

MADE BY HAND

# PEAK PERFORMANCE

Long relegated to the attic, the humble wooden ski is making a comeback – albeit in high-tech guise. CHRISTINA BEISCHL reports on the latest in bespoke skiing



Florian Schwarz of Artisan Skis with his handmade wooden skis

Like golf clubs and tennis racquets, skis undergo an annual overhaul, injected with this, that and the other innovation by manufacturers intent on giving consumers what they want: the newest product and the latest technologies. But given the intimate relationship between a skier and his equipment, a handful of

craftsmen have decided to take things a step further by, paradoxically, turning back the clock. They aim to create skis and boots that aren't just a good fit – they want to sheath the client's foot with perfect precision and to support the client's style of skiing as no off-the-rack ski can. And, more often than not, they do that with wood, the material, from which the first

PHOTO MARTIN KREUZER



skis were made thousands of years ago.

Take German carpenter Florian Schwarz. A fanatic skier, he expanded his traditional woodcrafting business in 2008 to include his favourite hobby, calling the venture **Artisan Skis** (*werkstattschwarz.de*). Soon after, he was producing mini-series of handmade skis with a focus on craftsmanship and functionality. “Reduced to only what’s necessary, they are faithful companions and partners in the mountains,” says Schwarz of his wooden offerings. Aimed toward those who prefer the full-on free-ride, or telemark, experience, Schwarz’s skis are made from locally grown wood, triaxial fibres and carbon stripes that give them stability and flexibility. Natural oil and wax finish give them an artful look, which belies their unsurpassed functionality. “Each pair is handmade and unique,” says Schwarz. “Artisan skis embody the spirit of free-riding within nature without compromising performance.”

Munich-based firm **Sway** (*sway-skis.de*) takes ski creation one step further, making fully bespoke skis in its small

urban workshop a stone’s throw from the Isar River. Founders Hans Beyer, a mathematician, and Michael Reifinger, a chemist, decided to build their own skis for a similar reason Schwarz did: what was available from the major brands just didn’t fit the bill. They pooled their knowledge, made a few prototypes and then requests began pouring in from family and friends, so in the summer of 2011 the pair started taking orders from the public.

Sway creates fully tailored skis based on a range of factors, including the customer’s skiing style, weight, height, technique and skill. “We build skis for people who want something special and unique, something you don’t see everywhere,” says Reifinger. “We are not trying to compete with the big companies because our product is simply something else. Everyone experiences skiing differently and the equipment should reflect and support that.” As such, Sway utilizes costly materials like Kevlar – of the same sort >>



Clockwise from top left: Sway’s Munich workshop; Hans Beyer and Michael Reifinger of Sway work on a new pair of bespoke skis; it’s all about the details at Sway

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used in bulletproof vests – for their skis, making them more durable and allowing them to adjust to what’s underneath.

The only thing worse than imperfect skis are uncomfortable boots. Fortunately, there is **DaleBoot** ([dalebootusa.com](http://dalebootusa.com)), a company founded in Salt Lake City, Utah, that has been individually tailoring ski boots with a house-shoe feel for more than 40 years. Not only do the boots keep the wearer warm and comfortable, they last substantially longer than the ones off the peg, some up to 15 years.

Professional skiers already know that a happy pair of feet boosts performance. The company, with its European headquarters in Kitzbühel, Austria, sponsors some of the best pros on the circuit. “One of the biggest things for me was when we were approached by Wiley Miller, one of the top five free-riders in the world; he had injured himself in his boot and was looking for something new,” says DaleBoot’s Rob Graham, a former professional freestyler himself. “Now he’s a DaleBoot rider and has been for a few years.”

The process of fitting the boot is similar to the one Sway uses for its skis, combining a range of factors from foot and body size to material to skiing style, be it all-mountain, carving or powder. “The boot fitting in Europe is far behind the boot fitting in the States in terms of technologies”, explains Graham, who himself fits boots every day. With 14 patents and decades of experience, DaleBoot’s ongoing mission is to rid skiers the world over of the belief that ski boots have to be painful or complicated. As the new wooden ski makers demonstrate, sometimes going back to basics – whether its shoemaking or joinery – simply can’t be beaten. ■



DaleBoot’s showroom statue kitted out in a pair of custom-made boots, above

## TAKING THE SLOPES IN STYLE

Custom-made gear for those who would like to give their ski wardrobe a unique edge and personal touch



### 1 | BOOT UP ▲

Strolz has been making handmade, individually tailored boots since 1921. For those who constantly suffer from cold feet, the Austrian manufacturer can even build in a heating device – numb feet are never going to be an issue again. [strolz.at](http://strolz.at)



### 2 | BY DESIGN ▲

Customers can choose virtually any design for their handmade skis from Edelwiser – monochromatic ones, with either a matt or metallic finish, are the season’s head-turners. [edelwiser.com](http://edelwiser.com)

### 3 | ON BOARD ▶

Swiss firm Radical, founded by former World Cup snowboarder Mark Farner in 1984, hand-crafts a range of skis, snowboards and skateboards, with customisation available on the first two. [radical-sports.com](http://radical-sports.com)



### 4 | TAILOR-MADE ◀

Those who want to take customisation even further can order bespoke ski wear from Mountain Force. Individual trouser measurements can be taken in selected shops or at the comfort of one’s home. [mountainforce.com](http://mountainforce.com)