

# Beyond the Sea

**Philippe Cousteau Jr.**, grandson of famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, is charging forward with his wife, **Ashlan**, in the ongoing fight to save our world BY AMANDA OGLE

SEVENTY-THREE YEARS AGO, Jacques Cousteau, the French oceanographer and explorer extraordinaire, was testing the Aqua-Lung, the scuba system he co-invented that allowed for greater sea exploration. He's part of the reason people became more conscious of the impact we have on our planet, and his grandson, Philippe Cousteau Jr., is well aware of the influence his grandfather had. In fact, he's continuing the family legacy to strive for a greater world along with his wife, Ashlan. At age 20, Philippe founded EarthEcho International, a nonprofit inspiring young people to act now for a sustainable future. He also hosts numerous eco-conscious shows, including the *Awesome Planet* series on Fox and Hulu and *The Aquatic World of Philippe Cousteau* for Greatbigstory.com. Ashlan is a veteran journalist, a special correspondent for *Entertainment Tonight* and a passionate conservationist. We talked with the environmental power couple carrying on the Cousteau legacy and aiming to make the world a better place.

Philippe, this month, the French film *The Odyssey* debuts, about your family and the Cousteau legacy. What does this mean to you?

"It's a legacy of problem solving. When my grandfather started out, he actually wanted to fly in the French navy and enrolled in the naval aviation program in order to pursue that dream. He had a very violent car accident one day and broke his back and was washed out of the naval aviation program and told to swim in the Mediterranean Ocean every day to rebuild his strength. So this terrible tragedy for him that dashed his dreams of flying caused him then to experience the ocean. Anyone in the world back then in the 1930s had no understanding of what existed beneath the water. There were no videos, no documentaries ... nothing. He was amazed by this world, and he was frustrated that he couldn't spend more time underwater than holding his breath would allow. So, he turned a tragedy into a triumph. He met an engineer, and they co-invented scuba diving. He always had a passion for filmmaking, so he figured out how to make cameras waterproof and take those underwater. And so every step of his life he saw challenges and problems and he sought to solve them, and they led him on this journey that became legendary. Above all, that always inspired me to try to look at the world through new eyes constantly, and whenever you see a problem, try and find innovative solutions, even if they don't exist yet. To me, that is his legacy."

Ashlan, your work not only revolves around conservation but also interviewing A-list celebrities

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PHOTO: ROCCO CESELIN



Philippe Cousteau Sr. with his famous father, Jacques

**for *Entertainment Tonight*. How do you balance these two different worlds?**

“For me it’s just good time management. It’s kind of nice to be able to step away from each and into the other. The entertainment stuff is really fun and glamorous, but it’s nice to not have to wear makeup and get to go into the middle of the jungles of Nepal and escape from it all. You can only take so much Kardashian before you do want to go away by yourself in the middle of nowhere.”

**Philippe, you founded EarthEcho International in 2000 to educate and inspire youth to create a sustainable planet. What is your favorite thing about this organization?**

“I see a lot of problems when I travel and do documentaries and filmmaking around the world. What I love about the work we do at EarthEcho is when I walk into a classroom of students or work with young people, and I’m beaten down and a little depressed sometimes about the state of the world, and I see the enthusiasm and determination on their faces, and the commitment, the unwillingness to take no for an answer ... it gives me an incredible amount of energy and hope. I really do think that they have a bigger impact on me and our team and keep us believing in the hope of future generations and the potential they have to change the world and make it better.”

**Ashlan, what do you think is the biggest issue plaguing our world right now?**

“Behind oil and gas, the [second-most harmful industry in the world in terms of pollution] is the fashion and garment industry, and a lot of people find that shocking. I’m really taking that on as a personal mission to make people aware of that and to think about things, especially clothing, before they buy them, and to make sure they’re buying investment pieces and not buying fast fashion. The rise of fast fashion and this idea that your clothes are disposable has led to a lot of huge problems with the environment all the way from people not being treated properly and fairly, not having safe work environments, to plastics and pollution ending up in our oceans because of that industry. Next time you go to H&M or Forever 21 or Zara, think twice before you buy that shirt that you’re going to wear once and then literally throw in the trash can.”



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— PHILIPPE COUSTEAU JR. ON HIS GRANDFATHER JACQUES

**Philippe, if you could give people one tip on how to create a more sustainable planet, what would it be?**

“Vote. We don’t have a political problem in this country when it comes to climate change or anything in the environment like that — we have a constituent problem. People aren’t voting and getting engaged in these issues. We really need to vote, and vote in the kinds of politicians who are going to build the kind of world that we want. Even if you’re not old enough to vote, the influence that you have on your parents and the peers around you is tremendous.”

**Ashlan, what do you think is your greatest success in creating a better world?**

“I personally have made it a mission to help people realize that saving the world, this going out into nature, it can be fun. I kind of look at my time at E! News and at *Entertainment Tonight* and think, ‘Okay, how can I make saving the world entertaining and fun?’ So for me, that means bridging the gap and making going to Nepal and looking for tigers and going diving for three weeks with reef sharks in the Marshall Islands exciting. Because if people aren’t inspired by it, they’re not going to go out and do it.”