



An Eric Robère dossier
a life in the
by DE photos by
Nico Lauret
Days

Only recently having begun to dabble in tow occult, Eric's generally always opted to catch em the old fashioned way; big pintail, ticker, elbow grease, Portugal Dec 09.



Perched at various Iberian Peninsula vantage points scanning for wavey opportunities across the Atlantic fringes, Eric Rebiere casts a measured gaze across some of Europe's premiere lineups. From slabs in Galicia, classic Portuguese points to 'new' reefs, the throaty call of Lanzarote's El Quemao to France's shorebreak barrels and winter reefs, for a largely post-tour Rebrix there is no home and away. Just home from home from home. And all those waves to be surfed.

January 2010, Valenca, Portugal. 9pm: A small town somewhere near the Spanish border where I'm to be intercepted from the Porto-Vigo bus shuttle. It's pissing down with rain, but the fierce South-West gale is mild and comforting after a frigid Yuletide London. Eric Rebiere is waiting in a white VW Transporter with French plates. We jump in and set off, wipers on the fastest setting. Niceties out of

the way, he recounts recent adventures in Europe's swell-drenched November/December. A big left in Portugal where his jetski sucked up a sand boil, misfired and he got washed all the way in. A dream session at classic, empty Coxos, slab days near La Coruna in Galicia, a recent run of backyard blue barrels at El Quemao, where he owns a home. But as good as story telling is, there's no time like the present. "There's a secret spot we might score tomorrow near the house," he chimes in his own unique diction. "A sand point left that works on this crazy onshore. I just found out about it." The rain appears to be letting up slightly. In the coastal hills just yonder, in an old Portuguese farmhouse awaits Eric's pregnant wife Elena and a hearty, home-cooked dinner.

Rewind to 1978, Arraial do Cabo, Brazil, the place where Amerigo Vespucci (widely credited with the name 'America') once built a home, and Eric middle names here Rebiere



comes into the world. His French father and Brazilian mother settled on this scenic outcropping close to Rio, and his love of the ocean was born. "My father was a diver," he remembers, "Always in the water. He surfed a bit too and had one of the first ever surfboards north of Rio. About 30 people learned to surf on that board, and one of them was me." Under family pressure to give up surfing in pursuit of a career more savoury, Eric moved to France at 16, to Vieux Boucau north of Hossegor to be precise, and never looked back. Dedication to the contest circuit ensued, application and toil. European titles followed in 2000 and 2002, and in 2004 Eric broke the Gallic top-tier seal, becoming France's first ever WCT surfer.

The next morning Elena is juicing oranges plucked fresh from trees that line the driveway, while Eric is in the lounge mid-way through an exuberant morning work out, his nasal exaltations audible above the machinery of the juicer. Daylight

reveals that we're situated in lee of a protective coastal mountain, over which a procession of rain bearing thick clouds rise, spin and march purposefully east. The roar of what sounds like the ocean, several kilometres on the other side of the mountain is discernable nevertheless. To the north, across a large estuary lie rolling green hills of Spain's Galicia province. Gray it might be, but in the mid-teens celcius it's relatively tropical for Europe's brutal 09/10 winter.

It's a short punt through rural hills and forest to the coast in Eric's van. Crossing a small dune complex we're greeted by the mid-morning ocean colour scene: gray, big and windy. White water stretches to the horizon, apparently beyond. But the raging SW onshore is at least mild, salt air enticing. More importantly, a kilometre or so to the north where the coast bends in dramatically, it seems like a left point might be reeling off. Maybe.

We park as close as we can get and walk in to check it under a

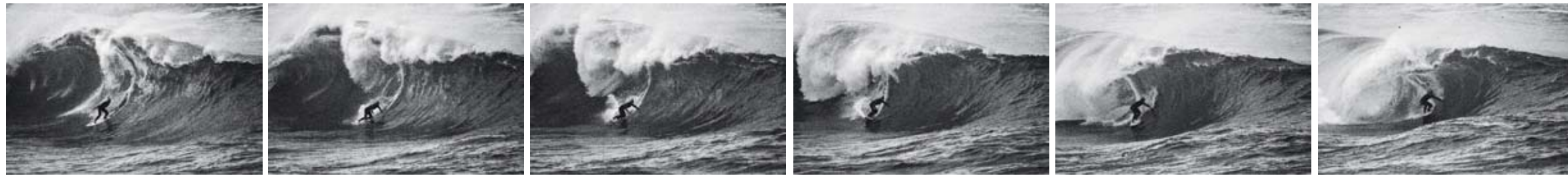
fine mist of drizzle. The dunes are backed by pine forest, reminiscent of SW France. Evidence of recent big atmospheric events are everywhere blocking the path, snapped branches line the deck. We walk and talk, I ask him about his unpublished novel. "I love reading," Eric explains in English. "I figured it'd be good to have something to do when I'm old and my body doesn't work anymore. In the car I've got one I'm reading in Portuguese, at Elena's a Spanish one and in Lanzarote I'm reading in French. A friend of mine, a writer from the Canaries told me, 'If you want to start writing, stop reading.' I don't know about that, but I know it's not easy to become a writer." Eric's book is tale of a Norwegian who locates and steals hidden Nazi gold following the war. "The information on where the gold is always out there," he explains, "But those in the know always end up dying. It's a case of finding it before that happens to you." We arrive at the dunes and

