



words Dan Kostrzewski photos Embry Rucker

Last February, when snowboarding was broadcast from Finland to Fiji, few predicted it would get top billing in the IOC's corporate stage show. Even fewer expected the patriotic fervor and media frenzy which followed the American halfpipe sweep. And while the athletic artistry of Ross, Danny, and JJ was worthy of the extreme close-up, one particular unsung hero was content to quietly watch from the deck as the Olympians sessioned his handiwork.

Pat Malendoski, the man who constructed the Olympic Superpipe, has been shaping contest venues since 1996. His work has repeatedly graced high-dollar huckfests including the Nippon Open, the various US Grand Prix events, and the granddaddy of them all, the US Open. Pat has also spent the last six summers on Mt. Hood's Palmer Snowfield crafting High Cascade Snowboard Camp's playground. His company, Planet Snow Designs, has earned respect from the world's top riders and his approach to design has thrown down new standards of pipe and hit consistency.

He calls what he does a "bit of a black art" and stresses the intensity of shaping for professional events saying, "Events are tough. Everyone wants to come off looking good. Usually there's television involved and the highest caliber athletes, so you've got some heavy critics."

He continues, "Everyone's going crazy when professional events come to town and the whole operations department is working overtime. It just blows into and out of town quickly and creates havoc. The places which do support contests on a year-to-year basis should get a lot of props because it's good for the sport. And it's not an easy thing to do."

Due to the politics involved in working with such a huge bureaucracy, he considers the Olympic pipe one of his biggest challenges, "In the two years leading up to it, I was a real proponent for the bigger Superdragon transition. I knew that was the direction it was going, but getting the competitive world up to speed was a lot of work. Even though snowboarding had peaked out on the size of things that, mechanically, we were able to create — for the mountains to retool it takes a little more time. So, the curve of the industry was a little behind leading up to the Olympics. There were a lot of differing opinions... I really had to push for what I thought was best for snowboarding."





But after plenty of hard work, and some behind-the-scenes lobbying, the result was an epic pipe framed by blue sky sunshine and the world's rapt attention. Says Pat, "It really helped show the world what we were all about as a sport. It showed the best athletes doing what they do."

After working the spectrum of snowboard events, he points to Vermont when asked to pick a favorite, "Every year I really look forward to the US Open. There's so much history behind the event, and the caliber of riding that you see every year is so good. It's a truly broad base of snowboarding from all over the world. It's not this big Federation-this, and Federation-that thing, it's just an open event."

Pat's initial interest in shaping came from a personal desire to ride quality terrain, but his affinity for big machinery keeps him stoked on the job. He says, "I like heavy equipment. If I see an excavator, I'll just stop on the side of the road and watch it work." Then he daydreams, "If I owned five acres and you could just buy all this giant equipment and have business men come out of their high-rise towers and move dirt all day — that would be a really cool business."

Another factor he credits for developing shaping skills is a "constant feedback loop" between riders, riding, and shaping. He says that riding more is one of his business goals because, "Most of your inspiration and motivation comes from riding."

His excitement carries over to the next gen crop of rider/shapers. He observes, "There's a lot of new blood in the operating community as far as guys who snowboard and ski: now you've got so many skiers and snowboarders who know what they're trying to build. They just look at it from that vantage point. That's helped the curve of the whole industry, just by having that influx people who want to operate equipment because they have that love of riding."

But Pat cautions that a long learning curve, combined with a high burnout factor may pose serious challenges for resorts in retaining talented employees. Creating his own solution, Pat is looking to establish operator camps as a way to impart his black art. He sees this flow of information, as well as continued mechanical advancements, as critical to ensuring the progression of sculpted terrain.

He also craves the opportunity to create a signature park. "Building a park is probably the most enjoyable thing you can do, because you can always add something and change it and make it better. It doesn't have to be this static thing. It's hard to get from A to Z with something like a park. It's this process of re-adjusting and rebuilding and tweaking. I hate going to a park situation where you just see this same lump of snow that's been there the whole time. Because I think you can always make stuff better."

Pat's dream job as professional shaper may leave many envious, but some aspects of his work detract from his snowboarding. He reflects on the downsides: "The mountain which has always been your solace, the place you go to lose yourself, becomes your place of work, which is a weird mixture." And he says, "The hardest thing is sitting on an ice cube somewhere and listening to your wife tell you that Bachelor had two feet of snow last night."

