

Story and photos by Mark Aiken/
Additional photos courtesy of Vin Faraci



AT WORK IN VERMONT

WhiteRoom Skis

What Happens When a Skier's Hobby Goes Haywire

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A HOBBY THAT went awry? Something, for example, that begins as an idea? You test out your idea but think *maybe you can do better if you try again*. You try again, and this time you *know* you can do better. You keep trying—tweaking something here, making minor adjustments there—and you improve.

Vin Faraci of Hyde Park has such a hobby: making custom skis. The words above describe Vin and his journey as founder of WhiteRoom Skis. So, if you are Vin, you continue with your hobby. You do hundreds, maybe thousands of hours of research. You build tools. You construct a workshop behind your house. You purchase a CNC machine—a computer-controlled router—that costs as much as a good used car.

You begin a side company, and your company gains notoriety, if not fame (as famous as you can get in the world of skiers who know something about craft skis). However, becoming known was never the goal; exploring your hobby was.

Yet deep down, you always know: It's only a hobby.

What? You say you've never had a hobby quite like this? I didn't think so, but Vin Faraci of WhiteRoom Skis has, and his story is unique.

A Skiing Background; I ski; therefore I am.

Vin learned to ski at the ripe age of 4 at Plattekill, New York—a ski area known less for its size and more for its



PHOTO: MARK AIKEN

WhiteRoom Skis is a culmination of years' worth of Vin's research, field-testing and development, and hands-on work, all of it a labor of love. It all started when he decided to make his own skis, circa 2013.



Building skis for Vin isn't...well, like just building skis. He looks at each pair as he hand-finishes them with a critical eye, as an extension of his passion for skiing. "I make 10 or 20 pairs of skis per year," he says.





“Skiing,” says Vin (above, and in his element) “is in my soul.” Vin got into the sport at the young age of 4, skiing at a small, family-owned ski area in Plattekill, the Catskill Mountains of New York. “I wasn’t a racer,” he says, “but I did learn to go fast.”

soul. “I wasn’t a racer,” Vin says. “But I did learn to go fast.” Vin’s father and his brother were volunteer patrollers at Plattekill, and skiing became part of the fabric of his life. “In my family, skiing was just something we did,” he remarks. “We were there every possible day.” Holidays, weekends, and when school was canceled. “We’d ski in pouring rain,” he says.

Years later, Vin was still an avid skier. Having studied athletic training as an undergraduate, one can only assume that some of the motivation driving him to pursue a master’s

degree in biomechanics was his interest in how the human body turns and moves on skis. Also, no surprise, he landed a job and relocated to a ski town near another soulful ski resort—this time Smugglers’ Notch, a bigger mountain than his native Plattekill but one that spurns the glamorous trappings of bigger, glitzier neighbors. “Smuggs” has a strong local following, ancient and slow, fixed-grip double chairlifts, and plenty of wild sidecountry and backcountry for earthy locals to explore. Vin had landed.

In 2007, Vin was frustrated with his skis, a set of Rossignol Scratch BC backcountry skis. He felt they were fine in soft, untracked snow, but they underperformed in hard pack and most other conditions. Vin could have done what anyone else would have done in his situation: demo (and most likely purchase) a new set of skis.

A Hobby Goes Awry

Instead, Vin considered what nobody else would think to do: “I wondered if I could make them stiffer,” he says.



Vin's passion for skiing extends to a passion for perfection and attention to detail. Each pair Vin builds are built as if they are going to be his own, with no compromises when it comes to the skis' performance.



He asked a friend in the snowboard industry how to make a board stiffer. "He said I could grind off the top sheet and add a layer," Vin continues. However, Vin, like most, didn't exactly have ski-constructing tools lying around his basement. "I didn't have a press," he says, referring to a large piece of equipment that holds a set of skis and provides uniform pressure throughout the entire ski to squeeze its materials and epoxy together. Nor did he have a place to *put* the press. "It just seemed like a lot of work," he concludes.

The voice of reason prevailed...sort of. Deciding against trying to alter one pair of skis, he decided to *make* his own skis. Researching on the internet, Vin dove into the project. "I had to build a press," he explains. "I had to build a shop to put the press in and a bunch of other equipment. I had to learn to shape a ski core, attach sidewalls, cut bases, and bend edges."

