

THE GREEN ISSUE

# PRODUCED BY

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## Fred Baron

“If producers don’t  
**take the lead,**  
no one’s going  
to do it.”

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Fueling the future of film  
Green Production – the global picture  
2010 Producers Guild Awards

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONTENT:

# The Movie

With the abundance of “green” content available, one of the challenges for documentary filmmakers is to successfully convey the importance of protecting the environment in an entertaining way. To that end, I spoke to producers and directors of *The Cove*, *Oceans*, *Dirt! The Movie* and *Fuel*. Whether or not you agree or disagree with the content isn’t as important as getting a conversation started. Here is a glimpse into how these films were produced, distributed and kept “green” throughout the process.

**“This is an Act of Love, an act for the ocean. This is an environmental film that is going to hopefully help people change the way they see the ocean.”**

—Fisher Stevens

The journey to *The Cove* started with a conversation between friends, producer Paula DuPre’ Pesmen and director Louie Psihoyos. DuPre’ Pesmen had moved back to Boulder to raise a family after taking a sabbatical from a successful career in the film business and had founded her own non-profit “There With Care” ([www.therewithcare.org](http://www.therewithcare.org)). Psihoyos, one of the top photographers in the world, wanted to start a non-profit and make a film about the infractions against the ocean. His passion for the environment led to him and executive producer Jim Clark founding the non-profit Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS) ([www.opsociety.org](http://www.opsociety.org)) and eventually to *The Cove*.

It was Ric O’Barry that introduced Psihoyos to the town of Taiji and its secret dolphin slaughter. To expose that secret, most of the work out in the field transpired under the cover of darkness in the middle of the night. There would be many obstacles to overcome in the making of this film, but the most crucial challenges proved to be avoiding being arrested or killed and keeping the footage secure.

The film goes beyond the waters of the cove and awakens the viewer to the effects of pollution on the ocean, the reality of mercury poisoning and the diminishing food sources. Producer Fisher Stevens feels that there is a need “to wake people up to what we’re putting into our bodies.” In fact, while making the film both Stevens and Psihoyos discovered they had mercury poisoning.

Fisher Stevens was asked to join the project by Clark; after viewing some of the footage, he saw the possibilities

and jumped right in. Stevens envisioned the film as a theatrical release — “a thriller, not a nature film,” — where the audience could sit in the cinema and be on the edge of their seats. Stevens and DuPre’ Pesmen are well aware of the challenges implicit in combining entertainment and information, and no doubt, the thriller aspects of *The Cove* helped to get the film seen. Stevens found getting distribution was “a bit of a nightmare” until Norman and Lynn Lear offered to have a screening at their home and invited Jeff Skoll of Participant Media and Michael Burns of Lionsgate. “Once Michael Burns and Jeff Skoll got onboard,” notes Stevens, “it made the deal much easier to make with Roadside Attractions.”

As much as possible, the team tried to be green. Psihoyos even turned the studio as green as he could as soon as he could, in order to start offsetting the carbon debt. “We installed 117 solar panels (a 23-kilowatt system) on our headquarters and I bought fully electric cars for local transportation, a Zenn NEV (Neighborhood Electric Vehicle) and a Toyota RAV EV, which goes 80 mph and about 120 miles on a single charge — and all powered from the sun.” They also bought organic food at local farmers’ markets and did not use plastic water bottles.

Stevens and DuPre’ Pesmen hope that after people see the film, “they’ll look at the ocean differently, actually really look and open their eyes. Change their diet. Not go to Sea World. Send money to Ric O’Barry’s organization and OPS. Keep the ocean clean and dolphins free. Look at animals a little differently.”

The question we can all ask ourselves is, “What did you do?”

*The Cove* has since received many awards and was the 2009 winner of the PGA Producer of the Year Award for Documentary Theatrical Motion Picture, as well as the winner of the Oscar® for Best Documentary Feature.

by Karyn Benkendorfer

**“Cinema is an artistic spectacle, a source of emotion, but it can also function as a weapon to serve and defend the most noble causes, not the least of which is nature.”**

—Jacques Perrin

The ocean covers more than 70% of the earth’s surface.

*Oceans*, a film by veteran actor, director and producer, Jacques Perrin (*Winged Migration*), who co-wrote and co-directed the film with Jacques Cluzaud, opened in Paris on January 27, 2010. It took three years of planning and four years of filming, spread over 70 expeditions to 54 shooting locations. PGA member Antoine de Cazotte was the U.S. production supervisor on the film. He covered shoots from the Bering Strait to Venezuela, to shoots in the Gulf of Mexico, Florida, Bahamas and Delaware. When we sat down to talk about the film, he had just returned from attending the premiere in Paris.

