

**California, 1957**: Yvon Chouinard, a young American from a French Canadian family decided to make his own climbing equipment as he couldn't find pitons he liked. With the help of a second-hand anvil, he forged pitons out of hard steel that were extremely strong and lightweight compared to the iron equipment on the market. He could make 2 pitons an hour and sold extras to his friends for $1.50.

These pitons, named "Lost Arrows" were soon in high demand because of their extreme durability. Chouinard started to sell them from the trunk of his 1940 Ford and then through a little brochure where the customer was warned not to expect deliveries during the climbing season!

By 1964, the pitons were such a success that Yvon Chouinard decided to form a partnership with an aeronautical engineering friend, Tom Frost, and started up industrial production. The company *Chouinard Equipment* was founded.

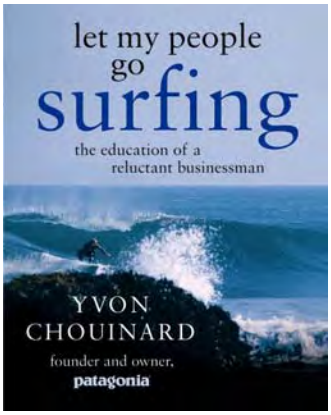
His credo for design was a quote from Antoine de St.Exupery. The French aviator wrote: "In anything at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away."

By 1970, *Chouinard Equipment* had become the largest supplier of climbing hardware in the U.S. but it had also become an environmental villain, as the repeated hammering of pitons – during both placement and removal- in fragile cracks, severely disfigured the rock. Yvon and Frost decided to phase out the piton business and propose to their customers an alternative to pitons: aluminum chocks. In 1972 they introduced "clean climbing". Today, this equipment is still on the front lines and distributed by the company *Black Diamond.*

Those were the days when Yvon Chouinard and his climbing partners opened new routes on big walls such as in the Yosemite Valley, California. Long and hard ascents, like the Nose on El Capitan, could last more than a week. During a climbing trip to in Scotland, Chouinard discovered tough and hardy rugby shirts and decided to import them. The first apparel collections consisted of these everlasting sturdy shirts and corduroy britches.

**In 1973, Patagonia was founded**. The name was chosen because it relates to the beautiful wilderness, glaciers and high peaks of the landscape in the very south of the American continent. Chouinard is convinced that clothing must be as efficient as climbing equipment: an alpinist on a bivouac needs to stay warm when it is cold and feel comfortable when it is warm. Patagonia clothes are designed for outdoor enthusiasts who take their sport to the extreme: climbers of the Himalayan peaks, backcountry skiers, surfers of big waves and more.

***Let My People Go Surfing***




In this book, Yvon Chouinard writes how he became a reluctant "business man". He relates the history of his company, his way to manage people (his MBA style, management by absence) and Patagonia's philosophy. Also published in French, German, Italian and Spanish.
Excellent presentation of his book when launched in the US. Yvon also explains his beginning in both climbing and business.


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVfy2T0rzMc

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# The Coolest Company On The Planet

The story of how **patagonia** founder Yvon Chouinard took his passion for the outdoors and turned it into an amazing business.

**BY SUSAN CASEY** (PAGE 62)

THE ONLY GREEN ISSUE THAT MATTERS (PAGE 42)

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"I would never be happy playing by the normal rules of business."
*—Yvon Chouinard*

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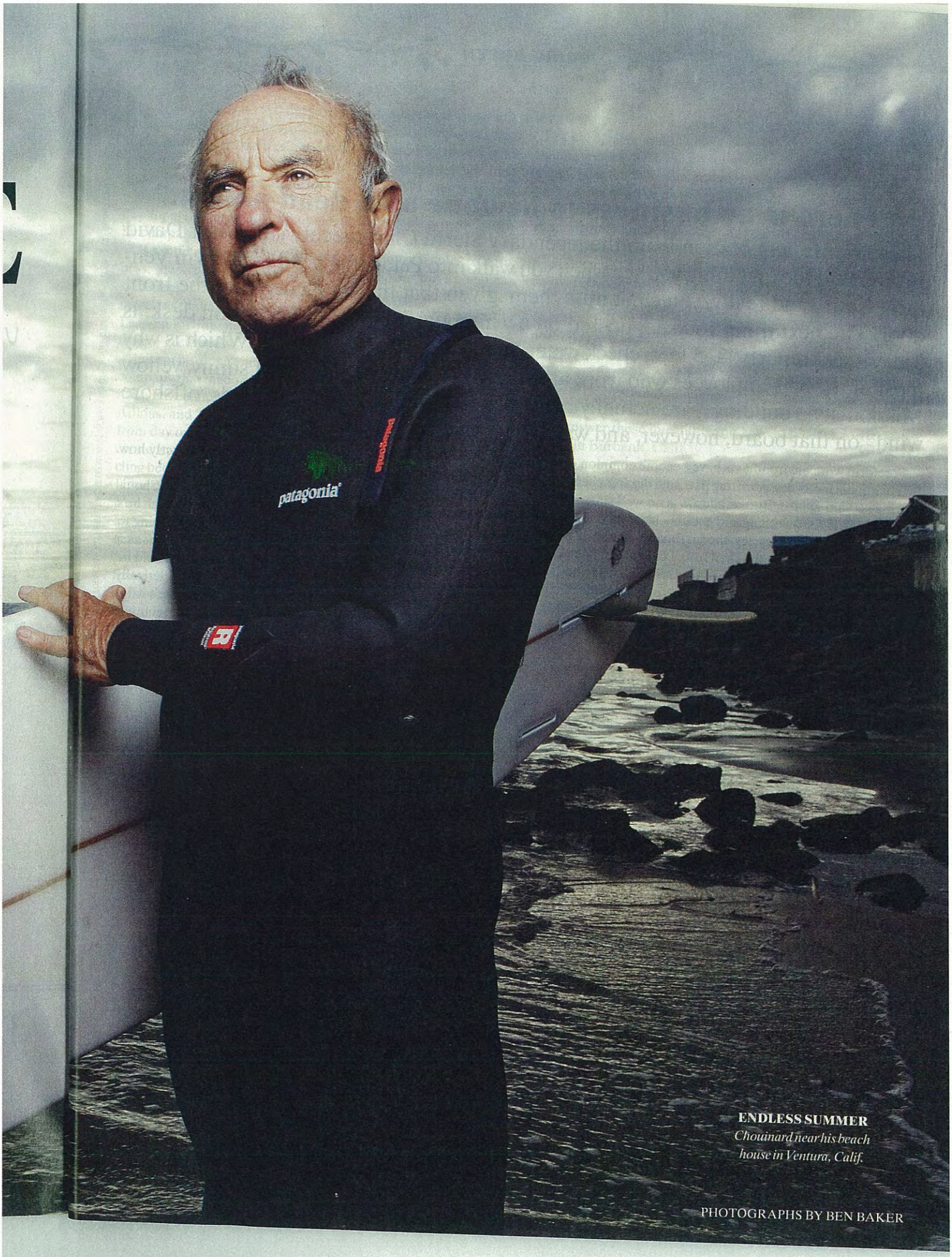
# ÉMINENCE GREEN

*The story of how* **PATAGONIA** *founder Yvon Chouinard took his passion for the outdoors and turned it into an amazing business.*

**BY SUSAN CASEY**




**ENDLESS SUMMER**
*Chouinard near his beach house in Ventura, Calif.*

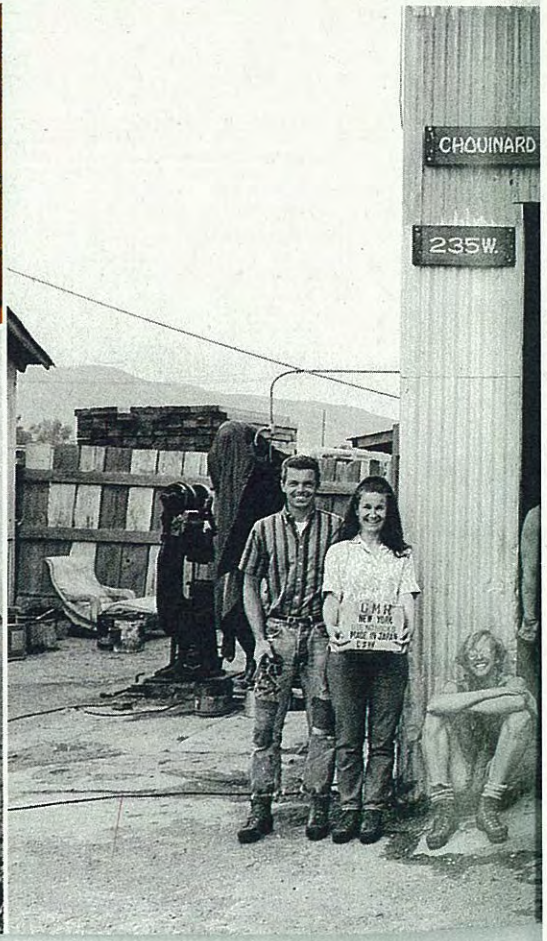
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN BAKER

# "There is no business to be done on a dead planet."

These words, a quotation from the legendary Sierra Club executive director David Brower, are the first thing you see when you walk into Patagonia headquarters in Ventura, Calif., and really, you can't miss them, given that they're etched into the front door. The next thing you see, posted on a whiteboard above the reception desk, is today's surf report: "3–5 feet, check water quality." Not too promising. Which is why most of the 350 employees who work at this campus, a block's worth of sunny, yellow Mission-style buildings, are actually in residence. Write "double overheads, offshore wind" on that board, however, and watch the place clear out.

