

# Couloir

Backcountry Adventure

Volume XVI, Number 4 — Winter 2004

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IPA/Big Top Newsstand Services (415-643-4401)  
Coast to Coast, One Source, U.P.S., US Postal Service

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Printed on recycled paper in the USA

Since February 1997 *Couloir Publications* has recycled 10,750 pounds of paper.

*Couloir* magazine, ISSN 1080-4455, is published four times a year in October, November, December, and February by *Couloir Publications*. The annual subscription price is \$18 in the United States, \$24 in Canada, and \$34 overseas. Periodical Postage paid at Truckee, California and at an additional entry point in Denver, Colorado. CDNCPM#1610457 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *Couloir*, P.O. Box 2349, Truckee, CA 96160. Butterfly?



## Intro

Growing up in New York City, I indulged in a private little secret. Slamming the door to my room, 10 stories above the displaced human cries and cacophonous horns of the concrete jungle, I lay in bed poring over the pages of my favorite ski magazine that magically served me with snow each month. Two or three weeks into the month, after studying the same waist-deep powder shot for the hundredth time, I'd begin cutting out photos and taping them to the walls in the corner of my room that soon became my ski shrine. To my friends and family, I was an oddball; I wore fleece jackets when they wore designer black overcoats, hiking boots in place of their sleek dark pumps. Call it unnecessary, but I wanted to be prepared for the rare weekends when I got whisked away to the mountains, and ultimately for the time when I'd be able to jump out from behind the glossy pages and join the ski community for real.

Fortunately, it didn't take long. I escaped the city at age 17 and found myself chopping onions in the sub-culture sub-level of Alta's Peruvian lodge, then serving steaming pizzas in Crystal Mountain's Snorting Elk cellar bar. But by day, I was living the life, choking on powder, tiring myself out, getting better, and forging friendships on the mountain far more easily than I ever could in the school hallways or city streets.

Skiing everyday also taught me that, for as much vicarious experience as magazines provide, they're designed to have a synergistic effect when combined with a healthy dose of the real thing. Though they can carry you through dry spells, they're not designed as a substitute. For us at *Couloir*, now is the time. This is our last issue of the season, we re-

ceived more than 100 inches of snow in December, and we're crawling out of our publishing holes to play in it. Every morning or afternoon, we're arcing gravity-pulled gouges in the deep soft snow, feeling our muscles burn as we push ourselves to go further, harder and faster, and experiencing the chest expanding, detoxifying, full body workout of the climb. It's often hard to strike a balance between a healthy work ethic and a healthy body and mind. But for snow-addicts like us, we have no choice. We need to make sure we temper our visual and cerebral stimulation with all-out, lost-in-the-moment turning and burning.

And while I'm as much of a techno-weenie as the next backcountry junkie, I think I know when to say when. I try to cut myself off when I start obsessing over the micro specs of gear at the expense of the visceral elation of the backcountry. Ninety-nine percent of gear made today is vastly improved over gear that was new 10 years ago; clothes keep you drier and regulate your temperature better, boots provide more support, and skis plow through the nastiest of snow while arcing rounder, quicker turns. So, any way you slice it, if you're riding with some new gear, you've got an advantage. Or, as they say: It ain't the arrow, it's the Indian.

I'll click into telemark or alpine skis or strap on a snowboard any day of the week. Take me Nordic skiing, snowshoeing or ice-skating and the corners of my mouth will creep upwards in an uncontrollable smile. Whatever new snow toy is thrown at me, getting out in the mountains is what I've taken from the magazine pages of my life. It's what we hope you take away, too.

—Susan Schnier

Photographer: Doug LePage • Skier: Stu LePage • Whitewater, British Columbia