

SANTA CRUZ

Winter 2016

Style



Extreme skier
Scot Schmidt
Follows
his bliss
at 100 MPH

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"Summer of Love"

By Lee Quarnstrom
with photographs
by Herb Greene

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Following Your Bliss at 100 miles per hour

Extreme skier Scot Schmidt performs the impossible

By Peggy Townsend

From the kitchen of his house in the Santa Cruz hills, Scot Schmidt can look out over the 25 acres of steep, redwood-studded property he owns and see the sparkling Monterey Bay beyond. He and his partner of eight years, Patti Hilla, call this place, "The Rock." Which is fitting, because jumping off cliff-like rocks is what made the now 55-year-old Schmidt one of the world's most recognized freeskiers and also paid for this hideaway that sometimes turns him into a kind of hermit.

"I've always been a believer in what (writer and mythologist) Joseph Campbell said," said Schmidt. "And that's the follow-your-bliss approach to everything. If you follow your bliss your path becomes apparent."

(Spread) Extreme skier Scot Schmidt airborne in the Chugach Mountains, near Valdez, Alaska.

Schmidt is low-key, understated — the kind of guy who needs a bit of prodding to get him to talk about his accomplishments. He grew up in tiny Montana City, Montana, and learned to ski on a hill 16 miles from his house. In high school, he began winning ski races and moved to Squaw Valley where he quickly climbed the ranks of downhill racing — although not quite high enough to make the U.S. Ski Team.

“I started hanging out with the freeskiers, the longhairs,” Schmidt said.

Soon, he was jumping big cliffs and rocketing through toothpick-sized chutes on 220cm skis. His style, an unforgettable combination of relaxed and explosive, was born from an inherent fluidity and also from study-

“His huge cliff drops and style was something every skier of my generation wanted to emulate. He broke the mold for the rest of us.”

Mike Douglas, filmmaker

ing World Cup legends like Ingemar Stenmark, he said. In 1983, the ski tracks he left down a skinny chute at Squaw Valley caught the attention of cameraman Gary Nate, who was filming for Warren Miller at the time.

“He called me up and said, ‘I’m here for three days and I want to film you,’” Schmidt recalled. “I told him ‘you’re welcome to come along. I’m going out anyway.’ Basically, I didn’t want him to slow me down.”

Schmidt’s segment in the film, *Ski Time*, launched his career. He went on to appear in more than 40 ski movies.

“Scot was the first skier I can remember who proved you could make a great career from skiing without competing,” said Canadian filmmaker Mike Douglas, a legendary freeskiier in his own right. “His huge cliff drops and style was something every skier of my generation wanted to emulate. He broke the mold for the rest of us.”

For Schmidt, life became filled with trips around the world and bigger cliffs, more daring runs.

“The adrenaline, for sure, is huge and there’s the stoke when you pull it off,” Schmidt said of the drive to push his limits. “Skiing is like flying with your feet near the ground — and everybody likes to fly.”

Indeed, if Schmidt were to sum up his life it might be the single word: Speed.

Speed is partly what drew him to Santa Cruz when, at age 19, a friend invited him to here for the summer. Although his first



(Above) Extreme skier Scot Schmidt pushes the envelope in the mountains near Valdez, Alaska.

Photo: ©The North Face/Chris Noble

attempt at surfing Privates left him bleeding and shaken, he said, he became entranced with the rush of the waves. He learned to wave-sail and eventually became a competent surfer. He also rides dirt bikes.

But it was that need for “flying,” that also led him down a new path. Twenty-five years of standing on clifftops or ridgelines waiting for a filmer to set up, for the right light, for the perfect conditions began to take its toll, Schmidt said. He lost the stoke.

So he co-founded a cat-skiing operation in Fernie, B.C., and began taking high-paying clients on ski trips.