Freeform work environments have become common enough that barefoot employees, cavorting pets, and organic chefs hardly merit a second glance. But Patagonia is no web startup. It's a 35-year-old outdoor-clothing and equipment company. And yet, looking around at the bicycles, the surfboards, the solar panels, the Tibetan prayer flags, the shed full of convalescing owls and hawks, it's clear that you're not in traditional corporate-land, either. The place is all business, but it's business conducted upside down and inside out. Everything about it flies in the face of consultants' recommendations about How to Maximize Profits and Cut Costs. Simply put, it's radical. Which is exactly how Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard, likes it.

"This company is an experiment," says the 68-year-old Chouinard, leaning back on a redwood chair in his office. Though he's given to provocative statements—"I don't think we're going to be here 100 years from now as a society, or maybe even as a species"—anyone expecting a pugnacious character would be surprised. He speaks softly, with a California drawl. Athletically built and small-statured, forged by a life spent in nature's wildest corners, he looks more like a river guide than an executive.

1966 LOCATION: TOM FROST; JACKETS: RICK RIDGEWAY; TESTING ROOM: BEN BAKER—REDUX; 2007 STORE: YONI BROOK (2)

And again, this is no accident. To Chouinard, the average suit ranks somewhere between alcoholic and criminal on the respect scale, and American business, when powered by the endless consumption and discarding of stuff, is unimaginative at best and evil at worst, responsible for clear-cutting forests, polluting oceans, and bulldozing wetlands to make way for the next condo development. Its modus operandi is unsustainable growth, which he compares to an "out-of-control tumor."

"I would never be happy playing by the normal rules of business," he writes in his book *Let My People Go Surfing*, a combination memoir and green-business primer. "I wanted to distance myself as far as possible from those pasty-faced corpses in suits I saw in airline magazine ads ... I wanted to be a fur trapper when I grew up."

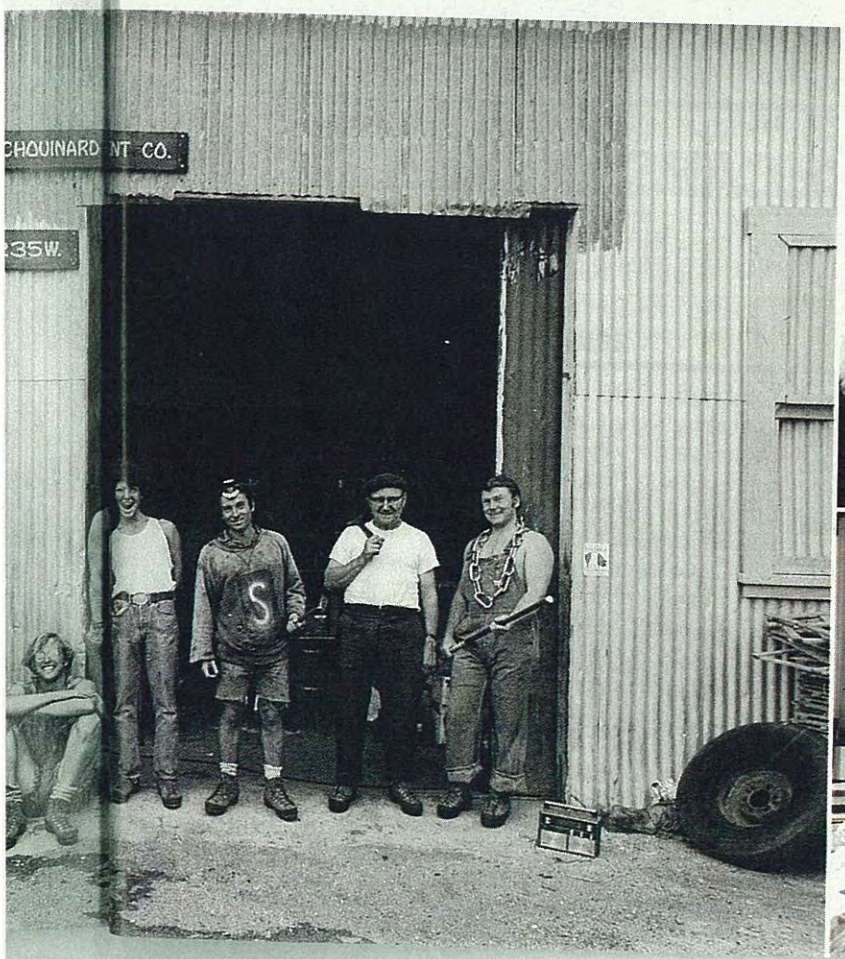
Except he didn't end up skinning muskrats. Instead, he heads a company that made $270 million in revenues last year. No, that's not a huge number. Most of the company's competitors—Nike, Adidas, and Timberland, to name a few—are much bigger. But from day one, Patagonia has punched above its weight—helped create a whole outdoor lifestyle, in fact. And decades before recycling became common practice, Patagonia was reusing materials. It was one of the first companies in America to provide onsite day care, both maternity *and* paternity leave, and flextime. It used its lushly designed mail-order catalog to speak out about issues like genetically modified food and overfishing, proving that a company can benefit from having a voice and a moral compass, and that a clothing-company owner who quotes Thoreau ("Beware of any enterprises that require a new set of clothes") isn't necessarily a paradox. Along the way, Patagonia's conscience has rubbed off on others, from smaller enterprises like Clif Bar to larger ones like Levi Strauss and the Gap. Even Wal-Mart: "The one thing that impresses me is the power of the people who work at Patagonia," says Matt Kistler, a senior vice president at Sam's Club, the warehouse-store division of Wal-Mart. "I was very impressed to see how involved in sustainability their employees are. They're tremendously knowledgeable and want to do the right thing."

So how did this antibusinessman's experimental little company become so influential? How did Chouinard hack his own contrarian path to success by putting the Earth first, questioning growth, ignoring fashion, making goods that don't break or wear out, telling customers to buy less, discontinuing his own profitable products, giving away chunks of earnings, and saying things like, "If you're not pissing off 50% of the people, you're not trying hard enough"? And given Chouinard's intention to prove that "business can make a profit without losing its soul," how did he get so cozy with Wal-Mart?

To answer these questions you have to go back to 1957, to a garage in Burbank, Calif.

BORN IN RURAL MAINE to French-Canadian parents, Chouinard had an early education in rugged living and recalls watching his father once do his own dental work with pliers. When

**THERE'S NO "I" IN GREEN** *Clockwise from center: Chouinard (third from right) and crew at the Ventura shop in 1966; rappelling near L.A., early 1950s; fleece jackets in the 1980 catalog (the woman's sold on eBay Japan for $4,000 in 2005); Patagonia's testing room today; Chouinard (far right) with his falconry club in 1956; New York City's Upper West Side store, 2007*




Yvon was 8, *la famille* Chouinard moved to Burbank. Speaking little English and saddled with a girl's name, Chouinard spent much of his time alone, exploring the nearby ocean, forests, and lakes. School chafed (with the exception of shop class); social success was elusive. At 15 he followed several "fellow misfits" into the local falconry club, where he learned to rappel down from raptors' cliff-top nests. And at this point, everything changed. Climbing was it.

Life became a circuit of passions, with only occasional interruptions for school (two years in community college) and work (a stint at his brother's detective agency, where he spied on starlets for the main client, Howard Hughes). There was surfing in Baja, fly-fishing in the Tetons, and—especially—climbing in Yosemite. Chouinard gravitated to the famed Camp IV, where elite climbers congregated to scale the park's 2,000- to 3,000-foot granite walls. As much a '60s subculture as a base camp, Camp IV's residents shared a disdain for the establishment, a reverence for nature, and a genius for scaling sheer, vertical rock. Chouinard was in heaven.

