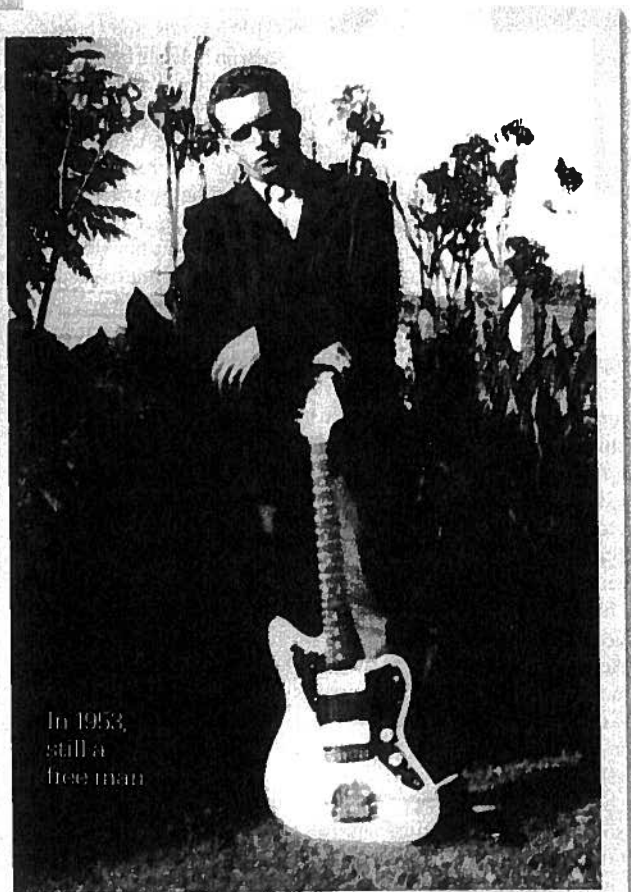


WHEN I KNEW

EIGHT ICONIC MEN — FROM ACTOR ROBERT DUVAL TO SURFER KELLY SLATER — DESCRIBE THEIR PATH TO GREATNESS AND THE MOMENT THEY REALIZED THE POWER OF THEIR GIFT.

as told to **LARRY PLATT**



In 1953,
still a
free man

MERLE HAGGARD

PRISON PAVED THE WAY FOR THE ORIGINAL COUNTRY MUSIC OUTLAW.

I WAS A WILD BOY AND MY father died when I was nine, so I got into trouble a lot. In my early 20s, I spent a few years in San Quentin for burglary. They put me in the toughest place because I'd made 17 escapes from prison or juvenile halls. I was tempted to escape from San Quentin, too, but music kept me there. I wrote 10,000 songs at San Quentin — they weren't no good, but I had to write those songs to get to the good ones. Music saved me. It made me a survivor.

Then on New Year's Day, 1959, Johnny Cash came to play at San Quentin. I wasn't really a fan prior to that show. When he got there, he couldn't sing — I guess he'd had a rough New Year's Eve up in 'Frisco. I thought he'd get his ass booted off that stage. But he got that crowd in the palm of his hand.


The next day, 25 or 30 guys in the courtyard wanted to learn to play the guitar like Johnny Cash. He was just so charismatic. If there were 40 other stars in a room, he'd be the one you'd look at. What

other star are you gonna look at? Eminem? C'mon. You look at fuckin' Johnny Cash, and you know it. I said to myself, if he can do that without his voice, then I can do something with my talent.

I didn't meet Johnny until 1963. We were on the same TV show in Chicago, and I was next to him at the latrine. We'd both been up for days. He bumped my shoulder and held out a Dextro-drine pill. He then held out a flask with wine in it and said, "Wash it down with this."

He didn't know I'd been in San Quentin. In 1969, I was a guest on his TV show and I thought to myself, I'll confide in ol' John, tell him where I first saw him. I told him I loved his show at San Quentin, and he said, "I don't remember you playing in that show." I said, "I wasn't in the show. I was in the audience." Our relationship was never the same after that. We became like brothers. He once said to me, "You're exactly what people think I am."

I miss ol' John.



Playing his first
round match
at Wimbledon
in 1980

JOHN MCENROE

TENNIS'S TANTRUM-
PRONE GENIUS
NEVER BELIEVED
HIS OWN HYPE.

I can't remember not knowing how to play tennis. There had to be a beginning — when someone showed me how to grip the racket — but I must have blocked that out, because in my memory, I could play from the start.

I didn't have any history of tennis in my family. I grew up in Douglaston, Queens, and my parents started playing at the same time I did. I really learned the game at the Port Washington Tennis Academy, on Long Island, under Harry Hopman, who had been the Australian Davis Cup coach. I wouldn't have known the guy if I fell over him, but he had this aura about him. I can't explain what it was, but I know one thing: When I went on the court, I tried harder because I wanted to impress him.

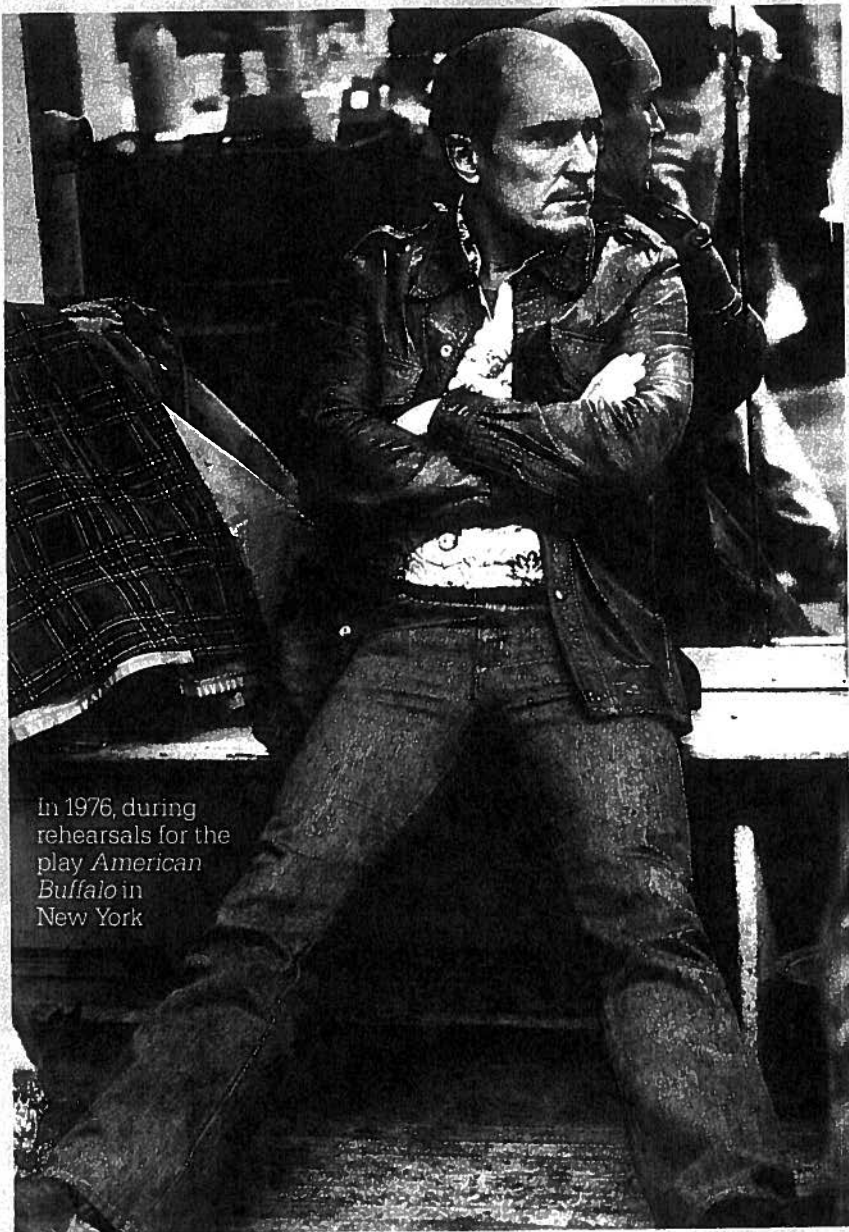
My dad was supportive, but he was very into me playing tennis. I told him, "Don't pressure me now — at least wait until the 18s," which is the peak of your junior career in preparation for college. That turned out to be good, because I had a normal sports childhood — playing soccer and basketball, in addition to tennis — if you can call growing up in New York normal.

