

LAST SHOT

ART BREWER

THE PHOTOGRAPHER
RECALLS WILD TIMES
WITH SURF LEGEND,
BUNKER SPRECKELS



Bunker breaking the law by showing a black man a photograph of a nude white woman, South Africa, Winter 1975

Adolph Spreckels III, or Bunker to his friends, was the archetypal bad boy of surfing. After inheriting a fortune, he used his wealth to travel the world, surfing the best breaks, getting into bar fights and sleeping with the hottest women – 64 in one week apparently. At the height of his excess he hired Art Brewer, a surf photographer, to document a substance-fuelled three-month tour of the world. It turned out to be Bunker's last. Here, Art reflects on his time with "Surfing's Divine Prince of Decadence". TIM NOAKES

"Out of the blue I got a call from Bunker: 'Got a passport?' He wanted to know if I'd come with him to surf and shoot pictures that summer – three months of first class travel – LA, London, and then South Africa. Two weeks later I was being chauffeured around LA buying the best photography equipment money could buy. As his personal photographer, Bunker wanted me to look the part. I exchanged board shorts and flip-flops for slacks, a sports coat, and nice shoes, courtesy of Bunker's wallet – as was our stay at the Beverly Hills Hotel. The deal for the trip was simple: if I was fired I'd receive a first-class ticket home; if I quit, I was on my own. No salary but all expenses paid. We were greeted in London by paparazzi and a chauffeur-driven Jaguar. The week we spent there was a blur. Bunker was non-stop and we were soon on a plane again and headed for South Africa. After a layover in Johannesburg we were airborne again,

Durban bound. Bunker hooked up mid-flight with an Australian ex-con, David Landsley, who had recently left prison after being convicted of throwing a chap out of a window for making a pass at his wife. He was promptly hired as our driver.

Two brand new Mercedes with eight surfboards strapped to the roofs were waiting for us at the airport. We proceeded to the Edward Hotel and the Gunston 500 surfing competition. The next ten weeks were pure 24/7 crazy shit. Anything could happen and did. Bunker pulled a buck knife across the throat of an adversary at a banquet. He shot out stoplights while driving around Durban at night between bar fights. On his 25th birthday, dressed as a German U-boat commander with bell-bottom stretch pants, Bunker got pretty rough and destroyed both Mercedes.

His girlfriend then split, he fired me, and for good measure, he took a shot at me with his .25-caliber pistol. Then it was kiss and make up, and I was rehired. We moved on to Paris and it was the same craziness. We were chased by prostitutes, \$35,000 worth of new film equipment was purchased, and Bunker spent his last night in town with a redhead.

In 1976, I got a call that Bunker was dead. I thought it was him on the line, bullshitting me – 'pulling a Bunker' – but he had passed out and died at a friend's house on the North Shore. 'The Player' had made his final move."

Bunker Spreckels by Art Brewer and CR Stecyk III is published by Taschen

Image courtesy of Taschen