But there was the problem of gear. Yosemite's difficult climbs called for a new generation of tools. Back in Burbank, Chouinard installed a coal forge in his parents' garage and became a self-taught blacksmith, hammering out pitons—three-inch strips of steel used for anchoring climbing ropes. Chouinard's pitons were stronger and more elegant than their predecessors, a triumph of minimalist engineering. He sold them out of the back of his car for $1.50 and tried to live on the proceeds. It wasn't easy. There were lean years of Dumpster diving and, during one particularly fallow time, subsisting on cat food. There was a summer spent living in an abandoned incinerator. And in 1962, Chouinard was arrested with a climbing buddy in Winslow, Ariz., and spent 18 days in jail for "wandering around aimlessly with no apparent means of support." (Upon release, he was given 30 minutes to get out of town.) But what he describes as the "dirtbag" way—living as close to the wild as possible with as little as possible—never seemed like privation. Rather, this was freedom.

**Most** *business is unimaginative at best and evil at worst to Chouinard. Its modus operandi is unsustainable growth, which he compares to an "out-of-control tumor."*

Chouinard managed to keep climbing even when he was drafted and sent to Korea for two years in the 1960s. Upon return he made a series of big-wall ascents that established him as one of the era's greats. He expanded his business, which he now called Chouinard Equipment, and moved it to Ventura—and he met his match: a rock-climbing art student named Malinda Pennoyer. They married in 1970.

Over the years, Chouinard Equipment grew and morphed and existed mainly to fund its owner's wilderness adventures. Malinda threw herself into the work, and in 1972 they branched into clothing, launching a new company called Patagonia. Among its early offerings were rugby shirts, corduroy knickers, and boiled-wool mittens. Meanwhile the outdoor industry itself was taking off, with more people doing the kinds of activities that required these clothes.

Which is how Yvon Chouinard, who intended to spend approximately zero days of his life behind a desk, became a businessman. But he and Malinda were crystal clear: This would be business on

BOTTLES: JUSTIN SULLIVAN—GETTY

## AND WHEN THE ICECAPS DO MELT ...

GLOBAL WARMING = LESS ICE = MORE WATER = SURF'S UP! PATAGONIA'S NEW HIGH-TECH WETSUIT IS JUST THE LATEST MILESTONE IN A LONG HISTORY OF ECO-FRIENDLY INNOVATIONS.

**1993**

Working with fabric supplier Malden Mills, Patagonia introduces fleece jackets made partly from discarded plastic soda bottles.

**1996**

The company pioneers organic cotton—and in the process helps establish a whole new organic-cotton industry.

**2005**

Japanese supplier Teijin invents a process to reuse polyester almost endlessly. Patagonia begins an apparel recycling program.

**2006**

Patagonia begins treating wool products using a patented slow-wash process rather than environmentally harmful chlorine. Instead of antimicrobial silver (a groundwater pollutant) for odor control, Patagonia implements a product made from crushed crab and shrimp shells.

**2007**

Its new **wetsuit** is constructed using a number of custom-developed, environmentally conscious materials.


FORTUNE GRAPHIC / SOURCE: PATAGONIA

their terms. It wouldn't release toxins into rivers or cause nervous breakdowns or chase endless growth. It wouldn't make disposable crap that people didn't really need. Anything it produced would be of the highest quality, manufactured in the most responsible way. When the surf was up or the powder wafted down, employees would be where they ought to be: outside. If an employee's child was sick, the parent would also be where he ought to be: at home. They would keep Patagonia privately held and say no to anything that compromised their values.

Scaling the likes of Yosemite's El Capitan, Chouinard had learned big lessons. The biggest was that reaching the summit had nothing to do with where you arrived and everything to do with how you got there. Likewise, he thought, with business: The point was not to focus on making money; focus on doing things right, and the profits would come. And they did.


**ART BOOKS** *Lushly designed catalogs have always been a Chouinard staple. The latest (left) and early editions.*

ON A WINTER Saturday afternoon the Patagonia store on Manhattan's Upper West Side is jammed with shoppers eyeing Houdini full-zip shells, Plush Synchilla hoodies, Micro Puff Polarguard vests, and Recycled Capilene underpants. Unlike, say, Abercrombie & Fitch, where anyone over 23 is greeted with a hostile stare, there is no one type of customer here. There are couples pushing double-wide strollers, teenagers and grandparents, and even a woman in high heels clicking across the sustainably harvested Douglas fir floor. None of them is suiting up for Everest anytime soon, and many would be surprised to hear Chouinard's criteria about what makes the merchandise appealing: "You should be able to wash travel clothes in a sink or a cooking pot, then hang them out to dry in a hut, and still look decent for the plane ride home." It's ironic that although Chouinard detests trendiness, instructs Patagonia designers to ignore the current fashions, and tells his customers that "the more you know, the less you need," people often refer to this store, and the other 22 like it, as Patagucci and Pradagonia.

As always, there is plenty of fleece on the shelves. In 1977 the company created its breakthrough product, a jacket made of polyester pile that, unlike natural fibers, repelled moisture while retaining heat. It was stiff and ungainly but worked like a charm in environments where looking odd was preferable to getting hypothermia. Refinements continued. Working with fabric manufacturer Malden Mills, Patagonia created a finer, softer version called Synchilla in colors like sea-foam green and garnet red. Sales exploded, and the company became known for the "fleece jacket." Later, when Patagonia discovered it could make Synchilla using discarded soda bottles, Chouinard saw a way to reconcile his expanding business with his angst over manufacturing's destructive effects: by conducting an "environmental assessment" of all materials. Could recycled materials be used in a product? Could the product itself be recycled? Which materials caused the most harm to the environment, and which the least?

"We didn't have any of the answers," Chouinard recalls. "There was no book you could pick up and say, Here's what we need to do. We didn't know that making clothes out of a synthetic was better than making them out of a natural material. And so what about rayon? It's made out of cellulose, which is made out of trees—that seems like a good product. But then you find out they use really toxic chemicals to convert it." It turned out that hemp was the most responsible fiber but only if grown in cold, wet climates. Wool, too, could be good or bad: "If you get it from sheep grazing in alpine meadows," Chouinard says, "that's damaging as hell."

Conventionally grown cotton was especially heinous. Heavily dependent on noxious pesticides, insecticides, and defoliants, it's an environmentalist's nightmare crop. "To know this and not switch to organic cotton would be unconscionable," Chouinard says. In 1994 he gave his managers 18 months to make the change. Given that organic cotton, rare at the time, cost between 50% to 100% more, and that a fifth of Patagonia's business came from cotton products, this was no small risk. There was pushback from the ranks; suppliers defected. Chouinard delivered his ultimatum: Do it, or we never use cotton again.

The gamble paid off. Patagonia's cotton sales rose 25% and, more important, established an organic-cotton industry so that other companies could cross over. Demand grew and prices decreased, leading to even more demand. In 2006, Wal-Mart became the world's largest purchaser of organic cotton.

You'd think this would make Chouinard happy. And it does, to a point. He's ecstatic over Wal-Mart's green initiatives. But when executives from Sam's Club came to Ventura last month to meet him, he told them they needed to go further. "Even organic cotton is bad," he says. "It's better to make clothes out of polyester if you can recycle them into more clothes, and keep doing it—like we do with aluminum cans—instead of growing more organic cotton and selling cheap clothes that people just throw away."

In the early 2000's, the Japanese fabric company Teijin, a partner of Patagonia's, invented a process by which used polyester can be almost endlessly recycled. Patagonia, which makes a line of polyester base layers known as Capilene, encouraged customers to send back their worn-out underwear. (It now also accepts products made from fleece, nylon, and organic cotton.) Recycling polyester, Chouinard says, is a home run: "We use 76% less energy than if we'd made it out of virgin petroleum."

DECREASED
**52%**
The number of oil spills in U.S. waters, from 8,177 in 1990 to 3,897 in 2004.

DECREASED
**86%**
The Atlantic cod catch (in tons), from 1990 to 2005, due to overfishing.