Then people started saying things. When I was 13, my parents sent me to the National Indoors in Chicago. I stayed with a friend of my family's, whom my father was in the Air Force with. I lost in the round of 16, but I won the doubles. In the *Chicago Sun-Times* the next day, a writer said something like: "Of all the guys I watched, I predict that this guy is going to be number one in the world." I was, like — Whoa! I was really taken aback — that was quite a pronouncement.

I remember thinking it would be smarter to not buy into that stuff. You hear all the time about how guys set goals for themselves to be number one or to be the best ever in their sport. I made a conscious effort to not make those kinds of prognostications.

I got the sense that something could happen in 1977, when, as the top junior player, I made it to the semifinals of Wimbledon. That told me that the leap between the juniors and playing — and beating — pros wasn't going to be as big as I'd anticipated.

**MY COACH HAD THIS
AURA ABOUT HIM.
I TRIED HARDER
BECAUSE I WANTED
TO IMPRESS HIM.**



In 1976, during rehearsals for the play *American Buffalo* in New York

ROBERT DUVALL THE LEGENDARY ACTOR FOUND HIS OWN METHOD EARLY ON.

IN THE FIFTIES, AFTER BEING IN THE Army, I went to New York. I was sleeping on Gene Hackman's kitchen floor, and he introduced me to Dustin Hoffman. Later, Dustin and me and three other actors shared one of those railroad flats at 107th and Broadway. Hackman once offered me his last \$300 when I busted myself up falling off a horse. I didn't take the money, but that was the kind of guy he was. We all shared our dreams and talked about where we wanted to go. That's when I learned that acting is about finding your character's vulnerability.

I did a play called *The Midnight Caller*. My character comes home drunk and can't find his girlfriend. I played him very emotionally open. [Playwright] Horton Foote came with his wife and ultimately gave me a part in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I started to learn that you had to trick yourself within a scene to give your character vulnerability.

Years later, when I played Stalin in the nineties, I had to find that same vulnerability in a monster. That's what drama is about; that's what life is about. In that final scene, I put a picture of his wife, who had committed suicide, on the mantel, and I let it eat at me and work on me emotionally. Before we shot it, I said to the director, "The camera's too far back. Come in. Something's going to happen." And it did. I had a very vulnerable moment without necessarily designing it — I'd been feeling the character's loss.

I don't know what you call that. It's not the Method. Maybe it's the Bobby Duvall School of Acting. I don't know what the hell it is, but it had its roots with those guys back in New York in the fifties.

THOMAS KELLER AMERICA'S GREATEST CHEF SAYS COOKING IS ALL ABOUT NURTURING PEOPLE.

My mother was a restaurateur and I worked for her, starting as a dishwasher when I was 12 or 13. I loved washing dishes. It taught me discipline in the kitchen. In 45 seconds, you realize whether you're successful or not. And if you're unsuccessful, you have to figure out in a hurry how to be successful again. You have to organize yourself and the dishes around you so there isn't chaos. You have to be efficient with space, time, and movement. It taught me how to perfect what I was doing through repetition, which is what cooking is all about. When a young cook comes to me today and says, "OK, I'm bored with this task and ready to do something else," I'm like,

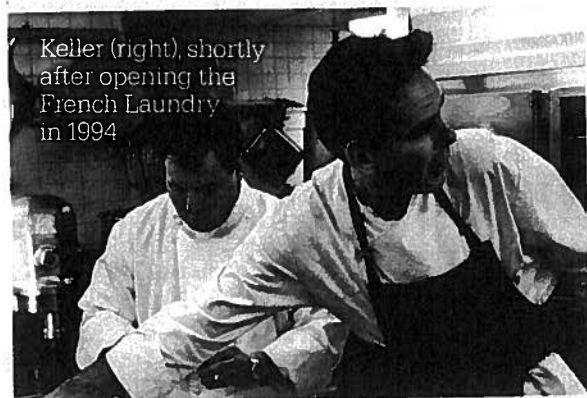
"What else is there? This is cooking."

I really embraced cooking when I was working at the Palm Beach Yacht Club under my mother and my brother. That's where I began the process of perfecting my hollandaise sauce, which took two years. You do it every day and you start to learn what works — the temperature of the eggs, the temperature of the butter, the temperature of the environment. But early on, cooking for me was still a physical thing. I was on the line with six other guys doing 300 dinners a night. For someone who's 21 years old, that adrenaline is amazing.

