

maine.

December 2019



THE **SUGARLOAF** ISSUE

maine.
THE MAGAZINE

themainemag.com

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BACKCOUNTRY

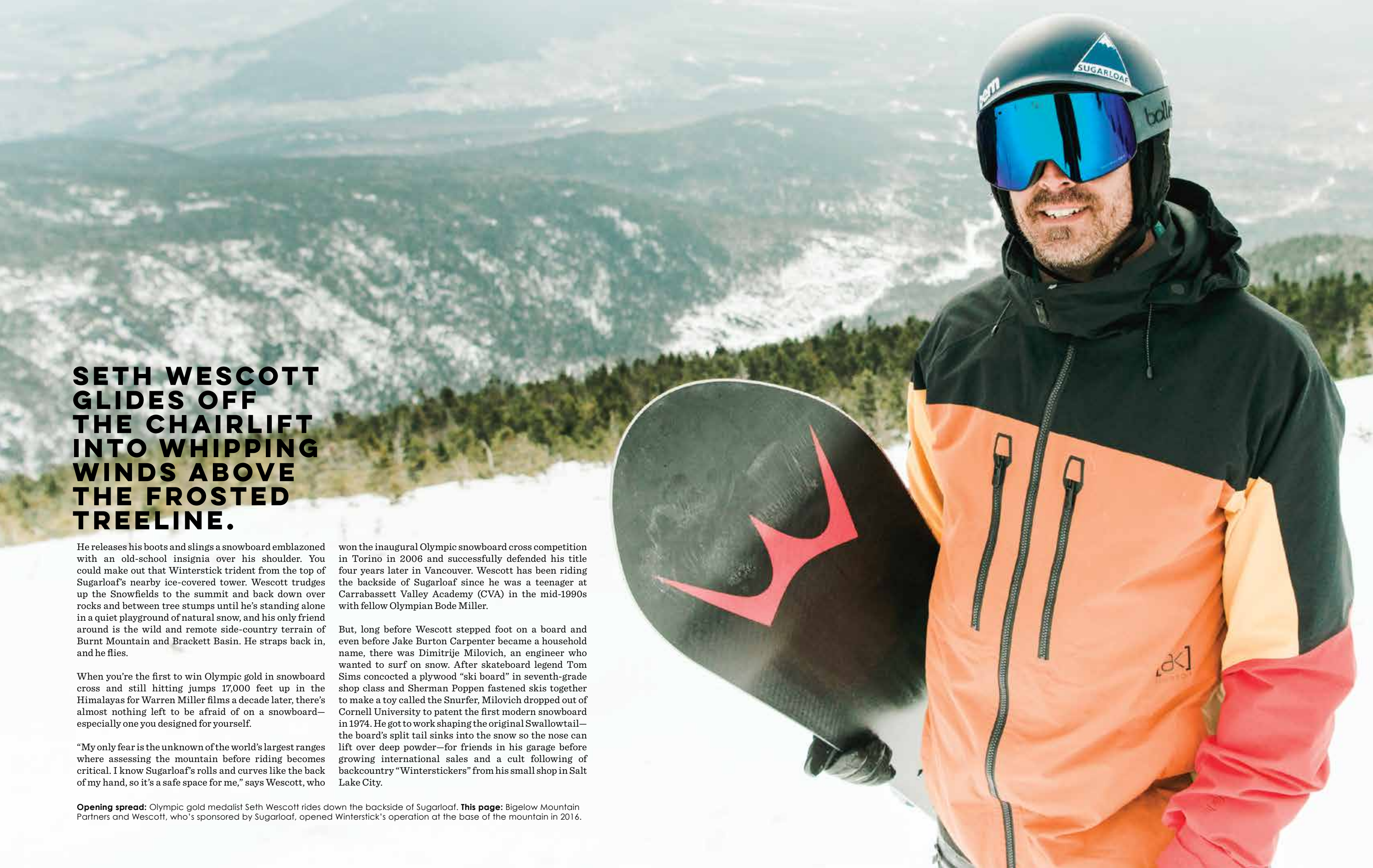
**SETH WESCOTT
AND THE
WINTERSTICK
CREW ARE
REINVENTING
THE ORIGINAL
MODERN
SNOWBOARDING
BRAND IN A
WORKSHOP AT
THE BASE OF
SUGARLOAF**



LEGENDS

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BY ANNA FIORENTINO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTINA WNEK



SETH WESCOTT GLIDES OFF THE CHAIRLIFT INTO WHIPPING WINDS ABOVE THE FROSTED TREELINE.

He releases his boots and slings a snowboard emblazoned with an old-school insignia over his shoulder. You could make out that Winterstick trident from the top of Sugarloaf's nearby ice-covered tower. Wescott trudges up the Snowfields to the summit and back down over rocks and between tree stumps until he's standing alone in a quiet playground of natural snow, and his only friend around is the wild and remote side-country terrain of Burnt Mountain and Brackett Basin. He straps back in, and he flies.

When you're the first to win Olympic gold in snowboard cross and still hitting jumps 17,000 feet up in the Himalayas for Warren Miller films a decade later, there's almost nothing left to be afraid of on a snowboard—especially one you designed for yourself.

"My only fear is the unknown of the world's largest ranges where assessing the mountain before riding becomes critical. I know Sugarloaf's rolls and curves like the back of my hand, so it's a safe space for me," says Wescott, who

won the inaugural Olympic snowboard cross competition in Torino in 2006 and successfully defended his title four years later in Vancouver. Wescott has been riding the backside of Sugarloaf since he was a teenager at Carrabassett Valley Academy (CVA) in the mid-1990s with fellow Olympian Bode Miller.

But, long before Wescott stepped foot on a board and even before Jake Burton Carpenter became a household name, there was Dimitrije Milovich, an engineer who wanted to surf on snow. After skateboard legend Tom Sims concocted a plywood "ski board" in seventh-grade shop class and Sherman Poppen fastened skis together to make a toy called the Snurfer, Milovich dropped out of Cornell University to patent the first modern snowboard in 1974. He got to work shaping the original Swallowtail—the board's split tail sinks into the snow so the nose can lift over deep powder—for friends in his garage before growing international sales and a cult following of backcountry "Winterstickers" from his small shop in Salt Lake City.

Opening spread: Olympic gold medalist Seth Wescott rides down the backside of Sugarloaf. **This page:** Bigelow Mountain Partners and Wescott, who's sponsored by Sugarloaf, opened Winterstick's operation at the base of the mountain in 2016.



Today, under Bigelow Mountain Partners, Wescott and fellow CVA alums Chris Lorenz and Tom Fremont-Smith, are continuing the Winterstick tradition inside the West Mountain chairlift barn at the base of Sugarloaf. “Winterstick is the longest continually running snowboard brand in North America,” says sales manager and master woodworker Ned Merrick, who, with legendary big-mountain freeriding pioneer Tom Burt and others, is a minority Winterstick owner. “We always pay homage to Dimitrije. He’s like the godfather of snowboarding.”

Bigelow Mountain Partners took over Winterstick in 2000 after the snowboard company declared bankruptcy as the industry shifted to overseas production. Since 2016, the lifelong ‘Loafers have been shaping the swallowtails and roundtails that defined the Milovich era, as well as powder shapes, hard-boot racers, and any board a rider can dream up. There’s the one made for a size-15 foot and another etched with a Maine Beer Company logo. But it was Wescott’s freeride model with a personalized full top-sheet design that brought the company to Maine in the first place.

The Seth Wescott Pro by Winterstick won a *Backcountry* magazine 2016 Editor’s Choice Award and struck a chord

with both his buddies in the World Cup and recreational riders. Wescott first designed the board in 2015 with Wagner Custom Skis, a Telluride-based company that began licensing the Winterstick name in 2008 after Winterstick overcame another bankruptcy by its previous manufacturer. Wagner and Wescott’s successful design carried Winterstick into the custom snowboard market, and convinced Lorenz and Fremont-Smith to bring on Wescott to design boards. “We thought, ‘If Wagner could build an award-winning board designed by Seth, why couldn’t we?’” says Fremont-Smith. The Seth Wescott Pro became a springboard for Wescott to join forces with his former classmates and for Winterstick to start making snowboards in-house once again, now at the base of Sugarloaf. With equipment and support from Wescott and a \$50,000 economic development grant from Carrabassett Valley, Wescott, Lorenz, and Fremont-Smith raised the money to build up and reopen the chairlift barn. A year later, they began making custom skis under West Mountain Ski Company with the same wood veneer topcoat that’s re-popularizing Winterstick.

