

Expanded Book Club Kit

"A shimmering rendering . . . pairs the surf culture of the Beach Boys with the sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll of *Daisy Jones & The Six*."
—ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

California Golden

Now in
paperback

A NOVEL

Melanie Benjamin

NEW YORK TIMES bestselling author of

THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD

Author Letter

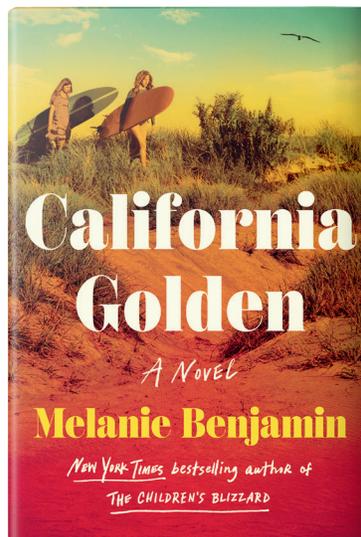
Dear Friend,

Thank you so much for preordering *California Golden*! I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. With every book I write, I have so much fun with the research. Much of it ends up in the book itself but a lot of it doesn't, other than as inspiration for me as I work. So this is an opportunity to share some of that inspiration with you! I hope you'll get a kick out of some of these extras that I couldn't fit in the book itself. I really enjoyed compiling these—including my first ever playlist for one of my novels!

Whether you choose *California Golden* for your next book club or tuck it in your beach bag to read on vacation, there's something in this kit—including recipes and fashion tips!—that will hopefully enhance your experience.

Dancing off in my white Go-go boots to have a Mai Tai—

Melanie Benjamin



Discussion Questions

Spoilers ahead . . .

1. *California Golden* explores a number of themes, including family, loyalty, ambition, and reconciling societal norms with individual desires. Which theme resonates the most deeply with you, and why?
2. Mindy and Ginger's parents never treated them well as kids and always involved them in their arguments. In what ways do you think this shaped Mindy and Ginger as individuals? How do you see this impact them throughout the rest of the story?
3. Despite a caring husband and loving daughters, Carol resented—and resisted—the traditional life in front of her. Why do you think that is? What could she have done differently? What would you have done if you were in her shoes?
4. Mindy and Ginger grow apart and live completely different lives. Why do you think they didn't stay in contact with one another? How do you think their lives might have been different if they hadn't fallen out of touch?
5. Ginger goes through so much pain in her life with no real support. Why do you think she was so attached to Tom even though he treated her so badly?
6. What does this novel tell you about love and friendship from family?
7. Do you think surfing serves as a metaphor in *California Golden*? What do you think it means?
8. If you were in Mindy's shoes and found out your sister had had a baby with your significant other, would your reaction have been the same as Mindy's? Do you think Mindy made the right choice raising the baby with Jimmy?
9. The Donnelly girls were a big thing in the surfing community (the "Fabulous Donnelly Girls!"), but they never seem to think of themselves as so. Why do you think that is?
10. Melanie Benjamin is known for grounding her novels in historically rich settings, and *California Golden* is set in the '60s, a time of significant cultural shifts and events. In what ways do we see the positive cultural changes at play, and what ways do we see the negative?
11. How do you feel about how the story ended? Do you feel the author was trying to leave you with any specific message?

Ginger

- The “pretty” one
- Curves for days
- Has more heart than talent
- Afraid of being left behind
- She just wants “Somebody to Love”

Mindy

- The “athletic” oldest Donnelly girl
- The best surfer in the family
 - Loves Jimmy Cho
- Loves being famous even more
- She was born “California Dreamin”

Carol Donnelly

- The original Surf Mama
- An athlete born in the wrong time
 - The anti-Donna Reed
- An enigma to her family
 - “These Boots Were Made for Walking”

Who's Who

Tom Riley

- The self-proclaimed Surf God
- Tries to seduce both Donnelly Girls
- Dangerous on and off the waves
 - He'll show you “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”

