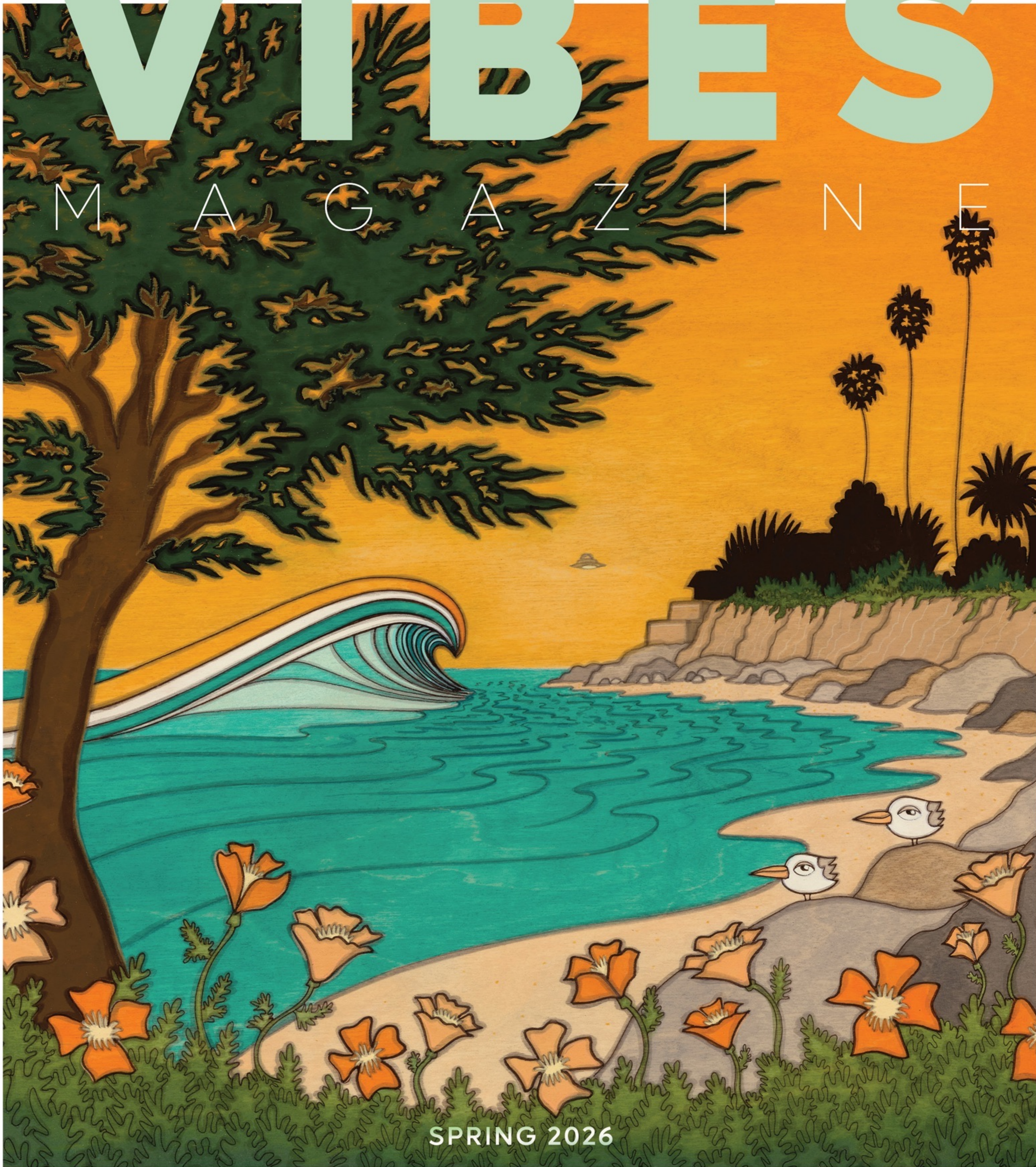


Santa Cruz

WIBES

M A G A Z I N E



SPRING 2026



MAKING SPACE IN THE WATER

BY JADYN-KATHLEEN POLK

PHOTOS BY HARLEY HUDSON

As humans, it is not a question of whether we are a part of the land — we exist and therefore participate in ecosystems. At times, that may feel out of our control or unfair, and it can be hard to find a moment of joy. Not a distraction, not a quiet moment in between work, but an entire space just to have fun. To discover something new about yourself, be somewhere beautiful, and end the day with a juicy, toasty burrito. Luckily, almost magically, the ocean, like all nature, has the power to remind you it is a beautiful honor to be a part of this world. It affords us the opportunity to attune to our softer and slower natures and realize ourselves in ways that are new and life-giving.

As a Community Outreach Intern with Black Surf Santa Cruz, a nonprofit that gives free surf lessons which prioritize BIPOC people, before and after programs are my favorite times. The process of building a safe space, then seeing the joyous faces of people who've enjoyed their time with us, just the way I've seen it in my dreams. I am one of the many dreamers in Santa Cruz whose imagination plays vibrant pictures of our hopes for the future — mine

being to have as many people as possible having as much fun as we can.