And Vin made the first WhiteRoom skis. They weren't perfect: the edges were wavy. He damaged the sidewalls finishing the skis with a router, and they had too much camber. "They were basically a disaster compared to what I do now," Vin says. "I was super proud of them."

Vin never intended to sell skis. "The initial idea was to build something," he says. And build skis he did, learning with every pair. He honed his skills, ironed out mistakes, and began sharing skis with friends and family. "People said they were good," Vin says. "Like, really fun."

Meanwhile, he was bombarded with curiosity. "What are *those* skis?" people would ask in lift lines.

"How much were *those*?"

"Did you get those in Utah?"

"Those look cool!"

It was a matter of time before he began to wonder if there was perhaps a niche market for custom-built skis.



“I’ve always enjoyed building things,” Vin says, setting clamps on a ski (above). Working mostly at night, he builds his distinctive wooden skis from April until December (when the snow flies).



“At the time, nobody was doing it,” he says. “At least nobody in Vermont.”

Winter Is for Skiing

WhiteRoom is a well-known name in the Vermont ski community, but it’s not like the Rossignols and Volkls of the world are shaking in their ski boots. Vin spends Thursdays in his shop and evenings—after his 11-year-old and 7-year-old boys go to sleep. He hasn’t quit his day job as an athletic trainer at Copley Hospital in Morrisville. “I make 10 or 20 pairs of skis per year,” Vin says. In a decade, he has improved his technique, and this year he made a major technological advance, purchasing his computerized router machine, which gives him a level of precision he could never have achieved working by hand.

Most clients contact Vin via social media. This is how skiing enthusiast and blogger Harvey Road reached him. Harvey’s blog, NYSkyBlog.com, celebrates natural snow, slow lifts, small, soulful resorts, earning one’s turns, respect for the environment, and the earthy magic of skiing. Harvey was interested in custom skis because beautiful, handcrafted skis line up with his own core values. And second, he wanted to inscribe his blog handle on a set of skis.

“I’m not necessarily a gear head,” says Harvey, noting that people often “mistake my enthusiasm for expertise.

“Vin just oozes integrity,” Harvey says. “I can’t describe how nice it was to have someone listen to me talk in my non-technical terms and try to describe what it was I wanted.” The two men exchanged a couple of phone conversations, Vin e-mailed some drawings, and then he went to work.

“I was looking for something that would float in powder and cut up snow but not compromise performance in other conditions,” explains Harvey. When an e-mail arrived last



The cores of Vin's skis are made from hardwood trees harvested in Vermont, and his home workshop utilizes a sophisticated CNC router to create the skis' distinctive designs. An array of finished skis includes all-mountain, freeride, and powder skis.



March that a pair of skis was ready and mounted (Harvey had shipped a pair of telemark bindings to Vin), a Nor'easter was brewing. Harvey instructed Vin not to ship. Rather, he got in his car and showed up at Vin's doorstep in the midst of a blizzard. Vin brought Harvey his new skis—a 174-centimeter set with mixed rocker and traditional camber. The skis were wide underfoot (but not as wide as some modern skis) at 97 millimeters. As with all WhiteRoom skis, they have a hardwood core (maple, ash, and poplar to reduce weight—all harvested in Underhill) under a beautifully designed veneer top sheet.

Vin brought Harvey skiing at Smuggs. "He took me *everywhere*," says Harvey. "And his skis made me a better skier."

WhiteRoom skis are pieces of functioning technical equipment, and they are works of art. "People tend to first notice what they look like," says Vin. "They notice performance later." Vin balances a full-time job and a family with a hobby that has careened out of control in ways that few hobbies could. "I've always enjoyed building things," he says. "I enjoy the construction piece and the aesthetic piece." He builds skis from April until December, but remember he's a skier.

"I tend not to build in the winter," he says. "That's when I ski." 🏔️

Mark Aiken is a freelance writer from Richmond, VT. A skiing enthusiast also, when he's not at his writing desk, he instructs at Stowe. This year, now that his 2-year-old can balance on skis, he can say he went skiing with his entire family of four at Stowe.

JUST THE FACTS

For more information about WhiteRoom Skis, call (802) 371-7871 or visit whiteroomcustomskis.com.