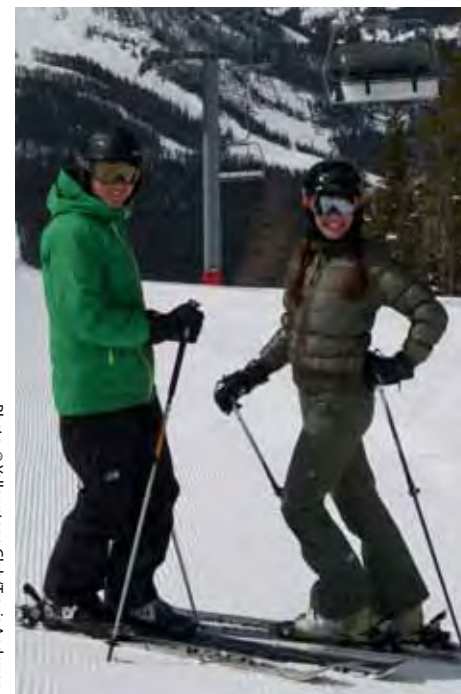


Photo © Yellowstone Club/Travis Andersen

(Above) Schmidt and his partner, Patti Hilla, on the slopes at the Yellowstone Club in Montana.

It was professional surfer Jerry Lopez who suggested Schmidt visit the exclusive Yellowstone Club, a 13,600-acre private development with 2,200 acres of skiing and 60-plus runs in the Rocky Mountains near Big Sky, Montana. Schmidt was soon hired as an ambassador at the Yellowstone Club, where the resort’s 550 members and their families can sign up to spend a morning or afternoon skiing with him.

“Being a native Montanan, Scot isn’t just any great skier,” said Krista Traxler, marketing director for the Yellowstone Club. “Scot cares about Montana and has Montana charm. There is an authentic feel to Scot, which ties in to what we’re about.”

It was there on the mountain where Schmidt, who now skis 100 to 120 days a year, got his stoke back, he said. He and Hilla spend

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their winters in Montana and are building a 2,500-square foot house partway up the resort's mountain. The rest of the year, Schmidt is ensconced at his mountaintop property in Santa Cruz, working the land, living a life still filled with passion because, as he said, "I made a conscious decision to be a skier, to do what I love."



Photo: © Yellowstone Club/Travis Andersen-

(Above) Skier extraordinaire Scot Schmidt powers through waist deep powder at the Yellowstone Club in the rocky mountains of Montana.



Photo: © Island Lake Catskiing/Mark Gallup

(Above) Schmidt explodes in a cloud of powder while on a cat-skiing adventure at Island Lake in British Columbia.

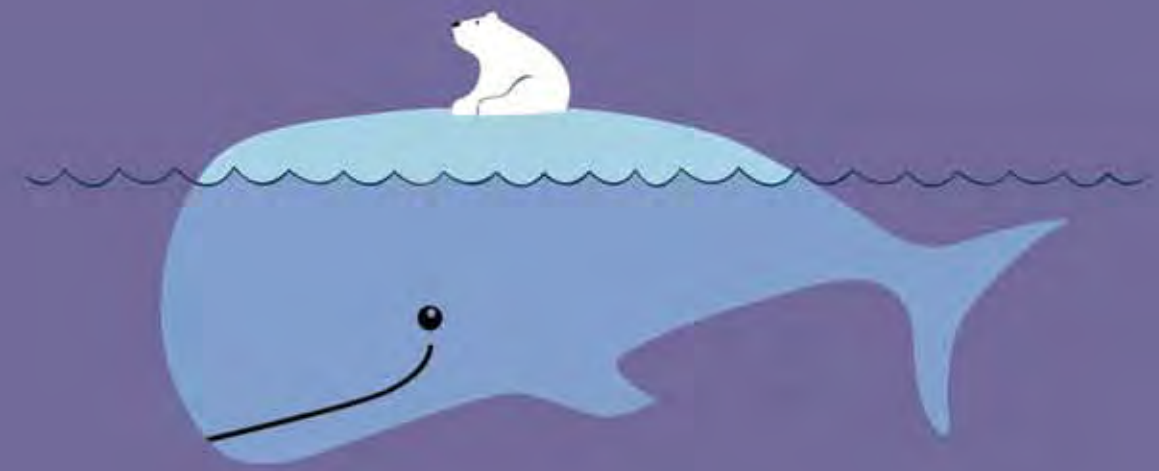


Photo: © Island Lake Catskiing/Mike McPhee

(Above) Scot Schmidt relaxes beside a roaring fire at Canada's Island Lake Lodge.

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