Jimmy Cho

- Surfing legend
- Gentleman with an edge
- Loves both Donnelly Girls
 - Serves in Vietnam
- He's no “Fortunate Son”

How to Dress Like the Donnelly Women



How to dress like Mindy Donnelly

When writing about Mindy during the period of her minor celebrity, I had a specific image in mind: The sheath dress, the Mary Jane shoes, maybe Go-go boots. 1960s fashion heavily influenced by Jackie Kennedy and then Mary Quant. The kind of clothes that Marlo Thomas wore in the first couple of seasons of *That Girl*. This was very 1960s, from the early years of the decade through about 1967. After that point, fashions—and hair—became looser. But if you wanted to look chic at The Whisky, or cute at the beach, these are some of the fashions you might have worn.

How to dress like Ginger Donnelly

Ginger doesn't get much chance to dress fashionably in the book. As a child she longs for traditional 1950s dresses but rarely gets them. As an adult, she's living so far outside of society, she has to take what she can get. But when she's in the commune, I imagine she dressed like the traditional hippie—clothes looser, often tie-dyed, peasant blouses and long skirts, in more natural fibers, hair worn natural—but mostly out of necessity, most likely wearing second-hand clothes most of the time.



How to dress like Carol Donnelly

In high school, Carol dreams of playing for the All-American Girls Baseball League (immortalized in the excellent movie, *A League of Her Own*). Then she becomes, for a short while, at least, a typical 1950s housewife. But her daughters notice she rarely covers her arms; she prefers sleeveless styles. And she goes without pantyhose, which was slightly scandalous. Then, when she goes on her surfing safari and turns her back on tradition, she mainly lives in a swimsuit. I envisioned Carol as more modest, however, than her lifestyle would indicate; I don't really imagine her wearing string bikinis.

Locations Behind the Book



CALIFORNIA

Van Nuys—Community within the greater Los Angeles area, in the San Fernando Valley. After World War II, with all the nearby airplane and auto manufacturing, the former farming community became a booming suburb. Carol and Bob Donnelly bought a home here when he returned from the war.

Whisky a Go Go—Iconic live music venue on the famous Sunset Strip, still open today. The Whisky, as regulars call it, opened in January of 1964 with Johnny Rivers as the first house act. Originally, women spun records on a stage suspended above the dance

floor; this evolved into the famous Go-go dancers with fringed dresses and white boots. One of the first house bands was The Doors. Every California rock band in the 1960s played the Whisky at some point in their careers.

Malibu Beach—The iconic surf spot, made famous by Gidget. The long, unbroken waves were heaven for surfers. The Beach Party movies were filmed nearby. As the sport became more popular in the 1960s the locals became frustrated by the influx of “kooks,” weekend surfers and tourists.

Laguna Beach—Where Carol moves with her daughters after the divorce. Also where the Brotherhood of Eternal Love was located. This is hippie heaven, an artistic and surfing town located about an hour south of Malibu.



VIETNAM

China Beach—Actual name My Khe, but American soldiers named it China Beach during the Vietnam War. Located on the coast of Vietnam, this was a famous R&R spot during the war, where soldiers were sent during leave. There was also a large military hospital there. Many soldiers who never would have surfed back