"This one is a fucking maniac, people don't realize how hard he charges. Now that he's not on the QS, I'm already scared to answer his phone calls."

Sancho on Eric.

Main: "Eric is respected for his kindness and comradeship, always up for a laugh and fully committed to getting heavily barreled. El Quemao is without question his fetish wave on Lanzarote." Charly Gomez on Eric.

Sequence: The Spanish province of Galicia is somewhere Eric's been spending a lot more time in of late, seeing as its home to his expectant sweetheart. A couple of hours up the road in Galicia also happens lies this Biscay grunt-exposed slab, which is handy.



make our way to the beach in front of the left. It looks fun, head high breaking right on the shore. Starting ruffled then cleaning up as it bends and hugs the sand point playfully. The best part? Not a soul for miles and miles.

We set off back for the van, for boards and wetsuits. Judging by the unrest of the forest canopy above, the wind seems to be gaining impetus. We know not whether the tide is filling or running out, but know it would be better if it's the latter. Not so good the other way around. The pace quickens. Still, there's time enough to get Eric to impart intimately on three defining life of Rebrix moments.

I. "A wipeout at Waimea in 2002. I fell and went over the falls. I surfaced by climbing up my leash with very little left. My whole body was twisted. I knew that was the first wave of the a - I'd seen the other waves, so as I was climbing up my leash I was thinking 'OK, this is it.' But when I came up there were no more waves. The set just... disappeared. I don't know how, maybe it was God... The lesson I took from this experience is never let someone push you into going for a wave, 'Go! Go! Go!' Sancho and I used to do that all the time - you can kill someone with that. You can get a good one to of course, but I'm not a kid anymore. When it's big now, it's different."

II. "Malik (Joyeux) got so many bombs in his life, so many crazy dangerous waves. And the one that took him was just, by his standards, a routine day. You just never know when your time will be up. The lesson is simply to surf as much as you can. If you're a surfer, you have to. It's not just about feeling good, it's more than that. It's hard to describe it, but it's like that feeling of intimacy, awareness you get if you surf alone when

it's big."

III. "Yesterday we went and did the scan for our baby in Vigo. It's just one inch, but makes so much movement, it moved around so much that I tripped out. Watching the baby dance around inside there, the life I saw made me instantly think of my granddad, whom I was really close to. When he died back in Brazil they put him in a little room. I saw his open eyes and how cold he was and that had a big impact my life. You don't know when you are going to die, but you know you are going to. Me, I'm supposed to wear a helmet now when I surf dangerous waves. And I do... or at least I do when Elena is watching."

We're back at the van, damped. That's damp from the rain, amped to surf, but slightly perturbed by the prospect of the walk back in. The path we've followed seems wide enough to get the van down, more or less. A unmarked cop car idles past as we debate the next move. It seefns strange, the feds out here in the arse end of nowhere. The cops take a good look at Eric and roll off slowly. Aside from one middle-aged jogger in leggings who offers us an earnest 'Bom dia' we're alone again. We roll slowly along the edge of the forest looking for a potential entry, pulling up at an entrance, gated and fixed with a padlock. "You know the trouble with today's society?" Eric ponders, climbing out of the drivers seat and picking up a baseball-sized rock. "The erosion of civil liberties. They're taking away our freedom." He proceeds to smite the padlock barring our motorised traverse of the woods back to the left, but the lock holds true. "There's perfect waves here and we can't go."

