

**Many, many divers, underwater photographers and filmmakers, when asked about the origin of their passion to go underwater, say that they were inspired by the films and books of Hans Hass. He must be a very remarkable person, interesting to listen to, not to mention, Dr Hass is the greatest celebrity in the diving world today. Is it possible to meet him, to talk?**

I call. On the other end of the telephone line, I hear a very pleasant man's voice: "Interview? Oh, here, in Vienna... Yes, of course, but I am leaving for a week tomorrow." Deep in my mind, I bless the good fortune that I also planned to stay in Austria for some time, and we agree about our meeting.

Dr Hass was born in 1919. I know this fact and am enthusiastic about meeting him. He is the megastar in the diving research constellation. He gave thousands of interviews...

I wondered, would it will be interesting for him to tell his stories once more?

Text by Svetlana Murashkina  
Photos courtesy of Michael Jung  
at the Hans Hass Archive HIST.  
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# Hans

# Hass *A talk with*



ALEXANDER AXENOV





Hans Hass talks with X-RAY MAG's editor, Svetlana Murashkina, at his office in Vienna

## Hans Hass

there was great articulation.

The most frequent phrase in the Hass biography is "the first"—"the first to dive", "the first to research", "the first to apply..."

His fame in Europe and America and the whole world is great, but not widespread in Russia. Only one book, of the 25 by Hass, is published in Russia. His films were not shown. This was the case most likely because his pioneering research was made during WWII, and mostly before the 1960s. There were probably some other reasons as well. It's not fair.

That's why we are sitting here with Hans Hass, to listen... just dates, just thoughts, just ideas.

*I always liked to experiment.*  
— Hans Hass

*Interview with Dr Hass in his office in Vienna, 17 August 2007*

**Youth.** "Let me go..." I am Viennese, my father was a lawyer, quite famous. My father went hunting, and we had hunting grounds just here, not very far from Vienna. We went there. And I also liked to fish at the Old Danube.

My mother was pretty. I loved my mother! She took me to France, so that I learned French. And when I was 18 and finished with my studies, my first studies, she said: "Now this summer, you go on your own to Paris," and in German they say it differently, "to cut off your horns".

I spent five days in Paris, and

then I went to Juan-les-Pins again, where we went always, and I fell in love with a very nice French girl... but she then decided that a French man was better (*Hass laughed*)... he knows better how to behave.

So, one morning, I went out to Cape Antibes and thought about my life.

**The Turn.** I was sitting at Eden Rock. In the cliffs, I was sitting and thinking about my future... and this nice girl... And suddenly something

happened to me that changed my life completely. I saw a man swimming around. He was an American, Guy Gilpatric from *The*

*Saturday Evening Post.*

Here he was, the inventor of this new sport—spear fishing—with a long spear and small goggles, and so, I observed him.

I was very good in sports—diving. So, I joined him. And when I came back, I told many stories about the adventures I had, diving down to fish, and nobody believed me.

Then, I decided to make pictures to show everybody how it really was. So, I found a black smith, and he helped me to make a case, the first one for my photo camera. And already by the next year, I went on a little expedition with several friends of mine, four or six of them. We went to the Dalmatian coast, and we had a nice time. So, I wrote about all that in my first book.

The long awaited date, 17 August, comes. Dr Hass' office is situated in the center of Vienna. In the room, there are book shelves, a bureau with a green table cloth, a lot of books and albums, pictures and magazines.

Just before our meeting, the Russians had made the first dive expedition at the North Pole.

The achievement was still in the limelight of the world's media. Dr Hass was very interested in the story, and that's how our meeting began—not questions and answers, but just friendly conversation about current events.

Dr Hass just returned from Monaco with his Italian friends, so he apologised for the Italian words

that come first from his tongue here and there. (These Europeans, switching easily from one language to another...) We looked at the old picture books, and Dr Hass told me about his life. All the key points of his bright career are well known, but the details!

Very cordially, he spoke about Lotta Hass, his wife and partner. He

spoke about the fear that Cousteau and his companions had taken the idea of the oxygen breathing apparatus.