Wescott rides down the West Mountain trail under the world’s only lift that services a snowboard factory, past an après-ski barbecue, and unstraps his boots. He leans his Seth Wescott

Opposite, clockwise from top left: A Winterstick boards gets a tune up on a stone grinder. Wescott sharpens the edge of a board. Paying homage to Winterstick’s original founder with an early Swallowtail by Dimitrije Milovich. Shop tech Nick Clements trims a West Mountain Ski Company ski. West Mountain skis and Winterstick snowboards outside the Bag and Kettle. A glimpse of Winterstick’s original trident from under the Sawduster chairlift. **This page:** Ned Merrick and Wescott venture off-trail.



Pro against the side of the Wintertick shop. The board depicts a photo he snapped after a helicopter dropped him at Pyramid Peak in Alaska's Chugach Mountains. "It's my go-to daily ride and also what I race on," says Wescott. "It carries over a bit of the heritage of what I used in the World Cup into something that's more freeride capable."

Wescott joins Merrick at the picnic table in the center of the bare-bones factory and slides off a pair of hot pink shades. Over screeches from the woodshop, he explains this isn't his first time working inside the chairlift barn. "I was running golf carts to golfers out of the back door right there while it was Sugarloaf's golf pro shop when I was in high school," says Wescott. "So it really felt like a neat moment of bringing everything full circle to manufacture right here and give anybody working at the factory the ability to go out and get a couple runs in every day."

Customers work directly with president and chief engineer Rob Lu to customize their board, including the shape, length, width, camber profile, side cut, and any

other specifications they want. "They can pick up their skis or board, hop on the chairlift, test it out, and, if they need to, ride back down to ask us to tweak it a little here or there," says Merrick. The shop is accessible by ski, board, or car.

Winterstick's solid or split custom boards are known for their speed. The wood runs the length of the board, eliminating knots and finger joints for a more fluid ride. "The grain is perpendicular—like a Stradivarius violin is to improve harmonics—so it doesn't slow the board down," says Merrick. The veneer topsheet in elm, walnut, turkey feather, ash, or curly maple is assembled by hand. Then there's the textured base, the steel edges, and two sheets of woven fiberglass. Once the layers are saturated and bound together with epoxy, the board is pressed, cured, trimmed, sharpened, coated twice with yacht-grade varnish, waxed, detuned, and inspected all right on the mountain, and priced starting at \$899. The company made 350 boards last year, and the owners hope for around 500 orders this year.

Merrick and Wescott riding the Sawduster lift up the mountain. **Opposite:** Wescott has been riding Sugarloaf since attending Carrabassett Valley Academy.



“Each rider has different physical characteristics that impact their use and how they interact with the mountain,” says Wescott. “Because you stand sideways on the board, it’s the pressure you put on your edge that controls whether you have drag or don’t have drag and how efficiently you can turn. It has to start with your feet on the right-sized board.” Despite the popularity of mass-produced stock boards from a single mold, the Winterstick owners anticipate a shift back to custom recreational snowboarding. “Dimitrije was so far ahead of the curve that modern companies are finally just getting back to making these high-end snow surfers he was building in the early ’70s, rather than ones built for commercial success that entered the market a few years after him,” says Wescott.

Wescott never felt prouder to be a Wintersticker than in 2015 at the launch of their first test center in Powder Mountain, Utah, when he met older snowboarders who had grown up on the brand. “The passion that these

guys had for Winterstick when it was originally owned by Dimitrije was incredible,” says Wescott. “They told me about being young kids going into Dimitrije’s shop in Salt Lake City. You could just see the gratitude they felt for us bringing Winterstick back to life and knowing they could place an order at the factory.”

Wescott himself was at one time, after all, just a skateboarder from western Maine who started snowboarding before it was an event at the Olympics or the X Games, when snowboards weren’t even allowed on most slopes. “You’d get bullied by the football team, all these kinds of things. There was just a lot of stigma that we had to deal with for doing this alternative sport,” says Wescott. “To have gotten past that time and see the passion of an older generation that dealt with that same thing in the ’60s and ’70s, especially in Utah, was inspirational for me.” Now, 40 years later, it’s still a group of friends in a small factory at the base of a mountain. +

From left: Writer Anna Fiorentino and a pair of West Mountain skis. Wescott performs a method grab on his Seth Wescott Pro design. **Opposite:** Merrick and Wescott take a break for a drink at the Beach outside the Base Lodge.