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Paddles Up

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Ocean Therapy

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BY KRISTINA ANDERSON

Life is very busy for ocean-lifestyle purveyors Ian Foo and his wife, Lauren Turnbaugh. At their iconic Kailua-Kona mom-and-pop shop Hypr Nalu, a small surf shack across from the pier, they carry their own brand of apparel, stand-up paddleboards, outrigger canoes and surfboards, offering rentals and lessons while sharing something even more important to them — an authentic devotion to the ocean.

Their friendly faces, competitive nature, commitment to fitness and four beautiful children (along with surf dog Ollie) are well-known to

started young. Growing up all over Southeast Asia, he swam competitively from an early age. His dad, a traveling physician stationed in Malaysia, moved the family far and wide, including England, where Foo attended boarding school and later became his school's swimming champion. He even made the Malaysian Olympic swim team in 1984, but unfortunately, the country boycotted the games that year and he was unable to compete. Later, on a swimming scholarship to UC Berkeley, Foo obtained his business degree and hit the corporate world hard. He worked on Wall

100-hour weeks. I stayed through two crashes, until Wall Street was in its 'psychotic' phase. You could make great money, yes, but I began asking myself, 'Am I doing what's important?' I didn't have a good answer, so I quit."

Once he returned to the Bay Area in the early 1990s, Foo reconnected with good friend Lau-

the Kona paddling, surfing, swimming and athletic communities.

"Our mission in life is to help people rejuvenate and rejoin the connection to oceans all around us," says Foo, who describes himself as the "chief eternal optimist" of his business.

For Foo, the love of water

Street for Salomon Brothers in the high-pitched, frenetic world of investment banking, helping structure the mega-deals that took companies public. But eventually, the high life wore thin.

"I didn't like New York and the cutthroat lifestyle," recalls Foo. "They pay you very, very well but expect

ren Turnbaugh, a single mom and fellow Berkeley alum. Together, they decided to try something completely different and a world away from their respective, former corporate lives — start a fitness sportswear company, even though neither had any experience in



Ian Foo of Hypr Nalu crafts custom boards with intricate designs.
KRISTINA ANDERSON PHOTO

(Inset)
Ian Foo (in green) and Lauren Turnbaugh (far right) are joined by their children Madeline, Ky, Alyssa and Weylin.
PHOTO COURTESY ALYSSA FOO



fashion merchandising.

But excellent at sensing market trends, Foo and Turnbaugh designed and created a line of apparel called "Body Masters Sportswear," and found immediate success.

"We had a product called 'Clawbutt,' which was our first big seller at 50,000 pairs," says Foo with a laugh. "We were really ahead of our time with this clothing line, and were (a) huge hit with the gay community. In fact, we were the top vendor for 'International Male' at that time. Although we also designed and sold women's clothes, too."

Eventually, when a large, well-known, big-box retailer began knocking them off, they decided not to fight them, but join them. So they went under contract with the retailer for an astonishing \$16 million to produce the new line within 16 months. With 300 employees, they

still did everything themselves — cutting, sewing and finalizing the production. Eventually, they ran into issues with a supplier who shorted them on the 100 percent cotton fabric they specified, and the retailer fired them, suing for millions.

Although they lost everything monetarily, Foo felt the worst about having to lay off hundreds of employees.

"The bigger you grow, the more problems you get," he muses.

Both he and Turnbaugh returned to corporate life to pay back all the debts. Foo worked in business development for a metal-crafting company, which created prototypes for aerospace and automotive clients. He enjoyed the job immensely and learned a lot about design and production. But then came another crash and they lost everything — again.

Fortunately, Hawai'i was

their escape and their salvation.

"We'd been coming here every year since college," Foo says. "And since we were broke anyway, we decided to sell our only asset, our home in the Bay Area, and just come. We had no jobs, no money, no income, nothing!"

Once in Hawai'i, he says he knew he had to change his attitude, and he did, becoming a highly competitive outrigger paddler.

"I applied everything I knew from swimming to the physics of paddling," he says. "It's like swimming in the breath control, the explosiveness of it."

He also taught himself surfing. Not surprisingly, the whole family participated in watersports at a high level.

Foo soon realized there was a market niche on the Big Island for one-man canoes, as there was a two-year wait for these specialty



Ian Foo takes surf dog Offie out on the water back in 2016.
PHOTOS COURTESY IAN FOO

(Top left)
Hypr Nalu's 'Ohana board series is great for paddling or surfing.

boats. So he went into production. After some problems again with suppliers and production issues (stealing his carbon, substituting deficient materials and stealing designs), and another heavy business loss, Foo and Turnbaugh still didn't give up. They expanded the business in 2003 to focus on stand-up paddleboards. They say most of the boards are multifunctional, mean-

ing they can be paddled as well as surfed.

Creating them of exotic veneer materials such as rosewood, African ebony, blue and brown cat's-eye and other woods, the stunning but durable boards are so beautiful they could be hung on the wall as art.

They ship worldwide, but Foo says they have learned their lesson about growing too big or relying on distributors.

"We have constant interest from certain big-box retailers to produce boards for them, but we always decline. We are small by choice," he says.

Now, nothing gets him down, including two major flooding events in recent year, which whipped high surf across the street into their small store and outdoor displays.

"I wasn't phased by the floods, even though there's no insurance available down here," he says. "After what we've been through, those were easy."

At the heart of everything, Foo and Turnbaugh say it's all about the love of the ocean and promotion of a fit lifestyle: "We won't get rich doing this. We make just enough to pay the bills while doing what we love and bringing the mana of the ocean to our customers and community."

For more information on Hypr Nalu, call 960-4667 or visit hyprnalu.com.



(Left) Ian Foo (far right) poses for a photo with his Kai Ehitu paddling buddies Bruce Ayau, Niklas Dahm and Theron Ogata.
(Above) Hypr Nalu's nine-foot Walnut board