

Matt Parker shapes boards of nearly any size and shape for Album Surfboards.



Evan Fair is hands-on with every snowboard that Kindred produces in its two-person shop on Vancouver Island.

Kindred skis, made from locally grown cypress, can be customized with intricate graphics.



MEET YOUR MAKER

Though increasingly popular, handbuilt outdoor sports gear won't be the next big thing—the whole point is to do something that isn't mainstream. It's a chance to support a genuine craftsman and get equipment that fits you perfectly, with a design that is literally one of a kind rather than mass produced. Turn the page to see the very best builders who can build you a custom bike, surfboard, skis or snowboard with only one goal in mind: You.

Words JOE LINDSEY AND JEN SEE



The Arktos Custom showcases Alchemy's capability to make a bespoke carbon mountain bike.

KAILEY SKELTON, KINDRED, ALCHEMY

Alchemy's in-house paint shop can match any Pantone color and create one-of-a-kind designs.



After a 20-year hiatus, legendary bike builder Chris Chance is back in the game.



CUSTOM BIKES

Some are made for the trail, or women, or road racing. All are made for individualists.



Nik Crumpton hand-builds roughly 3 carbon-fiber road bikes every year.

ALCHEMY

Serious carbon-fiber full-suspension bikes rely on light, stiff frames and efficient, kick-ass suspension designs. They typically come from Asia—where manufacturing expertise is centered and it cheaper to make them. But there's one notable exception: the Arktos Custom, made in Denver and offered in two wheel sizes: 27.5 and a 29er. Alchemy pairs the Se suspension design, under exclusive license from noted engineer David Earle, with a suspension from Fox to create a 130mm-travel all-mountain rig that has won accolades for its efficient climbing and surefooted descending. "The Arktos really shows the capability of carbon-bike manufacturing in the U.S.," says Alchemy founder Ryan Cannizzaro. "We believe we can make a better bike if we control the build process ourselves." That extends to paint; Alchemy's in-house paint shop can match any design a customer wants. Price \$3,800 and up for frame and rear shock. alchemybicycles.com

ALCHEMY, FAT CHANCE BICYCLES, CRUMPTON

CRUMPTON

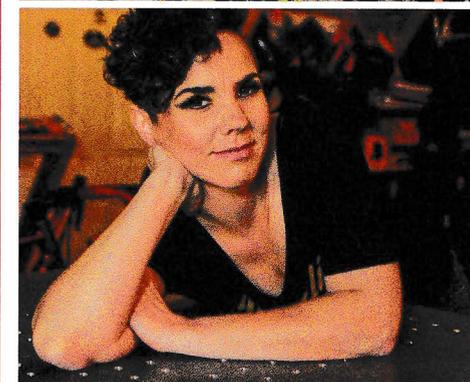
Nick Crumpton isn't a mechanical engineer or a former composites expert. He doesn't even have a high school degree. But he does make some of the best custom carbon-fiber road frames available today. Using far thinner layers of carbon than large builders, Crumpton makes his own tubes, which lets him customize each tube to match a buyer's size and riding style, with full custom geometry to match. Because his one-man shop makes and paints only 30 or so creations a year, wait times are about seven months. Price \$5,300 and up for a frameset. crumptoncycles.com

FAT CHANCE

When Chris Chance shuttered Fat City Cycles in 1994, it consigned devotees of his iconic designs like the Yo Eddy hardtail to fan sites and eBay. Fortunately, the treasure hunt got easier in 2015, when Chance rediscovered his love for framebuilding. So he rebooted the brand, updating his classic frames with modern standards, like an oversized head tube, disc brake mounts and clearance for wider tires on the new Yo Eddy. Some of the bikes are produced in collaboration with other notable builders (Mountain Bike Hall of Famer Steve Potts is one). Price \$1,800 and up, frame only. fatchance.bike

PEDALINO BICYCLES

As a fine artist Julie Pedalino tried painting, sculpture and drawing, but nothing stuck until she picked up a brazing torch and started making bicycles, apprenticing with renowned builders like Doug Fattic. "It engages every part of my mind," she says. Pedalino is excited about using technology like 3D printing, but her favorite part of the process is helping clients create individual designs—everything from flowers to fantasy sci-fi. "I approach every frame as a piece of art," she says. "But it's functional, too—a transportation tool." Price \$1,800 and up, frame only. pedalinobicycles.com



Most full-suspension carbon mountain bikes are fabricated in Asia, but the Arktos Custom (top) is made in Denver; Kansas-based Julie Pedalino (bottom) is a fine artist turned framebuilder.

BLACK SHEEP

The mark of a high-end titanium frame is a weld bead composed of perfectly symmetrical puddles of welding rod that joins the tubes. And James Bleakley's smooth-riding cruiser-style creations certainly have those, thanks to two decades spent making bikes and in metal fabrication for the medical and aerospace industries. Still, most customers are attracted to his bikes for their unusual curved tubes and truss-style forks. Price \$3,200 and up, frame only. blacksheepbikes.com

HANDMADE SKIS AND SNOWBOARDS

Whatever you want and however (and wherever) you rip, these builders can make you something truly unique.



