

THE KINGS OF WHISTLER

When the snow melts in most mountain towns, the resident adventure pros move on. But the local talent in Whistler, British Columbia, wouldn't dream of spending summer anywhere else.

KIRK BECKER

Outdoor Guide

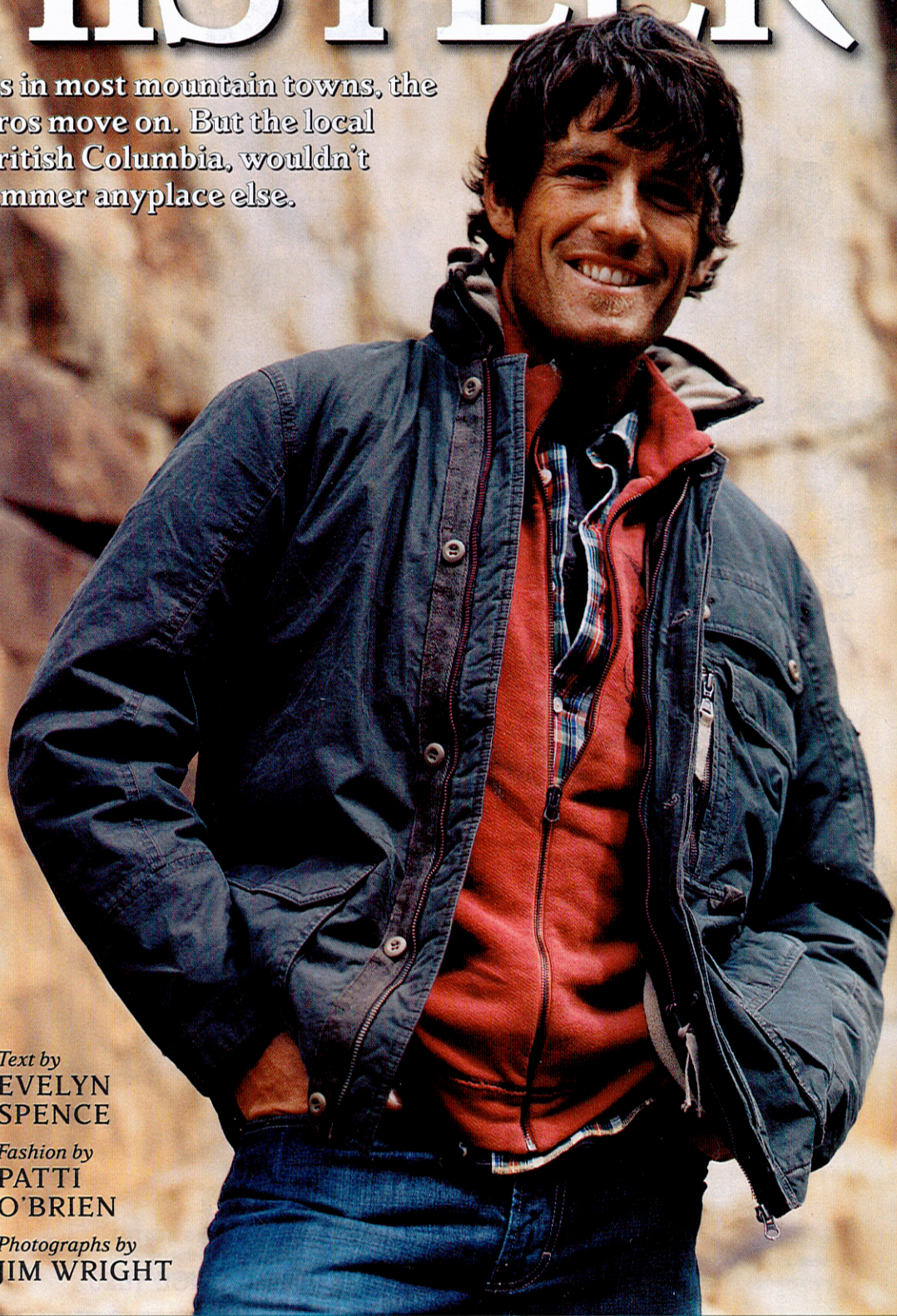
In early 2000 Becker arrived in Whistler having never tasted alcohol. The 25-year-old lived out of his cousin's camper for three weeks, taking in the nightlife and a lot of Bailey's Irish Cream. ("It tasted like dessert!" he says.) Growing up nine hours to the north in Vanderhoof, a 4,500-person farming town, may have delayed Becker's entrance to the party scene, but it also exposed him to the outdoors. A camping trip to 12,972-foot Mount Robson remains a defining moment: "My mom borrowed some marginal equipment, packed my two brothers and me up, and off we went. It rained. It snowed. And I loved every minute of it." The trip inspired him to become a climbing and backcountry-skiing guide. After his mini partying binge in Whistler was over, he intensified his training with the prestigious Association of Canadian Mountain Guides. Seven years later he's approaching full certification. "I'm right at the heart of things here," he says. "Kayaking, climbing, biking — it's all world-class."

