



DIVE MASTER:  
Cousteau on board  
at New York City's  
Dyckman Marina.

## 12. FABIEN COUSTEAU: UNDERWATER AUTEUR

MISSION// SAVE THE SEAS

FABIEN COUSTEAU IS SUNBURNED. It's a sultry August evening in Key Largo, Florida, and the 38-year-old grandson of history's preeminent undersea explorer arrives late for dinner, having just wrapped up a 13-hour day filming coral spawning. He walks across the parking lot of the Italian bistro and extends his hand to shake mine. His wispy brown hair is flecked with gray, a striking contrast to his crimson face. "I'm Fabien," he says. "I'll be right back." With that, he darts across the blacktop highway in his flip-flops and into a CVS pharmacy. Five minutes later, he returns clutching a jumbo bottle of aloe vera gel.

So it goes for Fabien, a skilled underwater filmmaker with ambitious plans for the First Family of the Deep. After about 12 years of career roaming—freelancing as a graphic designer and marketing eco-friendly products for Burlington, Vermont-based Seventh Generation—he's looking to breathe new life into his clan's once pacesetter documentary juggernaut and shake up a public that he believes is inured to the

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rapidly declining health of the world's oceans. His strategy: Ditch the classic Cousteau marathon approach to filmmaking in favor of fast-moving production teams that can deftly churn out television specials defined by modern visual fireworks and high-paced editing.

If he can shake off his land legs—SPF 40, anybody?—he's well suited to the challenge. Fabien, who was raised in the States, took his first plunge with a scuba tank at four and began joining family filming expeditions aboard the *Calypso* at seven. In his teen years he regularly pitched in with documentary crews working for his father, Jacques's oldest son, Jean-Michel, and his grandfather. But while coming of age in flippers infused him with a profound connection to the sea, adulthood brought with it a craving to venture beyond his family ties. "After college, I went through a rebellious phase and thought I would do something different," says Fabien. This led him into a spate of business courses, the gig with Seventh Generation, and treks in Nepal and Africa.

His rediscovered commitment to the family legacy grew out of a gnawing sense of responsibility to the seascapes that were once his playgrounds. "I feel an urgency that maybe my grandfather didn't

ALL-STARS  
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until his later years," he says, "to explore faster and faster before the oceans are destroyed so you can then relay the message to the general public and they can influence what's happening."

Though his surname provides a leg up in any film project, Fabien faces a ruthless broadcast landscape Jacques Cousteau never could have imagined. "When Jacques was on television, there were fewer than ten channels," points out Jean-Michel, 67. "In the 1970s, we'd have 35 million Americans watching all at once on ABC. That's unthinkable today, unless it's the Super Bowl."

Fabien also has to contend with a fractured Cousteau dynasty. In 1990, shortly after Jacques's first wife died, the 79-year-old patriarch confessed to a long affair with Francine Triplet, a Frenchwoman 40 years his junior. Jacques married her a year later, and Jean-Michel was swept aside as his stepmother took over his duties within the Cousteau Society. After Jacques died, in 1997, Francine was named president of the Society, which owns all commercial rights to the Cousteau name

and his work; Jean-Michel agreed not to use "Cousteau" to promote his own ventures unless he directly precedes it with "Jean-Michel." And while he's released more than 70 of his own blue-chip TV documentaries, he's never attained Jacques's megastardom—a fact that's left the next-generation Cousteaus lingering backstage.

All this means that Fabien is going to have to succeed on his own passions and talent. It does appear that he has plenty of both. His emergence began in 2000, when he joined Jean-Michel on a filming expedition to South Africa. Two years later, National Geographic hired him to host a special on the legendary 1916 Jersey Shore shark attacks. This fall, Fabien completed his first self-produced project, *Mind of a Demon*, which debunks the notion that great white sharks are ruthless killing machines with a taste for humans. He enlisted Hollywood inventor Eddie Paul to build a 14.5-foot submarine that looks and swims like a great white. Dubbed *Troy*, it allowed Fabien to capture never-before-seen footage of the predators dueling for territory off Mexico's Pacific coast. Despite a budget of only \$650,000, the one-hour film premiered on CBS in November—the first network airing of a Cousteau documentary in more than a decade.

He'll be onscreen again next spring in *Ocean Adventures*, Jean-Michel's new six-hour PBS series, which mixes celebration of undersea beauty with reporting on the plight of marine ecosystems. Fabien plays a starring role in the final two-hour episode, which explores America's national marine sanctuaries. The series also unites him for the first time on television with both his

33-year-old sister, Céline, and Jean-Michel; KQED Public Broadcasting in San Francisco, the project's co-producer, has dubbed it "the return of the Cousteaus." Fans drawn by that pitch might be surprised by the thumping soundtrack and reality-TV format, with crew members and sea critters getting equal camera time—a result, to some degree, of Fabien's preproduction suggestions and editing-room tinkering.

Blending environmental gospel with pop entertainment is tricky business, but Fabien argues that it's essential to jump-start ocean conservation in an era of 400 cable channels and *Desperate Housewives*. And if you're going to lure people into caring about the undersea world, it helps to roll out its biggest stars, which is why he's planning documentaries on blue whales and the giant squid. "The Cousteaus have always been a voice for the sea," he says. "This is what I've inherited: the responsibility of exploring and protecting the oceans." —MICHAEL BEHAR

## 13. JEB CORLISS AND MARIA VON EGIDY: WING PEOPLE

MISSION// FLY LIKE A BIRD

THE RACE TO BE THE FIRST to jump out of a plane and land safely without deploying a parachute is on. That's the goal of Malibu-based Jeb Corliss, 29, and South African Maria von Egidy, 41, who, working separately and in secret, say they've found a way for humans to leap from 30,000 feet and live—wearing flying-squirrel-like wingsuits that slow free fall to less than 40 miles per hour while propelling you forward at more than 100 miles per hour. This can make for a rough landing, but BASE jumper Corliss claims to have invented a touchdown strategy that "can be done ten times out of ten without breaking a fingernail." Meanwhile, von Egidy, a former costume designer, says she's within a year and \$400,000 of skydiving's ultimate prize; now all she needs is a willing test pilot. "Obviously," she says, "it will have to be someone very brave." —JUSTIN NYBERG