

# Santiago Aguerre

## Speaks Out About Kiteboarding

By Ryan Riccitelli

It's a sunny, June afternoon in San Diego as I am pulling into the parking lot of Reef's corporate headquarters. I am quickly buzzed into the facility and ushered to former owner Santiago Aguerre's offices where I find him packing his belongings into boxes. Santiago's warm personality and sense of humor quickly show as we make our introductions. I guess I would be in a really good mood too if I had just sold my company for

over 100 million dollars. We checked the wind report on the computer and both agreed to bail on the interview and go kiting. On the way to the beach we pulled up to a stoplight and saw the typical California homeless person holding a sign reading "Homeless Veteran, Needs Help." I then watch Santi's window role down and a bill of some sort is given to the man. After spending a day getting skunked for wind, we roll back to Santi's place

in La Jolla and finish the interview over a few Heinekens. Driving home, I started thinking. I really wish more people had Santiago's positive energy. For a guy who could have the biggest attitude and ego, he was about as humble as they come. Santi's perspective on kiteboarding also showed me that he is just as addicted as any of us. The guy loves to ride. The following is a shortened transcript of our hour long conversation.

### { Vitals }

**Name:** Santiago Aguerre  
**Nickname:** Santi  
**Hometown:** Mar del Plata, Argentina  
**Current Home:** La Jolla, CA  
(lived in the US for 25 years)  
**Boardsports background:** Surfing since 10  
**Years kiteboarding:** Two years  
**Local spot:** Tourmaline, Silver Strand, and Stinkies



Santiago's charges down the line in Tahiti. Photo courtesy Santiago Aguerre



Santi pumps up in San Diego. Photo Ryan Riccitelli



Jeff Tobias, Santiago, Ben Wilson and Martin Vari hang out on a recent trip. Photo courtesy Santiago Aguerre

Santiago proudly shows off his kiteboarding quiver. Photo Ryan Riccitelli

### Reef sandals, Reef girls, you've created a legend with Reef. What is they key to your success?

Let's set the record straight. The whole Reef thing was never a decision to make money or to be successful in a business. We started Reef, so I could hang out with my brother, have fun with the girls, surf and you know, do what we like. The company was successful, crazy and creative because we had a lot of free time. We could cover for each other. That's the magic of this business. When I can take four months off a year, go anywhere in the world, have fun, do crazy things, meet people and come back and things are done. That's a partner. We were lucky enough to surround ourselves with a lot of cool guys that had the same feeling and the same dream that we had.

### How did you get turned onto kiteboarding?

Six years ago in Tahiti, a friend of mine, who is very forward thinking and a hot surfer, told me that he had bought a kite. He pumped the kite up, launched the kite into the sky, put me in a

harness, hooked me in and wished me good luck. He followed me as I was getting my ass kicked. After that experience I said to myself, I don't know if this is really fun but it sure has a lot of power. So I let it go for about two or three years. This was in 1998 or 1999. I was back surfing the same place and saw this French guy. I heard he taught lessons, so I told him I would like to take a class. The guy put me on a 16m two-line kite. Same story! I body dragged for about 10-15 minutes. I then asked the guy to hand me over the board. He said, "no, no, no..." I insisted that he hand me over the board! At first I fell on my face and lost the board. I then put the board back on my feet and went for about 100 yards. I came out of the water and said, 'Hey I like this! This has got potential.'

### What was your perception when you first saw kiting for the first time?

Kiteboarding's biggest challenge in going mainstream is showing people that it isn't just a stunt sport. I'm sorry to the guys that do this. I respect

them very much, but a lot of tricks are like trapeze tricks—like in a circus. You know jumping high and then starting to do boards offs and tricks; grabbing the rail this way and the other way, and handle passes. Do any of these things really have anything to do with kiteboarding? I mean you can do any of these things with anything that flies or is hanging from a tree or bungee cord. I give them a lot of praise, because they are not easy to do, but for the public it's only exciting for about three minutes. The first time I saw a kiteboarding video. No wait. I keep on mixing things up. Let me clarify. To me, kiteboarding and kitesurfing are two different sports. It's almost like downhill skiing and telemarking or half pipe and slalom in snowboarding. They are very different, requiring different skills, different states of mind and different places to do it.

I saw Martin Vari riding one time. You know we are both from Argentina. I invited him to Tahiti last year. I needed a lot of help kiteboarding and Martin needed some help to improve his surfing.