It was a great pleasure not just to talk, listen and converse with Dr Hass, but also to decode the interview (a very rare case). All the words and sounds were clear, nothing like "eee", "well", etc—



Hass with wife, Lotte—who also became an astute underwater photographer and diver—during the production of one of their underwater films in the 1950s

### From spear fishing to making underwater pictures to the study of fish behavior...

I began spear fishing in 1937. But very soon, I changed to photography. It was very fascinating to photograph all these colorful fish, and to film, and study them. Then, I realized that if you want to find out what fish are, how they live, and what their behavior is, one must oneself behave like a fish-like creature. So, I invented the first underwater breathing

equipment, pure oxygen, and then, already in '39, I went to the Caribbean Sea with my friends, Jorg and Alfred.

We were the first to dive the coral reefs. In those days, nobody dared to go in the water, because everyone was afraid of sharks. And we soon found out that these sharks were—as every diver today knows—very interesting, beautiful animals, but not interested in human beings, with some very rare exceptions. And I loved it, and I still love the sharks today.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

1919 January 23. Hans Hass (Hans Heinrich Romulus Hass) was born in Vienna (Austria) to the family of a well known attorney.

1937. Hans graduated from school and did his first trip to France without his parents. There he met Guy Gilpatric, and was grabbed by a strong passion for spear fishing. On return, he entered the Law Department of the University of Vienna.

1938. During the first expedition to Dalmatia, the first underwater photos were made with the assistance of a self-made underwater box. During the same period, Hans constructed an open diving helmet with an air pump.

1939. Expedition to the Caribbean, to Curacao and Bonaire (The Netherland Antilles Islands) with university friends, Alfred von Wurzian and Jörg Böhler. Publication of the first book, *Jagd unter Wasser mit Harpune und Kamera* (Hunting under the water with harpoon and camera).

1940. Beginning of the WWII made the three friends stay in Curacao longer than they had planned. They were away from home for nine months and managed to get back via the United States, China and Russia. After returning to Vienna, Hans, contrary to his father's wish, stopped his studies in law and went into biology and zoology. At that time, he realized the advantages of being a "fish among fish" when studying fishes and presented new research methods for marine sciences. Production of the first film, *Pirsch unter Wasser* (Stalking beneath the sea).

1941. Meeting with Hermann Stelzner, technical director of the Dräger company (Lubec, Germany). Together they modernized "Dräger-Gegenlunge", an oxygen rebreather, and made alterations to the breathing bag and the oxygen supply valve. The continuous flow regulator fitted to the Gegenlunge was replaced by a simple push-button valve, allowing the diver to manually admit oxygen to the breathing bag according to his varying consumption and to control his buoyancy. To produce an advantageous center of gravity in all swimming positions, the breathing bag was moved to the back. Hass replaced the original goggles he had been using up until this time, with a circular diving mask that enclosed the eyes and nose. The use of flippers turned the self-contained oxygen rebreather into a swimdiving apparatus, which Hass used constantly on all his expeditions from 1942 on. Publication of the book, *Unter Korallen und Haien* (Diving to Adventure).

1942. Expedition to Aegean Sea. On 12 June, Hass for the first time acted as a "swimdiver" (he swam underwater and did not walk like a heavy diver). It happened near a small Greek island, close to the western tip of Euböa Island. Production of the film, *Menschen unter Haien* (Man amongst sharks).

1943. Study of the immobile animalcule called "Reteporiden", which he began during this expedition, is regarded today as a milestone in marine biology research and the first marine biology project carried out with the swimdiving method.

1945. Hans Hass married Hannelore Schroth (their marriage lasted until 1949).

1946. The son, named also Hans, was born.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Hans Hass with underwater camera in 1938; Hass in action under the waves in 1939; INSET: Hass spearfishing with a wooden helmet in 1939