FORTUNE GRAPHIC / SOURCES: U.S. COAST GUARD; NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

BOTTLES: JUSTIN SULLIVAN—GETTY

**FAMILY VALUES** *Chouinard with his son Fletcher, who is heading up Patagonia's development of environmentally correct surfboards*

The questioning continued. Chlorine disappeared from Patagonia's wool products, replaced by a patented slow-wash technique. Instead of adding antimicrobial silver, a groundwater pollutant, to its underwear lines, it used a product made of crushed crab shells for odor control. It became the first California company to use renewable sources like wind and solar to power all its buildings, and one of the first to print catalogs on recycled paper. After discovering that airfreight requires more energy than shipping by ground or sea—at least eight times more, according to Luke Tonachel at the Natural Resources Defense Council—the company advised customers to "ask yourself if you really need that pair of pants sent overnight." But Patagonia does offer that option, which brings up an inconvenient truth: No matter how careful the choice of materials or methods, all companies leave a footprint. This is Chouinard's conundrum, and you get the sense it keeps him up at night. "Patagonia will never be completely socially responsible," he writes gloomily at the end of his book. "It will never make a totally sustainable, nondamaging product. But it is committed to trying."

FEEDBACK *fortunemail_letters@fortunemail*

"THIS IS OUR SWEATSHOP," Chouinard says, and the roomful of workers sitting behind sewing machines bursts out laughing. The place is idyllic. Rolls of fabric are stacked like a psychedelic patch of giant flowers; sunlight and bird song stream through open windows that look onto a playground of the company's day-care facility. Walking around headquarters with Chouinard is like going on a sprawling house tour: Here is the Infant Room, the day-care annex for newborns; here, in a onetime slaughterhouse, is the first Patagonia store; here is the original blacksmith shop where Chouinard Equipment was born. "I still come out here and make fireplace tools," Chouinard says. He greets employees by name, and they light up when they see him. But the laid-back ambience is misleading. Competition to be here is stiff; Patagonia receives more than 900 applications for every job opening. The people who get hired are anything but slackers, and Chouinard is an unrepentant perfectionist. "He has an easygoing persona, and he's a California guy," says Casey Sheahan, Patagonia's 51-year-old CEO. (He got the job in March 2006.) "But he does demand excellence. People in this company would run through walls for him."

**"This** *is our sweatshop," Chouinard says in the sewing room as sunlight and bird song stream through open windows. Everyone bursts out laughing.*

REDUX

That would be a shame. The walls are gorgeous, filled with nature photographs and paintings, including many of Mount Fitzroy, the South American peak that inspired Patagonia's logo. The images evoke the solidity and timelessness that Chouinard has tried to instill in his brand, which makes it startling to hear what he has to say next: "We're in the middle of a revolution. Every ten years we have to blow this place up."

The reason for the upheaval? Climate change. "We're getting into the surf market, because it's never going to snow again, and the waves are going to get bigger and bigger," Chouinard says. "I see an opportunity." In response, he is opening Patagonia watersports shops along the coasts and in Hawaii. The first, in Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Calif., opened in June 2006.

Like his stand on organic cotton, Chouinard's vision of a stormier, more aquatic world caused some heels to dig in. No mid-sized, well-established company has ever broken into the surf industry, his skeptics remind him; it's all edgy startups or billion-dollar juggernauts like Billabong. "People just do not like change," he says. "You've got all these people hired to create a mountain-sports company, and now you're telling them to go 50% watersports." He sighs. "Now it's accepted. But there's still grumbling."

This "Ocean Initiative" has its roots in a Quonset hut across the parking lot, where his son Fletcher, 31, is crafting a line of surfboards made with nontoxic materials that Patagonia claims are stronger, lighter, and more eco-friendly than its competitors'. Surf legend Gerry Lopez has signed on to the effort, as have Chris, Keith, and Dan Malloy, professional surfer siblings who have serious industry clout. Another watersports product Chouinard shows off with pride is a new wetsuit. Anyone who has spent time encased in neoprene knows that it can be stiff, uncomfortable, and smelly. Chouinard, who surfs about 200 days a year, was determined to improve on this. "He told me he wanted to make the perfect wetsuit material," says Tetsuya O'Hara, 44, Patagonia's manager of raw material sourcing and development. O'Hara, who previously developed sailcloth technologies for the America's Cup, began with a new, nonpetroleum neoprene made from crushed limestone and then added a lining of recycled polyester and, of all things, organic wool. (See box.) The Patagonia suit is pricey ($470), but in-house testing showed it to be 90% warmer than other wetsuits, as well as stretchier, stronger, and naturally odor resistant.

Compared with fleece, surf gear may seem like a sideline, but this is classic Chouinard—activism mixed with reluctant capitalism. If anything, he's more concerned with Patagonia's growing too *fast*. (Typical revenue growth is a modest 3% to 8% a year. And a fair chunk of the company's haul is given away—$26 million donated to grass-roots organizations since 1985.) That kind of attitude can get you fired in corporate America. But as the guy who owns 100% of the company—he gets calls regularly from would-be buyers—he can do what he wants. "Everybody tells me it's an undervalued company," he says, "that we could grow this business like crazy and then go public, make a killing." He shakes his head. "But that would be the end of everything I've wanted to do. It would destroy everything that I believe in." Chouinard's good friend and fellow environmentalist Tom Brokaw has heard him put it far more succinctly: "He says, 'I don't want a Wall Street greaseball running my company.' That is a direct quote."

**Going** *public is not an option. "It would be the end of everything I've wanted to do," says Chouinard. "It would destroy everything that I believe in."*

COULD IT BE that the world is finally catching up to Yvon Chouinard? These days he's a standing-room-only ticket at Stanford and Harvard business schools. Yale, which awarded him an honorary doctorate in humane letters in 1995, recently offered him a fellowship to teach courses merging business with environmental studies. "I mean, can you imagine that?" he says, laughing. "I got a degree in auto mechanics at John Burroughs High School. But there's no surf in New Haven." The appeal of his message has gone way beyond students—other companies are paying attention too. In 2001 he created One Percent for the Planet, an alliance of businesses that pledge to donate 1% of gross revenues to environmental causes. To date, 500 organizations have signed on.

**MAN'S BEST FRIEND** *Chouinard (with Pepper) has the ear, and respect, of Wal-Mart.*

REDUX

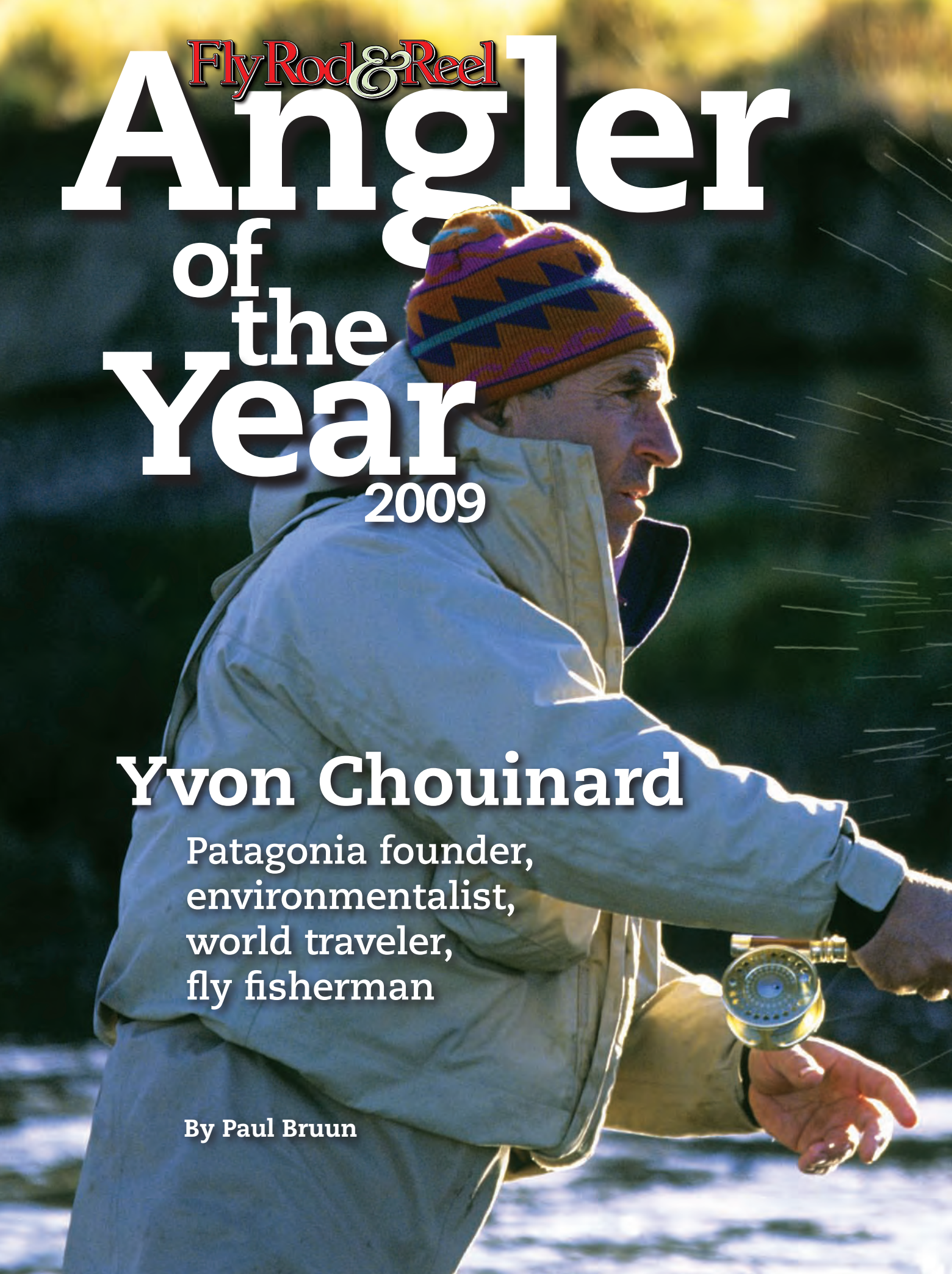
Wal-Mart is not among them, but Chouinard's greatest cause for optimism nevertheless comes from Bentonville, Ark. "The revolution really has started," he says with a slow, curling, and just slightly subversive smile. "I'm blown away by Wal-Mart. If Wal-Mart does one-tenth of what they say they're going to do, it will be incredible. And hopefully America will get a government that we need rather than one we deserve, that will put pressure on business to clean up its act. But the most powerful pressure will come from the consumer. Oh, my God, it's going to be *really* powerful."

