



ROUTE SETTER

magazine

#6

2023/24

PHYSIOS & PREHAB
for routesetters

CREATING SPACE
in wartime Ukraine

PROGRESS IN PADDING
a historical overview

RSM PHOTO CONTEST
the winners & highlights

THE CATALOG
the latest & greatest gear

Red Chili

VOLTAGE LACE

Discover now the best climbing and bouldering shoe for crispy routes!



EDELRID 



Do you miss the perfect climbing equipment? Take a look at the EDENRID shop!



Kletterzentrum Gaswerk, Wädenswil, Switzerland

Welcome to the sixth edition of Route Setter Magazine - an edition perhaps few anticipated when our inaugural RSM #1 made its debut. The journey to create each edition is an adventure in itself, often seeing many of us at Vertical-Life stepping outside our comfort zones. Historically, specialized climbing magazines have had fleeting lifespans - financial constraints and a wish to dedicate more time to climbing often being the catalysts. But RSM has withstood these challenges, and I am grateful to all contributors who have helped create this unique publication.

In this edition, Melissa Rudick tells the compelling story of three Ukrainian gym owners who are demonstrating resilience and unity amid the chaos of the Russian invasion. You can find an inspiring interview with Olga Niemiec - a mother, IFSC route-setter, and strong climber who, alongside her team, has set exceptional rounds at the World Championships this year. This edition also features some sharp thoughts from Matt Samet and a deep dive into the engineering behind that all-important gym flooring in an article by Mark Fraser and Jackie Hueftle. To round it off, our brand pages showcase fresh holds and other innovations from the finest gym suppliers around.

At Vertical-Life, we embrace every facet of the vertical life - both outdoors and indoors. The heart and soul of our community often pulse strongest in gyms, where dedicated managers and routesetters forge spaces that not only bring us together, but also democratize and shape the evolution of climbing. Gyms are where innovations in routesetting continually carve out new paths in our climbing journeys, expanding our collective rock climbing capabilities. And with our eyes trained by the imaginative feats of talented setters, we are able to see the next generation of world-class boulders and routes.

Happy climbing,
Ben Lepasant & The Vertical-Life Team

Editorial

Publisher and Editors in Chief: Matthias Polig, Maria Hilber
Associate Editor: Melissa Rudick
Assistant Editor: Cody Roth
Layout: Egon Larcher, Egle Kirdulyte
Contact: press@vertical-life.info

Contributors

Matt Samet, Jackie Hueftle, Mark Fraser

Editing & Translations

Melissa Rudick, Cody Roth
Katherina Polig (www.polig-translations.com), Charlotte Marston,
Anna Shliakhova, Vladek Zumr

Catalog & Advertising Sales

Advertising Manager: Simon Nagler
Contact: sales@vertical-life.info

Cover

Photo: Vladek Zumr
Location: Kletterzentrum Gaswerk, Wädenswil, Switzerland

Publishing House

Vertical-Life s.r.l.
Via Brennero 32, 39042 Bressanone, Italy
www.vertical-life.info

Route Setter Magazine is published once a year in November by Vertical-Life s.r.l., available in print and in a digital edition worldwide. The magazine is devoted to climbing gyms and connected businesses.
Contact & orders: sales@vertical-life.info

All rights reserved. Copyright 2023 Vertical-Life s.r.l.



Disclaimer: Vertical-Life s.r.l. makes no warranties, expressed or implied, of any kind regarding the contents of this magazine, and expressly disclaims any warranty regarding the accuracy or reliability of information contained herein. Vertical-Life s.r.l. further disclaims any responsibility for injuries or death incurred by any person engaging in the activities described in the magazine.



VERTICAL PRO



#6
2023/24



PLATFORM
FOR VERTICAL
PROFESSIONALS

Nov 22 – 23, 2024

Messe Friedrichshafen

Sport und Arbeit in der Vertikalen – darum geht es bei der VERTICAL PRO.

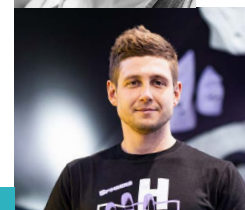
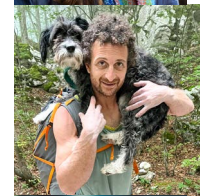
Die VERTICAL PRO ist der Treffpunkt für Kletterhallen- und Seilgartenbetreiber, Seilzugangstechniker und Hilfsorganisationen. Das Thema Sicherungstechnik ist dabei ein zentrales Thema aller Messe-Segmente. Hier bietet die Messe VERTICAL PRO ideale Synergie-Effekte – nicht nur bezüglich der Produktwelt, sondern auch im Hinblick auf Testen, Kontakten, Lernen und Erfahren. Ein wichtiger Partner ist dabei der **DAV** mit seinem renommierten Kletterhallentreffen „Halls & Walls“. Weitere starke Partner sind der **FISAT**, **IAPA** sowie die **DRK Bergwacht Württemberg**.

Vertical sport and work is what it's all about at the VERTICAL PRO.

VERTICAL PRO represents the meeting place for operators of climbing halls and high rope courses, for rope access technicians and for relief organisations. The topic of safety technology is a key theme of all segments of the fair. The VERTICAL PRO trade fair offers great opportunity for synergy – not only with regard to the product world but also when it comes to trying things out, establishing new contacts, learning new techniques and experiencing everything the industry has to offer. An important partner is the **DAV** with its renowned climbing hall meeting „Halls & Walls“. Other strong partners of the fair include **FISAT**, **IAPA** and **German Red Cross mountain rescue Württemberg**.

www.vertical-pro.com

#verticalpro



INSIDE

- 4 **SINGULAR VISION** Matt Birch, Whetstone, and the crucial role of a head setter
Matt Samet
- 12 **PHYSIOS & PREHAB** for routesetters – *Interviews*
Jackie Hueftle
 - 14 **KLAUS ISELE MSC, D.O.**
 - 16 **DR. CARRIE COOPER, DPT**
 - 18 **BC. NIKOL CHOVANOVÁ**
 - 20 **AUSTIN EINHORN, CSCS**
- 23 **GYM SPOTLIGHTS**
 - 23 **CREATING SPACE IN WARTIME UKRAINE** a story of resilience and dedication
Melissa Rudick
 - 38 **GASWERK** three decades of innovation in indoor climbing – *Interview*
Melissa Rudick
- 50 **PROGRESS IN PADDING** a historical overview of climbing gym flooring
Mark Fraser with Jackie Hueftle
- 60 **BJÖRN POHL** climbing propagator – *Interview*
Cody Roth
- 66 **OLGA NIEMIEC** routesetting for the long haul – *Interview*
Cody Roth
- 71 **RSM PHOTO CONTEST 2023** gym vibes
Vertical-Life

86 - 159 THE CATALOG featuring the latest and greatest gear
Software solutions, training tools, holds & volumes, safety & climbing equipment, walls & infrastructure

SINGULAR VISION

MATT BIRCH, WHETSTONE, AND THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE HEAD SETTER

BY MATT SAMET

Matt Birch, Head Setter at Whetstone Climbing, pondering his options on the slabby side of the Turtle

Photo: Matt Samet

◆ I first visited Whetstone on a whim, looking for a new gym outside my hometown of Boulder, Colorado. It was 2019 on one of those early spring days when a hint of sun and warmer air in town might fool you into venturing outside despite it still being freezing and windy at the rocks. Owned and founded by Darrell Gschwendtner, Whetstone climbing gym had opened in January of that year. It occupies a former hockey rink, and has a big, open feel – 30,000 square feet (approx. 2,800 square meters) in two rooms split by lead/top rope walls, with the main room housing two enormous, elongated freestanding boulders, the Battleship and the Turtle. The Battleship, with its wild highball prow, is visible from the entrance, and inspires you to get climbing. Whetstone offers 20,000 square feet (approx. 1,900 square meters) of climbing space, and that day, bouldering by myself, I climbed almost nonstop until my fingers opened. The problems were athletic, consistent (with very few stopper or morpho moves), and crimpy – just my jam. I quickly became a regular, driving the hour from Boulder once a month.

In late 2019, after less than a year, the head setter parted ways with the gym. It had been his vision that trickled down into all the problems and kept me coming back. At 168 centimeters (5 feet 6 inches), I'm a shorter climber, and I often struggle on indoor problems above 7A+ due to the long spans between holds. But the setting at Whetstone, with its myriad options for feet and different solutions at cruxes, didn't have this issue. I wouldn't have called it soft – just forgiving. The setting quality and consistency showed me just how important it is for gyms to have a talented and organized head setter. They bring a tone, consistency, and vision to the climbing. They're ultimately responsible for overseeing the setting team – and, believe me, discerning customers will notice the difference between a good head setter and a bad one.

Whetstone next had an interim head setter for around two years. I visited the gym a couple of times during this period, but felt that the bouldering no longer hit the same sweet spot as before. Think sequences that seemed to make no sense, hard-to-reach holds, campus ladders up sloping blobs in lieu of subtle, technical crimping, and a lack of footholds that made moves feel risky for the shoulders. Not connecting with the setting, I stopped coming for a bit.

In December 2022, my friend Brandon and I decided to give Whetstone another try. We both had fond memories of the gym, plus I'd read that one year earlier – in November 2021 – the UK bouldering legend Matt Birch

had been hired as the head setter, his first time ever in the role anywhere. I'd met Matt a few times back in the 1990s when he'd passed through Boulder, and knew his reputation; most famously, in 2004, he'd established the iconic crimp problem The Swarm in Bishop, California (8B+; see sidebar for more on Birch's life and climbing résumé). At Whetstone that day, the bouldering was amazing, and Brandon and I stayed six hours, climbing until our fingertips were shiny. Not only did the problems have a clean, appealing, almost austere aesthetic – with just enough holds to see you through – but the movement was thoughtful, subtle, technical, and precise.

Meanwhile, the ratings had gotten stiffer – a lot stiffer – and we failed to flash grades we could power through elsewhere. But, on the flip side, once we'd deciphered the beta, the problems felt more accurately graded, almost like outdoor bouldering where the rating only applies to the easiest possible sequence. I remember one red-holds 7A+ on the Turtle – a rising traverse along sloping rails – that felt impossible at first, but that once we'd spent 15 minutes cracking the code, shifting our hips, and grabbing the holds just so, suddenly made sense.

"That was sick," I told Brandon as I topped out. "Totally memorable, like an outdoor problem." "Yeah, dude," he said. "Whetstone has gotten really good again."

**BIRCH SPEAKS SOFTLY,
MOVING WITH PURPOSE
THROUGH THE SETTING AREA,
STOPPING EVERY NOW AND
THEN TO CONFER WITH THE
OTHER SETTERS.**

It's a quiet Tuesday morning in early June 2023, and Whetstone is mostly empty save a couple walking over to the lead area, a guy sitting by the Kilter Board looking at his phone, a trio of middle-aged top ropers, and a squad of energetic summer-camp kids being shepherded from one activity to the next by gym staff. Birch and his team of setters – Matt Stephens, Matt Robbin, Cameron Forbus, and Assistant Head Setter Logan Whiting – all of them lean and boulderer fit, are working on the east end of the Turtle, on its overhanging prow and flat slab around its north face.



Photo: Matt Samet

They've stripped the wall and slapped on a few volumes, including a giant black half-moon that will form a compression feature on the steepest panel. Devoid of holds, the blue, green, black, and white waves of color on the Walltopia boulder draw the eye hypnotically. Bins of holds and bolts lie around the cordoned-off area, impact drivers strewn amongst ladders with wooden planks screwed to their feet to stabilize them on the padded floor.

Birch stands a muscular 180 centimeters (5 feet 11 inches) tall, has greying brown hair, and wears a red shirt and grey shorts – no fancy "Route Setter" or "Head Setter" T-shirts here. He speaks softly, moving with purpose through the setting area, stopping every now and then beneath the wall to confer with the other setters or to look up and quickly pantomime a sequence that's been germinating in his head. Today, each setter will be responsible for four problems; they'll strip and set from 8 a.m. until noon, and then come back after lunch to forerun for four hours. The setters wear protective glasses, some opting for noise-canceling headphones to mute the impact drivers, others wearing gloves to protect their hands. Every now and then Birch disappears to the setter's closet to find more holds, not entirely happy with the selection laid out on the floor.

One problem he's setting will be around 6C, following yellow holds up the far-right side of the Turtle's prow. "Do you think this is too high for a toehook?" he asks me. "Like, are people going to get scared?"

The hold you'll be hooking is an ergonomic lozenge about nine feet off the deck, up around the arête. "I think it's OK," I say, and Birch gives a nod, tightening the grip.

"If you're climbing this grade, you should be comfortable with a move like this in any case," he says.

A core tenet of Birch's setting philosophy is to educate climbers – to give them problems and routes that, essentially, only have one way



The setters' tool cart as they prep for the day's work crafting new problems

Photo: Matt Sommet

through and that teach technical skills applicable both in the gym and outside. While the climbs can be done in other ways, those ways are going to feel powerful, off-balance, and sandbagged. He applies this school of thought on problems of all grades, even the moderates — as Birch puts it, *"Including technicality in easier climbs prepares people for outdoor climbing without being detrimental to people who never go outside."* Birch and most of the other setters are primarily outdoor climbers, which is reflected in the pared-down feel of the problems, which have zero surplus handholds and may have only one small ice-cube-sized jib or a downsloping volume for the feet, especially on starting moves. (Birch doesn't like to spray on extra footholds for shorter climbers — he feels they just let tall climbers like him get their feet high and bypass moves, while shorter climbers must still do more hand moves. And yet, as a shorter climber, I'm certain that there have been Whetstone problems I could have done at the given grade had there been more foothold options.)

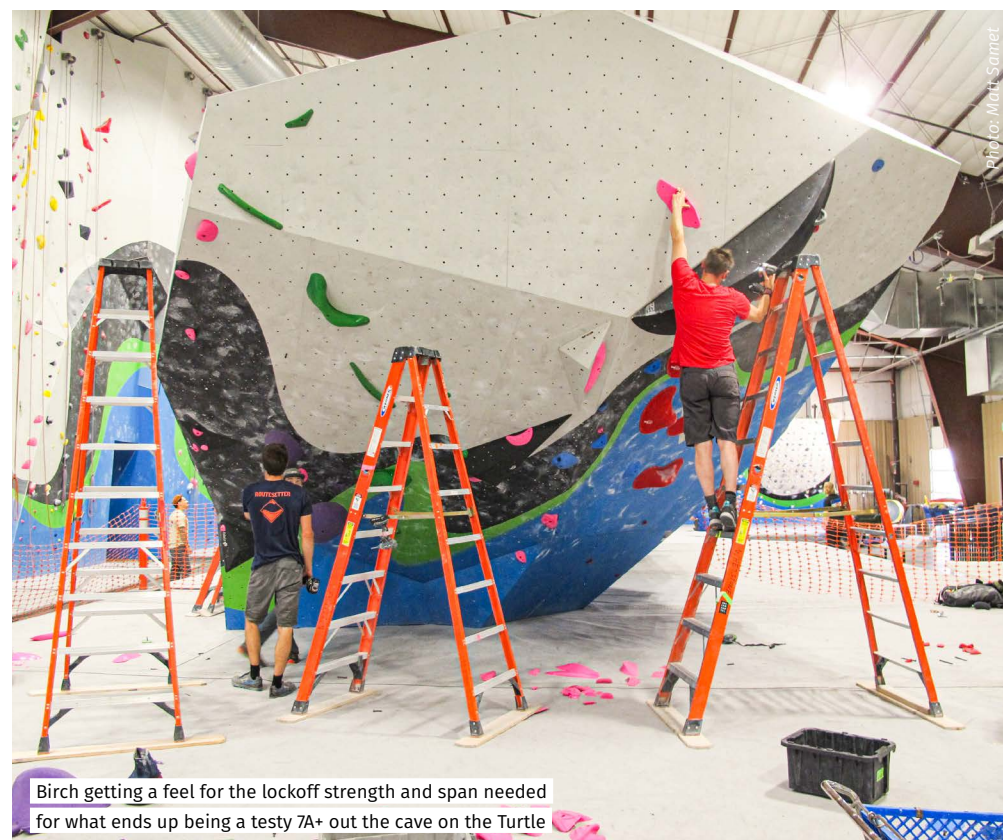
As well as educating climbers, Birch tends to set routes and problems that are more positional. *"I don't view myself as being particularly strong,"* he says. *"But I think I'm good at placing my body and distributing my weight between points of contact."* He's also naturally flexible, able to jack his foot up by his torso and rock over, which lets him climb in a scrunched position even though he's tall.

Birch and his team's problems are also stiff, feeling closer to MoonBoard benchmarks or those at classic outdoor areas — think routes like the razor-sharp crimp ladder Babyface [7A+] at Hueco Tanks in Texas, or the famous Midnight Lightning [7B+] in Yosemite, Califor-

nia — than your standard customer-friendly, pull-and-go gym fare. They also incorporate unobvious moves, such as stemming against the crease formed between the main wall and a volume, that are atypically sophisticated for the gym. When I ask Birch and Matt Robbin whether customers ever complain about the grades, they share a look and burst into laughter.

"The grades are stout," concedes Birch, who says he's only climbed at one other gym in the United States that had stiffer ratings — Focus Climbing, in Phoenix, Arizona. Still, Birch and Robbin say that customer feedback has been predominantly positive, with the most common complaint being that the climbs are too reachy. They mainly put this down to climbers keeping their feet too low for the move, though building one's feet up requires deliberate sequencing as well as power and flexibility, skills that are inobvious to newer climbers or that go easily forgotten during a rapid-fire, one-hour lunch session. In other words, climbing at Whetstone requires customers to slow down, try hard, and figure out the beta. *"After all, even indoor climbing is about discipline and learning,"* sums up Birch.

After lunch, the crew strap on rock shoes and begin forerunning. Birch starts with a 5+ jug haul on black holds out the Turtle's main cave, swinging up the grips like monkey bars. He



Birch getting a feel for the lockoff strength and span needed for what ends up being a testy 7A+ out the cave on the Turtle

Photo: Matt Sommet

drops down, looks up, grabs an impact driver, and removes a few handholds. *"Now it's a lay-back flake but without the flake,"* he tells me with a sly grin. Birch pulls back on and redoes the problem, which now involves mandatory sequencing and leaning sideways to get into position for the next reach. It's still a 5+ jug haul, but instead of being a mindless ladder, the problem requires a dash of technique.

**AT WHETSTONE,
"THE GRADES ARE STOUT,"
CONCEDES BIRCH, WHO
TYPICALLY SETS WITH A
DISTINCT MINIMALIST STYLE.**

Birch likes to set this way, even on moderate routes. *"All sports involve technical progression, so why not start early?"* he says. *"Also, to help retain customers, why not make things interesting? People get bored with the same old stuff."*

The team next plays around on the Turtle's slabby side, moving holds and adjusting feet, with Birch and Whiting climbing a cryptic 6B set by Birch up tiny black crimps by doing an improbable Egyptian between volumes. Then

Birch and Stephens try a pink-holds 7A+ Birch set on the overhang. Stephens, who is so strong he could probably campus the entire problem, sends it first try, but points out that a rockover exiting the black half-moon volume may be too morphological for taller climbers. The pair move a crimp higher up the feature, and then Birch heads off to the setter's closet in search of a hold to swap out lower down, on the volume's underside, so that it protrudes more for the rockover.

Interestingly, Birch says that, while he's learned from working with other setters over the years, he had no early mentors. *"I taught myself with a T-wrench, a Grigri, and a plastic bucket full of holds,"* he says. *"I simply wanted to create movement and re-create the infinite movement possibilities found in outdoor climbing." It's a quest that fascinates Birch to this day. He returns, swaps out the pink hold, and tries the sequence again, this time standing effortlessly into the rockover, a little less bunched up. He pulls a ladder over, drops a "Finish" tag onto a hold below the lip, and then the two Matts call it good on pink holds. In the short time I stand and watch them, I can't help but notice how chill and professional Birch's crew is. There's no peacocking, no hungover swearing, no kicking the chalk bucket in frustration — none of the more toxic behavior you sometimes see with setting crews.*

I head off to climb for the next three hours, beating myself into a sweaty pulp on Whetstone's blocs, flashing some, taking a few tries on others, and having to walk away from others yet. On one 7A, a line of purple holds on the left arête of the Battleship, I punt on the flash, my feet ripping off in an unchecked swing. *"Wow, that feels really hard for a 7A,"* I think. *"I suck."* I undo my shoes and sit on the mats, noting the setter's card on the starting holds: MB — Matt Birch. Then it hits me: If I hand-heel match in the right starting hold, suck in over that hip, and then take my left foot off as I reach to the next hold, I won't pendulum — the heel will hold me in place. It's an advanced move, a far cry from what Birch, in an opinion he knows might be controversial, calls the default *"physical challenge"* style of modern setting, where all you really need is power. Instead, it's the kind of sneaky beta you might find at your local blocs that turns a problem from impossible into a repeatable part of your after-work circuit. Using the new sequence, I climb purple holds next try.

I loop back to the Turtle, where the crew has finished forerunning. I'm tired — beat down by Whetstone's challenging blocs — but I'm still



Birch (red shirt) and Assistant Head Setter Logan Whiting (black shirt) forerunning the black 6B techno-slab on the Turtle

Photo: Matt Sommet

curious about the new problems. As I look at the pink-holds 7A+, I think of something I'd overheard an 8C boulderer saying at the gym on a previous visit: *"It's a good day when you can do a Matt Birch V7 [7A+]."* For me, today won't be that day — I can't get past the first move — but it's the kind of bloc I'd like to come back to, an elegant blend of ferocity, three-dimensionality, and technicality that is pure Matt Birch.

The setters' day is wrapping up and the team is heading home, with 20 new problems from 5+ to 7C+ for customers. As I wind down myself, I reflect on something Birch shared with me over lunch in Whetstone's yoga room. The two

**"I TAUGHT MYSELF [TO SET]
WITH A T-WRENCH, A GRIGRI,
AND A PLASTIC BUCKET FULL
OF HOLDS," SAYS BIRCH.
"I SIMPLY WANTED TO
CREATE MOVEMENT."**

main areas in which setters need to improve, he told me, are their ability to judge difficulty and their comprehension of movement. In the former case, he sometimes sees setters miscalculate how difficult certain holds will be on certain walls, in which case he gently helps them understand how hold utility changes with wall angle. In the latter, he often notices

setters failing to understand how their natural strength will make a move feel easy to them despite it being difficult for other climbers. *"To help people become more well-rounded, it's important to understand your weaknesses and your strengths, and to appreciate why some things feel hard while others don't,"* he says.

Of course, this is a lifelong process. Every climber's journey involves calibrating their ability level against their subjective experience on the wall, even as they strive to improve through training and expanding their movement repertoire. Perhaps this is what draws me to Birch's setting — yes, I consistently get beaten down and am routinely humbled by grades I can breeze through at other gyms. But I always leave Whetstone tired, happy, and a stronger and better climber. And I can take everything I've learned with me to the rock the next time I'm seeking a challenge. 🧗

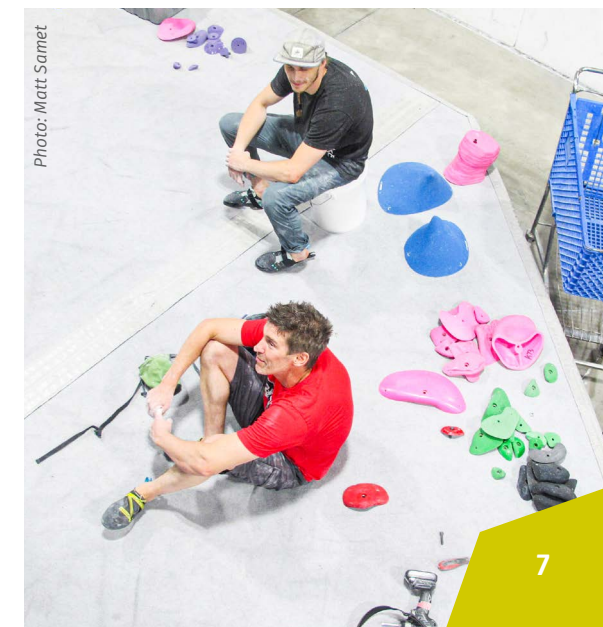


Photo: Matt Sommet

Matt Birch trying Lucid Dreaming (V15/8C) at the Buttermilk Boulders, Bishop, California, USA



A STORIED CLIMBING CAREER

◆ **Matt Birch, 52, grew up in Thurlaston, a picture-postcard English village with 650 inhabitants in rural Leicestershire. He spent plenty of time outdoors as a kid on family hikes in the Lake District, but only started climbing in 1987 at the age of 16 when a family friend took him to Birchen Edge, a gritstone crag in the Peak District. He was instantly hooked and would get out on the rock every weekend he could get a lift to the crags.**

Birch first bouldered at Stanage Edge, also in the Peak District, with the Hinckley Mountaineering Club, even free soloing up to HVS (5c) while following the club members around on the cliffs' micro routes. Right off, he said he was attracted by how you had to use your body in different ways to climb different moves. In summer 1990, however, a few years into a promising climbing career, Birch came down with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS), a devastating condition for a young climber. It started on a climbing trip in the South of France when Birch felt like he'd come down with the flu, but soon he became too weak to even walk to the supermarket. Birch returned to England to complete his studies at Manchester University, white-knuckling it through for another couple of years. But at times he experienced

fatigue so extreme he could barely get off the couch, especially after exertion (roped climbing, with its aerobic component, was a particular trigger). Finally, he moved back home to Thurlaston, receiving his ME/CFS diagnosis from the family doctor about three years after first experiencing symptoms.

As it became apparent that his was a chronic, life-changing diagnosis, Birch adjusted to a new way of life. "After time and rest, I figured out that I could do short bursts of anaerobic activity," he says, and so he became exclusively a boulderer – and a very strong one at that. Over the years, Birch has managed his condition by eating well, limiting caffeine and alcohol, and carefully rationing his energy. Meanwhile, to stay busy and earn money, he began route setting in the UK in 1998, starting at the Leeds Wall and setting an early British bouldering championship. Later, as Birch's health improved, he set at the Arch Climbing Wall in London and freelanced at various bouldering gyms around the country.

These days, Birch lives in Loveland, Colorado, with his wife, Anjani Visan (also a climber), and stepdaughter, as well as two cats and a dog. His health, he says, is ever improving, and Gschwendtner has given Birch a four-day



Photo: Whetstone Climbing

workweek that lets him recover over the long weekend. On the local high-country granite boulders of Wild Basin and Chaos Canyon, Birch has pulled off 7C+ blocs and flashed up to 7C, and still holds ticking off 8C as a life goal (he has climbed 8B+). Despite ME/CFS, Birch has amassed an impressive tick list, including:

- 1990: First ascent of an 8A+, Press Low Left, Rubicon Wall, Peak District, UK
- 2003: A repeat of Slashface (8B), Hueco Tanks, Texas, USA
- 2003: Second ascent of Nagual (8B), Hueco Tanks, Texas, USA
- 2004: First ascent of The Swarm (8B/+), Buttermilks, Bishop, California, USA
- 2008: Mandala Sit (8B+), Buttermilks, Bishop, California, USA
- 2010: A repeat of the highball High Fidelity (8B), Caley Crags, UK ◆

Darrell Gschwendtner on Scirocco (5.12), the Needles, California, USA



AN INTERVIEW WITH GYM OWNER DARRELL GSCHWENDTNER

◆ **Darrell Gschwendtner is a longtime, passionate climber based in northern Colorado with his family. He opened Whetstone in January 2019 in a former hockey rink in Fort Collins, Colorado.**

MS: When you were hiring a new head setter, how did you hear about Matt Birch?

Darrell: A local source/friend put Birch in touch with me. He was the best candidate and aligned very well with Whetstone's vision, mission, and values. He hadn't yet had the opportunity to be a head setter, and we were grateful to provide it.

MS: What were you looking for in a new head setter, and how did Birch tick those boxes?

Darrell: We were looking for a setter who embodied Whetstone's culture and had the experience to lead a team. It's rare to find someone with Birch's extensive outdoor experience, so that was a huge plus. He's a world-class climbing technician who just so happens to have been setting for about three decades.

MS: From your perspective, what are the most important things a head setter does?

Darrell: A head setter – or CAO (Chief Artistic Officer) – has to creatively balance meeting consumer demand and expectations (e.g., ratings/style/rotation frequency) and staying true to themselves as a lover of climbing's natural movements and challenges. The trick is to do

this successfully, as a team, in a business environment where a quarter-turn spin on one hold can be the difference between a customer having the best day of their week or walking away dejected.

MS: How has customer feedback been since Birch came on board?

Darrell: There was an uptick in difficulty ratings when Birch took the helm, and since this happened organically and because our new ratings aligned more with climbing outdoors, this was a direction we slowly embraced. At Whetstone, we want to prepare customers for outdoor ratings / movement, which ultimately has contributed a lot to the name Whetstone has made for itself. We want to sharpen a climber's skills here.

Overall, I'd say customers appreciate Birch and his team's expert knowledge of movement and technique. Of course, there are some who'd rather have more feet and softer ratings. However, a strict technician would tell you that adding that extra foot would change the crux move/rating considerably. Ultimately, we trust Birch and his team's setting decisions – and their collective setting experience of fifty-plus years. Perhaps most importantly is how Birch and his team never lose sight of our mission of connecting our community through climbing. They're fantastic at chatting with customers, gathering feedback, and offering beta when asked. ◆



Photo: Forest Picture Company

A view of Whetstone Climbing in Fort Collins, Colorado. The spacious gym occupies an old hockey rink, and has 20,000 square feet of climbing surface, including two long, freestanding boulders plus lead and toprope walls.

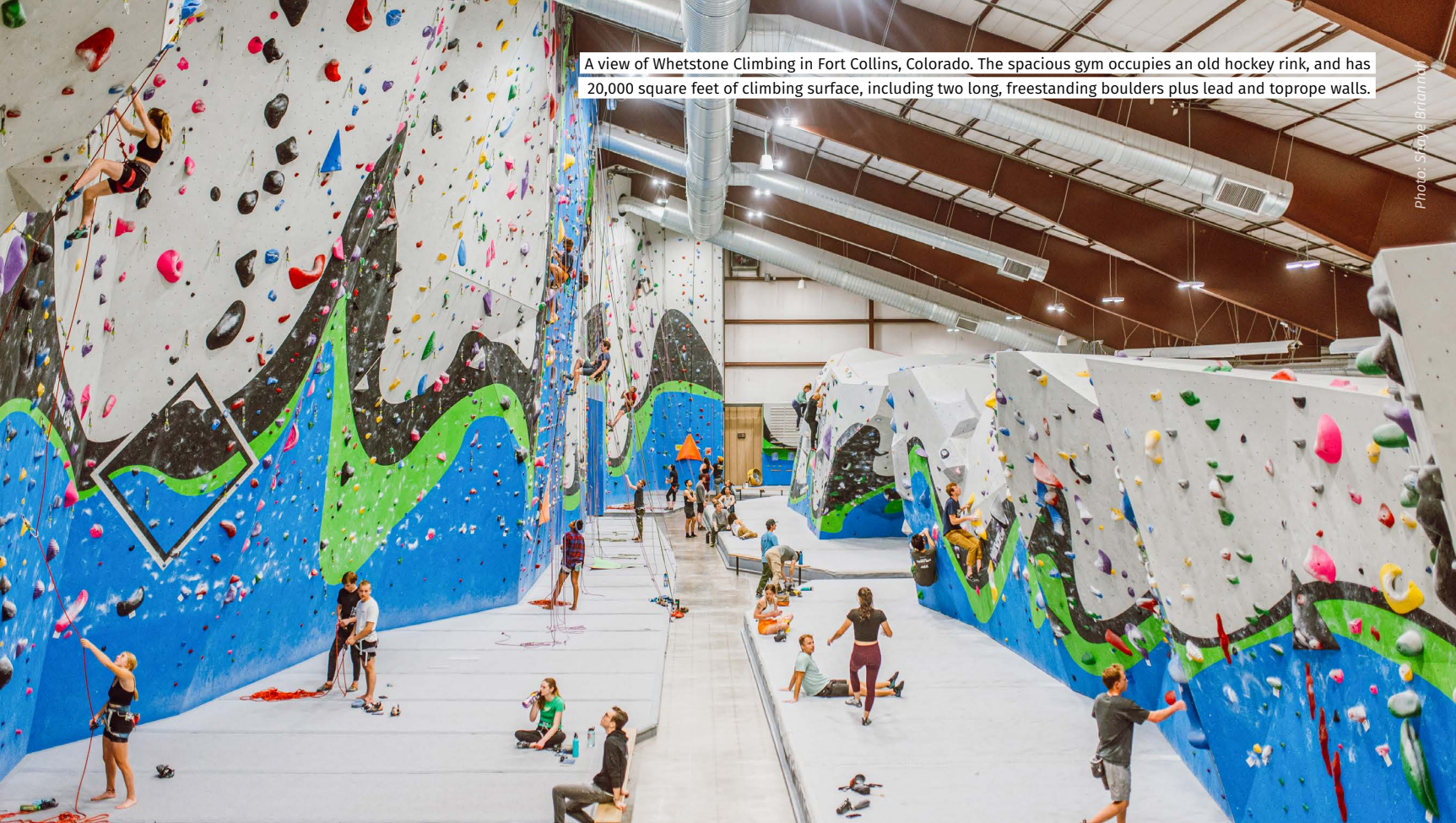


Photo: Steve Brannan

A LIGHT TOUCH

Matt Robbin has been routesetting for 12 years, including a stint at the historic bouldering gym The Front in Salt Lake City, Utah. He began working at Whetstone in August 2021, a few months before Matt Birch joined as head setter.

“What’s unique about Birch,” says Robbin, “is that he sees what you’re trying to do but doesn’t interfere – usually the changes he suggests go right to the core of the issue.” In other words, Birch doesn’t say things like, “Put this hold here and that hold there,” essentially rewriting the climb to his own style and thereby failing to mentor his setters. Instead, he asks simple questions like, “How do we make this move work?” or “How do you think we can do this?” Continues Robbin, “When he does make tweaks, there’s an elegance to it, a light touch. If you understand the core of the movement that’s being created, you don’t have to do a lot to achieve it.”

Robbin attributes this deft approach to Birch’s 36 years on rock and to his deep well of setting experience. “With Birch,” says Robbin, “there’s no ego; no right or wrong.” Sure, the team has parameters – in commercial setting, the problems need to be safe, thoughtful, and accessible to customers – but overall, says Robbin, “Birch silently gives us permission to explore our personal styles.”



Photo: Whetstone Climbing

Matt Robbin, a setter with 12 years' experience, and a fan of Birch's "light touch" with setting feedback.

Matt Samet is a freelance writer and a climber with 36 years of experience. He lives with his family in Boulder, Colorado.

Pictured right: Matt on his new route, Reservoir Dogs (8b), at the River Wall, Button Rock Reservoir in Lyons, Colorado.

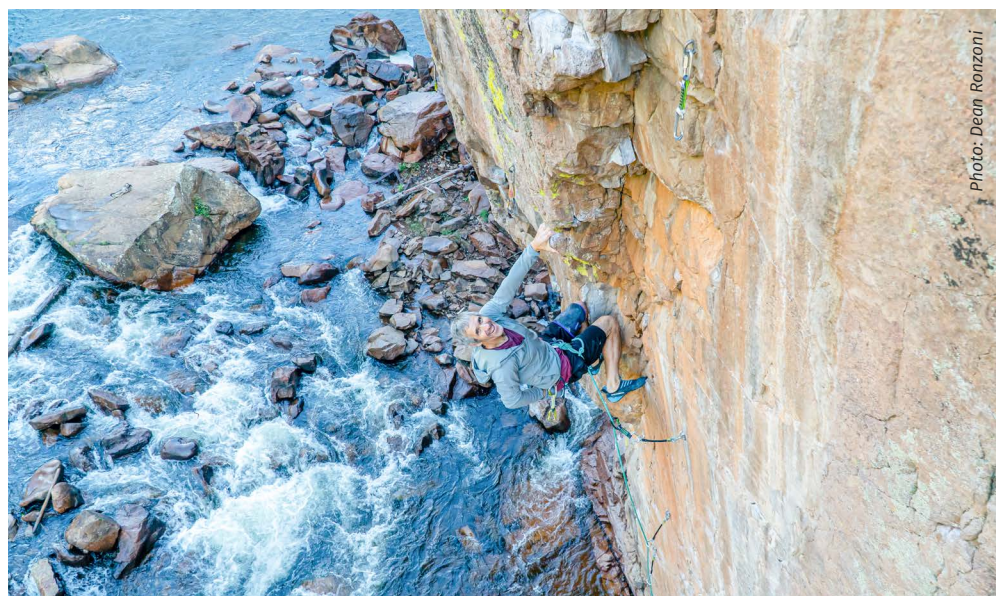


Photo: Dean Ranzoni



www.peakaboo.de
peakabooclimbing@gmail.com

PHYSIOS & PREHAB FOR ROUTESETTERS

TEXT & INTERVIEWS BY JACKIE HUEFTLE

◆ Chances are if you're reading this article you're capable of doing a pull-up on the nearest door jamb. In fact, you probably wouldn't think twice about it. But door jamb pull-ups are not a normal thing to be able to do. As climbers and setters, the things we ask our bodies to do are unusually strenuous. Our demands – hanging our entire bodyweight off a ¼ pad edge, campusing, jumping into a downward press and high gaston while holding a full body flag, heel hooking next to our face and rocking up – are ridiculous when considered in terms of normal physical activity. But climbers and routesetters are not normal, and you may be doing moves like these on an almost daily basis.

If you're a climber you've likely had an injury at some point, and, when you did, you may well have had difficulties finding good treatment. Standard medical professionals may have struggled to understand what you were even talking about, or why you'd need to return your body to working in a certain extreme way. Someone might have told you to "stop doing the thing that hurt you" or prescribed general physical therapy that didn't result in any noticeable improvement after weeks of visits. They may have taken an X-ray or scan and expressed disbelief that you are even able to move/walk/climb with whatever series of old and new injuries show up on the imagery. Perhaps they opened up your shoulder to perform a SLAP tear repair, only to end up fixing your entire biceps tendon and rotator cuff. Maybe your lower spine is somewhat fused together, or you have years of old avulsion fractures that have made your finger bones abnormally wide or caused painful spurs. Over the years, climbers have told me all these stories and more, and I'm sure each of you readers have heard these kinds of stories or have your own to tell.

If you're a routesetter, any injury you've had probably affected your ability to do your job – you may have even sustained the injury while at work. This is not surprising, as routesetting is technical work with fairly punishing physical requirements; but injuries are a big issue, as even relatively small tweaks can be a big problem for a day-to-day setting job, whether it's finger pain, elbow tendonitis, shoulder problems, hamstring tweaks, creaky knees, a sore back, or injuries to any other part of the body. More and more setting programs are taking this into account by approving paid time for injury prevention, including antagonistic work, sufficient warm-ups before forerunning, and other prehab. But how should we best use that time? To answer this question, we decided to reach out to some professionals and ask what setters can do to help reduce their chances of injury and take good care of their bodies.

We picked some experts – osteopaths, physical therapists, coaches, and movement specialists – and began the interviews. Immediately it became clear that the first concept for this article – "exercises setters can do" – was not going to fly, as every expert we talked to said that blanket advice is always risky to give because it doesn't take into account the specifics of each person's history, movement, and individual physical issues. This is very responsible of the experts of course, but sadly we can't all travel to Austria to see Klaus Isele every week, nor can we all have our movement examined in person by Austin Einhorn, our work habits assessed by Nikol Chovanová, or our fingers evaluated up close by Carrie Cooper. What, then, can setters who do not have an expert on hand do to learn how to take better care of their bodies? Surely there are some basic things we can all implement to help keep ourselves strong and healthy. Our experts weigh in below:

◆ KLAUS ISELE (p.14)

◆ CARRIE COOPER (p.16)

◆ NIKOL CHOVANOVÁ (p.18)

◆ AUSTIN EINHORN (p.20)



Photo: Eddie Fowke

KLAUS ISELE MSC, D.O.

INTERVIEW WITH AN INNOVATIVE PHYSIOTHERAPIST

JH: Do you have any setting experience?

Klaus: Ha! I tried it, but I believe I am better at providing treatment.

JH: Do you treat routesetters? If so, what injuries have you seen in routesetters?

Klaus: Yes! With setters, I see a lot of problems caused by overuse. Injuries in the upper extremities (shoulder, elbow, wrist) are slightly more common, but I also see injuries on the lower extremities, ranging from simple back pain to heelhooker's knee. Despite the high volume of work setters have to do, they have to train at an extremely intense level because of all the test climbing they need to do, and they have to do this hard work in a short amount of time no matter what's hurting them! The problem here is that sometimes they won't stop, even when they're in pain, because they have to keep going to earn money and make sure the job is done right.

JH: What advice do you have to help setters take better care of their bodies?

Klaus: Wherever possible, plan more time for the competition setting process. Setting a competition puts much more stress on your body than working regular shifts in a gym. If you are "worn out" because of too many comps – and too many long days and nights in too many different time zones – you're at a much greater risk of injury. Here I speak from experience, as during my 11 years on the World Cup scene, I treated routesetters for injuries and overload problems far too many times.

In terms of lead setting, there are still far too many setters hanging in their harness and pulling up holds and themselves. We need to reduce the time setters spend hanging in harnesses. Passive pressure or traction on your lower back for a long time while you're in a similar position can be poison to us. It's important to work smarter when you can. Our bodies can take a lot as long as we do a variety of movements and don't stay still too long in one position.

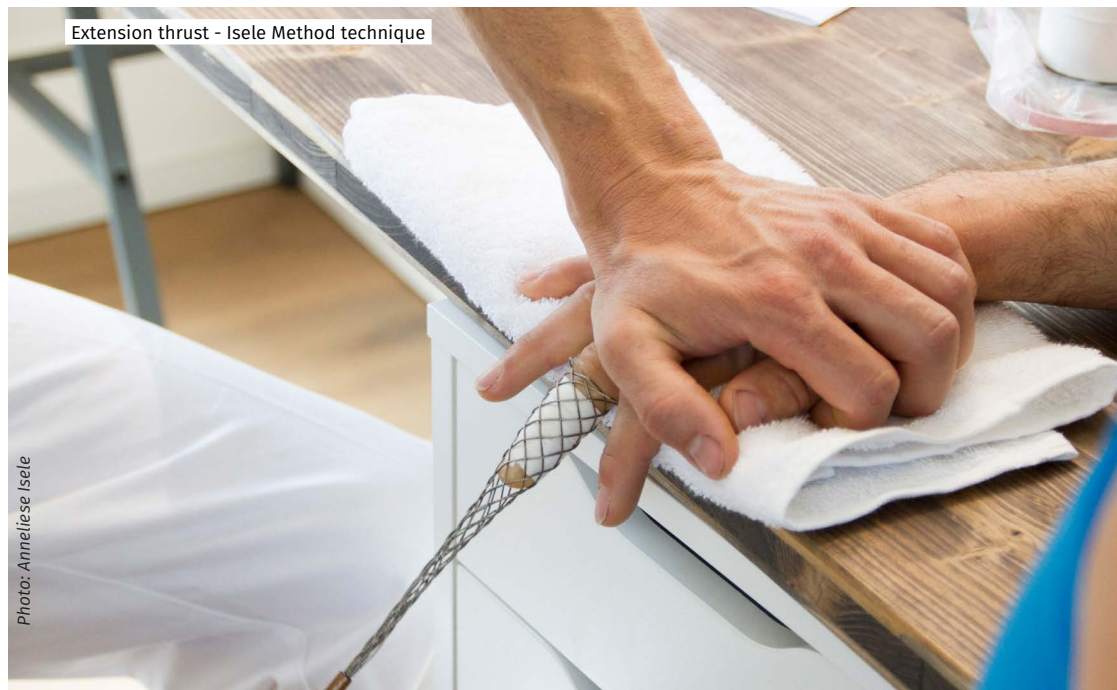


Photo: Anneliese Isele

JH: Are there any specific exercises setters should consider doing?

Klaus: No, it would be really embarrassing if I gave you such general advice! First, I'd have to consider the setter's height, gender, age, the kind of routesetting they do, whether they set every now and then for fun in their friend's gym, or whether setting is their profession and they travel with the World Cup circuit, and so on and so on... Humans are individuals, and so is good treatment. And that's why I love it!

JH: Can you give us an example of treatment in your practice?

Klaus: My work with Adam Ondra demonstrates just how important it is to take individuality into account. Consider his hip mobility. Looking at normal ranges of motion, you'd think a stabilization program would have made sense for Adam. Instead, I found out that his hip mobility could be improved and that we could push it without too much risk of injury. So that's exactly what we did. Through specific training and the use of visualization, Adam learned the moves and had the flexibility to climb Silence using his unique climbing style.

JH: Do you teach workshops or clinics or offer a service that allows setters to consult with you remotely?

Klaus: I teach my finger treatment method and give workshops on injury prevention. You can see upcoming clinics or contact me to set something up by visiting klausisele.com. I feel that working remotely takes away a ton of quality from my work so I prefer not to work remotely unless it's for something really urgent.



Photo: Anneliese Isele



Photo: Anneliese Isele

KLAUS ISELE MSC, D.O.

Physiotherapist, Osteopath, Sports Osteopath, Master Student of Chiropractics, Sports Climbing Trainer, traveled with the Austrian Climbing Team for 11 years as their physio.

Home base: Dornbirn and Vorarlberg, Austria

Years in profession: 15

Years climbing: 28

Practice name: Therapierbar Vorarlberg // Klaus Isele

Websites: www.therapierbar.com // www.klausisele.com

Region served: 4 clinics near my home base, and I travel worldwide to speak and teach

DESIGN YOUR WARM-UP WITH KLAUS

Fast or Slow

Warming up involves what's needed to wake up the body. Generally, it needs to know about every move that will come up later in the climbing session for the lower and upper extremities and the fingers – a complete warm up includes all.

Every climber must develop their own warm-up program. To do this, you must know your response type. Are you a slow or fast responder? If you are a fast responder, do not do a long warm-up. Some top level climbers are fast responders and can be ready to try hard in as little as 15 minutes. Others are slow responders – for example, Akiyo Noguchi can take three hours to properly warm up!

To learn how to develop your own warmup, see my YouTube videos (Scan QR code to the side).

Your warm-up should have two phases:

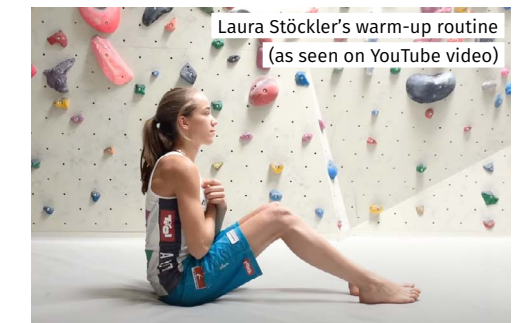
Phase 1: General Warm-up

Trigger a cardiovascular response to get you to the right temperature, increase your heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, and so on. You can do this through running, cycling, rowing, etc... but you need to **do it for at least 6 minutes** to make your body release hormones that will keep your alertness up for a longer time. This heightened alertness should continue as you get into phase 2 of the warm-up.

Phase 2: Specific Warm-up

Tell your body what it will have to deal with, but at a lower intensity. Basically you hop on a wall or simulate some specific moves on the ground to make your body feel what it is about to be challenged by. Your aim is to pre-stress passive and active structures so your body will focus and supply the right areas with the right things.

You need something like **60 moves** before the pulley ligaments in your fingers are a bit looser and will align well to take a lot of load in. Create these early moves with less load so your body is activated and then it will be ready when you need it to be ready to try hard.



DR. CARRIE COOPER, DPT

INTERVIEW WITH A CLIMBING MEDICINE SPECIALIST

EXCERSIZE PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CARRIE COOPER

JH: What injuries have you seen in route-setters?

Dr. Carrie: Along with normal climbing shoulder injuries, I see a lot of wrist and elbow irritation.

JH: What advice do you have to help setters take better care of their bodies?

Dr. Carrie: When you are using a drill to place holds, make sure that you maintain a neutral wrist, which is most easily achieved when the hold is directly in front of you. Bring your body to the hold height and then place the hold. This means that you have to adjust your position more often, but it will be better for you in the long term. If you do have wrist irritation, wear a weight lifting wrist brace closer to the hand than elbow to help support the wrist. Wrist widgets can be useful if you have ulnar (pinky side) wrist pain.

JH: Are there any specific exercises setters should consider doing?

Dr. Carrie: Setting is hard! Warm up!!! Even before you start drilling. Think wrist circles, forearm stretches, and a little cardio. Add in some wrist curls and extension exercises to help bolster your wrist stability a few days per week as well.

JH: Do you teach workshops or clinics or offer a service that allows setters to consult with you remotely?

Dr. Carrie: I treat setters just as I treat anyone else who walks in the door. Contact me through my website for remote consultations. I'm also teaching workshops starting in France this November and I look forward to offering more for athletes closer to home. I am part of an international group of climbing medicine specialists and we have yearly meet-ups and events that I speak and teach at.

JH: Do you have any other advice?

Dr. Carrie: Remember that you are doing twice the work. You are setting the climb and you are climbing. When you have a rest day, let it be a true rest day. Your body will thank you.

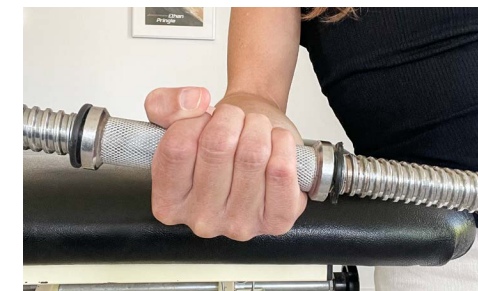


THE WRIST WITH CARRIE

The wrist is a complicated arrangement of bones, joints, ligaments, and tendons. Wrist pain can originate from an array of issues located internal to the wrist itself or even external to it above or below along the kinetic chain. With respect to wrist instability, a few basic exercises can help. These exercises should be at low enough weight that no pain is elicited. Persistent wrist pain is not something that we can just push through. If you have pain with gripping with no weight added, stop and consult a professional.

The illustrated exercises are isometric contractions, meaning that the load is held without movement. For a starting point, I generally recommend each position for:

7-10 sec hold
5-10 repeats
1-2x day



DR. CARRIE COOPER, DPT

Published Researcher, Climbing Medicine Specialist

Home base: Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Years in profession: 9

Years climbing: 30

Practice name: Carrie Cooper, DPT

Instagram: @carriecooper_dpt

Websites:

Region served: Salt Lake City and the world; I do in person visits in SLC as well as remote consultations everywhere

Setting experience: My home wall



Photo: Jakub Konečný

BC. NIKOL CHOVANOVÁ

INTERVIEW WITH THE CZECH TEAM PHYSIOTHERAPIST

JH: Do you treat routesetters? If so, what injuries have you seen in routesetters?

Nikol: Yes, I treat routesetters. Most of the time, I treat their fingers, shoulders, and back pain and sometimes their wrists.

JH: What advice do you have to help setters take better care of their bodies?

Nikol: Routesetting is a hard job that requires a combination of strenuous manual work and high-level climbing skills. The routine and demanding nature of the work often lead to physical deformations among routesetters, which, in my opinion, makes it important for setters to pay attention to their posture.

Working with a unilateral load and performing repetitive tasks for long periods can have a negative impact on the body. To prevent such issues, setters need to focus on body mechanics and ensure they maintain a good posture in different segments of their body. They must be educated on how to work with imbalances in their bodies and take preventive measures to maintain their health in the long run.

The physical demands of their work – such as carrying heavy loads, endless drilling, and

climbing – can cause mobility, stability, and strength issues in various parts of the musculoskeletal system. This overloading in one direction can result in injuries and pain, which is why setters need training on how to prevent such overloading.

Even when setters perform exercises to compensate for their work, there's a risk that they might do these exercises with incorrect body mechanics, leading to further deformation. The key is to use correct technique and exercises to achieve the desired effect on their form and posture. Setters need to be taught which exercises are beneficial for them and how to perform them with proper technique and at the right frequency. This includes exercises aimed at mobility, flexibility, stability, and power.

Another issue that setters face, particularly when setting for competitions, is a lack of time for recovery and regeneration. Working at night and inadequate sleep can lead to muscle and tissue fatigue. Setters can mitigate these issues by using proper relaxation techniques and equipment to enhance their recovery in shorter periods of time. This is crucial to slow down the overuse and overload they experience.



Photo: Lukáš Bida

BC. NIKOL CHOVANOVÁ

Physiotherapist; Czech National Team Physiotherapist, Isele Method therapist and teacher, Teaches courses for coaches, setters, and climbers.

Home base: Prague, Czech Republic

Years in profession: 12

Years climbing: 20

Practice name: Fyzio Gym Cooper

Instagram: @Fyziogym

Website: www.fyziogym.cz

Region served: Central Bohemian Region, Prague, Ostrava

Setting experience: My home bouldering gym and the adjustable wall at Fyzio Gym Cooper

Finally, it is essential to note that having good posture and stability alone is not enough—setters must develop and maintain physical strength in these areas as well.

JH: Are there any specific exercises setters should consider doing?

Nikol: It's a good idea for setters to do exercises that help them to retain or restore full mobility in the thoracic spine and shoulders so that they can maintain full flexion of their arms. This should prevent them from using their lower back to compensate for the rigidity in the thorax and shoulders while they are working.

There's also a whole host of hand and finger exercises that setters can do to strengthen their grip while maintaining a good posture and to compensate for the imbalance between pushing and pulling, which is highly pronounced in climbing and setting. Exercising the hands and fingers can also compensate for the imbalance between the flexors and adductors and the extensors and abductors in the fingers (aka help to better balance the short muscles in the hand).

It's also important to practice good techniques for landing and using the hips to relieve the knees.

JH: What about rest?

Nikol: That's highly individual. In general, it's beneficial to remain active but refrain from intense activity during rest periods. The specific approach depends on the athlete, their training, the season, and what follows the rest period. Factors like the need for a quick recovery or the availability of a longer rest period also come into play. Based on these

considerations, I decide whether to recommend relaxation, going for a walk, engaging in light hanging activation, using cold water or a sauna, and so on.

JH: Do you teach workshops or clinics or offer a service that allows setters to consult with you remotely?

Nikol: Yes, we offer a lot of courses for climbers focused on injury prevention and performance improvement. All of them are useful for routesetters. 🍷



Photo: Petr Chodura

WARMING UP WITH NIKOL

A climbing warm up should be tailored to the individual climber and should depend on what that climber is preparing for. Generally, it is important to start by warming up the body and mobilizing the different body segments. The specific warm up routine will depend on the time of day and the activities already performed.

After general mobilization, climbers should focus on activation exercises specific to climbing. The exercises will vary depending on what angle and styles the climber is planning that day, whether they are bouldering or lead climbing, and whether they are projecting, going for general fitness, or participating in a competition. One aspect that is often overlooked is the need to prepare the hands and fingers, which I highly recommend, as it's important to properly activate finger abduction and extension. Although climbing primarily involves finger flexion and adduction, this full activation is essential for ensuring that the joints are stable and soft tissues are prepared for handling the grip load. Climbers should not forget to activate their fingers for grip on various holds, including crimps, before taking on a higher load!

How to perform this activation

Start the warm-up by squeezing a grip strengthening mass (plasticine or similar) and use a finger exerciser set to coordinate finger abduction and extension in different variations of exercises. With the finger exerciser, push each loop down towards the hand (vs. up near the nails) so when you use it you are really working the small muscles of the hand (see image above).

Next, go for activation on holds or a campus rung or bar. Arrange your grip how you want it, then pull with your fingers against the hold in a

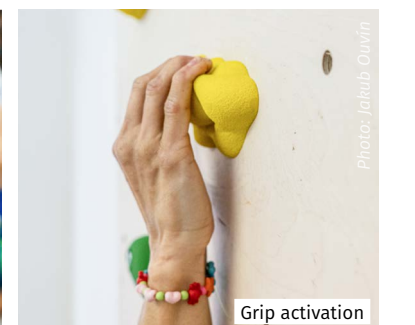


Photo: Jakub Čižvík

Photo: Jakub Čižvík

controlled way to activate them while still supporting some of your weight with your legs on the ground. Watch your hand to make sure you keep the correct grip position throughout the warm-up, and make sure your shoulders are in a stable position. Do this for many different types of grip.

Notes on hand position:

- Keep your hand dome-shaped – you don't want to see the hand lengthen when you load it.
- Your wrist should not be flexed – it should always be extended. If your hand stretches out or flattens or your wrist flexes, the correct activation is not being done.
- If you are using a bar, hold it as a pinch from the bottom with your thumb against the fingers so the grip is really solid.

While your weight is still shared with your feet on the floor, you can try to take one hand off, making the load to the other grip higher and making you stabilize the position of your body more. When you feel your hands are activated, you can go into a full hang.

AUSTIN EINHORN, CSCS

INTERVIEW WITH A MOVEMENT SPECIALIST



Photo: Austin Einhorn

JH: Do you treat routesetters?

Austin: I don't see routesetters regularly yet, but it wouldn't be any different than seeing any other athlete.

JH: What advice do you have to help setters take better care of their bodies?

Austin: Become aware of how your bones move. In general, people focus too much on how their muscles feel and that's just not accurate information. Myriad factors go into those perceptions. Paying attention to where your bones move is more objective and a better determinant of injury risk.

JH: Are there any specific exercises setters should consider doing?

Austin: It's not necessarily about specific exercises because you, me, and Bob could do the same shoulder exercise, moving our hands from A to B, and each of us would take a different path. For example, if you arch your

back to lift your hands, you're not moving in your shoulder joint and you're not training the area you intended. So, seriously, pay attention to where your bones move. Record video of yourself. If you intend to move in your shoulder joint during a pull-up, watch to see if your spine moves instead, or if your ribs flare. If they do, you need to change how your skeleton is positioned rather than focusing on squeezing your muscles.

In general, prepare for movement by moving. I don't have any of my athletes stretch or foam roll. Instead, we move in ways that prepare us for the training ahead of us. That being said, I don't know you or your history, so proceed at your own risk.

JH: Do you have any other advice?

Austin: More is almost never the answer. If your shoulder, or neck, or something else isn't improving within one to two weeks, chances are there's a better exercise for you. Or you could be doing it differently. The body is incredibly adaptable with the right interven-

tions. If I don't make significant progress in a short amount of time with my clients, I try something else. Holding myself to that standard has helped me more than anything else to create useful, innovative techniques and to support more people. I'd rather you carefully explore your movements than repeat the same exercise for several more weeks without any results. Videoing yourself will go a long way. Just watch how your bones move, look for patterns and symmetry, and compare videos with your friends. I believe more people can figure out how to improve their movement merely by watching themselves move.

JH: Do you teach workshops or clinics or offer a service that allows setters to consult with you remotely?

Austin: I'm accepting applications for professional athletes and I'm also open to adding more climbers and setters as I grow my Colorado practice. Any strength coaches, trainers, or practitioners can take my course, which can be found at www.theevolvedcoach.com/course.

TIPS FOR GRIPPING BARS

I frequently see people (including climbers) hanging on bars with just their index and middle fingers loaded. But the pinky and ring fingers are important too! I want my athletes' knuckles to be parallel with the bar and for all their fingers to wrap straight around the bar as opposed to being crooked.

1. Scapular circles

1. Hang from a bar with two hands
2. As slow as a tai-chi practitioner, try to move your shoulder blades in circles.
3. Maintain grip tips from above (Wrap all fingers straight around the bar with knuckles parallel to the bar, and don't drop your pinkies!).

