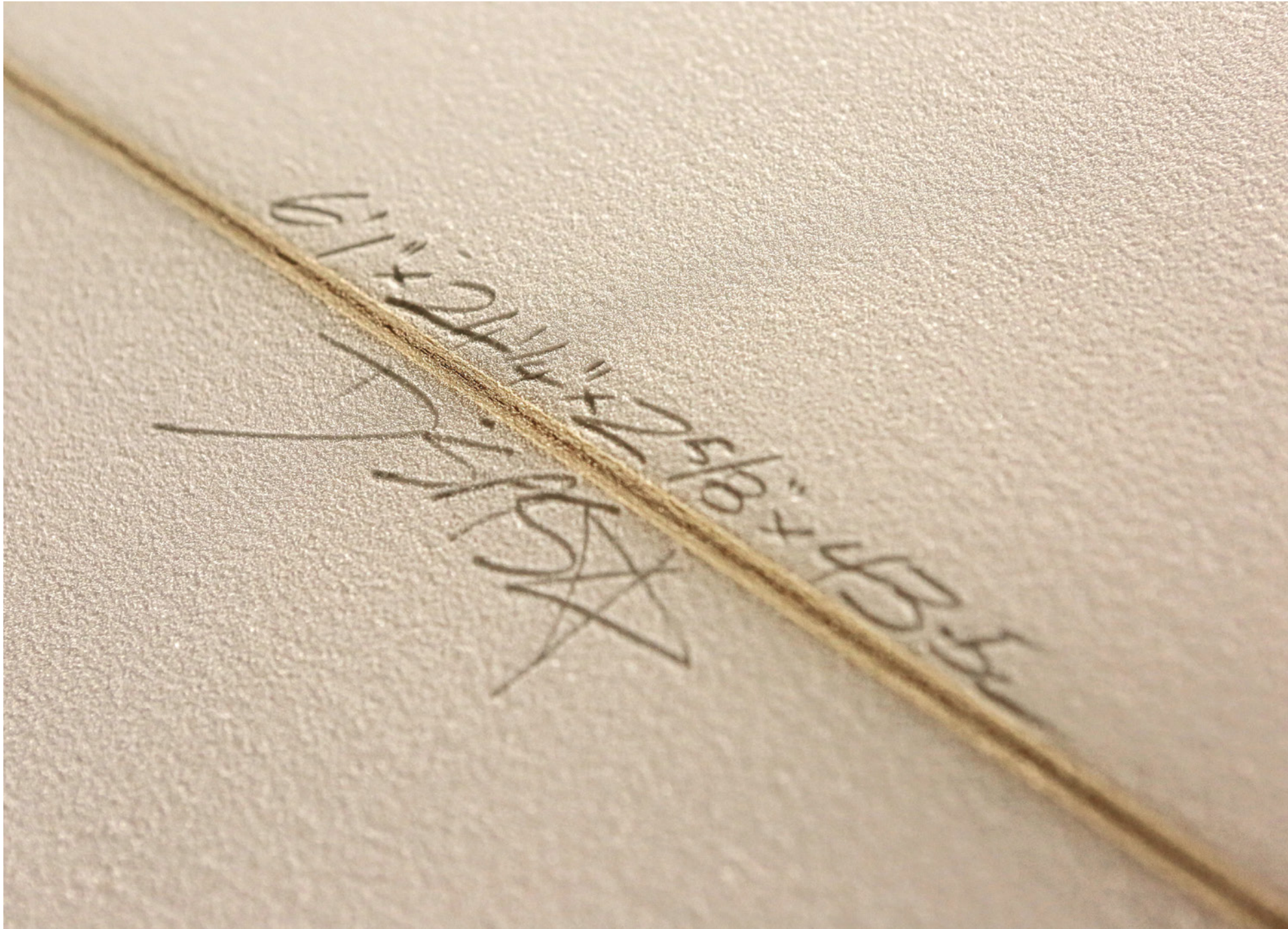


WAVE, SHAPE AND

# FORM

Having left school at 15 to chase barrels, board maker Michael Di Sciascio is today at the beating heart of his local surf community, close to **Australia's** iconic Bells Beach



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**I**t's not yet daylight but Michael Di Sciascio is up to check the waves at Bells Beach, Australia's iconic surf spot. If conditions are good, he'll get out on the board, and if not, head to the workshop. Out the back of Strapper Surf, in Torquay, the factory's low-set lights cast a haze through the dust that's been kicked up during the surfboard-shaping process: a hand planer carving the sleek form; sanding gauze smoothing its classic curves. "Surfboards are sculptural, something you touch," says Di Sciascio. "They've got an aura. I don't see a lump of plastic – I picture the waves that it would be able to surf."

Di Sciascio has a knack for seeing potential. In 1979, at 15, he made the decision to leave school and focus on surfing, getting a job shaping kneeboards for local board maker Dennis "Strapper" Day. Just a decade later, he bought the company.

Since then, Strapper Surf has become a stalwart of Aussie surf culture, but the workshop in Torquay remains its soul. There are always innovations: newer materials like EPS, foam and epoxy resins offer alternatives to the traditional (but ever-popular) polyurethane and fibreglass. And while a computer-aided design (CAD) machine can cut out boards, Di Sciascio still shapes them the old-school way, wielding his woodworking tools.

As the kid who learned to make surfboards in the backyard with his older brother, and won a state school board competition as an unknown – "I didn't even know what I was doing!" – Di Sciascio understands how a passion for the surf can change a life. The company ran the Strapper Surf Junior competition for 18 years, before it was picked up by Surfing Victoria and became the state junior series. Today, it still has an Encouragement Award, where the committee nominates "someone who's just having a crack". Strapper gives the winner a free surfboard.

In that way, Di Sciascio is helping shape a community; one that exists well beyond Bells Beach. "You can be anywhere in the world and bump into a surfer and you've got an instant rapport," he says. "They might have a different political view to you, a different history, but you're both at the beach, you're both going for a surf and you've got an affinity. That's how powerful it is."



ENDLESS SUMMER

Michael “D’Sas” Di Sciascio has shaped over 12,000 boards, from kneeboards to longboards, big-wave guns to zippy performers. But, ultimately, he’s crafting someone’s best moments. “Surfboards are capsules of experiences,” he says. “I’ve got old boards that are pretty beaten up, but I look at them and I remember that wave or that trip... It’s amazing what they can hold.”