As Chouinard sees it, there's only one downside to this good news: It's probably too late. "There's a race between running out of water, topsoil, or petroleum. I don't know what's going to be first. Or maybe it will all happen at once."

Locusts, high water, whatever; you can bet that Chouinard will be out there, on a Patagonia surfboard. "I'm a very happy person," he says. "I never get depressed, even though I know that everything's going to hell." F

Fly Rod & Reel

# Angler of the Year 2009



## Yvon Chouinard

Patagonia founder,
environmentalist,
world traveler,
fly fisherman

By Paul Bruun

PHOTOGRAPH BY **TOM MONTGOMERY**

The laughter, resonant with enthusiasm, is penetrating...even from across the river. The man is having a good time but who doesn't when they're catching fish? It's obvious from a glance at this behavior that size is unimportant: Nine-inchers elicit the same commotion as do fish twice that length. These trout are special in another way. They're rising in a run beside an island in Grand Teton National Park (GTNP), where more than 30 years ago the man taught his own son and daughter to fish with a fly rod and a tiny piece of worm.

Jackson Hole and GTNP, where he first spent summers starting in 1956, are still the home-water places of Yvon Chouinard, despite his meteoric evolution from climber, blacksmith, surfer, author and adventurer to Patagonia founder, world traveler, reluctant businessman, philanthropist and outspoken champion of the environment.

Yvon Chouinard's parents didn't emphasize fishing but his older brother, Jeff, did. First they chased brook trout in the tiny creeks, and later pickerel and bass in the cozy ponds, of Maine. After the family migrated to California, and before most kids were allowed even to play across the street, Yvon was bicycling 10 miles to Toluca Lake, hiding in the bushes like a commando and catching bass on wooden plugs he carved himself. In school he liked baseball but got so nervous that he always clutched in the games. He says he was a geek, an outdoor loner who frequently ran away from home.

An interest in falconry required climbing cliffs to capture young birds and when the climbing itself became his event, he eventually began packing a spinning rod along. Simple reasoning: trout could supplement a delicacy-filled diet of ground squirrels, porcupines and mountain grouse he climbed trees to thump with an ice axe. On his first trip to scale Wyoming's highest point, Gannett Peak, Yvon's spinners cast in the upper Green River and other Wind River Range tributaries landed many fresh dinners.

In the 1950s, Chouinard and his unruly climbing pals lived at Guides Hill, a former CCC camp near the shore of Jenny Lake, between Jackson and Yellowstone National Park. A rehabbed old incinerator became his first Jackson Hole summer home. The guy never owned a tent until he was 40 but was expert at stuffing a leaky old Army down sleeping

bag into caves, cracks in talus slopes and under alpine firs. Near the incinerator/bunkhouse, Yvon first noticed climbing pioneer Glen Exum teaching his son, Ed, to fly cast. Glen invited Yvon over and included him in the class.

"Glen was a wonderful dry-fly fisherman but because I hung around with a Pennsylvania guy named Joe Faint who fished wets, I traded climbing stuff for his wet flies," Yvon recalls. At about 17 or 18 he and his yellow combination pack rod graduated from wet-fly to nymph fishing.

Association with Mike Borgo facilitated the changeover. Borgo had been climbing and fishing in Colorado, where he studied the rudiments of the soon-to-tame-the-West outrigger method from Aspen nymphing pioneer Chuck Fothergill. Chouinard stayed with nymphing for several years but eventually discovered that the practice wasn't efficient for Snake River cutthroat, a species that likes to chase its prey.

"I'm not a perfectionist," Chouinard explains as he assembles a new dropper/soft hackle leader arrangement. "I'm serial obsessive…a seventy-five percenter. I get bored with doing the same thing. So I isolate one thing, study and improve on it until I feel good about it, and then move on.

"I'm doing the same thing with fishing that I did with climbing. I started with jam cracks then moved on to the big walls. From there I became totally interested in ice and then finally the Himalayan adventures but I set a 24,000-foot altitude limit."

So he continued dredging with nymphs until the challenge of dandruff-sipping cutthroats in his favorite spring-creek system forced him "to graduate to dry flies," Chouinard says.

"When those cutthroat got on one (Pale Morning Dun) stage, I learned lots more about selective trout from that...emergers, cripples, spinners and tricos. I call that my Cinnamon Ant Period!" he says, joking. "The last few years I have been into soft hackles. Sylvester Nemes has been a great influence. I'm going backwards, relaxing and learning there's a lot more to soft hackles than most people think, especially in heavy water."

Still the loner, the runaway, Chouinard's style emerges repeatedly when he and his fly rod, a small pack with some fruit and snacks and a lightweight vest with his always-evolving soft hackles and baby streamers stroll and wade five or six miles along the Snake River in an afternoon.

Whether it's creating new fly patterns, forging pitons, brining and wood-smoking whitefish fillets, sewing the first waterproof cover for that leaky Army bag or championing synthetic clothing to the outdoor market, Chouinard continually seeks new and better ways. His late brother Jeff once said he was shocked when their parents loaned Yvon several hundred dollars to buy a forge to create stronger pitons. Jeff said: "I thought,'What kind of a business is a forge, for God's sake?'"

The world eventually learned about the forge Yvon carried in the trunk of his beater Chevrolet and how he introduced double-tough American-made climbing protection. More important, from that same blacksmithing smoke materialized the Ventura-based Great Pacific Iron Works and a man whose business vision would become as sharp as the recreational skills he continually honed.

By the early 1980s, Chouinard's climbing hardware company was paired with a fast-growing rugged outdoor clothing and gear purveyor simply called Patagonia. The only hint to the existence of this tiny office in Ventura, California, was a small "Friends Of The Ventura River" sign.

"I saw Mark Capelli at a City Council meeting one night when all kinds of paid biologists endorsed plans to channelize the river. One guy, Mark Capelli of Friends of the Ventura River, stood up and argued brilliantly against the project because of the damage it would do to wildlife and especially the tiny remaining native steelhead population. The power to protect was totally amazing!" Yvon remembers.

"That's when I learned the value of one person and became involved with environmental activism. It was a short step from there to what we called corporate tithing. That started out with giving 10 percent of our profits—before taxes—and then 20 years ago we decided to get more serious. If we didn't make a profit, the problems don't go away," he reasons. "We switched to a one percent"—currently $3 million—"of sales figure"—currently $300 million—"and tax ourselves whether we make a profit or not. We were serious and threw down the gauntlet to other businesses." The Patagonia founder originally encouraged (and guilted) 80 or 90 other companies beginning with REI and North Face into a corporate-conservation alliance.

Chouinard is a modest consumer, choosing to wheel about in creaky cars exuding Bondo and appearing at functions or on trips wearing older but familiar clothing while his friends and hosts usually sport the latest Patagonia duds. He's a fastidious fly tier who relentlessly prowls fly-shop shelves for the latest quality materials. During several West Yellowstone hackle hunts, Yvon became friendly with extreme bugmeister and Blue Ribbon Flies founder Craig Mathews, who was similarly donating between one and two percent of his profits to environmental causes.

