



Kastle Waserman

specs+spaces Reporter, Dunn-Edwards Corporation

Wyland: Having a Whale of a Time

09/06/11 **Kastle Waserman** | specs+spaces Reporter, Dunn-Edwards Corporation

Against a backdrop of giant whales swimming in the ocean along the AES Power Plant building in Redondo Beach, Southern California officially kicked off this year's Earth Month with a rededication ceremony following the restoration of environmental artist Wyland's famous mural, Whaling Wall #31. With eyes as blue as the ocean itself, Wyland moved out and about in the crowd, surrounded by enthusiasts for his work who wanted to shake his hand, get his autograph and snap a photo with him. He is clearly a man of the people and makes sure he takes the time to greet each and every one of them. He knows, every person he touches can make a difference, and that's all part of what he's trying to do.



Preceding the ribbon-cutting celebration, members of "Team Wyland" busily assisted the crowd and ushered California dignitaries to the podium including City Councilwoman Janice Hahn and Mayor Mike Gin of Redondo Beach, who came to honor the artist. The rest of the time, the Team worked the booth for the Wyland Foundation, a non-profit organization founded in 1993 dedicated to preserving the world's oceans and marine life through education programs, public arts projects, and community events.

"My favorite thing about working with the Wyland Foundation is going to work every day for such an important cause," said Cyndie Balling, Human Resources Director for Wyland Worldwide. "Every team member is able to contribute to conservation efforts and that is a good feeling. Not everybody can say that about their job."

A few days later I am on the phone with Wyland from his studio in Laguna Beach where he is spending the day doing some painting and looking at the ocean, "I don't believe in the suffering artist, I never have!" he says with a laugh. "I don't really have a job, I just create art every day. With the success I've enjoyed as an artist, I have a lot more opportunities to give back."

He is cheerful and optimistic and it must be said, his passion for the planet is downright contagious, making him the perfect spokesman for environmentalism. During our chat, he must take time-outs to put the phone down and grab his camera to take photos of flocks of pelicans passing overhead.

"Wow, this is amazing! Look at them go!" he shouts with glee.

His "give back" as he calls it, are his now famous murals inspired by what he's seen in the sea - gorgeous depictions of giant whales that bring the beauty of ocean life above ground, and also serve to raise awareness and action for conservation. The rededicated Whaling Wall of Redondo Beach is just one of 100 Wyland vowed to do, all for free as gifts to each city to raise awareness. He completed his 100th mural in 2008 at the Beijing Olympics.

"I gave myself 30 years to do it and I beat my goal by 3 years. I'm so appreciative that something like that can be accomplished. All the paint and food for the crews was donated, so many volunteers gave their time," says Wyland. "It's not just about me painting whales on the side of a building, it's about how a community comes



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together, companies come together, and we give a work of art that becomes part of the fabric of a city. It's meaningful to people. It's very meaningful to me."

That evidence was clear at the Redondo Beach event as the fans and families from across Southern California came out to applaud Wyland's recognition. But it just may have been the littlest ones in the crowd that Wyland appreciates the most. A big smile grew across his face as he looked out at a group of local school kids in attendance who made their presence known by cheering their mention from Wyland as the earth's youth ambassadors, "I've painted with over a million kids and they will change the world if we support them!" he told the crowd.



Wyland himself was just a kid when he painted his first mural at age 16 for a teacher on the side of a building in Detroit. But

it may have been the man he now calls his hero, legendary seaman/ecologist Jacques Cousteau, that prompted Wyland to become an environmentalist and merge a cause with his gift of art. "That man had such a passion for the ocean. He was a poet and a filmmaker. He inspired me and a whole generation of people to care about the ocean and to get involved. He used his films and now I use my art."

So why does this artist, who is so concerned about the planet, choose the medium of paint -- a chemical -- to put his message out? "Paint companies have come a long way from the old days of oil based paint to acrylic to water based, and I'm so encouraged by that. I've seen the transformation in my lifetime. Companies like Dunn-Edwards understand the cause element behind the brand. Dunn-Edwards has donated paint for a number of murals I've painted. They make the best eco-paint on the planet and I appreciate their support of my efforts."

	
Red Power (DEA108)	Colbalt (DEA140)
	
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Rare Turquoise (DEA133)	Magic Night (DEA191)
	
Beautiful Blue (DEA136)	White (DEW380)

Wyland's Dunn-Edwards Mural Colors

Wyland's efforts seem to be endless. He is currently working on 100 monumental life-size sculptures of great whales and water habitats to be donated to cities around the world. That, in addition to his chain of art galleries, restaurants and his music label, Wyland Records, that is soon to be releasing, "Blues Planet," a two-CD set of original blues music from an all-star band, inspired by the Gulf oil spill disaster. As Wyland's creative reach continues to grow and so does his message.

"I use my art to encourage people to think about what they are doing to our oceans. I painted the world's largest earth portrait [located atop the Long Beach Convention Center Complex] and that was just another creative way to get people's attention. For me it's not just about the art, it's about the message. If I can grab people's attention just for a moment while they're driving down the freeway or walking down the street, and they see the beauty of nature, they'll work to preserve it."

See more of Wyland's art on his website: www.wyland.com

To learn more about the they Wyland Foundation visit: www.wylandfoundation.org

Photos by Kastle Waserman

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