

Los Angeles Times  
**latimes.com**

Chili's new Fajita Trio  
Chicken, Shrimp & Steak



<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-cousteau21apr21,1,7128728.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>  
*From the Los Angeles Times*

## Philippe Cousteau's concern for the sea is in his DNA

The grandson of Jacques tries to make his ocean lessons hip and fun.

By Lynn Smith  
Times Staff Writer

April 21, 2007

If Philippe Cousteau, a 27-year-old with a master's degree in history, were to describe his many multimedia conservation projects, he wouldn't choose the word "educational." "It sounds so pedantic and boring," he said. He'd prefer "compelling," "empowering," "cool" and "sexy." Adventuresome, for sure, but with an added dash of "poetry and philosophy."

His grandfather, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, and his father, Philippe Sr., left him a formidable legacy. "We're communicators, explorers and environmentalists," he said this week during a visit to Los Angeles to promote his latest project for Animal Planet, "Spring Watch USA." In that and other programs, he said his mission is to leverage all the media his father and grandfather never knew — to make conservation simply irresistible to a new generation.

For "Spring Watch," Cousteau surfed with sea lions and swam with sea otters and gray whales to show how spring was shaping up last week in the Pacific Ocean. Other correspondents across the country are still filming birds, reptiles, bears and bobcats for the series and online event. It was based on similar BBC live broadcasts in spring and fall in which viewers can report in on the animals in their neighborhoods. The series, hosted by Jeff Corwin, launches tonight at 8.

Buoyed by a green movement in Hollywood, Cousteau's Washington, D.C.-based EarthEcho International has filled the next 18 months with various projects, including a simulated underwater ride for amusement parks and video games that require players to go outside. It has also consulted with the ecologically aware punk rock Warped Tour. The projects are sure to increase Cousteau's visibility as sustainability's most glamorous spokesman.

In June, he'll start filming "Oceans 5," a co-production of Discovery Channel and the BBC that focuses on conservation. "The BBC is doing some penance for 'Blue Planet,' a popular series they did on the world's ocean systems that didn't talk about conservation," he said.

Another upcoming project is a 16-part, team-based ocean exploration adventure incorporating sports. "We're making it fun and young and sexy," said Cousteau, a rock climber and snowboarder. He also plays guitar.

Tall and thin, Cousteau had the look of a model on Monday at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, where he drew stares from the tourists. His spiky hair and stubble looked Hollywood, his black jacket and exotic charms a bit French. He was born in Santa Monica to Philippe and Jan

Cousteau, an American and a former model. He was raised in Los Angeles and Westport, Conn., summered in France and graduated from a university in Scotland. He speaks French and Spanish and is now a well-known presence on the Washington, D.C., social scene, where he lives.

Surprisingly, he seemed uncomfortable with being the object of attention from a reporter, a photographer or a crowd. Rather than talk about himself, he stayed relentlessly on message — unable to resist little lectures about the environment.

Talking about a project he inspired, a new children's book that will take Curious George underwater, he said, "The ape has been to the moon, and he's never been in the ocean. The average federal budget for ocean exploration and conservation is *1/600th* the budget for space exploration. Knowing whether or not there was water on Mars is not critical to our survival.... Healthy oceans are. We've only explored 5% of our oceans."

After photos by the underwater seal tank, Cousteau sought out the aquarium's otter display. "The human head on average has about 100,000 hairs. Sea otters have 500,000 to a million hairs per square inch on their body to keep them warm."

Passing some sea dragons nearly indistinguishable from the plants, he said: "There are species going extinct around the world every day. It's terrible. We kill 70 to 100 million sharks a year for shark fin soup primarily." Cousteau does not eat seafood, partly because he doesn't like the taste, partly out of principle.

He paused in front of a tank with small stingrays. Last year, Cousteau was filming "Ocean's Deadliest" for Animal Planet when Steve Irwin was killed by a stingray barb. Cousteau helped administer CPR to his friend until paramedics arrived and pronounced him dead, he said. He finished the project by himself. "It wasn't the stingray's fault. It wasn't Steve's fault. It was just an accident, and that's what happens in life when things we do are dangerous," he said.

It's an attitude earned from sad experience. Cousteau's own father was killed in an airplane crash, leaving his wife, six months pregnant with Philippe, and a 3-year-old daughter.

"Family jealousies and issues" caused the fatherless siblings to be excluded from much of the Cousteau family's ongoing media activities, he said. Cousteau saw his grandfather a few times a year but was too young to accompany him on expeditions. Former crew members and other friends introduced him to underwater exploration, he said.

Cousteau was still in college when he and his sister, Alexandra, decided to create a nonprofit organization to honor their father. After they named their organization the Philippe Cousteau Foundation, a legal tussle arose with Jacques Cousteau's second wife and widow, co-founder of the Cousteau Society, over using the name Cousteau. Eventually, the siblings changed the name to EarthEcho, referring to the echo everyone's actions leave on the Earth.

"It wasn't a great sacrifice, believe me," Cousteau said. "People have a hard enough time spelling Philippe." Still, he conceded it's "ridiculous" that anyone would fight to prevent him from using his own name "in commerce to do what your family's done for two generations. But that is the way of it...."

"We're moving forward. You can go to the Cousteau Society and come up with your own judgment about the organization and what they're doing today. We see our mission to empower individuals to take action for a sustainable future. We're not just about raising awareness. That separates us and

makes us different."

Phone calls to the Cousteau Society's Hampton, Va., offices for comment went unanswered Friday.

He said it's ironic that underwater ocean exploration began only 50 years ago and yet that period has also seen the greatest amount of environmental destruction. When he talks to young people, he said, he always leaves them with a tip about something they can do to help. He said he tells them the next 50 years will determine whether "we make a change or continue down this road to disaster."

\*

---

*lynn.smith@latimes.com*

---

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at [latimes.com/archives](http://latimes.com/archives).

**TMSReprints**

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2007 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)  
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

PARTNERS:

