



Steve Outerbridge's 2014 award winning backyard build. CONRAD PETZSCH KUNZE PHOTO.

BUILDING A MONSTER

By Andrew Wood

Snow culture is a Frankenstein of sorts — part unrestrained emotional experience, part inhuman physical feats. Throw in a dash of occult-like locals (casting protective charms on favourite lines or conjuring golden moments from leaden lives) and the monstrosity-metaphor can really start to breathe.

Backyard terrain parks and labour-intensive, DIY projects brought to life

by their builders can reveal the nitty-gritty grassroots of snow culture. The people are passionate and the projects are pure, yet every spring, these backyard beasts have routinely melted away with minimal evidence other than scars, stories and the odd photo... at least until two seasons ago.

For the past two winters, Evolution Board Shop has been acting as a liaison between Whistler's backyard build tribes through a loose contest called *BackYard Sessions*. According to Evolution's website, the conceptual spark for *BackYard Sessions* was "ignited by the idea of capturing these elusive backyard parks in their prime, bringing crews together to snowboard in hand-shaped parks."

Crews are invited to submit a 'proof-of-park' to be reviewed by a panel of shop-riders and snowboard bum judges based on three criteria: *sessionability* (flow of features and lines), *creativity* (use of space) and *sweat equity* (work invested).

► *Continued*

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**I'M A FULL-GROWN MAN OUT TIL
4 AM HAND-PACKING LIPS.
IT ALMOST SEEMS JUVENILE...**



TOP: Garret Connolly from the Camp of Scallions. SAM LOTZKAR PHOTO.
BOTTOM: The author gets monster air. CONRAD PETZSCH-KUNZE PHOTO.

Three backyard parks are then selected to host a riding session with the judges and each park receives a sponsor package, professionally shot video and photos of the session. However, only one hardworking build crew walks away with the coveted Arena Snowparks "Golden Rake" award.

Backyard builder and 2014 Golden Rake recipient, Steve Outerbridge says, "Every passionate snowboarder dreams of having something they can session in their spare time. Few resorts offer night riding, so having your own park to shred at any hour of the day is pretty sweet."

The entire contest is so dependent on snow conditions each season — in 2014 the final session ran in early April after a late snowfall in the valley. Outerbridge stresses the importance of shaping whatever is possible before the snow even falls. "Rake piles of dirt/leaves for landings or drop-ins so that whatever snow you get goes to good use." Outerbridge's winning

park included multiple features made of wood, "smoothed with a Sawzall belt sander and coated with hot wax to slide super nice," he explains, "all on naturally sloping terrain."

Nate Proulx, backcountry guide, professional dirtbag and recipient of the 2013 Golden Rake for the *Camp of Scallions Park* says, "It's all about getting the shovel in the ground and having a team of people down for a little bit of manual labour and collaboration."

Creativity at the Scallions Park also impressed judges that year. "They had an almost clam-shell/quarter-pipe-bowl-corner thing," says guest judge Tristan Hansome. "It was pretty multi-functional and it even had plastic coping."

Jeremy Melanson, who put over 100 solo hours into his third place backyard park in 2013, thinks the process is a lot like building urban features. "I enjoy the digging, I enjoy creating stuff, seeing a vision and making it come to life." Melanson's park was a triple threat of features all fed by the same janky, 90 degree, bermed corner. It also included a 20-foot step-down over a fire pit, a pole jam onto the balcony of his deck (which had a mini-pipe on it) and a tree tap off the knuckle of the jump. Melanson says that what works in his mind doesn't always work for other people, "but as you build, you are playing it out in your head. Everything is where you want it to be because you designed it."

Pemberton-based Arena Snowparks specialize in professional feature fabrication. They donate the spray-painted Golden Rake each year and have even introduced a *Backyard Line* to their catalogue. Arena's website boasts nine different styles of welded metal and states, "There is an army of park builders out there. Every season we get more and more inquiries about rakes and rails for backyard set-ups."

Backyard build tribes usually consist of semi-nomadic members and self-selected outcasts who have banded together and pooled their resources towards a common goal. As the snow melts, often the bond of creation does as well. But each new winter electrocutes the monster back to life as backyard builders, rookie and veteran, combine commitment and enthusiasm with minor geographical features to create something greater than the sum of its parts.

"It can be an uphill battle in a downhill sport," says Proulx as he and the *Scallions* crew work tirelessly on their latest monster project — converting an empty pond into a backyard bowl. "I mean, I'm a 'full-grown man' out 'til 4 AM hand-packing lips. It almost seems juvenile, but every emotion you can get in snowboarding can come from a backyard park." ❄️

For videos of previous Evolution Backyard Sessions and links to what's happening for 2015 hit up mountainlifemedia.ca/inthisissue.

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