

FACT-FINDING

COLORADO

BY JULES OLDER



Photo: Tom Zuccareno

OUR BELOVED EDITOR INTRODUCES
THE CONCEPTS OF MULTI-TASKING AND
FACT-FINDING TO A WAITING WORLD.

Along with 30 or so other freeloaders and a dozen or so P.R. flacks, I'm standing in the penthouse of a San Francisco hotel, chomping happily away on perky little lamb chops. Like most ski writers, I've long ago mastered the art of snaffling free food, quaffing free drinks and making conversation, all at the same time.

We call it multi-tasking.

So here am I, munching lamb, sipping Pinot and feeling, Gee I'm glad I'm a ski writer, when my luck takes a turn.

For the better.

A P.R. woman approaches me with intent. "I'm Lupe," she says, "and I understand you're with Ski Press."

As I daintily dab a morsel of lamb from my lips, I confess that I am. Lupe says, "I represent Destination Hotels & Resorts. We manage hotels and condos at leading American ski areas. I'd like to organize a fact-finding trip for you."

Fact-finding. How long have I tried to make friends and loved ones understand that when I disappear for a week of skiing, I'm not just skiing, I'm *fact-finding*. Lupe is the first who has truly comprehended that.

Two months later, I'm on my way to Vail, Snowmass and Aspen. Fact-finding.

Here are the facts I found...

VAIL

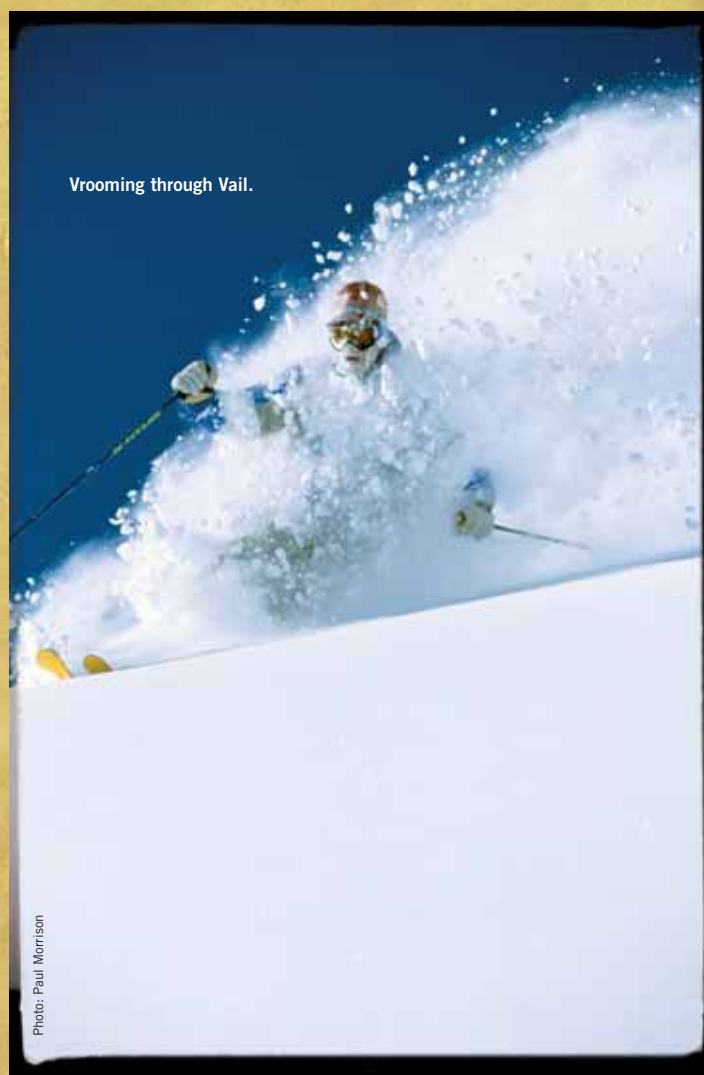
For my money, Vail is the best ski mountain in the country, bar none. If you're determined to throw yourself off cornices, Squaw or Jackson Hole is more simpatico, but for the 99.98 percent of skiers who don't jump buses or ski turn-or-die chutes, Vail has no peer.

The Front Side — mostly groomed, mostly a degree or two on either side of intermediate — is, in itself, a big and bountiful ski area. The Back Side — endless bowl after endless bowl — is powder paradise. Then, 45 minutes by lift and ski and lift and ski away, is a third area, Blue Sky, which is powder paradise plus trees. If you wanted to design the perfect ski hill, Vail would make an excellent template.

BONUS

Rustic Lunch: At the top of Blue Sky in a stone warming hut. BYO or buy a light lunch there. It's lift-served yet wilderness, Vail yet far from Vail.

Fancy Dinner: Chap's in Cascade Resort. Despite the name, Chap's is elegant, expensive, delightfully served and delicious.



SNOWMASS AT ASPEN

Though they'll try and persuade you that Snowmass is full of chutes and couloirs and cornices, ignore them. It's all true, just as it's true for most major Western mountains. But Snowmass' forte isn't huckable cliffs — it's the fact that Snowmass is one big-ass hill.

Wanna ski till you drop, swoop till you droop? Go to Snowmass. Wanna carve endless GS turns on trails wider than a hockey rink? Snowmass. The high trail — though high *boulevard* would be more accurate — Big Burn, is an exemplar. Named after a 1940s forest fire, Big Burn also describes your thighs after you ski from top to bottom of this broad-shouldered, wide-bottomed mountain.

BONUS

Special Dinner: Under the twinkling lights at the Artisan in the Stonebridge Inn. The food is richly delicious, the service is exceptional and the slopeside setting is pure romance.

Family Apres: In the lobby off the Silvertree Hotel — starting at 3 p.m., Friday through Sunday — take in the forever-running, outrageously interactive, absolutely free concert by Heart of the Rockies. They play the American country canon from John Prine to John Denver to John Sommers... who's a member of the group. jhsmmers.com

ASPEN

Beneath Aspen's three famous mountains — Aspen, Buttermilk and Aspen Highlands — lies America's most famous ski town. Yes, it is dripping in diamonds and pearls. Yes, it is awash in Victorian architecture. Yes, it exudes charm the way a powder day exudes delight. Yes, you can enjoy free movies, free buses, and on the mountains, free guided tours. Yes to the ungodly rich, yes to the X Games, yes to eye-candy blondes on the arms of comb-over Viagraphiles, yes to sphincter-shutting chutes, and yes to long, soaring groomers — Aspen is a yes kind of place.

BONUS

Granny Tour: If you see a four-foot-nothing grandmother leading a mountain tour, join the group at once. That grandma is Ruth Waldman, who knows every trail on the mountain, every local in town, and who leads tours on skis and snowboard.

Cabaret: For dinner and musical satire, make a reservation at The Crystal Palace, 75 bucks and worth it... unless you're politically sensitive or Condi Rice. (970) 925-1459, cpal@rof.net

Thundering down Thunderbowl
on Aspen Highlands



YES TO THE UNGODLY RICH, YES TO THE
X GAMES, YES TO EYE-CANDY BLONDES ON THE
ARMS OF COMB-OVER VIAGRAPHILES...

Photo: Tom Zuccareno

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on Destination Hotels & Resorts' multitude of lodging options, logon destinationhotels.com.
For more on Vail, Snowmass and Aspen, logon vail.snow.com and aspensnowmass.com

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