2. Scapular pull-ups (single & double arm)

1. When pulling your shoulder blade, just pull it downward.
2. Your elbow should turn during the movement. When dangling, your elbow crease should point toward your head. When engaged, it should point backward. In other words, when you are engaged in a scapular pull-up, your shoulder should be rotated externally.

3. Varied pull-ups

1. Humans have extremely dynamic shoulders, and yet we train as if we're LEGO® characters. We also need warm ups that

prepare us for the dynamic ranges of pulling involved in rock climbing.

2. Start with traditional pull-ups and then get creative. Make every pull-up different from the last. Switch your grip, side bend or twist your spine, or hold your knees to your chest—you get the idea. If you have a mixed grip on a single bar (one hand grabbing forward and one grabbing backward), you can spin 180 degrees during the ascent and descent.

Squat advice

1. My one rule with squats is that your knee and foot need to point in the same direction on each leg. I don't want you to have your right knee pointing to 12 o'clock and your right foot pointing to 2 o'clock, for example. Heel hooks encourage this twisting. I see it all the time in climbers, and it can increase the risk of leg injuries. So, when you squat, your legs can point inward, outward, in mixed directions, or straightforward as long as you keep the knee and foot of each leg pointing in the same direction. The rotation comes from your hip.
2. Adding varied squats into your warm up or workout should improve how your legs move and feel. One caveat is that if you're lifting heavy, less variability is better—keep your knees and feet pointing forward-ish. 🍈

Photo: Kevin Palmhood / Lookout, Santa Cruz



AUSTIN EINHORN, CSCS, DNSET, EVOLVED COACH

Coach, Movement Specialist, Author, Speaker, Teacher, Pro Athlete Trainer, Consultant

Home base: Boulder, CO and Santa Cruz, CA

Years in profession: 11

Years climbing: 4

Practice name: Apiros

Instagram: @apiros.team

Website: www.apiros.team

Region served: Colorado Front Range, Bay Area California, travel for clinics and evaluations

Setting experience: Almost none

TAKEAWAYS

Climbing is all about movement, so it's no surprise that the key to staying healthy as a climber, setter, and forerunner is to focus on your own movement – using your body in the way it wants to be used, so your muscles work the right way, your bones and joints are lined up the right way, and you get the most out of your strength and ability. According to all our experts, this means making a conscious effort to listen to your body and evaluate your own positioning and movement, as well as finding experts to work with in your area or remotely who can help you evaluate how your body is moving and what might help it to move better so that you can accomplish your goals and stay healthy. Moving well and taking preventative steps like prehab, resting and fueling enough, staying hydrated, and warming up, are all incredibly important things that setters can do to improve their working life and extend their ability to do their job so they can keep experiencing the joy of creating movement.

FOR THE FUTURE

All of these experts want to remind everyone that they are not magicians and that not every treatment will work for every person. Nevertheless, the experts interviewed for this article are well trained, highly educated, and well versed in evaluating the movement requirements of athletes and in finding solutions to help individuals improve their own outcomes. More experts like this are needed as the sport of rock climbing and the profession of routesetting expand. If you're a student of movement who wants to coach others and make these evaluations yourself, the experts consulted here all teach workshops and courses designed to help you improve your understanding of the body and increase the quality of the evaluations and treatments you can bring to the athletes and setters you work with. Look them up online, sign up for a course, or reach out to them and organize a workshop in your area!

Photo: Fabrizio Zangrilli



JACKIE HUEFTLE

Born: 1982

Lives in: Boulder, Colorado, USA

Background: Climbing and setting since 1998, Jackie is passionate about improving the climbing industry's future. She does her best to contribute as part of the CWA Routesetting Committee and through her companies Kilter Grips and the Routesetting Institute. Find her on Instagram @thegirlinlongshorts

CREATING SPACE IN WARTIME UKRAINE

A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND DEDICATION

BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH STANISLAV KLESHNOV AND OLEG POKUSAEV

BY MELISSA RUDICK / PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE SPACE GROUP

МЕРЕЖА SPACE В УМОВАХ ВОЄННОЇ УКРАЇНИ

ІСТОРІЯ СТІЙКОСТІ І САМОВІДДАНОСТІ

В ОСНОВІ МАТЕРІАЛУ ІНТЕРВ'Ю ЗІ СТАНІСЛАВОМ КЛЕШНЬОВИМ ТА ОЛЕГОМ ПОКУСАЄВИМ
ТЕКСТ МЕЛІССА РУДІК / ФОТО НАДАНІ ПРЕДСТАВНИКАМИ SPACE GROUP

It's 6 o'clock in the evening at Climbing SPACE in Kyiv, and the Ukrainian National Championships are in full swing. The atmosphere is electric, the music is loud, and the gym is jam-packed with athletes, judges, and spectators. The staff keep an ear out for the all-too familiar sound of an air-raid siren or even a missile overhead, ready to move everyone into the basement-turned-bomb shelter at the first sign of danger. A full year since the Russian invasion began, it's become second nature to listen out for disturbances coming from outside. Nonetheless, everyone is immersed in the action and pumped to be together in one place again.

Earlier that day, Stanislav (Stan) Kleshnov, one of the gym's three owners, gave me a virtual tour around SPACE as we chatted online. The gym is outfitted with clean birch plywood walls, a colorful array of holds, warm lighting, and cozy hangout spaces. Several of the staff greeted me warmly on screen, while the setters worked fervently in every corner of the gym. When I asked Victoria Fadeeva, the gym's manager, to sum up the emotions stirring in the room that day, she said: "Out of this chaos, a real sports holiday is born. People can smile and share experiences with each other. The energy coming from the athletes and my colleagues is so high that it's impossible to feel tired in that moment. I absolutely love the days when we hold competitions."

While most of the national team athletes were present for the Championships, some weren't comfortable with the level of risk involved in traveling to public places. Though the circumstances were still far from normal, the event served as a symbol of progress in the only sphere the organizers and athletes had control over. Just one year ago, the idea of holding such an event was unimaginable, so this felt like a momentous occasion.

Stan, Oleg Pokusaev, and Oleksandr (Alex) Horobtsov, are from the mining region of Donbas in eastern Ukraine and first came to know each other on the climbing circuit. They each moved to Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, under different circumstances – Stan chose to relocate to the city to study in 2004, while Oleg and Alex were forced to move when the Russian military invaded Donbas in 2014. Their paths crossed again a handful of years later when they brought their individual gyms

Шоста година вечора на київському скеледромі Climbing SPACE, де національний чемпіонат України в самому розпалі. Атмосфера наелектризована, музика гучна, а спортивний зал переповнений атлетами, суддями та глядачами. Персонал напоготові, щоб при перших звуках такої вже добре знайомої сирени повітряної тривоги, або й снаряду над головою, супроводити всіх до підвального приміщення, що виконує функцію бомбосховища. Ось вже рік пройшов від початку повномасштабного російського вторгнення і з'явилася звичка прислухатися до будь-яких підозрілих звуків назовні. Але, незважаючи ні на що, тренування та змагання продовжуються, бо це можливість знову бути разом.

Того дня, коли ми спілкувалися в режимі онлайн, Станіслав (Стас) Кleshнов запропонував мені віртуальну екскурсію. Стенд побудований з блискучої світлої березової фанери з м'яким освітленням та затишними місцями для відпочинку. Кілька співробітників приязно вітали мене на екрані, а постановники завзято крутили боулдери в кожному куточку залу. Коли я попросила менеджера скеледрому Вікторію Фадєєву підсумувати емоції, що вирували того дня в залі, вона сказала: «Так багато змінилось в нашому житті, та коли в нас проходять змагання – це як спортивне свято подалі від всього хаосу. Люди можуть посміхатися та ділитися своїм досвідом. Енергетика, що випромінюють спортсмени та організатори, настільки сильна, що в цей момент просто неможливо відчувати втому. Дні змагань в нашому залі я люблю найбільше».

На чемпіонат приїхала більшість атлетів національної збірної, проте дехто побоювся ризику, пов'язаного з відвідуванням громадських місць. У цих нетипових обставинах змагання стали символом прогресу в тій єдиній сфері, яку організатори та спортсмени все ще можуть контролювати. Лише рік тому сама ідея проведення таких змагань здавалась неймовірною, тому вони стали такою визначною подією.

Стас, Олег Покусаєв і Олександр Горобцов походять з гірничодобувного регіону Донбас на сході України. Саме скелелазіння звело їх разом. За різних обставин і в різний час вони перебралися до Києва. Стас приїхав на навчання у 2004 році, тоді як Олег і Алекс

– TheWall in Lviv and Climbing SPACE and Boulder SPACE in Kyiv – together under one shared network: the SPACE Group.

Over six months, the three founders shared their personal stories with me, recounting the details of how their respective climbing gyms were born. Their ability to navigate through the tumultuous twists and turns of war and the unpredictable challenges it has brought make their accounts even more moving.

[Read their stories at the end of this article].

THEWALL, LVIV

After years of training in inadequate facilities, a trio of accomplished Ukrainian climbers – Stan, Oleksandr Paukaev, and Maksym Stynkovyy – set out to fill a void left by the Soviet era by building a modern climbing gym with sufficiently high lead climbing walls and bouldering wall angles fit for competition. With the financial backing of long-time Ukrainian climber and entrepreneur Vitaly Antonov, TheWall Climbing Gym emerged as Ukraine's first commercial climbing gym in 2015, located near the central train station in the vibrant tech and cultural hub of Lviv.

The trio did everything themselves, from manufacturing the climbing walls to designing and building the gym. As Stan recalls, "Back then, it was a very modest gym by European standards, with just 250 square meters (approx. 2,690 square feet) to train in with top rope, lead climbing, and bouldering. We were the first climbing gym in Ukraine to have WiFi, hot water in the showers, and a hairdryer in the locker room."

The three athletes had, for the most part, been climbing and training in a strictly competitive environment for decades. "We discovered that our routes were too difficult for new climbers coming to us. It took about a year for us to change our approach to meet our customers' climbing needs," reflects Stan. They redirected their efforts to set routes for a wider range of climbers, from the novice to the experienced, and over time they saw positive results.

CLIMBING SPACE, KYIV

In 2019, Oleg and Alex pooled their engineering expertise to design and construct Climbing



TheWall, Junior Cup, 2023

були змушені залишити Донецьчину через російське вторгнення у 2014 році. Зараз вони об'єднали свої колишні окремі скеледроми – TheWall у Львові, Climbing SPACE та Boulder SPACE у Києві – в одну спільну мережу SPACE Group.

Я познайомила з ними пів року тому. За цей час троє друзів розповідали мені про себе, пригадуючи різні подробиці побудови скеледромів. Війна додала цим історіям додаткового виміру, змушуючи проходити випробовування та реагувати на непередбачувані виклики.

[Іхні історії ви знайдете в кінці статті.]

THEWALL, ЛЬВІВ

Після років тренування в олд-кульних залах, троє досвідчених українських скелелазів

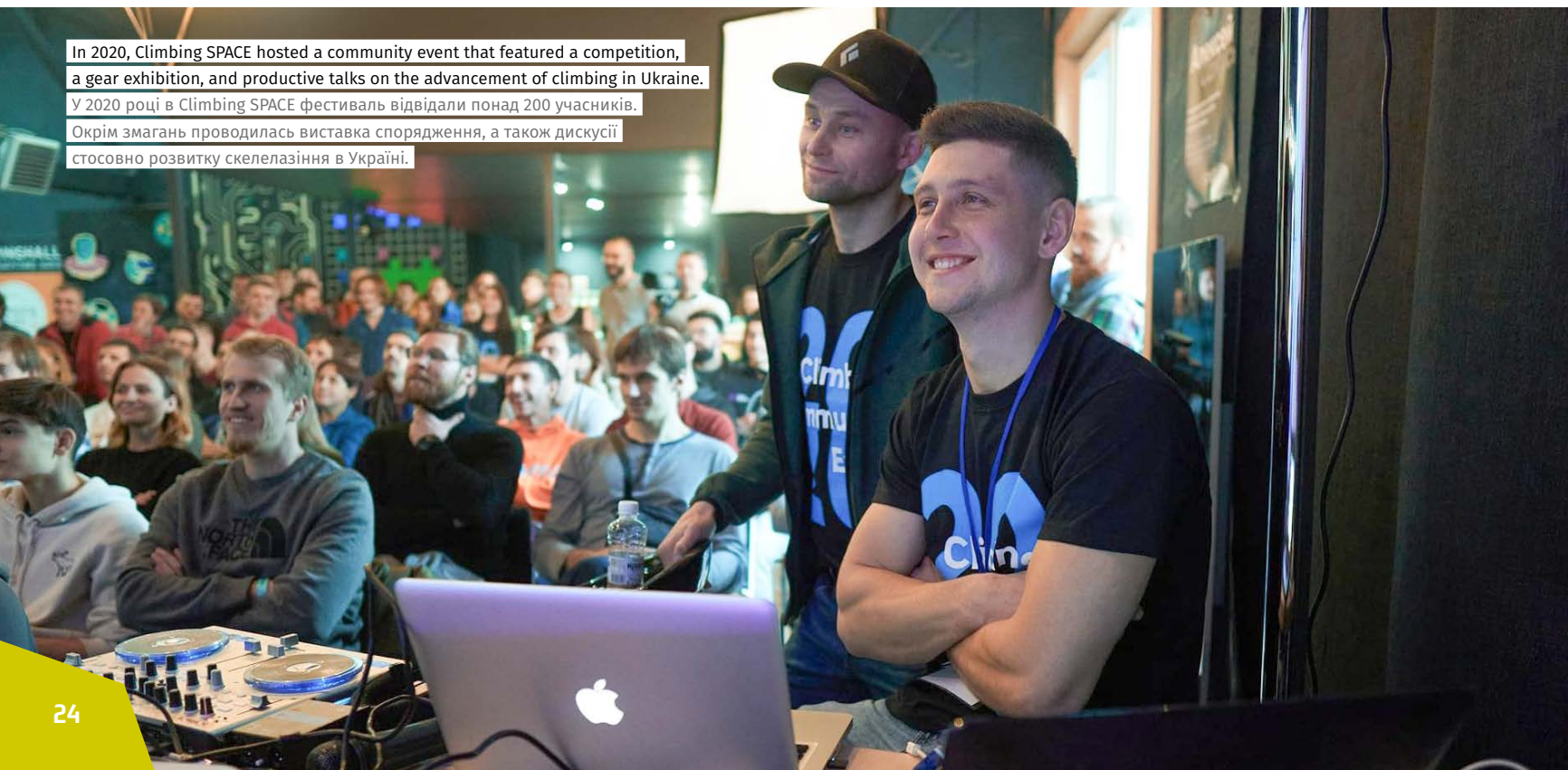
– Стас, Олександр Паукаєв і Максим Стенковий – вирішили заповнити порожнечу, що залишилась від радянської системи, а саме – створити сучасний високий скеледром, а також боулдерингову стіну з кутами, що підходять для підготовки до змагань. За фінансової підтримки підприємця та скелелазя Віталія Антонова скеледром TheWall став першим в Україні комерційним залом такого рівня у 2015 році. Він розташований біля центральної залізничної станції у жвавому технологічному та культурному хабі Львова.

Троє скелелазів робили все власноруч: від виробництва панелей до проектування та побудови залу. Стас пригадує: «На той час це був дуже скромний тренажерний зал у порівнянні з європейськими стандартами, з площею лише 250 квадратних метрів для лазіння швидкості, трудності та боулдерингу. Ми були першим скеледромом в Україні що мав Wi-Fi, гарячу воду в душі та фен в роздягальні».



All together again at Climbing SPACE
Усі разом знову в Climbing SPACE

Протягом багатьох років скелелазіння було спортом мотивованих атлетів, які лазили на високому рівні. «Ми зрозуміли, що наші маршрути були надто важкими для початківців, які приходили до нас. Нам знадобилося більше року, щоб змінити наш підхід і пристосуватись до рівня лазіння наших клієнтів», – пригадує Стас. Вони почали крутити маршрути для різного рівня лазіння – від початківців до більш досвідчених – і згодом вони побачили позитивні результати.



In 2020, Climbing SPACE hosted a community event that featured a competition, a gear exhibition, and productive talks on the advancement of climbing in Ukraine.

У 2020 році в Climbing SPACE фестиваль відвідали понад 200 учасників. Окрім змагань проводилась виставка спорядження, а також дискусії стосовно розвитку скелелазіння в Україні.



Construction begins at Climbing SPACE, 2018
Початок будівництва Climbing SPACE, 2018 рік

SPACE. Oleg, with his extensive background in competitions and route-setting as well as his skills in designing walls and volumes from his years of 3D modeling in his spare time, brought a wealth of experience to the project. Meanwhile, civil engineer Alex had strong construction skills and a keen interest in building a sports facility with a unique architectural design that didn't yet exist in Ukraine. Additionally, Stan was keen to help out by sharing the insights and knowledge in gym management he'd gained in the years since opening TheWall.

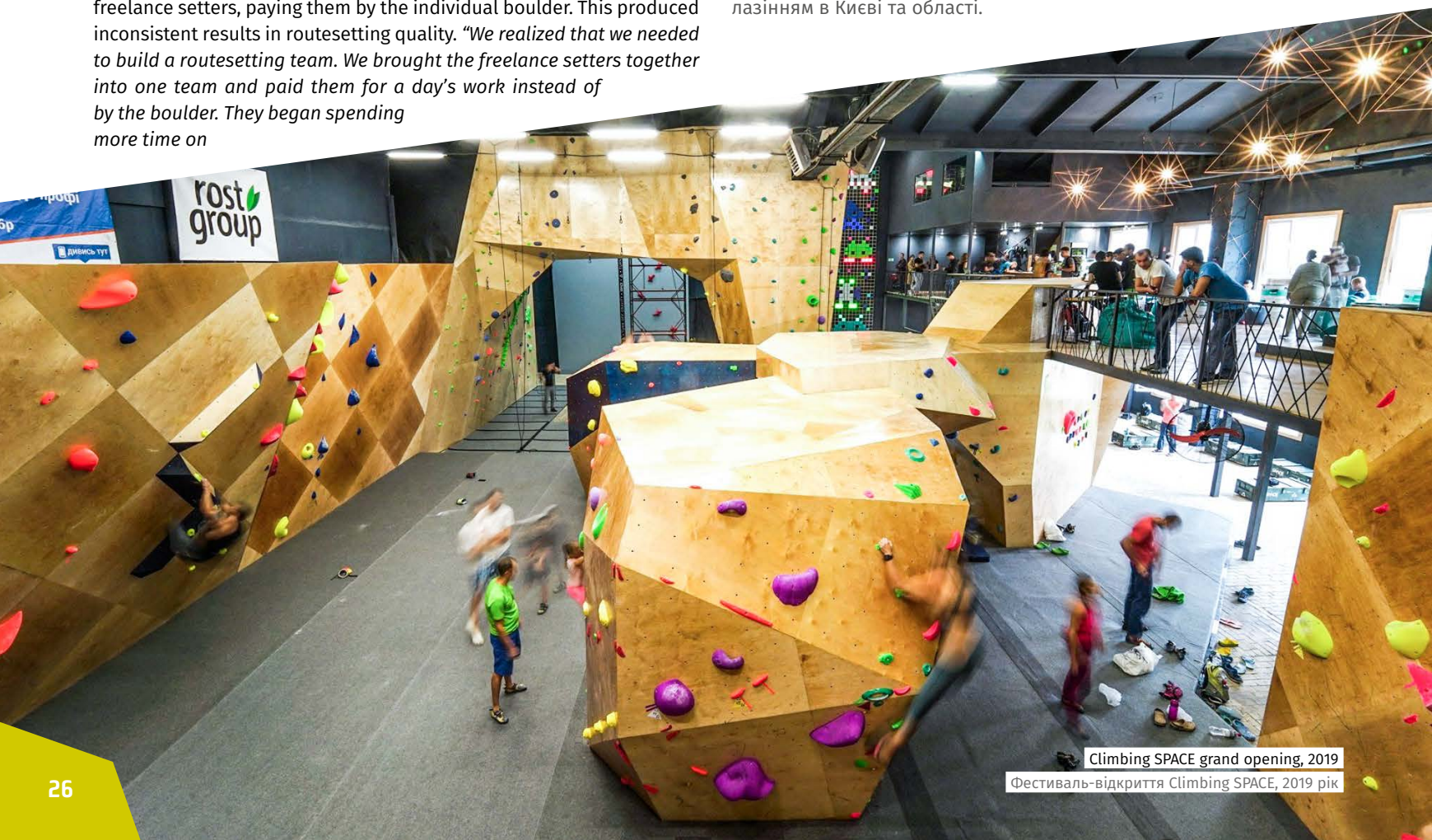
Located in the Obolon district of Kyiv, SPACE was constructed with over 800 square meters (approx. 8,610 square feet) of lead climbing, bouldering, and fun walls for kids. "It was a revolution in Ukrainian climbing gyms. We made climbing more comfortable, more attractive, and easier to understand for newcomers," says Oleg. SPACE appeared in the local media, leading to an uptick of new climbers in Kyiv and the surrounding area.

In the early days, SPACE didn't have a dedicated setting team. Oleg was really the only fixed routesetter, and the gym would occasionally hire freelance setters, paying them by the individual boulder. This produced inconsistent results in routesetting quality. "We realized that we needed to build a routesetting team. We brought the freelance setters together into one team and paid them for a day's work instead of by the boulder. They began spending more time on

CLIMBING SPACE, KYIV

У 2019 році Олег і Олександр застосували свої інженерні навички для проектування і будівництва скеледрому Climbing SPACE. Олег привніс в проєкт свій значний досвід участі у змаганнях у постановці маршрутів та застосував свої навички у проектуванні стін та рельєфів, які він отримав від занять 3D-моделювання як хобі та на роботі. Олександр був досвідченим у будівництві та мав велике бажання зробити скеледром за унікальним архітектурним проєктом, досі небаченого в Україні. А Стас прагнув допомогти досвідом управління, якого він набув за роки існування скеледрому TheWall.

Скеледром Climbing SPACE розташований у київському районі Оболонь. Він має понад 800 квадратних метрів площі стін для лазіння труднощі, боулдерингу та швидкості, а також фан-стілки для дітей. «Це була справжня революція серед скеледромів. Ми зробили скеледром комфортнішим, привабливішим та зрозумілішим для новачків», – каже Олег. На скеледром Climbing SPACE звернули увагу телеканали та видавництва, що спонукало зацікавленість скеледромом в Києві та області.



Climbing SPACE grand opening, 2019
Фестиваль-відкриття Climbing SPACE, 2019 рік

each problem, making each more well thought out," explains Oleg. Although it was still a work in progress, the Climbing SPACE setting team was developing a distinct style that had potential for growth.

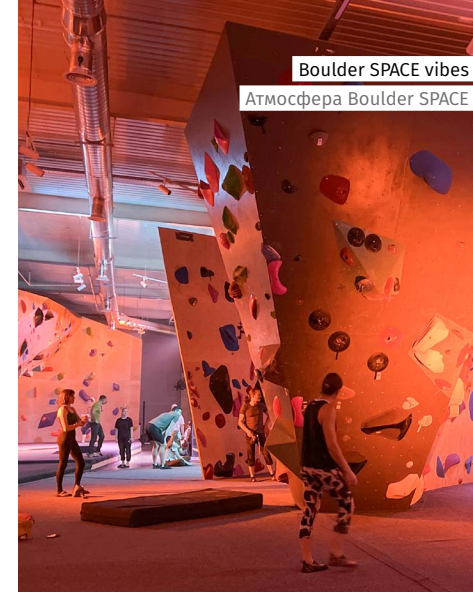
A REFOCUS ON ROUTESSETTING

When COVID hit in 2020, all non-essential businesses in Ukraine, including climbing gyms, were forced to close for a period of three months. As a consequence of the pandemic, new projects were put on hold, government funding for sports was deprioritized, and building materials became scarce. Although COVID restrictions on businesses were fairly lax in Ukraine, climbers were hesitant to return to gyms for most of 2020. And just when the clouds seemed to be lifting, the same cycle repeated itself the following winter.

By mid-2021, COVID had taken a backseat, and Ukraine's gyms came back to life. The SPACE team got out of survival mode and refocused on their customers and routesetting. Oleg still had a sense of just how far behind they were from the rest of the world when it came to routesetting: "We brought in Andrzej Musial, the chief setter at Cube Baldy in Poland, and IFSC setter Pierre Broyer from France for our annual SPACE Anniversary competition. We invited all Ukrainian setters to observe the 'magic of routesetting.' We asked Pierre and Andrzej not to focus too much on setting boulders, but rather on checking ours and giving us ideas and feedback. Pierre taught us the basic principles of routesetting. We learned to test all the boulders as a team to find the defects, make changes, and then test them again, and we learned from our mistakes. We still use his approach to this day."

BOULDER SPACE, KYIV

During the summer of 2021, Oleg and Alex secured the funding needed to build Boulder SPACE in Kyiv. As with Climbing SPACE, Oleg designed all the climbing walls and volumes. The grand opening took the form of a well-attended bouldering fest just after Christmas that year. "Boulder SPACE simply stunned our climbing community. They couldn't believe they were in a Ukrainian climbing gym. It was like having a ticket to Western Europe," Oleg remarks, comparing the ambiance to that of a nightclub, with its dark walls, inviting lighting, and innovative new wall shapes. The core setting team remained the same, but the new stock of top-tier climbing holds from Europe and the US added a fresh dimension to the bouldering experience at Boulder SPACE.



Boulder SPACE vibes
Атмосфера Boulder SPACE

На початку свого існування Climbing SPACE не мав команди рутсетерів. Олег фактично був єдиним постійним постановником трас і час від часу залучав інших з оплатою за кожний боулдер або маршрут. Якість маршрутів була низькою. «Ми зрозуміли, що нам необхідно створити команду рутсетерів. Ми зібрали всіх зацікавлених в одну команду і встановили поденну оплату. Так вони мали змогу більш ретельно продумувати кожний окремий боулдер», – пояснює Олег. Команда рутсетерів Climbing SPACE почала виробляти свій власний стиль з потенціалом для розвитку.

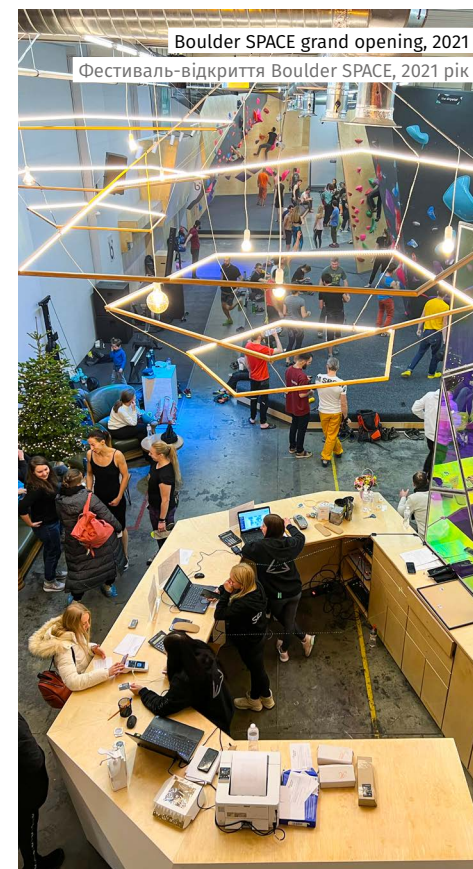


Routesetting at Boulder SPACE
Постановка боулдерів в Boulder SPACE

ЗМІНА ФОКУСУ

Коли у 2020 році почалась пандемія COVID, всі некритичні підприємства в Україні, включаючи скеледром, змушені були закритися на три місяці. Нові проєкти були призупинені, державне фінансування спорту перестало бути пріоритетним, а будівельні матеріали не продавались. Хоча пов'язані з COVID обмеження в Україні і були відносно м'якими, скеледром не повертався до тренувань в залах протягом більшої частини 2020 року. І коли ситуація почала поліпшуватися, той самий цикл повторився наступної зими.

В середині 2021 року COVID відійшов на другий план і українські спортивні зали повернулись до життя. Команда Climbing SPACE вийшла з режиму виживання та зосередилась на потребах клієнтів та постановці маршрутів. Олег переймався через відставання рівня рутсетінгу в Україні від світового: «На наші щорічні змагання SPACE Anniversary ми запросили поляка Анджея Мусяла, головного постановника Cube Baldy, та французя П'єра Броєра, ліцензованого рутсетера IFSC. Ми також запропонували всім українським рутсетерам долучитись до підготовки змагань, щоб перейняти досвід "магії постановки маршрутів". Ми попросили П'єра та Анджея займатися не стільки безпосередньо постановкою, скільки перевіряти наші боулдери, ділитися своїми думками та давати оцінку. П'єр навчив нас основним принципам постановки: тестувати всі боулдери всією командою, знаходити недоліки, вносити зміни, і тестувати їх повторно. Таким чином ми вчилися на власних помилках. Ми й досі використовуємо цей підхід».



Boulder SPACE grand opening, 2021
Фестиваль-відкриття Boulder SPACE, 2021 рік

THE LAUNCH OF A NEW NETWORK

As membership of the SPACE gyms grew, the walls became crowded, prompting Stan, Oleg, and Alex to begin discussing the idea of developing future gyms as a team. And so the SPACE Group was born. As Oleg recalls, "We planned to build one larger gym in Kyiv and one in Dnipro, a city to the east that needed a modern bouldering gym. We visited a dozen gyms and trade shows in Europe to learn about the latest ideas and best business approaches and practices." The trio secured investment and a location in Kyiv that was perfectly suited for two 20-meter speed walls (the first IFSC-standard speed walls in the country), ample lead climbing space, and a kids' fun zone. Walltopia agreed to manufacture and install the walls, and the leasing contract was set to be signed two months later.



BOULDER SPACE, КИЇВ

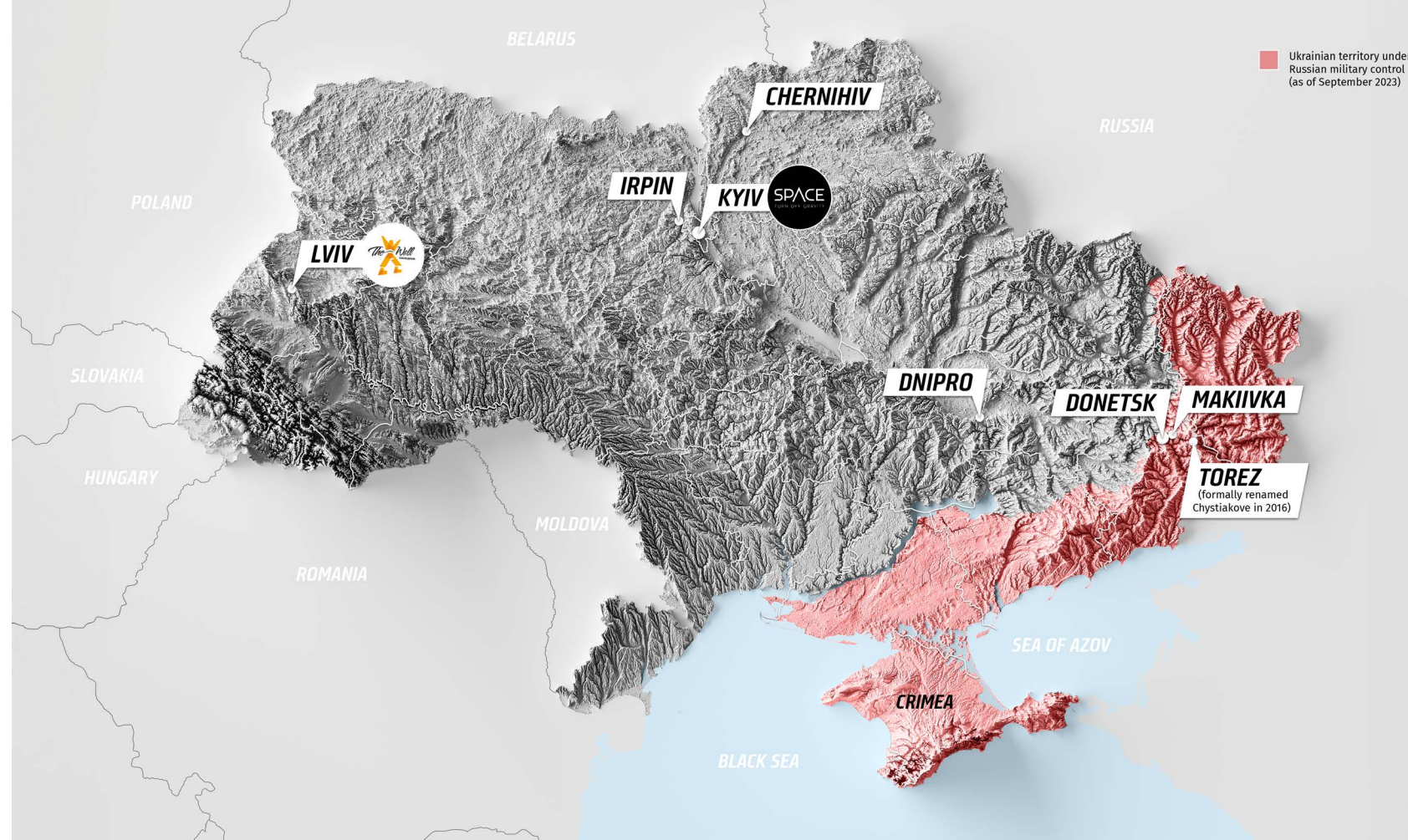
Протягом літа 2021 року Олег і Олександр знайшли фінансування для будівництва нового скеледрому Boulder SPACE в Києві. Як і у випадку із Climbing SPACE, Олег проєктував всі площини та рельєфи. Урочисте відкриття відбулося одразу після Різдва у формі фестивалю. «Boulder SPACE просто приголомшив нашу спільноту скелелазів. Вони не могли повірити, що знаходяться в українському залі. Це було як купити квиток в Європу», – каже Олег, порівнюючи атмосферу в залі з атмосферою нічного клубу з його темними стінами, привабливим освітленням та інноваційними формами стін. Рутсетери були тими ж самими, проте рівень їхньої постановчої майстерності зріс, а сучасні зачіпки від кращих виробників Європи та США зробили досвід боулдерингу на скеледромі ще більш вражаючим.

STOPPED IN THEIR TRACKS

The first cause for concern came in the form of a phone call from Walltopia on February 23, 2022. The manager informed the SPACE Group members that, in light of the news reports of mounting tension in Ukraine, they weren't going to send any personnel or materials to the country in the foreseeable future. Surprised by this, Stan, Oleg, and Alex searched for reliable information about the situation, hoping that this was merely a precaution. But their hope was extinguished in the early hours of the next morning, February 24, 2022, when the first explosions rang out. Matters escalated quickly, and the team didn't have time to discuss their options or get organized. "After just a few hours, Russian troops were nearing Kyiv and it was clear we needed to close the gyms, gather everything and everyone we could, and head west towards safety," remembers Oleg.

РОЗБУДОВА НОВОЇ МЕРЕЖІ

Кількість скелелазів у мережі тренажерних залів SPACE зростала, і скеледроми стали тісними. Це наштовхнуло Стаса, Олега та Олександра на думку почати обговорювати ідею створення майбутніх залів єдиною командою. Ось так і з'явилась SPACE Group. Олег пригадує: «Ми планували збудувати один, більший за розміром, зал в Києві та один у Дніпрі на сході, де не вистачало сучасного залу для боулдерингу. Ми відвідали з десятків скеледромів та спеціалізованих виставок в Європі, щоб перейняти найновіші ідеї та найкращі бізнес-підходи та практики». Троє підприємців знайшли інвесторів та місце в Києві, яке чудово підходило для двох 20-ти метрових стін для лазіння на швидкість (що мала стати першою в Україні сертифікованою IFSC стінкою для лазіння на швидкість), величезної зони лазіння на трудність та дитячої зони з розважальними стінами. Компанія Walltopia погодилась виготовити та встановити скелелазні площини. Договір оренди мав бути підписаний через два місяці.



Stan vividly recalls the hours following the first attacks: "There were streams of people leaving the country by train and bus, and cars sat on the roadways for days. We packed everyone we could into cars: our families, staff, coaches, their partners, and their pets, and drove towards the western border." However, as they made their way closer to the border, they were troubled to learn that men were forbidden to leave the country. With lumps in their throats, the men said goodbye to their loved ones at the border and headed back to Lviv, where they would be in the far west of Ukraine, distanced from the line of battle, and relatively safe for the time being.

ВИМУШЕНА ЗУПИНКА

Першим приводом для занепокоєння став телефонний дзвінок з фірми Walltopia 23-го лютого 2022 року. Менеджер фірми проінформував членів SPACE Group, що в зв'язку з наростанням напруженості в Україні вони не знають, коли зможуть відправити до країни персонал і матеріали. Здивовані новиною, Стас, Олег і Алекс почали шукати достовірну інформацію про ситуацію в країні, сподіваючись, що це була лише пересторога з боку фірми. Але їхня надія згасла з першими вибухами досвіту наступного ранку 24-го лютого 2022 року. Ситуація швидко загострилася, і в команди вже не було часу обговорити свої наступні дії та організуватися. «Вже за кілька годин російські війська наблизились до Києва, і було зрозуміло, що треба закривати зали, зібрати все і всіх, кого могли, і прямувати на захід у пошуках безпеки», – пригадує Олег.

Once in Lviv, the team opened the doors to TheWall and transformed it into a shelter for people moving west who needed somewhere to stop and regain their strength. The gym could house up to 60 people at any given time. Its mats became beds, the bathrooms provided showers, and the restaurants in the neighborhood prepared meals with food the team supplied. "The first two weeks were chaotic, and the work was endless," Oleg says. "We took turns driving back and forth between Lviv and Kyiv, bringing more people to TheWall, and delivering food and medicine to people while the markets were all shut down in Kyiv. Helping each other was the only way for us to stay alive, and volunteer work hasn't stopped."

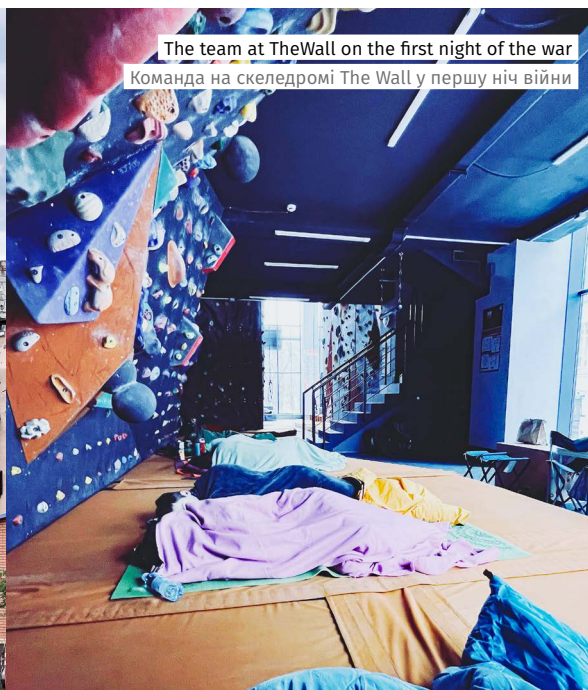
Стас добре пам'ятає години після перших атак: «Скрізь були потоки людей, що залишали країну на потягах і в автобусах, а машини цілими днями стояли на проїжджій частині. Ми розмістили в машинах всіх, кого змогли – наші сім'ї, персонал, тренерів, їхні родини та домашні тварин, і вирушили до західного кордону». Однак, наблизившись до кордону, вони дізнались, що чоловікам було заборонено залишати країну. З важким серцем, чоловіки попрощалися зі своїми рідними на кордоні та вирушили назад до Львова, відносно безпечного міста.

In a mood of profound uncertainty, Ukrainians were forced to make the agonizing choice of staying or going, and unfortunately, not everyone had the means to leave. For Stan, these were the saddest of times: "It wasn't clear if our military was losing control of the country, or if the fight was equal. The media was saturated with propaganda from both Russia and Ukraine. Donations and support flooding in from around the world gave us hope that people hadn't forgotten us and wanted to help. I can honestly say that I was experiencing waves of depression every few days. It comes much less often now, but it still affects me."

У Львові команда перетворила TheWall на прихисток для тих, хто рухався на захід, і кому потрібно було десь зупинитись і перепочити. В будь-який час в залі могли розміститися близько 60 осіб. Його мати стали ліжками, помитися можна було в душі, а сусідні ресторани готували обіди з продуктів, які постачала команда. «Перші два тижні були дуже хаотичні, і роботі не було кінця», – каже Олег. «Ми їздили по черзі туди-сюди між Львовом і Киє-



Destruction near Oleg's house in Irpin
Наслідки російської атаки в Ірпені поруч з будинком Олега



The team at TheWall on the first night of the war
Команда на скеледромі The Wall у першу ніч війни



Delivering food in Kyiv while the Russian army surrounded the city
Доставка продуктів харчування в Київ під час його облоги російською армією



5Finger Holds' booth at the 2022 Vertical Pro in Friedrichshafen, Germany
Зачіпки 5Fingers на Vertical Pro 2022 Friedrichshafen, Germany

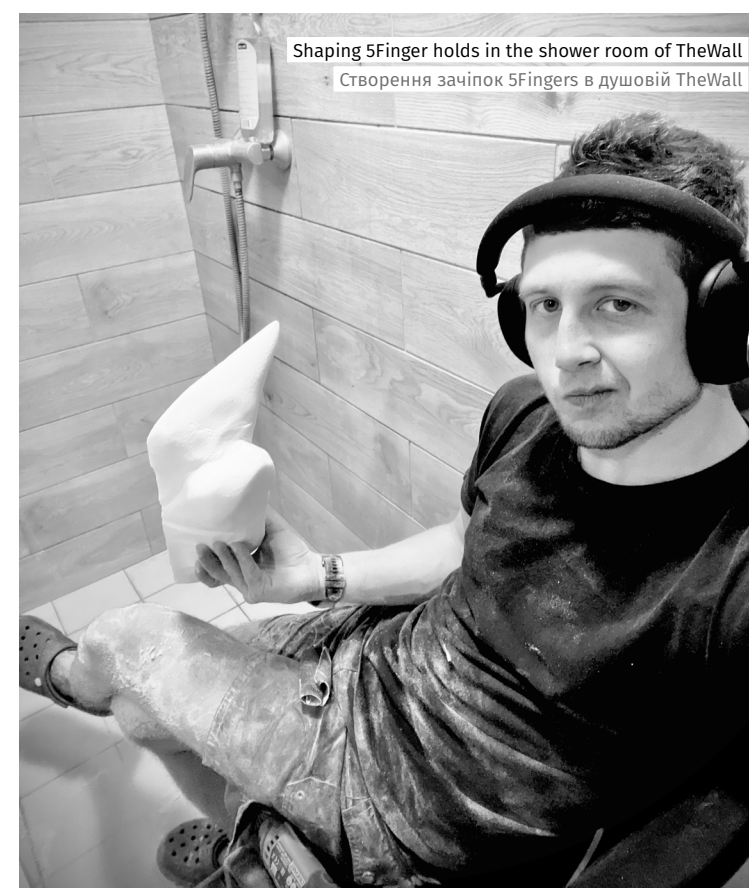
вом, привозили людей на скеледром, годували їх та забезпечували медикаментами, тому що всі магазини в Києві були зачинені. Взаємодопомога була для нас єдиним способом вижити, і навіть зараз волонтерська робота не припиняється».

В атмосфері невизначеності українцям довелося робити нелегкий вибір: залишатися на місці чи їхати світ за очі, але не всі мали можливість поїхати. Для Стаса то були найсумніші часи: «Було незрозуміло, чи наша армія втрачає контроль над країною, чи боротьба йде на рівних. ЗМІ були переповнені пропагандистськими новинами як з Росії, так і з України, що викликало багато плутанини. Пожертвування та підтримка надходили з усього світу, і це давало нам надію, що люди про нас не забули і хочуть допомогти. Я можу відверто сказати, що відчував хвили депресії кожні кілька днів. Зараз це трапляється не так часто, але все ще буває».

НАРОДЖЕННЯ БРЕНДУ ЗАЧІПОК 5FINGERS

Поки київські зали були зачинені, а TheWall активно використовувався як прихисток, всі зосередилися на виживанні та гуманітарній допомозі. Стас, Олег і Олександр почали думати над тим, чим зайнятися і як отримати достатньо прибутку в умовах, що склалися. Нові проекти були нездійсненними, а придбання скелелазних зачіпок за кордоном стало практично неможливим у зв'язку з обмеженням імпорту.

Проте, цій трійці вдалося вигадати життєздатний план. Як з'ясувалося, придбати матеріали та обладнання, необхідні для виробництва зачіпок, було досить легко, а організувати майстерню для їх виробництва можна практично будь-де. Олег скористався своїм досвідом в моделюванні. До того ж створення зачіпок різних форм відволікало від усього, що відбувалось навколо. Невдовзі вони налагодили виробничу лінію зачіпок 5Fingers, і створили більше 100 унікальних форм. Вони не лише вирішили власну проблему покупки зачіпок, а й знайшли спосіб експортувати зачіпки в Європу і далі по світу, почавши просування бренду 5fingers поза межами України до більш широкої, платоспроможної аудиторії.



THE BIRTH OF 5FINGERS CLIMBING HOLDS

During the months when the Kyiv gyms were closed and TheWall served as an active shelter, the primary focus was on survival, community, and humanitarian efforts. Stan, Oleg, and Alex began thinking about how they could maintain productivity and generate enough of an income to survive in the current climate. Construction projects were unfeasible and obtaining climbing holds from abroad had become virtually impossible due to import restrictions.

Nevertheless, the trio formulated a viable plan after working out that they could acquire the materials and equipment needed to shape and produce holds fairly easily, and that they could set up a workshop and produce them from almost anywhere. Oleg had experience in modeling and found that shaping holds was a helpful distraction from everything that was happening around him. Before long, they had set up a production line, operating as 5Fingers, and crafted over 100 unique shapes of polyurethane holds. In addition to resolving their own hold shortage issues, they also found a way to export their holds to Europe and beyond, so began marketing their brand outside of Ukraine to a wider, receptive audience.



LIFE GOES ON

Little by little, those who had sought refuge at TheWall found alternative long-term housing, be it in Lviv, neighboring western cities, or in hospitable locations outside of Ukraine. Those who remained in Lviv needed a safe place to gather, stay active, and find respite, and Ukraine as a whole needed businesses to reopen and revive the economy. In mid-April 2022, Stan, Oleg, and Alex purchased TheWall from its original owners, integrating it into the SPACE network, and reopened its doors to climbers. Boulder SPACE and Climbing SPACE in Kyiv were soon reopened as well, even though the capital still echoed with sounds of gunfire and explosions on a daily basis. "Life here isn't easy, yet we all strive for normality. What could be better than climbing in the gym with friends or in nature instead of [dwelling on] terrible news? People come to us in search of emotional relief, and that's why we keep going," says Stan.

The Kyiv gyms were open, but their operations were extremely limited. A mandated curfew meant that they were only allowed to open for a few hours per day. Plus, they relied solely on donations for entry. In contrast, the city of Lviv was functioning more or less normally and growing economically, and TheWall saw an influx of new visitors. In a strategic move to keep their network alive, Stan, Oleg, and Alex opted to expand TheWall by an additional 470 square meters (approx. 5,060 square feet) of ultra-modern bouldering space, effectively more than doubling the size of the gym. As before, Oleg took care of designing the new walls and volumes. The expansion ultimately proved to be a success, as it attracted new customers from the tech industry looking for a new activity and a sense of community.

Stan recounts a moment from a few days after TheWall's expansion

ЖИТТЯ ПРОДОВЖУЄТЬСЯ

Поступово прихисток TheWall почав спустошуватись. Переселенці знайшли альтернативні, довгострокові помешкання у Львові чи сусідніх західних містечках, або й за межами України. Місцевим мешканцям було потрібне безпечне місця для тренувань та відпочинку, в той час як Україні було необхідно відновлення роботи бізнесу для відродження економіки. В середині квітня 2022 року SPACE Group викупили TheWall у колишніх власників і знову відкрили його для скелелазів. Невдовзі Boulder SPACE і Climbing SPACE у Києві також відкрили свої двері, незважаючи на те, що в столиці все ще лунали звуки пострілів та вибухів. «Життя тут нелегке, проте всі ми прагнемо якоїсь нормальності. Що може бути краще, ніж полазити з друзями в залі або на природі замість того, щоб заціклюватися на жакливіх новинах? Люди приходять до нас у пошуках емоційної розрядки, і тому ми продовжуємо працювати», – каже Стас.

Робота скеледромів в Києві була доволі обмеженою, до того ж вони мусили рано закриватися відповідно до комендантської години. Плата за відвідування на той час була добровільною. На відміну від столиці, у Львові життя було більш-менш нормальним, економіка зростала, і на TheWall приходило багато нових відвідувачів.

Стратегічним кроком для виживання всієї мережі було рішення розширити TheWall, додавши 470 квадратних метрів ультрасучасного простору для боулдерингу, фактично збільшивши розмір залу більш ніж вдвічі. Як і раніше, площини на рельєфи спроектував Олег. В зал прийшли нові люди з високотехнологічної сфери, які шукали нові активності та можливість поспілкуватися.

Стас пригадує випадок через кілька днів після розширення

"PEOPLE COME TO US IN SEARCH OF EMOTIONAL RELIEF, AND THAT'S WHY WE KEEP GOING."

«ЛЮДИ ПРИХОДЯТЬ ДО НАС У ПОШУКАХ ЕМОЦІЙНОЇ РОЗРЯДКИ, І ТОМУ МИ ПРОДОВЖУЄМО ПРАЦЮВАТИ.»



cidences made it possible for us to attend. We faced a lot of logistical problems, and our bus was turned back six times in two days. It felt like our participation was on the verge of collapse, but we were determined to get there. It really was a great experience that filled us with motivation. And it gave me my first opportunity to visit my children after nine months apart." Today, the team is primarily focused on production and ironing out their logistics to allow them to export their products more quickly.

"ALL OUR HARD WORK OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS COULD BE DESTROYED IN AN INSTANT."

«ВСЯ НАША ВАЖКА ПРАЦЯ ОСТАННІХ МІСЯЦІВ МОГЛА БУТИ ЗНИЩЕНА В ОДНУ МИТЬ.»

ЗМАГАННЯ ЗАРАДИ СПРАВИ

Після Національного чемпіонату України, що пройшов у березні 2023 року в Києві, скеледром TheWall у Львові провів перші дитячі змагання із серії трьох благодійних подій, що відбулися за фінансової підтримки SPACE Group. Провідні бренди товарів для активного відпочинку також виступили спонсорами змагань. Більше 150 дітей з усієї України приїхали до Львову на змагання.

COMPS FOR A CAUSE

Following the National Championships held at Climbing SPACE in March 2023, TheWall in Lviv held the Junior Cup, which was the first in a series of three charitable youth competitions. The comps were funded by the SPACE Group and supported by leading outdoor brands. Over 150 children from around Ukraine were in attendance.

Другий дитячий SPACE CUP відбувся в червні на скеледромі Climbing SPACE, де зібралося понад 100 дітей віком від 5 до 12-ти років, включаючи значну кількість переселенців, які були змушені тікати від війни зі сходу та півдня України. Діти з Маріуполя змагались безкоштовно. Кошти, зібрані під час змагань, пішли на купівлю спортивного обладнання для шкіл Чернігова – міста, що постраждало від сильних бомбардувань. Останніми в серії були змагання в Києві в жовтні 2023 року, невдовзі після святкування з нагоди четвертої річниці скеледрому Climbing SPACE.

The second event, the SPACE Cup, was held at Climbing SPACE in June. Over 100 children between the ages of 5 and 12 competed, including a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their families from Mariupol, who tragically lost their homes when Russia invaded in February 2022. All the children from Mariupol competed for free, and the funds raised were used to buy sports equipment for schools in Chernihiv, a city that was heavily bombed and devastated in early 2022. The series will wrap up with a third event in Kyiv in October 2023, shortly after the Ukrainian National Bouldering Cup series and the celebration held to mark Climbing SPACE's fourth anniversary.

Стас, Олег і Олександр отримали статус внутрішньо переміщених осіб у 2014 році, на початку російської окупації Донбасу. За оцінками Агентства ООН у справах біженців, в травні 2023 року в Україні було 5,1 мільйонів внутрішньо переміщених осіб, у порівнянні з 7,1 мільйонів, записаних в квітні 2022 року. Це зменшення кількості переміщених осіб пояснюється значною мірою щедрою підтримкою, яку надають тисячі людей в

was complete: "There was an air-raid alert in the area, so we moved all the visitors to a nearby bomb shelter. I stayed in the gym, and as I looked out through the tall, panoramic windows, I heard a dull explosion and felt the windows vibrate. We later learned that a rocket had hit a critical infrastructure facility nearby. It was frightening then, not because I could feel the explosion, but because I was afraid that all our hard work over the past few months could be destroyed in an instant." The trio are keenly aware that things can change at a moment's notice, and plan everything one day at a time. Each day the gyms are open, the focus is on the present – on supporting each other, providing a place for the community to gather, and expanding climbing's reach to a wider audience.

TheWall: «Ми почули сигнал повітряної тривоги та відправили всіх відвідувачів до найближчого бомбосховища. Я залишився в залі і, коли дивився на вулицю через високі панорамні вікна, почув глухий вибух і відчув як завібрувало вікно. Пізніше ми дізнались, що ракета влучила в об'єкт критичної інфраструктури неподалік. Я злякався, але не через вибух, а через те, що вся наша важка праця останніх місяців могла бути знищена в одну мить». Життя може змінитися будь-якої миті, тож немає сенсу планувати щось заздалегідь. Зали відкриті щодня, в центрі уваги – сьогодні: підтримка один одного, створення умов для того, щоб скеледрази могли зустрічатися під час тренування, та залучення нових людей до цього виду спорту.

In the fall of 2022, Stan, Oleg, and Alex introduced the 5Fingers brand at the Vertical Pro trade show in Germany. Although traveling to the event was rife with challenges, the trio were unfazed. After all, they were accustomed to overcoming setbacks and obstacles, and the potential benefits outweighed the hardships. As Stan says, "Some fabulous coin-

Восени 2022 року Стас, Олег і Олександр представили свій бренд скеледразних зачіпок 5Fingers на виставці скеледразного спорядження Vertical Pro в Німеччині. Хоча подорож на виставку була сповнена труднощів, друзів це не злякало. Вони звикли долати невдачі та перешкоди. За словами Стаса: «Неймовірний збіг обставин дозволив нам відвідати виставку. У нас було багато логістичних проблем, а наш бус розвертали назад на кордоні шість разів за два дні. Здавалося, всі наші зусилля дістатися цієї виставки були марні, але ми були сповнені рішучості та не втрачали надії, що все ж таки якось доїдемо. Це дійсно був чудовий досвід, що додав нам мотивації. Це також дало мені можливість знову побачити дітей після дев'яти місяців розлуки». Сьогодні команда зосередилась головним чином на виробництві та на покращенні логістики, щоб прискорити доставку за кордон.



Stan, Oleg, and Alex were granted the status of internally displaced persons at the onset of the Russian occupation of Donbas in 2014. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, as of May 2023, there were an estimated 5.1 million internally displaced people in Ukraine, a decline from the 7.1 million recorded in April 2022. This reduction is in large part attributed to the generous support of thousands of people around the world who have provided homes, donations, and new opportunities to those affected by the war.

It's important to emphasize that nearly 17 million people require humanitarian assistance in Ukraine this year. Numerous nonprofit organizations are actively raising funds to help those in need. If you'd like to make a donation – no matter how small the amount – you may want to consider these organizations:

United24 - <https://u24.gov.ua>

Prytula Foundation - <https://prytulafoundation.org>

Nova Ukraine - <https://novaukraine.org/>

The SPACE Group collaborates with two foundations. Climb Army (<https://climbarmy.org/>) is a community of Ukrainian climbers supporting fellow climbers who are actively defending their country. JuniorS (<https://www.juniors.org.ua>) focuses on ensuring that children living in areas affected by war have access to physical activities and that their schools have sports equipment. 📌

усьому світі, забезпечуючи тих, хто постраждав від війни, житлом, жертвами та новими можливостями.

Важливо підкреслити, що цього року в Україні майже 17 мільйонів людей потребують гуманітарної допомоги. Численні некомерційні організації активно збирають кошти для допомоги. Якщо ви хочете зробити пожертву – якою б маленькою вона не була – ви можете звернутися до цих організацій:

United24 - <https://u24.gov.ua>

Благодійний Фонд Сергія Притули - <https://prytulafoundation.org>

Nova Ukraine - <https://novaukraine.org/>

SPACE Group співпрацює з двома фондами. Фонд Climb Army (<https://climbarmy.org/>) це спільнота українських скелелазів, що підтримують своїх колег на фронті. Фонд JuniorS (<https://www.juniors.org.ua>) - робить все можливе для того, щоб діти в районах, що постраждали від війни, мали змогу займатися спортом, а їхні школи мали достатньо спортивного обладнання. 📌



STANISLAV (STAN) KLESHNOV

Stan spent his formative years in Makiivka, a city in Donbas. It was the early 1990s, a period marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the post-Soviet states plunged into economic depression, many families like Stan's endured incredible financial hardships and struggled to provide for their children. With limited prospects for work and education, many of Stan's peers turned to the streets, grappling with drug- and alcohol-related problems. In contrast, young Stan was introduced to the world of climbing at the age of 10. The sport proved to be an invaluable outlet, keeping him focused and out of trouble for years to come. "My most cherished memories from that time were traveling to Crimea with my school to climb on real rock, which was a rare opportunity for someone of my age and background," Stan recalls fondly.

Stan remembers how he and his friends were cut off from the world climbing trends at the time. "We were able to get hold of outdated French climbing magazines and posters of Yuji Hirayama and François Legrand, but had no other access to current climbing trends. News about the world champion and the latest climbing accomplishments reached us by word of mouth back then," he says.

Stan showed promise early in his climbing career, and his coaches took notice. He participated in as many competitions as his budget allowed and did well, quickly ranking in the top three of his age group. By 2002, he'd begun to shine on the World Cup circuit, excelling in speed climbing and trying his hardest in lead climbing. The Ukrainian national team, however, didn't have adequate training facilities, and Stan felt that this held him and his teammates back at times. As Stan explains, "The climbing walls in Ukraine were rudimentary and inherited from the Soviet Union, and there was no concept of sport climbing development in Ukraine. There wasn't a commercial market for climbing, and the government's sports policy was outdated and ineffective."

In 2004, Stan relocated to Kyiv to study Sports Pedagogy. His best performance as a competitor came while he was simultaneously juggling a full-time academic schedule and coaching the Ukrainian national climbing team. Stan secured third place at the 2008 World Cup in Moscow, behind Rustam Gelmanov of Russia and Kilian Fischhuber of Austria. "We had a lot to be proud of in that period. Ukrainian athletes Maksym Styenkovyy and Olena Repko were world and European champions in speed and Olga Shalagina was the world champion in bouldering."

As Stan's competitive career was coming to an end in 2015, he knew he wanted to pursue climbing as a business. This vision became a reality when he constructed TheWall Climbing Gym together with several accomplished Ukrainian climbers, including his mentor and European speed climbing champion, Oleksandr Paukaev. Stan relocated to Lviv to construct TheWall and took on the role of operational director upon its completion. He and his wife still reside in Lviv.



