

McLEANINGS

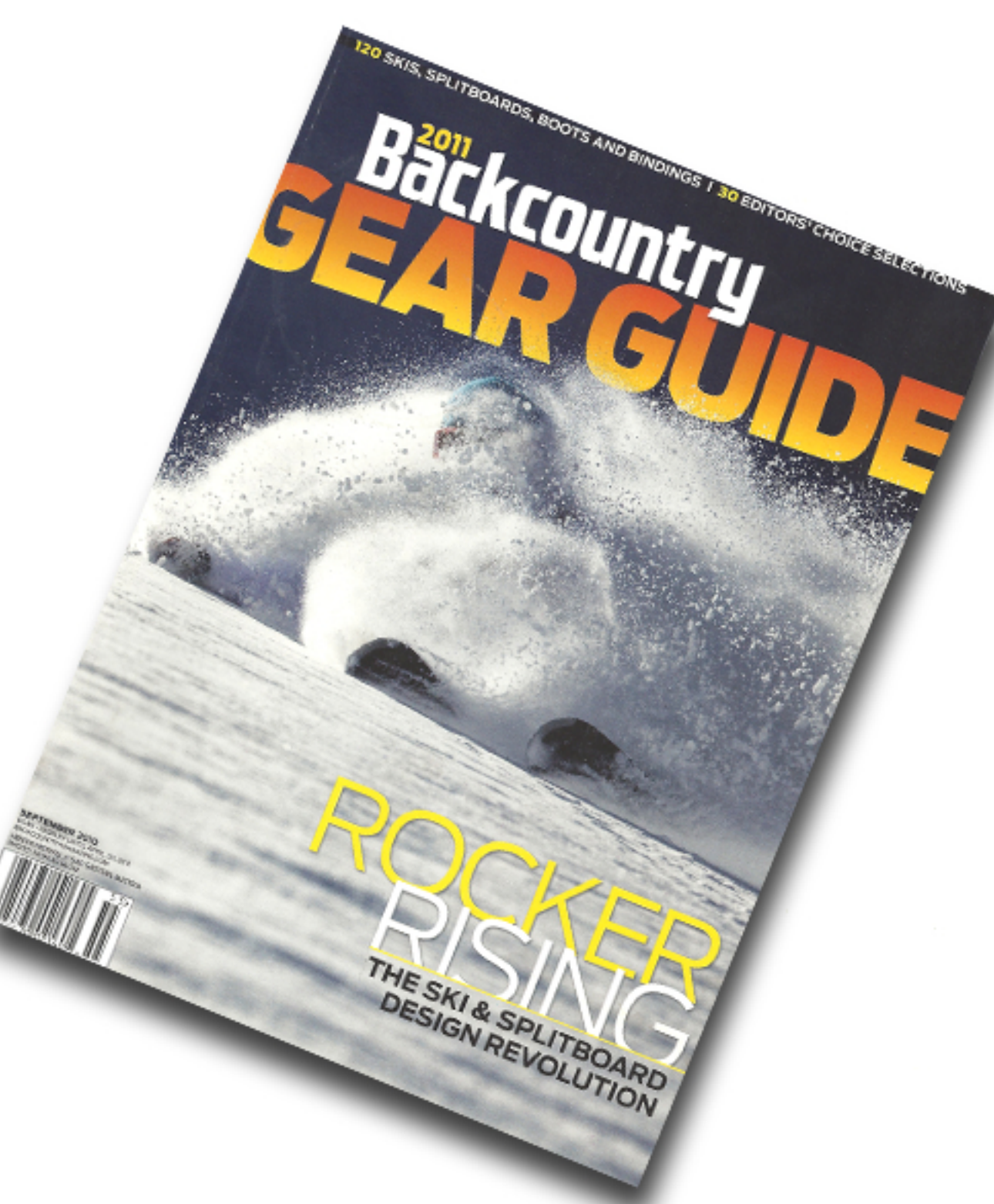
OF SKIS AND SPOONS

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The thrill of new gear never gets old, but the products themselves are irrelevant compared to the promises they make. Ranked just behind "Honey, your hair looks just fine," the second most common lie in the world is that a given new ski will cut, float, slice and shred through breakable crust like butter and leave you wanting more. This is like saying a new spoon design is going to make congealed oatmeal taste better. The only real cure for crust is to change aspects or elevations, but where's the fun in that? I want a pair of crud-eating skis, damnit, and therefore, I try something new every year. This leads to a number of considerations.

With ski gear, if it feels good, it *is* good, but the trick to picking the right gear is knowing what you like. Blind ski tests are ideal for this, but beware: you never know what you might end up liking. Another name for a lightweight, short, easy-turning powder ski that works well for touring is "Women's Intermediate Ski." And that's fine, but it means you'll be out shredding with yer bros on skis adorned with a name and graphic synonymous with feelings and flowers. Just envision your bearded buddy crying out, "Dude, are those the new Happy Hibiscus? Sick!" Yeah, not gonna happen.

Besides being honest with yourself and shedding any semblance of pride, the real trick of gear selection comes down to matching components. Going with BigPhat skis and bindings and then trying to save weight by using a doily pair of boots is akin to pimping a Prius with drag-race tires and nitrous oxide. The components are fine, but the end product is a rolling calamity. The problem with mismatched gear is you never really know where



the problem is coming from: your skis may seem unturnable, but it could just be that your boots don't have enough *oomph* to drive them properly. I think of gear in three categories—light, medium and heavy—then start with the boots and build my setup, matching appropriate skis and bindings.

Speaking of categories, in the realm of outdoor gear design there is an adage: "Weight, strength, cost: Pick any two." Strong, lightweight skis usually aren't cheap. Cheap, durable skis usually aren't light. A design becomes a classic when it hits all three criteria, but more often than not, we have to decide which two out of the three elements are most important to us.

And just like ski-town romances, gear should be approached with a love'em or leave'em attitude. Unlike wine, bad ski gear doesn't improve with time, and after the first year its value drops off a cliff. A four-year old pair of lightly used skis have almost no resale value, and there's only so much outdoor furniture you can build out of them. Trust your initial gut instinct—if you don't like your new gear, sell it ASAP, cut your losses and move on. If not, love it until it disintegrates. As any self-respecting dirtbag knows, time spent working to pay for new gear detracts from time spent using it, anyway.

Of course, none of these considerations are getting me any closer to the Holy Grail of the crud-eating ski. Every year the ski makers say they've done it, but so far, all they've done is dash hopes and shatter dreams. So, I guess I'll stick with what works for me (the Happy Hibiscus has new graphics this year) and keep waiting for that miraculous new oatmeal enhancing spoon.

Andrew McLean lives in Park City, Utah with his trophy wife, two red-headed daughters, one good dog and one bad dog. He's racked up first descents all over the world and laid arcs on all seven continents. In a past life he was an outdoor gear designer, and his current favorite color is mango. Photo: Adam Clark