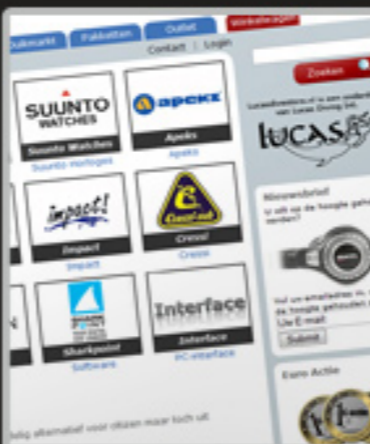
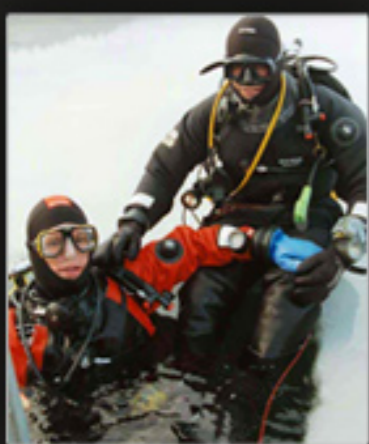




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## Hans Hass

**WWII.** When we came back from the Caribbean (1940), the military found out that when I marched, my toes became absolutely black. So, they did not let me go.

I made hundreds of lectures in Germany, because I was not allowed to be with the army on the front lines. I was lucky to be able to make all these lectures, because I earned a lot of money through the lectures and was able to get enough money for my own ship, *Seeteufel* (The Sea Devil).

But after the war, the Russians took it. And now, we have found out that it is somewhere in Saint-Petersburg, not in the museum. It is standing somewhere, and everyone can see it. But we were not interested in getting it back; it's too small.

**Lotte.** After the war, I went to the Red Sea. I was the first to dive the Red Sea, and took Lotti, my future wife. We have now been married for 57 years, and we still feel very well with each other. The reason for the great success of our films was partly Lotti, because a woman underwater was more interesting. Lotta was not only very beautiful, but also brave. It is nice to have a mate for your life.

Now, I do not lecture, no, no. Lotti said, "Well, after all, you taught all those years... now it is time for family." We have a very nice daughter with two grandchildren. We take them always to Venice. We first go to Venice and then to the Greek islands... Lotta is happy now that I am with her more.

**Money.** I financed every bit of what I did. I never wanted to accept any money from the government or anybody. So, I



Hass shows the title page of *Jagd unter Wasser*, one of his many published books

started making money by selling fish—which I harpooned—to hotels. Then, I published my first book, *Hunting Underwater*.

After our expedition to the Red Sea, there came the film, *Red Sea Adventure*. That was our first world success. You can see that at the end, my diving was limited. But certainly after 1960, I was doing many films, because I had to make money for some time during my life.

### Equipment.

The rebreather was such a

practical piece of equipment. But when the Cousteau team heard about it—they were thinking about the danger of pure oxygen—they said that after three minutes, I am dead.... Not at all. You can go 20 meters deep and stay an hour underwater.

**The boat *Xarifa*.** Now, I've seen my ship again. I spent a week in Monaco, on board *Xarifa*, I was hosted by Mr. Carlo Talio. I sold the boat to him over 50 years ago. Oh, it's so beautiful!

But imagine: he bought the ship,

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and for 50 years, he lived on the ship without using it! Is this not fantastic? I would not do that.

But I enjoyed so much to see my own ship again, and I mean, it hasn't changed much on deck... nothing. Certainly, in between, they had put a lot of money in it. It is now very luxurious, and I was staying there with Carlo Talio, and it was so much joy. So, we met again, and during the last week, we discussed his life, and my life.

**Back to Umbria.** In the beginning of the year, we went to a port in Sudan, and we went down to the *Umbria*—a very lovely ship, a tremendous wreck, tremendous wreck! From the time we first went there to now, it has changed quite a bit. It's overgrown with all these colors—it's like a fairy tale. It's as beautiful as ever.

It was little cold. It was February, and there was a strong wind, but it was only six days. We were invited on a very beautiful new ship for divers, and really, five days is very little. Every one of the five days I went diving with a lot of German divers going down and loved the sea... no, it hasn't changed. Not many people go diving there, as it is difficult to go—fortunately!

In the Egyptian part, there are so many hundreds of thousands of people, in many hotels. But the Red Sea is very beautiful. But you must go down for the details. You must not hurry, this is not important, but just sit down and watch what they all do, how they interact.

### Evolution of human beings

Later, in 1960, my interest was not so much the sea anymore, but this mystery of our existence. What is behind it? What does it mean? I was interested in the evolution of man. I changed my life. And that was my *Energon Theory*. My first book. But nobody was happy now—they all wanted me to make more films about sharks, and all that. So, my scientific works became less interesting.

