



TARPON

“*Tarpon* is a timeless and beautifully executed film about life, sport and culture. You'll be moved, amused, outraged and, most of all, entertained.” —Tom Brokaw

“This long-lost gem of a film has acquired cult status in the flyfishing world, and with good reason. It has the most breathtaking footage of the tarpon-stalking experience that you'll ever see. Like the fish itself, this is a work of art.” —Carl Hiaasen.

“*Tarpon* is a gem and, frankly, a window on better days. Without a profound respect for tarpon, this celebration of their majestic power and the enchantment of their pursuit, could never have been made. Tarpon fishing was and is a dream, and this may be the only time it's been captured.”
—Thomas McGuane

“I believe that *Tarpon* is the best film ever made that concerns itself with fishing.”—Jim Harrison

Synopsis

The first of the modern fishing films, *Tarpon*, was shot in the wild panorama of 1970s Key West. Colorful scenes of Key West from another era—with treasure hunters, smugglers, hippies, and eccentrics—are background to stunning cinematography and tarpon fishing at its finest. Authors Richard Brautigan, Tom McGuane, and Jim Harrison join with legendary flats guides, Woody Sexton, Gil Drake, and Steve Huff as they pose questions about life, art, nature, and catch-and-release fishing.

Behind the Scenes



For decades, the unreleased documentary *Tarpon* remained somewhat of a myth. Some were lucky to get a bootlegged copy, but for most, the film was urban legend.

The film was born from a 1972 visit to the Florida Keys by French cinema verité filmmaker, Christian Odasso. Enraptured by the aesthetics and ethics of catch-and-release tarpon fishing, Odasso paired with his brother-in-law, Guy de la Valdene, to co-direct this film about fishing, fishermen, authors, and nature lovers. De la Valdene was an avid angler and nature writer who had already been fishing the area for several years.

With a mostly French crew, the shoot took approximately seven weeks and was edited in Paris in the same amount of time. The film was shot in the cinema verité style on Kodak 16 mm Ektachrome. The crew built a platform on the flats to capture the jumping tarpon in slow motion on film stock, a challenging technological feat. Mics were wrapped in condoms to capture underwater sounds. In line with the verité ethos, improvisation

was key.

Jimmy Buffet composed original music for the film and Jim Harrison narrated his own text. With appearances by authors Richard Brautigan, Thomas McGuane, and Jim Harrison. The film shows some of the only extant video footage of Richard Brautigan, the cult 60s poet and novelist.

The film features fishing guides Gil Drake, Steve Huff, and Woody Sexton—pioneers and legends of a bygone era of Florida fishing. Also appearing in the film are Page Brown, an early Keys angler and prominent fishing conservationist; Ray Donnersberger, an angler and saltwater fly tyer; and Bob Montgomery, an early Lower Keys guide who guided into the 1990s.

The film's message about catch-and-release was far ahead of its time and highlighted the increasing pressure on our ocean and fish by sportsmen, tourists, and boaters. It reinforced an ethic among thousands who managed to see a pirated copy of the film. At the time, PBS was interested in screening the film in the United States. However, they wanted the scene of sharks being clubbed and thrown unceremoniously into buckets removed from the final cut. The filmmakers refused.

In 2008, the film was rescued from a barn in Normandy where it had been for 30 years. A print was restored and released to DVD. In 2022, we used the A/B negative rolls to create a higher quality 4K scan with image and sound restoration work by Goldcrest Post Production in NYC. The restoration premiered at Telluride Film Festival and screened at Key West Film Festival in 2023.

Filmmaker Biographies

Christian Odasso (1940-2011) began his filmmaking career in Paris during the Nouvelle Vague as the cinematographer for cinema verité director, François Reichenbach. Together they won numerous awards, including the Palme d'Or and Prix Special du Jury at Cannes, L'Ours d'Or in Berlin, the Voile d'Or in Locarno, the Prix Louis Deluc, and an Academy Award for Best Documentary film for *L'Amour de la Vie* on Arthur Rubinstein. Christian collaborated with directors such as Orson Welles on *F for Fake*, Chris Marker, Claude Lelouch, and Martin Scorsese on *Medicine*



Ball Caravan. He filmed profiles on artists such as Salvador Dali, Dunoyer de Segonzac, Gromaire; musicians such as Herbert von Karajan, Rubinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Van Morrison, BB King, Pink Floyd, Jimmy Buffet; athletes such as Jean Claude Killy, Pele, Bjorn Borg, Carlos Monzon, and El Cordobes; movie stars such as Jeanne Moreau and Brigitte Bardot; and writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Richard Brautigan, Jim Harrison, and Thomas McGuane. He shot documentary footage of indigenous Mexican culture, JFK's funeral, and musical performances in Iran, at Woodstock, at the Opera de Paris, and with the Maurice Bejard dance company. He filmed short and long format commercials and promotional films for Dior, Moet- Hennessy, Perrier, Air France, Club Med, Renault, and Citroën.