“The film *Oceans* is a chance for the public to see the world from the fishes’ POV. We tried to be as close as possible to feel their emotions.” According to de Cazotte, *Oceans* is the most expensive documentary ever made. Even with funding in place, there were many challenges the team would encounter over the course of production. First and foremost, the mandate was to capture on film the mammals and marine life in their

**From top: Mandy-Rae Cruikshank swims with dolphins in *The Cove*; Cruikshank with a humpback whale; the OPS team with a blimp helicopter.**





1. The black OPS crew from *The Cove*: Louie Psihoyos, Charles Hambleton and Joe Chisholm.  
 2. Josh Tickell in *Fuel*.  
 3. Tickell holding vegetable oil from the "Veggie Van."  
 4. Vandana Shiva in *Dirt! The Movie*.

5. *Dirt!* directors and producers Bill Benenson and Gene Rosow.  
 6. An environmentally conscious dirt floor is installed in *Dirt!*.  
 7. A still from *Dirt! The Movie*.

natural state without disturbing their environment. Respect for the ocean and its inhabitants was the primary concern. The crew monitored its noise levels, used sailboats when appropriate, and even created special equipment for use during filming: tanks that allowed the filmmakers to breathe without expelling telltale and potentially alarming bubbles into the ocean, permitting camera crews to remain submerged for much longer periods of time and to fade into their aquatic surroundings.

The team followed the rules of the Marine Mammal Act and worked closely with marine biologists at the top of their field. Obtaining the trust and respect of the marine biologists proved to be a central ingredient of the project's success. De Cazotte convinced the biologists of the importance of reaching out to the world through the film. "Working side by side gave us the same goal: to preserve the ocean and educate the public," confirms de Cazotte. "They had the knowledge; we had the tools of communication."

One of the biggest challenges for de Cazotte's team was cameraman David Reichert's effort to get a complete shot of a 130-foot blue whale from head to tail. "It took 27 weeks to get that shot," notes de Cazotte. After a year of meetings and several trips to Alaska, the team secured permission to film the phenomenon of humpback whales "bubble netting." However, it was disappointing not being able to film the Yangtze River dolphin before the last one disappeared and the species became extinct in 2007.

At times, it was tough waiting and waiting for "the moment" to happen, and de Cazotte worked diligently to keep the spirits of his crew up. But the waiting was not in vain and the rewards were many, including the beautiful "shows." "For

instance, the spinner dolphins in Costa Rica at sunset," he recalls, "and a mother leopard seal introducing her pup to the ocean for the first time in Antarctica."

It was a life-changing experience for the producer. "We have taken so much and given so little," he states. "The only thing man does to the ocean is pollute it with trash which goes into the rivers and eventually, ends up in the ocean. The ocean is begging for mercy."

*Oceans* opens in the United States on April 22, 2010. DisneyNature will contribute 20 cents per ticket to the Nature Conservancy's Adopt a Reef Program in the Bahamas for everyone who sees *Oceans* during the film's opening week (April 22–28) with a minimum of \$100,000 pledged to this program. For more information, go to [www.disney.go.com/oceans](http://www.disney.go.com/oceans).

**"Dirt feeds us and gives us shelter. Dirt holds and cleans our water. Dirt heals us and makes us beautiful. Dirt regulates the earth's climate."**

—Gene Rosow

It might seem like dirt is everywhere, with plenty to go around forever, but it's actually disappearing fast. How do you get the message out that humans are destroying dirt? How do you make it entertaining?

Gene Rosow directed and produced *Dirt! The Movie* with Bill Benenson. The pair took on this challenge after being inspired by William Bryant Logan's book, *Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*. The film was six years in the making and featured more than 20 locations — from Rikers Island in NYC, where a select group of prisoners were given

the chance to learn about dirt, to Kenya for an interview with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai. They met with quite an eclectic group. Through trial and error, they came up with an idea: Why not give dirt a point of view, a voice? They'd accomplish this by the clever use of animation and a little humor. Another challenge was to not leave the audience with a sense of hopelessness but rather to inspire them. Benenson said, "We try to give people hope and empower them to see the possibilities and their potential to change things."

PGA member Lisa Yesko was the post producer on the film. "Shooting and posting in digital formats is one inherent way of making a smaller carbon footprint than 16mm or 35mm film with the accompanying chemical processing and waste," she notes. Other ways they "greened" the production included the constant awareness of reusing/repurposing, recycling, carpooling and bicycling to the editing room and facilities whenever possible. From the brown "plain wrap" DVD sleeves made out of recycled paper to eco-friendly business cards, this team was green!