I think I have



Dr Hans Hass signs a photograph in his office in Vienna  
LEFT: The 2007 DVD of Hass' underwater adventures during the 1950s

### Concern

And only now, I try my last book. I am under the impression that we are in a very difficult time. And that the human—mankind—grows too fast, and they want too much. And it is very, very, very important within the next 20 years, that they do not increase anymore.

It is so simple. What to do is just three things, three sentences. Every woman in this world is permitted two children, not more. If one of them dies under six years, she may have a third. And if she really wants more, and if she has money and

the ability to put into raising her child, she can have a fourth one, yes, because there are enough women who do not have children and do not want to have children. In this case, we would not increase anymore.

But that certainly is very difficult, because everyone wants more money, more pleasure, new things, new ideas, and more and more and more and more... But I shall give enough reasons, I hope, to help that change. I will do it. Whether I'm successful or not, I do not know. I do not mind, I am unimportant. I have to address myself to the females on Earth. But

1947. The first showing of the film, *Menschen unter Haien* (Man amongst sharks) took place, a production that began in 1942 by the Ufa-Kulturfilm studio. After The Second World War, Hans Hass turned to anthropology and evolutionary biology. He founded in Liechtenstein his International Institute for Submarine Research (IISF).

1948. *Xarifa*. Hans Hass acquired a three-masted schooner, hired a crew, gathered a team of scientists around him and set off, with himself as expeditionary leader, to explore the various oceanic coral reefs in great style.

1949. The book, *Menschen und Haie* (Men and Sharks), was published.

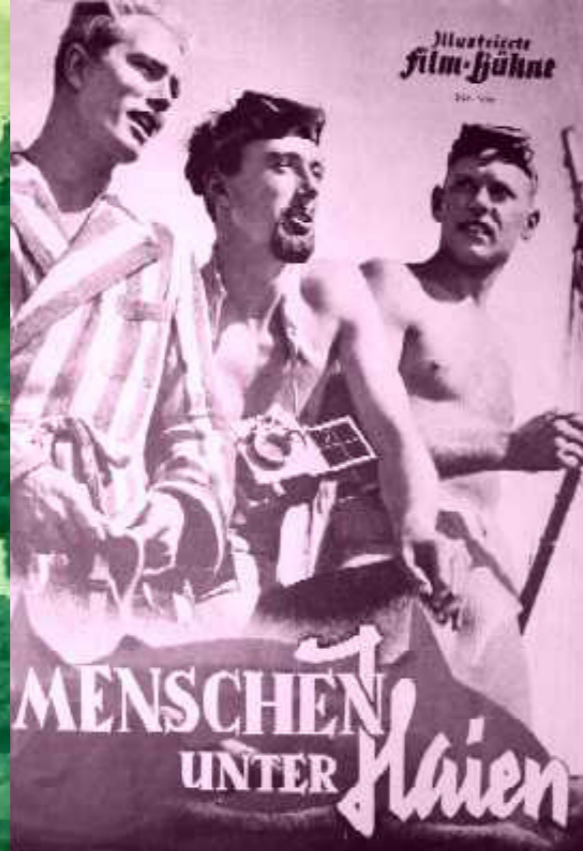
1950. Hans Hass married Lotte Baierl. She approached Dr Hass as his secretary and very soon became a competent member of the expedition and shooting team, a talented cameraman, and also the first charming and very brave underwater film star. The film, *Abenteuer im Roten Meer* (Adventure in the Red Sea), received first prize for long documentary films at the Venice Biennale.

1952. Publication of book, *Manta: Teufel im roten Meer* (Under the Red Sea).

1953-54. The *Xarifa* sailed across the Atlantic to the Caribbean Sea and the Galapagos Islands of the Pacific.

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THIS PAGE: Just a few of the posters of the many pioneering underwater films starring Hans Hass and his wife Lotte

remember again, it's a very fair thing if you say to a woman, you have a right to two. That is quite a lot.