СТАНІСЛАВ (СТАС) КЛЕШНОВ

Роки становлення Стаса пройшли у місті Макіївка на Донеччині. Тут він зростав після розпаду Радянського Союзу на початку 1990-х років. Коли пострадянські країни занурилися в економічну депресію, багато сімей, таких як родина Стаса, не могли забезпечувати своїх дітей через фінансові труднощі. З обмеженими перспективами працевлаштування та освіти, багато однолітків Стаса стали шукати пригод на вулицях, вживали наркотики та алкоголь. Проте Стас з десяти років почав лазити. Спорт став для нього безцінною віддушиною, що врятувала від вулиці. «Моїм найдорожчим спогадом того часу була поїздка до Криму, де ми лазили на справжніх скелях, що було дивиною для хлопця мого віку та походження», – з теплотою пригадує Стас.

Стас пам'ятає, що в ті часи він і його друзі були відрізані від світових тенденцій скелелазіння. «Нам вдалося дістати застарілі французькі журнали про скелелазіння та плакати Юджі Хіраями або Франсуа Леграна, але інших джерел інформації про сучасні тенденції скелелазіння у нас не було. Новини про чемпіонів світу та останні досягнення у скелелазінні доходили до нас з вуст в уста», – каже він.

З самого початку Стас подавав великі надії, і його тренери це помітили. Він брав участь в усіх змаганнях, на які мав змогу поїхати, і швидко увійшов до трійки найкращих у своїй віковій категорії. З 2002 року він став непогано виступати на Кубку світу з швидкості, а також намагався досягти певних успіхів у трудності. Проте національна збірна України не мала належної бази для тренувань, і Стас відчував, що це стримувало його прогрес і прогрес його товаришів по команді, та не дозволяло їм повністю розкритися. Стас пояснює: «Скеледроми в Україні були рудиментарними та дісталися нам у спадок від Радянського Союзу. В Україні також не було концепції розвитку спортивного скелелазіння. Не було й комерційного ринку для скелелазіння, а урядова спортивна політика була застарілою та неефективною».

У 2004 році Стас переїхав до Києва, де почав вивчати спортивну педагогіку. Його найкращий період на змаганнях припав на час, коли він поєднував навчання зі своїми тренуваннями та підготовкою національної збірної зі скелелазіння. На Кубку світу 2008 року Стас став третім відразу після Рустама Гельманова з Росії та Кіліана Фішхубера з Австрії. «Нам було чим пишатися у той час. Українські атлети Максим Стенковий став двократним чемпіоном світу в швидкості в 2001 та 2003 роках, а Олена Репко ставала чемпіонкою світу у швидкості три рази поспіль у той же самий час, і в 2005-му Ольга Шалагіна стала чемпіонкою світу з боулдерингу».

Коли у 2015 році Стас перестав виступати на міжнародних змаганнях, він хотів залишитися в скелелазінні як підприємець. Тоді він почав будівництво залу TheWall. У проєкті також взяв участь його наставник і призер Чемпіонату Європи з лазіння на швидкість Олександр Паукаєв. Стас переїхав до Львова, щоб побудувати скеледрум TheWall, а після закінчення будівництва став його директором. Він та його дружина все ще живуть у Львові.



The first bouldering festival at Climbing SPACE held during the war, Sep. 2022
Перший боулдеринговий фестиваль в умовах війни був проведений в Climbing SPACE в вересні 2022 року



Photo: Elodie Saracco

Melissa Rudick (born 1977) has been climbing since her first outing in Red Rocks, Las Vegas in 1995. She has a bachelor's degree in Kinesiology and practiced massage therapy and Structural Integration in private practice and in a clinical setting for over 20 years. For a handful of years she was an IRATA 3 Rope Access Supervisor and Training Manager. Melissa is currently an Associate Editor and Project Manager at Vertical-Life.

Melissa live in Arco, Italy with her husband and their former street-dog, Frankie.

Мелісса Рудік (народилася в 1977 році) почала лазити на Червоних Скелях, Лас Вегас, в 1995 році. Вона отримала бакалавра в кінезіології й практикувала масажну терапію і структуральну інтеграцію приватно і в клініці протягом понад 20 років. Кілька років працювала менеджером та інспектором навчання промислового альпінізму в IRATA 3 Rope Access. Зараз вона – помічник редактора і проджект менеджер в компанії Vertical-Life.

Мелісса живе в Арко, Італія, разом з чоловіком і їхнім раніше безхатнім собакою Френкі.



OLEG POKUSAEV

Hailing from Makiivka in Donbas, Oleg began climbing in 2000 at the age of 10 and participated in his first national competition that same year. He improved quickly, taking second place in the Youth Nationals in 2003 and earning himself a spot on the youth national team. Once a part of the team, Oleg met Stan, who was seven years his senior and who became a team mentor to him, and later a coach and training partner.

Oleg took part in his first World Youth Championship in 2004 in Edinburgh, which he says left an indelible mark on him: *"I had been training on a six-meter-high (approx. 20 feet) vertical wall with hand-made holds. When I came up against that wall and its routes in Edinburgh, I felt like all my training in Ukraine had been for a different sport."* After this eye-opening experience, Oleg recognized that he couldn't rely on competitive climbing alone. He dedicated himself to his studies and graduated with honors with a degree in automotive engineering, all the while continuing to train and compete with the national team.

At the onset of the Russian occupation of Donbas in 2014, Oleg and his wife made the difficult choice to leave their home in Donetsk and start anew in Kyiv. While this wasn't their initial plan, deteriorating circumstances compelled them to act swiftly. With each passing day, more roads leading away from Donbas were being destroyed, increasing the risk of them becoming trapped if they didn't make their move.

The couple settled in Irpin, near Kyiv. *"I had started learning CAD systems and 3D modeling as a hobby back in Donetsk and picked this up again in Kyiv. I learned about the software CATIA V5, which is regularly used by airplane and automotive companies like Boeing and BMW. When a job opportunity arose at Boeing's new design center, my skills paid off. I was selected for an interview, hired as a stress engineer, and got to take part in the process of designing an incredible new airplane,"* Oleg explains.

Oleg had always been passionate about routesetting, which he did on the side, often to help him prepare for competitions. Once in Kyiv, he began learning how to set routes for a wider range of climbers by observing what other setters in Europe and the US were doing and recreating the most interesting problems. His skills in routesetting, design, and 3D modeling also proved to be invaluable during his efforts to build Climbing SPACE in 2019 as well as subsequent gyms and additions. Oleg continues to compete on a national level, becoming the national vice-champion in bouldering in 2016 and 2017 and finishing third in nationals over the past two years.

OLEG ПОКУСАЄВ

Родом з міста Макіївка на Донбасі, Олег почав займатися скелелазінням у віці десяти років у 2000 році і того ж року взяв участь у своїх перших національних змаганнях. Він швидко прогресував і посів друге місце на Молодіжному чемпіонаті України 2003 року і виборов собі місце в національній молодіжній збірній. Стас, який був старший за нього на сім років, став його наставником, а пізніше тренером і партнером на тренуваннях.

Олег взяв участь у своєму першому Молодіжному чемпіонаті світу у 2004 році в Единбурзі. Ця подія справила на нього величезне враження. *«Я тренувався на шестиметровій вертикальній стіні з саморобними зачіпками. Коли я побачив стенд і маршрути в Единбурзі, то мені здалося, наче в Україні я весь час тренувався у якомусь іншому виді спорту»*, – каже Олег. У нього наче очі відкрилися, і Олег зрозумів, що з існуючою тренувальною базою не може розраховувати на те, щоб бути лише професійним спортсменом. Він зосередився на навчанні, яке закінчив з відзнакою в галузі автомобільної інженерії. Весь цей час він продовжував тренуватися та виступати в складі національної збірної.

У 2014 році, на початку російської окупації Донбасу, Олег та його дружина зробили нелегкий вибір – вони залишили свій дім в Макіївці та почали все заново в Києві. Їм довелося діяти швидко. З кожним днем все менше безпечних шляхів залишалось для виїзду, і вони ризикували залишитись без можливості виїхати.

Подружжя оселилося в Ірпені біля Києва. *«Ще в Донецьку я почав вивчати системи CAD і 3D-моделювання як хобі й знову повернувся до цього в Києві. Я опанував CATIA V5, якою користуються авіаційні та автомобільні компанії, такі як Boeing та BMW. Коли з'явилась можливість працевлаштування в новому проектному центрі компанії Boeing, мої навички знадобились. Мене відібрали для співбесіди, найняли на посаду інженера з міцності, і я зміг взяти участь у створенні нового чудового літака»*, – пояснює Олег.

Олег завжди захоплювався рутсетингом, хоча й робив це нерегулярно, частіше для підготовки до змагань. У Києві він почав вчитися постановці маршрутів для різного рівня лазіння, слідкуючи, що роблять іноземні рутсетери в Європі та Сполучених Штатах, намагаючись відтворити найцікавіші проблеми та рухи. Його навички в постановці боулдерів, проектуванні та 3D-моделюванні стали в нагоді при будівництві скеледрому Climbing SPACE у 2019 році, а також наступних скеледромів і виготовленні обладнання. Олег продовжує виступати на національному рівні, був віце-чемпіоном з боулдерингу в 2016 і 2017 роках, і останні два роки поспіль посідав третє місце.



OLEKSANDR (ALEX) HOROBTSOV

Alex grew up in the city of Torez (formally renamed Chystiakove in 2016) in Donbas. He'd always felt at home in the mountains, leading him to venture into alpinism at the age of 18, first in Crimea and then later in the Caucasus Mountains of Southern Russia. He always preferred wandering off the beaten path and exploring in winter when the experience of being in nature is unspoiled by crowds of people. He later became certified as a mountain guide and began leading his own tours. Alex moved to Makiivka to pursue his studies in civil engineering and trained at the local gym in his free time in preparation for his alpine adventures. It was there that he met and began climbing with Oleg.

Like Oleg, Alex left Donbas at the outset of the Russian occupation in 2014. He was resolute in the belief that leaving his occupied region was essential for him to lead a life of freedom as a Ukrainian. Having left his home, work, and climbing partners behind, Alex built his life back up from scratch in Kyiv, taking up new civilian building projects and joining the local climbing community.

In 2018, Alex poured all of his time and energy into constructing Climbing SPACE alongside his friend Oleg. It was the perfect endeavor for two climbers with strong engineering skills, as it gave them the chance to revolutionize their community's experience of climbing.



ОЛЕКСАНДР (АЛЕКС) ГОРОБЦОВ

Олександр виріс в місті Торез (перейменоване на Чистякове в 2016 році) на Донбасі. Він завжди відчував себе в горах як вдома, що привело його у віці 18 років до занять альпінізмом спочатку в Криму, а потім на Кавказі. Він завжди вважав за краще досліджувати неходжені стежки або відвідувати гори взимку, коли там менше людей. Пізніше він отримав кваліфікацію гірського гίδα та почав водити групи. Олександр перебрався до Макіївки вчитися на інженера-будівельника та тренувався у вільний час на місцевому скеледромі. Саме там він зустрів Олега, і вони стали тренуватися разом.

Як і Олег, Олександр залишив Донбас в 2014 році на початку російської окупації. Він був переконаний у необхідності їхати з окупованого регіону, щоб мати можливість бути вільним українцем. Олександр залишив дім та роботу і почав будувати своє життя у Києві з нуля, взявшись за нові будівельні проекти та приєднавшись до місцевої скелелазної спільноти.

В 2018 році Олександр разом із Олегом вклали весь свій час і енергію в будівництво скеледрому Climbing SPACE. це було ідеальним починанням для двох скелелазів зі значним інженерним досвідом, оскільки дало їм можливість збудувати перші в Україні скеледроми світового рівня.



GYM SPOTLIGHT

GASWERK

THREE DECADES OF INNOVATION IN INDOOR CLIMBING

AN INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER PATRICK HILBER, BY MELISSA RUDICK (byline p.34)

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY VLADEK ZUMR

INNOVATION IM INDOORKLETTERN SEIT DREI JAHRZEHNEN

EIN INTERVIEW MIT GRÜNDER PATRICK HILBER, VON MELISSA RUDICK (Autorenzeile p.34)

FOTOS VON VLADEK ZUMR



The evolution of Gaswerk: a shift from fueling Zurich to fueling passion for climbing
Die Entwicklung des Gaswerks: Vom Versorger Zürichs zum Umsorger für Kletterer

◆ In the autumn of 1994, Patrick Hilber and his friends got to work building Kletterzentrum Gaswerk Schlieren in Zurich, Switzerland with their own hands. It was the pioneering era of indoor climbing, and they undertook every aspect of the project themselves, from design and planning to construction. What began as a modest, seven-month-long DIY venture gradually evolved into a colossal multi-hall facility.

The climbing center is housed in a century-old stone structure preserved as a cultural heritage site. The building was once home to Gaswerk Schlieren, a gas works in Zurich, where coal was processed to provide cooking gas and fuel to light the city. As an homage to the gym's industrial past, the Kletterzentrum Gaswerk logo features a cogwheel symbolizing the transmission of energy, precision, and teamwork. In the center of the wheel is a tribute to the late sport climbing pioneer Wolfgang Güllich.

Today, the Gaswerk enterprise has three locations along Lake Zurich – Schlieren, Greifensee, and Wädenswil. All three gyms feature a collection of oversized contemporary indoor and outdoor photos, taken and arranged by Vladek Zumr, a professional photographer and Gaswerk's Head of Marketing. These photos aim to showcase the inherent beauty of climbing both indoors and outdoors, taking visitors on a journey through time by illustrating the continuous evolution of indoor climbing.

Gaswerk's founder Patrick and his team know a thing or two about hard work, accomplishing goals, and catering to the everyday climber. We had the privilege of speaking with Patrick and hearing a firsthand, in-depth account of what it took to establish and build the Gaswerk gyms and how, in the process, a team and community were created who are essential in keeping the cogwheel turning. As you read on, you'll discover how a passion for climbing has consistently been at the forefront of all they have achieved.

“OUR COMPANY CULTURE IS BUILT ON COLLABORATION AND A GREAT APPRECIATION FOR EACH OTHER – AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SUSTAINABLE.”

„UNSERE UNTERNEHMENSKULTUR BASIERT AUF DEM MITEINANDER UND GEGENSEITIGER WERTSCHÄTZUNG – UND DAS MACHT DAS GASWERK NACHHALTIG.“

MR: The work that you and your team did to design and build the first of the Gaswerk climbing centers was revolutionary. Starting with Gaswerk Schlieren, walk us through how you built the five halls from 1994 to 1998.

Patrick: To start with, finding a tall space in the Zurich area was challenging. It was crucial that the facility could be expanded to accommodate any future success and growth in demand. Securing funding was also difficult. Together with two colleagues from the ASVZ (Academic Sports Association Zurich), I founded a joint-stock company (Kletterzentrum Gaswerk AG) with a minimum capital of CHF 100,000 (approx. EUR 126,000 in today's money). The ASVZ provided around CHF 380,000 (approx. EUR 477,000 in today's money) of financing, and the joint-stock company entered into a leasing agreement to repay these costs with interest. That had to be enough for the time being, as the construction costs had to fall within our budget.

◆ Im Herbst 1994 begann Patrick Hilber mit einer Handvoll Freunden, in Zürich das Kletterzentrum Gaswerk Schlieren zu errichten – Marke Eigenbau. Es war die Pionierzeit des Indoorkletterns und alles wurde selbst gemacht: vom Design über die Planung bis hin zu den Bauarbeiten. Aus einem schlichten Heimwerkerprojekt von sieben Monaten entstand schließlich eine riesige Kletteranlage mit mehreren Hallen.

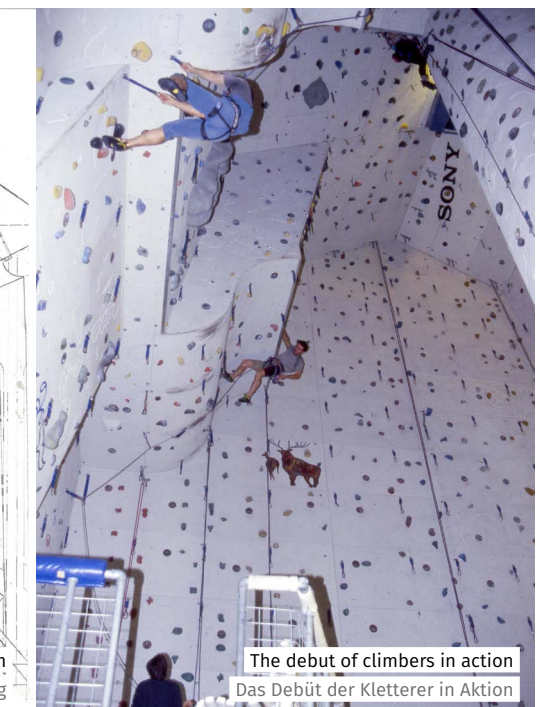
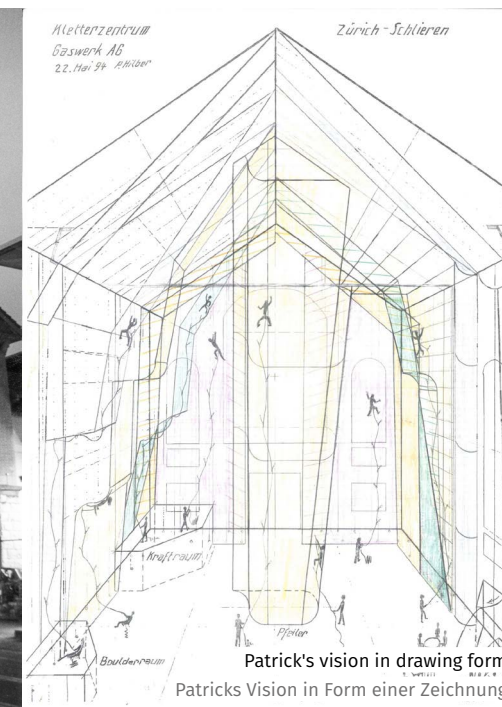
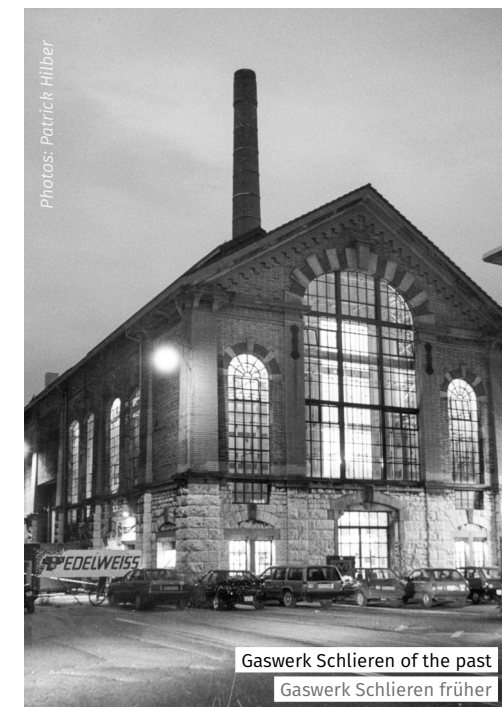
Das denkmalgeschützte Gebäude aus Steinmauern gehörte einmal zum Gaswerk Schlieren, in dem lange Steinkohle vergast wurde, um die Straßen der Stadt beleuchten und die Zürcher Haushalte mit Kochgas zu versorgen. Das Zahnrad im Logo der Kletterhalle – ein Symbol für Schweizer Präzision, Kraftübertragung und Teamgeist – erinnert noch heute an die industrielle Vergangenheit des Gebäudes. Der Kletterer in der Mitte ist eine Hommage an den Kletterpionier Wolfgang Güllich.

Inzwischen ist Gaswerk an drei Standorten rund um den Zürichsee vertreten: Schlieren, Greifensee und Wädenswil. Übergroße Indoor- und Outdoor-Fotografien von Vladek Zumr, Fotograf und Marketingchef von Gaswerk, sollen in jeder Halle die natürliche Schönheit zeigen, die dem Klettern innewohnt – egal ob in der Halle oder draußen geklettert wird. Die bildliche Zeitreise veranschaulicht, wie sehr sich das Hallenklettern im Laufe der Jahre verändert hat.

Gründer Patrick Hilber und sein Team können ein Lied davon singen, was es bedeutet, von früh bis spät zu rackern, fokussiert auf Ziele hinzuarbeiten und echte Kundennähe zu leben. Im Interview beschreibt er, welche Steine es auf dem Weg zur Eröffnung der Kletterzentren zu beseitigen gab – und wie dabei ein Team und eine Community entstanden, die noch heute entscheidend dazu beitragen, das (Gaswerk-)Zahnrad am Laufen zu halten. Was im Gespräch deutlich wird: Herzstück ihres Erfolgs war schon immer die Leidenschaft fürs Klettern.

MR: Mit der Gestaltung und dem Bau des ersten Gaswerk-Kletterzentrums hast du mit deinem Team absolutes Neuland betreten. Wie sind die fünf Anlagen zwischen 1994 und 1998 entstanden, angefangen mit der Halle in Schlieren?

Patrick: Eine hohe Halle im Gebiet von Zürich zu finden war schwierig. Wichtig war, dass sie erweiterbar sein musste, damit – falls Erfolg eintreten würde und die Nachfrage groß wäre – wir hätten vergrößern können. Die Finanzierung war auch schwierig. Gemeinsam mit zwei Kollegen vom ASVZ (Akademischer Sportverband Zürich) gründete ich eine Aktiengesellschaft (Kletterzentrum Gaswerk AG) mit einem Mindestkapital von 100.000 CHF (heute umgerechnet rund 126.000 EUR). Ein Betrag von ungefähr 380 000 CHF (heute umgerechnet rund 477.000 EUR) wurde vom ASVZ finanziert und die Aktiengesellschaft konnte einen Leasingvertrag eingehen, um diese Kosten zu verzinsen und zurückzahlen. Das musste vorerst genügen, denn bei den Baukosten mussten wir unbedingt im Budget bleiben.



Hall 1

The original hall had roughly 1,100 square meters (approx. 11,840 square feet) of climbing area. Since our historic Gaswerk building was protected as a cultural heritage site, we couldn't damage the old, thick, stone walls and could only install an extremely limited number of anchors. My vision was to encompass the entire facility with climbing walls running all the way up to the roof ridge. To achieve this, we decided to build a dome-like substructure within the building, similar to a church, to ensure that every surface would be climbable (see images above). For the substructure, I decided to apply a scaffolding tube technique commonly used in construction. This provided flexibility and the possibility of future modifications if necessary. At that time, the first climbing walls with modular holds that could be removed, altered, and reset were beginning to emerge. Previously, most walls were like Klettergarten Grodoonia in Rümlang, Switzerland, which was a concrete climbing facility where the holds were cast into the wall during production. These concrete climbing walls of the time didn't meet our standards. Newer companies like Pyramide and Entre-prises could potentially have installed modern, versatile climbing walls, but we couldn't afford them. On top of that, they didn't fit my vision for Gaswerk.

We made use of the experience we had gained from the do-it-yourself construction of smaller climbing walls at the University of Zurich and set up an assembly line in an adjacent hall where, together with some students, we processed and finished triple-layer panels with a thickness of 27 millimeters (approx. 1 inch) measuring 2 x 5 meters (approx. 6.6 x 16.4 feet). The work steps included cutting, drilling, milling structures, painting, sanding, and screwing in T-nuts. We blended paint and sand to create a climbing surface that resembled modern concrete without being slippery, and the surface's convex shape gave it a self-cleaning property. Today, this method is the prevailing standard in climbing surface construction.

At the same time as constructing the walls, we installed the floor anchors and assembled the scaffolding tubes I had obtained for a favorable price from the second-hand market. Back then, the scaffolding industry was undergoing changes and was replacing elaborate scaffolding systems with equipment that was quick and easy to set up. I remember buying about 5 kilometers (approx. 3 miles) of 5-meter

Halle 1

Halle 1 bekam am Anfang eine Kletterfläche von rund 1.100 Quadratmetern. Unser historisches Gaswerk-Gebäude stand unter Denkmalschutz, sodass man die alten – zwar dicken, aber nicht betonierten – Steinmauern nicht beschädigen und nur äußerst wenige Dübel setzen durfte. Mir schwebte vor, innen die ganze Anlage mit Kletterwänden bis zum Dachfirst einzuschalen. Dazu bauten wir eine kuppelartige Hinterkonstruktion innerhalb des Gebäudes, ähnlich wie in einer Kirche, damit am Ende jede Fläche beklettert werden konnte (siehe Bilder oben). Für die Hinterkonstruktion entschied ich mich, eine Gerüstrohrtechnik einzusetzen, wie man sie vom Bau her kennt. Damit ist man flexibel und man könnte auch umbauen, falls dies zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt nötig wäre. Damals kamen die ersten Kletterwände auf, bei denen man die Griffe aufschrauben und die Routen verändern konnte. Davor sahen die meisten Kletterwände wie im Grodoonia in Rümlang aus, eine Betonkletteranlage mit fix eingegossenen Griffen. Diese Kletterwände aus Beton waren einfach nicht mehr zeitgemäß. Theoretisch hätten neue Unternehmen wie Pyramide und Entre-prises uns mit modernen und flexiblen Kletterwänden ausrüsten können – aber das konnten wir uns nicht leisten. Außerdem schwebte mir für das Gaswerk etwas anderes vor.

An der Hochschule hatten wir bereits Erfahrung mit dem Eigenbau von kleineren Kletterwänden gesammelt. Dieses Knowhow nutzten wir. In einer Halle nebenan, wo wir eine Montagestraße einrichteten, bearbeiteten und veredelten wir mit einigen Studierenden 27mm-Dreischichtplatten von 2 x 5 Metern. Die wichtigsten Arbeitsschritte waren Zuschneiden, Bohren, Strukturen Fräsen, Malen, Besanden und Flanschmuttern Einschrauben. Für die Kletterflächen vermischten wir Sand mit Farbe. Das Gemisch ähnelte modernem Beton, war aber nicht rutschig, und durch die gewölbte Form hatten wir eine selbstreinigende Fläche. Heute ist diese Methode Standard.

Parallel haben wir am Boden die Bodenverankerungen für die Gerüstrohre verteilt und mit der Montage der Rohre begonnen, die ich günstig auf dem Gebrauchtmärkte beschaffen konnte. Denn der Gerüstbau war im Umbruch: Die aufwendige Montage eines Baugerüsts wurde gerade abgelöst von Gerüstbausystemen, die wesentlich schneller und einfacher zu montieren waren. Ich erinnere mich, ca. 5 Kilometer 5-Meter-Rohre eingekauft zu haben und Tausende von Rohrschellen

(approx. 16.4 feet) tubes and thousands of tube couplers to act as connecting elements. We used heavy-duty brackets to mount beams measuring 10 x 10 centimeters (approx. 4 x 4 inches) between the scaffolding tubes and the climbing panels. We then screwed the climbing surfaces to these beams as well as at the anchors to directly transfer the force to the scaffolding.

When we had the system tested by the inspection association TÜV ten years later, we were surprised at how significantly over-engineered the structure was. The advantage of this was that there was little risk of any part collapsing during modification work. It was important to us for our walls to include all types of climbing, with various angles ranging from slab, vertical, and overhanging to even horizontal. We also incorporated curves, a tower, galleries, corners, and pillar edges. We needed top rope routes for training and we wanted to be able to train ourselves at all difficulty levels. From the outset, we also had a bistro and gear shop at reception and offered climbing courses.

We also built volumes, cast thousands of climbing holds, and did our best to maintain the highest production standards. This explains why our original climbing walls are still in use after nearly 30 years. That being said, our homemade holds were not the best; there were issues with the chemistry, and many of them broke or were slippery. Today, we have a vast universe of hold brands, series, and options – a paradise for climbers that was completely unimaginable when we first started.

As well as being the founder and managing director, I was the only operational employee. At the end of each night, I had to plan the next day, from shopping and organizing tools to staff scheduling and preparing for a spectacular opening. Throughout the process, I was regularly supported by mountain guides who came and went, depending on the time they had available. We worked day and night to build Hall 1. Patricia, my wife, spent plenty of late nights preparing food for us all and assisting in any way she could. Other than that, she didn't see much of me during that time. I promised her that after five years as entrepreneurs, things would get better and the worst would be behind us. I had to prove to myself and my colleagues that it would work. But today, after 30 years and many annual expansions, we're still at it and there is no end in sight.

At the opening of Hall 1, there were so many climbers that we could hardly move among the crowd! We were literally overwhelmed by the influx of climbers, so we started negotiations to rent additional halls within the building.

Hall 2
Construction of Hall 2 began in the winter of 1995 and, once it was finished, we thought, "Okay, now the facility is complete." We had built two large climbing walls that were hydraulically adjustable, ranging from vertical to mega steep! One

als Verbindungselemente. Zwischen dem Gerüstrohr und den Kletterplatten montierten wir 10x10cm-Balken mit Schwerlastbügel. Auf diese Balken schraubten wir die Kletterflächen hinauf und bei den Haken schraubten wir sie durch die Holzbalken hindurch, um die Kraft direkt ins Gerüst zu leiten.

Als wir zehn Jahre später den TÜV die Anlage testen ließen, waren wir überrascht, wie stark überdimensioniert die Statik ausgelegt war. Der Vorteil war, dass bei einem Umbau wenig Gefahr bestand, dass ein Teil einstürzen könnte. Mir war es wichtig, dass alle Arten der Kletterei vorkommen: verschiedene Neigungen von flach, vertikal bis überhängend und sogar horizontal. Hinzu kamen auch Rundungen, ein Turm, Galerien, Verschneidungen und Pfeilerkanten. Wir brauchten Top-Rope-Routen für die Ausbildung und wollten selber in allen Schwierigkeitsgraden trainieren können. Von Anfang an hatten wir am Empfang auch ein Bistro, Sportartikelverkauf und Kletterkurse.

Wir haben auch Volumen gebaut und Tausende Griffe selber gegossen. Unsere Qualitätsansprüche waren enorm, was auch erklärt, warum die Kletterwände heute noch – nach bald dreißig Jahren – immer noch genutzt werden. Die Griffe Marke Eigenbau waren allerdings nicht der Hit. Die Chemie bereitete Probleme, viel brachen oder waren rutschig. Heute ist es ein Paradies, es gibt ein ganzes Universum an Griffmarken, Serien und Auswahl – damals unvorstellbar!

Ich persönlich war nicht nur Gründer und Geschäftsführer, sondern auch der einzige operativ Angestellte. Jede Nacht musste ich die nächsten Schritte planen: einkaufen, Werkzeug organisieren, Personal planen und nicht zuletzt eine fulminante Eröffnung vorbereiten. Während des gesamten Prozesses wurde ich regelmäßig von Bergführern unterstützt, die – je nachdem, wie viel Zeit sie hatten – kamen und gingen. Wir arbeiteten Tag und Nacht, um die Halle 1 fertig zu bekommen. Meine Frau Patricia verbrachte viele Abende damit, Essen für uns vorzubereiten, und mir wo sie nur konnte zu helfen. Ansonsten hat sie mich in der Zeit nur wenig zu Gesicht bekommen. Ich hatte ihr versprochen, dass es nach fünf Jahren als Unternehmer besser wird und das Größte hinter uns liegen sollte. Ich musste mir und den Kollegen beweisen, dass es funktioniert. Heute, nach dreißig Jahren, schauen wir auf jährliche Erweiterungsetappen zurück, aber ein Ende ist nicht in Sicht.

Bei der Eröffnung der Halle 1 waren so viele Kletter:innen da, dass wir uns in der Menge kaum bewegen konnten! Wir wurden regelrecht überrannt von dem allabendlichen Ansturm. So begannen wir Verhandlungen zu führen, um weitere Hallen im Gebäude zu mieten.

Halle 2
Bereits im Winter 1995 konnten wir mit dem Bau der Halle 2 beginnen. Als die fertig war, dachten wir: „So, jetzt ist die Anlage komplett.“ Ich hatte zwei große Kletterwände gebaut, die hydraulisch verstellbar waren, von flach bis megasteil! Eine Wand war mit Doka-Trägern schlank gebaut, so dass man auf der Vorder- wie auch auf der Rückseite klettern konnte. Die andere Wand war auf ei-



Patrick's architectural model of the Schlieren center
Patrick's Architekturmodell von Schlieren

Transferring a vision into reality
Umsetzung der Vision in die Realität

Grand opening of Hall 3 in 1997
Einweihung der Halle 3 im Jahr 1997

wall was built with a slim design, allowing climbers to climb on both the front and back sides. The other wall was constructed on a frame made from storage racks welded together using climbing panels from Reality Wall, which created a cast of a real rock texture from sandstone. It was a genuine innovation at the time, but unfortunately, the system was never further developed. We opened Hall 2 with a climbing show featuring legendary world champion François Legrand and bouldering king Fred Nicole. Our climbing shows were inspiring back then.

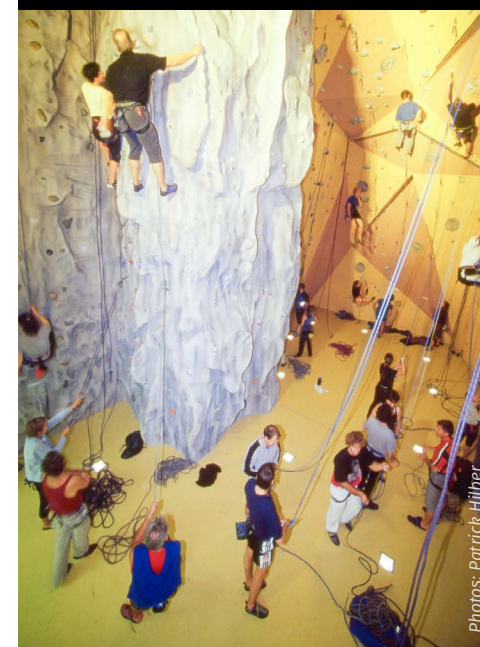
Hall 3
Just two years later, our customer base had grown again and we felt the need to add yet another hall. Hall 3 is as big as Halls 1 and 2 combined, reaching an impressive 17 meters (approx. 56 feet) in height. After I had built the model as I did for the other two halls, we decided not to construct it ourselves anymore. Running the climbing gyms, maintaining training programs, and catering to everything our customers need is a lot of work. So, in 1997, we joined forces with wall manufacturing company Sintroc from Arco, Italy, and have been trading partners ever since. With the additional height offered by Hall 3, we now had an opportunity to fully explore lead climbing. We gave the hall a centerpiece featuring two competition walls with up to 13 meters (approx. 43 feet) of overhang. We celebrated Hall 3's opening with a climbing festival and showcases and have since hosted two World Cup events on its walls!

Halls 4 and 5
Hardly a year had passed before we planned and built Hall 4, along with a separate bouldering area (Hall 5). By this point, we were said to be among the largest climbing gyms in the world. Our ambition had always been to keep up with demand and remain innovative pioneers. In the past, I'd visited plenty of gyms where parties were often lined up, waiting to climb. Climbing should always convey freedom and fun, and that's hardly possible when you're squeezed together like sardines. As the sport continues to grow and demand increases, we haven't ruled out expanding Schlieren further beyond its 3,500 square meters (approx. 37,674 square feet) of climbing space. That said, we never aimed to be the largest climbing gym; our climbing areas simply grew naturally. Our goal was and still is to be among the leading climbing centers in the world. But of course, bigger is better!

nem Rahmen aufgebaut, der aus Hochregallagern zusammengeschweißt wurde. Hier verbauten wir Kletterpaneele von Reality Wall. Der Abguss einer Echtfelsstruktur aus Sandstein war damals eine echte Innovation. Leider wurde das System aber nie weiterentwickelt. Zur Eröffnung der Halle 2 hatten wir ein Showklettern mit dem mehrfachen Weltmeister François Legrand und dem Boulderkönig Fred Nicole organisiert. Unsere Klettershows waren legendär.

Halle 3
Zwei Jahre später hatte sich unser Kundenstamm nochmal vergrößert und wir stellten fest, dass wir noch eine weitere Halle brauchen. Die Halle 3 war so groß wie Halle 1 und 2 zusammen, mit einer stolzen Höhe von rund 17 Metern. Nachdem ich wie immer ein Modell gebaut hatte, entschieden wir uns jedoch, nicht mehr selber zu bauen. Eine Kletterhalle zu führen macht viel Arbeit, wenn man auch ein Kurswesen aufrechterhalten möchte und alle Kundenbedürfnisse abdecken will. So haben wir uns 1997 mit der Firma Sintroc aus Arco (Italien) zusammengetan, deren Handelspartner wir seitdem sind. Mit der zusätzlichen Höhe der Halle 3 konnten wir für das Schwierigkeitsklettern aus dem Vollen schöpfen. Wir unterteilten die ganze Halle so, dass das Kernstück die beiden Wettkampfwände mit bis zu 13 Metern überhängender Wand bildeten. Auch hier eröffneten wir medienwirksam mit einem Kletterfest und Showklettern. An den Wänden der Halle 3 konnten wir zweimal sogar einen Weltcup durchführen!

Hall 4: The vintage charm of climbing is still a beloved choice // Halle 4: Der alt-ehrwürdige Charme von diesem Bereich ist immer noch sehr beliebt



Hallen 4 und 5
Kaum war ein Jahr vergangen, planten und bauten wir die Halle 4 plus einen Boulder-raum (Halle 5). Zu dem Zeitpunkt hieß es, dass wir zu den größten Kletterhallen der Welt gehörten. Unser Anspruch war immer, mit der Nachfrage mithalten zu können und ein Pionier zu bleiben, der innovativ und voller Tatendrang ist. Bei meinen Besuchen anderer Kletterhallen hatte ich häufig gesehen, wie viele Seilschaften in Reihen anstehen und warten mussten, um klettern zu können. Klettern sollte schon auch die Freiheit und den Spaß des Freizeitvergnügens vermitteln können – und das geht wohl kaum, wenn man wie in einer Sardinenbüchse eingepfercht ist. Da sich der Klettersport weiterhin positiv entwickelt und die Nachfrage steigt, ist ein weiterer Ausbau von Schlieren nicht auszuschließen. Heute sind wir da mit einer Kletter-

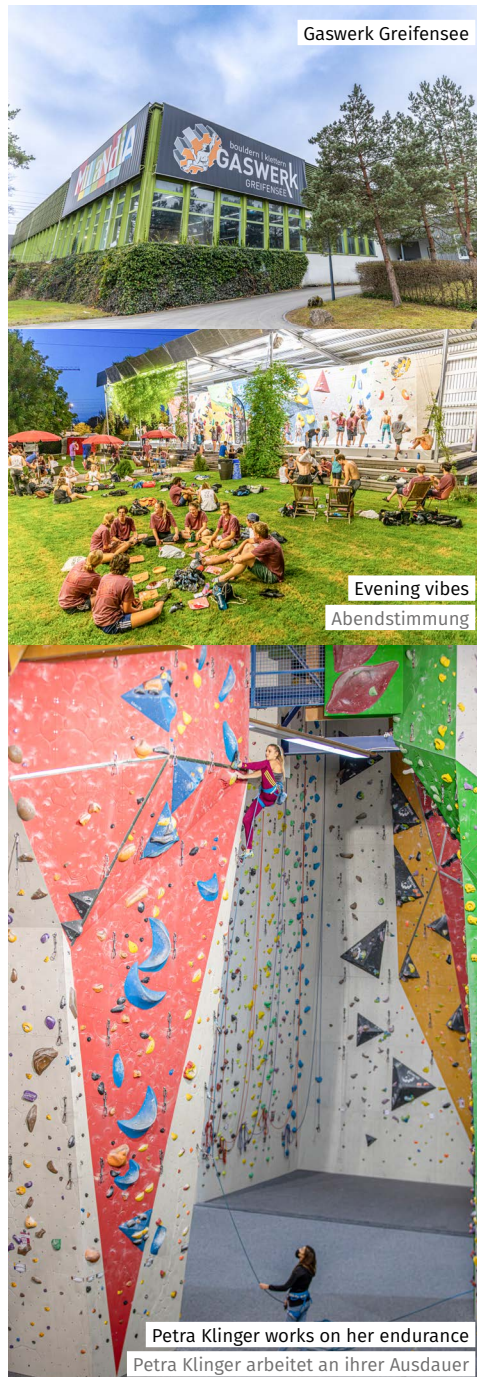
MR: Your Greifensee location was built nearly 13 years after the Schlieren location first opened. How did plans for a second location come about?

Patrick: Our aim was to offer indoor climbing in the Zurich Oberland region, as there was nothing available here at the time, except for a dormant project in nearby Uster. In 2006, I was invited to visit the impressive Milandia sports and adventure park facility in Greifensee and was pleasantly surprised by its generous dimensions, integration within the entire sports and adventure park, ample parking spaces, and restaurant. The hall was an impressive 2,400 square meters (approx. 25,833 square feet) and also boasted outdoor space and even the shared use of a natural pool. The only constraint was its height of 13 to 14 meters (approx. 43 to 46 feet) and we were unable to negotiate an increase to this when we leased the building. Nonetheless, the facility remains popular to this day due to its uniqueness. It caters to diverse needs and retains a family-friendly atmosphere, while allowing for serious bouldering and rope climbing across all skill levels. The speed at which we got the facility up and running was nothing short of legendary. Together with Sintroc, we rapidly constructed and inaugurated the venue, which opened its doors in the fall of 2007 – less than a year after the initial negotiations had begun.

A highlight at Greifensee was the 2009 International Military Climbing Championship – a major event involving over 40 nations, where all the participants represented their respective national teams. Equally memorable was the opening of a new outdoor area alongside a Boulder World Cup in May 2010. The men's event was won by Kilian Fischhuber, the current Austrian National Coach and five-time overall World Cup winner, and the women's event by Alex Johnson of the USA, a two-time World Cup gold medalist. The men's event also introduced the emerging talent of Adam Ondra, who secured second place.

MR: Tell us about your newest and largest facility, Gaswerk Wädenswil.

Patrick: Our newest, most state-of-the-art facility opened in the spring of 2021 and offers 6,400 square meters (approx. 68,889 square feet) of climbing space that truly makes every climber's heart beat faster. It's definitely one of the most impressive and largest facilities around. All three Olympic climbing disciplines are present under one roof. Inside, there are over 400 routes reaching heights of up to 17 meters (approx. 62 feet) and 200 boulder problems spread across two floors. Outdoors, there are over 100 routes in three different orientations – south, west, and north – to ensure that the walls remain climbable for around eight months of each year. Not only are there a lot of routes, but there's a lot of space – 1.40 meters (approx. 4.6 feet) – between each route, so they don't come into contact with each other as much.



fläche von über 3.500 Quadratmetern präsent. Unser Ziel war es aber nie, die größte Kletterhalle zu sein. Vielmehr sind wir einfach natürlich gewachsen. Unser Anspruch war und ist, zu den führenden Kletterzentren der Welt zu gehören. Aber klar: Bigger is better!

MR: Die Halle in Greifensee entstand fast 13 Jahre nach der Eröffnung von Schlieren. Wie kam es zu dem Plan, einen zweiten Standort zu eröffnen?

Patrick: Ganz klar: Wir wollten das Hallenklettern ins Zürcher Oberland bringen. Außer einem stillgelegten Projekt im nahegelegenen Uster hatte die Region damals nichts in der Art zu bieten. 2006 wurde ich eingeladen, den gigantischen Milandia Sport- und Erlebnis-park in Greifensee zu besuchen. Die riesigen Dimensionen, das enge Zusammenspiel von Sport und Erlebnis, die großzügigen Parkplätze und das Restaurant haben mich damals sehr beeindruckt. Neben der 2.400 Quadratmeter großen Halle gab es auch einen Outdoor-Bereich und sogar einen Naturpool zur gemeinsamen Nutzung. Die einzige Einschränkung der Location war die Höhe von 13 bis 14 Metern. Bei der Anmietung konnten wir aber leider keine Erhöhung durchsetzen. Dank ihrer Einzigartigkeit ist die Anlage aber bis heute sehr beliebt. Die Halle deckt viele Kundenbedürfnisse ab und ist familienfreundlich. Aber auch wer ernsthaft bouldern oder am Seil klettern möchte, kommt auf seine Kosten, denn es sind alle Schwierigkeitsgrade vertreten. Die Geschwindigkeit, mit der wir das Projekt in Greifensee aufzogen, war einfach nur spektakulär. Gemeinsam mit Sintroc wurde die Anlage in Windeseile gebaut und schließlich bereits im Herbst 2007 eröffnet – nicht einmal ein Jahr nach Beginn der Verhandlungen.

Ein Highlight in Greifensee war die internationale Klettermeisterschaft der Streitkräfte 2009 – ein riesiges Event, an dem über 40 Nationen teilnahmen, jeweils vertreten durch die Nationalmannschaften vor Ort. Aber auch der Boulderweltcup im Mai 2010 und die gleichzeitige Eröffnung des Outdoor-Bereichs sind bis heute unvergessen. Bei den Männern siegte damals Kilian Fischhuber, der fünffache Gesamtweltcup-sieger und aktuelle österreichische Nationaltrainer, und bei den Frauen die US-Amerikanerin und zweifache Weltcup-siegerin Alex Johnson. Auch Adam Ondra, der damals Zweite wurde, erschien dort erstmals auf der internationalen Bildfläche.

MR: Das Gaswerk Wädenswil ist eure neueste und aktuell größte Anlage. Was ist das Besondere daran?

Patrick: Unsere neueste und modernste Anlage in Wädenswil lässt mit 6.400 Quadratmetern Kletterfläche wirklich jedes Kletterherz höher schlagen. Sie ist definitiv eine der genialsten und größten Anlagen, die es zurzeit gibt. Wir haben hier alle drei olympischen Kletterdisziplinen

Unlike the other two facilities, Wädenswil was built from the ground up as a climbing gym. Having learned from our experience, and with many more options available to us, we could make our dreams a reality. We paid attention to every detail. We made sure the lighting cast no shadows on the walls, we smoothed the edges on the tops of boulders for a more comfortable feel, and we controlled the temperature and chalk accumulation in the bouldering rooms so they could be utilized all year round. And together with Sintroc, we randomized the T-nut pattern on the walls to make the routesetting more interesting and less geometric. Through Vertical-Life, we're able to export all route and boulder information onto our digital displays rather than printing it out on paper, allowing us to do our part to reduce our impact on the environment.

MR: What's the secret behind Gaswerk's success? What makes it a unique place?

Patrick: When I look back, I realize that passion comes before vision, and not the other way around. What we did was never just about business. As pioneers, we sometimes embark on endeavors that may not promise immediate success, but we have a sense of the direction we should take. We are playing a part in the development of sport climbing for the broader population. It feels good, and we take pride in the fact that a significant number of our 140-plus employees have been with us for decades. Roland Seiz, for example, has been with us for 29 years, first in construction and gym maintenance, then as the head routesetter, and for many years now, as the climbing course manager. After all, that's what distinguishes a company: its ability to retain its talents in the long run. Having said that, we're also happy for the many former employees who have since established their own climbing gyms. We're proud that we can still maintain such strong connections with them. And we look forward to celebrating our 30-year anniversary with everyone in 2024.

Our staff have always been enthusiastic climbers. Climbing connects us, and we understand what we're talking about. We rarely discuss politics or the economy. Instead, climbing helps us focus on what truly matters. Our company culture is built on collaboration and a great appreciation for each other – and that's what makes it sustainable.

MR: Tell us more about your climbing community.

Patrick: I find it interesting how many older individuals approach me and reminisce about attending our opening in 1994. Today, our customer base spans multiple generations, and many speak of Gaswerk as

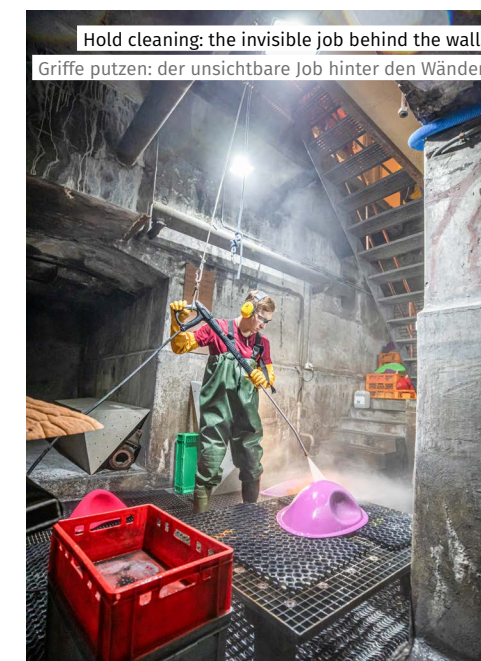
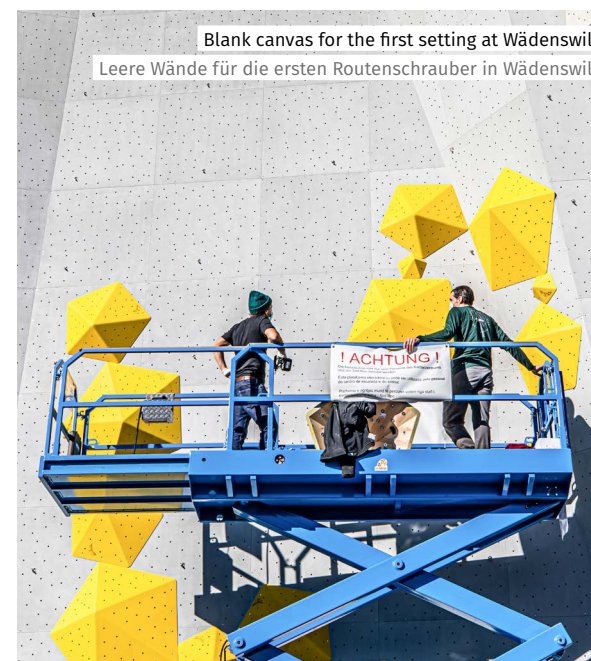
unter einem Dach vereint. Im Innenbereich gibt es über 400 Routen von bis zu 17 Metern Höhe und 200 Boulder auf zwei Stockwerken. Im Outdoor-Bereich gibt es über 100 Routen, die nach Süden, Westen oder Norden ausgerichtet sind. So können die Wände rund acht Monate im Jahr beklettert werden. In Wädenswil gibt es aber nicht nur viele Routen, sondern auch richtig viel Platz: Mit einem Zwischenabstand von 1,40 Metern kommt man sich hier kaum in die Quere.

Im Gegensatz zu den anderen beiden Anlagen wurde Wädenswil von Grund auf als Kletterhalle konzipiert. Mit unserem Erfahrungsschatz und viel mehr Optionen konnten wir unsere Träume nun tatsächlich in die Wirklichkeit umsetzen. Wir überließen nichts dem Zufall und kümmernten uns um jedes Detail. So sorgten wir dafür, dass kein Schatten auf die Wände fällt, und rundeten für ein angenehmeres Griffgefühl die Oberkanten der Boulder ab. In den Boulderräumen behalten wir die Ansammlung von Chalk und die Temperatur genau im Blick, um eine ganzjährige Nutzung sicherzustellen. Die Grifflöcher an den Wänden wurden in Zusammenarbeit mit Sintroc zufällig angeordnet, um den Routenbau interessanter und weniger geometrisch zu machen. Dank Vertical-Life können wir alle Routen- und Boulderinformationen exportieren und digital anzeigen, anstatt sie auf Papier auszudrucken. So leisten auch wir unseren Beitrag zum Umweltschutz.

MR: Worin siehst du das Erfolgsgeheimnis von Gaswerk? Was macht die Hallen einzigartig?

Patrick: Passion kommt vor Vision! Das ist meine Erkenntnis, wenn ich auf die Jahre zurückblicke. Es ging bei uns nie „nur“ ums Business. Als Pionier tut man manchmal Dinge, die nicht unmittelbar erfolgsversprechend sind. Man hat aber ein Gespür für die Richtung, in die es gehen soll. Wir sind Teil einer Entwicklung im Sportklettern. Wir tun etwas für die Breite der Bevölkerung. Es tut gut und wir sind stolz darauf, dass unsere über 140 Mitarbeitenden zu einem großen Teil seit Jahrzehnten bei uns arbeiten. Roland Seiz, zum Beispiel, ist schon seit 29 Jahren mit dabei – erst im Bau und in der Instandhaltung der Hallen, dann als Chefrouutenbauer und jetzt schon seit vielen Jahren als Leiter unseres Kurswesens. Am Ende zeichnet sich ein Unternehmen dadurch aus, wie lange es seine Mitarbeitenden halten kann. Gleichzeitig freuen wir uns auch, dass viele ehemalige Teammitglieder inzwischen ihre eigenen Kletterhallen aufgebaut haben. Wir sind stolz, dass wir immer noch ein enges Verhältnis zu ihnen pflegen. Und wir freuen uns schon darauf, 2024 mit allen gemeinsam unser 30-jähriges Bestehen zu feiern.

Unsere Mitarbeitenden waren schon immer begeisterte Kletter:innen. Das Klettern ist der Kitt, der uns zusammenhält – und uns eine ge-





Life-sized backdrop at Wädenswil
Lebensgrosse Kulisse in Wädenswil



Wädenswil facade with a sea of routes
Wädenswiler Fassade mit etlichen Routen

their climbing home. We have sports academies whose students train with us and even do their homework in our bistro.

Everyone's always spoken about how extremely difficult our routes are, but what's brilliant is that recreational climbers are able to have equal fun and rub shoulders with elite-level climbers. We're connected by the sport, but climbing is more than just a sport. It's an incredibly versatile and truly wonderful activity that captivates people from a young age well into their senior years, leaving an indelible mark on them.

Routesetting is of utmost importance and is becoming increasingly crucial. We constantly need new routes, as our target groups have high expectations when it comes to boulder and route quality, variety, the selection of holds and volumes, style, and difficulty. Our gyms are affiliated with SAC Uto, the largest section of the Swiss Alpine Club. However, SAC membership isn't mandatory and we welcome all visitors with the same warmth and openness, addressing them in a friendly, informal way ("per Du" as we say in German). The sport of climbing unites us so deeply that we are grateful to offer an oasis of joy and sportsmanship. In times of COVID, conflict, and political tensions, that's invaluable for both our physical and mental well-being.

MR: Speaking of routesetting, how does your setting team handle covering so much terrain across three facilities?

Patrick: Under the guidance of our head routesetter, Oliver Walder, each of our three climbing centers has a routesetting site manager, who works closely with the department head to continually develop routesetting. The site manager plays a central role not only in the practical planning, setting, and maintenance of routes and boulders, but also in ensuring that all safety regulations are followed. Setters are typically dedicated to one location because there is plenty of ground to cover at each gym.

Our philosophy is built on fostering the creativity of our routesetters who bring our climbing centers to life with their work. By promoting open communication and actively supporting creative ideas, we enable our routesetters

meinsame Sprache gibt. Über Politik oder Wirtschaft sprechen wir dagegen selten. Das Klettern hilft uns, uns auf das wirklich Wichtige zu konzentrieren. Unsere Unternehmenskultur basiert auf dem Miteinander und gegenseitiger Wertschätzung – und das macht das Gaswerk nachhaltig.

MR: Erzähl uns noch etwas über eure Kletter-Community!

Patrick: Ich finde es immer wieder interessant, wie viele ältere Personen auf mich zukommen und davon erzählen, dass sie bereits 1994 bei der Eröffnung dabei gewesen sind. Heute gibt es Generationen von Gaswerk-Kunden:innen und viele reden von ihrer Kletterheimat. Es gibt Sportgymnasien, deren Schüler:innen bei uns trainieren und anschließend im gemütlichen Bistro ihre Hausaufgaben machen.

Es wird oft gesagt, dass unsere Routen extrem schwer seien – aber das Geniale ist, dass Kletteramateur:innen bei uns genauso Spaß haben und auf engstem Raum mit der Kletterelite zusammenkommen. Der Sport verbindet uns, aber Klettern ist mehr als nur ein Sport. Es ist eine unglaublich vielseitige und wirklich wunderbare Freizeitaktivität, die Menschen von klein auf bis ins fortgeschrittene Alter begeistert und sie fürs Leben prägt.

Der Routenbau ist sehr wichtig und er wird immer wichtiger. Wir brauchen permanente neue Routen. Alle Zielgruppen stellen hohe Anforderungen an die Boulder und Routen in Punkto Qualität, Abwechslung, Griff- und Volumenauswahl, Stil und Schwierigkeit. Der SAC Uto, die größte Sektion des Schweizerischen Alpen Clubs, ist Partnersektion. Die Mitgliedschaft im SAC ist aber nicht verpflichtend, und wir begrüßen alle Kund:innen mit gleichem Charme, Offenheit und per Du. Das Klettern verbindet uns so sehr, dass wir froh sind, eine Oase der Freude und des Sports anbieten zu können. In Zeiten von Covid, Krieg und politischem Sprengstoff ist das für die physische und psychische Gesundheit Gold wert.

MR: Apropos Routenbau: Wie schafft ihr es, eine so große Fläche – auf drei Hallen verteilt – zu bearbeiten?

Patrick: Unser Chefroutesbauer Oliver Walder arbeitet eng mit der Filialleitung der einzelnen Hallen zusammen, um den Routenbau immer weiter zu entwickeln. Die Routenbau Standortleiter:innen spielen nicht nur bei der konkreten Planung, beim Setzen und bei der Instandhaltung der Routen und Boulder eine wichtige Rolle, sondern sind auch dafür verantwortlich, alle Sicherheitsbestimmungen einzuhalten. Unsere Routenbauer:innen sind in der Regel nur an einem Standort tätig, weil es dort bereits eine riesige Fläche gibt, die beschränkt werden will.

Unser Ansatz ist es, der Kreativität unserer Routenbauer:innen freien Lauf zu lassen, denn erst durch ihre Arbeit werden unsere Kletterzentren mit Leben gefüllt. Indem wir offen kommunizieren und ihre kreativen Ideen aktiv unterstützen, entwickeln sich unsere Routenbauer:innen immer weiter. Unser Routenbauteam besteht aus 40 unterschiedlichen Persönlichkeiten diverser Nationen. Manche sind schon sehr

ROUTE-SETTING ROTATION

Routes: every 6 months / Boulders: every 7 weeks

| Gym | Built | Size | Routes | Boulders |
|------------|-------|----------------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| SCHLIEREN | 1994 | 3.522 m ² (appr. 37,910 sq ft) | 330 | 260 |
| GREIFENSEE | 2007 | 3.063 m ² (appr. 32,970 sq ft) | 270 | 300 |
| WÄDENSWIL | 2021 | 6.081 m ² (apr. 65,455 sq ft) | 500 | 250 |



erfahren, andere steigen gerade erst in den Routenbau ein. Gemeinsam bringen sie eine riesige Bandbreite an Wissen und Können in den Betrieb ein.

MR: Die heute weit verbreitete Methode des Grigri-Sicherns war ursprünglich als „Gaswerk-Methode“ bekannt. Wie ist es dazu gekommen?

Patrick: Es ist wirklich lustig, dass sich der Begriff „Gaswerk-Methode“ rund um die Welt etabliert hat. Irgendwann um das Jahr 1998

war ich im New River Gorge in Kentucky klettern. Als ich mich mit den Amis dort unterhielt, kamen wir auf unser Kletterzentrum Gaswerk in Schlieren zu sprechen. Sie haben den Namen sofort erkannt und wollten mehr über die Gaswerk-Methode des Sicherns mit dem Grigri wissen. Viele wussten nicht einmal, dass Gaswerk eine Kletterhalle ist! Zur Erklärung: Vor über 20 Jahren hatte unser Team bemerkt, dass es eine bessere Methode gibt, Seil ausgeben, als dies in der Betriebsanleitung geschrieben stand. So entstand die Methode, die heute inzwischen in jeder Beschreibung des Grigri zu finden ist.

MR: Springen wir nochmal zurück zum Anfang eurer Geschichte. Was hat dich 1994 dazu bewogen, die erste Gaswerk-Halle in Angriff zu nehmen?