The 14 staffers at Wagner's workshop, based near the slopes of Telluride, do one thing: make custom skis.

WAGNER SKIS

Pete Wagner's epiphany was disappointment. A mechanical engineer who designed software-based fitting systems for custom golf clubs, Wagner realized one day that the off-the-rack skis he'd bought—which by their specs should've been perfect for him—were a total mismatch. "I thought, 'Why isn't anyone doing [custom] in ski?'" he says. "Maybe there's a smarter way to figure out how to get the right equipment."

Wagner, whose 14-employee shop builds only custom-designed skis, starts with customer info. A short "Skier DNA" questionnaire distills the basics about the customer's body, skiing habits and favorite terrain, and a follow-up call with a Wagner designer nails down specifics—like which skis you've loved (or hated). That feedback is run against a massive database of almost every ski on the market, tested in-house for characteristics like flex, sidecut and torsional rigidity to get not just the right length and shape but the ski experience the client wants. Custom doesn't stop with the ride: Wagner offers a variety of topsheet designs or custom graphics for \$300 extra. Turnaround time is three weeks and Wagner offers a money-back guarantee. Price \$1,750 and up. wagnerskis.com



COALITION SNOW

Jen Gurecki wanted more from her skis and snowboards. Roughly 40 percent of snowsports enthusiasts are women, but most women's-specific skis and boards are aimed at beginner and intermediate skiers and riders: shorter, softer and, yeah, pinker. It was out of step with what Gurecki wanted, and what she suspected others did. After some research, she started the by-women, for-women Coalition brand. Coalition's gear has a generally stiffer flex for aggressive riding styles and comes in a larger size range than most women's boards. Topsheet graphics are beautiful without being cutesy. Most important, Coalition is devoted only to women's boards. Price Skis \$599 and up; snowboards \$499 and up. coalitionsnow.com

PARLOR SKIS

"Boston is a great place for a ski company," says Parlor co-founder Mark Wallace, an ex-ski racer who wanted a board made for the East Coast's bulletproof surface. Beantown's thriving tech scene helped him source the design software Parlor (so named because the factory is in an old funeral parlor) uses to drive its custom business. But in the end, Parlor is about community. The company hosts shop nights—essentially a brewery tour for skis—and offers build-your-own classes, where you create your own skis, from design to cores to custom topsheet graphics, under the tutelage of its expert skismiths. Price \$950 and up; full custom from \$1,750; BYO from \$1,500. parlorskis.com

VENTURE

It's hard to beat Venture for credibility: For 20 seasons, they've hand-made snowboards at 9,300 feet in Silverton, Colorado. The accolades? Regular best-of picks from top magazine testers. Everyone at Venture is a rider. "If you have someone who's going to use the product they make, you get

a different level of pride in the work," says co-founder Lisa Branner. And Venture controls every part of production; boards start as piles of lumber in the lot next to the factory. Guides at nearby Silverton Mountain provide vital torture-testing feedback. "We're known for durability," says co-founder Klem Branner, "almost to our detriment." Price \$589 and up. venturesnowboards.com

KINDRED

Board cores today can be any number of different materials, but wood still dominates, and it's at the heart of Vancouver Island-based Kindred, where husband-and-wife team Angie Farquharson and Evan Fair make custom snowboards. But instead of common hardwoods like poplar, Kindred uses locally grown, FSC-certified cypress. "It's a much smoother ride than most boards, because the grain lines are so tight," says Fair. "But it's still super lively." What Kindred is perhaps best known for, though, are the intricate topsheets designed by Farquharson using marquetry, or wood-veneer inlay; a custom board with bespoke graphics might take 30 hours to make. Says Farquharson: Nothing else looks like it." Price \$650 and up. kindredsnowboards.com

PALLAS

There are multiple options today for women's split snowboards for backcountry use, but when Steph Nitsch and Alister Horn started Pallas in 2014, that wasn't the case. While women's gear has existed for a long time, "there's not much R&D and support behind it," says Nitsch. "Even now, 80 percent of what I see in shops lacks the ability to ride more technical terrain on a deep powder day." The made-in-Utah Pallas boards are all available as either solids or splitboards that have a high-density-plastic inside edge, which is durable enough for skinning but cuts weight significantly from full metal edges and makes the boards easier to maneuver. The company's topsheet graphics tell stories—Pallas "goes past preconceived notions of women's and men's gear," says Nitsch. Price \$575 solid; \$895 splitboard. pallasnobboards.com



Angie Farquharson of Kindred spends up to 30 hours crafting graphics for boards.



Venture's boards get intense testing by guides at nearby Silverton Mountain.

TINA WHATCOTT, KINDRED; KLEMENS BRANNER, WAGNER



Since he posted a Craigslist ad in 2005, Ryan Lovelace has hand-shaped 5,000 surfboards.



Album's custom boards are made in California's Orange County—and surfed all over the world.

HAND-SHAPED SURFBOARDS

Five builders, all based in the Golden State, can mesh history and innovation to make a board with your name on it.

RYAN BURCH SURFBOARDS

Ryan Burch combines a rare talent for surfing with an artist's eye for craft. He began shaping when the builder who made his contest boards wouldn't make him a longboard. "No one was going to build the boards I wanted to ride," he says. "So I had to go out and do it."

Thanks to a long-running sponsorship from clothing company Volcom, Burch tests his ideas in some of the world's best waves. At home in Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Burch might ride a longboard. "There's really no better feeling than getting to the nose, except getting barreled," he says. On the trip to Fiji's Tavarua Island, he'll paddle out on an asymmetric twinfin and slide through Cloudbreak's blue dreamscape. "It's like different genres of music and learning to play them all."

Though he builds an array of boards, Burch is most excited about asymmetrical shapes. Typically an asymmetric board will have a longer rail on the toe side of the surfer's foot and a shorter rail on the heel side.

Burch—who insists "I can take anything I want that floats out in the ocean and express myself on it"—incessantly experiments and encourages other surfers to do the same. "It's all out there," he says. "Go create what you want to ride." Price \$850 and up. ryanburchsurfboards.com



MORGAN MAASSEN(2), ERIC WARNER, LOVELACE

competitive surfer who started shaping to meet his own needs, Ryan Burch (top) loves to experiment with asymmetric shapes. Santa Cruz-based Ashley byd Thomson (bottom), who signs each board "Made with love," recently began using recycled and plant-based materials.

FURROW SURFCRAFT

"A furrow is a path," says Christine Brailsford Caro. Like generations of surfers, Caro doodled surfboards in her school notebooks. She was especially intrigued by the split-tailed fish shape created by San Diego kneeboarder Steve Lis in 1967. After finishing art school, Caro carved wood Paipo bodyboards. When a friend offered to pay for materials, she jumped to shape her first surfboard. Between 1965 and 1975, surfboard design experienced a burst of creativity driven by a search for faster, more maneuverable boards. "George Greenough was huge—he was able to do these wrapping turns that no one had ever seen before," says Caro. Her boards at Furrow are inspired by the innovations of this period, from Lis's fish to Greenough's edge-bottom boards. Caro envisions her boards as seeds that'll create memories and joy for the people who ride them. "I'm not doing anything miraculous. I'm just hoping to give someone an experience of joy." Price varies widely. furrowsurfcraft.com

RYAN LOVELACE SURFCRAFT

Ryan Lovelace received his first custom board order thanks to a Craigslist advertisement with the headline "Custom Surfboards, \$400." Based in Santa Barbara, Lovelace hand-builds boards that meld a vintage sensibility with innovative design. "We don't get a lot of waves, but we do get phenomenal test tracks." He rummages through surfing's design attics and plays with what he finds. He admires the foiling on Greg Liddle's hulls. "But I've flipped it all backwards." He feels a close affinity to George Greenough's no-rules approach to surfcraft. "His stuff is such fucking spaceships." Lovelace collects vintage fabrics and adds inlays to bring a unique style to his boards. "There are so many cool fabrics that are just lost," he says. If you want it, build it, believes Lovelace. Since that first Craigslist ad, Lovelace has hand-shaped more than 5,000 boards for surfers all over the world. Price \$825 and up. rlovelace.com

ASHLEY LLOYD SURFBOARDS

Surfing Malibu's cobbled point without a leash ensured that Ashley Lloyd Thompson would learn ding repair. And it inspired her to build her first board, with help from Malibu legend Danny Tarampi. Today, Thompson, who signs the stringer of each board "Made with love," still uses the Skil 100 hand planer that he gave her. When Thompson moved to Santa Barbara, she encountered the path-breaking work of George Greenough at Wilderness Surfboards. Though she began with longboarding, she has evolved her shaping to include boards of all sizes. Each echoes the speed and flow of a ride down one of Malibu's dreamy green walls. Thompson recently committed to more environmentally friendly production. She starts with blanks made from recycled EPS foam and glasses with plant-based epoxy. It's more time consuming, but the effort is worth it. "The boards are strong, beautiful and more sustainable." Price \$840 and up. ashleylloydsurfboards.com

ALBUM SURFBOARDS

"A surfboard shouldn't have rules," says Matt Parker, who brings an eclectic sensibility to the boards he designs for Album in San Clemente. Growing up, Parker felt like an outsider to the surf scene thanks to his inland upbringing. "Where surfboards came from was always kind of this mysterious thing, because I was on the outside a bit." Parker built his first board at age 25 after finishing an art degree (and says he's hand-planed about 5,000 boards since then). "There was a lot of uniformity" at the time. "I wanted to surf something different." He builds everything from sleek big-wave guns to speedy asymmetrical fish shapes. "We're super open-minded in our approach," he says. That open-mindedness extends to both materials and assembly methods. Parker uses EPS-epoxy construction for boards he wants to feel "more alive." Price \$750 and up. albumsurf.com