When the hectic schedule of world travel and high profile events does deal him some rare days off, you'll find this long-haul cat-driver heading home to Bend to catch up with his wife, Victoria, and his sixteen-month old son, Dylan. And the next time you're up around Mt Bachelor, you may catch a glimpse of him tearing around on his sled, sneaking a few tree runs on Northwest, or sampling some finely crafted hits in the park, because as he so simply puts it, "Just going snowboarding without a care in the world is my favorite thing to do." ▲





For many, getting the early tram at Jackson Hole or hopping an A-star helibird in Valdez are recurring dreams which may some day, if all the planets are aligned, come true. But for Jamie Weeks, sampling these buffets of exceptional terrain are all in a day's work. Every morning, from December to May, Jamie's vocation as a backcountry guide, provides access to some of the best steep and deep in the world.

Splitting his seasons between Jackson Hole Resort and Valdez Heli Ski Guides, Jamie's job is clearly the envy of most. But as the only snowboard guide in both Jackson and Valdez, his sideways-only approach sets him apart from the rest of his peers. Even though some guides go both ways, Jamie's non-skier status makes him an anomaly in the historically four-edged occupation.

Getting his start in 1989, he first taught urban refugees on the slopes of Hunter Mountain. He soon looked west to Wyoming for plentiful powder, voluminous whitewater and a chance to soak up some backwoods knowledge. After endless rounds of certification, seasons of snowboard school purgatory and a two-season internship as a shadow guide — he finally entered the ranks of the backcountry chosen. Jamie stresses that breaking down knuckle-dragger stereotypes provided additional motivation recounting, "One of the things which got me into guiding up in Alaska, was five years ago when Theo, who owns Alaska Rendezvous Guides, told me that there

was no way a snowboarder would ever guide in Valdez. I heard that and I wanted to do it even more."

Jamie also says that his summers guiding on the river helped him move through the ranks, "Getting people safely through shit wasn't a new experience for me. I started guiding class five whitewater when I was seventeen years old in West Virginia." He also adds that his willingness to learn and adapt played a critical role in his progression. He says that in Jackson, "There are so many incredible riders, snow-scientists and guides who live here. There's always somebody in this town who knows more than you do. And in Alaska, we have incredible resources — people who have spent years in the Chugach and when I get around them I'm just a sponge. I just try to absorb as much information as possible."

When guiding clients, Jamie's first priorities are "Safety and having fun." But he views the backcountry experience with a broader perspective: "It's not just about going downhill and looking like the folks in the videos. It's about just being out there and enjoying the mountains and enjoying the experience. And if I get to bring people to that, that's what gets me stoked."

And considering his choice of mountain playgrounds, embracing the environment seems a reasonable goal. He cites the steep terrain and consistent snowpack as the main factors in the allure of the Tetons. "Fortunately at Jackson, I'm blessed to have the kind of terrain where I can keep teaching





people. I'm not stuck in a rut. After living here for ten years, I'm still doing new runs. The same can be said for Alaska."

As a snowboard pioneer in the guiding world, he has faced some interesting challenges. He says the whole experience has been an experiment in adaptation: "I'm making it up as I go with the help of a lot of very talented ski guides. I'm learning how to do their job standing sideways." And he praises developments in backcountry equipment systems as facilitating his success: "I don't think I'd be able to do my job without step-in bindings. For me to be efficient and to work with skiers I have to have that kind of ease. It's a safety issue because time is always a factor."

But not everyone has been positive about his mode of travel. "Sometimes people don't get it. They question everything I can do. Once they leave the ski resort their brains go back to the eighties." But, for many, Jamie adds, he brings a new perspective to the interaction: "For the client, it's an incredible experience when you're a snowboarder and you're greeted in the morning by a snowboarder."

Jamie stresses that he'd like to see more snowboard guides and says, "I want to teach avalanche courses because I feel there's a growing need for more snowboarders in the education field. I want to keep progressing and have people follow in my footsteps." He observes, "The clientele is growing, there are more and more snowboarders. And there needs to be an equal

number of snowboard guides as there are snowboard clients."

Although his scene may seem ideal, Jamie does note a few downsides. He summarizes, "I'm blessed, but I'm cursed. I can get in that tram every morning at 8:36, but nine times out of ten I'm going to be working. I don't know how many times I've scoped lines that I want to ride, but then had to wait two weeks to get a day off to go hit it. Or, I'll want to be doing laps on powder days with my friends, but I'll just sit there in the Hobacks and wait on some billionaire guy. But if I was on the other side of the tram line and I was bitter, I wouldn't be making as many powder turns as I make."

As an antidote he cites frequent off-season riding and he savors his rare time off, "To get days when I can actually go out and ride with my friends, I tend to cherish them."

But regardless of the workload, there still is no more coveted place for Jamie than steep exposure. Even with a season that spans eight months and over 200 full days on snow, he still wrings every ounce of vertical out of the winter. When asked if he every gets tired of his lifestyle, he smiles and says, "Not really. I worked all day today, got off work at three and drove as fast as I could up to Togwotee, so I could actually get a run in before dark." He pauses, then boils it down, "I don't think I'll ever get sick of it." ▲

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