Patrick: In den 1970er und 1980er Jahren nahm ich als Kunstturner häufig an Wettkämpfen teil. Diese Wettkämpfe waren für mich immer eine tolle Gelegenheit, andere Teilnehmer:innen und verschiedene Nationen kennenzulernen. 1979 durfte ich an der Meisterschaft im Speedklettern auf der Halbinsel Krim teilnehmen, die Teil der ehemaligen Sowjetunion war. Später hatte ich dann die Ehre, an einem Weltcup in Lyon teilzunehmen. Durch die Wettkämpfe konnte ich die rasante Entwicklung des Sportkletterns damals aus nächster Nähe beobachten. Als mein Freund Wolfgang Güllich 1990 die legendäre Action Directe kletterte, die erste Route im UIAA-Schwierigkeitsgrad 11 (9a/14d), waren wir alle hochmotiviert. Schnell stellten wir aber fest, dass es im

Raum Zürich keine geeignete Infrastruktur gab, um auf hohem Niveau zu trainieren und mit dem Wachstum des Klettersports Schritt zu halten. Wir boulderten an den Konglomeratfelsen von Uetliberg, aber das war nicht genug. Das Interesse an einer Kletterhalle in Zürich lag spürbar in der Luft und alle Pläne, dies Wirklichkeit werden zu lassen, wurden mit Begeisterung unterstützt. Das Risiko, seinen Job an den Nagel zu hängen, um voll und ganz in das Projekt einzusteigen, wollte aber niemand. Im Grunde dachte ich da nicht anders und war überzeugt, dass das Gaswerk Schlieren nur eine Zwischenstation auf meinem beruflichen Weg sein würde.

Die Leute erklärten mich für verrückt und versuchten, mich davon zu über-



to continually improve their skills. Our routesetting team consists of 40 versatile setters of different nationalities. Some have years of experience, while others are just starting out in the industry, but together they bring a wide range of insights and skills.

MR: The now widely accepted method of Grigri belaying was once known as the „Gaswerk Method.“ We'd love to hear the story behind this!

Patrick: It's amusing how the term „Gaswerk Method“ has become established worldwide. In around 1998, I was climbing at the Red River Gorge in Kentucky in the US and got to talking with some American climbers. When we started discussing our Gaswerk climbing center in Schlieren, they immediately recognized our name and wanted to find out more about the „Gaswerk method“ of belaying they had heard about. Many people didn't even know that Gaswerk was a gym! The story is that our team had discovered a more effective way of feeding slack than the process described in the instruction manual. This led to the development of the method that is now integrated into every Grigri instruction manual.

MR: Let's go right back to the start. What led you to build the first Gaswerk gym back in 1994?

Patrick: During the 1970s and 1980s, I took part in a lot of competitions as an artistic gymnast. For me, competitions were a fantastic way of getting to know fellow participants and different nations. In 1979, I had the opportunity to take part in the Speed Climbing Championship on the Crimean Peninsula in the former Soviet Union. Later, I had the privilege to participate in a World Cup in Lyon, France, and through these competitions, I witnessed the rapid evolution of sport climbing at that time. We were all inspired when, in 1990, my friend Wolfgang Güllich climbed the legendary Action Directe, the first route graded 11 UIAA (9a/14d). Once that milestone had been achieved, we had to acknowledge that there was no suitable infrastructure available for high-quality training in the Zurich area that would bolster this level of growth in climbing. We bouldered on the conglomerate rocks of Uetliberg, but this wasn't enough. Everyone wanted a climbing gym to emerge in Zurich and there was a lot of enthusiasm about finally bringing this to fruition. However, no one was willing to take the risk of leaving their job and going all in. I shared this sentiment and believed that Gaswerk Schlieren would be just a temporary stop on my professional journey.

Everyone thought I was crazy and tried to convince me to approach the whole thing more sensibly. But today, people still climb in Hall 1 daily. And I'm delighted that our construction work was successful and that I could bring my idea to life.

With special thanks to Vladek Zumr for facilitating the conversation and for providing a wealth of information, translations, and images for this interview.

zeugen, das Ganze doch mit mehr Vernunft anzugehen. Aber heute wird in Halle 1 noch immer geklettert. Und ich freue mich sehr, dass unser Bauprojekt erfolgreich war und ich meine Idee umsetzen konnte.

Ein besonderer Dank gilt Vladek Zumr, der das Gespräch begleitete und den Beitrag mit zahlreichen Zusatzinformationen, Übersetzungen und Bildern unterstützte.



About the founders

The founders and pioneers Patrick (born 1961) and Patricia (born 1965) Hilber-Wissmann are married and have been together for 35 years. Alongside the management team and the board of directors, they oversee the operations of Kletterzentrum Gaswerk AG. Their adult son, Lionel, is a pilot and is also into climbing. Patrick was president of the Swiss Mountain Guides Association from 2000 to 2005. Patrick and Patricia live above Lake Zurich and have been embarking on mountain and climbing adventures of various kinds for decades.

Über den Eigentümer

Die Gründer und Pioniere Patrick (Jahrgang 1961) und Patricia (Jahrgang 1965) Hilber-Wissmann sind seit 35 Jahren ein Paar. Gemeinsam mit der Geschäftsleitung und dem Verwaltungsrat leiten sie die Betriebe der Kletterzentrum Gaswerk AG. Ihr erwachsener Sohn Lionel ist Pilot, klettert aber ebenso. Von 2000 bis 2005 war Patrick Präsident des Schweizer Bergführerverbands. Das verheiratete Paar lebt über dem Zürichsee und unternimmt seit Jahrzehnten Berg- und Klettertouren verschiedenster Stilrichtungen.

www.fumacros.com



PROGRESS IN PADDING *A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CLIMBING GYM FLOORING*

BY MARK FRASER WITH JACKIE HUEFTLE (byline p.21)

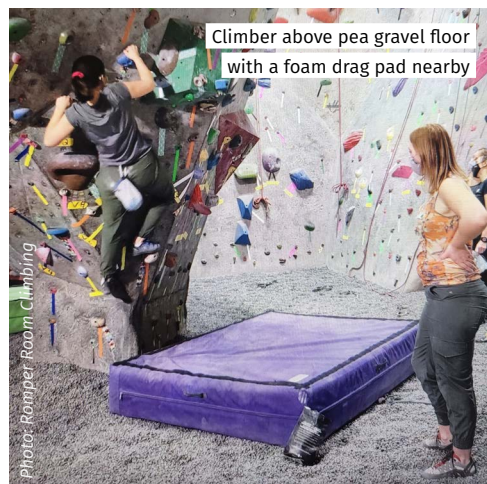
Flashed Bespoke flooring allows for total design integration at SoCal Bouldering, Calgary, Canada

◆ **Climbing equipment is diverse and innovative, evolving through necessity alongside the fringe characters who have made climbing their lifestyle. This tradition of free thinkers creating the gear they need for the unique demands of their sport is still very much alive today, even though climbing itself has become more mainstream. The ability to incorporate unique ideas into climbing as a whole is a hallmark of this edgy sport built by an inclusive, diverse, and mostly respectable bunch of oddballs.**

Step inside a modern climbing gym – whether as a first timer or a seasoned regular, in your home country or abroad – and you’ll be greeted by a unique and comforting type of space. Big walls filled with colorful holds over padded floors bolstered by well-equipped weight areas and training walls, yoga rooms and Pilates classes, nice bathrooms and co-working areas, and perhaps a café, bar, and retail shop – all served by knowledgeable staff. The wide suite of products and services common these days evolved quickly over the relatively short history of indoor climbing gyms, and sometimes it’s easy to forget how much has changed over the last 35 years. The progress made in padding is no exception. In this article, we’ll take you on a journey through the history of climbing gym flooring – from the rudimentary days of mattresses, shredded tires, and pea gravel to aesthetically pleasing designs and advanced impact absorption materials – and we’ll hear from some of the people who have helped shape these developments.

ORIGINS

Pioneers of our sport were always very crafty and thrifty folks (not to mention very bold). Just check out some of the early sport crags in Canada’s Bow Valley and you’ll still find bolt hangers fashioned from L-shaped aluminum



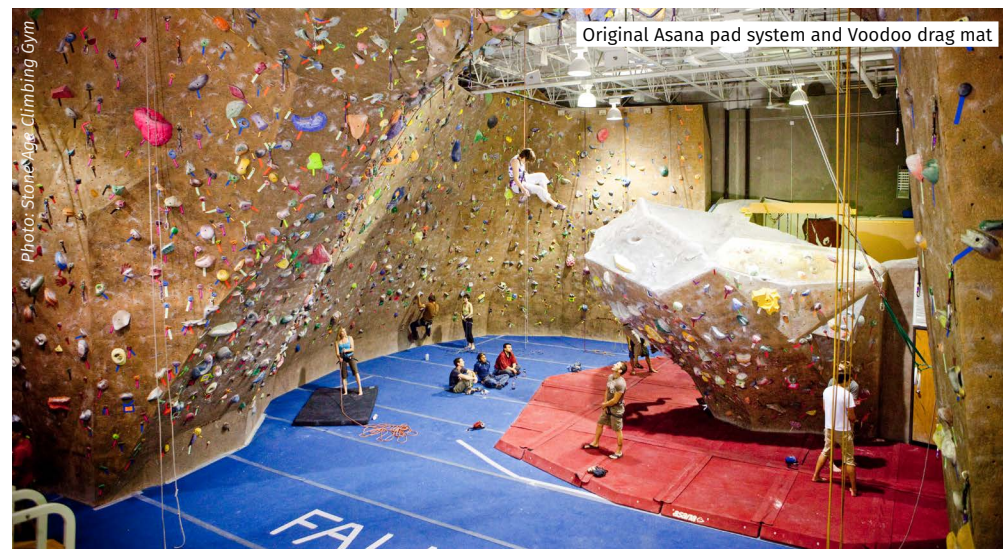
Climber above pea gravel floor with a foam drag pad nearby

bars cut into short lengths and bolted into the rock. At the famous boulders of Squamish, also in Canada, the first decades of climbers used cached mattresses and sofa cushions beneath classic problems like Sesame Street and Black Hole. Some of Font’s Bleausards still climb using the traditional style to this day—walking up slab test pieces (often including your project) as part of their weekly circuit with nothing but short shorts, high top shoes, and a small square of carpet. These days, advanced hardware and padding help climbers push the grade limits, but another major hurdle to climbers pushing the limits of their strength and ability over the years has been how much climbing they can actually do. Since rock climbing is weather dependent and many climates don’t allow for year-round outdoor practice, climbers needed a place to train during the offseason – and so the indoor climbing wall was born.

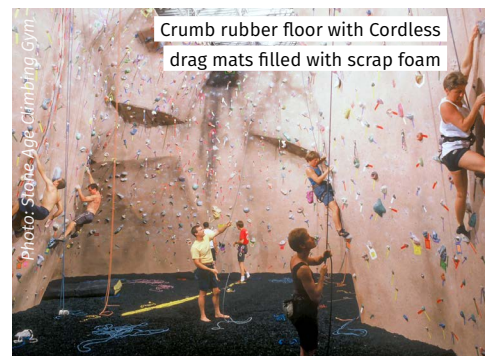
The first indoor climbing gym in North America, Vertical World Seattle, opened in 1987 with rocks glued onto plywood panels. Plastic holds made their way to North America shortly after, but flooring took much longer to develop on both sides of the Atlantic. In Canada in 1995, for example, the Calgary Climbing Center got the wall part right (there was actually more wall space than climbers coming to use it!), but for padded flooring they

just used rubber playground tiles under their rope areas. Others ventured into making their own walls and floors, but even with some professional help, gyms were built almost exclusively by elbow grease and passion for a long time, and each one was unique. For one thing, there weren’t many industry vendors offering the necessary walls and padded flooring; and for another, financing was almost impossible to secure due to uncertainty surrounding whether climbing businesses would be successful. With meager start-up capital, often borrowed from family or friends, climbing gym projects were a case of do-it-yourself. Despite the lack of finance, the whole community was very close-knit and visiting your local gym on any given winter evening felt like walking into a local bar where everyone knew your name. Some 30 years later, the boom in indoor climbing gyms is reflected in the massive progression in difficulty and average ability in the sport. The inclusion of climbing in the Olympics and the sprawl of gym chains in operation hold up an entire industry – from routesetters, instructors, and gym staff, to wall building companies, gym hardware and rope manufacturers, and hold and volume designers, to installers putting in professional padded flooring that ties it all together.

Wind back to the 1980s, 1990s, and even early 2000s, and many areas of the industry



Original Asana pad system and Voodoo drag mat



Crumb rubber floor with Cordless drag mats filled with scrap foam

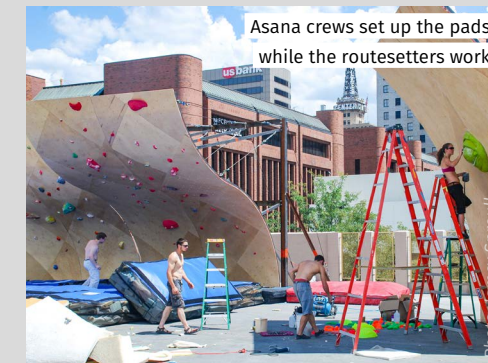


Early flooring solutions at Calgary Climbing Centre

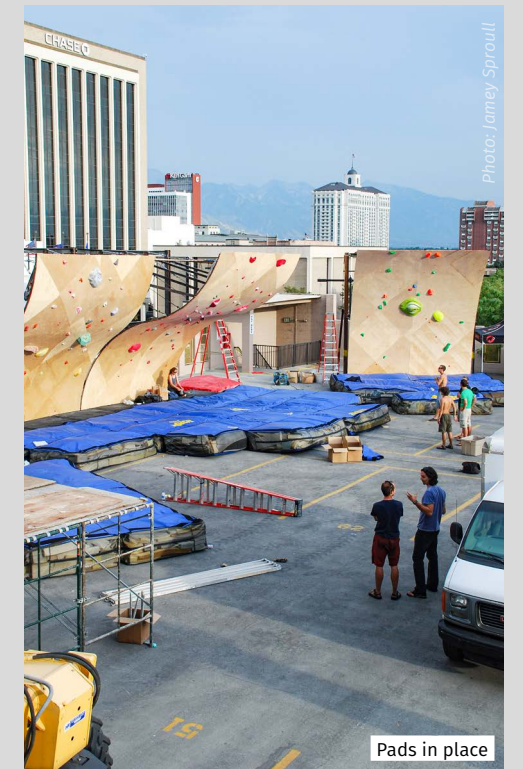
INNOVATION ON THE FLY

In 2008, the Outdoor Retailer tradeshow in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA featured a pro comp, not in a gym, but on the rooftop of a nearby hotel parking garage! The organizers needed to find a portable padding solution, and fast. This is where Asana Climbing came in. The company brainstormed a way to quickly and temporarily install and then remove custom pads to protect the athletes as they challenged themselves on comp finals problems up to 19 feet (approx. 6 meters) over concrete. Working with its foam manufacturer, Asana was able to “rent” foam trimmings and designed a bag system to contain them and provide a good landing for the climbers. Asana’s founder, Jamey Sproull, explains the process: “We ordered six massive bales of pre-cycled foam scraps, which were delivered to the parking garage the day before the competition. Each bale weighed around 500 pounds (approx. 227 kilograms) and once we cut the wire, foam chunks of all sizes went everywhere. It took our small team almost 18 hours to arrange the foam inside the 20 pad bags we had made and

then get everything velcroed together and in place. I’ll always remember being absolutely exhausted. Of course, as soon as we were done, we took turns climbing to the top of the massive walls and jumping off to land on our backs. We were ecstatic that it had worked, the competition was amazing, no one got hurt, and the day after the comp the foam company’s trucks arrived to pick up the pads and re-bale the scraps for recycling.”



Asana crews set up the pads while the routesetters work



Pads in place

were still evolving at a snail’s pace. With limited budgets and a focus on fitting as many climbing surfaces as possible into any given gym space, padding was often one of the last considerations when designing, planning, or constructing a gym. Research into pad design and quality was very limited and little was known about the physics or science behind climbing gym falls that could be used to make educated padding decisions. This meant that gyms ended up trying a lot of systems, with many independently sourcing versions of similar materials and using them in similar ways. Overall, progress was slow due to a lack of communication, testing, and collaboration.

Early testing and research, if done at all, mostly consisted of procuring a bunch of foam samples from the nearest foam store and spending a couple of afternoons with a ladder jumping onto all combinations to see what felt good, which ones bottomed out, and what foam grades fit within the budget. Other flooring attempts were simply pulled from other sports and industries, like playgrounds and gymnastics, and used materials ranging from wood chips, shredded foam boot liners, chunked foam, and shredded or chunked rubber to polished river rock and pea gravel, mattresses, carpet and foam layers, gymnastic floors, and rubber tiles in an effort to keep up with the growing number of climbers. At least one gym was known to have used cut-up sheets left over from making Teva sandals. Others used

shredded tires, but unfortunately some of these were radial tires, which left spiky metal splinters scattered throughout the gym!

One flooring attempt of note was an innovative product called Skydex, used at The Spot in Boulder, Colorado, USA when it opened in 2002. Skydex consisted of flexible sheets made of a thin polymer formed into hourglass shapes (sort of like two egg cartons placed back to back) that absorbed shock and quickly rebounded to their original shape – dissipating the energy without pushing the force back into the climber like compressed foam would do. Skydex formed the base layer under a more traditional top layer of low-density foam with a high-density, carpet-bonded foam top. The triple-layer system was meant to last for 20 years, but instead the promising concept failed quickly and the plastic sheets broke as the demands of a busy commercial bouldering gym surpassed any impact testing the company had done. The Spot replaced its flooring and the company behind Skydex stopped supplying the climbing industry (it’s worth noting that Skydex has been very successful in other industries – hammering home the point that different materials are best for different jobs, and also that climbing gyms really push things to and, in some cases, beyond their limits!).

The Spot was an early model for what has become a predominant type of gym – the modern bouldering gym. Besides being built

for climbers, gyms like The Spot were also designed to compete in the mainstream health and fitness market. To gain a foothold in this market, climbing knew that it needed to offer cleaner, brighter, and more user-friendly experiences. One key step here was reducing the risk of injury or death in climbing gyms, and improving the pads used played a big part in this. Luckily, with more users and more money, gyms were increasingly able to budget for professional-quality flooring. It was good news that these budgets began to exist, but in the early days the suppliers did not – there was a notable lack of companies available to make the high quality climbing-gym-specific flooring that was needed.

These days, there are plenty of wall and flooring companies making good-quality climbing gym flooring. One of these is Flashed Climbing, which has long been an innovator in the design and testing of foam padding for both outdoor crash pads and indoor climbing gym floors. Founded by Walson Tai, the owner of Calgary Climbing Center, Flashed was voted the #1 Gym Flooring Company in the Climbing Business Journal’s 2023 annual survey. As the owner of both a gym and a flooring company, Tai was perfectly placed to push the science of climbing gym flooring. He and his team could come up with new ideas and test them out immediately – identifying problems, making tweaks, and finding new solutions to improve the form and function of their products.

I (Mark) started working for Flashed in 2003 and have seen firsthand how the indoor climbing experience has grown and been redefined. Drawing on an engineering education and large sense of curiosity, the team at Flashed and I were able to speed up progress and explore the question of padding in a way that individual climbing gyms and wall companies simply did not have the time or resources for. We could test each new lab-cooked idea we built in one of our Calgary Climbing Center locations and see the results in almost real time.

Why did we do all this work? Well, we wanted to understand the relationship between climber and padding in a way that had never been truly investigated by a professional climbing flooring company before. This included exploring deeper questions such as: How does foam attenuate impacts? What's the relationship between layers of foam? How does the foam break down over time and how does this affect its performance?

To evaluate foam with precision and repeatability, we needed to step away from the human jump testing methods and move towards instrumentation. We began by borrowing playground testing equipment, and then in 2006 we designed our own drop tester based on the playground testing device, which included a model of a human head we machined in a friend's basement from a solid block of aluminum.

“TO EVALUATE FOAM WITH PRECISION AND REPEATABILITY, WE NEEDED TO STEP AWAY FROM THE HUMAN JUMP TESTING METHODS AND MOVE TOWARDS INSTRUMENTATION.”

The head was great, but to get a sense of how to emulate human impact, we needed to start with a human subject. One evening a volunteer came forward and we duct-taped a 3-axis accelerometer onto their ankle and asked them to fall repeatedly onto the pads to calculate the average impact. With a baseline established, we moved the accelerometer back to the model of the head and added weight to it until the average impact, at the same drop height, was roughly the same.

This was the first piece of in-house testing equipment we developed to understand this method of falling bodies and climbing padding, and we shared the initial results at the CWA Summit in 2006. Since we were the only team doing this research in North America back then, developing our equipment in-house was the only way to go. However, it wasn't long before other North American companies followed suit and began doing their own impact testing. One such example was Cascade Specialty, which developed a way to test heavier masses to explore the relationship between impact and padding. Here's a summary from Cascade Specialty's owner, Mike Palmer:

“The state of the art in the late 1990s was gravel or crushed rubber. Eventually, the need to keep gyms cleaner led to carpet-bonded foam and crash pads [many gyms used to have druggable crash pads on their floors for customers to use, but these created edge hazards amongst other issues]. These pad systems contributed to a lot of ankle injuries and pushed the need for thicker, better systems that eliminated the crash pads. Our research into other designs started with cycle testing supplied by foam manufacturers to determine the durability of the different grades of open cell foam and what the minimum densities we would incorporate into our systems. In our research we also met Mike Gentile of Sports Labs USA and worked with him to test different floor designs. We built a missile weighing 60 pounds (approx. 27 kilograms) with an accelerometer to mimic what Mike felt was the impact of a 165-pound (approx. 75 kilograms) climber landing feet first.

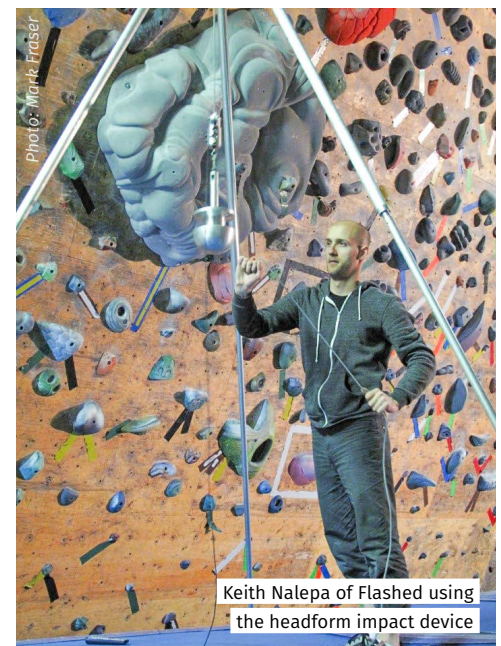
We used my old climbing gym, Cascade Crags, to do drop tests from 8 to 20 feet (approx. 2.4 to 6 meters). We tested designs from 8 to 20 inches (approx. 20 to 51 centimeters) in thickness to help determine the minimum thickness for a climber falling from a given height. Our conclusions led us to recommend a floor thickness of at least 12 inches (approx. 30 centimeters) for bouldering to minimize the possibility of bottoming out.

This along with our density/durability research led to our current approach on how we layer our system with different density and stiffness of foam to maximize the attenuation of the forces of a fall.”

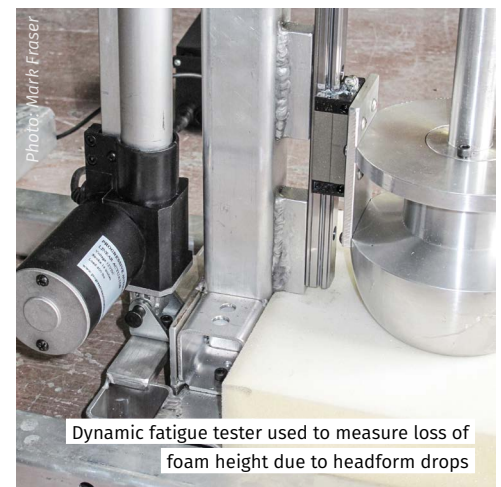
Once the Flashed team had finished developing our in-house impact and performance testing methods, we began to address durability – the ability of flooring to maintain the same impact performance over time. We developed a fatigue test method, which con-

sisted of dropping a weight onto a foam sample of 10 x 10 x 4 inches (25 x 25 x 10 centimeters) 1,000 times and measured the initial/final height (loss), before plotting impacts to create an impact deceleration curve. These results were then compared against different foam densities and levels of firmness to gain an insight into the relationship between density, firmness, and durability.

At this point, we still needed to find out how all these aspects would perform when used as a full thickness gym pad with multiple foam layers and a cover. From here, the MOFO (Multiple Overhead Fall Operator) was born. The MOFO is a single-axis CNC (computer numerically controlled) device that raises a mass and drops it 1,000 times onto a fully covered test pad of 4 x 4 feet (approx. 1.2 x 1.2 meters). The large test floor size with a top cover layer was a more complete representation of a real-life climbing gym environment. This put us in a position to test real-world gym pad setups for a range of wall heights up to 18 feet (approx. 5.5 meters). To this day, Flashed continues to use this compilation of data and experi-



Keith Nalepa of Flashed using the headform impact device



Dynamic fatigue tester used to measure loss of foam height due to headform drops



Flashed flooring at Quadrel Boulder in Chur, Switzerland

Photo: Stefan Schlumpf

is permissible, so if a floor is 30 centimeters thick (approx. 12 inches), the maximum permissible deflection is 24 centimeters (approx. 9.5 inches). The Q-Mat 8 has a deflection of 21 centimeters (approx. 8 inches).

Resilience – the bounce back of the foam. This is one of the most important characteristics and should be less than or equal to 15%. For example, if the body is falling from a height of 2,000 millimeters (2 meters or approx. 6.5 feet), the maximum distance the body is allowed to bounce back is 300 millimeters (30 centimeters or approx. 12 inches), which is 15%. The Q-Mat 8 has a resilience of 27 centimeters (approx. 10.5 inches).

We perform these tests for gym owners and climbers to provide them with the best possible experience. Floors have a limited lifespan, so it's important to balance durable foam with an attractive price, which is affordable for gym owners. We have installed over 250 gym mats in over 20 European countries. We see many gyms buying mats from the cheapest supplier, but we believe in offering the highest possible quality and also in providing a good service when gyms eventually need to repair or replace their flooring.”

CUSTOM FIT, LAYERING, AND TOP COVERS

These new-school floors are all custom fit, meaning they follow the walls and walkways cleanly and create an appealing space. A custom-fit gym floor is a staple of any modern gym, but the change from drag pads to purpose-built, custom-cut bouldering flooring came about more slowly than you might think. Like many companies in the indoor climbing gym flooring market, Asana Climbing started out by making outdoor crash pads, but eventually offered an indoor “drag pad” as bouldering areas became more common and customers needed better mitigation against the risk of indoor bouldering falls. As Jamey Sproull from Asana explains, it wasn't until 2004 when the Outdoor Recreation Director at Boise State University in Asana's home state of Idaho, USA asked the company to provide a quote for protecting the University's new bouldering cave that Asana began offering custom-fit flooring:

“In our concept meetings, the major topics discussed with Director Geoff Harrison were comfort in landing, durability, ease of maintenance of the components, and creating a seamless system that fit along the base of the walls and had no gaps between pads. To address landing comfort, we borrowed from

ence to make recommendations on foam and thickness for selected cover and wall heights. We've come a long way from jumping off ladders!

To address the lack of high-performance flooring options for commercial indoor gym operators, Timy Fairfield, a former World Cup climber and routesetter (and current President of Futurist Climbing Consultants and CEO of Chalk Cartel), co-founded Futurist Climbing Flooring & Mats, Inc. in the USA in 2009. Fairfield, who had witnessed many stages of the industry's development since the start of his competitive climbing and setting career in the 1980s, felt that the aggressive, gymnasium-style routesetting that was becoming popular required more advanced climbing flooring technology. Futurist subjected its climbing safety flooring products to rigorous independent third-party laboratory and field testing with Sports Labs USA (the aforementioned reputable testing company with experience in servicing contracts with FIFA, the NFL, USA Track & Field, and USA Gymnastics) and made sure that its products complied with all citable safety flooring standards from around the world, including ASTM International, UK, and EN standards. Here Fairfield explains why he founded Futurist:

“I've always been an advocate of the development and adoption of sport-specifically relevant climbing flooring product engineering standards and athletically relevant practices. Futurist was founded to provide unwavering quality, product testing, fast install speed, favorable warranty terms, and extended service plans to best serve and protect gym owners and operators, and their employees, setters, participants, and athletes.”

Shortly after Futurist was established, the Salt Lake City-based climbing wall company Vertical Solutions expanded its offerings to include floors. Jaime Garza of Vertical Solutions noted that the ASTM testing standards his company adheres to include standards for flame spread and smoke development. As professionalization increases across the industry, these kinds of whole-facility safety considerations are appreciated by gyms.

In Europe, gym owner and climbing industry supplier Christian “Benky” Benk has been in the industry since 2002 and has been making flooring specifically for bouldering gyms since 2011. Benky was born and bred to work in the climbing industry – his great-grandfather founded German climbing gear manufacturing company Edelrid and his family taught him the importance of testing and innovation. Through his testing laboratory and his own gym chain, Einstein, Benky has seen firsthand how different systems perform:

“Numbers are important, which is why we test. We're a member of the DIN EN panel (German edition of European standards), and with other specialists we created the DIN EN 12572-2 standard for safety flooring in artificial climbing centers. We test three main values as part of this:

Peak deceleration – how much force is put on the body during deceleration, which is defined by how hard or stiff the foam is. The DIN EN standard is between 15 and 25 gravity units. As an example, the Benky Q-Mat 8 has a peak deceleration of 16.8 gravity units.

Deflection – how deep the body is allowed to go inside the mat, measured in centimeters. A deflection of up to 80% of the foam thickness

our outdoor pad experience and used a combination of high- and low-density foams to dissipate and absorb fall energy, but thickened them up to catch higher falls and ensure the foam would endure thousands of impacts. For ease of maintenance, we crafted each pad case with a full clam-shell opening so that the foam could be “placed” in the case rather than stuffed in, meaning that University staff would be able to manage foam change-outs and repairs themselves. The cover material of these pad cases was another factor. We didn’t like the traditional vinyl used by most gymnastic mats commonly used as drag pads in climbing gyms at the time, because of the institutional look and because vinyl doesn’t absorb or hold chalk, meaning a greater impact of airborne chalk on nearby equipment and facility air duct filters. Our outdoor pads were made with heavy-duty nylon materials, which are incredibly durable, hold environmental chalk well, and provide more of an interior design look than the vinyl. To this day we still use heavy-duty nylon covers on our landing systems. Finally, to make a custom-fit seamless system, we created custom-sized velcro-edged pad bags with thick velcro seam cover strips that do a great job of holding the pads together and are easy to repair and replace. The system was well received by the University and now,

almost 20 years later, Asana is currently manufacturing the third iteration of this system for our various commercial landing projects.”

Like Asana, many companies have experimented with different flooring layer methods, trialing a range of layer thicknesses and foam densities in different orientations. Issues such as foam degradation caused by layers rubbing together and the foam stretching out over time after repeated impact – causing the floor to bulge or wave – must be considered when designing layered systems. Various toppers have also been tried, including thick and thin carpet, different types of foam, and different thicknesses of vinyl. In the last decade, vinyl in particular experienced a spike in popularity as it was seen as modern looking and easy to clean. Vinyl has since become less popular as a top layer, Sproull points out, because vinyl doesn’t capture any chalk or shoe rubber, causing additional wear and tear on the climbing gym’s ventilation systems and holds (especially those closest to the ground where any debris picked up on the climbers’ shoes would immediately be rubbed into the first holds climbers step on). Vinyl is also prone to stretch and tear, and tears often result in large sections needing to be replaced or in more vinyl being glued on in a patchwork

manner. Benky agrees and says he prefers carpet to vinyl:

“From our testing, we’ve found that a carpet top performs best in gyms because it reduces dust and noise, is durable, is faster to clean, and also absorbs light instead of reflecting it so it looks better in photos.”

Large German sports mat producer Bänfer has created a combination system for those who want to enjoy the benefits of both vinyl and carpet. This cover has a tarpaulin surface (vinyl) with sections of carpet laminated to the topper around the edges of the wall. This carpet captures chalk, cleaning climbers’ shoes before they step off the ground (which keeps the holds cleaner), while also being easy to clean itself (most of the tarpaulin can be wet- or dry-mopped or easily vacuumed). To make the floor, the carpet, nylon cordura, vinyl, or a combination of these and/or other topper materials, are either sewn into bags that are wrapped around foam blocks before being velcroed together (modular flooring), or the topper is sewn into a larger one-piece system where multiple foam blocks are pulled together and wrapped in a huge bag or placed directly on the gym’s floor and then secured in place by the bag or a wrap-over top layer that is fixed to a baseboard and the floor to keep the system taut. Like with toppers and materials, different manufacturers use different designs, cuts, and placement methods for their foam cores, all of which affect the seam feel and the user landing experience. Bänfer has a unique solution for this as well – its patented S-Connection system interlocks the base foam and limits the depth of the joints between the foam cores, creating an even and smooth mat surface without any deep joints or gaps. Regardless of the method used for cutting, placing, and joining the foam cores, the one-piece top cover system is currently one of the most dominant modern pad types for new installations because one-piece top cover floors look clean and work well. The large top covers allow huge sections of the pads to act as one big floor. A floor like this requires specific measurements and experienced installers, as the foam and top sheets need to be bespoke, cut to size, and sewn to fit properly into one specific space – just like a tailored suit made to measure for one specific person.

Opinions vary between manufacturers about what design is best, and certainly many solutions can provide a suitable floor, including the aforementioned use of a one-piece top cover, modular systems made up of smaller covered foam sections that are held together

with strong velcro strips, custom-installed cross-layered flooring, and other styles that modify existing impact absorption technology so that it fits the space available. When drawing up quotes for any gym, designers should consider many factors, including the following:

Performance

- How does the pad feel when you fall onto it?

Durability

- What is the lifespan of the pad?
- How does the feel of the pad change as it ages?
- What’s the best way to arrange the pad components to extend the pad’s life?

Ease of operations

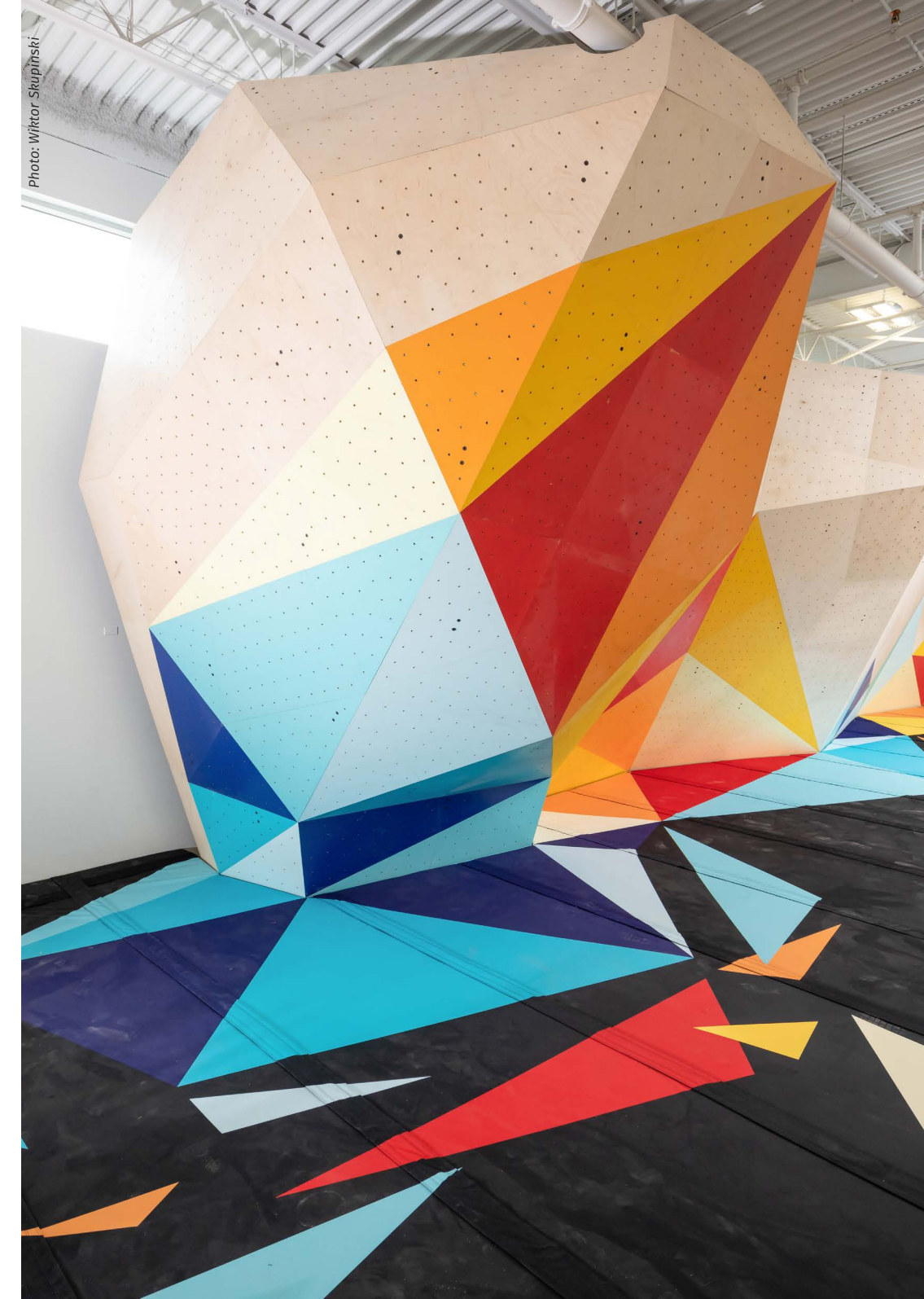
- How can gym staff quickly clean and care for the pad?
- How quickly and easily can a tear be fixed? What happens if a routesetter drops a tool or volume?
- How easily and effectively can spills or stains be cleaned?
- Can the pads be removed/replaced easily to create access lanes, for example if a hold closet or lift is behind the wall?

Space logistics

- What elements does this particular gym include? (Lead, bouldering, ninja, other?)
- What special needs does this particular gym design pose for the padding?

User experience

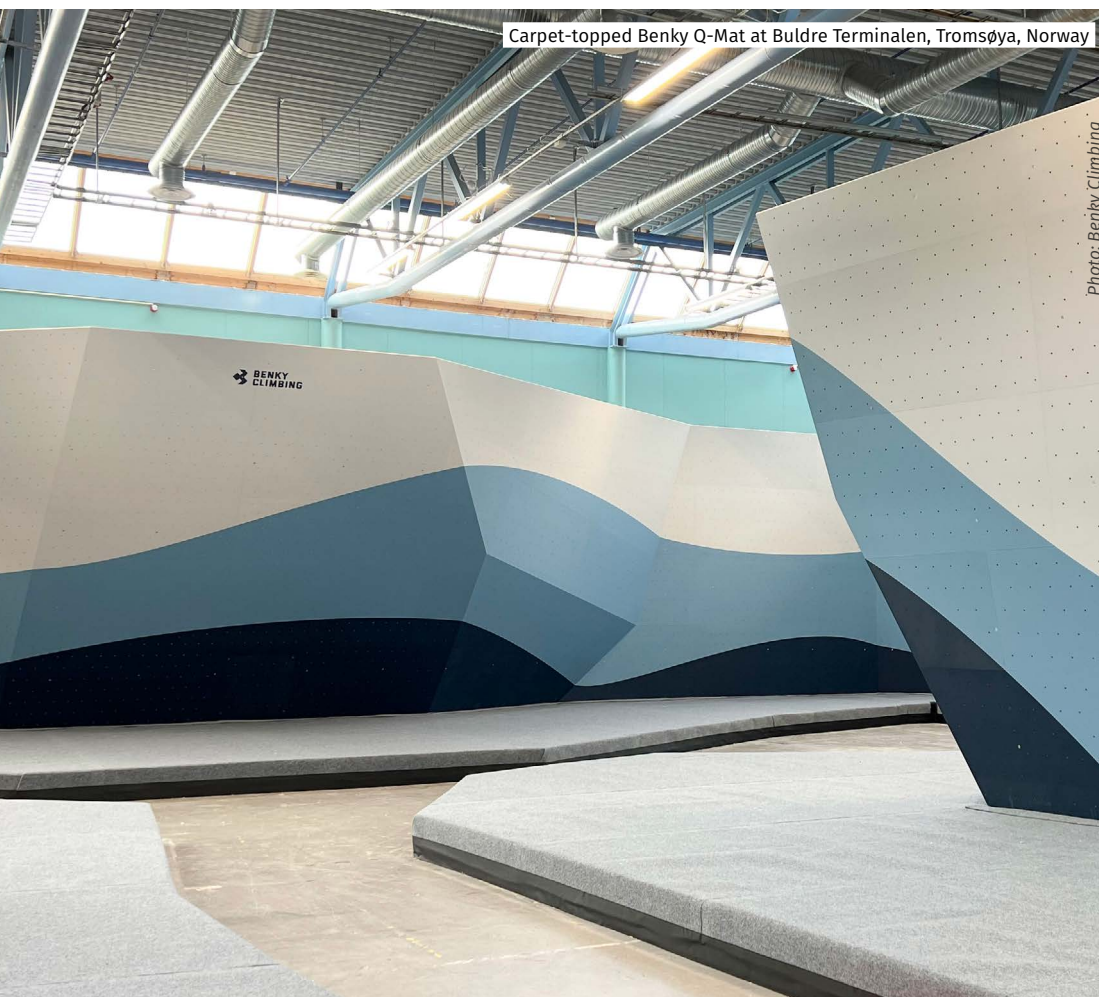
- How can flooring be used to encourage and create positive user interactions and experiences?
 - How can it be made easier for users to travel to/from the climbing wall?
 - How can a warm welcoming feel be created to encourage community and conversation?
 - How can sound be dampened to avoid an unpleasant echoing?
 - How can climbers be made to feel confident when landing on their feet or back, encouraging them in turn to try out more varied climbing styles?
- What materials will minimize the transfer of chalk dust onto walls or clothing?
- How can flooring be used to create a community atmosphere and build connections between users?
 - Padding is a very visceral part of bouldering since every fall involves the climber falling to the ground. It therefore provides a visual and tangible way to give members a deeper connection with their gym and a reason to call their gym “home”.



Versions of this list were mentioned by each of the flooring experts we reached out to for this article. Ernest Coletta from Strati Climbing in the USA points out that taking the time to consider these questions is essential because every gym is different and will therefore have different flooring needs, so the ultimate design for any gym must balance all these factors. Choosing what materials to use and how to put them together is a huge part of designing an appropriate floor for any given space. As Coletta explains, all of this – from budgeting and design to installation and maintaining the floor throughout its lifespan – goes a long way towards improving customer service and

customer experience and to ensuring that the flooring serves the gym well:

“High-level customer service means helping the customer design a floor to last as long as possible, to be as easy to care for as possible, while being affordable. This means problem-solving with the customer from the first stages to see what the best fit for their facility will be, creating a partnership where they have ownership of their own floor and understand what it is and how to care for it. The same materials put together differently can make a difference in how the floor performs, and finding out the best solution for each facility



Carpet-topped Benky Q-Mat at Buldre Terminalen, Tromsøya, Norway

Photo: Benky Climbing



Photo: Wiktor Skupinski

“Our aim is to ensure a safer experience for climbers, and increase lifespan of the product at the same time. We are verifying this by testing according to the various available climbing standards around the globe. We also compare these tests with a much more accurate human analog – a crash test dummy. Comparing the tests from the various standards and those with the dummy, we’ve observed that even though there are some specifics in the data (chest deceleration – European standard; head deceleration and head injury criterion [HIC] – Australian standard), no single standard test gives us a full picture on to what happens to a climber during landing. Furthermore, there’s a lack of accessible injury reports as well as insufficient data and research on injury mechanics. Clearly, an improvement in that area, combined with comprehensive testing, can help the industry to deliver lower injury rate products.”

In addition to the need for more safety research, one of the biggest areas of concern for both our industry and civilization is our impact on the environment. Currently there are no viable eco-foam alternatives to traditional oil-based materials with equivalent levels of performance, durability, or relatively low-cost specs. Like testing methods for impact and durability, materials and material sourcing must continue to evolve with time. Jaime Garza of Vertical Solutions agrees: “The future of gym flooring will see the development of more advanced impact absorption materials, increased sustainability, and the possibility of incorporating smart technologies into flooring, such as sensors that measure impact force of falls.”

Andrea Rothe of Bänfer comments on the company’s newest pad as it also works towards developing more sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions:

“After long development and testing with many urban sports athletes, this year we have a completely new outdoor mat. This new mat system is built of a multi-layer core made of synthetic fibers and a surface made of a fabric structure that is not only completely water-permeable, but also completely recyclable. Due to the multi-layer core, different heights can be offered, and of course, we are working to make the technology available for indoors as well. The advantage of this new technology is the water can drain off the mat completely and dirt can simply be washed away with a pressure washer without sacrificing the advantages of a fall protection mat.”

From these two examples alone, it is clear that we can look forward to better, safer,

longer-lasting, more sustainable, and smarter flooring products in the future. But what about how the floors look? We know that modern climbing gyms are concerned with aesthetics, and well they should be. As competition in this growing market increases, gyms will look to provide their customers with unique experiences to help them stand out from the crowd and to create value for their members. Padding takes up a significant amount of floorspace, creating opportunities for the climbing community and brands to gain a lot of visibility. Gyms can already choose pad topings in colors and styles that complement their aesthetics. Logos in vinyl or printed onto patches can be added to the sides of the pad for customers to see. Recently, customization options took another big step forward when Flashed released customizable boulder covers that allow gyms to print anything they want on top of their pads, including logos, brand colors, work by local artists, or even a photo of the local climbing crag!

As you can see, padding has come a long way over the years. At the end of the day, good climbing gym flooring is an important part of the industry’s mission to create inclusive spaces for people to connect and enjoy climbing and each other’s company. We’re fortunate to be part of an industry that does this so well. #celebrateclimbing



Photo: Mark Fraser

Mark Fraser’s life has been defined by climbing in many ways over the last two decades, both personally and professionally. Mark has worked with Flashed for 20 years, and the people he’s worked with have made his career both rewarding and enjoyable. Mark may have studied engineering, but it’s his curiosity and passion for climbing and its people that drive him each day. The chance to explore things like chalk and padding using scientific principles and then share that data without bias with the climbing community makes all his work worthwhile.

7000+ SHAPES

KILTER Urban Plasticix



SETTERCLOSET.COM

BJÖRN POHL

THE CLIMBING PROPAGATOR

AN INTERVIEW BY CODY ROTH // PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BJÖRN POHL

Photo: Thom Hörnström



Björn Pohl at Klättercentret Telefonplan, Stockholm, Sweden

Björn Pohl has worn many hats over the last couple of decades. From his early days as a pesky antagonizing voice on online forums to his work as an event organizer and photographer, he has experience with a wide spectrum of climbing media. These days, when he's not covering World Cup events across Europe as a photographer, he can be found in Stockholm, Sweden, where he lives with his family. Here, he holds down a day job as the Creative Marketing Manager at the Klättercentret, one of Scandinavia's most successful gym groups, which will be opening their tenth facility in Sweden this year. Björn says that he's happiest when he's able to branch out in different directions, so at Klättercentret, he tries to pitch in with everything related to media, marketing, and events. We caught up with Björn at his desk at the gym, and he was kind enough to share the experience and insights he's gained from his diverse range of work in the climbing industry over twenty-plus years.

CR: Thanks for taking the time to chat, Björn! You've been climbing for more than 30 years. How did you get started?

Björn: I started climbing in the late 1980s thanks to skiing and frequent trips to Chamonix, France. Even into the 1990s, I would ski in Chamonix a few times a season, and since we were skiing on steep terrain, we needed rope skills. In January 1990, I did a top-rope day in Chamonix and then, later on, I climbed Mont Blanc. From there, I came back home to Sweden and gradually moved to smaller rocks since Sweden doesn't have the Alps. Nowadays, I'm pretty much exclusively an indoor climber. I realized recently that I now view climbing as something you can also do outdoors rather than the other way around. Maybe that's a little weird, but I think we do have to recognize that climbing is trending towards a sport like swimming, where the majority of habitual participants go to a pool rather than a lake!

CR: Your first foray into working in the climbing industry was as a journalist. How did that come about?

Björn: In 1997, a friend and I were active on online climbing forums in those early days of the internet. I started writing on a Swedish forum just to provoke people. I created this anonymous online character and soon after an online Swedish climbing magazine contacted me, or rather my alias because they didn't know it was me, and asked me to write

as my alias on their page. From there, I wrote for several online publications and magazines like Climbing, Rock and Ice, Klettern, and Japan's Rock and Snow. Back in the 1990s and 2000s, online magazines had a stronger presence as news sources and there was more of a financial incentive to write for them. Once social media platforms started emerging, athletes had their own forums and I cut back on online climbing writing.

CR: So how did you make the transition from climbing journalism to organizing competitions?

Björn: That's a funny story! I studied financial economics, which is boring in my book, so I never really worked in that field. While I was studying at university, I was a substitute teacher and then later a full-time teacher. I taught for eight years, and then I had my son and took paternity leave for one and a half years. Unfortunately, I lost track of time, and suddenly I got this letter that said my paid leave was over! I hadn't prepared accordingly so I needed to find a job fast. I went to Klättercentret, my local gym in Stockholm, and when I inquired about a job, the owner was like, "So, why should I hire you?" I went with the first idea in my head and said, "Well, I could organize an international climbing competition for you..." He thought that idea sounded cool, and I was hired! I knew a lot of people from writing climbing news, so I was able to contact people like Daniel Woods and Adam Ondra, and that's how the first Legends Only competition we hosted was born. I told Daniel and Adam, "Hey, you should come to Sweden and compete in this awesome comp we're putting on!" They agreed and that was that! It came together in a pretty natural way. I was hired in the fall of 2010 and we held the first

Legends Only in the fall of 2011. There were a lot of things I was clueless about, but thanks to the help of others, and extra work on their part and mine, we were able to fill in the gaps and make the comp a success.

"I THINK A GYM SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY AVENUE THAT ALLOWS THEM TO INTERACT WITH CUSTOMERS."

CR: What would you say gym managers and organizers need to consider most when putting on a comp?

Björn: I think it's important to first remember that it's a show. You don't have to put too much emphasis on the competition part, because that will take care of itself. There's going to be competition no matter what because there is always the prestige of winning. I think you should always focus on the athletes and make sure they are having a good time, because they are the main players. If it's your own private event and you're bringing in pro climbers, you have a chance to give them something different from what they would get going to a World Cup. We've always made sure the climbers we've invited feel really welcome. We focus on providing good food and accommodation and a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. Lighting, music, a bar, and food/catering are also a must! On the subject of lights, it's important to bring in professional lighting,



Alex Megos climbing towards victory at La Sportiva Legends Only, 2018

but it's also equally important to keep it dark so that you create some mood.

The most key component of a comp done in this style is probably the intimacy. Being able to offer your spectators and community the chance to get really close to the pro climbers and be able to hang out with them brings huge value.

CR: What are some of the things you know now that you wish you had known when you put on the first Legends Only at Klättercentret?

Björn: Well, it actually takes quite a lot more than a "build it and they will come" approach. It's really important to get the key people involved and keen about the project. You could argue that this goes without saying, but when you're really psyched about something yourself, it's easy to forget this is not necessarily true for everyone else.

So, make sure to get people onboard and make them feel like this is their project as well, and the end result, as well as the road towards it, will be so much better.

CR: Do you think it's worth any commercial gym's while to put on at least one elaborate comp each year?

Björn: Yes, definitely. It's worth it to bring in local, regional, national, or international talent and to give them a stage where they can perform. It motivates people, keeps them excited about the sport, and motivated to push their own climbing. In a competition,

whatever the climb, it's always going to look and feel more spectacular than it would in a regular gym session.

CR: What's the minimum budget you think is needed to host a pro-level comp?

Björn: Not factoring in the costs for routesetting and staff, who you will likely have to pay overtime to, etc., I think you'll need at least €10,000 to put on a lower-level/more regional pro contest with a cash purse, and then it goes up from there. You'll more often lose money with an event in the short term, but you'll likely gain dividends in the long term from the marketing value it presents.

CR: What feedback did you get from Klättercentret after the first Legends Only event?

Björn: They were immediately happy with the results. It really helped Klättercentret's image and brand value. It opened up corporate partnerships that went beyond just the event. Prior to Legends, we weren't that well known at tradeshows, but after that event, the brands knew Klättercentret and wanted to work with us.

CR: How do you go about attracting and retaining event sponsors?

Björn: I think it's always about highlighting for the sponsors how they will get exposure from your event. We livestream our events and we always share the viewing stats with the sponsors afterwards. Make sure you have good photographers and use the athletes and their

social media to share and leverage the event too. Besides the exposure numbers, I think it's also important to highlight the community-building aspect. When you talk to brands, they often want to know numbers, but you also want to show them that you are giving something to the community and that they can be a part of that.

CR: You've also done comp commentary. What's the hardest part of that job and why is it so important?

Björn: I've been a speaker in the past. I've covered the Swedish nationals and European Championships for Swedish television. It's something that I still do and it's definitely something I can see myself doing more of in the future. Commentating at the Olympics would be a dream come true.

I think it's important to differentiate between the person who is doing the commentary on TV or livestream and the person who is emceeing the event. They are two very different jobs of equal importance. I would say that people have a tendency to overestimate how much you need to commentate when doing a livestream. If you watch an American football game, the commentator doesn't explain things like the goal posts every so many minutes. I think we should keep in mind that if someone is taking the time to watch, they are probably interested enough to look up any basics they don't already know on their own. I think Shauna Coxsey did a great job of commentating on the World Championships in Bern, Switzerland. She explained the climbers' decision-making and the moves they were encountering. I think her commentary was interesting for a complete novice or an expert viewer. Bottom line, whoever is doing the commentary, livestream, or event emceeing needs to be really knowledgeable. Another peeve of mine: If you're doing commentary, don't talk about yourself and what you had for breakfast that morning. Focus on what's happening on the wall!

CR: At Klättercentret, you run a podcast that I imagine was inspired by your experience as a writer and commentator. Can you tell us about it and why it's worthwhile for gyms?

Björn: I think gyms have to think about positioning themselves within the climbing scene. You want to show that your gym(s) is/are a resource and that you have expertise to offer. Nowadays, with most climbers never going outside, I think we can also fill an educational

role by talking about climbing history, different kinds of climbing, lingo, ethics, and so much more.

I think a gym should take advantage of every avenue that allows them to interact with customers. Instagram is the must-have no-brainer, but tools like Vertical-Life where climbers can rate and comment on routes and share with the gym what they've climbed shouldn't be underestimated. I'd love to see even more climbers utilizing tools like this and giving their feedback because it's really important and powerful for a gym to have that information. Doing a podcast follows the same line of thinking; it's another avenue of communication that you can use to your advantage. We even experimented and did radio commercials for our gyms in the past, but we felt like the results were mixed. We started the Klätterkanalen podcast about two and a half years ago, just before the start of the Olympics. We talk about what's happening at the gyms, discuss upcoming gym events, and throw in some international climbing news, and I do updates about the World Cup when it's on. Also, if a known climber or industry professional happens to be visiting, we try to interview them as well. Beyond that, we also cover climbing injuries and prevention, and we'll also sometimes dedicate an episode or part of an episode to talking about gear and climbing techniques. We also cover climbing lingo and humorous questions like why you shouldn't or when you should wear socks with climbing shoes. I think it's important to keep the podcast focused on climbing, but most importantly, you have to make sure what you put out is entertaining. We have climbers all over Sweden listening to our podcast, so it's a way for us to broadcast beyond our existing

Colin Duffy the moment he realizes he has qualified for the Paris Olympics. World Championships in Bern, Switzerland, 2023



facilities. We also take questions from our listeners and give prizes for the best questions that come in. So, it's once again another way to work with partner brands and offer them something as well.

CR: What does your work covering World Cup events look like?

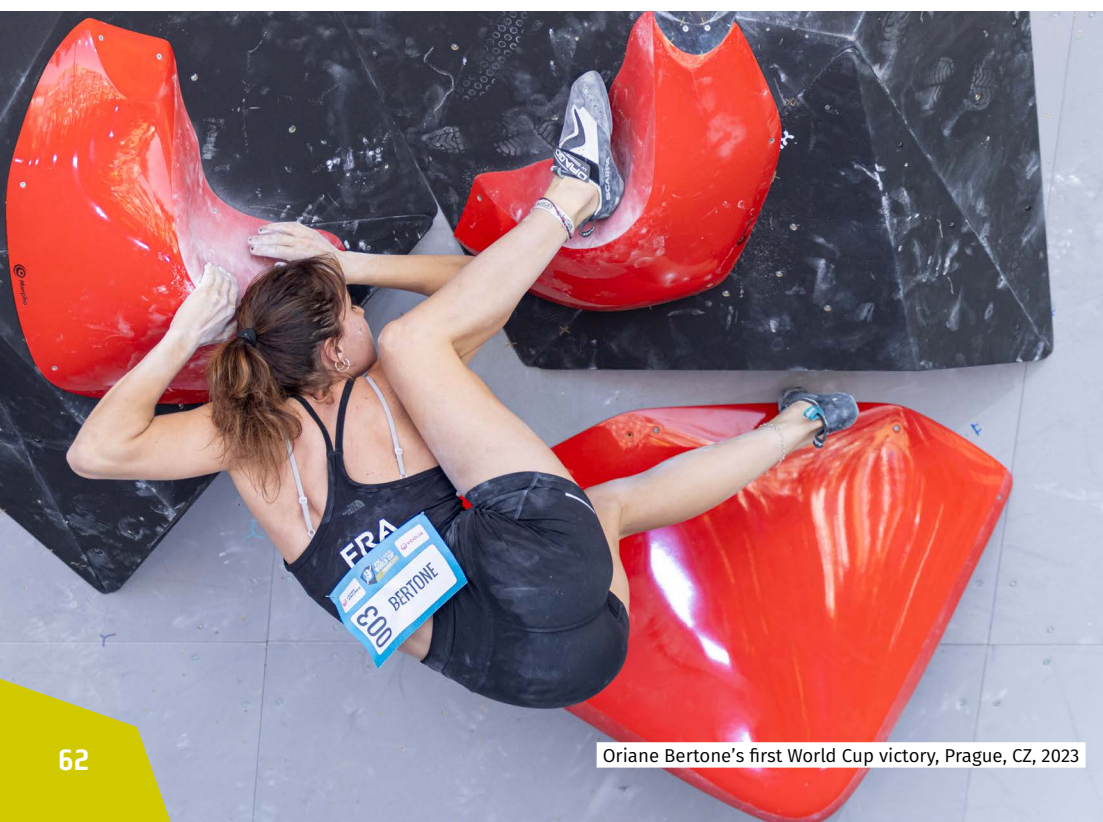
Björn: Well, I photograph the European World Cup events. I started by chance in Chamonix at the European Championships back in 2013. I was there as a writer and I just figured I could shoot some photos. I had a super basic digital camera with a very entry-level lens. I remember being up in the cherry picker with the other more serious photographers and they were giving me weird looks. Back then, there weren't really any restrictions as a photographer, so you could show up to an event and basically get access to everything.

