

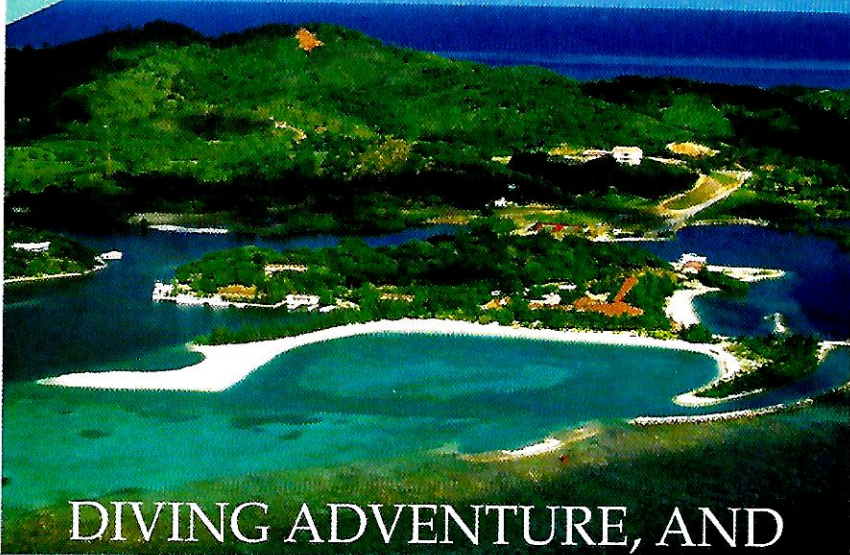
# Mr. UNDERWATER HOLLYWOOD

STUART COVE: A PROFILE BY SCOTT JONES

When Bahamas native Stuart Cove got involved with the production of the James Bond film "For Your Eyes Only" back in 1980, little did he realize his connection with Hollywood would grow to the point where he would become an authority on underwater productions. Yet that's exactly what happened, and now more than 20 years later, Stuart Cove's reputation as the dive instructor to the stars continues to grow along with the Bahamas' reputation as the destination for underwater productions.

Photo/Pam Christman

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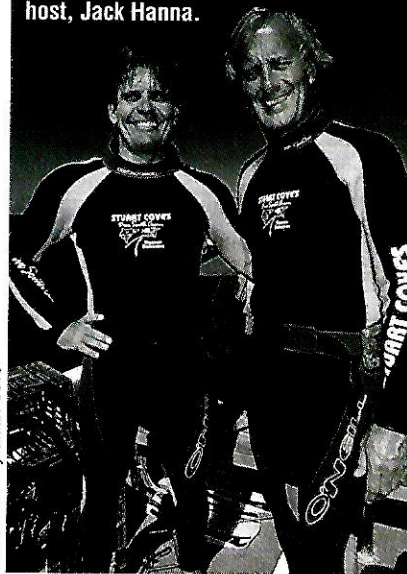
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## MR. UNDERWATER HOLLYWOOD

The calm, clear waters and fantastic underwater seascapes put the Bahamas at the top of most location scouts' lists. The islands have hosted hundreds of high-profile films, including eight James Bond films, the latest of which, *The World is Not Enough*, was filmed in Nassau's waters last spring. Earlier this year, *Skin Diver Magazine* participated in a location shoot for the syndicated television program *EXTRA!*, which featured fitness model Victoria Vogel and a school of Caribbean reef sharks. The well-received segment featured Vogel interacting and hand-feeding some of these well-known locals. Few places can "guarantee" sharks on demand for producers, but the Bahamas can make that claim, thanks in part to the efforts of island residents like Stuart Cove.

On that first project so many years ago, Stuart recalls he got his "break" during a scene that required a shark. During the scene, the shark escaped, forcing a halt to the production. Divers

Stuart and adventure show host, Jack Hanna.



Photo/courtesy Stuart Cove

tried unsuccessfully to recapture the shark. While producers struggled to find a solution to their dilemma, young Stuart Cove went out on his own and recovered the reluctant "star."

The rest is history.

