

FREETHINKING: IS THAT LIKE THINKING OFF JUMPS
AND DOING MIND TRICKS? PHOTOS: IAN COBLE



LINE EVOLUTION & INTERGRATION

SEATTLE'S EVO SHOP STAKES
A CLAIM AT THE CENTER OF
THE UNIVERSE

The culture war between skiers and snowboarders is dead. Far more than just integrated roof racks and touring posses, the signs are universal. From design—where width, graphics and twin tips have radically changed what we mount—to sculpted terrain that invites all freestyle disciplines, a movement is afoot that identifies people not by how they slide, but by the inclusive elements of their lifestyle.

Through media, music and fashion, the various disciplines are merging into a broader alliance. Core brands such as Dakine, Sessions, Arc'teryx, K2 and Lib Tech—a bastion of countercultural thought—have been quick to promote convergence. Even the Winter X Games and Whistler's World Ski and Snowboard Festival are now more an expression of who we are than what we ride. For the early believers, switching gears regularly now feels natural.

Still, retail has been slow to adapt. Even in the Pacific Northwest, long an incubator of snow trends, few shops spoke to this new breed until 2005 when pro skier Bryce Phillips founded Evo in Seattle's freethinking Fremont neighborhood. The shop is an extension of the successful online retailer evogear.com, which Phillips conceived as a K2 intern to resell warehouse overstock and fund a season in Whistler. His new brick and mortar retail location features gallery space, a DJ platform, a movie screen and integrated ski, snowboard and skate sections. This new space instantly served as a retail hub for a thriving culture that disperses each weekend between Baker, Stevens, Alpentel and Crystal.

"The name Evo is representative of the product that we offer and it's also representative of our mindset," Phillips says. "Tons of [local] ski and snowboard shops went out of business over the last few years because they didn't know how to evolve. They didn't understand what was going on with the Web, and they didn't understand what was going on in the real world with consumers, that these sports were converging and the tastes were changing."

In contrast to the stagnant retail norm, Evo's grand opening in 2005 attracted more than 1,000 skiers and snowboarders, and featured premieres of the ski flick *Teddybear Crisis*, MSP's *The Hit List*, and Absinthe's snowboard film *Futureproof*. A Mark Gallup photography exhibit and a performance by hip hop artists Talib Kweli and DJ B-Melo set the tone by mixing mountain and urban influences.

Bjorn Ballien, a 26-year-old passholder at Alpentel and Whistler, is one such consumer who appreciates Evo's direction. "They're pushing the culture of the sport more than the equipment or the gear," he says. "Those guys just know what's going on. And by throwing those events, it's about something more than just themselves."

Last winter, Evo held a "Switch Day" at the Summit at Snoqualmie ski area where the shop's 45 employees swapped out their normal gear for the alternate mode. The event proved to be so successful that the concept will be expanded into a consumer demo next winter.

Evo has felt resistance to these integrative ideas, not from staff or consumers, but from within the long-segregated ski and snowboard industries. Reps from several major brands initially refused to sell the shop, which Phillips attributes to divisive old-school thinking. He expresses disbelief at the opposition, saying, "Suddenly skiers are buying snowboard quivers and vice versa. That's the savior the industry has been seeking for a long time. That, fundamentally, could be a huge reason for people to be excited."

Yet, entrenched brands have slowly begun to alter their perspective, in part due to Evo's rapidly increasing order volumes. As a prime indicator, only two seasons out of the gate, the shop has gained the ear of big-brand marketing directors who have often maintained the same narrow focus for decades but are now seeking to tap this emergent demographic. "I don't want to sound arrogant, like we're changing the world or we had such a vision," Phillips cautions. "But I think because we are closer to it, that it does put us in a position to be leaders that help change people's mindset in the industry."

As a unifying, energizing and profitable illustration of this shifting attitude, Phillips sees what Evo has created as a positive retail example for the entire culture. "People will go this direction because it is a diverse model. They understand that there are strong connections with the lifestyle," he says. "Not that everyone is going to try and build community around their brand, but for us, that's just at the core of who we are." — DAN KOSTRZEWSKI

To read about Evo's recent "best ski shop in Seattle" award, click-in to Powder.com/evo.