Nowadays, there are a lot of restrictions and permissions needed to shoot events. In the years following, I only shot in Chamonix and Innsbruck, Austria, and I got way more into the art of photography and invested a lot more in cameras and lenses. It's quite a rabbit hole, or maybe better said, a black hole! I'm in it still because I just love being a part of it. I'm a complete climbing nerd! I get to hang out with friends and I shoot with Vladěk Zúmr. Together we run a media company called the Climbing Intelligence Agency. We do video interviews and take photos. Vladěk is just as nerdy as I am! I think our styles and approaches complement each other nicely.

CR: What's the most challenging and most satisfying part of photographing climbing competitions?

Björn: Dealing with bad light and shooting positions are the hardest parts of shooting World Cups. The World Championships in Bern were especially difficult. It was extra dark and when you're shooting action sports, you need a fast shutter speed, which makes it very challenging to get photos that aren't grainy. I wish many of the organizers would trust us photographers a bit more. We know where we can and can't be, and all we want is to do our best to promote the sport as best we can. It's not like we're the enemy, right?

My World Cup photography pursuit is a self-funded one. When you're an IFSC-approved photographer, you can't sell IFSC event photos to third-party brands, so you're limited to selling your work to event sponsors and print magazines. That definitely presents a challenge financially, especially with there



Oriane Bertone's first World Cup victory, Prague, CZ, 2023



Futaba Ito in the World Cup final, Innsbruck, Austria, 2023



Janja Garnbret after a particularly scary fall. World Championships in Bern, Switzerland, 2023



Janja Garnbret at the World Cup, Prague, CZ, 2023

being so few print magazines now. I definitely do it more for the fun and far less for the money.

When you're able to capture the emotions and make people realize how cool the sport is, I think that's the most satisfying part. I think a photographer is there to take cool pictures and to help expand the exposure for the sport and these great athletes.

CR: As an avid and consistent observer, what do you think routesetters are currently getting right and where do you think there's room for improvement?

Björn: In general, I think they get a lot of things right. I think they do a good job of giving the climbers the chance to express themselves. Overall, I think there's an effort to keep things balanced too.

Of course, it's always easiest for observers to see what routesetters aren't getting right, so I would preface any criticism with that. At

times, I think the individual bouldering rounds lack variety. Sometimes there is a final where all four problems have a jump, which takes some surprise away. It's always great if each round can test as many skill sets as possible. In Morioka, Japan last year, for example, there were three slabs in a single round. Maybe the rules could have slightly more defined criteria so that doesn't happen in the future.

Another thing that gets overdone currently is some of the trendy moves like the 360s and 180s. A move will pop up at one event and then variations of it keep on getting repeated throughout the comp season, which again takes away from the surprise and suspense.

With Lead World Cups, I think the female routes could have a little more risk and creative movement. Maybe they're slightly underestimating what the women are capable of. For the health of the competitors, I think the routes should always have some power sections, so that being an unhealthy weight is as little of an advantage as possible.

CR: Likewise, what do you think the bigger competitive comp bodies are getting right and where could they improve?

Björn: I interviewed Marco Sclaris with Vladek Zumr a while back and I think Marco and the IFSC definitely have the right intentions. They're committed to growing competitive climbing globally. However, I think we need to give more care to the athletes because without them there is no show. Starting with health and RED-S, the responsibility for governing this can't be left to just the national federations. Although I think the IFSC should look at what the Austrian federation is doing, as they have been fielding and fostering healthy athletes consistently in recent years, which makes me think they are on the right track.

The other change I would like to see is in prize money. We're at a point where we can get 10,000 paying spectators to attend a World Cup or World Championship event, but



Photo: Pierre Ropero

BJÖRN POHL

Born: 1971 in Stockholm, Sweden, where I still live today.

Background: Master of Economics, Finance, Stockholm University, Personal trainer, Climber since 1990, Creator of La Sportiva Legends Only, The Black Diamond Project, The Tierra Boulder Battle, The Ledge Podcast, Klätterkanalen podcast, and The Climbing Intelligence Agency (with Vladek Zumr).

When I'm not climbing or working, I listen to audio books (close to 100 books/year), and, being a man-child, I'm of course keenly interested in the Roman Empire and World War II.

the winner gets less than €3,000... I think that needs to be addressed.

Lastly, I'm definitely pro-Olympics and I think climbing deserves to be there, but for the time being it has weakened the importance of the World Cup and the three individual disciplines. The World Cup wasn't worth much this past season and the same is likely to happen next year, whereas the Olympics is ultimately only for 20 climbers every four years.

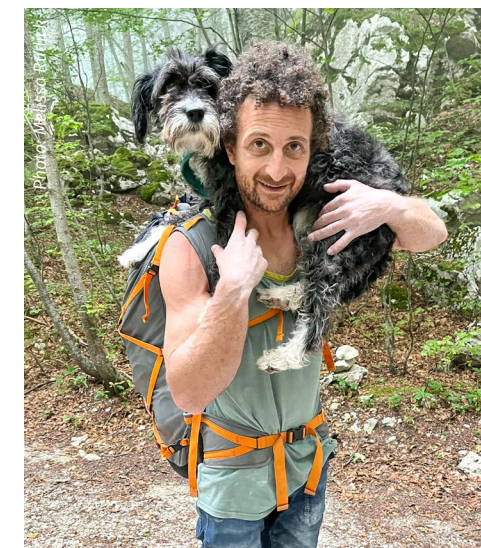
CR: What else do you think brands can do to elevate themselves? Are there possibilities that haven't been fully explored?

Björn: I think brands could focus even more attention on indoor climbing. Nearly all of the marketing and advertising are still focused on rocks and boulders, which is cool and definitely part of climbing, but indoor climbing shouldn't be overlooked. Where I live in Sweden, for example, it is thought that over 90% of our climbers climb exclusively indoors. That's their world and interest. Many in that group follow comps as well, so I think more marketing and advertising reflecting what they do and follow could be worthwhile.

CR: Where do you see comp climbing and event hosting going in the next couple of years?

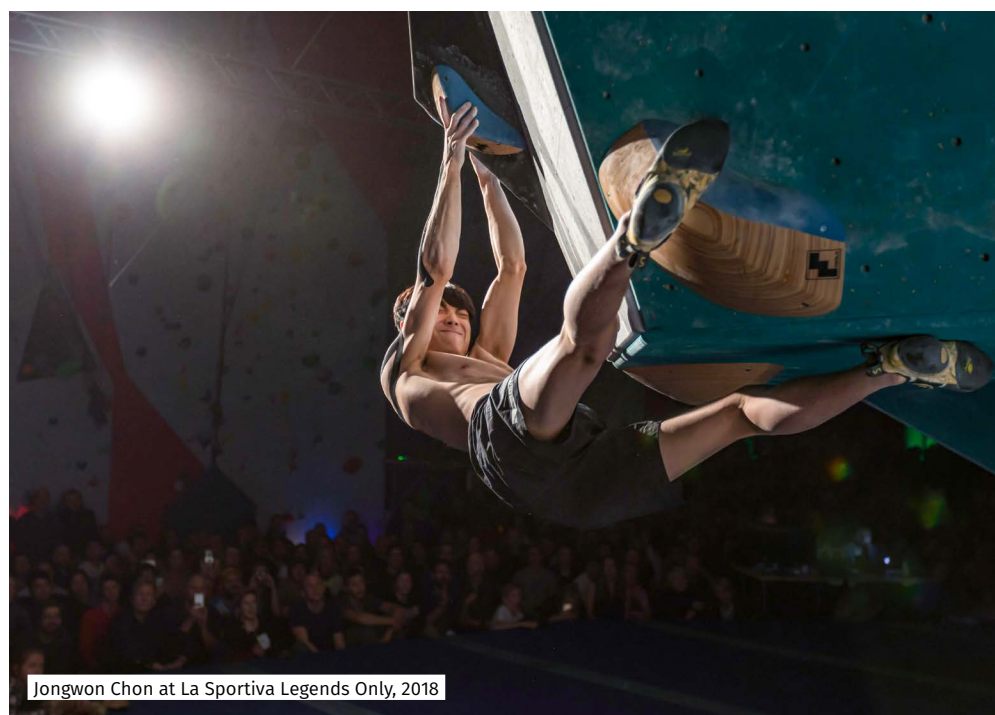
Björn: To me it's fundamentally important to find a way to make the World Cup exciting again. Having the best athletes going for the overall title, an increase in prize money, and bigger crowds are all necessary ingredients. Otherwise, I think it's inevitable that we'll see the emergence of a pro tour or big events with more money and relaxed rules and formats. I could imagine competitions between teams of athletes from different brands, like La Sportiva vs. Scarpa or Black Diamond vs. Petzl, for example. It would be cool to explore the possibilities to expand the scope of what competition climbing could be. Why not bring in trad, aid, dry tooling, and more? Of course, I have a couple of ideas of my own that I won't reveal here...

I also think it's very likely we'll see several events, both IFSC and others, in the Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and so on, and I see a possible dilemma here: Either the events will be where the money is or where the climbers are...

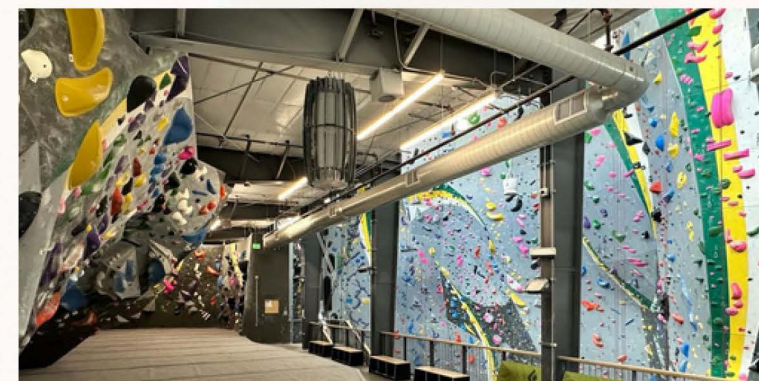


Cody Roth has been climbing since 1995. He's a former World Cup finalist, nationally certified routesetter and IRATA 3 Rope Access Supervisor and instructor. He's done the first ascent of a possible 9a+, placed gear up to 8b+, and at 40, he still gets in a few 8b onsights. Cody is a Sales and Concept Manager at Vertical-Life.

Cody lives in Arco, Italy with his wife and their former street-dog, Frankie.



Jongwon Chon at La Sportiva Legends Only, 2018



Beyond the Routes: How Air Purification Sets Your Gym Apart In the competitive landscape of climbing gyms where climbers seek physical challenges and a safe environment, implementing cutting-edge air purification can set your gym apart.

SYSTEM BENEFITS

- Low Maintenance.
- Plug & play installation.
- Over 80% Improvement in Indoor Air Quality.
- Reduction of (fine) chalk dust.

STATICAIR'S TECHNOLOGY CAN BE A GAME CHANGER FOR YOUR CLIMBING GYM

- Environmental Consciousness.
- Eco friendly Energy Consumption.
- Noiseless Operation.
- Revolutionary Ionization Technology.



"Welcome to Bel-Air. The air in our climbing gym has improved noticeably by the StaticAir Systems." Escaladrome, Hannover



Discover our story, expertise, products, and references on www.staticair.com. For inquiries about enhancing your climbing environment, email us at info@staticair.com.



OLGA NIEMIEC

ROUTESETTING FOR THE LONG HAUL

AN INTERVIEW BY CODY ROTH (byline p.65)

◆ **Olga has been passionate about routesetting ever since she first had the opportunity to set at an international event. Born into a family of climbers in Kraków, Poland, she has been climbing for as long as she can remember, and before turning her full attention to setting, she was a regular finalist at Polish national competitions. In 2022, she achieved one of her long-term goals when she became the fourth Polish and first Polish female IFSC-certified routesetter. Olga currently splits her time between setting comps, raising two children, and climbing outside, which she believes is a key contributor to her motivation, fitness, and success as a routesetter. On rock she's completed boulder problems up to 8a+ and has redpointed 8b+ sport climbs. We recently chatted with Olga about her past and present routesetting experience as well as where she thinks the craft is heading.**

CR: When and where did you start climbing?

Olga: Both of my parents are climbers, so I started climbing as a small child. It's been over 25 years with the occasional short break. At first, climbing was my parents' passion

and I wanted to share this with them. Later it became part of my life. It was (and still is) a great pleasure, but over time it has also become my dream job, which motivates me to constantly develop. I simply cannot imagine my life without climbing!

CR: When did the idea of pursuing routesetting first occur to you?

Olga: I had always been intrigued by the work of routesetters. I participated in numerous competitions in Poland, regularly taking part in the finals. Once I couldn't attend the largest competition in Poland because I was supposed to go on a climbing holiday in Spain and knew I wouldn't be able to participate in the finals. The comp featured international competitors and the best Polish routesetters, including two IFSC routesetters: Adam Pustelnik and Tomasz Oleksy. I still wanted to participate in some way and the idea occurred to me that maybe I could try to take part "from the other side." This was my first time working as a routesetter and I fell in love with it. Setting a competition makes you feel pressure, responsibility, and excitement. All so different

from the emotions you feel as an athlete, but somehow similar. As a routesetter, I can share the athletes' feelings: joy, disappointment, frustration, happiness. I experience all these emotions with them. This is unique.

CR: Have you had routesetting mentors over the years?

Olga: That's a hard question to answer. I don't think I have one single person from whom I drew inspiration. I tried to learn as much as possible from each experienced routesetter. Everyone has different experiences, observations, and perspectives on routesetting. Everyone is unique in their own way. I have always tried to gain as much information as possible from everyone I've worked with and turn it into self-development.

CR: Why do you think Poland has produced so many IFSC routesetters? What's the secret?

Olga: Have we? France has way more. We're only a group of four (Adam Pustelnik, Tomasz Oleksy, Marcin Wszolek, and me).

CR: Can you describe your journey to becoming an IFSC routesetter?

Olga: From the very beginning I wanted to set at the World Cups and work for the best athletes with the best routesetters. That was my goal. I think I was lucky. On my way, I met many people who supported me, motivated me, and helped me gain the experience I needed. I worked a lot to be where I am and I would like to thank everyone who supported me during that time.

I realize that women are currently "needed" to ensure diversity in routesetting. I know that there are many skilled women who will also achieve this competence in the future. I would really like us to be selected not because of our gender, but because of our competencies.

CR: You were part of the routesetting team at the most recent IFSC World Championships in Bern, Switzerland. How was that? Were there any standout moments for you?

Olga: It was a challenging experience. We spent 20 days together in a team of eight. Each of us is different, and each of us has a different temperament, emotions, and personality. I'm proud that these differences all turned out to be beneficial and we created a great team led by Rémi Samyn. We spent countless hours together, working under constant pressure and expectations regarding our work and its results. It was an extraordinary period for me, full of laughter, joy, excitement, disappointments, tears, stress, lack of sleep, and copious amounts of coffee. I'm proud to have been part of this team. Each of us made every

effort to ensure that the competition was prepared at the highest level. Every moment spent with these people brought a smile to my face. The most touching moment was Micka's (Mickael Mawem) victory. His emotions and unlimited happiness moved not only me to tears. The entire team was touched. We wait for moments like this.

CR: Does the new Olympic combined format present any extra challenges for the setting team?

Olga: First of all, we have two zones, which makes the boulders longer than in the standard format. We need to create three challenging steps instead of two, which complicates things a bit. The competitor's time to complete the boulder is still limited to four minutes. For us, this means that the athlete has to put in more effort in the same amount of time. As a result, they usually have fewer attempts per boulder. I wouldn't say the setting itself has changed. Rather, we try to match the level and difficulty of the boulder to the desired result. Collectively, we want both lead and bouldering specialists to have an equal chance of winning a combined medal. This is a challenge. Boulders can't be too difficult or too easy. We have IFSC guidelines that tell us what the ideal result is. Of course, perfection is difficult to achieve, but we strive to meet these standards. Additionally, it is important that each boulder, despite its completely different style, is characterized by similar difficulty. We do not want to favor the "slab master" or an athlete who is better at coordination problems. This is our intention.



Cody Grodzki and Olga setting during World Championships in Bern, Switzerland, 2023

CR: Do you think there is room for new competition formats?

Olga: Just recently, I worked during a competition in La Rochelle, France. The organizers, in cooperation with the French federation, proposed a new, mixed competition format. Classically we have four boulders, but instead of one athlete on the mats we see a team of two (one male and one female). Each competitor tries to get to the top, and their final result is the sum of the results of both of them. Therefore, the victory depends on the success of the entire team, not of any individual athlete. An interesting element of this format is the fact that the boulders are exactly the same. Athletes share beta with each other and work together as a team.

This event was a kind of test to see whether the proposed format had a chance of being implemented. I'm surprised how well this format worked! There are a lot of details to work out, but from a routesetter's point of view it was a great experience! We could observe that women performed significantly better than men on some movements/blocks. It was really interesting, and I think that this type of mixed format has a chance to exist in the future.

CR: Do you still set commercially in addition to comps?

Olga: I set commercially from time to time, although I must admit that I didn't do any



Romain Cabessut and Olga setting for an event with a new format in La Rochelle, France, 2023



Photo: Szymon Alstienionek

Setting during the European Cup in Krakow, Poland, 2021

commercial setting at all this season. I get more excited about setting for competitions, even though this is more demanding and much more difficult both mentally and physically.

CR: *In your opinion, what are the greatest and most challenging aspects of routesetting for competitions?*

Olga: The best thing is change. Each competition involves a different story, different people, different boulders, different challenges. I love it. Of course, I often work with the same people and that's also beautiful. These days, when we are together almost 24 hours a day, we get to know each other very well. I always remember the moments spent together with positive nostalgia and look forward to the next meeting with friends I haven't seen for a long time.

The hardest parts of routesetting are the moments of doubt and disappointment when our work does not bring the results we expected. However, each such moment is a lesson for the future.

CR: *Lately, particularly with bouldering, we've seen a little bit of athlete and spectator pushback, implying that comp problems are veering too far away from what a climber finds on rock. What's your take on this?*

Olga: I think we need to separate competition climbing from rock climbing. It is still the same sport, but personally I believe that the empty wall and "plastic holds" help us create various challenges for the competitors. The balance is important.

I think we routesetters try to figure out new moves because we are in love with climbing ourselves. We want to bring out its beauty and show those parts that have not yet been discovered. There was a time when the triple jump didn't exist. Nowadays it's considered a classic part of competition climbing. This is progress! Climbing is objectively a young sport, so it's still growing. We still have some kind of freedom in creating routes and boulders, and that's great. Limitations and strict rules will kill the sport in my opinion. The only thing we should avoid are potentially dangerous movements that may cause injuries to athletes.

CR: *Is there anything in terms of organization that you would like to see more of in comp setting?*

Olga: Actually, yes. I think there should be professional testers in the future. When setting competitions – especially large events – there is usually not enough time and too much work. We are exhausted. The tester's help is invaluable. They are not burdened with long days of work, which makes them fresh. Such a person can be a big relief for the team. Additionally, sometimes the tester can look at the boulder from a completely different perspective because they are not biased by the "intent" of the routesetter. Thanks to this, the team can enter the breaking beta phase faster/easier. Of course, not everyone is suitable for this role. It is important for testers to both understand routesetting and the way athletes think when they first approach a problem.

CR: *With such a hectic schedule, are you still able to climb a little bit outside of routesetting?*

Olga: Outside climbing is the best part of climbing for me. The greatest pleasure for me comes from exploring the rocks. It's a break from my work and it's the part of my life that gives me the most pleasure and fun. It's a passion that I share with my children and friends. Furthermore, to be able to set World Cups, I must be physically prepared at a high level. I treat rock climbing as a break from indoor

climbing. I cherish the opportunity to relax and enjoy every moment that I can spend on the rocks with my friends whose energy motivates me to continue training.

CR: *You've already achieved so much as a routesetter. Is there anything major that you still feel like you need or want to do as a routesetter and as a climber?*

Olga: Thank you very much! Yes, I am very happy with the point I have reached, but there are still a few goals I would like to achieve. However, I would definitely like to be able to work in this profession for at least 20 more years. As a climber, I would like to improve my sport level. Additionally, I have a few dreams related to sport climbing and multi-pitch climbing that I would like to fulfill and a few "classic" places in the world that I would like to visit, including Rocklands in South Africa, Yosemite and Red River Gorge in the US, and Todra in Morocco. I dream of traveling around the world and living in Fontainebleau. 📍



Photo: Michał Leser, Galavski

Olga climbing the multi-pitch route Rokokowa Kokota (7c+) in Tatra Mountains, Poland

OLGA NIEMIEC

Born: 1990 in Kraków, Poland

Background: Studied architecture, currently working full time as a mother of two and IFSC-certified routesetter, devoted climber, and aspiring surfer.



CLIMBING HOLDS WITH SCANDINAVIAN TOUCH



SLICKS
DUAL TEXTURE
PERFECTION



Lead Climb like never before

 **ProGrade**
Free, inside.

ROUTE SETTER
magazine

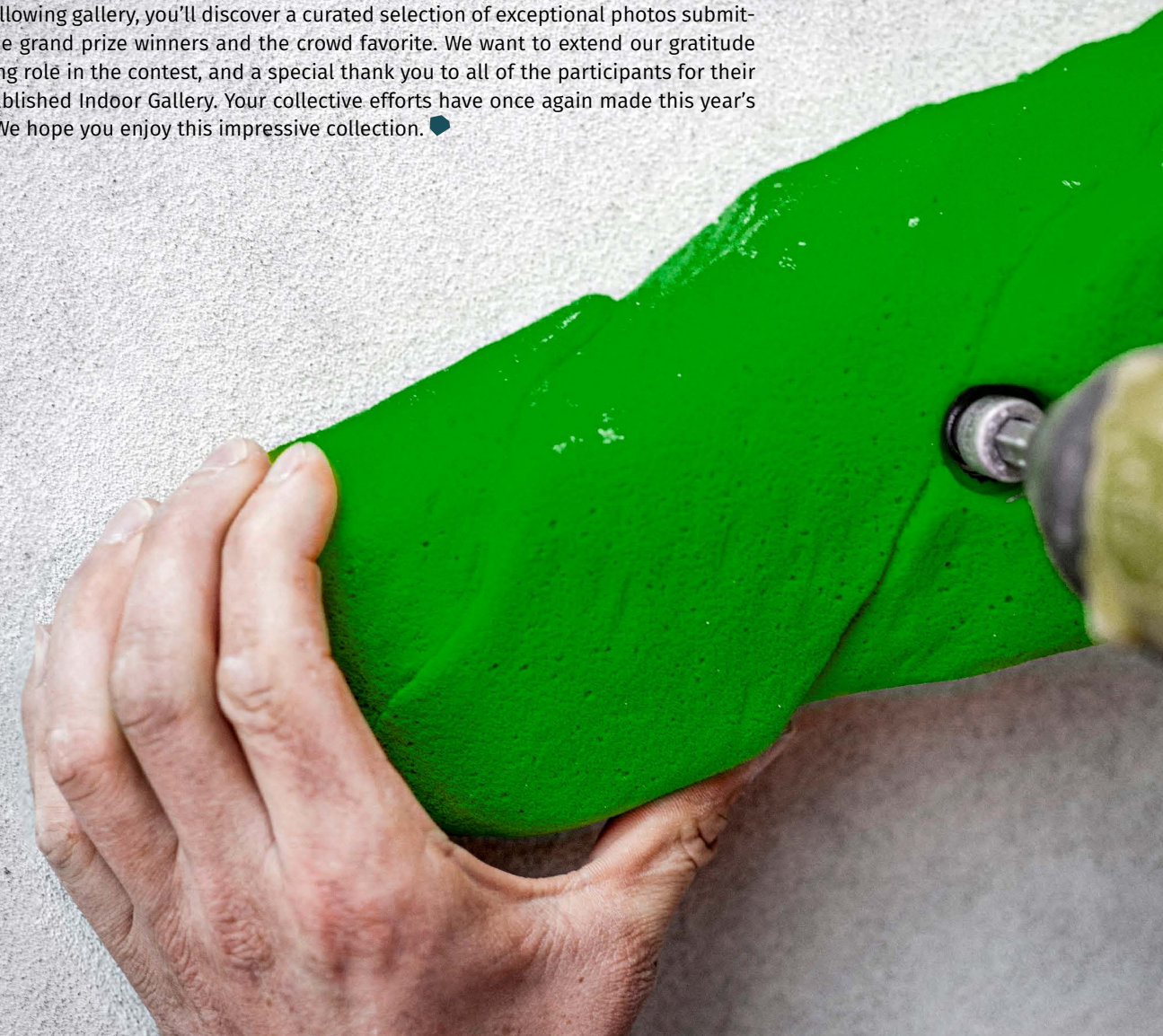
**PHOTO
CONTEST
2023**

RSM PHOTO CONTEST 2023

GYM VIBES: MOVEMENT, ROUTESETTING, DESIGN AND COMMUNITY

◆ In our third consecutive Route Setter Magazine Photo Contest, we expanded our invitation to a broader audience, calling upon all climbers to channel their creativity and skills in capturing the aspects of indoor climbing that resonate with us: movement, routesetting, design, and community. The outcome was just what we had hoped for: a diverse collection of images infused with individuality, expertise, humor, and a sense of unity.

A total of 439 images graced the RSM Photo Contest stage within the 8a.nu Gallery, with 1171 Vengas (votes) included among them. In the following gallery, you'll discover a curated selection of exceptional photos submitted to the contest, including the grand prize winners and the crowd favorite. We want to extend our gratitude to the voters for their supporting role in the contest, and a special thank you to all of the participants for their contributions to the newly established Indoor Gallery. Your collective efforts have once again made this year's contest fantastic and exciting. We hope you enjoy this impressive collection. ◆



1ST PLACE

*AS THE SUN PAINTS SKIES WITH HUES SO BRIGHT,
IN DAWN'S EMBRACE, WE CRAFT NEW HEIGHTS.
ROUTES TAKE FORM IN MORNING'S TENDER GRACE,
A CANVAS OF CLIMBING, IN THIS SUNRISE CHASE.*

by Vladek Zumr

📍 Kletterzentrum Gaswerk, Wädenswil, Switzerland



2ND PLACE

by Carlo Traversi

📍 The Boulder Field, Sacramento, California, USA



3RD PLACE

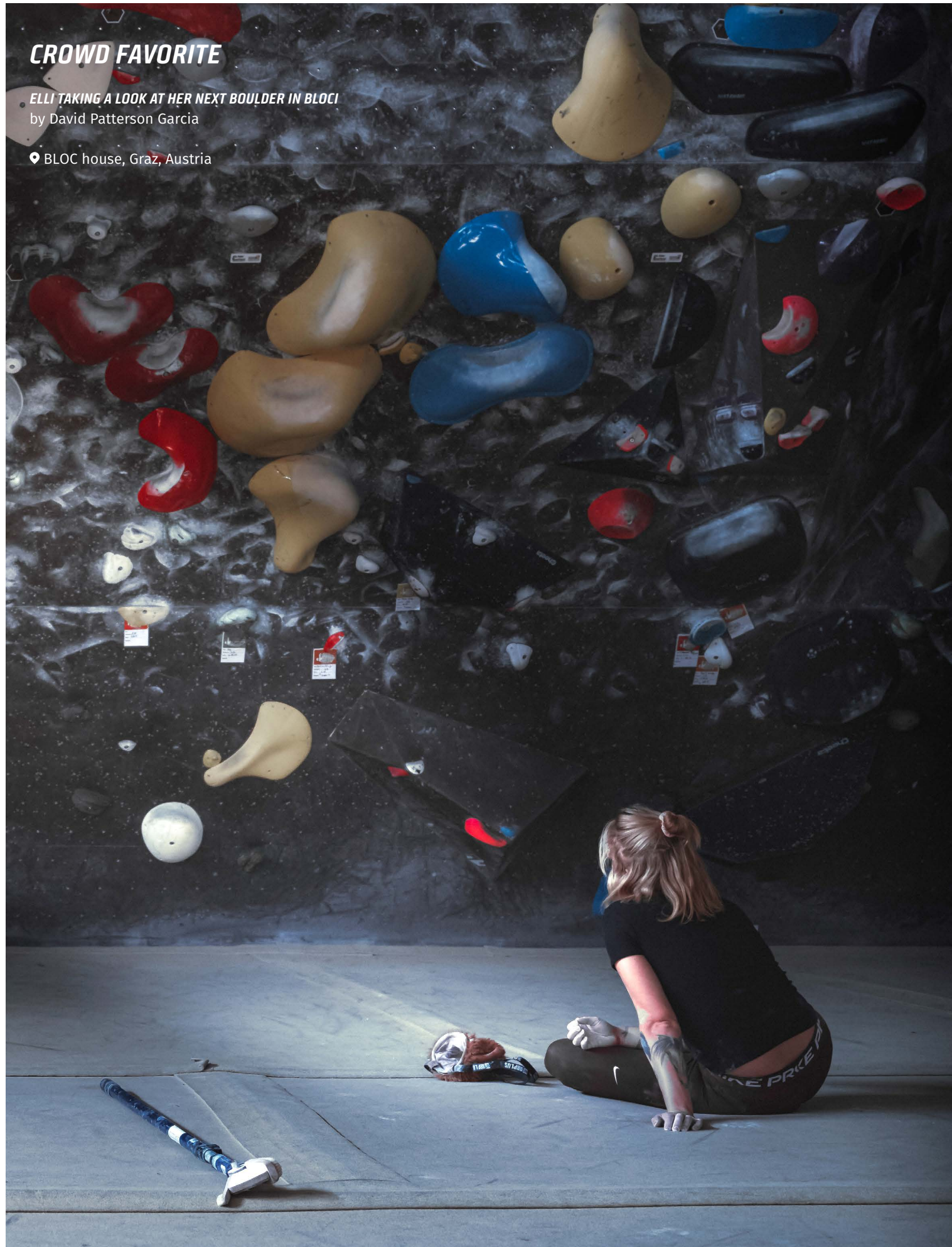
FROM PLANNING TO EXECUTION
by Victor Hall

📍 Urban Climb West End, Australia

CROWD FAVORITE

ELLI TAKING A LOOK AT HER NEXT BOULDER IN BLOCI
by David Patterson Garcia

📍 BLOC house, Graz, Austria



MODERN-DAY REMAKE OF MICHELANGELO'S CREATION OF ADAM

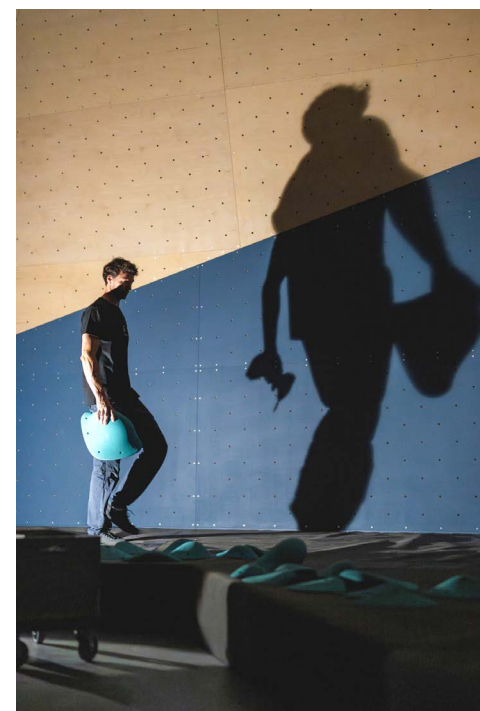
by Shae Yue

📍 Lighthouse Climbing Gym, Singapore



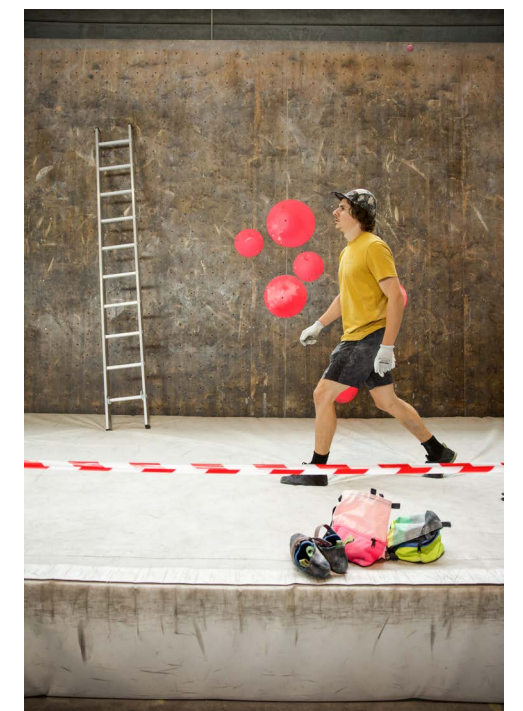
by Pawel Jarosiewicz

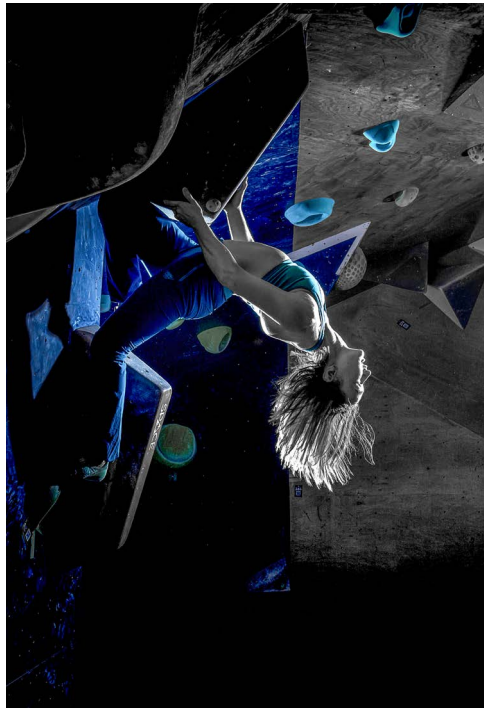
📍 WEST Bouldering, Warsaw, Poland



by Esteban Lahoz

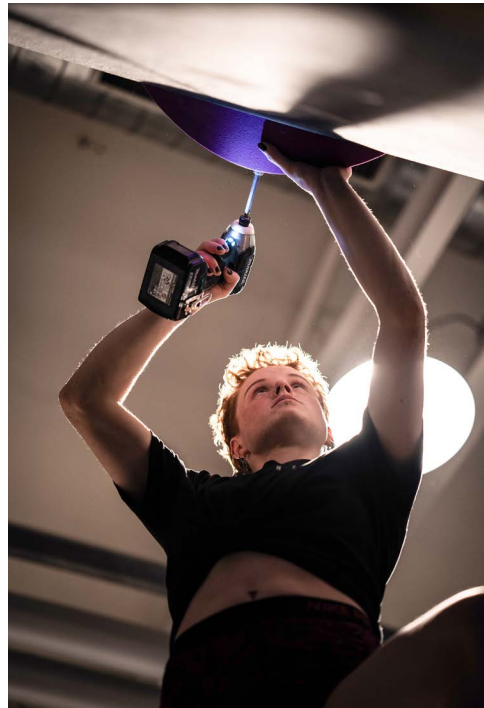
📍 Bimano Boulder, Bern, Switzerland





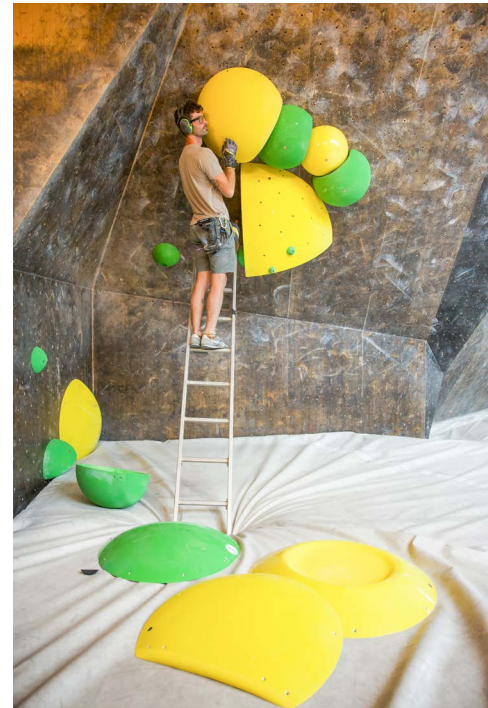
TURN OFF GRAVITY
by Max Shinkarenko

📍 Climbing SPACE, Kyiv, Ukraine



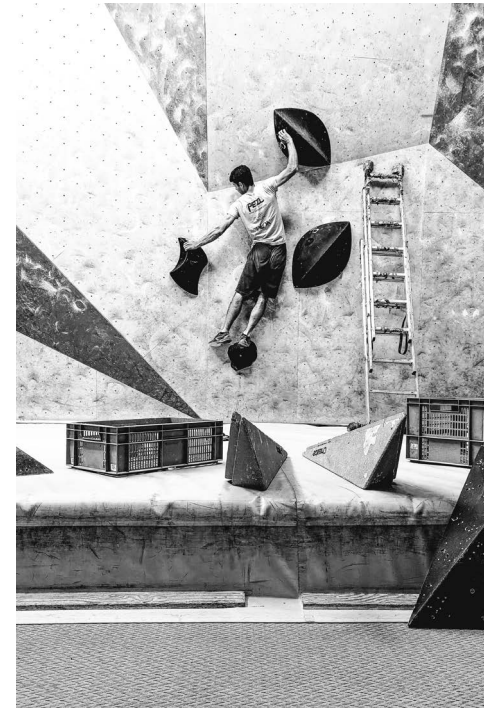
HELEN EMELI SETTING AND MOVING
by Jan Zureck Fotografie

📍 Boulderhaus Reutlingen, Germany



by Esteban Lahoz

📍 Bimano Boulder, Bern, Switzerland



GYMS ARE SANDBOXES, ROUTESETTERS ARE ARCHITECTS, AND THE ROUTES THEY CREATE ARE WORKS OF ART
by Matej Kožič

📍 Fothia Velesajam dvorana za penjanje, Zagreb, Croatia



by Stefan Riedl

📍 Der Steinbock, Nürnberg, Germany



THE GAME OF LIGHT AND SHADOW
by Martin Farkas

📍 Lezecká stena K2, Bratislava, Slovakia

THE PROCESS
by William Avelar

📍 Hangar 18 South Bay, Hawthorne, California, USA





TEAM WORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK
by Shae Yue

📍 Lighthouse Climbing Gym, Singapore



TRAINING
by Patricia Valero

📍 Sputnik Climbing Berango, Biscay, Spain



RAT PACK
by Erica Taylor

📍 The Boardroom Climbing, Queensferry, United Kingdom

ROUTESETTER VEC FIXING A LOOSE HOLD
by Matej Kožič

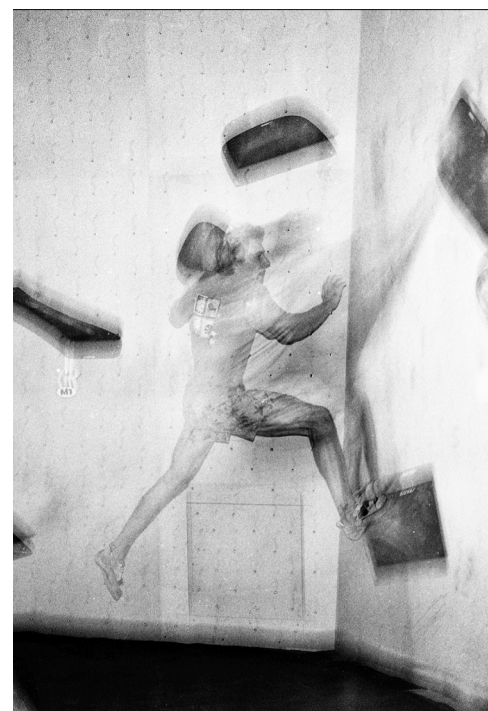
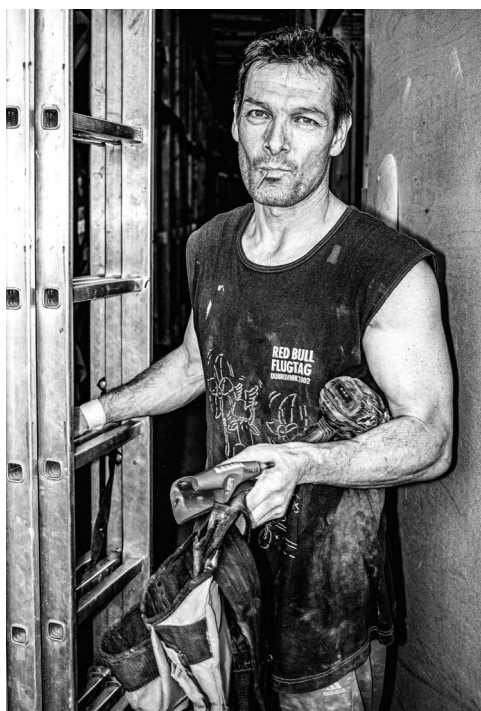
📍 Boulder Zona, Zagreb, Croatia

by Christina Fleming

📍 Gravity Vault, Flemington, New Jersey, USA

GHOST CLIMBER
by Grzegorz Gawlas

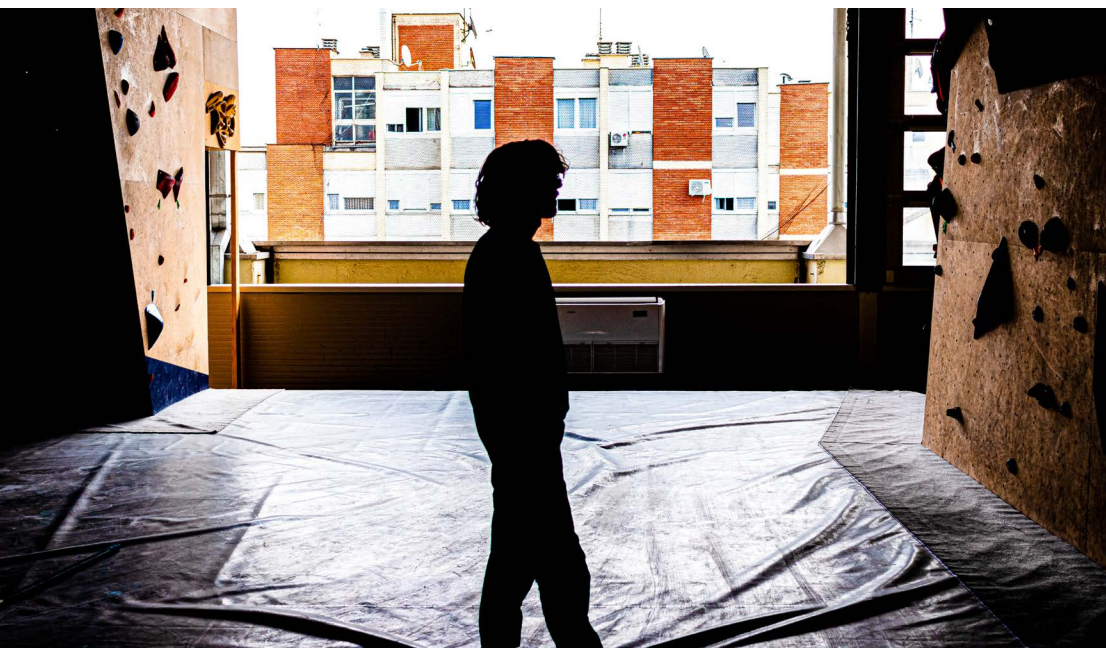
📍 Baldpol Bouldering, Bielsko Biata, Poland



GYM BIRTHDAY!
by Chia-Da Hsu

📍 Oyeyo Boulder Home, Singapore





by Matej Kožić
📍 Boulder Zona, Zagreb, Croatia



by Victor Hall
📍 Urban Climb West End, Australia



SUMMER DAYS TESTING AND TWEAKING
by Scotty Pritchard
📍 Blochaus, Marrickville, Australia



by Stefan Riedl
📍 Der Steinbock, Zirndorf, Germany



VIEW FROM THE OFFICE
by Scotty Pritchard
📍 Urban Climb Blackburn, Melbourne, Australia



by Marius Baade
📍 Oslo Klatresenter, Oslo, Norway

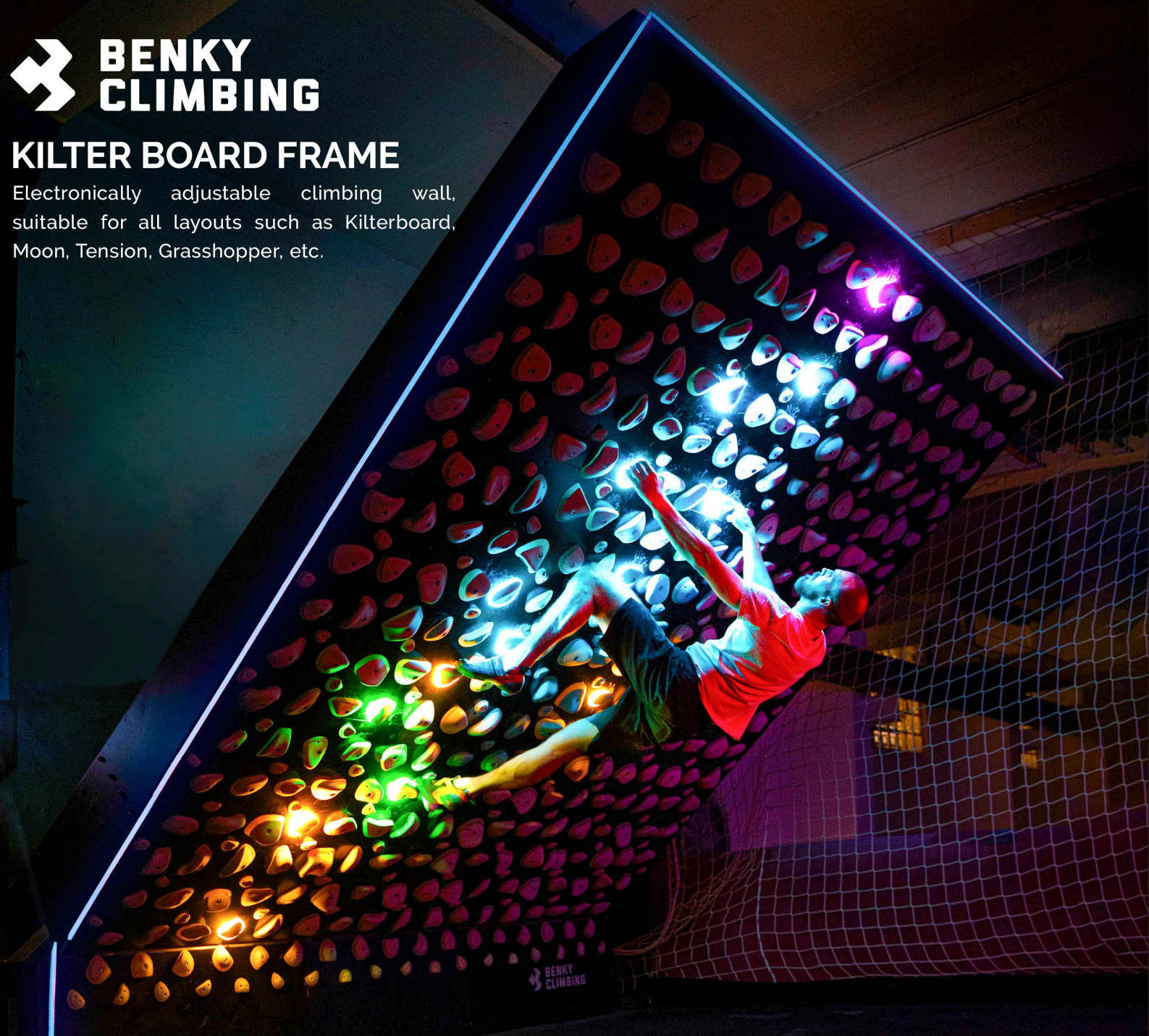


PRIORITIES
by Victor Benito
📍 One Move, Gijón, Spain



KILTER BOARD FRAME

Electronically adjustable climbing wall, suitable for all layouts such as Kilterboard, Moon, Tension, Grasshopper, etc.



World's first exclusively gear driven frame



Maintenance free



Fast adjustment



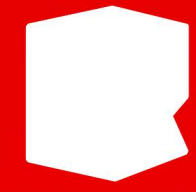
Completely stable



SCAN ME



benkyclimbing.com



ROPELESS



SCAN ME



Upsalite is the worlds only mesoporous magnesium carbonate that absorbs ten times more moisture than conventional magnesium carbonate.



We purify Magnesium carbonate by reacting carbon dioxide with the liquid that remains after salt is extracted from seawater. In fact, manufacturing our magnesium carbonate "consumes" carbon dioxide.

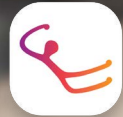


I'm made of sugarcane. I'm recyclable. I'm capturing CO2 from the environment.

resin free

Why should I care ? Scan the QR - Code.

ropelessgear.com



Vertical-Life



VERTICAL-LIFE APP

CONNECT WITH YOUR GYM COMMUNITY

The Vertical-Life App is a digital climbing guide, social network and training log for outdoor and indoor climbers. With full digital topos for 4800 crags and 321 gyms around the world the app is an essential resource for any climber. Catering to an ever-increasing number of climbing gyms, our app introduces dynamic training features. Embark on monthly challenges, celebrate personal milestones, and fuel your climbing passion.



480K+

REGISTERED CLIMBERS



14M+

TICKED CLIMBS



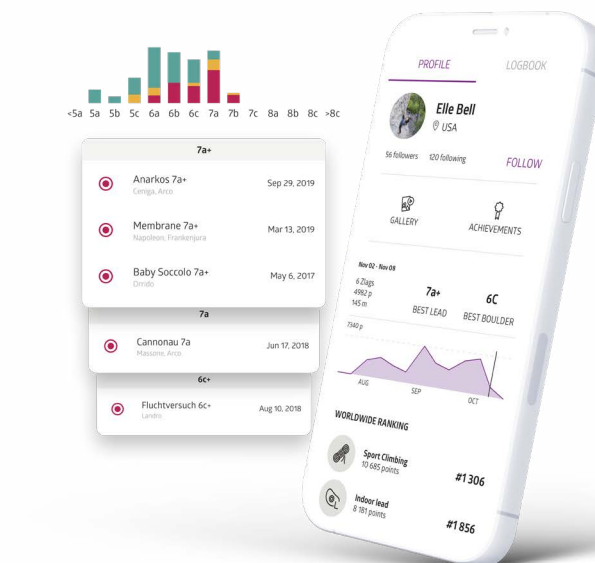
150K+

CHALLENGE PARTICIPATIONS



300+

SMART CLIMBING GYMS



SHOWCASE YOUR GYM

DETAILED GYM TOPOS & FEEDBACK

Vertical-Life's meticulous, one-of-a-kind topos make navigating a gym onsite or at home easier than ever.

- » Full gym map
- » Sector overviews
- » Route and boulder details
- » Logbook for tracking progress
- » Climber feedback for routesetters and managers

MOTIVATE YOUR COMMUNITY

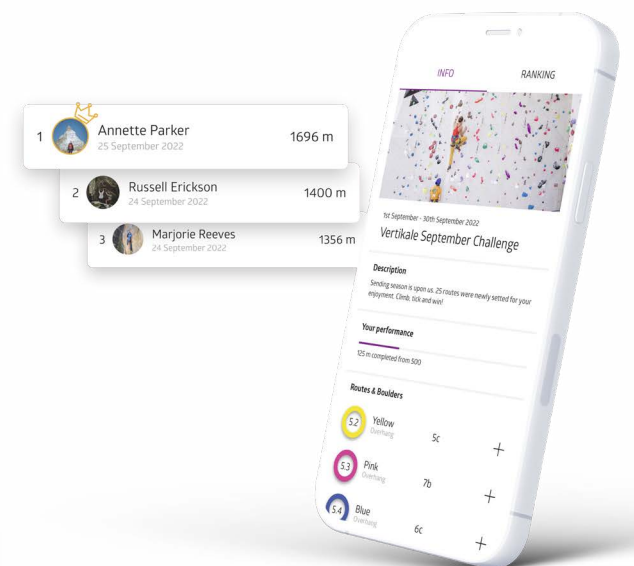
MONTHLY CHALLENGES AND RANKINGS

Multiple challenges are launched monthly by Vertical-life with prizes awarded by partnering sponsors.

GYM CHALLENGES NEW

Give your climbers an authentic challenge! The flexible format allows you to select climbs with a simple click and rank participants based on points collected or distance climbed.

- » Custom challenges created with your gym's existing routes & boulders
- » Prize giveaways
- » Gym rankings
- » Worldwide ranking
- » Friendly competition



KEEP SENDING

PERSONAL LOGBOOK & TRAINING

Climbers can tick any climb in the app and add tags and personal notes to keep a log of their favourite climbing memories. Logbooks are also great for training and tracking climbing progress.

- » Progress tracking
- » Statistics and insights
- » Rankings
- » Follow friends

Download the app

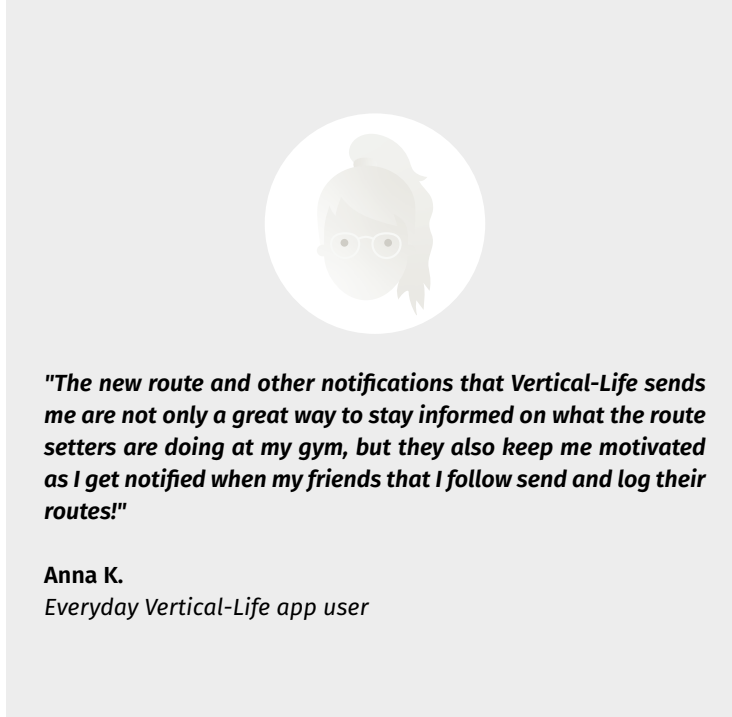




NOTIFICATIONS

EFFORTLESS COMMUNICATION AND UPDATES

Never miss a new line! Notifications go out when new routes and boulder problems go up at the gyms you follow. Keep your climbers engaged and excited with real-time updates, creating a seamless and interactive gym experience.



"The new route and other notifications that Vertical-Life sends me are not only a great way to stay informed on what the route setters are doing at my gym, but they also keep me motivated as I get notified when my friends that I follow send and log their routes!"

Anna K.
Everyday Vertical-Life app user

AN APP FOR ALL CLIMBERS

MAP OUT YOUR NEXT SESSION

Whether you only have time for an impromptu gym session, or you are excitedly planning your next climbing holiday and trying your next dream line, our interactive map has you covered!



GUIDEBOOKS

Brought to you by local authors

SMART CLIMBING GYMS

Topos, notifications, circuits & competitions

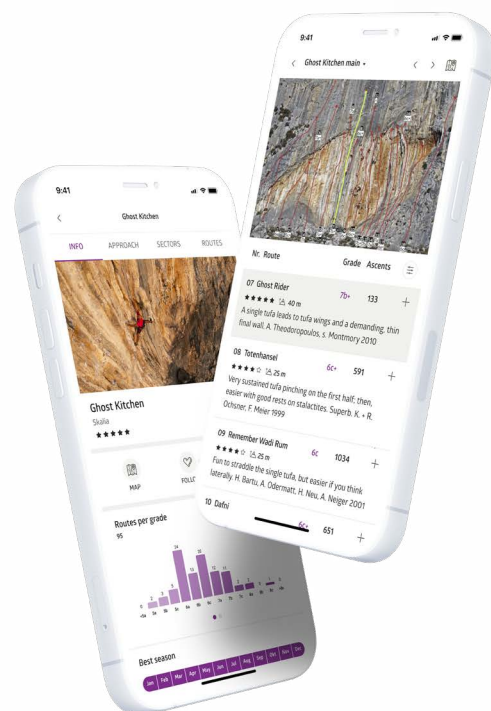
COMMUNITY ROUTE LISTS

Comments, descriptions and more

CLIMBING GYMS

Community and logbook features

Climbing shops & bars



INDOOR & OUTDOOR BETA

QUALITY OUTDOOR TOPOS

All premium content derives from local guidebook authors and publishers.

- » Full digital topos
- » Routes lists and details
- » Access and description info
- » Sector overviews
- » Easily search and filter
- » Comment and share

Download the app



SMART CLIMBING GYM



DRIVE CLIMBER ENGAGEMENT WITH GYM CHALLENGES

Custom-tailored challenges to perfectly match your gym's unique vibe and climbing community.

KEY FEATURES

1. SEAMLESS CLIMBER INTEGRATION

WITH GYM CHALLENGES

- » **One-Click Join:** Climbers can effortlessly participate using the app.
- » **Intuitive Ranking:** Simply ticking off climbs propels climbers up the challenge leaderboard.
- » **Effortless Navigation:** Access all challenge climbs with ease, courtesy of detailed gym topos.

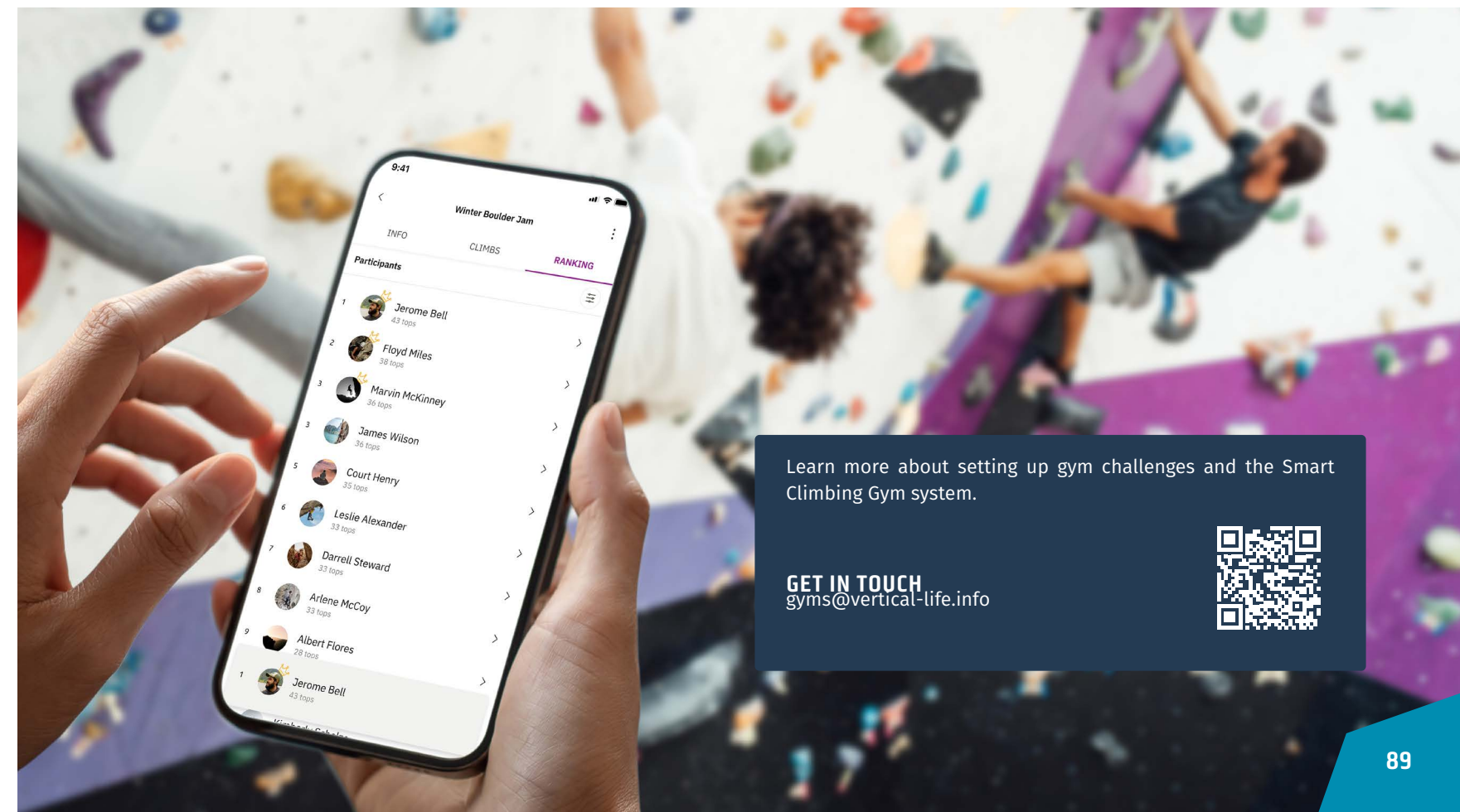
2. PERSONALIZED TO YOUR GYM

- » **Effortless Setup:** Seamlessly integrate your gym's existing routes and boulders into engaging contests.
- » **Performance Metrics:** Track and celebrate climbers' achievements, whether by points earned, tops achieved or distance climbed.
- » **Local Leaderboards:** Showcase the prowess of your top climbers and promote a friendly yet competitive atmosphere.
- » **Engage in Friendly Rivalry:** Encourage climbers to challenge their peers, adding an extra layer of excitement to their experience.