*Dirt! The Movie* has been invited to screen at many venues, from the Sundance Film Festival to the European Commission's headquarters. In September of 2009, Rosow showed the film in Osnabruck, Germany, as part of a Commission-sponsored soil-awareness event. The film has also been shown in European Parliament. As for Community Screenings, there will be 60 ITVS/PBS Community Cinema Free Screenings around the country. Rosow, apart from filmmaking, holds a Ph.D. in history from UC Berkeley, where he also taught and spent a year of post-graduate work at USC in ecology, biochemistry, cellular physiology and parasitology.

His conclusion: "Dirt is very much alive."

*Dirt! The Movie* will broadcast at 10 p.m. on April 20, 2010, on *Independent Lens* as part of PBS's 40th Anniversary Earth Day programs (check local listings). For more information, go to their website ([www.dirtthemovie.org](http://www.dirtthemovie.org)).

**"Fuel shows us the way out of the mess we're in by explaining how to replace every drop of oil we now use, while creating green jobs and keeping our money here at home. The film tries not to dwell on the negative, but instead shows us the easy solutions already within our reach."**

—Rebecca Harrell Tickell

It started out as a two-month road trip and turned into an 11-year journey! In 1997, Josh Tickell set out across America in a diesel Winnebago fueled by used vegetable oil from fast-food restaurants. Behind the wheel of the "Veggie Van," Josh spread the word about alternative fuel made from vegetable oil called "biodiesel" ([www.veggievan.org](http://www.veggievan.org)). With video camera in hand, he documented every moment of the experience. Along the way, the "Veggie Van" caught the attention of NBC's *Today Show*. Rebecca Harrell Tickell happened to watch the segment; a decade later, she would meet Tickell and become a producer on *Fuel*. (Today, the two are married.)

Every effort was made by Tickell and Harrell Tickell to keep the production of *Fuel* green. They used The Sandbox, a solar-powered post and production facility in Venice, Calif., owned by Todd Sali, one of the film's co-producers. Many members of the production team became part of a fuel cooperative on the west side of Los Angeles, buying biodiesel in bulk as a group. Whenever possible, they utilized biodiesel



generators, recycled, sent out press kits electronically, used recycled paper and rode their bikes. When possible, they flew on Richard Branson's Virgin Airlines, as "he is the only person that runs an airline that has an environmental commitment." To promote the film, Tickell and Harrell Tickell drove across the country to Washington, D.C., in the "Algaeus," a converted Prius, which they call the world's first algae-powered plug-in electric hybrid. Their cell phones are charged by solar panels on their backpacks. For the production of the film, they received a well-deserved EMA Award.

Harrell Tickell noted that more than 1,000 people donated, volunteered and participated in making the movie. "It's just been a huge labor of love by a community of people who are really passionate about green," she testifies. When it came to getting the word out about the film, they were not deterred by comments that a movie about fuel would not be interesting. Determined and committed, Tickell and Harrell Tickell took the film around to distributors showing it "every single night; sometimes showing the film two or three times a day."

For Harrell Tickell, the greatest moments have been any time they show the movie to a group of high school students. "Categorically, the response is overwhelming," she reports. "They're open-minded, excited, interested, engaged, and have questions about what they can do."

**"The goal: that the vision of sustainability gets out there in entertaining and fun way, causing a social shift. The philosophy of the movie, our organization and all of our work is to show that you don't have to stop living or stop doing all the great things you love to do. There are really smart solutions to these problems and sometimes they're the most overlooked and simple things."**

**—Josh Tickell**

For more information about *Fuel* ([www.thefuelfilm.com](http://www.thefuelfilm.com)) and to find out more about what Tickell and Harrell Tickell are doing, go to their websites: [www.joshtickell.com](http://www.joshtickell.com) and [www.rebeccatickell.com](http://www.rebeccatickell.com).

*Karyn Benkendorfer is a member of the PGA Green Committee West.*

- 8. Professor Miguel Altieri in *Dirt!*
- 9. Edible Schoolyard founder Alice Waters in *Dirt!*
- 10. Sustainable South Bronx founder Majora Carter in *Dirt!*



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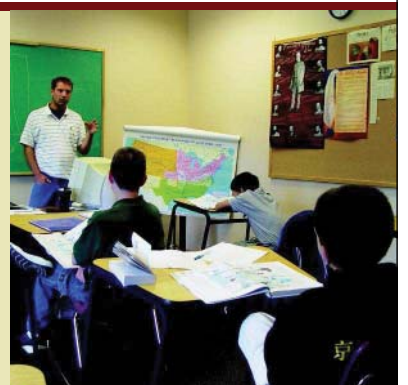
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