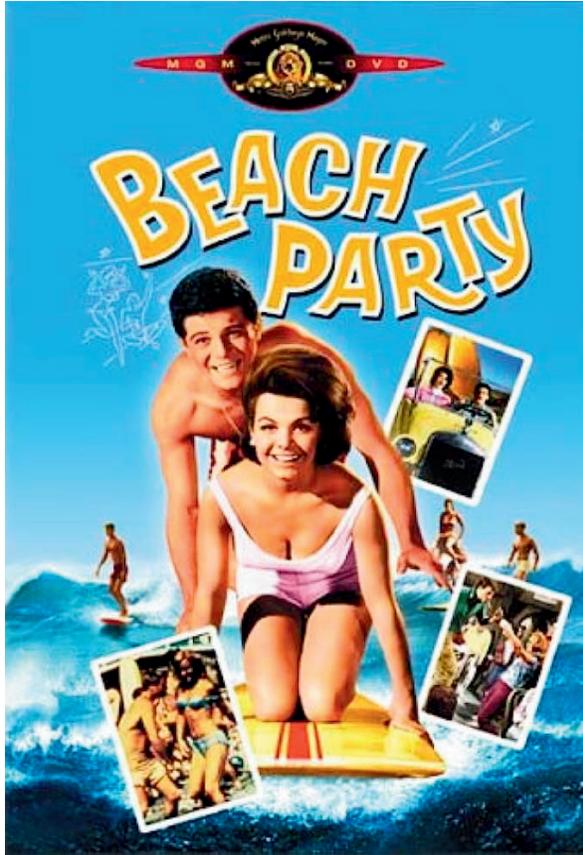
home were introduced to the sport there. Mindy goes here as part of her USO tour, and reunites with Jimmy Cho, who is stationed as a lifeguard.



HAWAII

Makaha—located on the western side of Oahu. When word reached the mainland in the mid-1950s of the big waves here, a few California surfers made Makaha their central location on a surfing safari. The first international surfing competition was held here in 1953. Carol Donnelly and her friend DeeDee go on a surfing safari to Makaha when Carol's daughters are young.

The Beach Party Films



This is an entire genre of films geared toward a teenage audience, starting in 1963 with the film *Beach Party*, produced by American International Pictures. AIP was a low-budget production company. While the film version of the book *Gidget* was released in 1959, to huge success, and definitely marketed to a teenage audience, there are differences between it and the true “Beach Party” films. For one thing, *Gidget*’s parents played a major part in that film. There wasn’t any music, either. And there was a morality lesson at the heart of it. AIP took the most popular elements—the beach setting and the teen heartthrob stars—and dispensed with any parents or morality lessons. AIP also added music—lots of music! Music by and for teenagers, which by 1963, were the largest consumer group. All those Baby Boom babies were in their teens now and had disposable income.

There were other movies that are included in this genre, some set against a skiing background, for instance. And major studios tried to replicate AIP’s success, including several Elvis

movies. However, AIP’s movies were by far the most successful and are what we remember collectively as The Beach Party movies, usually starring Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon, featuring musical acts like Dick Dale and his Del-Tones and little Stevie Wonder. There’s very little plot, no parents around at all, and the few older adults in the films are all portrayed comically. These movies are about surfing, sun, and lots and lots of scantily clad (for the time), beautiful—and exclusively white, it must be noted today—teenagers dancing to popular music. And occasionally surfing.

Real Malibu surfers like Miki Dora actually doubled for the stars in the surfing sequences, much like Mindy, Ginger, Tom Riley and the gang do in the novel. And it was ironic that in doing so, they helped these movies turn their hallowed, private surfing spot into one of the most popular beaches in the world, full of amateurs—“kooks”—trying to be like them. Spoiling their paradise.

The Beach Party movie era ended in 1967 with the release of *Thunder Alley*, which didn’t do well at the box office.