But then Roland Henin at the Dunes Club in Rhode Island taught me that cooking's not about me and

my adrenaline. It's about the fact that we're nurturing people. He made me the staff cook. Who wants to cook for the staff? You want to be on the line with the big guys, cooking for the guests and working with

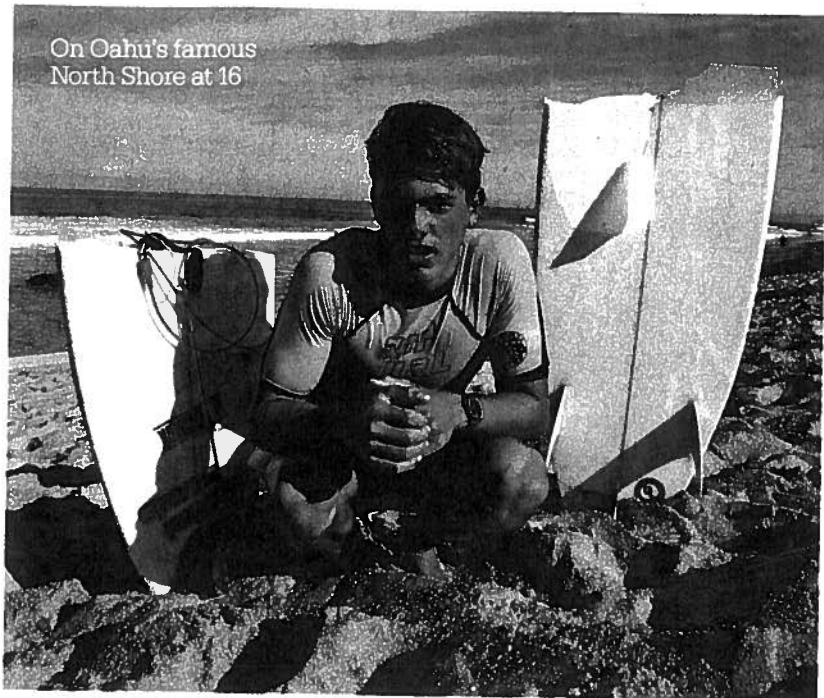
the truffles and the foie gras. Roland convinced me it was a job that had credibility, integrity, and honor. That's when I realized there's an emotional connection between us and the people we're feeding.



Keller (right), shortly after opening the French Laundry in 1994

FROM TOP: RICHARD CONE/IN/IN/ DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES COURTESY THE FRENCH LAUNDRY

On Oahu's famous North Shore at 16



KELLY SLATER
THE WORLD'S GREATEST SURFER
TALKS TO THE OCEAN — AND HE
SAYS IT TALKS BACK.

AT A PRETTY EARLY AGE, IT WAS clear that surfing was going to be my life's journey. It was a feeling inside that I was sort of chosen, if that's the word.

I first surfed when I was five, on a boogie board my dad gave me. I remember feeling back then that the ocean was talking to me. You find the wave, and the wave finds you. You're so in tune with the ocean that you're both more and less aware than normal. I remember being

aware of this connection but not knowing what to make of it.

I also remember there being these little ripples that would come at me, refractions of waves. I used to think there was a friend miles away from me sending me messages through the ocean. And I had to respond by being a part of the ocean — it seemed like a world that was mine and no one else's. No one bothered me or told me what to do or told me to do things a certain way. I grew up skateboarding, and that

GEORGE LOIS
THE REAL-LIFE DON DRAPER NEVER STOPPED
TAKING RISKS.

I was born with balls. I grew up in the Bronx, in a racist Irish Catholic neighborhood. I was Greek, so they treated me like I was black. I felt like an outsider, but I kicked the shit out of every Irish kid in my neighborhood — I didn't take shit from anybody.

When I was 14, I was lucky enough to have a teacher, Miss Engel, who sent me to the High School of Music and Art. One of the classes was a design course, where you'd cut out triangles or squares and make a design out of them. It was kind of mindless. The last class of the term, we were given a big rectangular piece of paper and told to make a design of rectangles out

of it. Everyone was working frantically, and I just stared out the window. When the teacher, Mr. Patterson, came to collect the assignment, I signed the lower corner of my blank sheet of paper: G. Lois. I wondered if he understood: I'd just given him one pure rectangle.