"We give to about 400 different groups every year," Yvon says proudly of the latest 1% For The Planet organization he and Mathews shaped and is now moving up on a thousand members. "We especially look for radical organizations that can't get funding from elsewhere."

Chouinard's activism has occasional critics, but it is rare for any of them to duplicate his and his wife Malinda's generous and thoughtful track record. In addition to the corporate donations, both of them give at least 30 percent of their annual salaries from Patagonia to environmental groups. To date, the company has given away more than $30 million and that figure climbs closer to $50 million when the Chouinards' personal gifts are added.

"At our company we make every decision based on whether it's good for the planet or not. I can take a risk and if it works, others will follow [e.g., the expensive but healthy changeover to organic

cotton; turning recycled plastic drink bottles into cozy fleece]. Patagonia is a privately held company and no venture capitalists are dictating what we can and cannot do," he says.

If the growing trend of touting company greenness is truly important for business, Patagonia and the Chouinards already have a lifetime supply of honors, hardware and recognition for greening practices that they instituted long before the buzz term hit *Forbes* and *Business Week*. Patagonia merrily cruises along continually championing new environmental promotion schemes; among the latest are the World Trout Initiative with designer T-shirts (organic cotton, of course) created by phenom artist/writer/activist (and *FR&R* contributing editor) James Prosek and the latest Freedom To Roam campaign designed to facilitate wildlife migration paths throughout the West and Northwest.

**"At our company we make every decision based on whether it's good for the planet or not."**

Some 20 years ago, Yvon joined his late Alberta rancher friend Yuri Krisjanson on a British Columbia climbing/camping trip that just happened to include fly-fishing on the Dean River. After landing his first steelhead, it was Chouinard, not the chrome sea-run rainbow, who was terminally hooked by anadromous trout and salmon.

"I began to fish British Columbia in the spring, summer and fall...three trips every year. I joined Tom McGuane at Rob Stewart's Lower and Upper Dean River camps with the handmade wooden jet boats, but it got to be too predictable," he sighs. "The guide tells you where to fish and boom, you catch a fish. So I quit lodges!"

In typical Chouinard fashion, he examined the famed British Columbia waters of the Skeena Drainage and assembled a circle of equally passionate and preservation-minded pals including former teacher Rob Brown and conservationist Bruce Hill. "I love the Skeena, where I can fish on my own, with friends...no guides," he announces.

Along with the steelhead addiction, naturally, came the Sirens' seductive song of the Spey rod—yet another new area for Chouinard's patented T-R-T formula—test, research, travel. And then the trip tempo increased. With Sage, Thomas & Thomas, CND, Winston, Burkheimer and other custom long rods in hand, he moseyed to Russia, Alaska, Iceland, British Columbia, Gaspe' Peninsula, Norway and Sweden.

"Steelhead are easy. They take anything you throw at 'em because they're playful. Now the Atlantic salmon, they are the king of fish! Atlantics are just giant brown trout with an attitude! I learned to slow down for steelhead—to get my fly down to their level. I'll speed up for Atlantics…. They love to smash things so keeping flies above them gets them to come up. I'm starting to feel better about myself and Atlantic salmon fishing…but that's after 15 years!"

Both personally and through the environmental funding procedures that he has organized, Chouinard takes keen interest in various watchdog and enhancement organizations such as the Atlantic Salmon Federation and Save Our Wild Salmon.

A fishing discussion with Yvon Chouinard is never purely about his newest experiments. He's been studying bamboo and has recently been using a delicate but lively fly rod made by a Japanese friend. "Bamboo is symbolic with my feeling: get simpler and simpler," he says. "Next summer I might just fish with a small Muddler. I'll catch as many fish as I did this year…but it would get boring and would probably destroy the fly-fishing industry!" he roars.

Over the summer, he added a handmade dozen-foot-long Italian Sesia horsehair line, a gift from an Italian friend, to the tip of his reel-less, 12-foot Tenkara collapsible rod for one-handed casting in small mountain trout streams like Japanese and Italian traditionalists. His latest intrigue with the super-sinking Czech and Polish nymphs came after deadly efficient Madison River experiments with Craig Mathews and Italian pal Mauro Mazzo.

But in a moment he can firmly switch to a less pleasant tone and explain, "The U. S. and Canadian government policy toward anadromous fish is to extirpate them because they're in the way of 'progress.' The current Administration and people like them are interested in sterilizing the oceans and ultimately coming in with fish farms everywhere. This president has been a terrible puppet, allowing industry-driven disassembly of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act and every other environmental law they can get their hands on," he rails.

Next he laments that despite the great gains made with the 1% For The Planet fund-raising program, there is nothing like it for the fishing industry, whose memberships are conspicuously absent. "Somehow they don't feel a responsibility despite making a living from clean air, clean water and the environment. They have no more responsibility than the average taxpayer…it's really sad.

"The strongest force in our society is civil democracy, especially where the government is the problem. It's what got us out of Vietnam and gave us civil rights. It's standing up to federal marshals. That's why we have to support environmental nonprofits," he says.

If you spot Yvon steelheading the Kispiox, polish up your thoughts and resume on environmental tithing before getting too deep into a discussion about Bob Clay bamboo Spey rods or the latest line tapers. Fly-fishing means the world to Yvon Chouinard, but it is our future that concerns him most. That's the only thing about this man that will never change.

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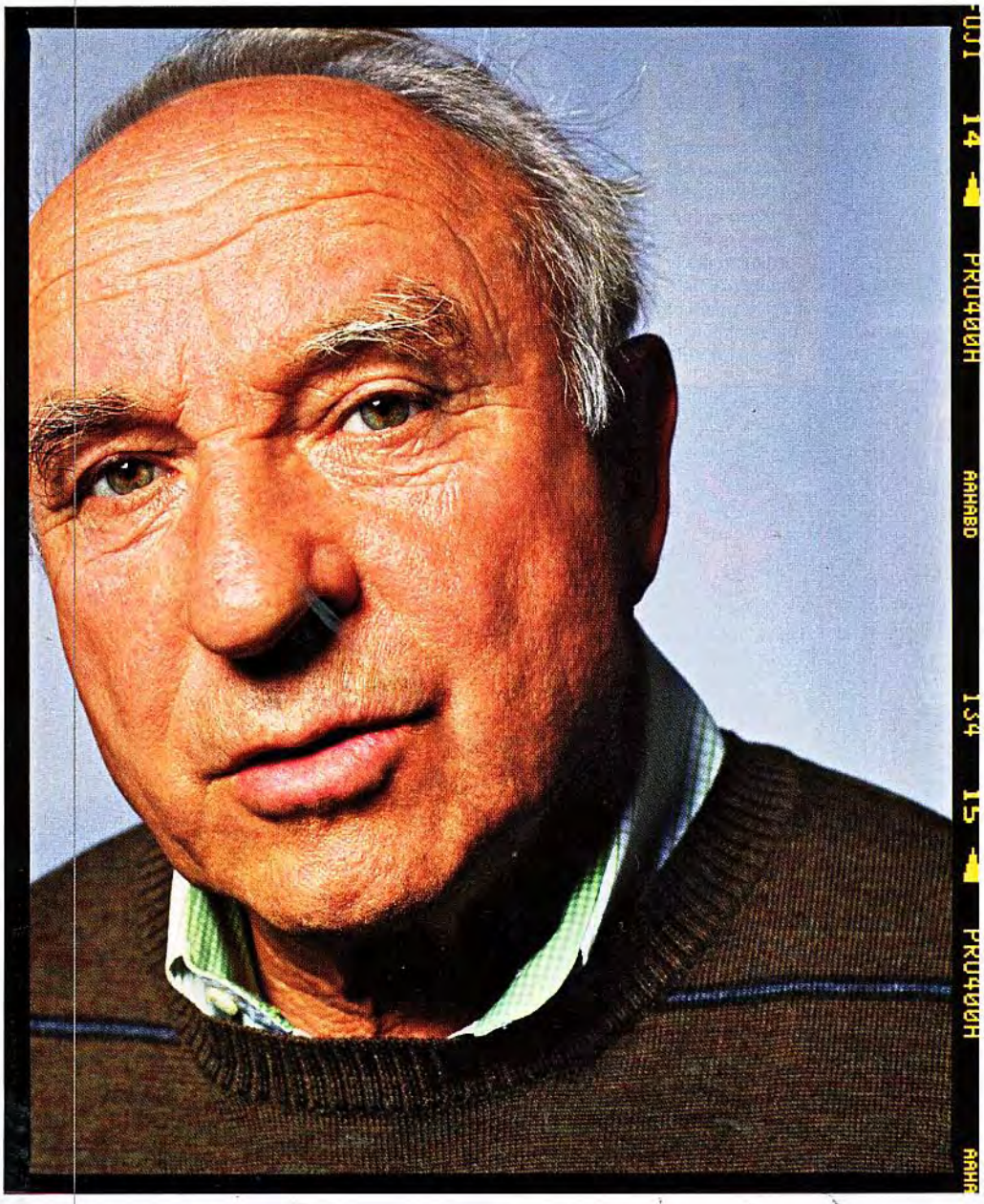
**Paul Bruun** lives in Jackson, Wyoming. Find more Angler of the Year reporting at www.flyrodreel.com.