Becker wears a coat by Napapijri, \$325; sweatshirt from Polo Jeans Co. by Ralph Lauren, \$70; shirt, \$99, and henley, \$125, both by Gant; Original 501 jeans by Levi's, \$46. Shot at Nordic Cliffs.

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WHISTLER AIR

GUILLAUME TESSIER

Cinematographer

Whistler is like the Hollywood of the ski industry," says Tessier, 31, who shoots and directs for Matchstick Productions, one of the top extreme-skiing film companies. Tessier had started his career as an assistant to a fashion photographer in his hometown of Montreal when Whistler sucked him in. He swung into town to visit a friend in 1995, unable to speak even a lick of English; later that winter he landed a job as a heli-skiing photographer. "I was just this French-Canadian guy, and I was given so many chances, so much support," he says. Which he deserved. "Guillaume is focused and progressive," says Murray Wais, Matchstick's co-founder and executive producer, who, with Tessier's help, rejuvenated the skiing industry in the late '90s by applying the innovative aerial tricks, backcountry snowmobiles, and urban aesthetic from the snowboarding world to their films. "And he really understands the big picture." Now Tessier lives with three-time world free-skiing champ Hugo Harrisson and spends his winters shooting the likes of local big shots Mark Abma and Mike Douglas. "Guillaume could be working in Los Angeles making big bucks," says Douglas, a longtime Whistler resident, "but he's drawn to the mountains and the 'bro' scene. He's got that Quebecois passion, yet he's totally laid-back." Indeed, Tessier isn't about to trade Whistler for L.A. "Whistler's the best place in the universe," he says. "There are pros and photographers everywhere, there's high alpine terrain and trees, there's a safe snowpack, and you can just jump in a heli and go for it."

Tessier wears a jacket by Timberland, \$698; sweater by Gant, \$175; T-shirt by Lucky Brand Jeans, \$30; jeans by Banana Republic, \$98; shoes by Rockport, \$165. Shot at the Whistler Air Dock. Moisturizer: XCD Defender by King of Shaves.

BRIAN FISHBOOK

Ski Patroller

When Fishbook, 34, got his first season pass to Whistler as a kid in 1984 and began making day trips up from Vancouver with his folks, the town was just one main square, built on a former landfill, surrounded by lowlands; the ride up to tree line took 45 minutes via three chairlifts; and skiing was everyone's primary objective. "We used to bug my dad to buy land here," he says. "He'd go, 'What kind of investment is a remote ski area on an old dump?'" Fishbook became a Whistler devotee despite the resort's then-crude feel, and a decade later he took a detour from a budding career in geomorphology (the analysis of glacial sediment, river erosion, and weather) to move up for a winter. "I needed to get it out of my system," he says. Once there, Fishbook lucked into one of the rare full-time ski-patrolling gigs. "I got a taste of what it was like to ski 140 days a year, not 40, and I got totally hooked," he says. Now he's there for good. He's a year-round resident (and homeowner), patrolling in winter and fighting fires across British Columbia in summer. Times have changed so drastically since Fishbook's earliest days that Whistler Village — with nearly 100 restaurants, bars, and art galleries, and more than 250 miles of mountain-biking trails — draws thousands of people each year who have no plans to even touch the snow. But as far as Fishbook is concerned, Whistler's original appeal hasn't diminished a bit. "When the sun's just coming up, the resort looks like backcountry," he says. "It's perfectly quiet. You look around 360 degrees and the mountains go on forever."

