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THE MAGAZINE OF MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

## MAMMOTH DREAM JOBS

HOW TO LIVE, WORK & SKI HERE FULL TIME

## SPECIAL PHOTO ESSAY: CHRISTIAN PONDELLA

## THE SO CAL CONNECTION

BOARD SPORTS & THE UNBOUND PARKS EVOLUTION

**47** WAYS TO SEE MAMMOTH & THIS AREA AT ITS BEST



# MICHAEL LISH

## Custom Ski Crafter



*Lish has built his own job and industry by making custom skis for \$333 from the comfy confines of his rambling, off-the-grid trailer.*



From his high-tech gypsy trailer somewhere near Mammoth, Lish pushes the bounds of off-grid manufacturing, making custom skis for \$333 and teaching customers how to do it themselves, one pair at a time. The 45-year-old has been featured in *Powder* and *Backcountry* and derided in *Skiing* as “that mohawked dude in the Mammoth parking lot who’ll... cut you a pair of skis during lunch.” When he’s in his groove, he spends at least as much time testing his innovations on snow as he does building them.

### How He Got Here

Lish worked for years building snowboards in the San Fernando Valley. He’d developed a thing he called “The Tool,” a next-generation monoski, which, by his own admission, didn’t go well. But in driving around with his wife and daughter trying to promote it, he realized he wanted to live off the grid. So he bought 10 acres of Mojave desert, within striking distance of both LA and Mammoth, built a rudimentary home base, then set about designing his solar-powered, portable ski workshop – to keep overhead (and the cost of building skis) to an absolute minimum.

### The Office

You might see it out by one of the hot springs tubs in Long Valley, or up at the Mill: a home-made, gunmetal gray, single-axle trailer with porthole windows, hitched to a red pickup truck. The whole thing’s made of reclaimed materials. Inside is a cozy but hyper-functional workshop with three building stations scattered with power tools, a sleeping berth, and a smattering of inspirational quotes scrawled on the walls in Sharpie like this one from Chagall: “Work isn’t to make money; you work to justify life.”

### A Day in the Lifestyle

Lish explains that the operation lives by the benchmark “12-2-4”: 12 sets of skis built by 2 people in 4 days. If those four days of furious cutting, shaping, glassing, and pressing go according to plan, that leaves three to six days for the arduous task of testing them on the hill.

### Hurdles & Considerations

Aside from the inherent difficulties of working in an off-grid trailer, perhaps the biggest challenge has been with what he calls “client interaction.” After big initial buzz on Internet ski forums about what he was doing, an onslaught of orders from people who didn’t quite get the DIY nature of the project led to a fair amount of necessary damage control. He’s had to continually work to better manage people’s expectations since.

### If He Knew Then...

Referencing the aforementioned Internet buzz gone wrong, Lish says he now avoids online chat rooms and social networks in favor of one-on-one communication by e-mail: “We’ve had to tailor our approach to engage the individual customer. That makes all the difference.” ◀