# "No Such Thing as Sustainability"

**Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard may be pessimistic about the earth's future, but he's determined to keep fighting. An exclusive interview.** BY TOM FOSTER

**"I'M KIND OF LIKE A SAMURAI,"** says Yvon Chouinard, founder of outdoor-apparel maker Patagonia. "They say if you want to be a samurai, you can't be afraid of dying, and as soon as you flinch, you get your head cut off. I'm not afraid of losing this business."

He may actually mean that. Ever since Chouinard began forging mountain-climbing pitons in 1957 and selling them out of his car, he has defined his business's bottom line as something other than pure profit. At first, it was a way to fund his "dirtbag" climbing lifestyle and equip himself and his friends with gear. As Patagonia grew, so did a realization that everything his business did had an effect—mostly negative—on the environment. Today, Chouinard, 70, defines the company's mission in purely eco-driven terms: "to use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis."

Since 1985, Patagonia has given at least 1% of its sales to environmental charities, and in 2001, Chouinard cofounded One Percent for the Planet, an alliance of mostly small companies that pledge to do the same. One Percent recently notched its 1,000th member; in total, its members have given $42 million to more than 1,700 groups.

Built like a fireplug but quiet in demeanor, Chouinard recently talked to FAST COMPANY about his life, his work, and corporate responsibility.

**FC: How has traveling influenced the way you run Patagonia?**

Traveling is my form of self-education. Every stream I fish now is not as good as it used to be. If you keep your eyes open as you travel around, you realize we are destroying this planet. I'm very pessimistic about it. I've created this business that I don't really need. I never wanted to be a businessman; I was a craftsman and good at working with



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAKE CHESSUM

**INTERVIEW YVON CHOUINARD**

**Reprinted Courtesy of Santa Barbara Magazine1 -2006)**

Throughout his 50 years in business, Chouinard has truly practiced what he preaches. Patagonia is a progressive company with an on-site daycare center and communal offices. Chouinard himself has donated millions to environmental causes. This month, the 67-year-old rebel tells his story with the publication of Let My People Go Surfing (Penguin). Santa Barabara Magazine sat down with him at Patagonia's eco friendly Ventura offices (built using 95% recycled materials), just a short walk from the waves he loves.

**If the surf was good today, would you have cancelled this interview?**

I'm going after this meeting - I've got a clear slate today.

**How much time do you spend in the office?**

Maybe a third of the year; I'm certainly backing off a lot these days. Well, I was never officially CEO, but I probably was unofficially. When you are the owner, you can call yourself whatever you want. [Laughs.] I am the company philosopher. I'm just going to do more of what I've always been doing, which is travelling and surfing and fishing and bringing ideas back into the company.

**You've said that Patagonia is a "purely California" company. How so?**

It's eclectic, just like California cuisine is a mixture off all kinds of stuff. It's open to new ideas. It's a blue state-most of it or some of it, anyway. It's a casual and outdoorsy lifestyle. When somebody from a different country thinks of the best part of America, they think of California, that lifestyle.

**How did you come up with the title Let My People Go Surfing?**

My book agent came up with it as a joke and it just caught on. It kind of describes what we do at Patagonia. If you live a life that is regulated to only going surfing on weekends, and Saturday finally comes around and there's no surf and it's been good all week, you're a loser. So the book could be called Let my People Go Powder Skiing, which is flexitime. I don't care when people work as long as the work is done, and as long as it doesn't effect someone else working with them. So there has to be a lot of responsibility. When I'm off two-thirds of the time, I can't remember when I've called into the company to see how things are going or whatever. There's no need.

**You're an optimist to give your employees so much responsibility. But in other ways, you're a pessimist.**

Well I'm very pessimistic about the fate of the world, but I'm much more of an optimist than say my son, who is a real pessimist. He'll look at the surf in the morning and say, "It's not surf-able today." I'll look at it and say, "If the tide changes, I think it'll be surf-able."

What I'm pessimistic about is that we'll never be able to solve our environmental problems. I don't think there's a will in society to do it. I'm pessimistic that we will never get the government that we deserve. The government is a reflection of who we've become-we're consumers, we're polluters.

**Why didn't you ever run for political office?**

Are you kidding me? Number one, I'm too short. No short person has ever been elected. That's how people choose leaders. Could you imagine what my friends would say when I wanted to go surfing and the secret service would clear the water out at Rincon? My friends would hate me!

**You've said that you've never even touched a computer. C'mon!**

I moved a mouse… once.

**But you have employees who use computers for you.**

My son was having trouble with math and I couldn't help him and I said, "Don't worry about it, Fletcher. I had trouble with math too, and I've got 15 accountants working for me!" And he went back and told his teacher, so I was hauled into a PTA meeting and the teacher accused me of having a bad attitude.

**Part of your business philosophy is the importance of "combating complacency," yet in this case, you seem to be fighting technological change.**

It's not a matter of change; it's a matter of cluttering up your life. I am trying to simplify my life. Everybody else in my position who has some money and a big business, they increasingly clutter their lives. They die with millions of dollars in the bank. I'm going to do the exact opposite. I'm divesting myself of all this stuff. If I ask my assistant for an address, it takes him three times longer to get it off of the computer than it would if he had a little address book. Computers are absolutely necessary in a company like this, but they are very inefficient for a lot of stuff. I'm in the mail-order business, and most of our orders come

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[1] (explanation: you`re allowed to print & use the interview for free as long as you mention the phrase "reprinted courtesy of Santa Barbara Magazine"

in during workdays-people who are at work and make believe like they're working and they are actually ordering online. I don't need the Internet; I don't need bits of facts that I can do nothing with.

**Do you have a cell phone?**

No, but my wife does. Personally, I'm very much anti technology-except medical. I don't watch television. I read I don't know how many magazines and books. I have a very simple life, and I'm not trying to grow my business bigger and bigger. I'm not trying to have bigger and bigger houses. When I read a book now, I give it away, keep it in circulation. I'm not accumulating books.

**How long did it take to handwrite your book?**

Sixteen years. First, I had to prove that a lot of the things that we do at Patagonia work-and I also had to figure out what we were unconsciously doing sometimes. I did the same thing with this book on ice-climbing technique that I wrote years ago. No one had ever written a book on ice climbing. It took me eight years because at the same time I was writing, we were developing the tools, which changed the technique. I had to travel all over the world and study French, German, Austrian and Scottish styles of ice climbing, but when it finally did come out, it was kind of a revolutionary book. I've had to do the same thing with business. I didn't feel the American way of doing business was right. I believe that capitalism is wrong myself, but then communism-the alternative-isn't right either. So I had to go all around the world and figure out what kind of company we wanted to be. I tried to study other methods of management. In the 70's, I was particularly interested in the Japanese style of management, which has lots of flaws in it too, but it focuses on quality. Our symbol of the best car in America is a Cadillac, well that's nothing compared to a Lexus [made by Toyota].

**So you own a private company but are against private capitalism?**

By capitalism, I mean stock markets. I believe in economic endeavour. The problem with the stock market and public ownership of corporations is when you buy $10 of stock you're not getting $10 worth of infrastructure and inventory, you're getting less than $1, and the rest is blue sky. You're banking that company is going to grow and grow and grow at minimum of 15% a year, which is how we're destroying the earth. We're already using the resources of seven planets as it is, so this endless growth is crazy.

**Yet year after year Patagonia grows bigger and bigger.**

Patagonia grows "naturally". We grew 3% last year and we're going to grow 10% to 12% this year. It's not because we advertise more, it's just that there's more demand for our stuff this year and the economy is strong. We don't try to create artificial markets or an artificial need; I want to sell to the people who need our stuff, not to the people who want it because

they've got excess money right now and it's fashionable or whatever. That's what limits our growth. Our advertising budget is less than half of 1% of sales. For a clothing company it would be 6% or 8%. For companies like Ralph Lauren, it's huge.