3. STAY CONNECTED WITH YOUR

CLIMBERS

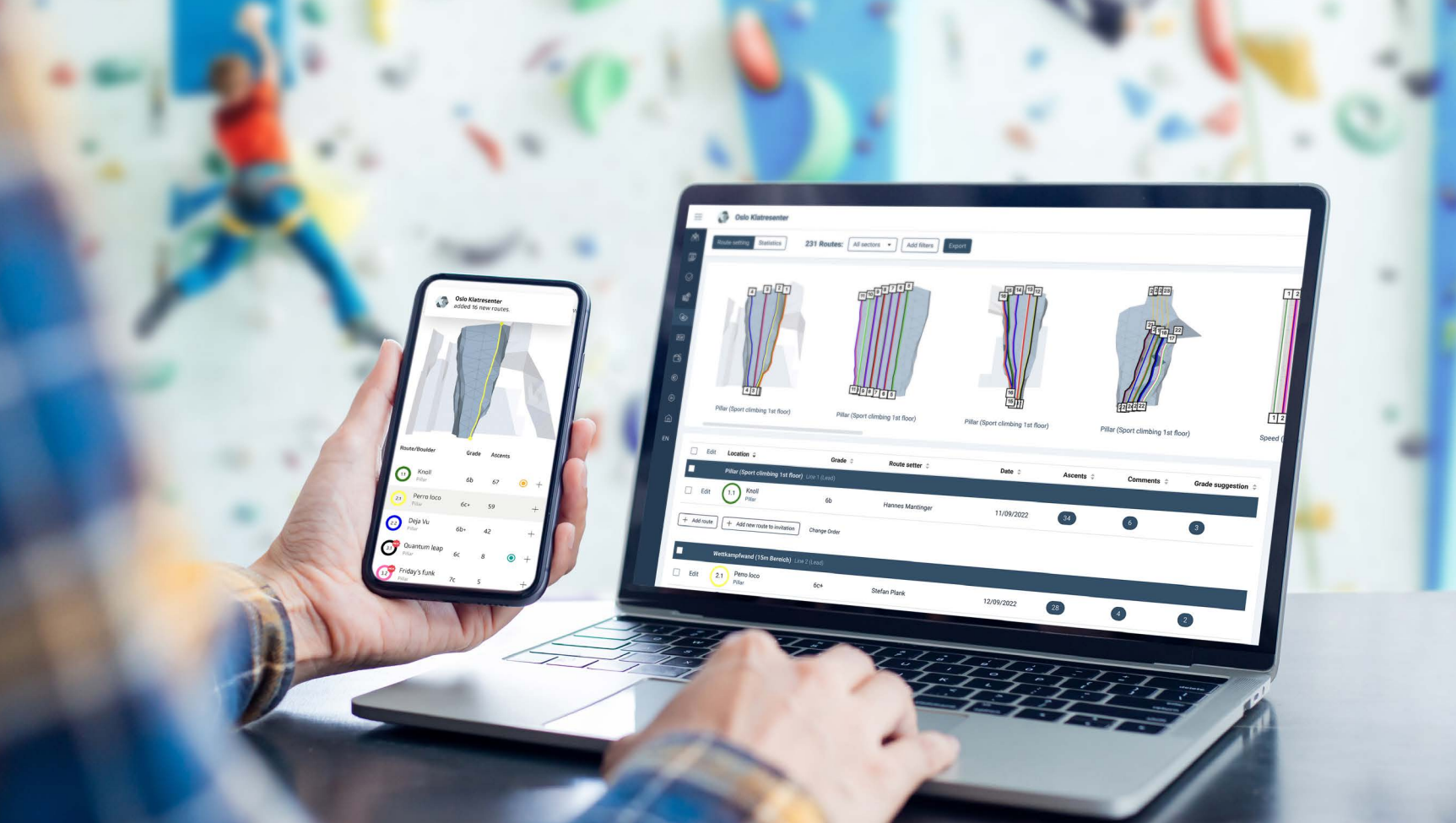
- » **Direct Messaging:** Reach out to challenge participants instantly via the integrated gym system.
- » **Real-time Updates:** Ensure your climbing community stays in the loop and remains actively engaged.



Learn more about setting up gym challenges and the Smart Climbing Gym system.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info





A DIGITAL CLIMBING GUIDE FOR YOUR GYM

ENGAGE AND INFORM YOUR CLIMBERS

With Smart Climbing Gym, your facility becomes a constantly evolving online guide. Directly update climbers about new challenges and receive their feedback in real-time.

ACTIVITY ANALYSIS TOOLS

- » **Gym Activity Monitoring:** Track your gym's popularity, climbing grades, and quality ratings.
- » **Routesetter Performance:** Get detailed insights on each setter's impact on climb quality and grading accuracy.
- » **Route Setting Insights:** Analyze and plan your route distribution by grade and sector to maximize variety and quality.



VERTICAL-LIFE: A NEW WAY OF MANAGING YOUR CLIMBING GYM

EMPOWER YOUR GYM WITH SMART TOOLS



Transform how you manage the key aspects of your climbing gym – from route setting to staff coordination and climber engagement. Vertical-Life's Smart Climbing Gym is a comprehensive digital solution, combining powerful software and a user-friendly app to enhance every part of your gym's operations.

BOOKING MANAGEMENT SUITE

Seamlessly manage every booking detail

- » **Check-In System:** Efficient and quick client check-ins
- » **Digital Course Booking:** Simplify course reservations
- » **Flexible Slot Booking:** Customizable for all activities
- » **Staff & Task Coordination:** Optimize staff scheduling
- » **POS Integration:** Streamline sales and check-ins
- » **Gym Profile in App:** Connect directly with climbers

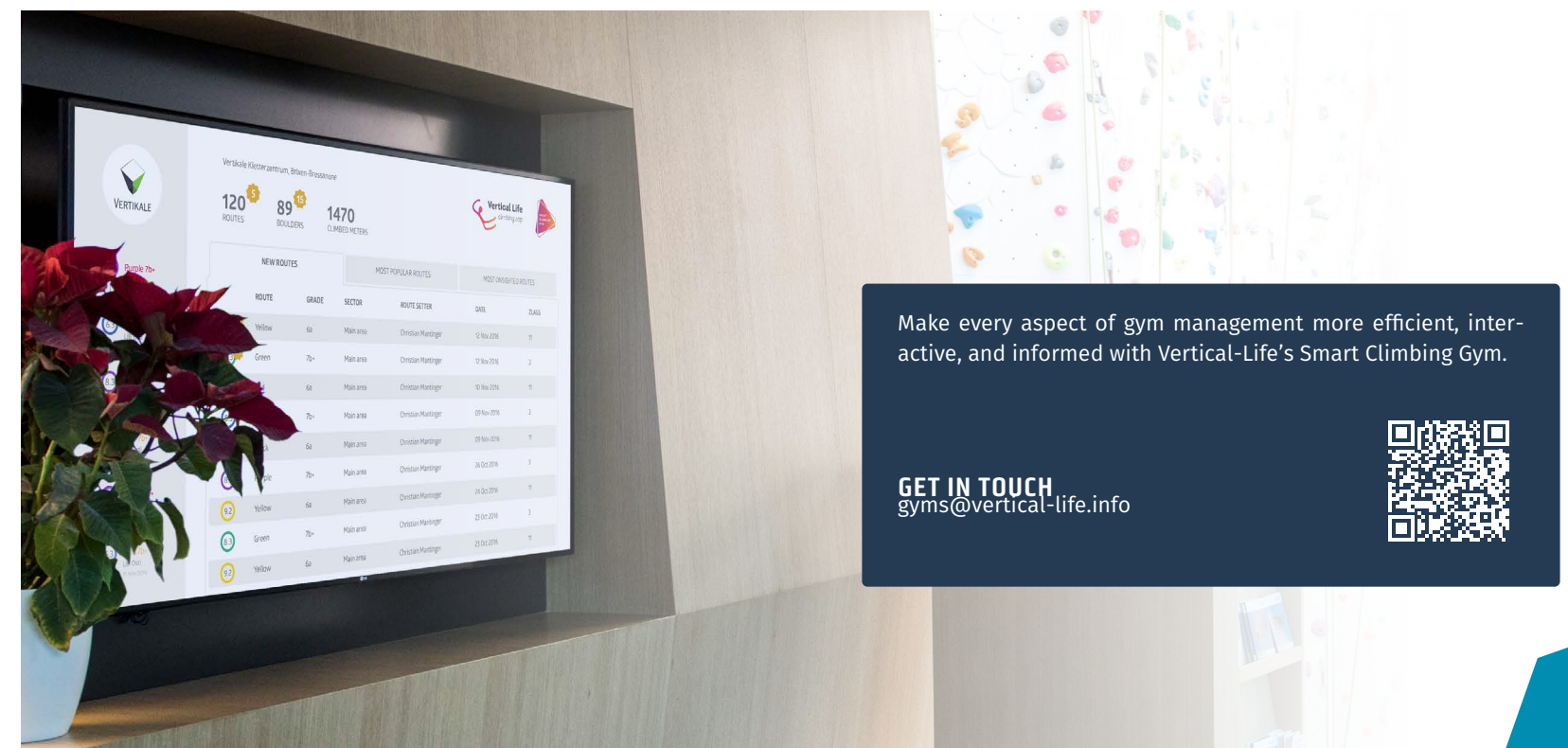
DIGITAL ROUTESETTING SUITE

The all-in-one solution to connect setters and climbers

- » **Routesetting Tools:** Manage and plan with ease
- » **Custom Digital Topos:** View engaging route information
- » **Informative Displays:** Utilize infosccreens and web iframes
- » **Valuable Insights:** Analyze performance and preferences
- » **Comprehensive Staff Management:** Efficiently assign and track tasks
- » **POS and App Integration:** Enhance user experience

INFOSCREENS FOR ONSITE BROADCASTING

- » **Live Feed:** Display a live feed of real-time climbing activity and current route information.
- » **Challenges Display:** Showcase your gym's and Vertical-Life challenges on smart TV monitors within your gym.



Make every aspect of gym management more efficient, interactive, and informed with Vertical-Life's Smart Climbing Gym.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info



ROUTE INFO PERFECTED

CONVENIENCE MEETS CONNECTIVITY

Introducing our enhanced route cards, now equipped with QR codes that combine easy logging with our tried and trusted quick-click printing and classy design. It's a game changer for climbers and setters alike.

KEY FEATURES

1. CUSTOMIZED ROUTE CARDS

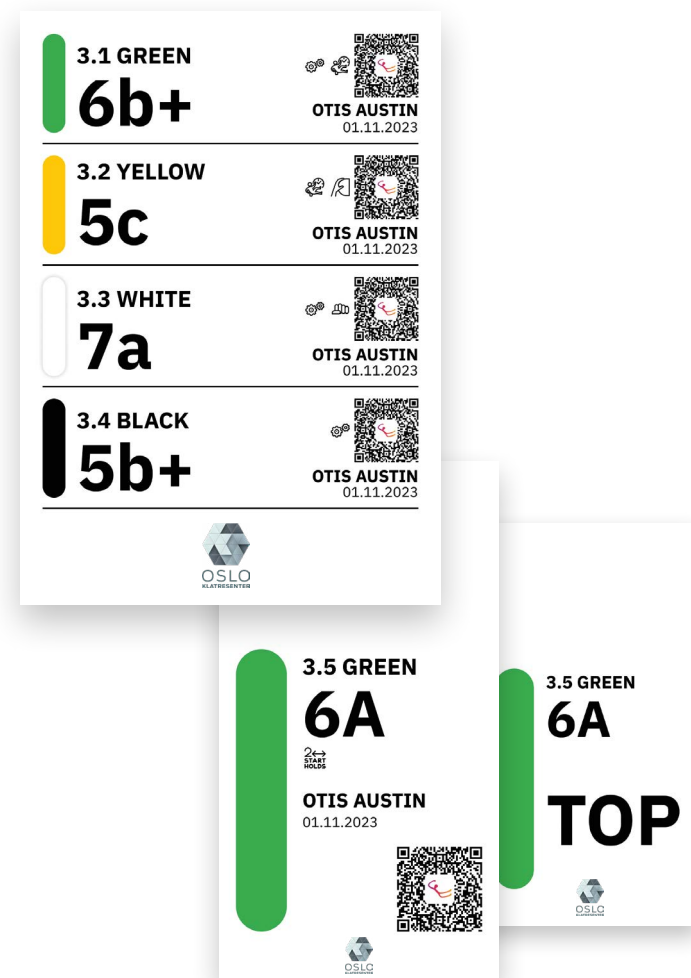
- » **Your Design:** Tailor format your route and boulder card's default template to fit your needs and automate the process.
- » **Countdown Clock:** Optionally include a take-down date so climbers can monitor their project progress.
- » **Your Gym's Brand:** Choose from multiple sizing formats and add your gym logo, sponsor logo, or unique artwork for a personalized route card.

2. QR CODE FOR EASY LOGGING

- » **For Setters:** Use the QR code to remove a route, and then add a route to the database seamlessly.
- » **For Climbers:** Utilize the QR code for easy route logging and access to additional route details and ascent activity.

3. SIMPLIFIED WORK FLOW

- » **For Managers:** Streamline your workflow by allowing each setter to effortlessly update the route database, print the day's work and new route cards with just a few clicks.



ROUTE CARD HOLDERS ELEGANT, DURABLE, AND USER-FRIENDLY

Our Route Card Holders offer a modern, sustainable way to display climbing routes. They enhance the customer experience with clear, easily accessible route information.

FEATURES AT A GLANCE

- » **Seamless Fit:** Directly print route cards using Vertical-Life's software, with a design that allows multiple routes per card.
- » **Effortless Installation & Use:** Quick to mount and easy to update. Bendable, hingeless design for rapid card changes.
- » **Durable & Discreet:** Crafted from shock-resistant polycarbonate, these holders are nearly invisible yet tough—perfect for indoor and outdoor use. The curved design improves side-view reading.

WHY UPGRADE?

- » **Eco-efficient:** More sustainable than traditional methods.
- » **User-Friendly:** Focuses on legibility and ease.
- » **Resilient Build:** Suitable for varied climbing environments.

BENEFITS FOR YOUR GYM

- » **Clean and Efficient Communication:** Ensure the smoothest experience for both climbers and setters.
- » **Streamlined Management:** Save time and resources with simplified route database updates.
- » **Enhanced Climber Experience:** Provide climbers with more info and a smooth and simple logging and progress tracking process.



Enhance your gym's functionality and aesthetics with our Route Card Holders, tailored for climbers and gyms.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info





FULLY INTEGRATED STAFF MANAGEMENT TOOL

SAVE TIME ON EMPLOYEE SCHEDULING, TIME TRACKING AND PAYROLL

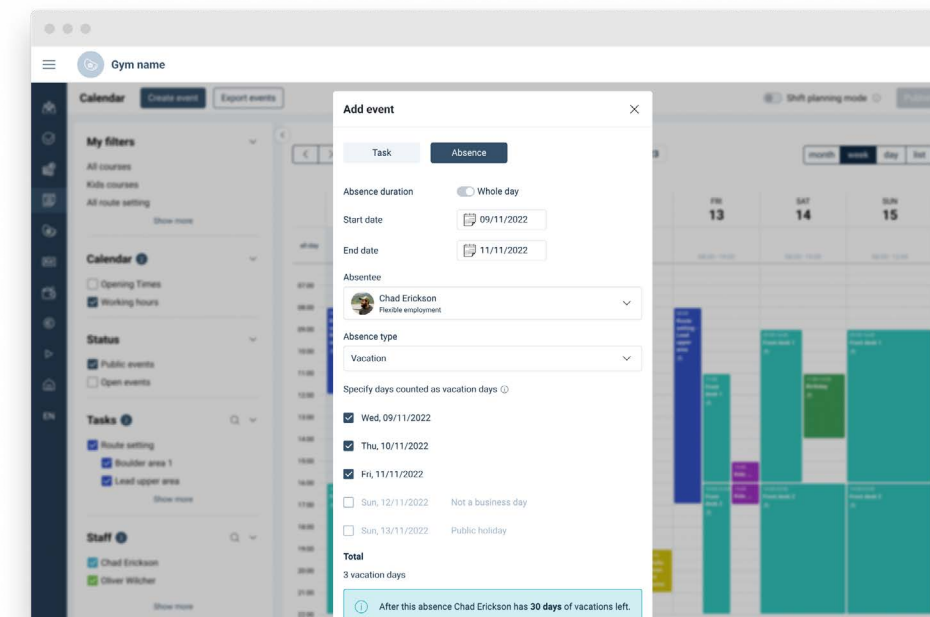
Entrust your staff scheduling to a system designed specifically for gyms. Whether it's managing front desk shifts, route setting, or coordinating climbing and fitness courses, our tool ensures seamless operations.



KEY FEATURES

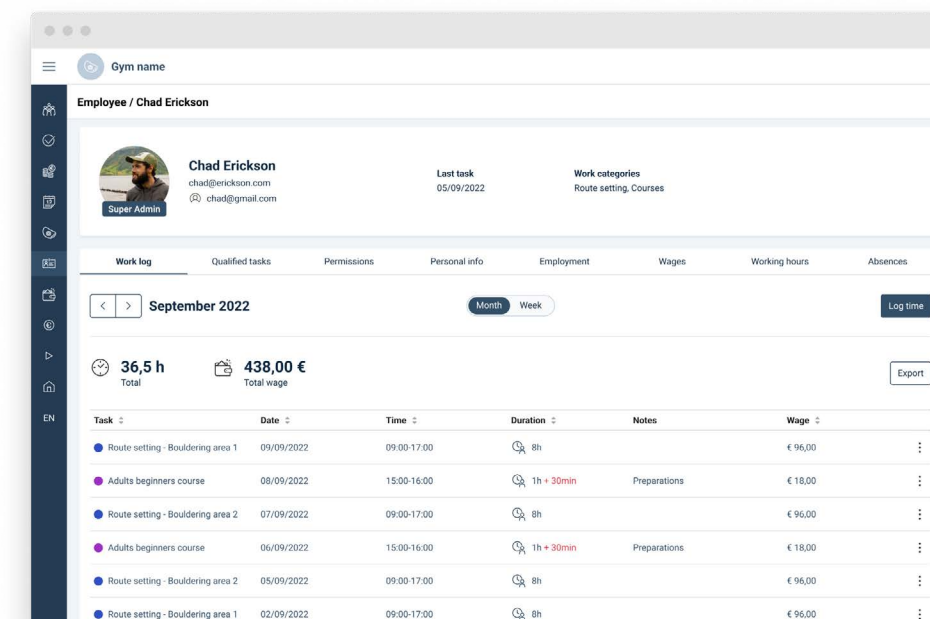
1. FLEXIBLE STAFF SCHEDULING

- » **Intuitive Calendar:** Use helper templates and customize with categories. Planning is easy with click-and-drag event creation.
- » **Empower Your Staff:** Offer open shifts, send job invitations, and allow staff to manage their schedules with automated notifications.



2. COMPREHENSIVE STAFF PROFILES

- » **All-in-One Data Management:** Store contact details, qualifications, access levels, and more for each staff member.
- » **Automated Time Tracking:** Track all work hours automatically, sourced directly from the scheduled events on the calendar.



WHY CHOOSE OUR TOOL?

- » **User-friendly:** Designed for ease of use, ensuring swift setup and modifications.
- » **Centralized:** Compile all working hours in one spot, reducing manual calculations and errors.
- » **Personalized Access:** Each staff member gets their own login to manage their time and availability.

Streamline your gym operations with a tool that understands your needs.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info





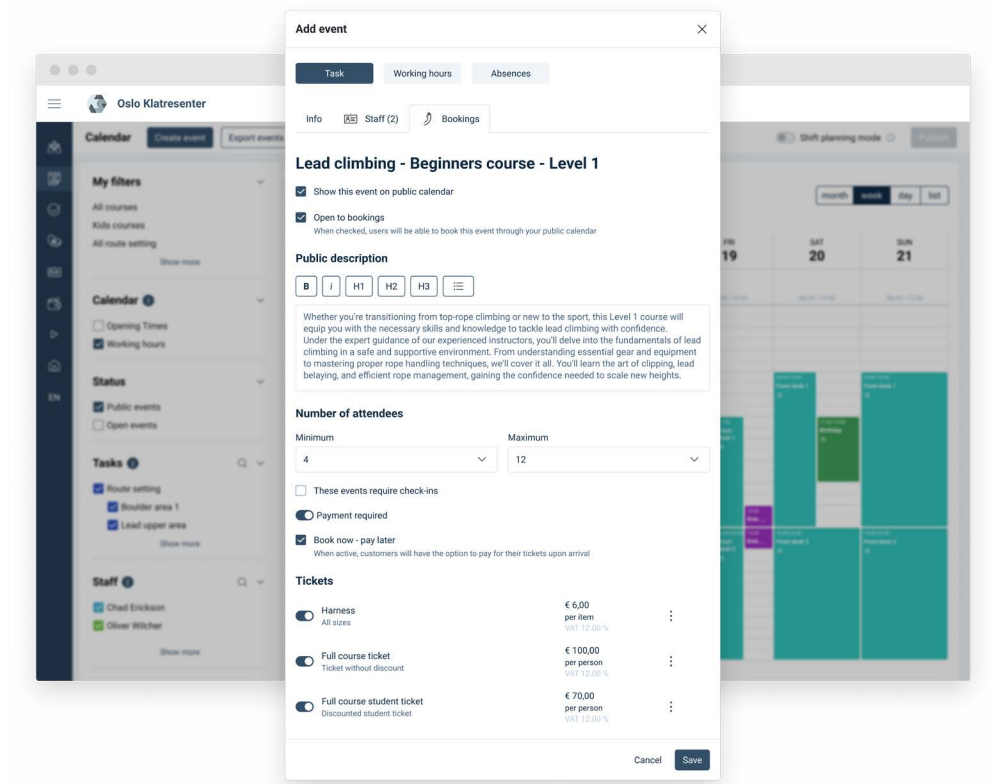
KEY FEATURES

1. CUSTOMIZABLE FRAMEWORK

» **Your Calendar, Your Rules:** Easily categorize and price your offerings, crafting a calendar that fits your unique needs.

2. STAFF COORDINATION MADE EASY

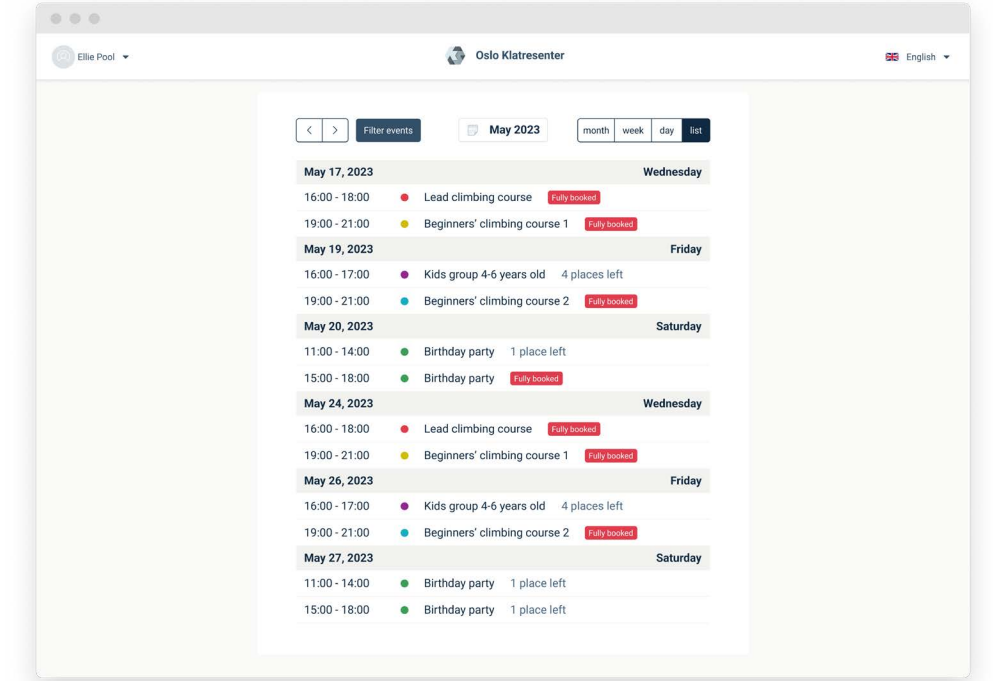
» **Assign With Confidence:** Connect staff to events with predefined roles and qualifications, ensuring every course is led by the right expert.



3. ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

» **Open & Accessible:** Share your offerings through a public calendar link. Let customers view, book, and reserve spots in real-time.

» **Full Oversight:** Manage registrations, track payments, and adjust course capacities. Make decisions that align with your gym's needs and customer preferences.

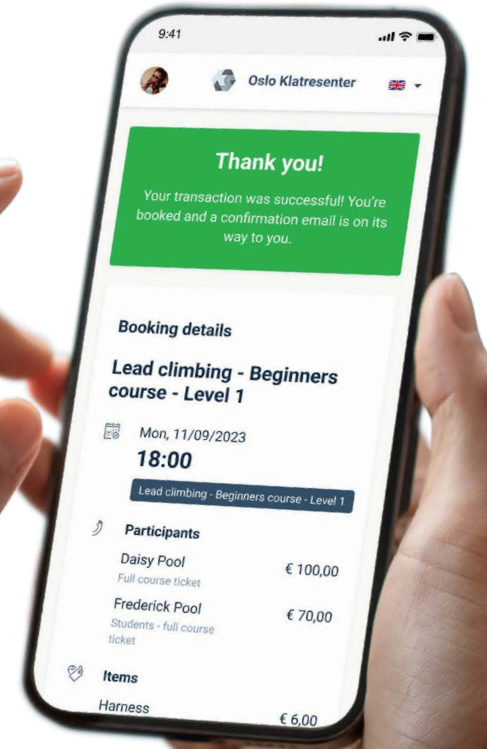


OPTIMIZE YOUR GYM'S COURSE BOOKING EXPERIENCE

REACH MORE CUSTOMERS, COORDINATE YOUR STAFF AND TAKE ONLINE PAYMENTS



Offer a seamless online booking and payment experience tailored to your gym. Our integrated tool allows you to effortlessly create, manage, and promote your courses, classes, and events.



WHY CHOOSE OUR TOOL?

» **Efficient and Integrated:** Coordinate bookings, staff, and promotions all in one place.

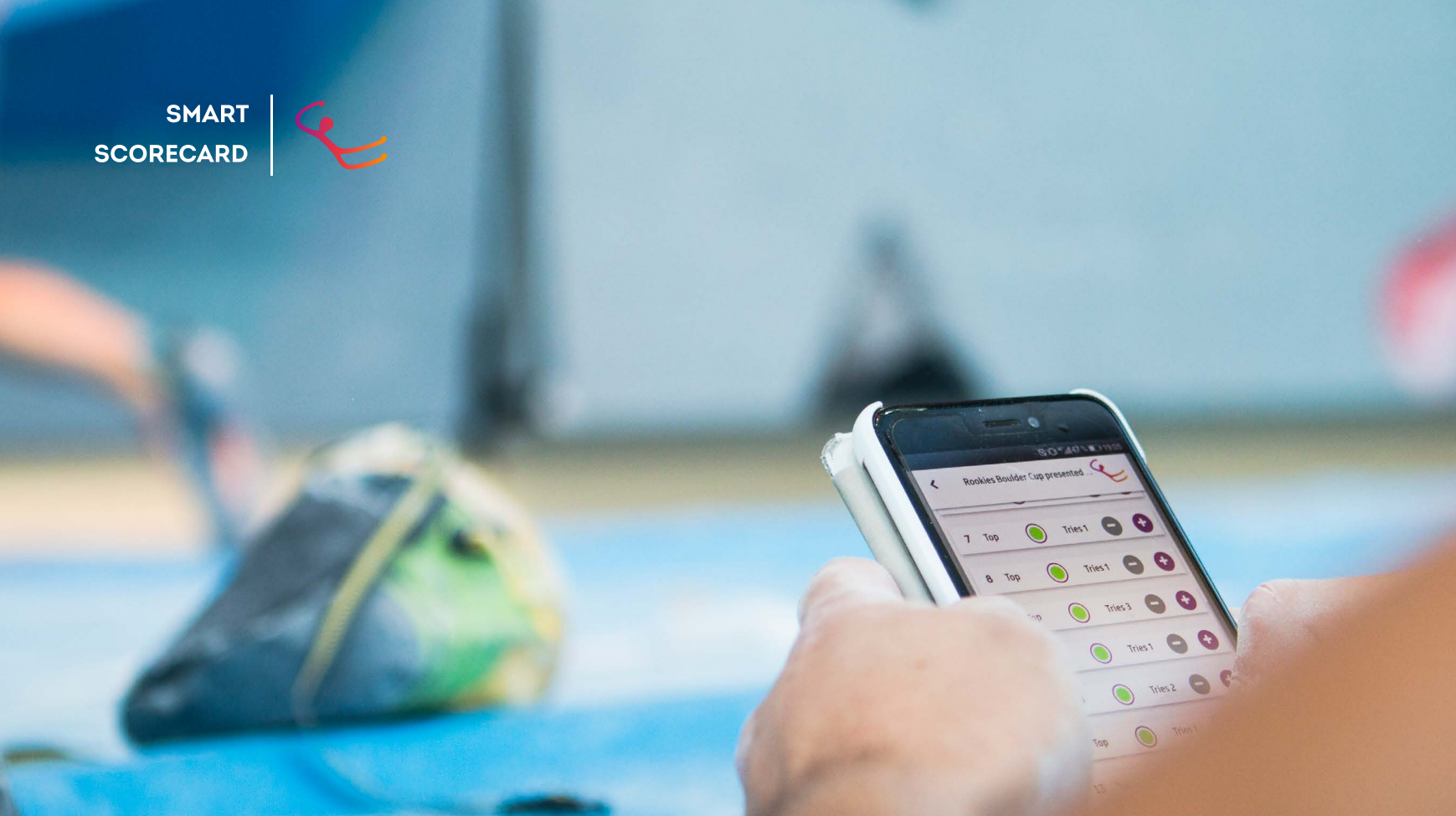
» **Dynamic and Responsive:** Update and inform your customers instantly about changes and new opportunities.

» **Data-Driven Decisions:** Analyze booking trends and customer feedback to continuously refine your offerings.

Empower your gym with a booking system that adapts to both your needs and those of your customers.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info





SMART SCORECARD

SIMPLE AND HASSLE FREE CONTEST SCORING

Are you familiar with that stressful and anxious feeling of trying to get the right results out to a waiting crowd at your event?

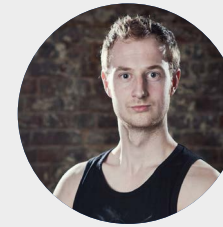
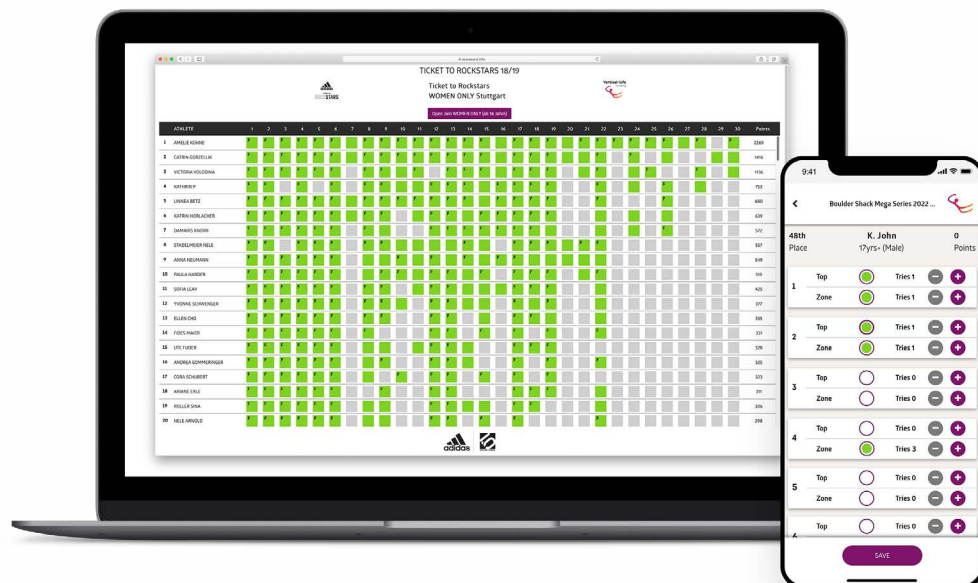
The Smart Scorecard by Vertical-Life puts an end to paper registration and scoring and offers a series of benefits for organizers and climbers.

BENEFITS FOR ORGANIZERS:

- » Real-time results
- » Flexible scoring formats
- » Multiple categories and rounds
- » Judge mode

BENEFITS FOR CLIMBERS:

- » Quick online registration
- » Live rankings
- » Intuitive logging of scores on smartphones



"We've been using the Scorecard for three years now. As an event organiser, it saves the team so much time and hassle. The Scorecard is a real life saver for us. Thanks to its automated scoring, it helps us pull off 12 categories in the qualification rounds and finals with more than 500 participants in one day! It's super easy for our participants to enter their scores and they love the added benefit of live results, which we display throughout the gym during the events. I can no longer imagine putting on a comp without it!"

Mike Langley

Event organizer, Head Route Setter at the Castle Climbing Centre UK and IFSC commentator



"The Vertical-Life Smart Scorecard is an integral element of our global adidas Ticket to Rockstars event series, because it enables us to run our all-inclusive grassroots bouldering jams with a user-friendly self-scoring system. Our T2R Smart Scorecard includes tailor-made functions that were specifically developed for us based on our needs, like a voucher system, participant certificates or a loyalty program. It helps us to create sustainable events with a long-lasting consumer experience."

Mike Hamel

Event director Adidas Rockstars / Ticket to Rockstars series

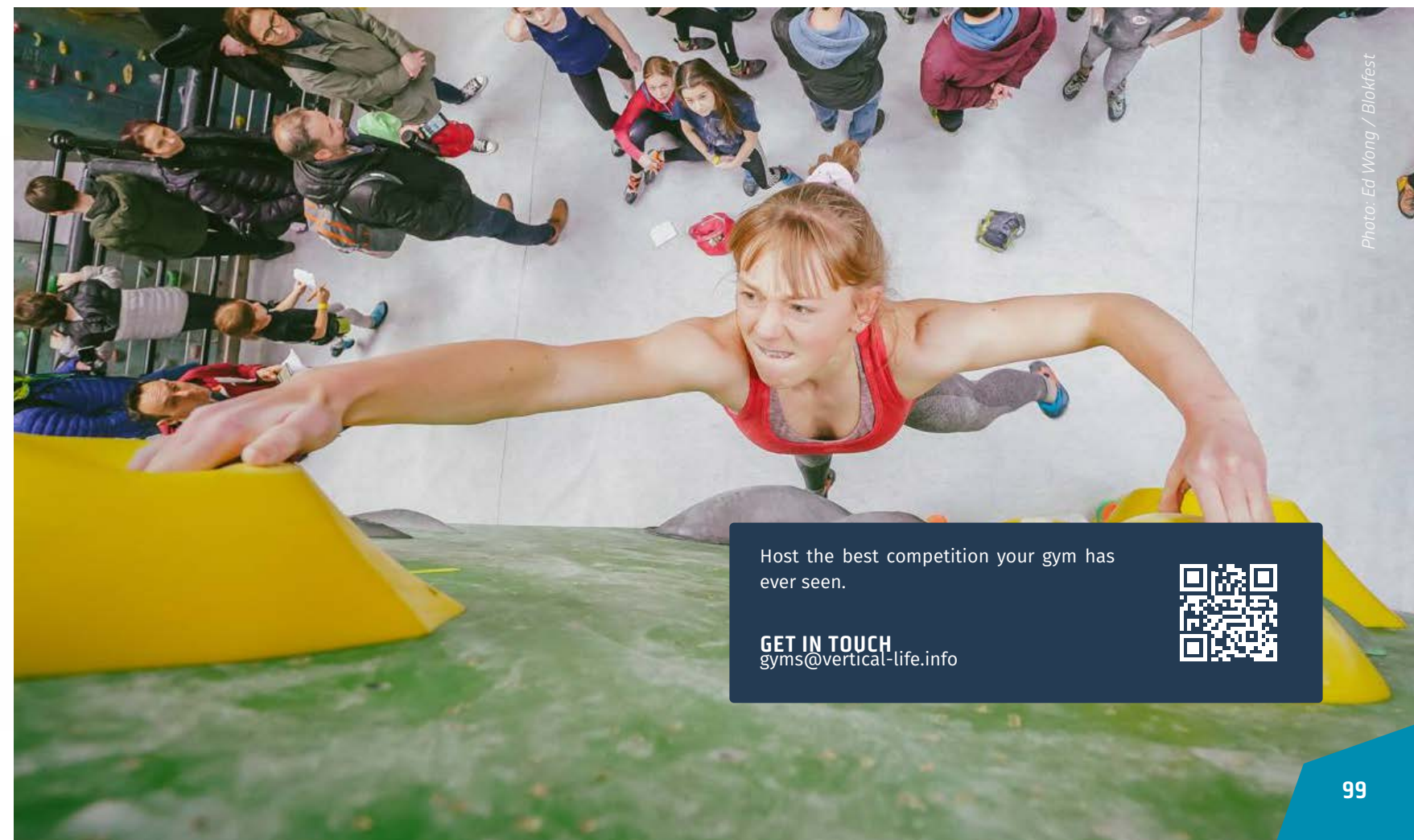
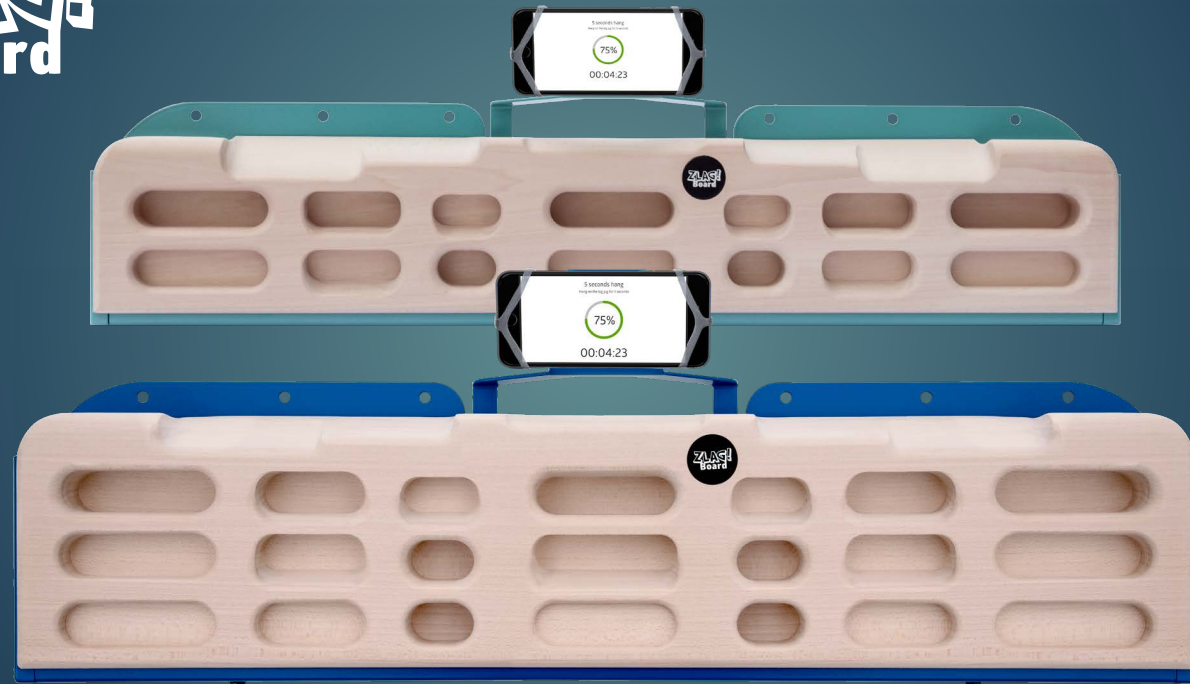


Photo: Ed Wong / Blokfest

Host the best competition your gym has ever seen.

GET IN TOUCH
gyms@vertical-life.info



ZLAGBOARD - TRAIN SMART, CLIMB HARD!

CUSTOM WORKOUTS, LOCAL CONTESTS AND AUTOMATED HANG TIMING AT YOUR GYM

Paired with its app, the award winning (and patented) Zlagboard puts an end to hand-written notes, spreadsheets and stop-watches to estimate hangtimes. The Zlagboard system does the job for you, using a weight-triggered mechanism for smartphones to precisely track the duration of every hang/rest as well as number of pull-ups. The app structures a whole training cycle and every session for you, giving detailed instructions about the single exercises, repetitions and rest times.

100% MADE IN SOUTH TYROL

All Zlagboards are manufactured by craftsmen in our home region of South Tyrol in the heart of the Alps.

COMMUNITY STATISTICS



8 800 hours
hang-time



5 932 844
pull-ups

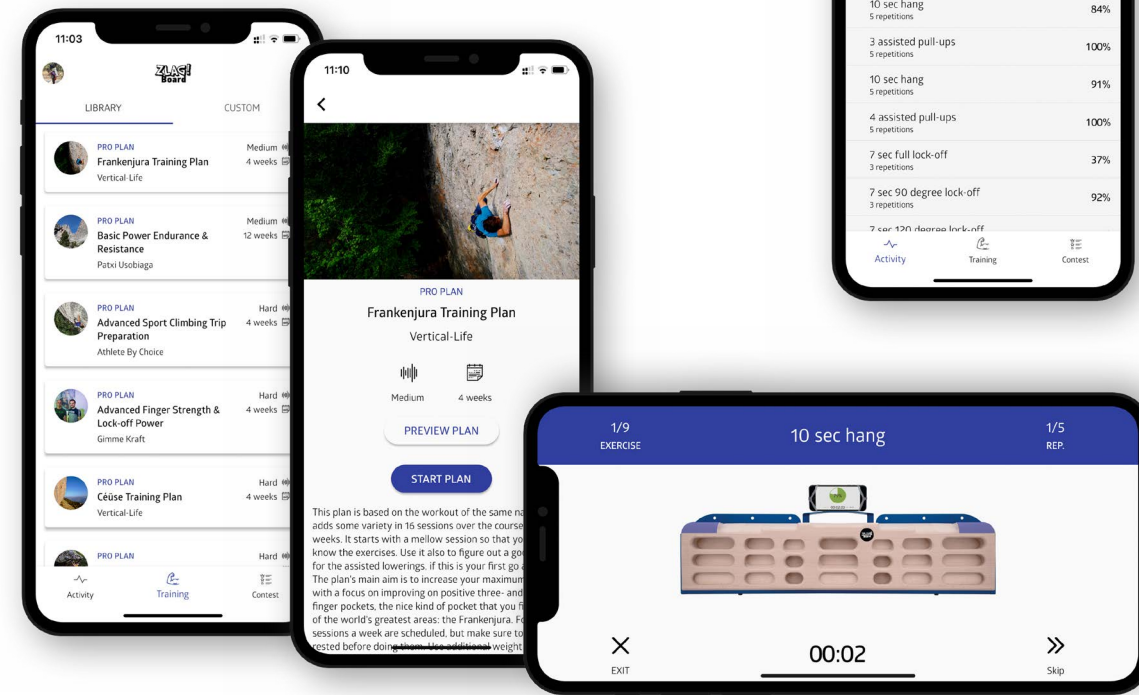


"Zlagboard is specifically designed to help with improvement, but also it's the best motivator. I used it during the lockdown and that was the only thing that helped to stay fit."

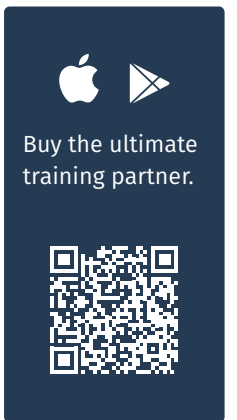
Farnaz Esmaeilzadeh
Pro climber, coach and route setter, Iran

NEW ZLAGBOARD PLANS

The zlagboard brings cutting edge training knowledge right to your fingertips. Zlagboard teamed up with some of the best coaches to develop a hangboard training program. Now you can train for your next big adventure with tailored training plans specifically adapted for the routes and boulders of some of the most famous climbing destinations around the world. Train hard for your next trip to Frankenjura, Fontainebleau or C euse.



TRACK YOUR IMPROVEMENTS
Performances (completion rates) are saved in the training log, allowing you to get detailed statistics.



Zlagboard.Contest

HOST YOUR OWN ZLAGBOARD.CONTEST!

The world famous Zlagboard.Contest is perfect for community events and it's guaranteed to draw a crowd and participants. The contest software tracks scores for the official world ranking as well as your individual event, which adds to the fun!



02:44.35 min
best hangtime by
Ramon Julian Puigblanque



More than **8 500**
participants



Photo: @lukasbiba



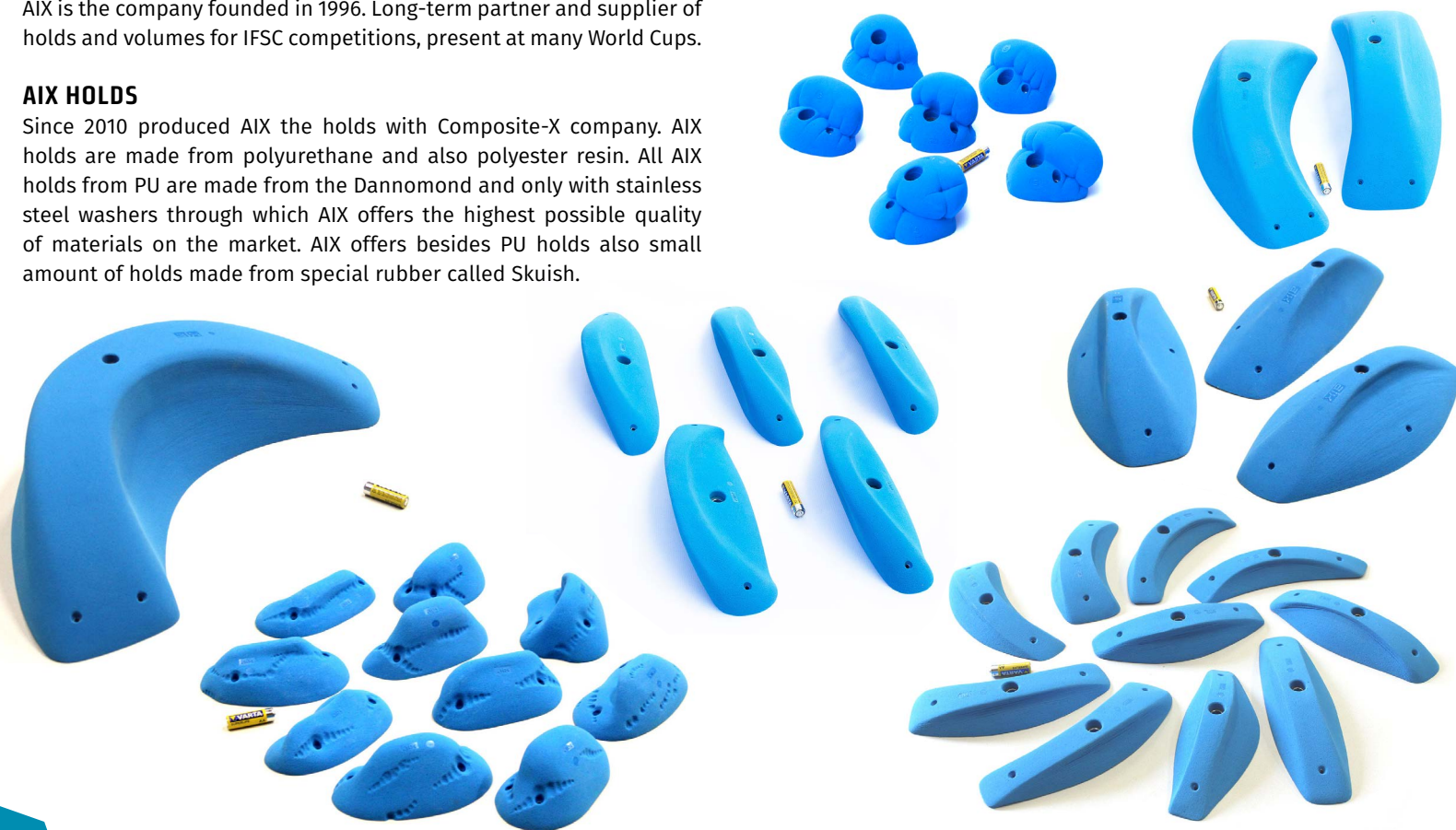
AIX HOLDS & VOLUMES

ICONIC HOLDS FROM CZECH REPUBLIC

AIX is the company founded in 1996. Long-term partner and supplier of holds and volumes for IFSC competitions, present at many World Cups.

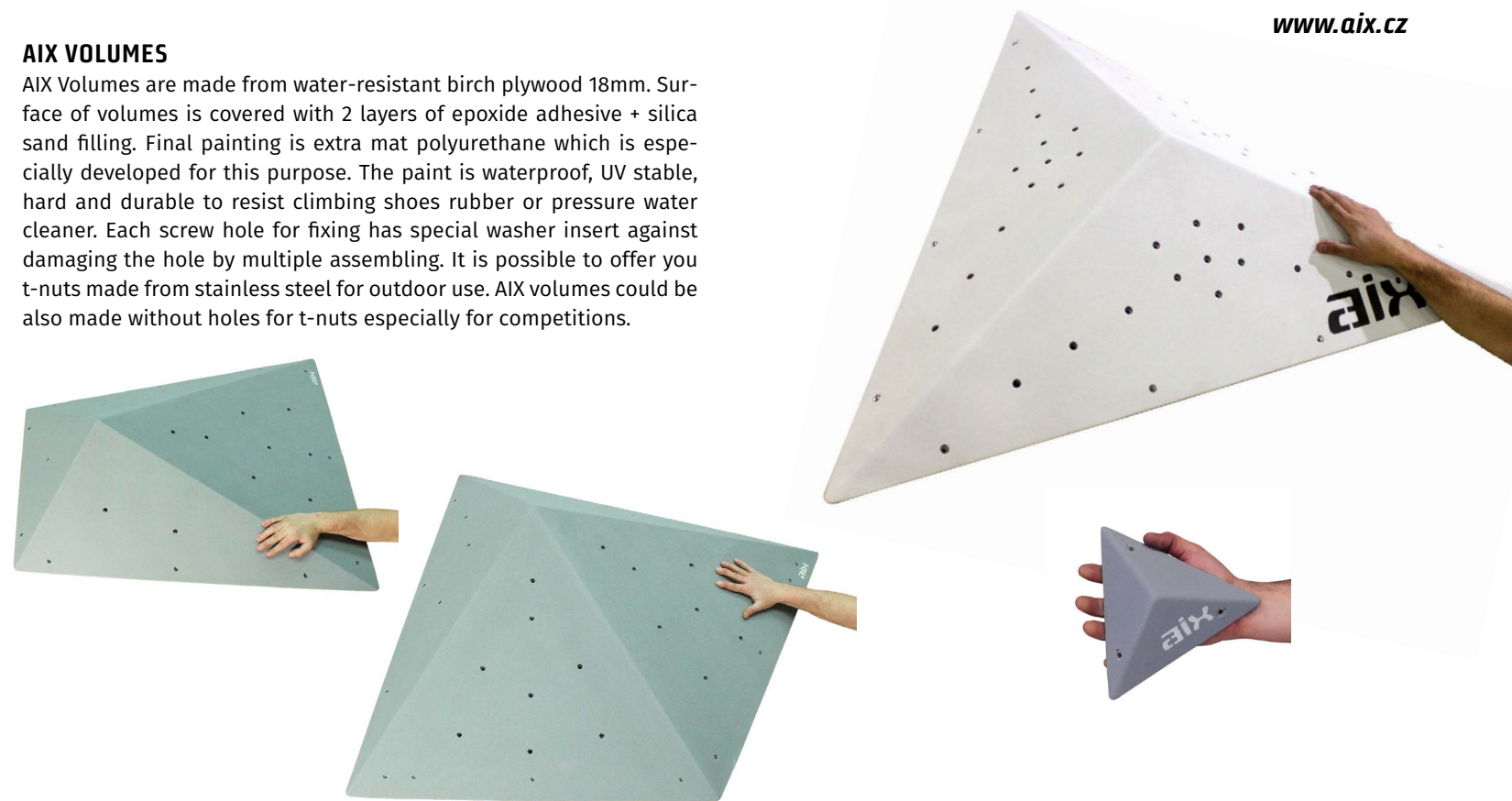
AIX HOLDS

Since 2010 produced AIX the holds with Composite-X company. AIX holds are made from polyurethane and also polyester resin. All AIX holds from PU are made from the Dannomond and only with stainless steel washers through which AIX offers the highest possible quality of materials on the market. AIX offers besides PU holds also small amount of holds made from special rubber called Skuish.



AIX VOLUMES

AIX Volumes are made from water-resistant birch plywood 18mm. Surface of volumes is covered with 2 layers of epoxide adhesive + silica sand filling. Final painting is extra mat polyurethane which is especially developed for this purpose. The paint is waterproof, UV stable, hard and durable to resist climbing shoes rubber or pressure water cleaner. Each screw hole for fixing has special washer insert against damaging the hole by multiple assembling. It is possible to offer you t-nuts made from stainless steel for outdoor use. AIX volumes could be also made without holes for t-nuts especially for competitions.



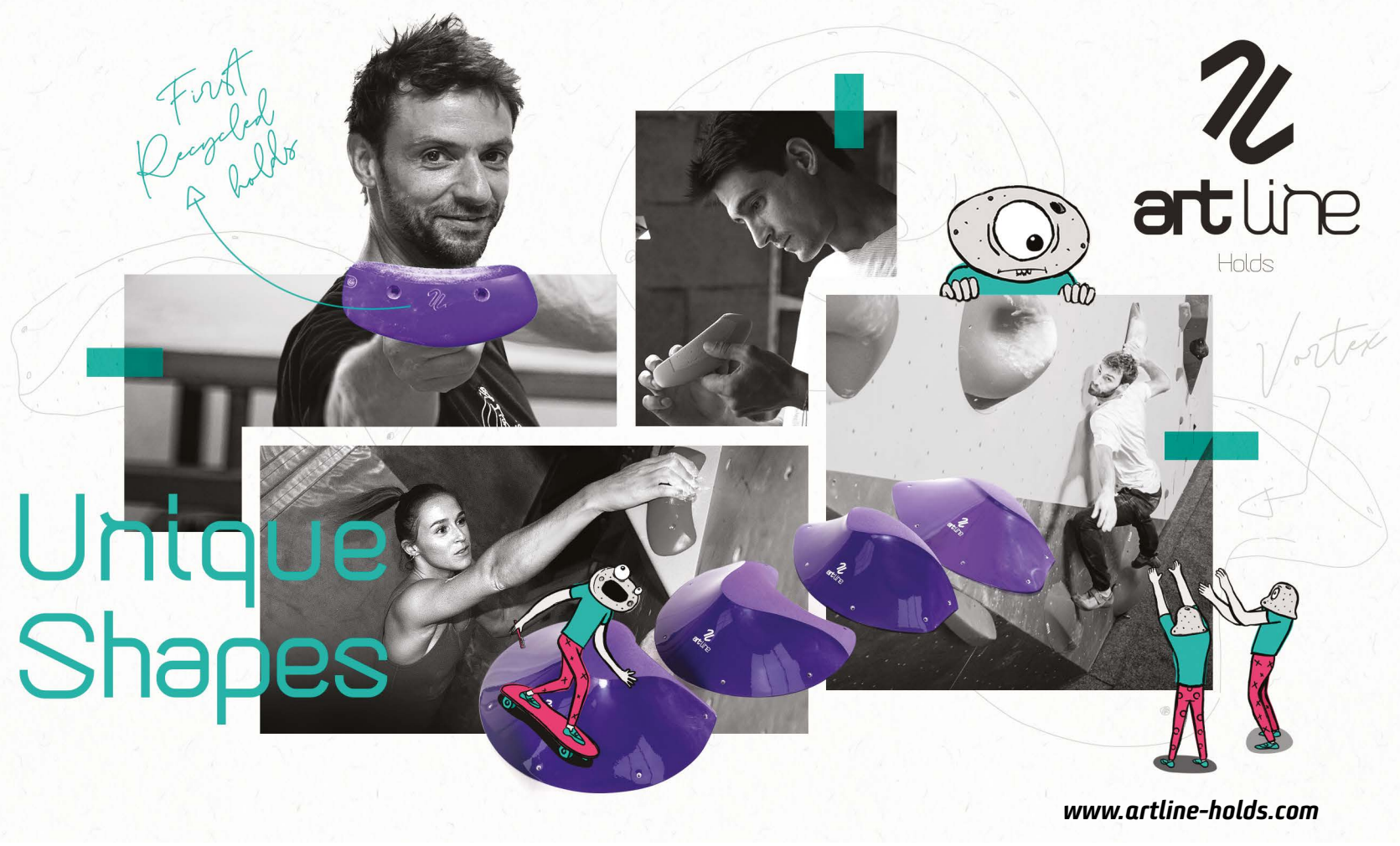
AIX SERVICES

We are exclusive distributor for climbing holds, macros and volumes in Czechia and Slovakia for many popular brands. We operate also web-shop for retail customers – check www.holdsmarket.com



www.aix.cz

10



Unique Shapes

FATLINE REVISITED

The climbing gym 2.0 is a friendly place where the setters screw on fibreglass macros and reinvent their sport with aesthetic lines and aerial movements. To adapt to the new standards, Brice Anziutti has brought the FatLine range up to date and is going LARGE! Vortex, Abyss, Blade, Mercy XXXL DT... So many possibilities with these bold shapes in (very) LARGE formats!