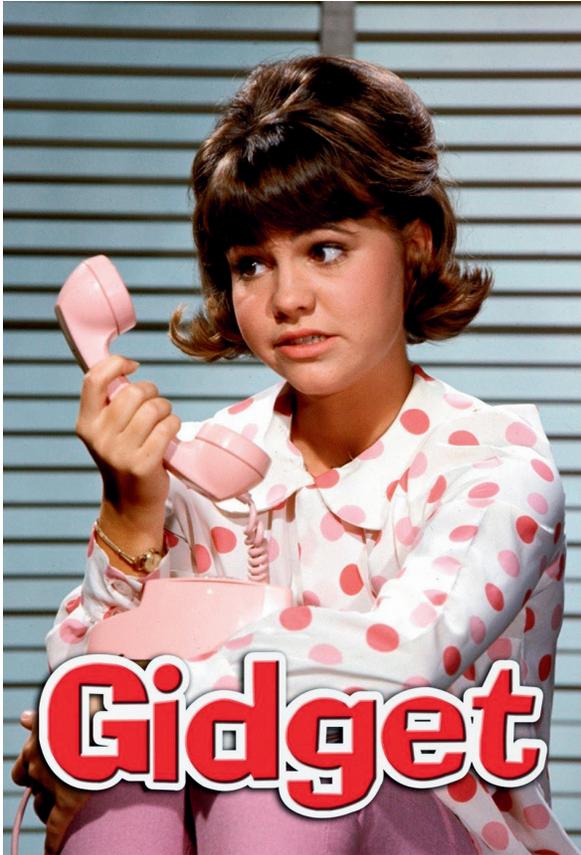
In 1987, *Back to the Beach* was released. This was basically a film with the premise of: What would happen if Frankie and Annette grew up, got married, turned into their parents, moved to the suburbs, and had a teenaged daughter who wanted to live with a surfer? It’s a bizarre, yet fun movie full of 1960s pop culture icons, 60s music, punk rockers, and musical numbers. It’s also the last movie Annette Funicello made before she retired.

I’d argue that the Beach Party movies were the first movies truly made only for a teenaged audience, and filmmakers like the late John Hughes can thank Frankie and Anette for their careers.

Here are some of the best of the Beach Party films, in my humble opinion:

Gidget, 1959
Beach Party, 1963
Muscle Beach Party, 1964
Beach Blanket Bingo, 1965
Back to the Beach, 1987

Gidget



Mentioned frequently in the book, *Gidget* was a true phenomenon in 1950s Southern California, and the entire nation.

One summer in the 1950s, a fifteen-year-old girl named Kathy Kohner took up surfing out of boredom. She stumbled across some of those original Malibu surfers—Miki Dora, Mickey Nunoz, Dewey Weber—hanging out at a rickety shack on Malibu Point. There were other women about, but none who wanted to surf. But Kathy was smitten, and begged the older guys to teach her, and let her surf with them. Finally tiring of Gidget's pestering, they let her. (Gidget was their nickname for her, a combination of "girl" and "midget," because she was so small.)

Kathy spent a couple of summers surfing with them, but then went on to college and married, had children. But during that first summer, her father overheard her talking on the phone using a strange lingo—surf lingo. Fascinated, he started writing down snippets of her conversation (creepy, right?). But her father was Frederick

Kohner, a successful Hollywood screenwriter, one of the Jewish *émigrés* who fled Europe before World War II to come to Hollywood. He collaborated with Kathy—who told him stories of her adventures that summer—to write a book, published in 1957, called *Gidget: The Little Girl With Big Ideas*. It was Kathy's image on the cover.

However, when the book was published only Frederick Kohner's name was listed as the author. He took full credit for the book at first; it was only after it became an enormous hit that he began including Kathy in interviews and giving her credit. Although he did give her a percentage when he sold the movie rights. When the book was rereleased in the 1990s, her name was finally listed as coauthor.

It's hard to describe how huge a deal *Gidget* was in 1957. It really put surfing on the map in Southern California, despite the fact that people had been surfing there since the 1920s. California teenagers, prior to *Gidget*, didn't really hang out at the beach the way we imagine they did. And surfers were outlaws, not icons.

But then *Gidget* made it all look glamorous and fun. And liberating, to a certain extent, for women—although women continue to this day to be marginalized in the competitive surfing world. When the novel was made into a hit 1959 movie starring Sandra Dee, spawning sequels and ultimately giving rise to the Beach Party movies, suddenly teenagers all over Southern California were flocking to the beach, and teenagers all over the rest of the United States were looking at them in envy. California Girls became the ideal. The Beach Boys only made surfing, sun, and California more popular. In 1965, a *Gidget* TV series premiered, starring an unknown Sally Field.

But it all started with Gidget—aka Kathy Kohner.