The next day, three teachers told me how much they loved it. It really was an epiphany. It made me understand that you haven't accomplished anything if your answer to any design or advertising problem isn't a surprise. Everything you do has to be memorable. It's not enough just to do great work — it's about talent, salesmanship, and a sense of theater.

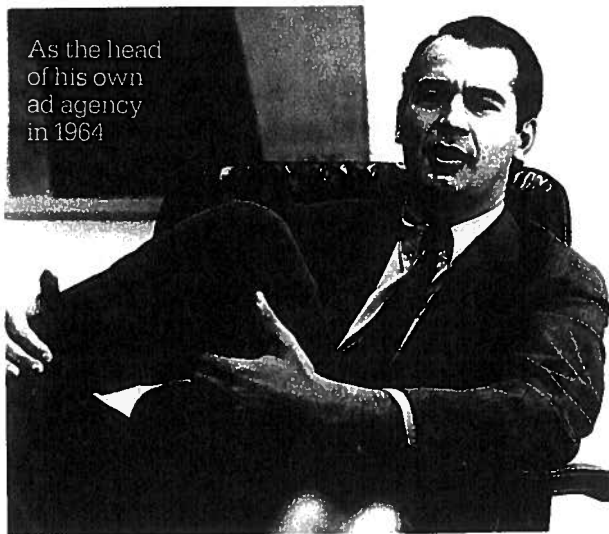
helped me imagine a different way to surf. At 14, I won a couple of pro events and I started beating guys who were 18.

I will say that the goal of being the best surfer ever was definitely in my mind. I didn't know if it was reachable, but people who achieve great things set those kinds of goals for themselves. I'd set all sorts of goals: I'm going to catch this wave, win the title this year, beat this guy. I would think to myself, I beat this guy, who beat that guy, who beat the world champion — so, by extension, I'd convince myself I could beat the world champion.

The decisive moment was when I beat my brother Sean in the 1986 pro-am Excalibur Cup at Sebastian Inlet in Florida. He was older. He had surfed longer than I had. At the time, we talked about how I might have caught a better wave than him, but I think that was the beginning of my tuning in and taking off.

I've always done a lot of visualization. No one ever taught me how. If your mind is fertile, it's natural — we call it mind-surfing. I'd do it just before I'd surf. I'd imagine the whole beach with the word *no* written all over it, covering the beach. Even if I was running late, I couldn't go into the water until, in my mind, I'd changed every *no* to *yes*.

**PEOPLE WHO ACHIEVE
GREAT THINGS SET
GOALS. THE GOAL OF
BEING THE BEST SURFER
EVER WAS IN MY MIND.**



As the head of his own ad agency in 1964

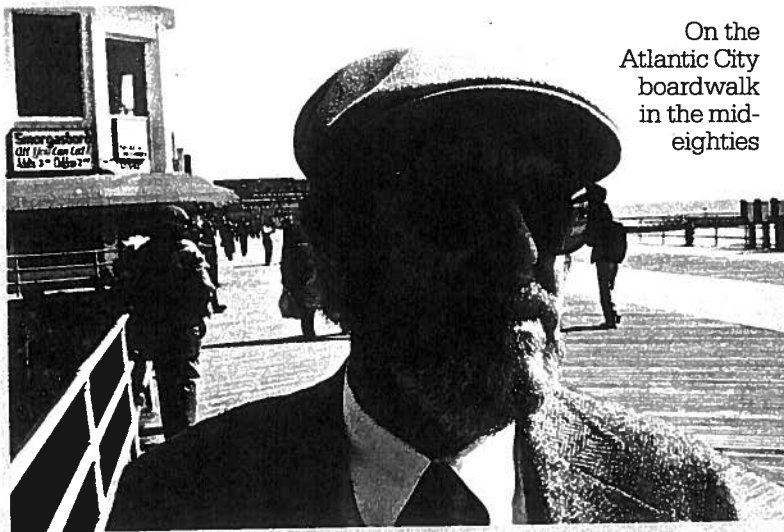
ELMORE LEONARD
THE PROLIFIC AUTHOR WASN'T
AFRAID TO IMITATE HIS HEROES.