"It was actually pretty simple, but the producers thought I had some special secret, so whenever they needed a

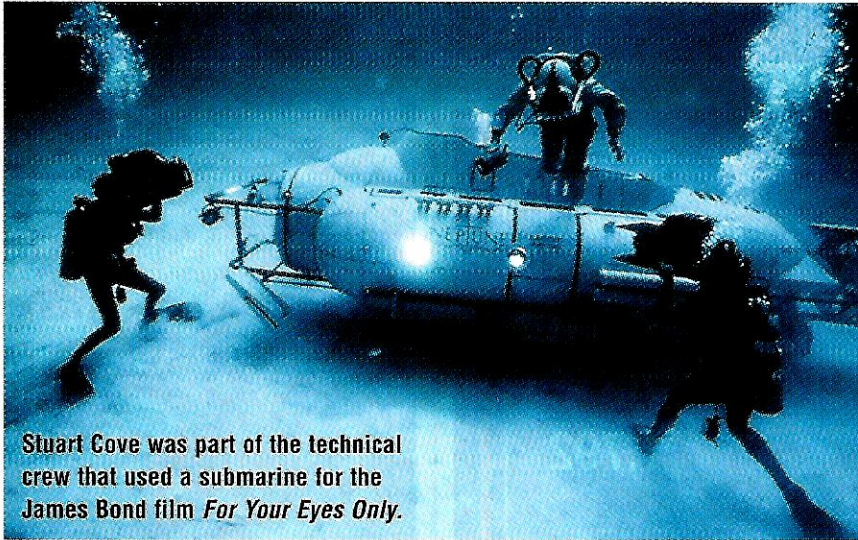
shark, they started looking for me.”

Stuart's reputation as a shark wrangler and dive expert has led to his involvement with hundreds of productions over the years. During one stretch last year, Stuart and his staff at Dive South Ocean resort, which he owns with his wife Michelle, worked on production projects for 45 straight days.

“It's gratifying to have producers

Paul Hogan.

In the mid 1980s, Stuart certified Brooke Shields, who was working on a TV movie. The actress, who stars in the NBC-TV show *Suddenly Susan*, was a model dive student, according to her instructor. “She scored 100 percent on her PADI Open Water Diver written test. I haven't had too many students get perfect scores, let alone



Stuart Cove was part of the technical crew that used a submarine for the James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*.

Photo/courtesy Stuart Cove

**“...the producers thought I had some special secret, so whenever they needed a shark, they started looking for me.”**

and stars tell others to come to Nassau and look me up,” explains Stuart. “The water here is beautiful, warm and clear—perfect for making movies or television programs.”

Stuart's personal attention and diving knowledge has gotten around Hollywood. His philosophy is simple. “You can't be star-struck. You have to treat the stars just like everyone else. Some of them are scared at first, but it's my job as their instructor to teach them to dive safely and enjoy themselves. That's what's most important.”

The list of projects he's been affiliated with and the stars he's worked with reads like a Hollywood directory. He took Sean Connery and Kim Basinger underwater for *Never Say Never Again*; taught Ron Howard, Tom Hanks and Darryl Hannah to dive for *Splash*; and his dive operation even served as the set for *Flipper* with Elijah Wood and

one who's a Hollywood star.”

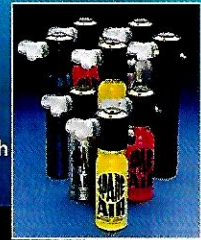
She's not the only celebrity to leave a lasting impression with Stuart. “Darryl Hannah is an exceptional diver. She actually was better underwater than the stunt woman the studio brought in to be her double.”

Of course, sometimes Stuart can get “too involved” with the production, like the time he worked with Sydney Poitier on a film involving diving and an underwater fight scene. “I read the script ahead of time and knew about the fight scene, so I showed him how to do it. The producers came to me and wondered why that was necessary. They said, ‘We have stunt men for that.’ So my training was never used by Sydney on camera.”