Localism in Surfing



One of the effects of the *Gidget* phenomenon was that surfers suddenly had to put up with crowded beaches and “kooks”—amateurs who couldn’t really surf, who had no desire to live the true surf life of following the waves, living outside of society, but who nevertheless wanted to look like those surfing gods. Those pristine California beaches, including Malibu, were suddenly overrun with tourists, kooks, and litter. And the water was filled with amateurs on surfboards who had no knowledge of the traditions of surfing—the sanctity of the lineup, meaning you took your turn riding the best waves, there was no cutting in, no popping up in front of someone else already riding in. There was a hierarchy, too, among the regulars that was disregarded by the dilletantes. Collisions became common, and some were on purpose; the locals often had no trouble plowing into some kook who was in the way. There were violent episodes, as well.

Locals owned the beach; that was the way it was then and it still is. You don’t just show up all of a sudden and belong to the tribe; you have to earn your way in.

The popularity of surfing, then, shone a spotlight that wasn’t always welcomed by the original surfers of the 1950s, before *Gidget* happened. All of a sudden surfing became a competitive sport with sponsorships, magazines devoted to it, and the purity of surfing life was at risk. What was seen as an ideal way of life, free from the pursuit of money, free from responsibility, was being co-opted and marketed. The Beach Boys, *Gidget*, all those Beach Party movies—none of them had any link to that original surfer mindset of leaving society behind and following the waves. The purists’ resentment was real—sometimes boiling over into violence.

And it persists still today.

Duke Kahanamoku



He is briefly mentioned in my novel, but he is remembered as one of the true legends of surfing and the man who brought it to California—and the world.

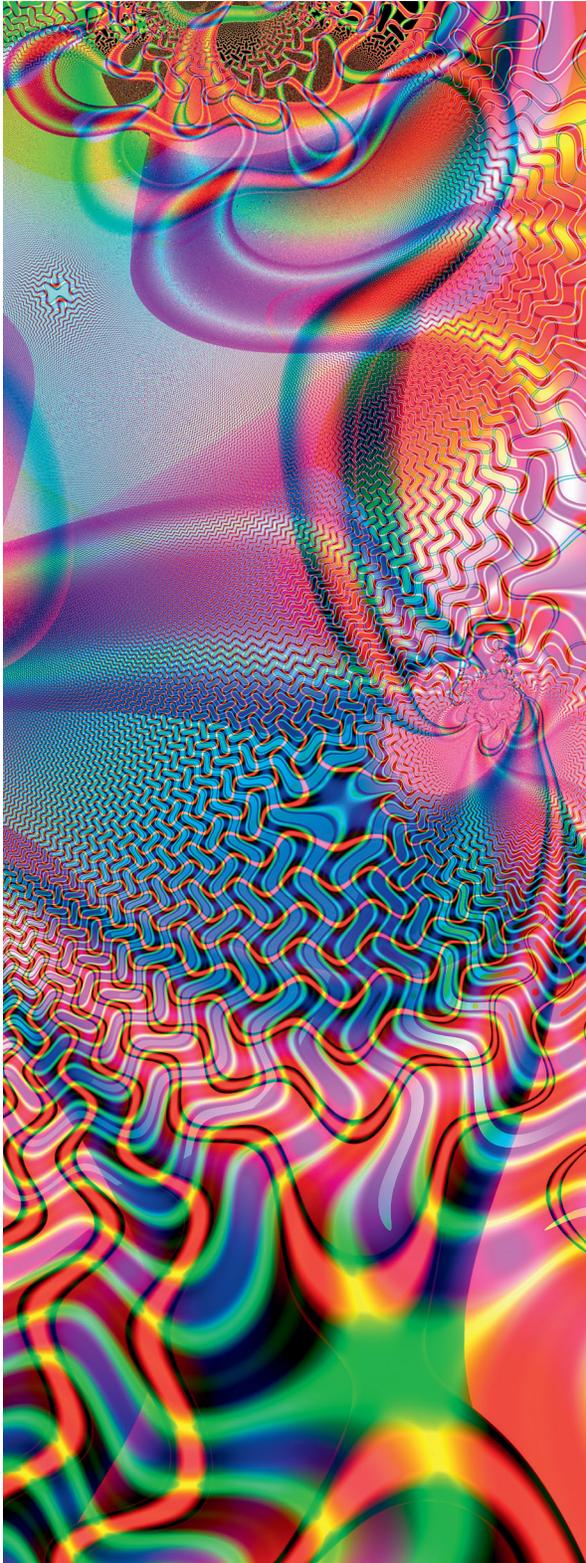
Duke was born Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku in 1890, in Honolulu. His family was minor Hawaiian nobility.

