

Whether bombing down a rocky pitch on a titanium diamond frame, skimming across a monster wave on a five-foot fibre-glass board, or floating through three feet of powder on a pair of carbon-fibre planks, terrain-based sports all have one thing in common — they require specialized, technically specific gear. A bike, ski or board mediates an athlete's relationship with the surface they cruise, carve or shred; as Norheim and his equipment proved, a couple of choice tweaks can make all the difference.

The popularity of mountain-riding sports has grown significantly over the past two decades, with more people riding more different kinds of terrain. To accommodate this, equipment has become increasingly specialized. In 1990, Salomon sold one model of ski. Today, they offer 34 models customized for five riding styles. Still, for the most hardcore skiers, that's not enough. Some people care so deeply for the ride that they want one-of-a-kind gear tailored specifically to suit their taste. To them, the interaction between man and mountain is sacred and personal, and so too must be their equipment.

A small and unique industry has emerged to meet the needs of these mountain-riding purists: boutique manufacturing. The CEOs are passionate riders who have devoted their lives to designing and building equipment of the highest calibre. Unrivalled access to knowledge and technology has enabled motivated sports lovers around the world to open their own small factories to make specialized gear, whether it be mountain biking, kite surfing or skateboarding. Here in the Pacific Northwest, several notable boutique manufacturers have taken root here in our own backyard: Prior in

Whistler, Crown in Vancouver, DeCosse Customs in Cranbrook, Big Bend Skis, and Trapper Snowboards in Revelstoke, and Ullr in McCall, Idaho, to name a few.

There's a twist to designing and building specialized gear. No two riders share the exact same physical build, style or preference for terrain. No ski or board, no matter how well designed, can provide the optimal ride for everyone. To address this problem, boutique manufacturers take on the monster task of building individually customized rides. After you tell them where you like to ride, how good you are, your height and your weight, they will design a ski that complements your riding style, ability and preferred terrain based on those parameters. Custom gear owners will tell you the difference is striking. Rider Henry Ogden feels DPS, his custom ski maker in Salt Lake City, Utah, has "invented a new way of being in the snow."










These are businesses owners who have dedicated their lives to crafting the most comfortable and responsive powdersticks that will ever grace a mountain glade. But in their pursuit of the perfect ski or board, these artisans face several problems: manufacturing requires extremely expensive machines, a broad set of skills, an inordinate amount of labour, and, in the end, offers little financial reward. It's their desire to inch ever closer to that perfect, blissful ride that motivates these purists to test, refine and press new gear year in and year out.

Nobody believes in the importance of equipment more than engineer Sheldon DeCosse. As the owner of Cranbrook's Decosse Customs, he once designed "impact protection" parts for airplanes that were used for difficult take off and landing conditions. That is

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## The Best in the West

THINKING ABOUT BUYING YOUR OWN CUSTOMIZED RIDE? HERE'S A LIST OF SOME OF THE BEST-KNOWN BOUTIQUE MANUFACTURERS IN WESTERN CANADA, PLUS ONE CHOICE PICK FROM THE US TOO.

THE LABEL	FOUNDER	FIRST RUN	STUFF THEY MAKE	VIRTUAL HOME
 <b>DECOSSE CUSTOMS</b> Cranbrook, BC	Sheldon DeCosse	2005	Skis, snowboards, snowkite skis and boards, and kiteboards	decossecustoms.com
 <b>BIG BEND SKIS</b> Revelstoke, BC	Daryl Ross	2011	Skis	bigbendskis.com
 <b>TRAPPER SNOWBOARDS</b> Revelstoke, BC	Greg Fortier and Tyler Riddell	2011	Snowboards	trappersnowboards.com
 <b>PRIOR</b> Whistler, BC	Chris Prior and Dean Thompson	1990	Skis, snowboards, splitboards, accessories	priorsnowboards.com
 <b>CHROMAG</b> Whistler, BC	Ian Ritz	2003	Mountain bikes and components	chromagbikes.com
 <b>DEKERF CYCLES</b> Richmond, BC	Chris DeKerf	1991	Mountain and road bike frames, forks, and accessories	dekerf.com
 <b>CROWN SKIS</b> Vancouver, BC	Michael Alexander	2009	Skis	crownskis.com
 <b>NAKED BICYCLES + DESIGN</b> Quadra Island, BC	Sam Whittingham and Andrea Blaseckie	1998	Mountain and road bikes, parts, and accessories	timetogetnaked.com
 <b>ULLR SKIS</b> McCall, Idaho	Matt Neuman	2010	Skis	ullrskis.com