THE ABYSS



THE VORTEX



THE BLADES



THE FIRST RECYCLABLE HOLDS

A first in the history of indoor climbing, ArtLine is marketing recyclable and recycled holds by transferring part of our production to a new player: **Ghold**.

They not only produce holds from recycled materials, they also recycle them again at the end of their lifespan. Once collected, the holds are sorted, crushed and recycled into future generations of holds.

We're kicking off this ecological transition with our best-seller, the Mercy holds, in smaller sizes: XS to L.



THE MICRO ADJUSTER

Brice has pulled off a real coup with this innovation, which is bound to delight quite a few setters. The concept is based on the slope adjusters (Slopes et Slices), only more radical since they are for use with micro-holds (foot- and hand-holds) and have absolutely no texture.



4 sizes (XS to L) / 6 angles (10 to 30°)



Hollowed out, so holds are screwed into the rather than into the Micro Adjuster



No texture, showcasing the screw-on hold



A set of plugs to fill any gaps if the screw-on hold is too small



KILTER

KILTER by Ian Powell and Haptic by our pro setters/shapers design team. Over **5516** grips in PU from Aragon and Composite-X, fiberglass from Walltopia, and new VTF Recyclable Plastic Macros from Binary.



DUAL-TEX SANDSTONE // GRANITE

New dual-text Sandstone and Granite have been an instant hit in comps. As featured on the infamous neon green spin boulder at the 2023 Innsbruck World Cup. Edges tapered and polished for precision, grips shaped for comfort. **392** grips by Ian Powell.



SOUTHERN WAVES

Southern Waves Dual-Tex Slopers join the awesome Southern Slopers series. **109** grips and counting by Jimmy Webb.



HO DUNES

Compliment Lo Riders with a larger profile and more incut, wavy grips. **89** grips and counting by Jeremy Ho.



SANDSTONE

Huge range of grips from Kaiju to tiny jibs work great for all applications. Complex Sandstone as featured in the 2022 and 2023 IFSC World Cups in Austria. **1633** grips by Ian Powell.

www.settercloset.com

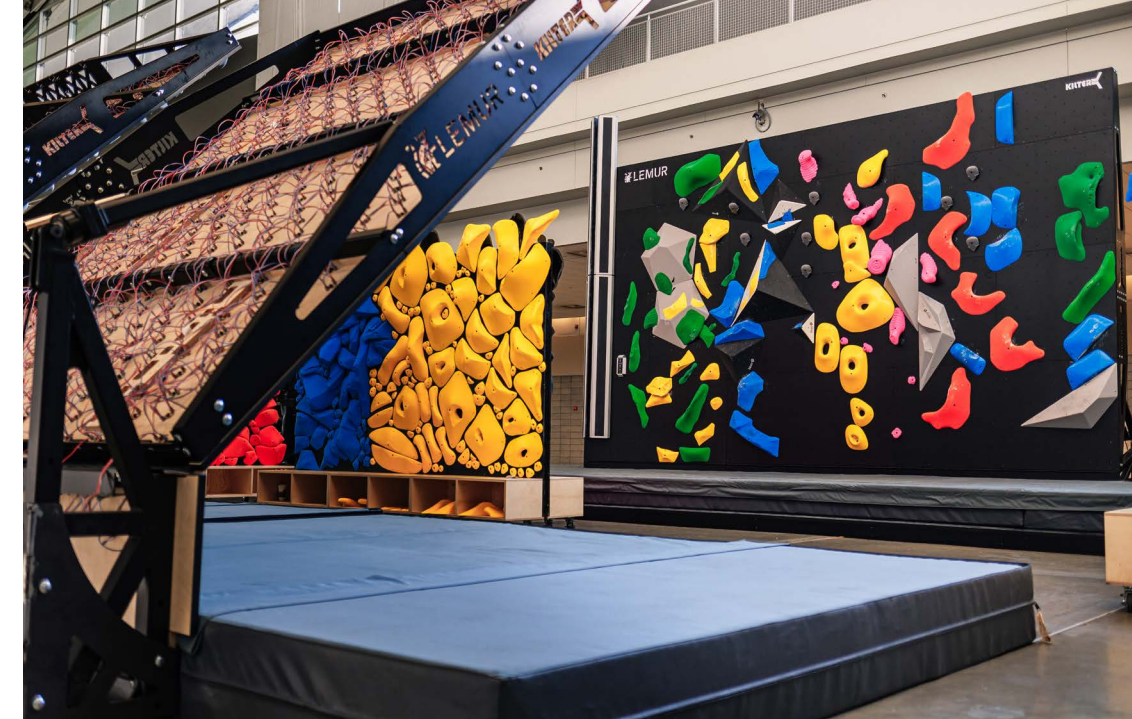
KILTER X LEMUR Adjustable Frames

Adjustable slab: 24' x 14'-16', -10° to 40°

Adjustable steep wall with overhanging kick-board: 16' x 16' 35° to 70°

Adjustable Kilter Boards: 0° - 70° all sizes from 16' x 12' down to 7' x 10'. Freestanding and bolt-down options available.

Let us help find the wall for you!



URBAN PLASTIX

Popular series expanded with even more Stratos wavy seam slopers and jugs, Stealth Dual-Tex slopers, edges, jugs, and crimps, and Ditches slots. **2087** grips from Peter Juhl.



STEALTH

DOWN CLIMB

Comfortable matchable overcut Downclimb Jug with dual-tex arrow.



GRANITE // GRANITE COMPLEX

Dual-Tex and fine-lined rock style with mod granite texture across a full line of classic shapes plus Complex shapes and blockers are perfect for comps. Need to reuse a problem? Just block the grip to make it harder! **721** grips by Ian Powell.



STRATO



DITCHES



POLYTALON
ENGINEERED CLIMBING HOLDS

POLYTALON – CLIMBING HOLDS MADE IN GERMANY



POLYTALON provides the perfect fusion of creativity, engineering, reliability and a pinch of madness. If you are looking for modular and ergonomic shapes with a special haptic, we are happy to assist you to fulfil your vision of a diverse climbing and setting experience. Our PU sets are carefully selected and manufactured inhouse, with focusing on each and every demand. Functionality, durability and sustainability first. Our shapes are mostly directional, symmetrical, blockable and clean, with an aesthetic outline for outstanding, still space-saving designs. These shapes are ready to help you easily create special climbs, from easy to comp, from boulder to lead. And even more important: All the holds are tested according to DIN 12572-3: To ensure the greatest possible safety for your customers, setters and walls.

For more information, feel free to contact us: info@polytalon.com
And stay tuned on our social media channels: [@polytalon_climbing](https://www.instagram.com/polytalon_climbing)

MACRO COMBO

The geometries of Fatbats and Macros look pretty much the same? Coincidence? Definitely not! The two series are designed to fit perfectly together. This opens up countless possibilities for appealing and challenging routes and problems in any grade. In addition, it saves money as a combo.



FAT BAT

At home in the same Batcave, yet totally different from the original Bats: The Fatbats impress with extreme ergonomics and variety without giving up the spectacular look. 138 shapes in full- and dual texture ensure that you never run out of ideas. You want to set a beginner friendly boulder in the overhang? The Fatbats are your choice! You want to set a technically challenging and Instagram-worthy lead route? The Fatbats are your choice. Holds for a competition? Go for it.



www.polytalon.com



YING

To any yin there is a yang. This is also true for our new Series. Simple and appealing shapes that push your climbers up the grades. Block- and adjustable, from XS to XXL, from slopy to juggy.



MELON

Round wood volumes? Only for Comps? Not anymore. With our new Melons we make this powerful "angle-changer" accessible for commercial gyms! Add a dimension to your wall and offer new possibilities to your customers and route setters. Medium sized from 30 to 50 cm wide. The cherry on the melon cake: A PU series that fits perfectly on the volumes, but can also be setted without. As if the summer never ends.



LUNA SERIES

The Lunas are the facelift of the Moon series. More jugs, more ergonomics and just what any wall needs: Easy and affordable routes... and enough footholds that don't break. Chic all-rounders at an unbeatable price.

SELECTIONS

Years of shape experience and countless customer experiences have gone into our selection: To save you valuable time when buying holds, we have created the discounted selections for most of our Series. They fit the average wall height in boulder & lead and cover the desired difficulty level very well. Of course, each selection can be customized - we are happy to help, saving time and money.





BY CLIMBING LEGEND RUSTAM GELMANOV

Rustam Climbing is a company founded by the World Cup Winner Rustam Gelmanov. This company was born out of Rustam's passion for climbing and his desire to create exceptional training tools to gain climbing skills faster.

Our journey began by mastering the art of woodworking to create climbing training devices. Working with wood taught us many things, now it's time to take the next step with PU holds, fiberglass and ABS macros.

Powered by a passionate team of climbing enthusiasts, we're on a mission to make the climbing world more exhilarating and beautiful.

From our hardworking workshop in the Netherlands, cheers to climbing excellence!



FAMILIO

Meet the all-inclusive hold family, offering a wide variety of holds, from small crimps and comfy jugs to massive macros! You'll find every hold you need to create engaging routes, all with consistent and appealing design. This hold family is constantly growing, with new holds being added regularly.

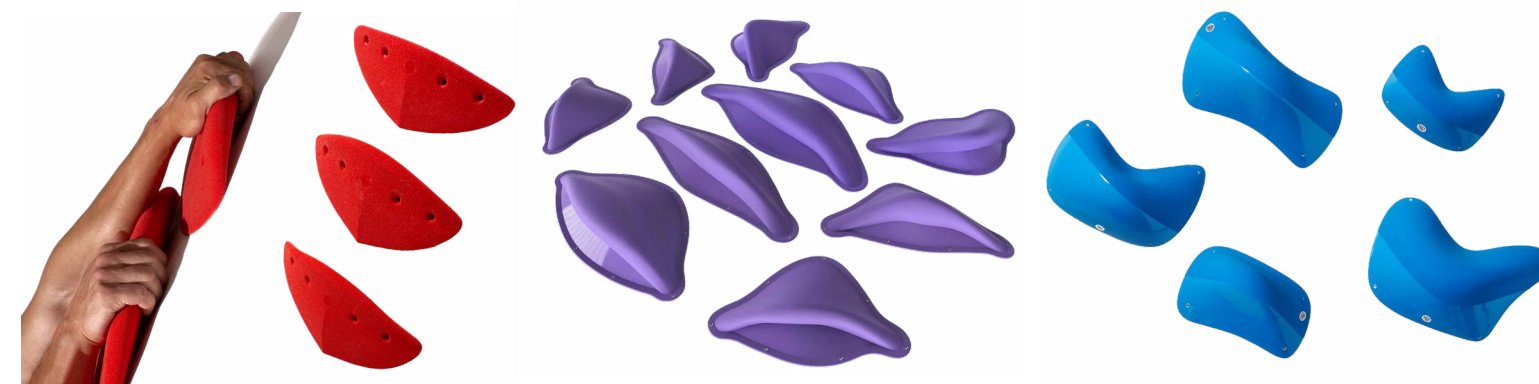
FAMILIO LYRIDS

ustam's signature crimps. Mmmm... we love them!



FAMILIO GANYMEDE

Fiberglass macros come with a foam texture, ensuring same friction across all "Familio" holds.



DRAGON SCALE

Unleash Your Inner Dragon with our Dragon Scale-inspired Climbing Holds. Crafted using CNC precision and manual finishing, these comfortable grips make your climbing experience a breeze. Dragon scale holds can be installed right on the edges of climbing walls and wooden volumes.

KAIZEN

Unlock limitless climbing possibilities with our brand-new masterpiece Macros and PU Holds, inspired by the Kaizen philosophy. These dual-texture macros, made from 100% recyclable ABS plastic, invite endless creativity. With 10 macros and 90 PU holds, enjoy climbing like never before.

GRIPZILLA

Get your pinchy-squeezy moves with Gripzilla macros. Organic-shaped troublemakers give your fingers a gentle but intense workout. Dual-textured macros redefine your climbing adventure, offering blend of functionality and aesthetics.



PRINCIPIUM

Glad to introduce a fresh vision on the simple fundamental shape. Triangles form the backbone of every climbing gym, and now, meet Principium: the fiberglass macros with dual-texture surfaces and captivating lines. You'll be delighted to infuse new energy into your gym.



ORBIT

Elevate your climbing wall with dual-texture fiberglass Orbit macros. Modern style and versatile, they transform walls nicely. It's easy to create stylish boulders for climbers of all levels.



TRAINING EQUIPMENT

We've got everything it takes to fuel your journey to become a strong climber. Whether you're grinding it out indoors or conquering the wild, our handcrafted climbing gear is your companion. Rustam personally brings life to every wooden product we offer. Our products aren't just pieces of wood, they have a soul — reach out and feel the passion.





www.grizzlyholds.com

CARBONS

Introducing the Carbons, our revolutionary dual-textured climbing holds that offer unmatched versatility and control. These holds are designed to be both bolted on and screwed on to the wall, providing maximum flexibility for routesetters and climbers alike. The Carbons feature a sleek and geometric shape that not only adds a visually appealing element to your climbing wall but also ensures a comfortable grip. Crafted with precision, these holds are designed to fit perfectly in your hand, allowing for confident and secure holds during your climbing sessions. Full set contains **48 undeniably beautiful holds!** Make some magic with these on your wall!



FOR ROUTESETTERS, BY ROUTESETTERS



Inspiring routesetters through high-quality climbing holds poured from Aragon's industry leading polyurethane. Our shapes were designed with a focus on ergonomics, creativity, compatibility, and aesthetics. We want to provide routesetters with the tools to leave climbers with a memorable and positive climbing experience. Our mission is to produce timeless shapes that inspire routesetters to think outside of the box and push routesetting into the future.

MERIDIANS

5 massive dual-tex screw-on pinches! These pinches vary in difficulty and direction making them great competition holds. These are fully screw on holds, meaning no bolt holes to worry about and a comfortable grip all around. We precisely placed the dual-texture in areas that allow these to be high profile yet very directional and really force the pinch grip.

They work great for any angle, from jumpy slabs to powerful overhangs.



GLACIERS

35 holds in this complete Tectonic Plates set. Shaped with forced movement in mind so you can create and move climbers the way you want with this full line. Almost all holds are screw on and bolt on, so you can place it on the wall exactly where you want it.



FLAKES

41 beautifully shaped Flake jugs. Sizes from Feet to XL can be both bolt on and screw-on mounted for maximum versatility. A natural aesthetic with a modern comfy feel, these jugs are tons of fun to set with!



TS
Feel the thrill



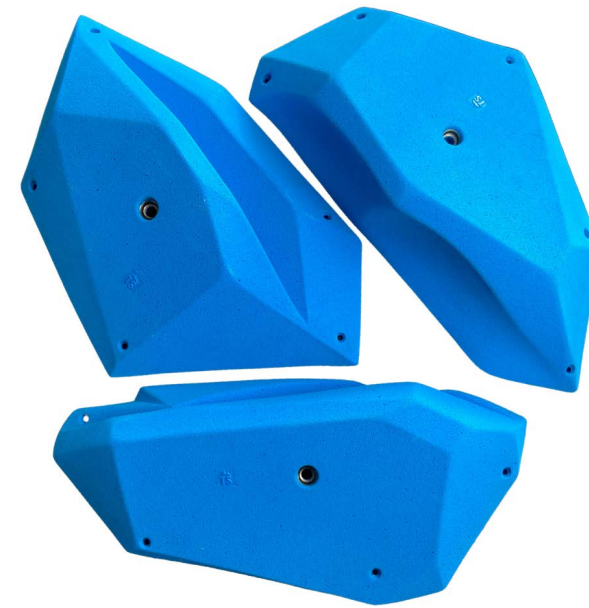
Unveiling the TITANS Expansion. A diverse array of shapes, from technique demanding XS footholds to Mega size, each of these holds is shaped to inspire. These full-textured designs invite you to explore the geometric patterns etched into each hold's surface.

Central to the TITANS collection's allure is the use of Dannomond PU, proven as the most advanced polyurethane developed by Composite X. All large size holds feature hollow-back construction granting these holds a remarkable lightness.

THRILL SEEKER HOLDS FEEL THE THRILL

Thrill Seeker Holds proudly presents the Obsidian macros! They are a long-awaited expansion of the very first range of holds released by the brand in 2019. These exquisite fiberglass shapes are not just climbing holds, they're works of art meticulously designed to ignite your passion for climbing. Behind the mastery of Obsidian Macros stands the creative genius of Dario Stefanou, who draws inspiration from the breathtaking landscapes of Greece. Crafted in a small workshop in Bul-

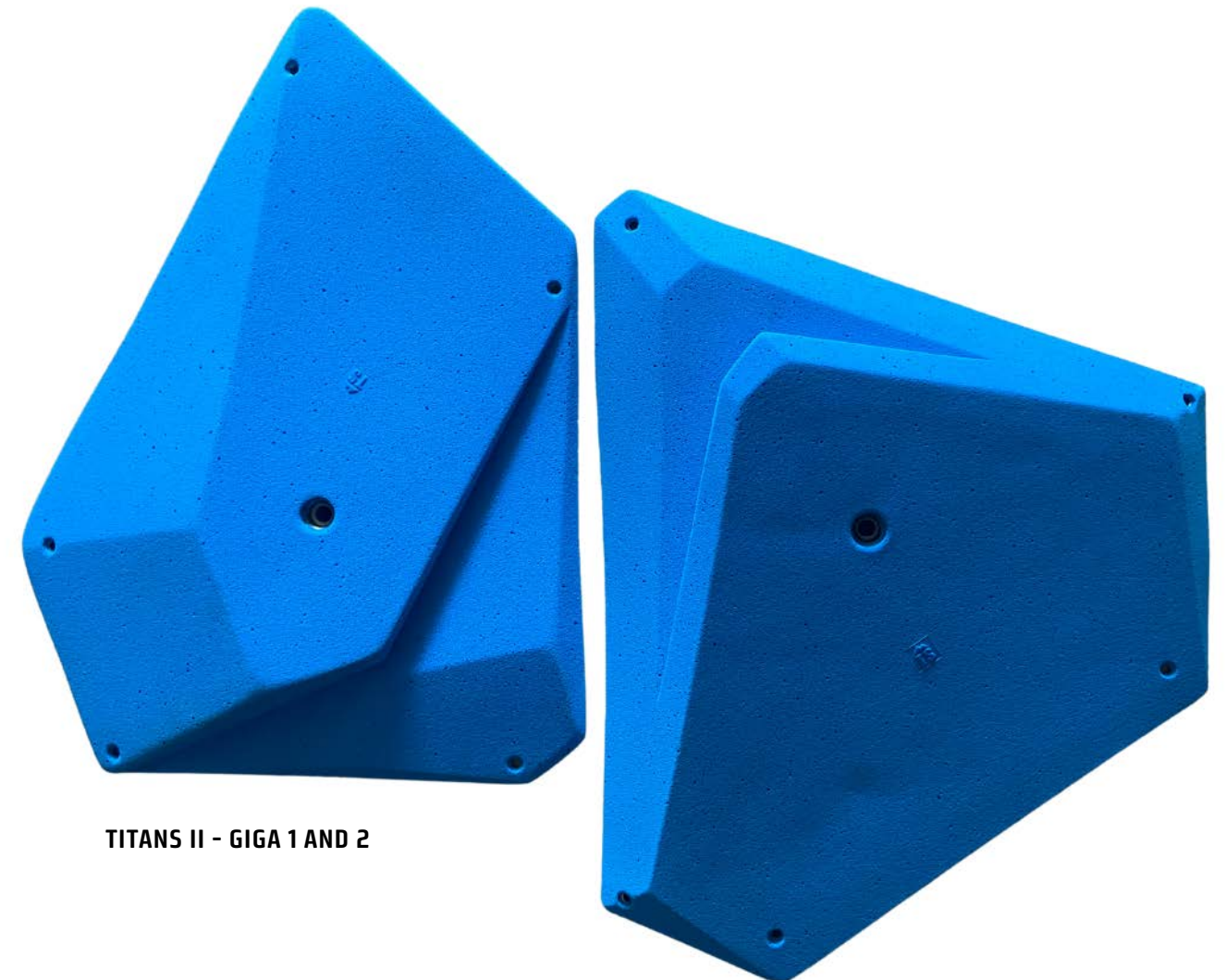
garia, each piece carries the essence of two rich cultures. Thrill Seeker Holds are your passport to a world of endless possibilities. Whether you're a professional routesetter or just starting your ascent in the industry, these holds will be your companions in conquering the vertical realm. Join us in shaping the future of climbing and experience the fusion of art, innovation, and adrenaline.



TITANS II - MEGA 1



TITANS II - MEGA 1 BACK VIEW



TITANS II - GIGA 1 AND 2



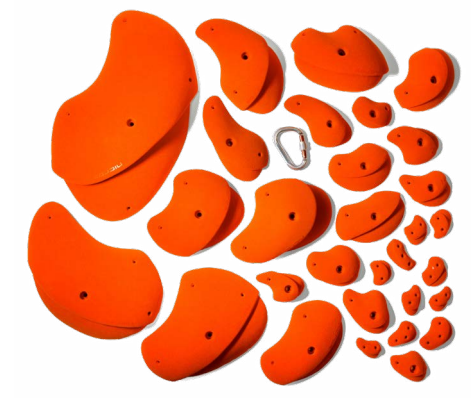


NICROS
 HOLDS | WALLS | VOLUMES

www.shop.nicros.com

BLEEPS

Elevate your climbing sessions to epic crusher sessions with these intermediate holds. Meticulously designed jugs and incuts not only refine your technique but also deliver an unparalleled grip. Get ready to conquer new heights with every ascent!



SPECTRE

Challenge and enhance your technique with Spectre: a set of 30 incuts designed to push your limits. From sizable to subtle holds, each demands precise footwork and unwavering grip. Elevate your skills and surge to new heights with the power of Spectre.



KETTLE

Unlock the true potential of your climbing wall with the indispensable addition of Kettles. This essential set boasts a dynamic blend of superb jugs, delicate pinches, and technical edges. Seamlessly rotate these holds to create diverse routes – from challenging to comfortable – making them the ultimate finishing touch for an exceptional climbing experience.



NUBBINS

Experience a whole new level of foot technique with Nubbin holds – the ultimate solution for maintaining a solid connection to the wall. Tailored for overhangs and beyond, these low-profile yet incredibly positive footholds redefine your climbing experience. When the going gets tough, sometimes all you need is a little Nubbin.



DOWN CLIMB #3

These essential holds feature a clean and simple design, sporting dual texture and a large radius-used feature for easy down climbing. The arrow points the way! Available in sets of 5, 50, or 100.



WOOD VOLUMES

Crafted to perfection, Nicros wood volumes redefine climbing dynamics with their durable texture. Their presence brings dimension and intricacy to climbing walls, and their customizable colors allow route setters to craft a tapestry of diverse and captivating climbing routes.

NICROS

Nicros has been a leading innovator in the climbing industry since 1992. Inspired by a passion for optimizing both the climbing and route-setting experience, Nicros holds and volumes boast unique surfacing technology with high quality texture and are built to last. Nicros has produced a variety of wall systems, beginning with A.R.T. Wall™, which mimics the look and feel of real rock, and later developing the clean and versatile NicroLite™—perfect for home walls and large gyms alike. Nicros proudly designs and produces all holds, volumes, and walls in-house.



WAVES

Elevate your climbing game and ride these sick Waves to the summit! These holds, influenced by the fluidity of tides, offer a unique challenge. Whether you're a novice or a seasoned pro, the dynamic design of Waves pushes you to test your limits and discover new strengths. Get ready to conquer these undulating challenges and experience the thrill of scaling to greater heights.

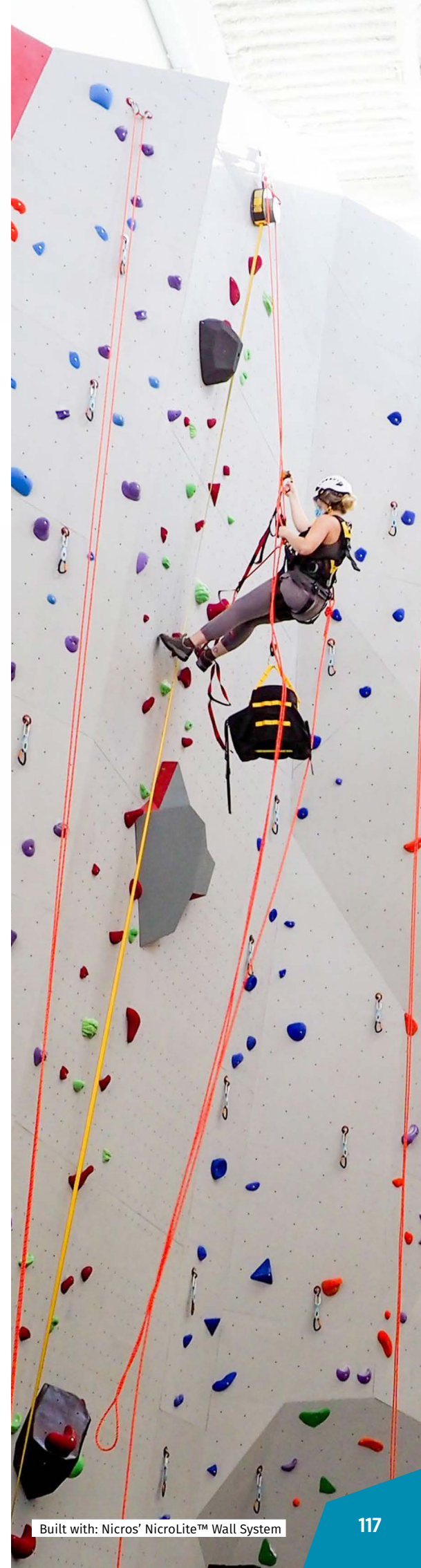
ARES

Get ready for an epic climb as Ares, Greek God of War, makes his presence felt! This set is filled with an exhilarating array of pinches, slopers, and crimps. Prepare to gear up for the challenge and step onto the battlefield where your ascent becomes a heroic conquest.



MOGULS

Unleash your creativity and craft climbing routes with an assortment of carefully designed slopers and pinches. Empower routesetters to curate an array of climbs that cater to all levels. Dive into the possibilities, customize your ascent, and embark on a climbing adventure that's uniquely yours!



Built with: Nicros' NicroLite™ Wall System

UTURN

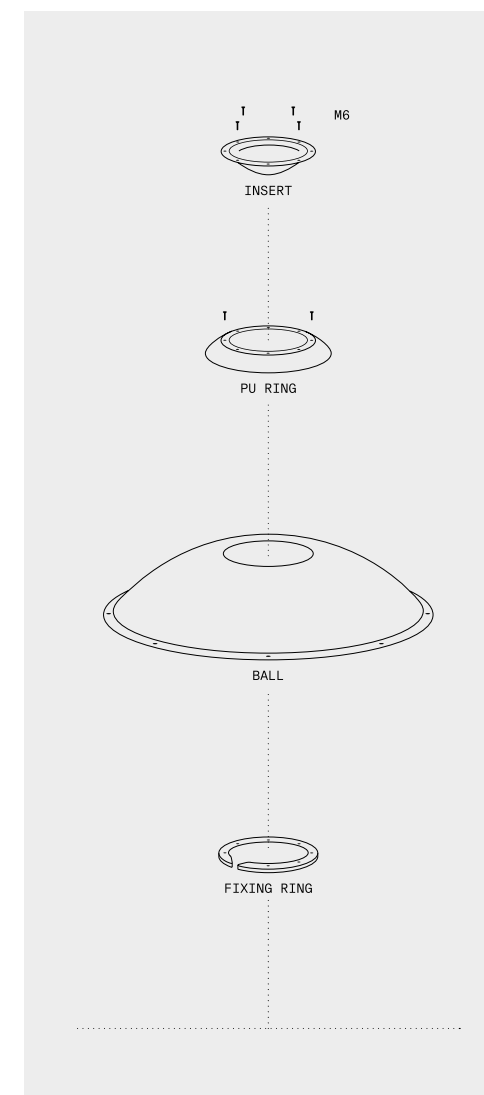


Kokoro Fuji, IFSC Boulder World Cup, Meiringen 2021

Photo: Marc Daviet

UTURN ARCHITECTURE

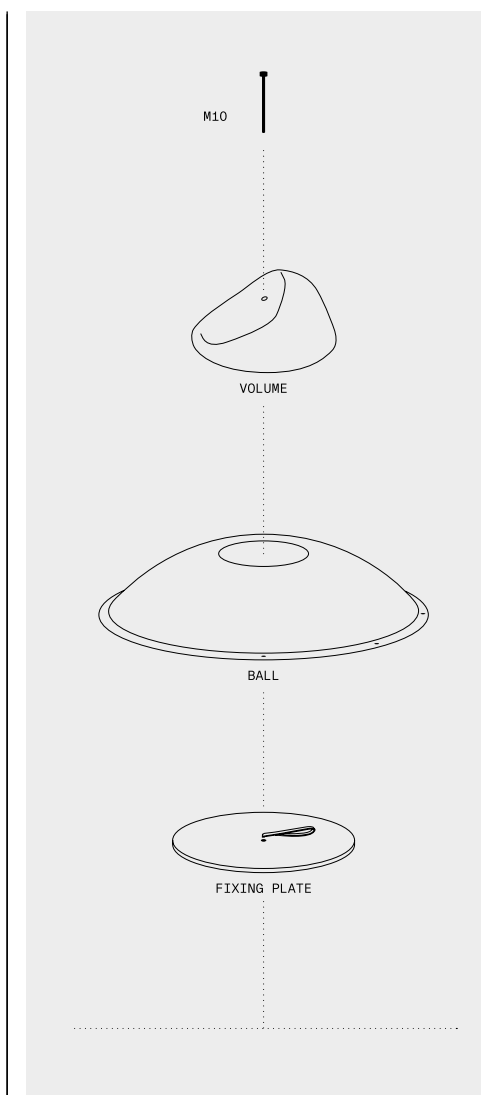
The UTURN comes in three different stacks, with each its specific advantages.



STACK 1

is the lightest of the three set-ups. Its components can be rotated by 360°, and its inserts are interchangeable. This stack is perfect for easy and precise adjustments.

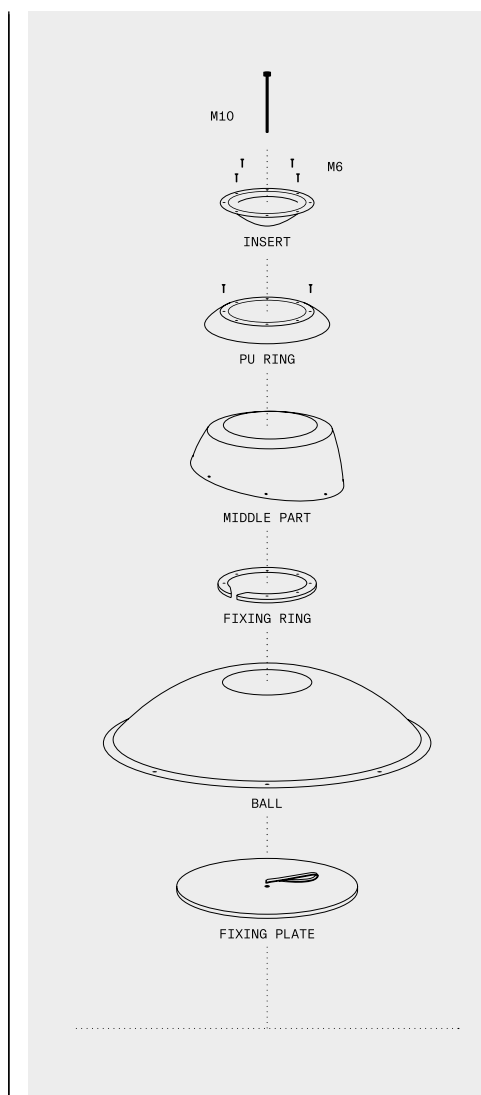
Composition: Ball, fixing ring, PU ring & insert.



STACK 2

reflects the original UTURN concept. With just three components, this stack excels in creating three-dimensional climbing at a variety of angles. The macros at the top of the stack exist in multiple interchangeable models.

Composition: Ball, fixing plate & volume.



STACK 3

is UTURN's most versatile package, as it combines the concepts of stacks 1 & 2. With its more elaborate architecture, this package offers an extensive panel of possibilities, and greater control over the tiniest of details.

Composition: Ball, fixing plate, middle part, fixing ring, PU ring & insert.

A REVOLUTION FOR ROUTE SETTERS

FLATHOLD'S LATEST RELEASE

uturn/flathold.com

After 3 years of development, Flathold just released a unique modular system. The UTURN is a combination of fiberglass Macros, assembled on a half sphere. It uses a central bolt to connect all its pieces together, enabling them to rotate on themselves, and all over the surface of the base.

This new product is designed to offer a wide variety of movements, paired with quick and precise adjustments. With it, route setters may easily modify the style or difficulty of their boulders; either by changing the angle of a piece or by replacing the mounted pieces with interchangeable shapes.



With every stack, it is possible to purchase multiple different layers and combine them to create your very own UTURN.

A TOOL FOR ROUTE SETTERS

The UTURN comes with multiple shapes for each of its layers. Each shape can rotate on itself by 360 degrees and is interchangeable with the other shapes of that layer. For instance, if a move is too complex, route setters may change the top layer's shape from a sloper to a jug. If the move becomes too easy, they can rotate the jug by just a few degrees to make it worse. On top of these options, further adjustment can be done by moving the top layer over the surface of the base.

Precise adjustments like these are made possible with the central bolt system, which reduces the time needed to perfect a movement. This reflects UTURN's core design: Assist route setters in their exploration of movement.

THE UTURN IN A NUTSHELL

- » A tool to create new movements and give birth to specific ideas.
- » Simplifies the adjustment and creation of sequences.
- » Quick and easy to change the difficulty of a boulder.
- » Changes the shape of the wall, aesthetic and eye-catching.
- » New playing field and challenge for route setters.



Photo: Antal Thomas



Photo: Marc Daviet

Manuel setting with the UTURN for the first time in Meiringen 2021

BIRTH OF THE UTURN

In 2020, Manuel Hassler (Flathold co-owner & IFSC route setter) sought a system to make route-setting more efficient for competitions.

“When setting for competitions, you’re constantly confronted with the tiniest of changes.” Manuel Hassler

Having to unscrew multiple holds or volumes when a movement wouldn’t work felt very time-consuming. Instead, he wished for a precise system that could correct his initial ideas, with minimal unscrewing. He wanted a tool that would allow him to quickly adapt the style or difficulty of his boulders; while keeping the same original base.

During the conception process, some natural limitations came about. For instance, for better transportation of the product, the UTURN had to fit in a pallet; restricting its length to 120 centimeters. Shape-wise, the base of the system needed to be spherical and symmetrical. This way, setters would be able to further adjust the second layer on top of the base. From there onwards, the rest of the system was designed and shaped.

Over the years, Manuel tried the UTURN prototype on the World Cup circuit. Already on his first test attempt, he was surprised by how well the concept matched his needs. He believed this could benefit route-setting on a wider scale. Thus, he optimized the system and made it easier for commercial gyms to use.



Manuel testing a crazy dynamic move, Meiringen 2021

UTURN AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The UTURN has recently been selected by the IFSC to join the P24 catalog and will soon challenge the athletes at the 2024 Paris Olympics. UTURN's quick and precise adjustments will assist IFSC route setters to efficiently separate the field of athletes. Furthermore, the aesthetics and size of the UTURN will bring a 3-dimensional perspective to the competition, fitting the current 'modern' style in route setting.

Beyond the Olympics, this first release is just the beginning. Flathold envisions the UTURN as a long-term family system. New shapes will be released in the coming years to bring even more depth to the concept.



Janja Garnbret, Imagine the possible 2023

Photo: David Schweizer

***"IN OUR EYES,
THE UTURN IS A NEW WORLD
IN ITSELF. IT BRINGS
A FRESH AIR OF CREATIVITY
TO OUR SHAPING AND TO
THE COMMUNITY
OF ROUTE SETTERS.
WE'RE EXCITED TO PROPOSE
A NEW TYPE OF PRODUCT
TO THE CLIMBING INDUSTRY"
MANUEL HASSLER***



Yoshiyuki Ogata, IFSC Boulder World Cup, Meiringen 2021

Photo: Marc Daviet



Yoshiyuki Ogata, Imagine the possible 2023

Photo: David Schweizer



blocz

www.blocz.de

Coming soon: new "Esperanto" macros



www.bluepill-climbing.com

bp

blue pill

holds · volumes · equipment

BLOCZ – BECAUSE WE CARE



Blocz unites gym owners, manufacturers of bouldering products and passionate climbers under one roof. This unique synergy enables us to comprehend the diverse needs and desires of our customers from multiple angles. By actively seeking input from bouldering gyms, we continually innovate, crafting fresh, standout designs, and relentlessly enhancing the quality and durability of our products.

OUR MACRO VOLUMES - 100 % RECYCLED PLASTIC

At Blocz, we proudly achieved a groundbreaking milestone by introducing the world's first macro volume crafted entirely from 100% recycled industrial waste. Beyond its visible exterior, every component embodies a sustainable transformation of industrial waste, granting it a second life. Sustainability is at the core of our values, and this is just one of the many steps we're taking to contribute to a greener future.

TAKE CARE-REPAIR! OUR DIY UPCYCLING KIT

Affordable and eco-friendly: Our upcycling kit offers a budget-friendly, sustainable solution. Refresh your climbing gear in over 60 color options—same color or something new, the choice is yours!



THE BLOCZ SERVICE VARIETY WALLS

Together, we collaborate on crafting your distinctive wall design and execute on-site construction.

MATS

We provide boulder mats with a choice of carpet or PVC tops.

BLOCZ AS PRODUCER

Blocz takes pride in being the manufacturer of holds, wooden volumes, and macro volumes for esteemed brands like Blue Pill, Unit Holds, Chapter Climbing, CCE, and our very own Blocz products.



BLUEPILL – IT'S YOUR CHOICE



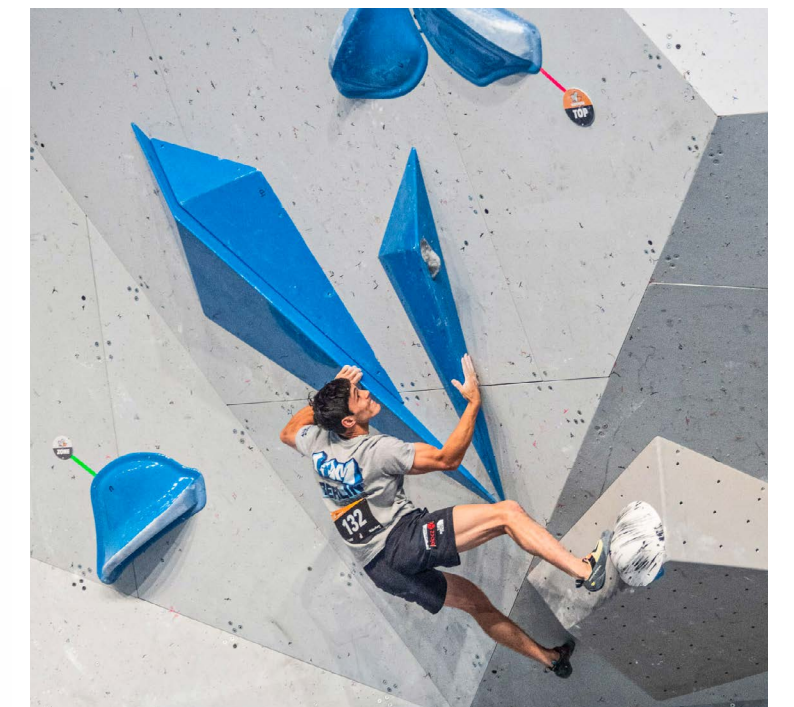
When details matter! With a focus on modern aesthetics, Bluepill effortlessly combines essential elements and stylish accents. We present gigantic competition lines with many creative macro shapes, commercial holds for everyday use, as well as a selection of wooden volumes to completely transform your wall's conditions. Our products redefine the art of route setting in both commercial and competitive settings.

DOPES-HANDSHAPED NEW LINE

Ignite your climbing enthusiasm with the revolutionary macros by Bluepill, each with dual textures that morph into demanding holds when strategically positioned. They inject diversity into route setting, categorized into four sets: 6 Rings, 12 Edges, 4 Slopers, and 7 Jugs. These new gems are not only visually striking but also incredibly versatile, rendering them an essential addition to any climbing wall.

MEGA & GIGA DIAMONDS-VOLUME'S REVOLUTION

The Diamonds hold volumes have elevated their versatility to a whole new level with a new size up to 2300mm they offer even more possibilities from precise, finely tuned movements to powerful, dynamic manoeuvres. A notable innovation is the texture-free option, which adds a unique twist to route setting, bringing diversity to the walls and creating entirely new challenges and climbing experiences.





www.community-climbing.com



Community Climbing Equipment



kletterkultur

www.kletterkultur.com

COMMUNITY CLIMBING EQUIPMENT (CCE) – CLIMBERS CREATE

We're all part of one community—the climbing community. Climbers, boulderers, route setters, shapers, trainers, and more, united to innovate, design, and manufacture products for you. From the community, for the community. CCE provides a comprehensive range of climbing gear, tools, and related solutions for route setters, gym owners, managers, and home wall enthusiasts. Our mission: Streamline processes and ensure top-quality equipment.

WE PROVIDE

ROUTE SETTING TOOLS

A wide range of tools, both for machines and manual work, designed to simplify your work life. Check out our latest innovation, the 'Magic Bit'—a versatile duo star bit.



TRAINING EQUIPMENT

Stylish hangboards and push bars for your training needs.



HOME WALL EQUIPMENT

Prefabricated wall panels, T-nuts, screws, and supplementary hold sets, all meticulously designed for your home climbing walls.



KLETTERKULTUR (CLIMBING CULTURE) – SERVICE FOR BOULDERING & CLIMBING GYMS

'Kletterkultur' brings years of experience in climbing gym planning, route setting, product sales, and knowledge sharing through workshops, ensuring top-notch service. Our in-house exhibition, 'Hold Together', in summer 2024 featured enlightening talks and valuable networking, highly valued by many of you.

HOLD TOGETHER

The Hold Together is a B2B event organized by Kletterkultur for climbing and bouldering gym owners and operators, as well as route setters. The event emphasizes networking opportunities with peers, our partner brands, manufacturers, and engaging lectures.

Following this year's tremendous success, the Hold Together event will return next year, in an entirely new venue, featuring an extended two-day program. Don't hesitate to contact us for further details and consider subscribing to our newsletter to stay updated.

OUR SERVICES

In collaboration with Blocz, we turn your climbing gym wall and mat dreams into reality. We are the exclusive distributor for holds and volumes in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland for several renowned brands. Our services include wood-friendly cleaning for your climbing wall and a suitable cleaning system for holds and volumes.

You can now track our live inventory! In our webshop, you can instantly check the availability of all our in-stock products and make immediate preparations for shipping. And of course, you can still place an order for your desired product in your preferred color.





TRANGO

SCREWY

- » Place in the bolt hole of a climbing hold and use a screw instead of a bolt for attachment (*must be used with one or more additional set screws; never attach a hold with just one single screw).
- » Stackable design allows the filling of deep bolt holes to prevent thumb catches and mono pockets.
- » Fits #10 and #8 screws.
- » Works with most brands of US and European climbing holds.

Available in 3 color-coded sizes to accommodate different bolt-hole depths:

- » 4mm (black)
- » 10mm (gray)
- » 15mm (blue)



STARDRIVE BITS

- » Switch quickly and easily to Torx bit without removing the hex bit from your impact driver.
- » Slides perfectly onto 5/16" (8mm) Hex bits.
- » A magnetic connection keeps the drive securely in place.
- » Hardened S2 steel construction for maximum durability.

Available in 2 sizes:

- » Black Star fits T-25 Torx screws
- » Gold Star fits T-20 Torx screws



REACTION STEEL GYM DRAW

- » Smooth action bent gate Reaction carabiner makes for fast, effortless clips while steel construction provides durability.
- » Durable EDC-coated steel carabiner and maillon for maximum strength and longevity.
- » Extra beefy 2.5cm x 17cm dog-bone for ease of use.
- » Extra-large rubberized keeper protects the quickdraw and climbing wall surface and makes for easy clipping.

Available in 3 distinct colors to enable the designation of route "lanes":

- » Blue, White, or Green



ALLEGIANCE SEMI-STATIC ROPE

- » Low elongation 10mm semi-static design perfect for top rope belay, jugging, and hauling.
- » 2x2 Pro Weave construction for balanced handling and durability.

Designed for use in 3-rope setting systems:

- » Red, Black, or White



TRANGO® ROUTESETTING GEAR / FALL 2023

EQUINOX SIT HARNESS

- » Ergonomic work positioning and fall protection harness for all-day comfort while routesetting and working at height.
- » Color-coded components for ease of use and efficient, thorough equipment inspection
- » 4 reinforced gear loops plus 6 smaller connection loops keep gear organized and accessible.
- » Anterior tabs for easy attachment of Equinox Bench or bosun chair

Available in 2 versions:

- » Equinox (standard speed buckles at waist belt and leg loops)
- » Equinox Viper (quick-release buckles at waist belt and leg loops)



EQUINOX FULL BODY HARNESS

- » Equinox or Equinox Viper Sit Harness with the addition of a comfortably padded and adjustable chest harness.
- » Beefy D-ring attachments for both front and dorsal connection.
- » Quick-release attachment point for easy attachment and removal of chest harness.

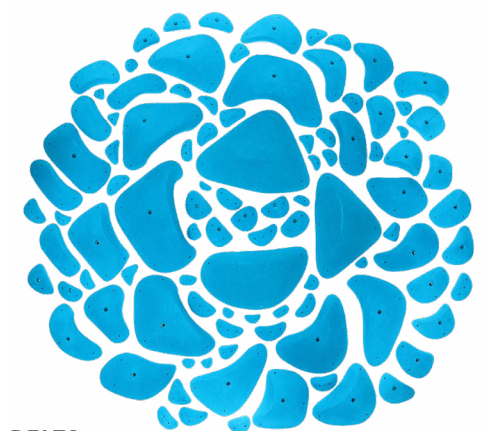


EQUINOX BENCH

- » An extra wide padded platform for comfort during prolonged suspension
- » 3 gear loops with high strength rating for versatility and durability
- » Sustainable and replaceable internal wooden frame



TRANGO® HOLDS / NEW FOR FALL 2023



DELTA
100 Shapes (12 sets) in PU



MAMMOTH RUB VOLCANOES
3 Macros in GRU



2TEX LOAVES MACROS
8 Macros in GRP



MYORCAN
10 Shapes (4 sets) in PU



KHANS
33 Shapes (4 sets) in PU
2 Macros in GRU



ALL THAT YOU NEED FOR ROUTE SETTING

At SINGING ROCK we make products for your vertical world. We bring simplicity, honesty and fairness to climbing and working at heights. We are climbers who create for climbers. We put not only our experience but also our passion into our products for climbing and working at heights. The combination of climbing and work at height experience and passion, allows us to bring you the most suitable gear for your route setting job. We create our products in the Czech Republic since 1992.



ROOF MASTER
Lightweight and fully adjustable full body harness. The unique Singing Rock **MOTION SYSTEM** gives the user freedom of movement without being restricted by a working rope or a fall arrest system. It allows the perfect foothold placement without limiting the route setter movement. The ideal solution for working at heights where precise positioning and free movement are important.



FRANKLIN
Work positioning seat with maximum load 250 kg intended for use with fall arrest or work positioning harnesses. Easily adjustable with patented **Rock&Lock** buckles. Wide sitting area ensures good stability and allows comfortable route setting even in 45° overhangs.



HEX
Durable, fully ventilated helmet for climbing and other rope activities. Durable EPP+ABS shell protects against falling objects and guarantees a high degree of protection against impact force, including repeated impact force. The "OPEN CELL" construction with 35 ventilation holes with a total area of 108 cm² guarantees maximum ventilation in the hottest days in the gym. Available in two sizes (M 52/58cm a L 55/61cm) and 5 colors.



STATIC R44 11.00 MM
Excellent quality static rope with patented rope-braiding technology ROUTE 44 intended for rope access, work positioning, rescue or manipulation with the objects. Sheath is braided more densely which provides better protection of the core against dirt and dust. Rope is running smoother through belay/rapel devices with lower risk of core prolapse through the sheath when is bent over small diameters.



SIR
Robust and compact multipurpose device. Its functionality spans the range from rope descender and abseiling device through semiautomatic belay and fall-arrest device to work positioning device. Metal lever under all industrial conditions is tested for 225 kg according to EN 12841.



LIFT
Hand ascender for safe and smooth ascent with a trigger for a short descent mode. Extra wide handle and attachment point for two carabiners will fit everyone from bigwall climbers to workers at height or route setters. Available in two variants – for the left and right hand.



LOCKER
Guided type fall arrester and work positioning device. By its various use and perfect functionality, LOCKER has become the common device for every worker at height.



JOULE 70
Fall absorber for securing persons working on horizontal constructions and high lift platform. Suitable with the LOCKER fall absorber, for working situations which require longer distance from the safety line.



TWISTER
Rotating anchor device to prevent twisting the boxes with the holds. Ball bearing allows rotation up to 4 kN load (≈ 400 kg).



OXY TRIPLE LOCK
Hot-forged light alloy oval carabiner designed to be used especially with pulleys, ascenders and descenders. On the locking sleeve there are rough notches for easy manipulation. Each carabiner is individually tested for a strength of 10 kN.



TOOLKIT
Special bag to carry fasteners and tools for route setting. Made of the high resistant and durable POLYMAR fabric. Intended to be attached to the harness via carabiners or directly to the user using an additional belt. Number of holders and closable pockets for tools and fasteners.



CARRY BAG
Practical bag intended for storage and transport of ropes, holds and other gear. Made of durable and washable material. Textile reinforcements keep the bag self-standing. Reinforced handle to haul the bag. Textile handle on the bottom to shake out the gear and dirt.



SPOC € 70
Ultra-light pulley with backstop. Designed for lifting loads, crevasse rescue operations, or as an emergency ascender.



SALATHE € 100
Light and well-ventilated climbing helmet for tree care work. The combination of a foam-injected EPP core and a partial ABS hard shell enables both optimum safety and a minimum weight. Fulfills requirements regarding protection against shocks and impacts in accordance with EN 12492.



SWITCH PRO ADJUST
120 cm € 85 | 200 cm € 90 | 300 cm € 95
Easy to use, length-adjustable lanyard for self-belaying, positioning, and progression on structures, anchor points, or railing ropes, or when climbing ropes. The system consists of the popular PERFORMANCE STATIC 10.5 mm, an OVAL POWER triple lock carabiner, and the innovative rope clamp. This enables length adjustment even under load – allowing the lanyard to be shortened or lengthened at any time!



VECTOR X € 350
Lightweight modular harness for any kind of work and movement on the rope or in rope systems. Especially comfortable thanks to 3D Vent technology. The intelligently integrated but detachable chest ascender enables efficient climbing in rope systems. Available with two chest harnesses: the traditionally designed VECTOR CHEST Y or the VECTOR CHEST X, which allows maximum freedom of movement.

EXPERIENCE VERTICAL FREEDOM! EDELRID

ROUTE SETTING WITH EDELRID

For over 160 years, EDELRID is constantly developing climbing equipment. It's the company's vision to turn ideas into reality to allow free movement in the vertical world. Discover the latest products of EDELRID – especially selected for route setters, developed in Germany.

MEGAWATT € 190
MEGAWATT is the most versatile descender device on the market with maximized compactness and minimized weight. This descender device is also for industrial climbing and rescue use up to 230 kg. The ergonomic lever design with rubber coated grip inserts allows intuitive active and passive operation with the left or right hand. The risk of uncontrolled travel along the rope is reduced by the anti-panic function. All this makes the MEGAWATT the most versatile descender device in the market at a weight of only 495 g.



FUSE € 210
FUSE redefines the standards for guided type fall arresters. It is the only securing device in the market for a payload of up to 140 kg that meets all applicable standards in Europe and North America. From the first meter it moves along the rope with unprecedented ease. This is achieved by a new, sophisticated attachment at the lever arm.



DEFUSER RESCUE € 50 & DEFUSER RESCUE L € 50
The specially designed DEFUSER energy absorbers type RESCUE (22 cm) and RESCUE L (40 cm) may be used exclusively with the guided-type fall arrester FUSE: They are light, compact, and the maximum arrest shock is 30 % below the standard.

The high load capacity enables users to work with heavy equipment and offers an additional reserve for rescue situations where users need to bear the weight of the person in need of assistance on their own system.



SETTER BAG € 90
Practical and secure transport aid for route setters that perfectly holds the euro containers commonly used in most climbing gyms for storing holds or two type 2 mail containers. The all-round strap system withstands loads of up to 150 kg and can be suspended at two angles to allow the attachment of two SETTER BAGS.



Internal dims.: 630 x 420 x 300 mm

SETTER BOX € 15
Practical bag for storing small spare parts and tools. Perfectly matched for use in combination with the SETTER BAG.



FLASK € 20
Small, easily accessible bag for storing small tools and valuables. Large opening with VCR fastener ensures quick access to the contents and can be secured with an additional push button.



BEAKER € 50
Robust bag made of abrasion-resistant canvas material for transport and organization of tools and equipment. The BEAKER is reversible so that the inside pockets can be used as side pockets. The wide lid for easy access is improved with an embedded magnet to keep it secured in windy situation.



GRIP GLOVE € 4.50
Sensitivity, grip, abrasion resistance and protection all in one—this is what the GRIP GLOVES offer. The lightweight all-round protective gloves are certified according to EN 388 and are manufactured free of harmful substances according to Standard 100 by OEKO-TEX®.



TOOL SAFETY LEASH € 32
Elasticated strap for securing tools against falling or dropping. The large girth hitch loop with a Tanka cord lock enables extremely versatile use. The integrated carabiner can be attached to personal protective equipment. Not PPE.



BAREFOOT CLIMBING SHOES

Our mission is to produce quality shoes for climbers and outdoor lovers.

We are striving to develop high quality products which satisfy even the most demanding customers around the world.

We are family company which was established in 1989 by the climber Vojtěch Ocelka and is run by him.

All of our products are hand made from premium materials.

We are located in Zlín in Czech Republic and also produce all of our shoes here in our factory.

We are trying to connect barefoot shoes together with climbing, join us on this journey.

TAIFUN

The brand new climbing shoes with elements that are new in the space of climbing. This is **TAIFUN**. Asymmetric slipper with fitting around whole feet. Unseen construction of midsole which goes from toe to heel. The shoe will hug your feet giving you a confidence and flexibility when moving.



ELIOT





SOLID CLIMBING CLUB

A NEW ERA OF CLIMBING GYMS

SINT ROC SRL
VIA FORNACI 27B
ARCO TN ITALY
tel +39 0464 518427
info@sintroc.com
www.sintroc.com

Solid Climbing Club marks a new step forward in the world of commercial climbing walls in Italy. Sint Roc joined forces right from the outset and readily provided its thirty years of experience and know-how in the design and construction of facilities dedicated to sport climbing.

Solid, based in Buccinasco (Milano), is a market leader thanks to over 3000 m2 of climbing surface and its huge variety of walls for lead, speed and bouldering. It caters for beginners all the way to international competitions, but what really sets it apart is its fantastic ambient.

Solid was born with the aim of responding to the needs of the vast and rapidly increasing number of people who have started climbing in recent years. Many practice this sport on a recreational level, and see the climbing wall not only as an effective training tool but also a space for building relationships and having fun.

It is around this concept that for almost three years Sint Roc supported the design team, first in the search for the ideal location, then in the study of layout of the walls and the organisation and simplification of the internal spaces.

While traveling along Milan's western ring road, the large outdoor lead wall, flanked by the Solid logo, never fails to catch the eye. From here it's just a couple of minutes drive to reach the large car park.



The entrance to the center, with its large porched bistrot bar and lush lawn, is strikingly different from traditional "industrial" style entrances that are often used in renovated buildings.

From the large reception the view through the large window unfolds onto the bouldering hall and the outdoor walls. The spacious changing rooms and toilets are located immediately after the turnstiles, while directly ahead lie the two internal lead/speed and bouldering halls. The outdoor walls are located just beyond the huge glass wall.

Everything here is designed to combine cutting-edge sport with fun, and the spacious ambient enables climbers to relax between one route and another and chat to friends, without invading the climbing areas. The bouldering area is spread across two floors, with a large balcony that opens onto the "little square" below.

Colours, lights and ventilation systems are designed to increase cleanliness, linearity, simplicity and well-being. The ventilation, air conditioning and chalk removal system enables Solid to maintain a comfortable environment, and this was appreciated by many during the hot summer of 2023.

But there are more surprises in store. Can you imagine a crag in Milan? This is what inspired Sint Roc experts when designing Solid's outdoor walls, and these are now surrounded by a large green area ideal for resting and even sunbathing!

For Sint Roc this project represents a great and beautiful adventure that we continue to develop with our friends at Vertical Space, the company that owns Solid Climbing Club.