Duke spent his childhood near Waikiki and became a legendary swimmer and diver—a waterman—winning medals in three Olympics and breaking world records. He was also an excellent surfer, preferring, in his younger years, the traditional Hawaiian board made out of wood, standing sixteen feet tall and weighing 114 pounds. Between Olympics, Duke toured internationally to give swimming exhibitions. He also incorporated surfing in these displays and thus, in 1912, introduced surfing to Southern California. He did the same to Australia in 1914.

He did some stunt and background work in films during the periods he lived in Southern California. In 1925, Duke rescued several swimmers in Newport Beach, California, a heroic effort that led to much publicity and was the catalyst for lifeguards incorporating surfboards in their lifesaving equipment. In the 1930s and 1940s, Duke became very popular among the Hollywood crowd and taught many movie stars how to surf, also increasing the sport's visibility.

Duke died in Hawaii at the age of 68. He was the first person to be inducted in both the Surfing and Swimming Halls of Fame.

The Brotherhood of Eternal Love



Ever heard of “Orange Sunshine”? These bright orange LSD tablets were manufactured by the Brotherhood of Eternal Love in the late 1960s to early 1970s and distributed widely in the hope of starting a “psychedelic revolution.”

The Brotherhood was started by John Griggs, first as a commune. Soon, however, it became heavily involved in drug manufacturing (LSD) and importing (hashish, first from Mexico and later, Afghanistan). The Brotherhood moved south to Laguna Beach, establishing a commune in the hills. Legally registered as a non-profit religion, the Brotherhood opened Mystic Arts World, a headshop that also sold arts and crafts (and lots of LSD and marijuana in the back rooms). *Rolling Stone* dubbed them the “Hippie Mafia” and police regularly raiding the compound.

Dr. Timothy Leary was an icon to them, and after Leary was imprisoned, they hired the Weather Underground to spring him from jail in 1970. The Brotherhood broke up in 1972, after Griggs died of an overdose and the police arrested most of the remaining leadership.

Recipes



Everybody Come to Trader Vic's!

Trader Vic's was one of the cool places to see and be seen—and drink delicious tropical cocktails. Truly one of the first Tiki Bar-type restaurants, Trader Vic's started in 1934 (under the original name, Hinky Dink's) by Victor Bergeron, a San Francisco restaurateur. Soon, the restaurant changed its name to Trader Vic's and in 1960 started franchising. The chain once had restaurants all over the world, including in my hometown of Chicago, although now there are only two remaining locations in the US.

Trader Vic's and its competitor, Don the Beachcomber's, could be considered one of the first fusion restaurants. In this case, it was an American take on Polynesian and Chinese food. And drinks! Vic claimed to have invented the Mai-Tai and Crab Rangoon, among other things.

I'm a huge Tiki Bar fan. While I've never had a Trader Vic's Mai Tai, I can say that the Mai Tai at Billy's at the Beach in Newport Beach, CA, is the best I've ever had. So if I were having a party to celebrate *California Golden*, this is what I'd have on the menu!