On his office wall, Stuart has a large framed photo shot during the filming of *Jaws IV* near the island. The shot features a large mechanical shark as it

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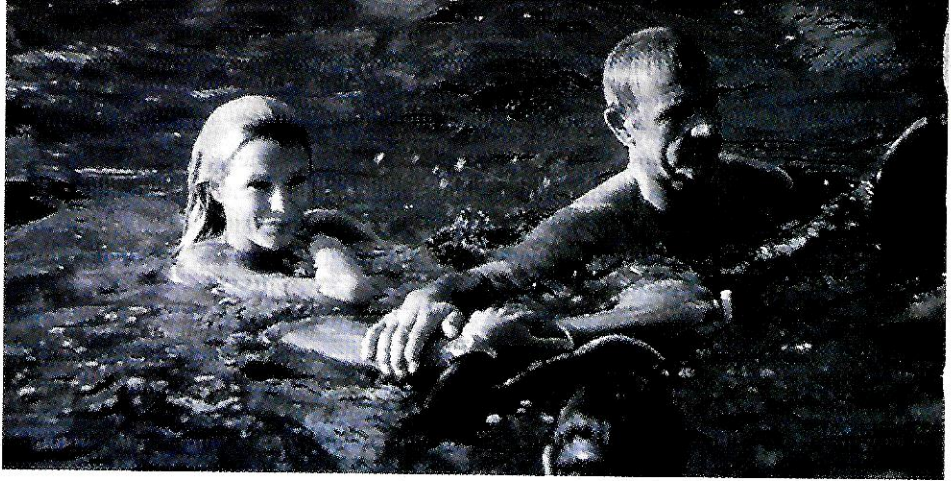
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**MR. UNDERWATER HOLLYWOOD**

“leaps” on the back of a passing boat. The photo also shows a boatload of very interested onlookers—divers from Dive South Ocean going to a dive site. “It was a shock for some of them to see that ‘shark’ leap out of the water. I forgot to warn them about the filming and they happened to go by right when the shot was being filmed,” he recalls with a smile. “We promise our customers they will see

Photo/courtesy Stuart Cove



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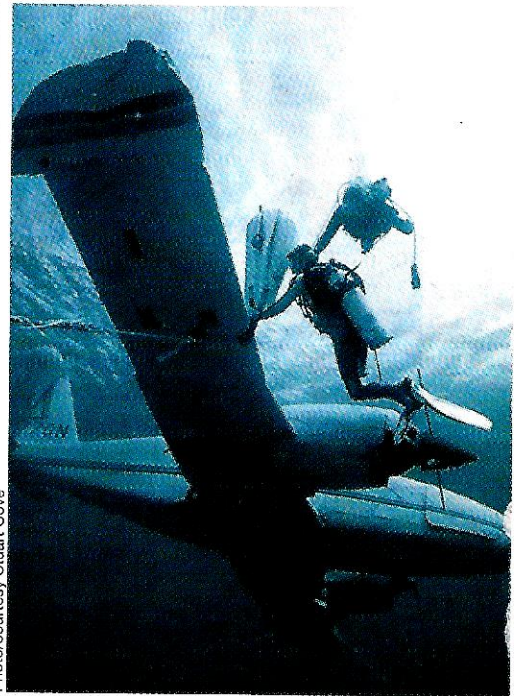
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Photo/courtesy Stuart Cove

**Top:** Stuart introduced Kim Basinger and Sean Connery to scuba diving in the 1983 film, *Never Say Never Again*. **Above:** Stuart sunk a twin engine plane for the film, *Jaws IV—The Revenge*.

sharks, but I have to admit that was a bit over-the-top.”

Word of the Bahamas’ spectacular diving has brought many famous people to the islands for diving vacations. The celebrity guest list includes Robert Redford, Barbara Mandrell, Roger Moore, Elijah Wood, Sandra Bullock, Sarah Ferguson, Hulk Hogan, David Hasselhoff and two young guests who received “royal treatment,” Prince William and Prince Harry.

It’s safe to say that Stuart Cove and his Bahamian neighbors have all earned their “starfish” in the sea of celebrity divers and Hollywood film and TV productions. 🐟