Oh, here it is not the problem anymore. But in the other parts of the world... It's so unfair to put children in the world without any bit of money, any thing... and if you go to Rio de Janeiro, there are 20,000-30,000 children running around trying to eat any food that they can find. It is unfair! I mean you must have the help of your father and your mother... and you must have enough food, and especially learn languages and learn other things. Only then, can you start to be a human being. So, I think, I should impress the women. And we need the women more now. Men are not important anymore. It is unimportant to go to outer space, why? Keep the money first, and get it good on the planet Earth.

Planet Earth has a certain size. But if we would stop—we've gone over six billion—then, after a while we can go back to five billion, and the ideal would be four. If we go back to four billion or so, there would be no poor people at all, and if they are not so solid, then the world could go on...for millions of years!

If not, I tell you, within 20 years or 30 or 40, we will destroy, the human being will destroy the whole evolution of life. Very simple. And there are lots of people, who have the same idea.

But what can we do with the politicians? The politicians are uninterested... Every single person on this earth, if there is no change, will go down in terrific wars.

We are happy, because we had so much success. But we are changing our wishes to want more and more and more.

**Satisfaction.** I have been in so many places, and the sea is so big. Half of the world is covered with seas, which have been unknown. I've done what I wanted, I've been every where in the world, and had much success. We went to the Galapagos Islands, Coco Island, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and to the Great Barrier Reef of Australia, and wherever I went, I had the luck to be the first. But I am careful, I go closely, and it went quite well, and I succeeded in interesting people very much in diving. In the beginning, people did not like the sea. It was dark, and there were dangerous things. Today, there are millions of divers everywhere in the world. And science is changing wherever you go. Now, all scientists go underwater. They are not afraid of sharks.

I've made many films, and I made many scientific works, and many lectures everywhere, even in Japan you will meet a lot of people who have heard about me and my first expeditions. ■

1957. Lotte Hass gave birth to their daughter, Meta. Publication of the book, *Wir kommen aus dem Meer* (We come from the Sea).

1957-58. Hans Hass sailed through the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean to the Nicobar Islands and, finally, to Singapore. During these expeditions, many exciting events took place, sensational data obtained, lots of research work done. For example, the first encounter of man and sperm whale under the water. Also, the new theory of the origin of the Maldives atolls was proposed.

1959. After African and Asian expeditions, new TV serials appeared (about 100 TV programs were created all in all). The film, *Unternehmen Xarifa* (Under the Caribbean), was awarded the "Underwater Oscar" from the Underwater Photographic Society for outstanding underwater cinematography.

1963-1966. Beginning of the Energon theory development.

1968. Monograph, *Wir Menschen. Das Geheimnis unseres Verhaltens* (Men: The mystery of our behavior).

1970. Monograph, *Energon: Das verborgene Geheimnis* (Energon: The hidden mystery).

1977. Hans Hass became a professor at the University of Vienna.

1983. He continues to do research, lecturing, and other educational activities on the theme that interests him most of all, "The instinct of a predator in professional life", where marine biology, human behavior and management theory are connected. The Energon theory was not accepted by Academic science and was declared "pseudo-scientific".

1988. Monograph, *Der Hai im Management. Instinkte steuern und kontrollieren* (Business shark. Instinct control).

1999. Dr Hass is awarded the Konrad-Lorenz-Preis by the Ministry for Environment of Austria.

2000. On 1 December, the Hans-Hass-Institut für Submarine Forschung und Tauchtechnik (the Institute for Underwater Research and Diving Technology by Hans Hass) was created as a non-profit organization, originating from an amalgamation of the Hass Institute (IISF, 1947) with the Research Centre for Diving History (Forschungsstelle fuer Tauchgeschichte, FTG, 1995).

2004. Publication of the book, *Erinnerungen und Abenteuer* (Reminiscences and adventures).

2005. In January, Hans Hass dived the Maldives to witness tsunami consequences.

2007. In January, the trip to Port Sudan was held, devoted to the 50 years of *Xarifa* journeys and diving the *Umbria* wreck. In November, Dr Hass addresses us with "The letter to the women of the world". [http://www.hans-hass.de/Englisch/index\\_english.htm](http://www.hans-hass.de/Englisch/index_english.htm)

2008. On 23 January, Dr Hass celebrated his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, he received phone calls from all over the world. Today, Dr Hass together with his wife, live in the center of Vienna. Hans and Lotte keep traveling and visiting important dive events. ■