Pierre Broyer setting for team Flathold at Set&Send Boulder Comp in Sofia Bulgaria

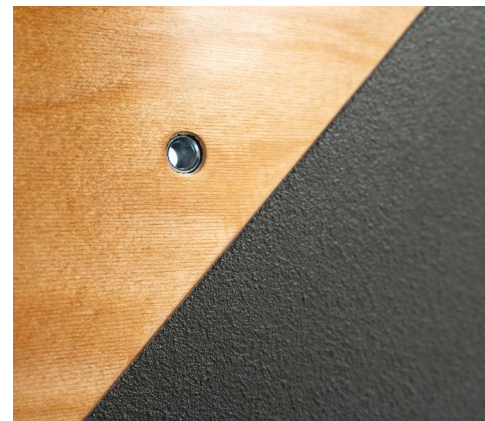
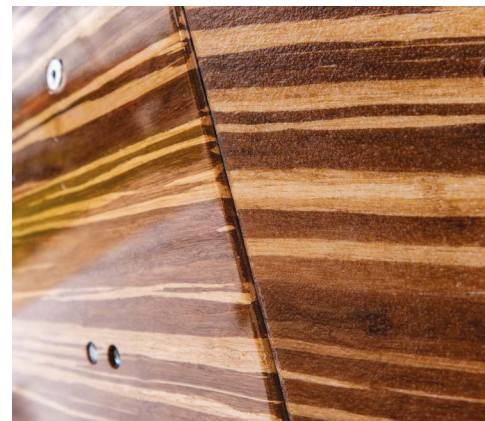
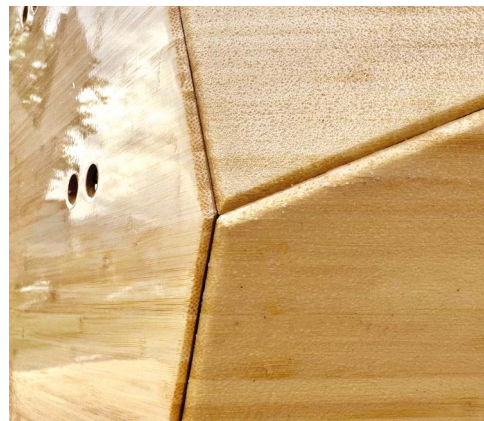
www.walltopia.com

PROVIDING DUAL TEXTURE CANVASES FOR ROUTESETTERS

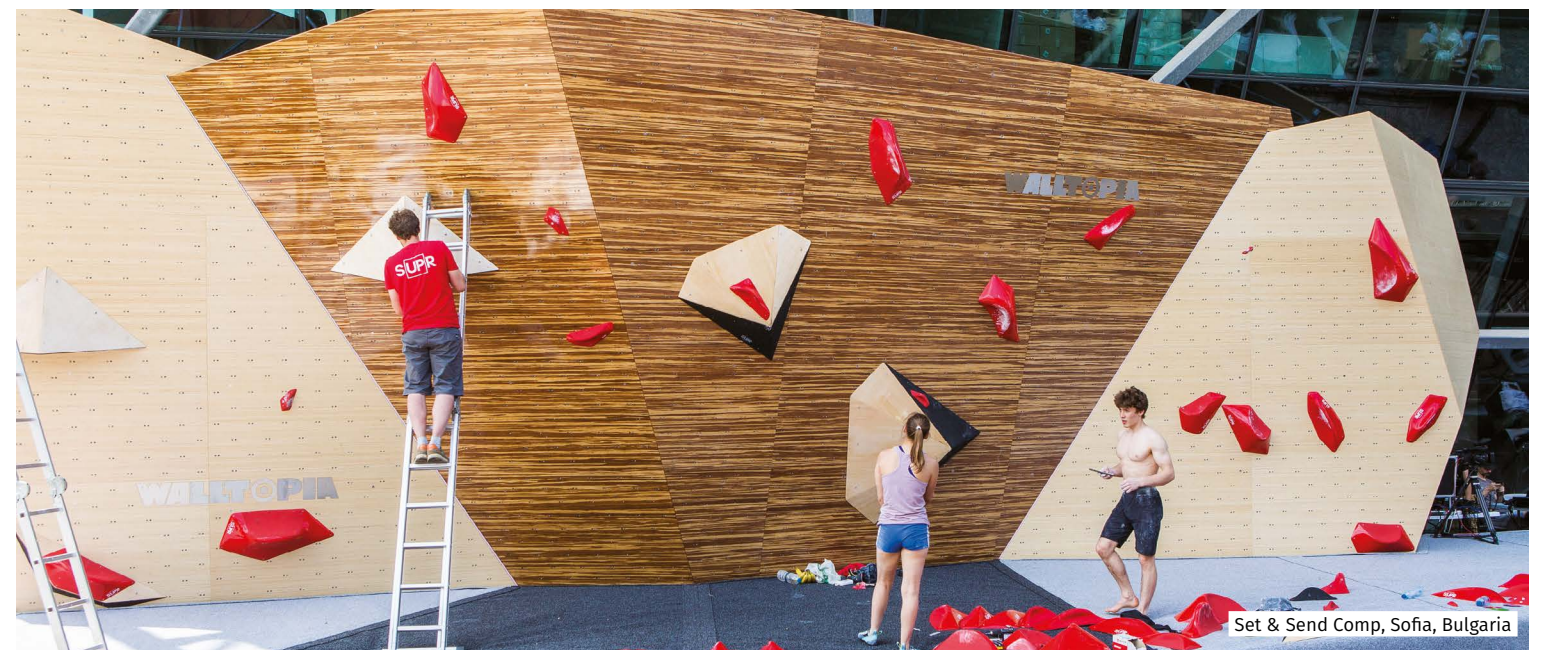
We're not reinventing the wheel with dual texture in climbing equipment. But we're doing it well with climbing walls.

Combine our two distinct surface textures on a climbing wall to create a new dimension of challenge for your customers.

Our high-friction textured panels ensure secure foot smearing for a confident and controlled ascent. Paired with our UNSTEPPABLE glossy panels, climbers are presented with a new level of complexity that fosters creative climbing and helps improve technique.



Kraftreaktor Aarau, Switzerland



Set & Send Comp, Sofia, Bulgaria



Sputnik Legazpi, Madrid, Spain

UPSCALE SAFETY WITH SMARTGATE

THE BELAY ATTACHMENT MONITORING SYSTEM

safety
ENGINEERING



Despite the great developments in the climbing wall industry in the recent decades, an area for continuous improvement will always remain the safety of climbers. It is no longer sufficient for climbing gym owners, to merely rely on liability waivers, mandatory introductory courses and informational posters.

Safety Engineering, a company renowned for its climbing safety products like the SelfBelay climbing connector, has introduced a new safety system specifically tailored for climbing gyms - SmartGate: The Belay Attachment Monitoring System.

“The user-friendly autobelay devices draw a larger number of beginner and novice climbers who fall into a higher risk group. We have observed a rise in insurance companies becoming hesitant or even refusing to provide coverage to gyms using autobelay systems. While measures like impact flooring and the use of next-generation climbing connectors such as the SelfBelay are steps in the right direction, our goal is to push safety as close as possible to 100%,” explains Borislav Atanasov, Deputy CEO of Safety Engineering.

The SmartGate comprises two primary components: first - the vinyl gate, which not only physically prevents unclipped climbing, but also incorporates an orientation detection device that continuously monitors whether the gate is upright and connected to the autobelay device or in a horizontal position, indicating a climber is attached to the

autobelay. A constant wireless connection is ensured between the orientation detection device and the sensors, embedded into the climbing wall at approximate height of 2.5m, being the second vital part of the system. In cases where a climber forgets to secure themselves to the autobelay system and surpasses the predetermined height, an audible and visual alarm is activated.

Most notably the SmartGate doesn't impose any requirements on the end user. Climbers don't need to carry any sensors with their gear for the system to detect them nor does the system protrude to the surface of the climbing wall preserving their climbing experience

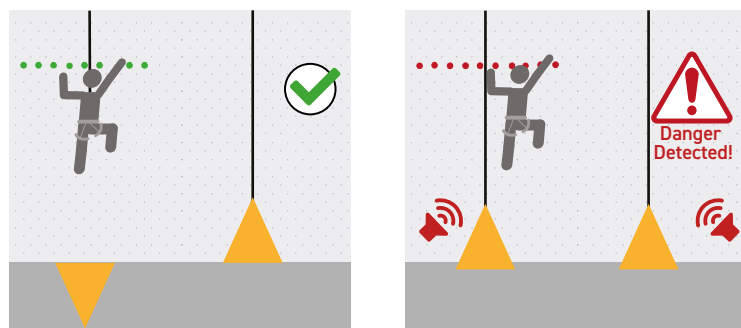
For gym owners, a primary advantage lies in the SmartGate's "plug and play" nature, where no specialist installers are required. The vinyl gate attaches to the front of the climbing wall using the provided mounting kit, while the sensors are designed to fit into standard t-nut pre-drilled holes on the climbing wall. The system is now operational at Walltopia Climbing Center in Sofia, Bulgaria, preventing accidents multiple times every day.

The SmartGate is now available for pre-order on our website, with shipping scheduled to commence on January 15, 2024, on a first-come, first-served basis at safetyeng.eu/product/smartgate



SMARTGATE BENEFITS

- » Audible and visual alarm for unclipped climbers
- » Fully automated system
- » No prerequisites for climbers to be detected
- » Easy implementation, retrofit to existing climbing walls
- » Custom design of vinyl gates with system integration
- » Automated system self-checks and operator alerts



SUSTAINABILITY IN WALLTOPIA MACROS

The new Walltopia Thermoplastic macros & volumes adopt a well-established environmentally friendly production technology from other industries to improve sustainability within indoor climbing.

At Walltopia we thrive on advancing products through scientific dedication. We've emerged as global leaders in the climbing industry fueled by our passion for technology, hard work, and responsibility. With a constant drive to enhance, we conduct extensive R&D, exploring materials, machinery, and technology. Noteworthy lately is our integration of thermoplastic, inspired by our CEO Ivaylo Penchev and his packaging industry expertise. This eco-conscious move has made a sustainable shift to our volumes and macros, making them entirely recyclable. Walltopia Thermoplastic (TP) is environmentally friendly, as it can be melted and reshaped, emits no toxins, and outperforms previous industry materials.

Traditionally, climbing holds were made from non-recyclable polyurethane, polyester, or fiberglass, contributing to landfill waste and toxic emissions. Plywood, seemingly eco-friendly, poses challenges due to their limited reuse potential and controversial burning process. Plywood volumes have a short lifespan compared to walls, necessitating swift recycling solutions. Walltopia TP offers a sustainable alternative being fully recyclable.

While the industry may not fully transition yet, we firmly believe in TP's potential. We're expanding our TP product line, encouraging gym owners and setters to embrace this greener route. Let's adopt a sustainable approach to route setting, shaping a cleaner future for climbing gyms.

WALLTOPIA



WALLTOPIA TP VOLUMES

- » 100% recyclable
- » The ultimate grip
- » Extra durable
- » Super hard to break
- » Ultra light
- » Environmentally-friendly production
- » Zero toxic emissions
- » Isocyanate and polyol free

The latest range of Walltopia TP macros and volumes are available at holdtopia.com

Create your own climbing holds brand.

- Your own brand name
- Your own shapes
- Our production capabilities
- Our distribution network



SUPPORTED BY WALLTOPIA Contact sales@walltopia.com to learn more



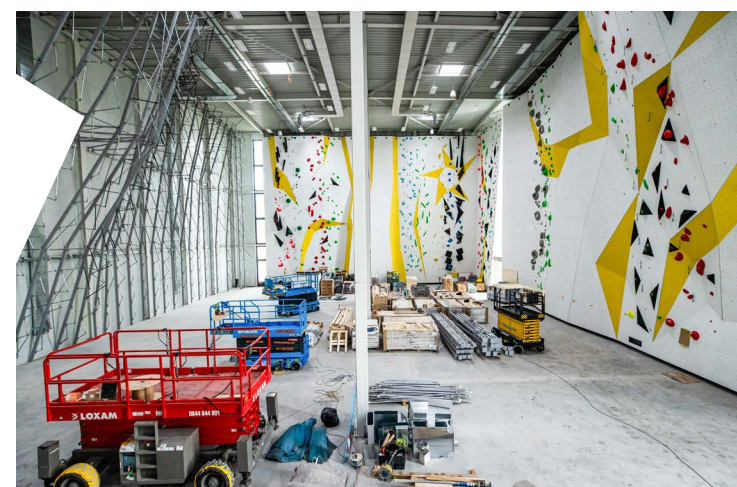
Photo: Lene Drapelet / IFSC



Official Partner
since its creation in 2007

We can offer you a turnkey solution with all the specific products required for your wall:

- Holds**
- Protection accessories
- Mats*
- Climbing gear*
- Hardware
- Design*
- Studies
- Installation
- Maintenance**
- Route setting**
- Compliance*



EP HOLDS NEWS

SKINNY & NERVE, WOOD VOLUMES

- » Designed for all climbing and boulder gyms.
- » Selected for Olympic Qualifier Series (OQS) / IFSC events.

BARCHAN, FIBREGLASS MACROS

- » Inspired by sand dunes created by the wind.
- » Different grips from beginners to pros.



E/P BRINGS CLIMBING
to everyone

THE PIONEER IN PRODUCING CLIMBING WALLS AND HOLDS

Since 1985, the EP Climbing team has changed the lives of millions of people around the world, by making climbing accessible to everyone.

- » A skilled and passionate Team.
- » Understanding and anticipating the needs of climbers and wall owners by staying ahead of the ever changing climbing market.
- » Involved in all aspects of the climbing community, from school teachers to international route setters.



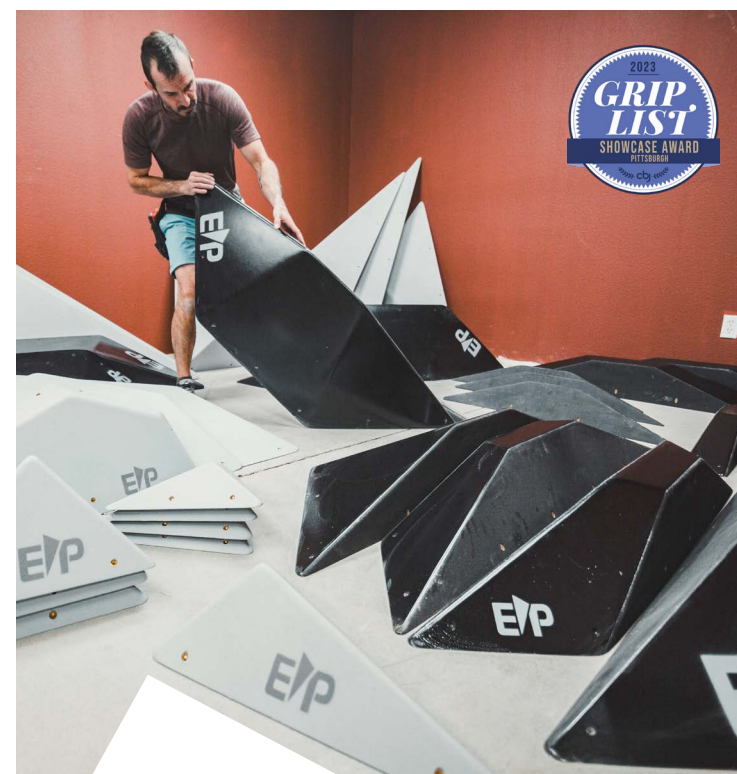
Portland Rock Gym, USA



Espace Vertical 4, France



Biwak Climbing, Spain





BaRocka WALLS AND MATS

The history of BaRocka's climbing walls dates back to 2016. Since this day we have created many boulder gyms, rope climbing walls, school walls and kid playgrounds. Our biggest realization is Skarpa Bytom with over 2300 sqm of climbing surface - the biggest climbing object in Poland.

Our projects are always dedicated to a specific place where the climbing panel will be located. The individual elements are adapted to the parameters of the facility and needs of the client. Each project is preceded by a 3D visualization and follows the latest trends in the design of climbing walls. We provide boulder and rope climbing walls, colorful walls for kids, and boulder mats.

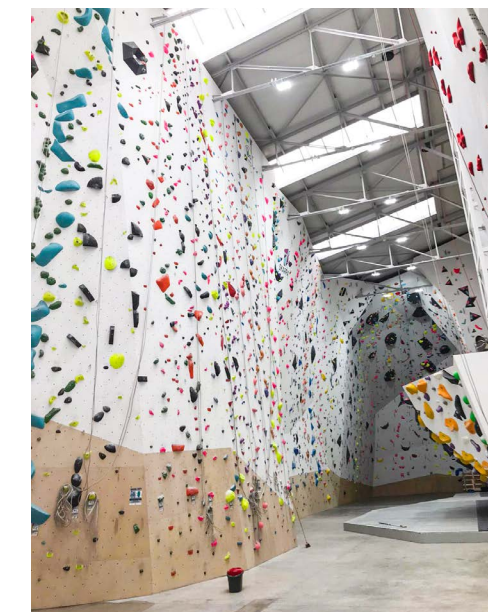
WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL

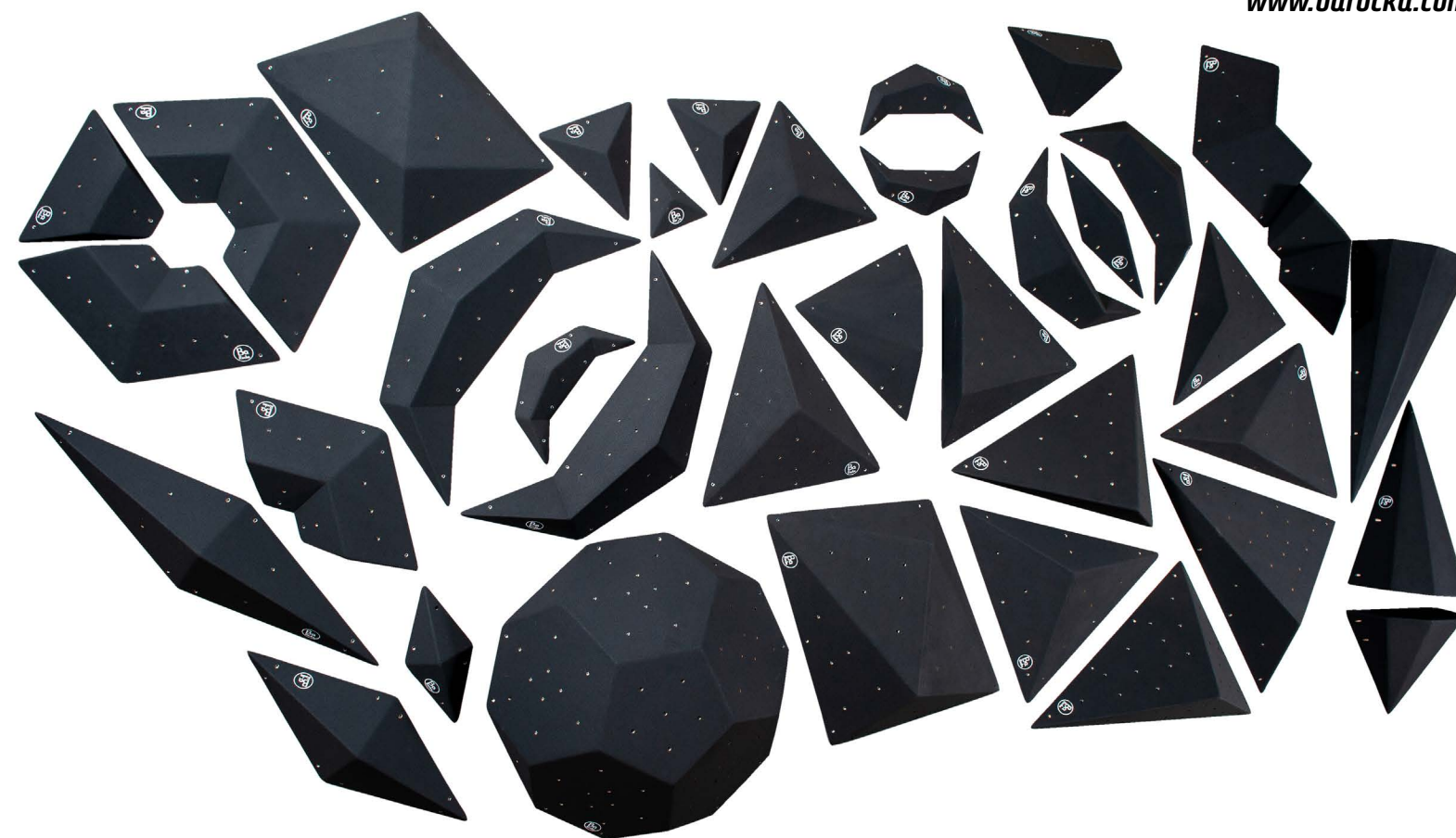
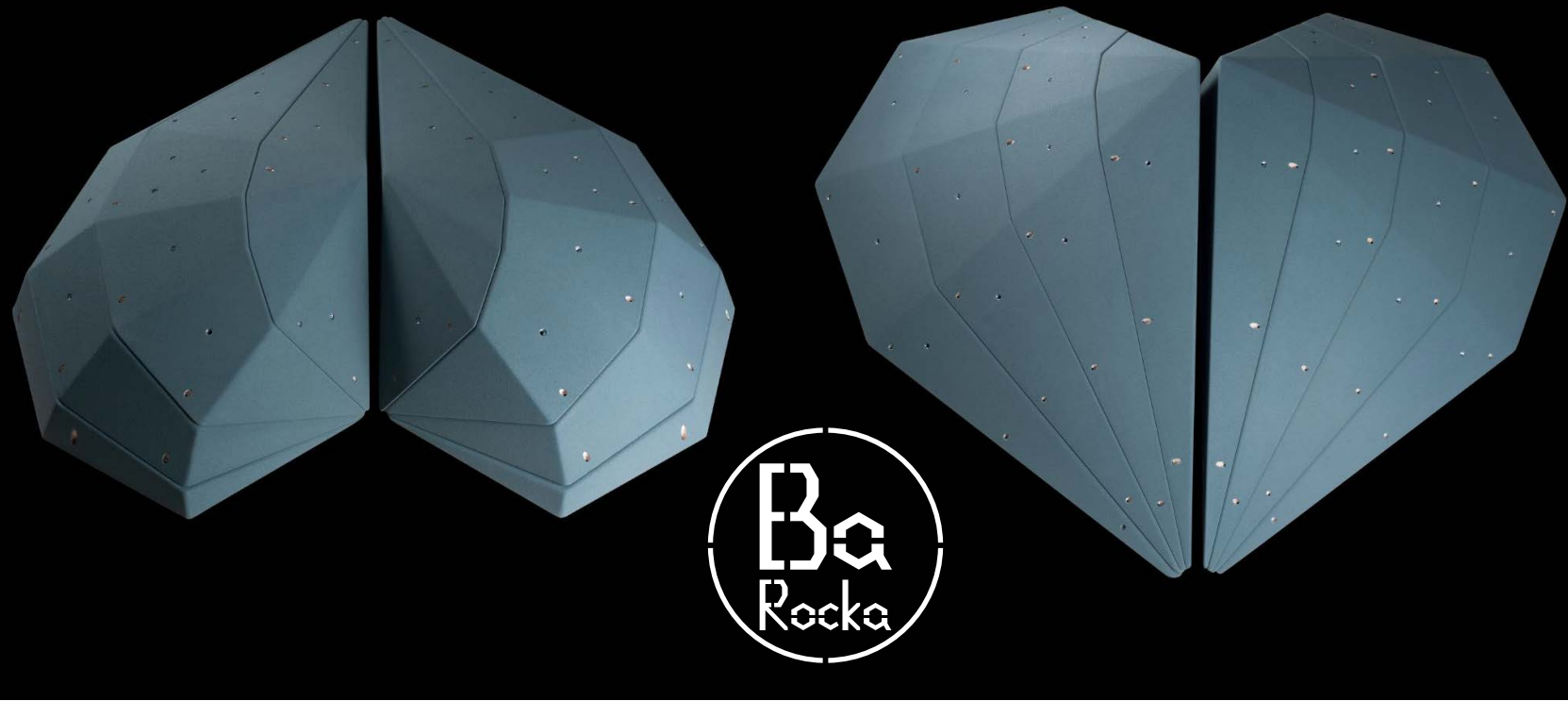
PANELS

- » smooth friction or without friction,
- » transparent or half transparent colors,
- » reduced shoes marks
- » UV stable,
- » easy to clean,
- » Self centering T-nuts with 4mm initial diameter without thread for self centering. Special coating for outdoor use.
- » Edges protection with stainless steel stripes – very durable but with low visual impact,
- » Top edge jug- made of two round edges plywood, makes a nice hand hold on the top of a boulder wall.

MATTING

Made of 3 layers of foam, carpet cover with PVC base cover. Our mats are well absorbing fall impacts, but still keeps stiff surface, that is easy for walking and vacuuming.





BaRocka

PLYWOOD VOLUMES

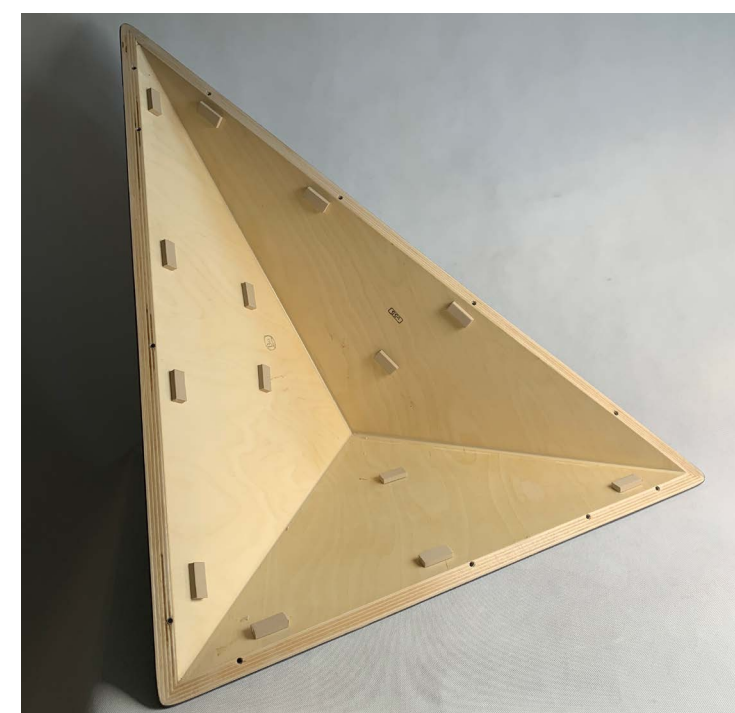
BaRocka is a Polish company formed by two friends, sharing the same passion for climbing, engineering and woodworking. Through abilities and experience our hobby quickly becomes professional manufacturing of climbing walls and plywood volumes. BaRocka provides a wide range of volumes which are for now 140 models.



Volumes are made of 18mm water-resistant birch plywood.

On the back are foam spacers, which makes volumes easy for storage. Screw placements are reinforced by special metal sleeves.

Newest "Heart" volumes are two sets of 8 pcs, possible to connect to huge blocks. The sides of the blocks are flat, which enables the huge holds to screw to it.





STEILHEIT
DIE WANDMACHER

Wildbichlerstraße 1D
A-6341 Ebbs/Tirol
05373 21 233 0

www.steilheit.at

STEILHEIT AM PULS DER SZENE

Nicht jede Kletterhalle zieht die Massen an. Nuancen und Details entscheiden über den Erfolg. Wer versteht, was Kletterer wollen und brauchen, schafft Orte, die mehr als nur ein kurzfristiger Hype sind. Stefan Fürst von STEILHEIT über aktuelle Anforderungen, künftige Innovationen und die Notwendigkeit am Puls der Szene zu sein.

Sie schießen aus dem Boden, wie die sprichtwörtlichen Pilze. Kletter- und Boulderhallen liegen im Trend. Immer mehr Kommunen, Vereine aber auch private Investoren setzen auf den ganzheitlichen Trendsport.

Doch bei all dem Hype und der Flut von Anbietern kann leicht übersehen werden, dass hinter einer erfolgreichen Kletterhalle weit mehr steckt als nur Wände und Griffe. Stefan Fürst, 9-facher Kletter-Staatsmeister und Trendexperte bei Steilheit, kennt die Geheimnisse eines gelungenen Baus. Hier sind seine drei unverzichtbaren Tipps, die über Erfolg oder Misserfolg entscheiden können:

KEINE KLETTERHALLE DARF WIE DIE ANDERE SEIN

Die Investition in eine Kletterhalle zahlt sich nur aus, wenn sie von der Kletter-Community begeistert angenommen wird. Unterschiedliche Regionen, verschiedene Anforderungen. Stefan Fürst von Steilheit kennt die Bedeutung einer präzisen Abstimmung auf die Region und deren Kletterszene. „Und die beginnt mit einer unverblühten Standortanalyse, in der Ehrlichkeit im Vordergrund steht“, betont der 9-fache Staatsmeister. **Nur so schafft man eine einzigartige Halle, die viele begeistert.**

AM PULS DER SZENE: TRENDS FRÜHER ERKENNEN

Die internationale Kletterszene ist in ständiger Bewegung. Heutige Innovationen können morgen schon alter Kaffee sein. Daher zählt eine Partnerschaft mit Insidern, die diese hippe Szene wirklich verstehen. Steilheit pflegt daher den Draht zur Kletterelite und behält stets den nächsten großen Trend im Blick. Stefan Fürst. „Mir geht es darum, dass unsere Kunden in eine erfolgreiche Zukunft und nicht in den Moment investieren.“ **Mit Steilheit wählt man Weitsicht und Zeitgeist zugleich.**

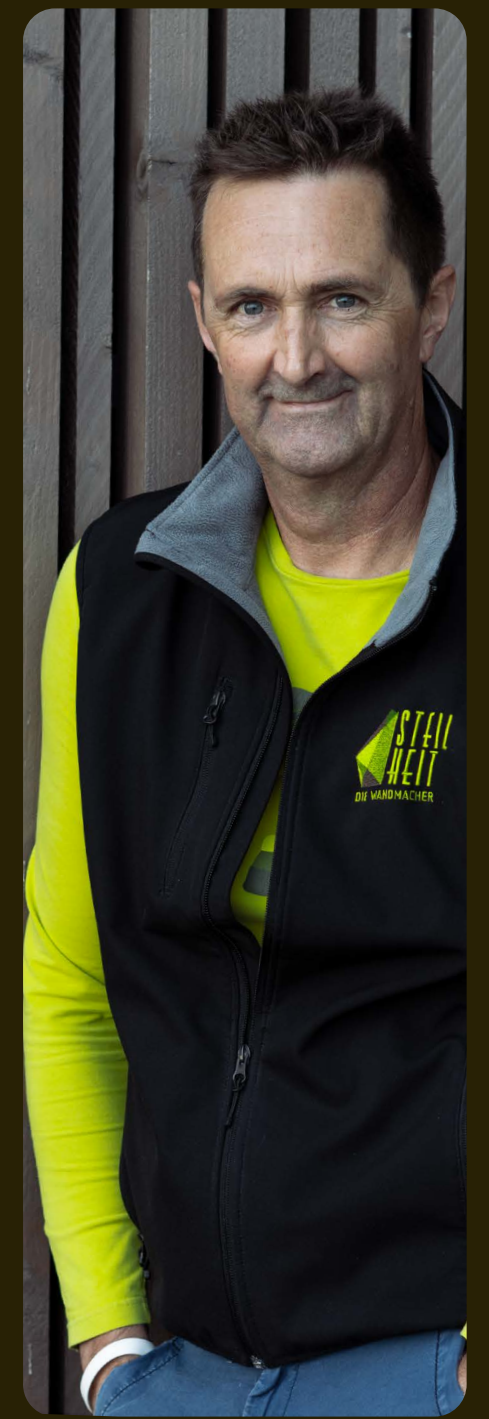


Am Puls der Szene zu sein bedeutet für mich stets die aktuellen Trends zu erkennen und tief in den Herzschlag der Klettergemeinschaft zu horchen.

Es geht darum, jeden Beat, jede Emotion und jedes Bedürfnis zu verstehen. So schaffen wir bei STEILHEIT Kletterwände, die wirksam und nachhaltig Resonanz in der Szene erzeugen und begeistern.

*Stefan Fürst
STEILHEIT*

9-facher Kletter-Staatsmeister



MIT EINEM NACHHALTIGEN BAUSTOFF WOHLFÜHLATMOSPHERE ERZEUGEN

In der Kletterszene geht es um mehr als nur den Aufstieg; es geht um Respekt für die Umwelt und den Wunsch, ihr nahe zu sein, selbst in urbanen Gebieten. Nachhaltigkeit ist hier nicht nur ein Schlagwort, sondern eine tiefe Überzeugung. Holz, mit seiner natürlichen Wärme und organischen Struktur vermittelt genau dieses Raumgefühl mit jeder Faser. Es ist damit nicht einer von vielen Baustoffen, es ist eine Hingabe an die Werte und Anforderungen der Kletterszene und gleichzeitig ide-

aler Baustoff, weit über Kletterwände hinaus. „Auf Wunsch planen wir daher ganze Raumkonzepte, von der Stiege über Fenster, Türen bis hin zu komplexen Dachstühlen – alles in meisterhafter Holzbauweise.“ So entstehen einzigartige Erlebnisräume, die Kletterbegeisterte magisch anziehen. Die organische Wärme und Struktur des Holzes schaffen eine unvergleichliche Wohlfühl-atmosphäre, die jeden Besuch zu einem inspirierenden und erholsamen Erlebnis macht.





einstein Neu-Ulm 2023



Boulderhaus Reutlingen 2023

BOULDERING GYM DEVELOPMENT, DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

www.benkyclimbing.com



Tromso 2022

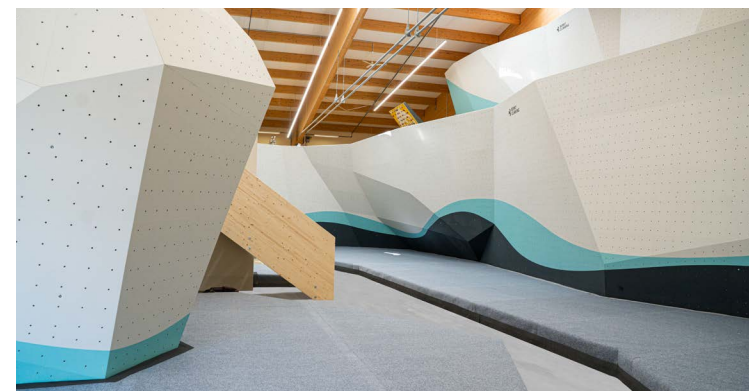
We've been climbers for years, both as passionate enthusiasts and professional competition climbers. At some point, we found ourselves in need of high-quality matting for bouldering gyms.

That's when we embarked on a journey over 15 years ago to develop our patented Benky matting, designed to fit all possible needs. As our expertise grew, we ventured into becoming gym owners.

Now, with our extensive experience and keen design sense, it was only natural to take the next logical step: building climbing walls.

BENKY CLIMBING WALLS

Benky Climbing walls are designed and crafted to the highest standards. We ensure seamless joints and use top-tier coatings as standard practice.

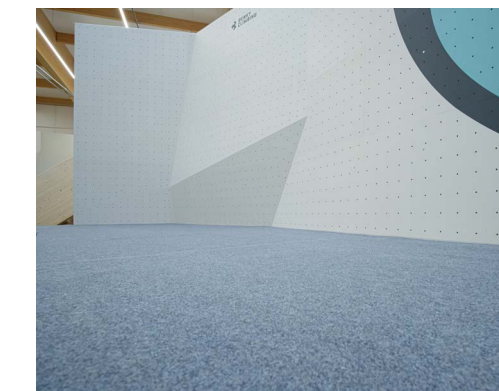


BENKY CLIMBING MATTING

Premium German-Made Bouldering Mats

Our state-of-the-art manufacturing technology ensures perfectly tensioned carpet surfaces, guaranteeing a completely flat and wrinkle-free installation.

Our 2023 bouldering gym carpets are designed to be dust proof - not only to simplify the cleaning process during vacuuming, but also to prevent chalk from penetrating deep into the carpet. Goodbye to chalk accumulating under the carpet which is released into the air with every jump onto the mat, and hello to cleaner air. An added bonus: this also greatly increases the lifespan of your foam.





GYMCARE

TWIN POINT

“the only double safety climbing system in the world”

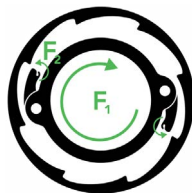
The brake mechanism

The brake mechanism reacts immediately after the start of a free descent. It controls the smoothness of the descent. The braking mechanism is designed for maximum weight of 150 kg.



Locking mechanism

The revolutionary locking mechanism reacts in case the brake mechanism exceeds the descent speed of 2m/s. This causes a complete blockage of the fall/descent, preventing injury. This locking mechanism starts only in case of faulty operation, such as when the falling climber's weight exceeds 150kg or when the mandatory factory annual recertification with brake pad replacement is not fulfilled.



www.benkyclimbing.com

GRIPWASH

Benky Gripwash was developed specifically for cleaning climbing holds. Soaking holds in Gripwash quickly and effectively removes rubber, chalk, sweat, and more, without leaving a smeary residue - perfectly restoring their original surfaces. All while being eco-friendly and saving water. Certified and made in Germany for a sustainable future.



SKUNKX

Our SkunkX hygiene spray is tailored perfectly for rental shoes, but works on any damply treatable surface. Apply it once, wait one minute and let air dry - thanks to its much higher concentration of alcohol than comparable products it dries faster and kills more bacteria. Faster, cleaner and a pleasant citrus aroma to top it off.



RUBBERX

Tired of rubber stains on your wall and matting? RubberX solves the eyesore - simply apply, let soak, brush lightly and rinse it off. The only product of its kind, developed by gym owners for gym owners.



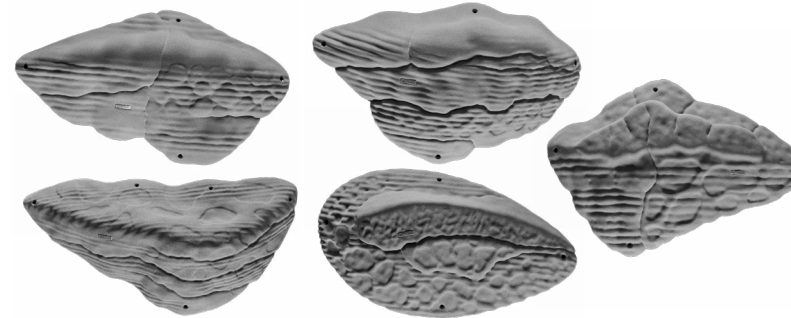
www.coreclimbing.co.uk

CLIMBING HOLDS MADE IN SHEFFIELD

Core Climbing Ltd was founded in 2008. In founding Core, we were motivated by a desire to translate the look and feel of real rock into holds for training boards, home walls and commercial climbing centres. In 2012 we expanded our offering to include bespoke matting for commercial bouldering walls. This side of our business has gone from strength to strength, and we are now one of the leading producers of commercial matting in Europe.

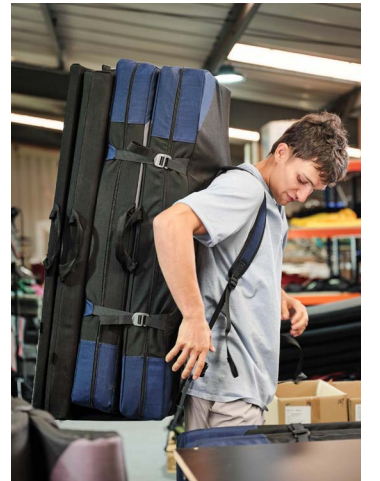
COASTAL MINI-VOLUMES

The Coastal Sandstone range is inspired by the rock found at St Bees Head on the Cumbrian coast. Millennia of exposure to the eroding processes of wind and water has given this rock a unique appearance. The texture is classic sandstone, fine-grained and grippy, the shapes inherently ergonomic.



BURDEN OF DREAM REPLICA HOLDS

Cast from 3D scans taken by Aiden Roberts these Burden Replica holds are an exact match of the real thing. Manufactured using our 'engineered stone' Polyester composite material, these Burden of Dreams replica holds have a cool feeling to the touch and a rock like texture. Recreate a Font 9A at home!



WORKHORSE OUTDOOR CRASH PAD

The Workhorse is the main feature of our Outdoor bouldering matting, it is an all rounder suitable for use at any crag in any condition. Made from 1100 denier Cordura®, it is incredibly tough. All of our products are made in the Core Climbing factory in Sheffield, and our new range of crash pads are no exception. Hand sewn by our expert machinists with years of experience.





ProGrade
Free, inside.

PROGRADE - LEAD CLIMB LIKE NEVER BEFORE

WHAT IS IT

ProGrade is the world's first exclusive autobelay system for both lead and top-rope climb. It manages all aspects of the belay in a fully automatic way, starting from the knot to the descent to the ground.

WHAT IT DOES

Prograde allows you to lead climb, to top-rope, to fall, to rest, to restart and to work the route all in the highest safety conditions. It recognizes the climber's movements and follows the climb during the progression phases by providing rope when needed and retrieving slacks when present. Climbing gestures are kept unchanged: the knot, the clipping, the feeling of a true climb, and after a fall you can always restart.

WHERE IS IT

It is fixed at the base of the wall between two lines, externally it has the shape, size, and appearance of a climbing volume. It can be installed both on vertical and on overhanging walls.



Just Climb, Reggio Emilia



OPERATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Using sensors and specially designed software, ProGrade reads the movements of the rope and recognizes the actions of the climber in real time. Inside, the rope is wound and unwound neatly by the motors according to needs. The locking system is fully mechanical and works by friction. Thanks to the "Slack Control System" ProGrade maintains the right amount of rope needed for progression, eliminating slacks. In case of a fall over the quick-draw, it retrieves rope very quickly, reducing the length of the fall.

Knowing the position of the climber on the wall, the "Adaptive Belay" and "Soft Brake Feel" technologies patented by ProGrade allow to balance speed of action and comfort in, immediately stopping a fall in the first quickdraws, and making a dynamic and comfortable belay in the highest part of the wall. ProGrade performs a very high quality, reliable, safety and comfortable belay and at the same time offers freedom of movement.

INSTALLATION

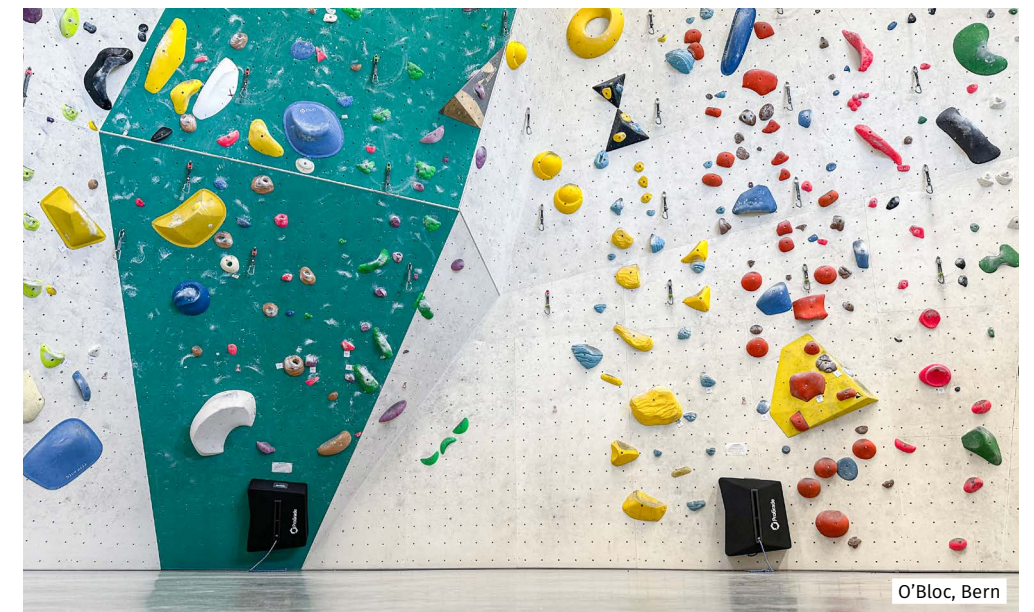
The installation is carried out by highly qualified staff, is fast and does not require any type of modification of the wall. The fixing consists of an independent structure that is anchored to the floor on the back of the wall, making it ideal for existing gyms and for new projects.

ADVANTAGES

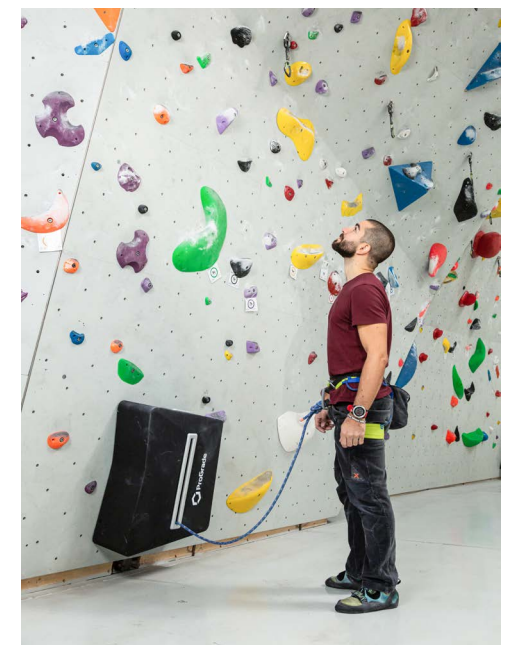
ProGrade allows you to optimize the space on the wall: being positioned between two rows of quickdraws, it allows you to equip a section of the wall and make it climbable both to the climbers who want Prograde, and to those who want to climb in pairs. ProGrade gives you the opportunity to train independently, safely and completely, carrying out the sport of climbing from start to finish without compromise on all types of walls, even the most overhanging. With ProGrade, the gym offers a new service to its customers, giving them the opportunity to live an experience of true freedom.

DISTRIBUTION

ProGrade is already present in many gyms in Europe, contact us for information.



O'Bloc, Bern



Rockspot, Milano

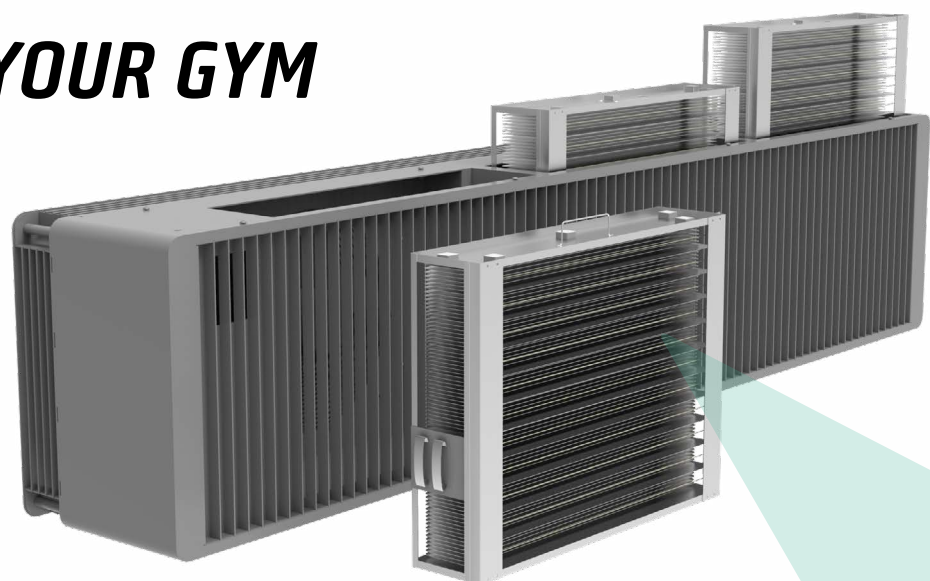


CLIMBLAB

www.climblab.dk

Photo: Busse Lommers

THE BEST AIR FILTER FOR YOUR GYM



**UP TO €5,000
IN ANNUAL SAVINGS**

Compared to conventional pocket filter solutions.



Chalk dust trapped in filter cassette

The Climblab filters collect a lot of dust, and we see a change in the air quality. With less dust and thus less cleaning, we definitely notice the benefits.

Raymond van den Hooven, Technical service. Monk

THE MOST EFFECTIVE FILTER SYSTEM FOR YOUR GYM

Our electrostatic filter technology combined with high air flow fans guarantees effective removal of chalk dust throughout your gym. No unfiltered areas, no dead corners.

EASIEST FILTER TO SERVICE

Experience the convenience of our filters with easily removable and cleanable filter cassettes. Cleaning is a breeze, and these cassettes can be reused for years and years.

MODULAR CLEANING SYSTEM FOR EVERY GYM

The best selling cleaning system on the market offers improved work flow, a safe working environment and a lot of time and money saved.

We create a safe workplace by utilizing our advanced technologies. Our ultrasonic cleaner does not create harmful fumes or aerosols, and in addition our pressure washing booth creates a splash and aerosol free work environment by utilizing a powerful extraction fan.

Whether you want an automated system or to manually pressure wash, we have the ultimate system for you.



Soak & Pressure Wash

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| Speed | ●●●○○ |
| Automation | ●●○○○ |
| Cleanliness | ●●●○○ |

Ultrasound

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| Speed | ●●●●○ |
| Automation | ●●●○○ |
| Cleanliness | ●●●●● |

The Ultimate System

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| Speed | ●●●●● |
| Automation | ●●●●○ |
| Cleanliness | ●●●●● |

The Climbing Academy have tried every method of washing from acid baths to pressure washers without a great deal of satisfaction. Moving to the Climblab system has opened our eyes to the new industry standard. Our staff have a better work experience and the life span of our holds has improved.

Alan Cassidy, Development Director, The Climbing Academy Group



DIRTY HOLDS
Crates optimise the work flow

SOAKING
Doubles cleaning capacity by reducing needed time in the ultrasonic cleaner

ULTRASOUND
Cleans up to 20 crates an hour and reduces water usage and workload

CLEANING BOOTH
Clean macros & volumes indoor or rinse crates

CLEAN HOLDS
Crates optimize the work flow

ADVANTAGES OF HVLS FANS IN CLIMBING GYMS

|| The HVLS fans are absolutely fantastic. They've made a huge difference in the comfort of our climbers.

Steve Dunning, Owner, Depot Climbing



SAVINGS ON HEATING COST DURING WINTER

The temperature gradient in high climbing gyms can reach up to a 15°C difference between the floor and ceiling levels. A High-Volume Low Speed (HVLS) fan promotes an even distribution of the heated air, thereby reducing your heater's energy consumption. This can result in energy cost savings of up to 40%.



COOLER CONDITIONS DURING THE SUMMER

Inadequate insulation of the roof and walls can result in elevated indoor temperatures during sunny periods. Introducing a gentle breeze from a HVLS fan can create a perceived temperature drop of up to 8°C. If you are using air conditioning and fans combined, you can achieve energy savings of up to 30% vs. using air conditioning only.



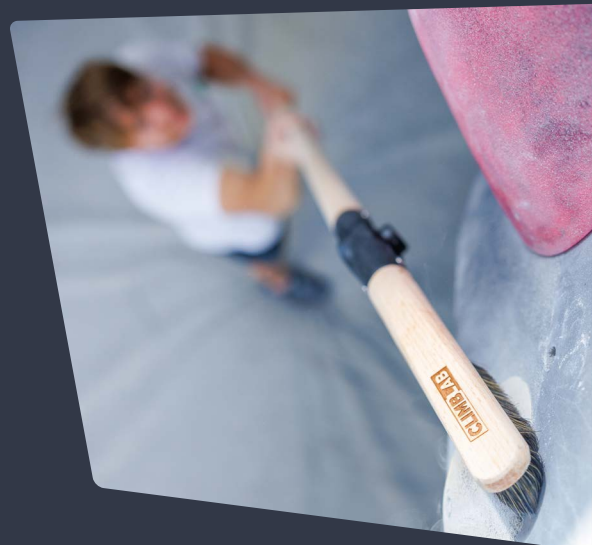
UNIQUELY DESIGNED BRUSHES

|| By far the best brushes we have used in the gym. Our climbers really value the design and use of high quality materials which makes it a joy to use the brushes.

Soren Davidsen, Sports and facility manager, Bison Boulders



A SERIES OF HIGH QUALITY BRUSHES FOR CLIMBING GYMS



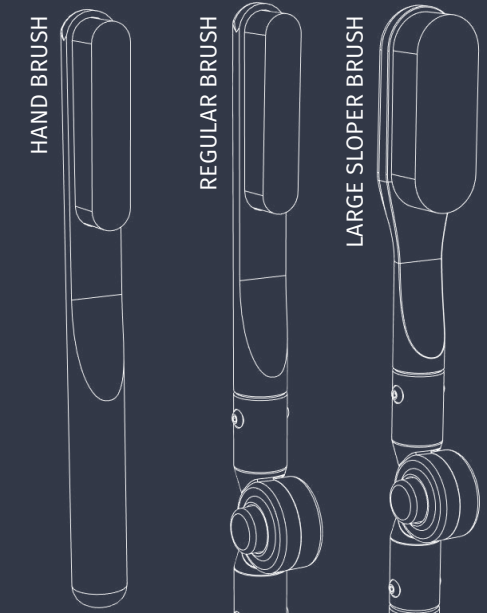
Dark boar hair bristles. Highly dense and durable.

Easily exchangeable brush head.

Sustainable design. 100% FSC sourced beech wood.

Push button angle adjuster for quick adjustment.

ø28mm beech wood shaft for high durability.



www.climblab.dk

8a+

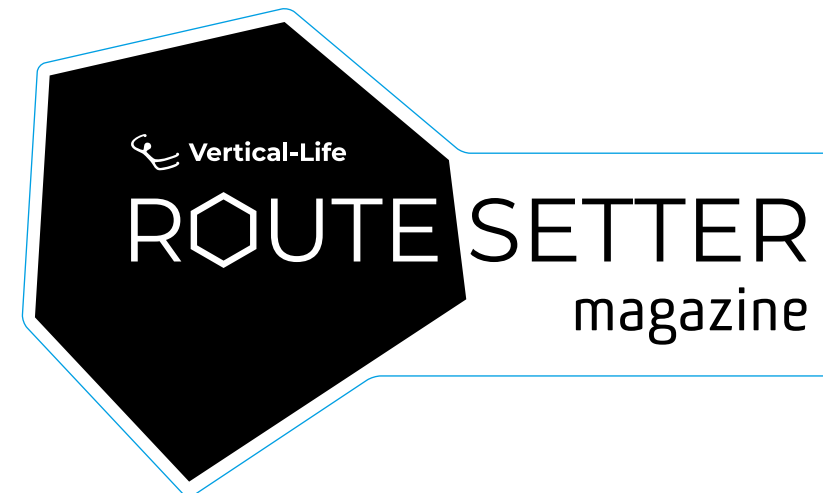
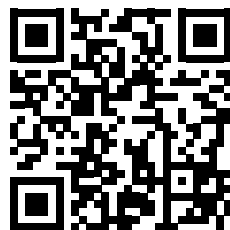
Say hello to Vertical-Life web

vertical-life.info
5.0 ★★★★★

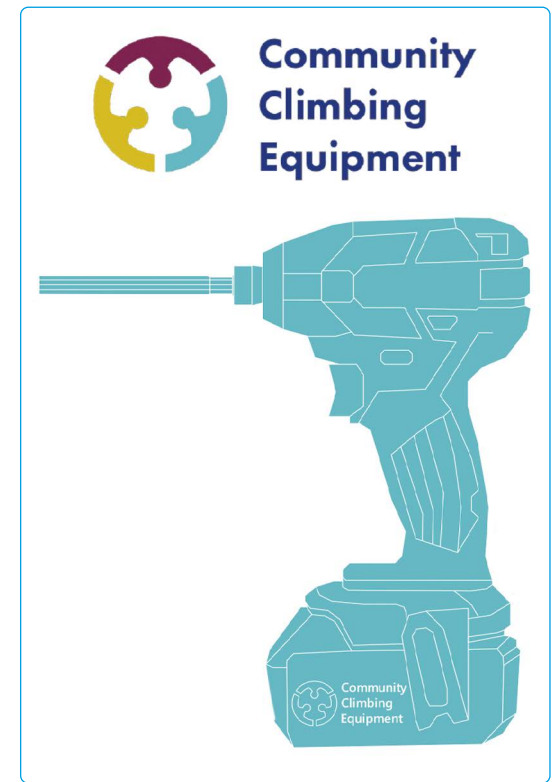
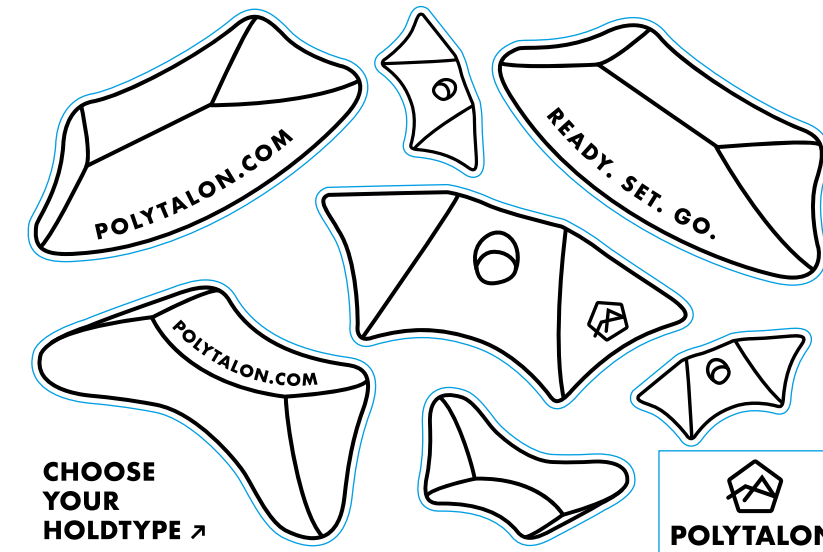


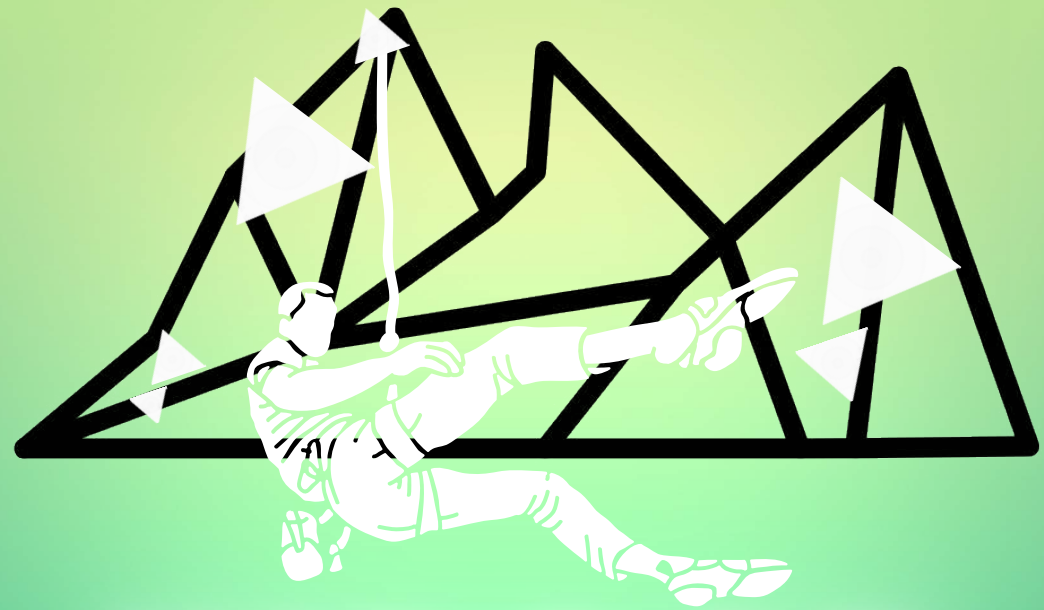
Turn every day into a perfect climbing day.

VENGA!



ZLAG!





INDOOR CLIMBING EXPO

DEC. 13-16 2023
2024 DATES TBD

CHATTANOOGA, TN.

Save \$20 off Admission
with Promo Code
"VERTLIFE"

@INDOORCLIMBINGEXPO

AN ALL AROUND EVENT TO CELEBRATE CLIMBING.
FROM THE LOCAL CHATTANOOGA CRAG TO
MEETING YOUR FAVORITE CLIMBING BRANDS.

GRAB TICKETS NOW!

INDOORCLIMBINGEXPO.COM



SEE A FULL LIST OF PARTICIPATING BRANDS ON OUR WEBPAGE

THE RETURN OF



Shaped with Chainsaws, Masterfully Refined.

Fabricated with Glass Reinforced Urethane, the Great Khan has a top layer gripping surface of durable polyurethane and an underlayer of lightweight, strong fiberglass resin. Shaped with mega stomp pads, the biggest Khan shapes can feel like volumes with a sloper jug side ideal for paddle dynos, thuggy compression, or any weirdness you can come up with. They're intended to be more of a situation than a hold—spin it and you will encounter a different experience with every angle 360 times.





IFSC APPROVED WALL

The official competition wall



Have you climbed it?

IFSC Asian Kids Championship, India
Natural Climb, Spain
The Climbing Lab, UK
ClimbPro Center, Spain
Parthian Wandsworth, UK

World Championships Bern, Switzerland
Wyn Skillpark, Switzerland
Portland Rock Gym, USA
Pan American Games, Chile
Neom Beach Games, Saudi Arabia

If it's good enough for Tokyo and Paris,
IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU!

Get in touch at
EPclimbing.com