

BACK IN THE DAY GREAT WHITE SKULL

WARM-UP SPOT

POWERED BY A PUNK DIY ETHOS AND PATHOLOGICAL GEAR TINKERING, SKULL SKATES IS STILL CHARGING AFTER 30 YEARS



photos: BOB KRONBAUER



DURING THE 80S, WHEN THE INDUSTRY THRIVED

on its own juice while ignored by the mainstream, a skate shop personified the state of skateboarding. Most were labors of love run by freaks whose obsession filled those stores like broken bottles of cheap perfume. The attitude, unrefined look, and often raw counter service offered a rite of passage for a kid entering the skate world.

That ceremony is unfortunately a thing of the past with most skate outlets today. Almost, but not completely. P.D.'s Hot Shop in Vancouver (with branches in Japan and Switzerland) and Skull Skates have maintained that threshold of passionate initiation for three decades.

Fifteen-year-old P.D. started selling skateboards out of his house in 1978 before starting GNC Skates with his older brother Rick. Marketed with a generic ying-yang logo, it rippled few waters until P.D. cut a skull image out of his griptape. Rick immediately recognized its boldness, and the image was screened atop their boards.

Kids wrote in for stickers, addressing mail to "Skull Skates," unofficially renaming the company. Decades before companies marketed black/white graphics, P.D.

set the stark standard with Skull. A longtime punker, he employed the photocopied fanzine look while designing graphics.

That fanzine feel also saturates P.D.'s Hot Shop. The oldest skate shop in Canada and Skull have been intertwined since birth and are under the total control of P.D. You can buy Skull in select shops around the world, but any fan knows its power generates from a small shop in Vancouver.

For a short time, P.D. relocated to L.A. while unleashing the Hammerhead to the world when Christian Hosoi blasted on Skull for almost two years during the mid 80s. Popular? Distributors ordered 5,000 decks at a time. Today, there are no more 5,000-deck orders, but that's how P.D. wants it. After a few years, he moved back to Vancouver to refine his companies. "Now our average run size for a model is between 30 and 50 pieces," he says. But that low number is misleading because it ignores P.D.'s pathological habit of tinkering with skateboards. Looking back at his shop's wall of decks, he says, "We have over 70 Skull models out right now." (That's different graphics and shapes.) Digesting that staggering number, he pauses. "That's just ridiculous."

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It's that love of skating and creativity that has kept P.D. in for the long haul. "I love where skating is at right now. People are riding surf style, technical, burly vert sh-t—it's everything. We try to keep in mind that it's a really diverse deal. If somebody is stoked on skateboarding, then we don't care what style of skateboarding they're stoked on."

"Hot Shop" is an apt name because you can be custom fit for a board, from the rise of the rails down to the rebound in wheels. Hands down, Skull offers the most varied selection of shapes out of any skateboard company. Want a responsive deck that's perfect for tailblocks in a pool? P.D. will pull down a few depending on your size and preference. Longboard with medium flex? A wide ride with a touch of tech? P.D. has been known to spend over an hour, talking and figuring out customers' needs

before constructing a complete for that person's skating.

"I'm talking to people in the store who are the end users of the product," he says. "There's something about that direct connection that obviously feels good but also enhances the quality of the design. I know what I like, but skating is a very individual trip, not just the practice but the preference of the equipment."

And even if you can't wander into P.D.'s Hot Shop in Vancouver and catch P.D. with his constant black T-shirt and cropped hair, you can receive the same service. He'll spend just as long finding a setup that's a perfect fit through skullsates.com. You even get a flicker of that vintage rite of passage with the Web site's black-and-white zine look that showcases P.D.'s raw love of skating.—Sean Mortimer