Mai Tai

First up, Mindy's drink of choice, the iconic Mai Tai:

Shake all ingredients over ice:

- 2 oz. top shelf Caribbean rum
- ½ oz. Orange Curacao liqueur
- ¾ oz. freshly squeezed lime juice
- ⅓ oz. Orgeat (almond) sugar syrup
- ¼ oz. rich sugar syrup (ratio of 2 sugar to 1 water)

Shake, strain into a double old fashioned glass, garnish with your choice of lime, mint, or a fruit skewer (pineapple and maraschino cherries).



Planter's Punch

Maybe Ginger would like some Planter's Punch, Trader Vic-style?

- 3 oz. Jamaica rum
- ½ oz. grenadine
- Juice of 1 lime
- ½ oz. lemon juice
- ¼ tsp sugar
- Water

Pour rum, grenadine, lime, and lemon juice into a mixing glass filled with ice. Add sugar. Stir thoroughly and pour into 12 oz. glass full of ice, fill rest of glass with water. (Note: the original recipe calls for "charged water," which I've never heard of! But apparently it's a thing now, as well; it's sunlight-charged. You used to have to leave the water out in the sun for several hours, but now there are bottled waters that are charged with electrolytes and/or ions that have the same effect. Me, I'd just use plain water.)



Wahine

For Carol, how about a Wahine? This is described, in a 1947 cocktail book written by Vic Bergeron, as a “. . . cutie, especially recommended for the gals. You can knock their eyes out with this when it’s your turn to entertain the club at luncheon. As a special feminine touch, garnish each drink with a small gardenia and serve with short straws.”

- 2 oz. pineapple juice
- 2 oz. Puerto Rican rum
- Mix and serve in fresh coconut shell with large pieces of ice



PuPu

Now it's time for PuPu—the Polynesian name for appetizers, usually served in an assortment. From a vintage Trader Vic's menu, I would suggest the following:

- Crab Rangoon
- Barbecued spareribs
- Rumaki
- Fried Shrimp
- Egg roll
- Canoes of Chicken Livers Bora Bora (I tried, but could not find the recipe for this!)
- Clam roll (also a favorite item on Howard Johnson's recipes in the 1960s; I have vivid memories of family dinners at Howard Johnson's, which was a real treat. I always ordered the clam roll, which is basically fried clams on a toasted roll, with some kind of dressing.)



Trader Vic's Own Soup

For soup, how about Trader Vic's Own Soup, described as "A Rich Chicken Broth with Diced Potatoes, Slice Green Onions and Shredded Egg"?



Green Goddess Salad

For a salad, you can't go wrong with a California classic, Green Goddess Salad

Green Goddess dressing:

- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 2 green onions thinly sliced
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sour cream (contemporary recipes try to substitute Greek yogurt. But this is the 1960s, and nobody cared about heart health, so go for the sour cream!)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mayonnaise
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh parsley leaves & stems
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup basil or tarragon leaves and stems
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. anchovy paste (or omit and substitute another $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Place all ingredients in food processor or use an immersion blender to blend. Taste and season with more salt and pepper if necessary.





The Main Dish

For a main dish, you could do a roast suckling pig or Chateaubriand—both favorites of 1960s restaurants and Trader Vic's. Or any favorite Chinese recipe (not authentic, of course. I'm talking the 1960s!). Trader Vic's had those—sweet and sour pork, almond duck, chicken chow mein, etc. But I suggest a good old-fashioned favorite from that time, also on the Trader Vic's menu: the chopped sirloin steak. Which is basically what it says; sirloin meat chopped or ground and formed into a patty, then grilled. Yeah, it's basically a hamburger. But oh, how my mother loved a chopped steak!

The Polynesian Snowball

Trader Vic's menu lists many ice creams and sherbets, in tropical fruit flavors as well as plain vanilla and coconut. And fried bananas! Who knew? But there are three different fried banana dessert items on the menu.

But I'm going with one of the classic Trader Vic's dishes, the Polynesian Snowball! Described as coconut ice cream rolled in toasted coconut and covered with chocolate sauce, this is sure to please all the surfers in your crowd!