We traded skills. One day the wind was wrong for surfing, but the wind was perfect side shore for kiting. I saw Martin riding six foot, perfect peeling barrels, for about an hour. I moved the boat to the east side of the reef to get a better look. Martin was parking the kite up high, killing the power and surfing like you surf on a regular surfboard. He had no straps, nothing; just ripping the shit out of the waves. Off the tops, cut backs, fades, aerials—everything! That day my mind changed on the difference between kiteboarding and kitesurfing. I said to myself; I'm now witnessing something that is very different. I felt like I was watching Jake Burton when he was riding the first goofy snowboards down a slope.

### How long did it take you to get going on a board?

I was getting up and going in Tahiti in a few days. Then, well, you know San Diego. It's hard here. There is not a really good place that you can go on a downwinder and be followed by a boat or a jet ski. I decided to book four days at Real Kiteboarding with a friend. We got two days out of four with wind. Matt took me out one day and improved my upwind skills from like 10 degrees to 35. And then the next day, was the first time I kited on flat water at the slick. It was 30 knots and Matt pumped up a 7m Slingshot kite for me. We trained in the water for a little bit and then I rode by myself for like two hours. It was the first time that I could really ride and practice with steady wind. It was so great. Those two days of kiteboarding at Real, I went

from being an advanced beginner to a good intermediate kiter. It's the right place to be. Then I got back to San Diego and I went to the ocean right away. I was doing off-the-tops, switch foots and was able to have a lot fun. My next vacation, I booked a holiday to Brazil for 40 days. I'm going to come back a lot different than I kite today!

### What kind of boards and kites do you ride?

I have a lot of good friends in the industry! I think there are three companies that impress me that I've been in touch with. One is Slingshot. I think their approach is different than everybody. It's solid. I think they have a great marketing machine and great riders and really good products. The next one is probably Pete Cabrinha. I think those guys are always pushing the envelope with technology. Another company that always impresses me as core is Naish. I think Robbie is a great guy at the helm of the company. He's got a great reputation that can really push the sport out to a lot of places. He is the Tony Hawk of windsurfing. I enjoy criss crossing samples from the three guys. I try to be a neutral person. I'm not aligned with any one company. I talk to all of them and try to help them. I would like to see them get together and create a kite association. You know, to spend their money to bring people into the sport and keeping beaches open, instead of fighting and trying to get market share from each other. I think eventually the industry will mature and there will be something like that. - continued on page 62

**Being from a surfing background, what do you think of the crossover of surfers getting into kiteboarding?**

What surfers still see is kiteboarding, not kitesurfing. Maybe a handle pass or a kite loop or just guys riding into the horizon. That doesn't have a lot of appeal to a surfer. Now when a guy sees a guy kitesurfing on a perfect left, getting barreled or turning a choppy, side shore day into a fun park, we got something here! The best place in the world to light the fire is the East coast of the United States. They've got 2000 miles of beach break, mostly unsurfable with side shore wind, warm water and open space.

**You interact with many key players in surfing and other action sports industries. Do you talk about kiting or is it your best kept secret?**

You know, Martin and I did a little DVD, and I sent it out to some powerful guys to see if they would answer. A couple people got back to me and said well I don't really know... I just don't see it yet. I think the sport shows a little bit of the right thing, but the guys don't see it yet. Let me give you an analogy. When you were 10 years old and you saw a couple French kissing you probably thought it was disgusting. Five years later, you wished you could kiss that girl everywhere. So, it's just an issue of maturity. I think the hormones are there, you're just too young! It's around the corner. I hope the ingredients come together the right way to explode it.



Santi boasts his proudest accomplishment, his beautiful family. Photo courtesy Santiago Aguerre

**Does kiting cut into your surfing time or just balance it?**

I would say that it has cut into my surfing time in that I don't surf, shitty, choppy stuff here in San Diego anymore! I think it's a great complement. Listen...off-shore winds...no good. On shore wind...hey, you can always go around the corner and get it side shore. I hope that people can find out that you can just throw a couple of kites in your board bag, and your fun doubles. It's like having two girlfriends.

**What tips do you have for anyone getting into the sport?**

Take lessons. Don't buy a kite off the internet and pump it and launch it. Don't ride next to a road with cars going by you at 50 mph. Let's rewind. Why is it that the manufacturer's don't have a video? Nobody wants to read a manual. Nobody reads that shit. How many one-hour DVD's showing how to correctly rig and be careful with the equipment are there? We are getting people killed every year. I don't know

the exact numbers, but one is too many already!

**I am sure this is a question many guys are wondering. Have you ever hooked up with a Reef girl?**

Yes. I haven't told that many people this, but I'll tell you. I'm still married for 13 years and have four kids with the very first Reef girl. ■

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