**Is the book printed on recycled paper?**

I tried to get the publisher to print it on 100% recycled paper, but the only quality of that type is made in Denmark, and they couldn't get it on time. They used 40% recycled paper and the rest is sustainable forest.

**How far did you go in school?**

I did two years of college. My major was geography just because I had to have something, but I took classes that interested me, like philosophy. I don't know if I ever got an A, but I got a B in geography because I was interested in it.

**Would you call yourself a Buddhist?**

I'm a philosophical Buddhist, just kind of Zen. If anything, I'd be called a Unitarian. My mind is open, but I have no reason to believe in anything. I see religious people spouting dogma saying, "This is it," and I'm saying, "How do you know." And then you get these invented religions-Mormonism, Anglicism, modern religions-that have just been invented by some guy… Scientology, are you kidding me?

**You believe that everything is living-even a rock. What's your reasoning?**

I don't really have anything to base it on except for the fact that there are atoms in rocks and they're bouncing around hitting each other. So if life is movement, then rocks are energy and life. It's a harmless thing to believe in and it gives me respect for a lot of things. If you put a lie detector on a plant and threaten it, it vibrates. In fact, the vineyards up in Napa stress their grape vines because they produce better. If they'd give them too much water, they wouldn't produce grapes as sweet. So they keep them right on the verge.

**That's wild; I had no idea. Do you believe in reincarnation?**

How should I know? That's my attitude. Dear God, if there is a God, save my soul if I have one. I'm probably more like the American Indian spirituality. I'll kill animals, and eat them, but I respect the animal.

**You once killed-with an axe!-and ate a porcupine. How did it taste?**

It tasted better that the cat food I was eating at the time! I was hungry.

**Is that how you lived on 50¢ a day?**

This was the late ‘50s, early ‘60s. Gas was 29¢ a gallon. I’d go to the butcher’s shop and he’d just give me a bag of bones, and I’d cook that up on a fire. I’d buy oatmeal and scrounge. I’d
get fruit off people’s trees. I was buying cases of cans at this dented can store. In those days, you could do it a lot easier than you can these days. There was a lot of fat in society then. It didn’t cost $1,200 a month to rent a one-bedroom apartment. For years, I rented a house at Faria Beach right on the surf for $75 a month. Sure I wasn’t making much money, but then you could live on the edges of society really easily, and now you can’t do that.

**In 1962, you were pulled off a railway car and charged with “wandering around aimlessly with no apparent means of support.”**

Can you imagine? That’s as unconstitutional as you can get. It can’t be against the law to choose not to work. It was in Winslow, Arizona, and they kept us there for about 10 days and for the last eight days they had me working on a garbage truck. We were starving to death in the jail because all they gave us was a little bowl of oatmeal in the morning with one slice of Wonder Bread, and then a bowl of pinto beans at night with a slice of Wonder bread. I ate better when I was on the garbage detail because I’d find food in the cans! Yeah, we were called hobos in those days, now you would say homeless. It was truly an adventure.

**Then you tried, unsuccessfully, to get out of the draft.**

Everybody tried to get out of it. There wasn’t really a war going on and they were drafting people just to fill the army. This was between the Korean War and the Vietnam War. I had just started my business and the last thing I wanted to do was go into the army and waste two years of my life. A lot of people faked being gay, and I had heard that if you drank soy sauce it would give you super high blood pressure-your heart races like crazy from all the salt. I did that all right, but then they put me on a train and by the time I got up to Fort Ord, California, I couldn’t stand the thought of drinking any more soy sauce. I had drunk three bottles and was throwing up.

**When you were in the service, you went on hunger strikes.**

I’ve been a contrarian all my life. I was angry with the army for drafting me. As a businessman, the way things were done in the army was so inefficient, so stupid, it just drove me crazy. On Saturday morning, there’d be a footlocker inspection, where everything had to be perfectly folded, your shoes shined and you’d stand there at attention. Well, I’d leave all kinds of hair and shaving cream on my razor… Finally, they sent me to a bunch of civilians who were working on guided-missile repairs, and all I had to do was turn their generator on in the morning and change their oil once a month. So I bribed a guy to turn the

generator on and off while I disappeared with some Korean friends and went climbing. At that time, you weren't allowed to even wear civilian clothes, but I had an extra set and all my climbing gear.

**To a wimp like me, mountain climbing seems like such a harsh sport. What do you enjoy about it?**

Well, we are not that many generations from being monkeys and chimpanzees. And when you use your body it feels good, right? You get endorphin highs after doing something. Rock climbing uses your whole body. It's a very balanced sport. It's not like playing tennis where you mainly use your legs and one arm. Plus you are using your mind as well. You're thinking ahead and going through these movements, which is a very pleasurable thing.

"When somebody from a different country thinks of the best part of America,
they think of California, that lifestyle"

Then you get to situations that are very dangerous, the mountain is moving and séracs
[ice cliffs] are breaking up. I can't say it's that enjoyable while you're doing it-half the time you're scared to death. But you're doing it for other reasons. And when you're young, you're doing it to prove yourself and it's basically what doesn't kill you makes you stronger both physically and mentally.

**But the risk is real. How many avalanches have you been in?**

Three. In one, a friend broke his neck and was killed next to me, and another friend broke his back. I broke some ribs and had a concussion on that one. That particular avalanche was a long one, so it was a close call. We went 1,500 feet and over a 30-foot cliff and stopped just short of a 300-foot cliff. I had accepted that I was going to die. I've had a lot of close calls-big falls, automobile accidents-and right afterward you feel very happy to be alive, going around, smelling the flowers. I was depressed for three months after that. But since then, I've accepted that fact. If someone told me tomorrow that I had terminal cancer I wouldn't fight it.

**But earlier you said you believe in medical technology.**

A lot of people who fight like crazy are just afraid of dying. It's like when people keep their dogs and cats alive even though they have so much arthritis that they can hardly walk and they aren't afraid of dying. They're not worried about what's on the other side. We've got all this junk that's been put in our heads. I don't know, I'm kind of curious actually.

**This natural curiosity must have helped in your past career as a private detective for Howard Hughes.**

My brother owned a detective agency and he worked exclusively for Howard Hughes. We were tailing all of Hughes's girlfriends. It was so boring sitting in the car all day long, you can't even go to the toilet-you have to carry old milk cartons with you. This one girl would go roaring out of her street onto the highway so fast that we couldn't react, so we'd lose her. We built a bunker on a hillside above her house so that we could radio down when she was leaving. One time this girl picked up a German shepherd and she thought nobody owned it, poor dog. Well Hughes heard about the shepherd, and he's afraid of germs, so we had to break into the house and steal the dog.

**I passed some construction coming into your office. What's it going to be?**

It's pretty cool-we're going to have parking underneath with solar panels on top. Then we're taking out the asphalt and putting in permeable concrete. We're the first ones in California to do that. So when it rains, all the waste and oil drippings that are on the asphalt don't just run off and pollute the river and the ocean.

**You're simplifying your life, but what three things could you not give up?**

I can't give up my car [a Subaru and a Prius, the gas/ electric hybrid] because I'd become a martyr. Air travel. I mean I'm part of the problem, that's for sure. Air travel is really wasteful. I pay my penance. My surfboards-I have five or six at any one time, but my son makes them. I'm a tester for surfboards, the old-guy-models.

**Do you have a favourite place in the world?**

People think I'm a mountain person, but when I was teenager, I used to dream about disappearing in the South Pacific. For me that's the best. I just like the tropics-I like the ocean, surfing there, the people, and I'm a real romantic-the whole idea. My wife doesn't like the tropics.

**They say that opposites attract. Is that true in your marriage?**

Absolutely. I think it's symbiotic neurosis. Two crazy opposite people, but it all works out.

**How long have you been married?**

34, 35 years… I can't remember.

**Current project or passion?**

1% for the Planet, an alliance of 150* companies that pledge to give 1% of their sales to environmental causes of their choosing, whether they make a profit or not. Jack Johnson just joined, so that's quite a large deal. There's a fee for

belonging to the organization and for that, you get to use the logo on your product. It's growing by two to three companies a week and there's a list of the organizations on onepercentfortheplanet.org

Reprinted Courtesy of Santa Barbara Magazine.

*150 companies at the time of the interview. Over 1200 now in 2009.

**INFO BOX / THE NITTY GRITTY**

**more company philosophy information :**

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