Back to the house now. A couple of unanswered calls to

Elena sets Eric into concerned father to be mode. Meanwhile, he's explaining a treatment he took recently in Brazil, autohemotherapy. It basically involves taking your blood in a syringe and re-injecting it back into your own muscles with the aim of boosting your immune system. The conversation veers from serious to semi-profound to light banter, almost in the same sentence. Almost as if not to come across self-important or grandiose, an affliction that can blight a post-touring pro. On a narrow stone walled lane near home now we yield to a scene of yesteryear; an impossibly old woman in traditional get-up leading a yoked oxen to toil. A forgotten hillside hamlet of Europe as it was. Back at the house, Elena is surprised to see us. "You came all the way back just because I didn't answer my phone?" "Of course sweetheart. Well, that... and I forgot my wetsuit too..."

On the path the pace has quickened to a march now, and we

still haven't seen soul in these woods. The clean runners we saw earlier have amplified in our own imaginations into a hybrid of Raglan, Chicama, Skeleton Bay. And we'll have it all to ourselves. But, through the low dunes now, a violent buffeting gust halts us. And behold there she is, our left. Some two hours or so since we were last here. But look... she's dead. The tide came up and chewed her to shreds with sweep. Raging wind chop spilled in over the protective bar and ravaged her peak. Where there was modest magic, now appears precisely the scene you would expect on such a day at a tired, west-facing beachie. Heartbreak. Humiliation. Nobody likes to peel a dry wetsuit off, do they? Morals of the story (a): Not only beginnermediates drive around yapping and flapping and miss the tide. + (b): Tidal sand points, like surf careers are short-lived and transient = (c) If it looks good now, paddle out, now.

This old road is getting familiar

by now. Mid afternoon light is fading fast, putting a sombre hue on proceedings, that and the fact that surf hope is extinguished for today. Well, we tried. Eric's mood is jovial nonetheless. He's excited about upcoming Atlantic forecasts in reds and purples for later in the week. Plus, he's been around enough to feel privileged to be in the pro surf game anyway. "When I was young I was going for a run in my town in Brazil," he recalls, "And a guy on a motorbike going the wrong way down the street nearly ran me over. I shouted something and he calmly held a finger to his lips as in 'shut up' and showed me his gun, all slow and calm. That's reality for a lot of people, how they live. It's not hard to feel lucky doing this when you've seen another side."

Rebrix is stoked. Probably the simplest explanation as to how he's been embraced by different local crews across some of Europe's premier lineups, calling home at various times the Ericeira region,

“Mellow on the outside and so freakin’ fast inside his own head, for me he’s the **hardest charger of all the comp pros in Europe**”

Tiago Oliveira on Eric

Lanzarote, SW France, and now Galicia. Juggling cultures is something Eric seems adept at, but most of all, he just wants to surf, and enthusiasm, as they say, is infectious. Last year two of the leading young talents around Joan Duru and Marc Lacamore travelled with Eric to Thurso and upon return couldn't say enough good things about the experience. "Can't believe we never hung out with that guy before, what a legend." Lip service may be as common as muck in surfing, but characters with viral enthusiasm for the game will always stand out.

Looking forward, it's some of Europe's heavier spots that are exciting Eric, and the prospect of learning more and more about towing. "I'm the beginner at this sport, towing-in," Eric readily admits. "These other guys; Sancho, Pujol, Yann Benetrix, Seb St Jean, they've been doing it for years and know what they're doing. But me, I'm still a kook!" A hearty trademark chuckle. "I want to chase

those big sessions, Isla Pancha, Cave, a new spot near Vigo. But something else real important to me is trying to organize an invitational event in memory of El Fula who died last winter at El Quemao. People never really understood how dangerous this wave was before that, nothing bad had ever happened. A lot of crew would go to surf it who couldn't. That's all changed now."

The off. Them south to the Algarve for the weekend in a small sports coupe, sagging under the burden of a coffin board bag. Me, the long climb to France in Eric's van. He'll be in France before long, too, apparently, to pick her up.

Nightfall approaching, Eric takes me through the vitals of his vehicle. His patter mirrors the man himself today. Sensible but with an edge, Euro order with a Latino reality check, if you like. "Check the oil and water," he prompts, popping the hood. He shows me where to fill up with blue windscreen wiper fluid. "Insurance and paperwork all

in the glove box here." He slides the side door open, lifting up the mattress in the back, and summons my attention. "Just in case you need it, there's this big wooden stick in the back here." Deeper under the mattress now. "And just in case you really need it brah, there's a metal one too." **SE**

Cider house rules, San Sebastian, with David, Sancho, Eva, Guillaume & Jean Jacques.



The peak of the big December swell in Portugal, grabbing the tow rope was the smart option in, but doesn't guarantee a kick out. Was the view worth the pinch? He'd say so.