Fishbook wears a vest from Polo Jeans Co. by Ralph Lauren, \$99; jacket by Jansport, \$180; thermal from Polo by Ralph Lauren, \$65; jeans by Lucky Brand Jeans, \$148; boots by Keen, \$99. Shot at the Bomb Shack, Whistler Mountain.





**THOMAS
VANDERHAM**

Professional Mountain Biker

Vancouver-based Vanderham, 22, is a professional mountain biker with sponsorships from Oakley and Fox Racing, and fat tire-porn flicks such as *New World Disorder* and *The Collective* on his résumé — but his beginnings were, well, dubious. As a kid, his mom repeatedly tried to convince him to start riding. He refused because of his interest in other sports. Finally, on his 10th birthday, she bought him a bike. “And then I didn’t want to get off,” he laughs. “Within a month, I broke it in half doing a wheelie. My neighbor pieced together a crazy roach bike for me made of steel. That lasted me a long time.” Just a few years later he was competing. And winning. “He’s smooth, he’s fast, he goes huge, and he lands with exacting precision,” says Sterling Lorence, one of the sport’s top photographers. “His bikes are lucky to have him as their pilot.” Having racked up multiple top-five finishes in the Red Bull Rampage and Monster Park and traveled the world to huck cliffs and ride teeter-totters, Vanderham still returns to Whistler each summer. Maybe it’s because of the riding: “Whistler was one of the first places to build a huge bike park, and they nailed it,” he says. Or maybe it’s because, post-ride, he can roll to lakes like Lost and Alta, jump in the high-alpine water, dry out on the beach, then head to Garf’s (Garfinkel’s, a Whistler nightclub) for a beer. But most likely, it’s both.

Vanderham wears a hoodie, \$65, watch, and sneakers, all by Oakley; Original 501 jeans, \$46, and “Trucker” jacket, \$78, both by Levi’s; T-shirt from Victorinox by Swiss Army, \$35. Shot at the Gondola.

A man with dark hair and a goatee, wearing a red and black plaid jacket over a blue hoodie and dark pants, is crouching on a wooden deck. He is looking directly at the camera. In the background, a person is seen ziplining through a forest. The scene is outdoors, likely at a ziplines resort.

SEAN BICKERTON

Outdoor Guide

In Whistler there's less social pressure to be at a certain stage in your life and in your job," says Bickerton. "People aren't worried about benchmarks." The 26-year-old Ontario native may in fact be more goal-oriented than most Whistler locals: In high school he was already taking outdoor-education classes. By age 17, after a weeklong visit, he decided he would eventually end up living here. In college he majored in outdoor recreation management; and before he moved to Whistler two years ago, he had lined up a job as a guide with Ziptrek Ecotours — an outfit that sends people flying down 2,000-foot-long, thumb-wide cables through old-growth forests in the Fitzsimmons Creek Valley, smack between Whistler and Blackcomb mountains. "I was aiming to do just what I'm doing, right where I'm doing it," he says. In his free time Bickerton gets on his mountain bike. He rides cross-country trails such as Comfortably Numb, a 15-mile route with 4,000 feet of climbing, and coaches the local high school mountain-biking team. He also participates in the town's weekly Loonie Races — social rides put on by the Whistler Off-Road Cycling Association, to which a tenth of the town belongs. "It's an adult playground," Bickerton explains. "In the spring you can be riding in the valley while people are skiing powder up top. You can come, party, and leave. Or stay."

Bickerton wears a jacket by Jansport, \$140; hoodie by Woolrich, \$65; thermal by Timberland, \$54; cargo pants by Calvin Klein Jeans, \$70; boots by Rockport, \$120. Shot at Ziptrek Ecotours.

Production by Cassia Hoffman and Jessie Levoy. Groomer: Sonia Leal-Serafim for THEYrep.com. Fashion assistant: Elliot Abt. All accommodations provided by the Fairmont Chateau Whistler Resort (fairmont.com/whistler). For more information see Where to Buy, page 90.