Playlist

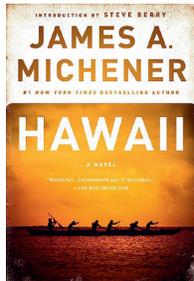
[Listen to the playlist on Spotify!](#)

- “Let’s Go Trippin’” by Dick Dale and his Del-Tones
- “Beach Party” by Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon
- “California Girls” by The Beach Boys
- “Good Vibrations” by The Beach Boys
- “Surfin’ USA” by The Beach Boys
- “Fun Fun Fun” by The Beach Boys
- “He’s A Rebel” by The Crystals
- “Be My Baby” by The Ronettes
- “California Dreamin’” by The Mamas and The Papas
- “Tracks of My Tears” by Johnny Rivers
- “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’” by Nancy Sinatra
- “Tiny Bubbles” by Don Ho
- “Blue Hawaii” by Elvis Presley
- “Hawai’i Au” by The Sunday Manoa
- “Queen’s Aloha Oe” by The Hiram Olsen Group
- “Somebody to Love” by Jefferson Airplane
- “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane
- “Uptight” by Stevie Wonder
- “Reflections” by Diana Ross and The Supremes
- “Eve of Destruction” by Barry McGuire
- “Piece of My Heart” by Janis Joplin
- “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival
- “We Gotta Get Out of This Place” by The Animals
- “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” by The Beatles
- “Leavin’ on a Jet Plane” by Peter, Paul and Mary

Additional Recommendations

Here are a few of the books and documentaries that were helpful to me in my research:

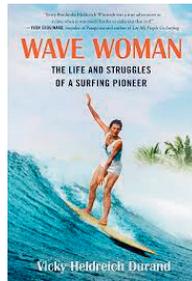
Books



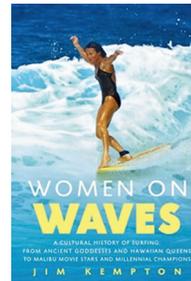
Hawaii
by James A.
Michener



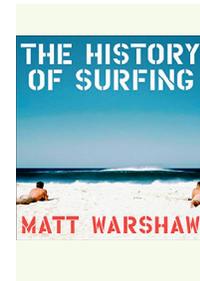
The Descendants
by Kauai Hart
Hemmings



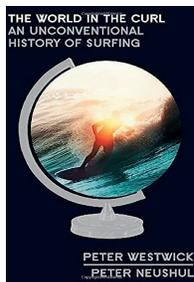
Wave Woman
by Vicky
Heldreich
Durand



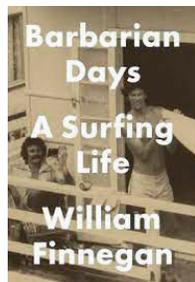
Women on Waves
by Jim
Kempton



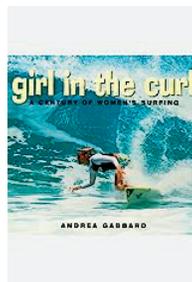
The History of Surfing
by Matt Warshaw



The World in the Curl
by Peter J.
Westwick and
Peter Neushul



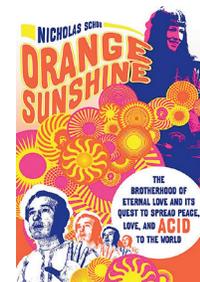
Barbarian Days
by William
Finnegan



Girl in the Curl
by Andrea
Gabbard

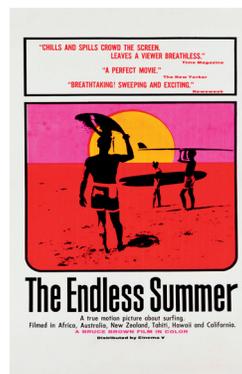


Gidget
by Frederick
Kohner and
Kathy Kohner
Zuckerman



Orange Sunshine
by Nicholas
Schou

Documentaries



The Endless Summer
directed by Bruce Brown



93: Letters from Marge
directed by Heather Hudson