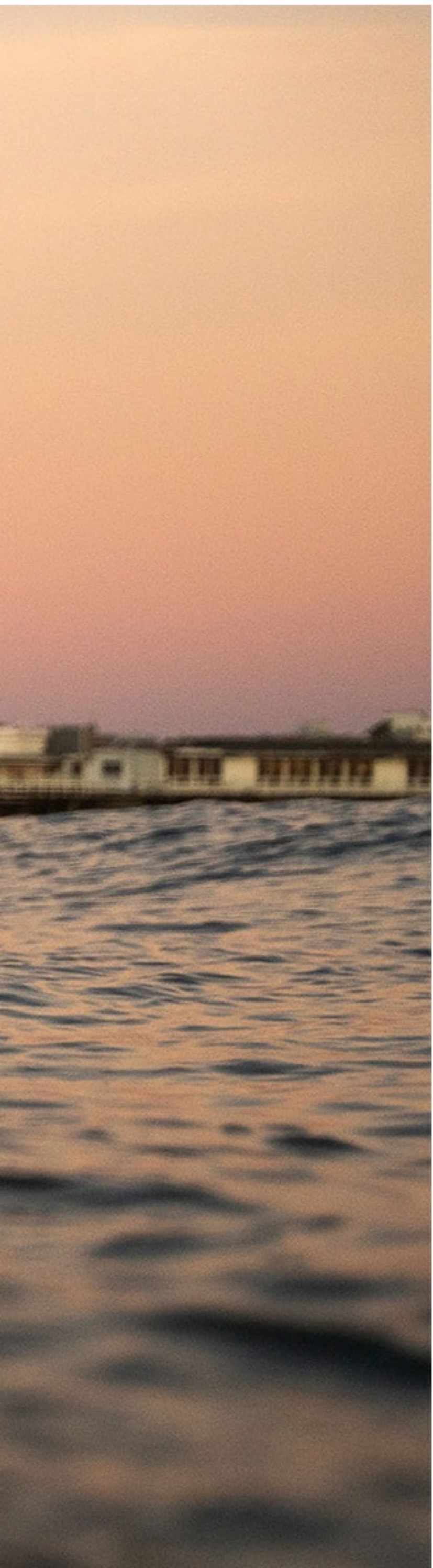
In my role, I assist with the backend of getting our programs ready to host participants, from updating resources for our Surf Guardians and coaches, attending tabling events and giving out free stickers, to cultivating relationships with other organizations that do similar work to provide better experiences for our community members, and much more.

Entering the water feels like swimming in the body of an incomprehensibly huge mythical spirit. The fluidity of the particles that make up our ocean, separating and reforming around my body, taking me in, connecting me to all the other bodies that it mothers. It's filled with all kinds of creatures, and when I am in the water, I feel like a creature, too. Floating, playing, becoming wet. It is a special thing to be on the only planet (that we know of) where we can breathe the air and the water is not too hot or too cold, providing all of the resources that it does. Touching the ocean becomes a moment to reflect on the ways I consume and am made of the body I am

entering. It leaves me feeling enriched and grateful to this life-giving spirit that is powerful, a creator, and sentient.

While I'd love for everyone to have their own relationship with the ocean based on mutual respect, my wish for the community of Santa Cruz is that we keep making spaces where our BIPOC community members feel safe and confident spending time outdoors. That doesn't mean to do anything except to mind your own business, or to treat others with dignity and respect as we reclaim a sense of normalcy after a history of being met with violence and hate for wanting to enjoy somewhere beautiful. Life teaches us that not everything is as it seems, that it is normal to discover many things we "know" to be true and solid may fall between our fingers like sand. I encourage everyone to be like the nature they love, to be strange, accepting, and nourishing to all kinds of life. To pay life forward, rather than cripple it with choices that are harmful to us all.

One of the difficult parts of this job is listening to the stories of people who feel disconnected from nature, who don't



believe they belong, or who fear it. At BSSC, we know this feeling was cultivated intentionally by imperial powers and enacted by people who engage in work that maintains systems of oppression, like segregationist legislation that is still alive today in redlining, violence, and economic disparities to keep us out of these spaces. Black surfers represent the nature our people have displayed for centuries, our instinct to fight for the truth and for love in the face of racist hate and violence.

The truth we've always known is that everyone belongs on Earth and should enjoy it to the fullest! In the face of our activism, BSSC and other organizations doing similar work have forced colonial powers to scurry

and rebrand themselves as having always known we belong, that we are beautiful, and Blackness is needed on this Earth.

We now know we are all composed of the same elements — predominantly oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen. The same elements as stars and from the Big Bang's fusion. We are as magical and mythical as the ocean is, and we deserve to enjoy ourselves and this time together on this little planet, in a massive galaxy, orbiting a black hole. So be weird, be kind, and seek every opportunity to express yourself. I'll end my share by saying I love you all and I'm so grateful to be one of many working to make this world a safer place.

For those interested in how I earned this role, it was with the services of the University of California, Santa Cruz's Humanities EXCEL Program. The assistant director of the program, Kylie Rachwalski, develops and oversees the various internship programs they offer. Rachwalski is brilliant at her job and skilled at making students feel supported as we begin our professional development. She helps interns understand what strengths they bring to the workplace, with a focus on individual growth, making sure every student can identify their special shine and skill sets, and thereby growing the confidence in the next generation of humanitarians. Thank you, Kylie, Esabella Bonner, and Christina Funck!