I LOVED WESTERNS, AND, AROUND 1950, the first couple of western stories I wrote were rejected. That's when I thought, Let's do this right — do some research. I bought books to learn how to bring my westerns alive. What did people wear? What coffee did they drink? What types of suspenders did the men wear?

I made my first sale just before my 25th birthday. I had a belief in myself, and it came from reading. I was always reading stories in magazines, and I just thought my stories were better than most of them. In the early forties, most stuff was too wordy. Books were too long, too crowded with lines of narration. I've always said: If it sounds like writing, revise it.

After World War II, I found Hemingway. I loved his style, the white space on his pages, that you could tell a story with dialogue. Reading Hemingway inspired me to think about my own sound on the page. I would copy down a paragraph from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and, without looking at the book, I'd try to continue writing in that voice. It was an exercise I'd do to try and find my own sound.

For nearly 10 years, I worked in advertising, but my goal was always to sell to the movies. I got up every day at 5 AM to write. I'd sit in my cold living room at a cocktail table with my 8-1/2-by-11 tablet, with no lines. I'd make rules for myself — I couldn't put the coffee on until I'd already started to write. I sold 30 stories in the fifties and wrote five books, westerns. At work, I'd sometimes write with my arm in my drawer behind my desk, so people couldn't see I was writing. I hadn't sold



On the Atlantic City boardwalk in the mid-eighties

anything to the movies, but I quit my job anyway in '61. Instead, I did some freelancing to make ends meet.

After a few years, the market for westerns dwindled, so I turned to crime. I'd gotten advances of \$4,000 for my third and fourth paperbacks. The next one, *Hombre*, got only \$1,250, and it took a year for the publisher to sell it. In '72, I read *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and saw that you could start in a scene with dialogue already going. By the fourth line, you can tell where they are, and in the sixth line, you could sprinkle a little more backstory in while they're still talking.

In 1984, I finally got on the *New York Times* bestseller list,

after I'd been writing for 30 years. It was never one of my goals because I didn't care for any of the books on that list. The ones that made that list, I wouldn't read. The review was written by that guy from Maine, who is at all the Red Sox games. What's his name? Stephen King. He's terrific. He wrote something like, "After I read this book, I had to go back and read the last seven or eight books." That's when I knew I was doing fine.

I HAD A BELIEF IN MYSELF AND IT CAME FROM READING — I JUST THOUGHT MY STORIES WERE BETTER THAN MOST.

JAMES WATSON

THE CO-DISCOVERER OF THE STRUCTURE OF DNA FOUND INSPIRATION IN HIS PARTNER.

If I hadn't gone to the University of Chicago, I would have never made the discovery. Chicago's aim was to prepare you for greatness. It's a presumptuous statement, but that's what the president of the school would say. Chicago taught me to always ask why, to think like a scientist. I think I was the only person in the world educated to find the structure of DNA.

As a young boy, I'd go off by myself and watch birds. From about 12 on, my chief friends were books and birds. My father had given up religion in college, and when you give up one explanation, you need another. The

truth of the matter is, I was looking for something to replace God. So I majored in zoology. A review in the *Chicago Sun* of a book called *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* was pivotal for me. It said the gene must be a molecule and somehow this molecule must be copied and that there was information there.

Francis Crick was working on the structure of proteins at Cambridge when I began working in the lab there in 1951. We hit it off immediately. He was the first person I ever met whom I could talk to about DNA. We realized this in the first hour of meeting each other. Francis said, "Why did

you come here?" And I said, "I saw an X-ray picture of DNA, and I realized that the essence of DNA was going to be found in an X-ray structure lab, not in a biochemist lab."

You know, the moment someone saw Crick, they'd think, "He's bright." The moment someone saw me, they'd think, "He's awkward." By the time I got the Nobel Prize, in '62, I was relaxed about myself. Success makes you confident. In 1968, I got married and I went up and gave a talk at Dartmouth. I realized I could speak on my feet; I could tell jokes. By that stage, I was Crick's equal and not his inferior. People said I could lead.

Years after we graduated, an old classmate of mine from Chicago came up to me and said, "No one at Chicago ever thought you were going to be successful at all!"



PHOTO: LARRY SHENAU; BOTTOM LEFT: ANTHONY REMONDINO; BOTTOM RIGHT: JAMES WATSON