Guy de la Valdene (1944-2023) was born and raised in France, before eventually settling on a farm near Tallahassee, Florida. An avid angler, lifelong hunter, foodie, naturalist, and nature writer, his books include *On the Water: A Fishing Memoir*, *The Fragrance of Grass*, *For a Handful of Feathers*, *Making Game* and a novel, *Red Stag*. His numerous articles have appeared in *Sports Afield*, *Field & Stream* and *Gray's Sporting Journal*. His enduring friendships with Jim Harrison, Thomas McGuane, and Richard Brautigan up until his death, His single foray into directing and producing film created the cult classic, *Tarpon*, for which he remained very proud.

Character Biographies

Richard Brautigan (1935-1984) was a pivotal 1960s cult author and poet. A prolific writer, he published ten novels, two collections of short stories, and four books of poetry. He is best known for *Trout Fishing in America* (1967) and *In Watermelon Sugar* (1968). A strong part of the 1960s counterculture, Brautigan was reticent to be either photographed or filmed. He spent a large portion of the film shoot refusing to be interviewed, though he enthusiastically participates by the end. The footage from *Tarpon* is some of the only known extant film clips of him.



Jimmy Buffett (1946-2023) composed the original score of *Tarpon* in exchange for a trip to France for the film edit. He briefly appears in a scene examining treasure hunting spoils. Before his worldwide fame as the scion of the Margaritaville music and business empire, he played local bars in Key West, read literature, enjoyed the conch lifestyle, and deepened his friendships with these authors whom he would remain close with for the rest of his life.



Jim Harrison (1937-2016) was an American poet, novelist, and essayist. He published over three dozen books in several genres including poetry, fiction, memoir, children's literature and wrote screenplays, book reviews, literary criticism, and essays on food, travel, and sport. He is best known for the novella, *Legends of the Fall*. He appears in *Tarpon* early in his novel-writer career, though already established as a poet. Harrison's work often engages with the recurring encounter between man, society and nature, a theme he explores in his voice-over in *Tarpon*.

Thomas McGuane is an American writer whose work includes ten novels, short fiction and screenplays, as well as three collections of essays devoted to his life in the outdoors. Perhaps his best-known novel is *Ninety-Two in Shade* (1973), a tale of a fringe character barely surviving as a skiff guide on the flats in Key West.

Press

- [“At Telluride, screening a film about Jimmy Buffett, without him: Buffett’s friends came to Telluride with two movies about him. Then had to grapple with his death,”](#) by Jada Yuan. *The Washington Post*, Sept 6 2023.
- [“Tom McGuane and Jimmy Buffett Recall the While Literary Scene of 1970s Key West in Telluride Film ‘All That is Sacred’”](#) by Chris Willman, *Variety*, Aug 31 2023.
- [“Fish Stories: A Film Follows a 1970s Boating Trip by Some Leading Writers,”](#) by Jeffrey Trachtenberg, *Wall Street Journal*, Oct 17 2008.
- [“Interview with Guy de la Valdene,”](#) by Marshall Cutchin, *Midcurrent*, 2008.
- [“Tarpon Rolling: Fly fishing’s cult-classic finally makes it to the small screen,”](#) *American Angler*, 2008.
- [“Tarpon,”](#) by Marshall Cutchin, *The Drake*, 2008.
- [“Tarpon,”](#) *Fly Fisherman Magazine*, 2008.

Festivals

- 2023 Telluride Film Festival
- 2023 Key West Film Festival

Technical Specifications

- Originally shot on 16 mm Ektachrome, restored in 2023 on 4K
- Aspect ratio 1:37
- Stereo sound
- 54 minutes length
- English

Contact

UYA Films, Inc
1400 Alabama Avenue, Suite 2
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Diana Odasso, vice-president UYA Films
561.371.0032
odassodiana@gmail.com

www.tarpon1973.com
<https://www.instagram.com/tarponfilm1973/>
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