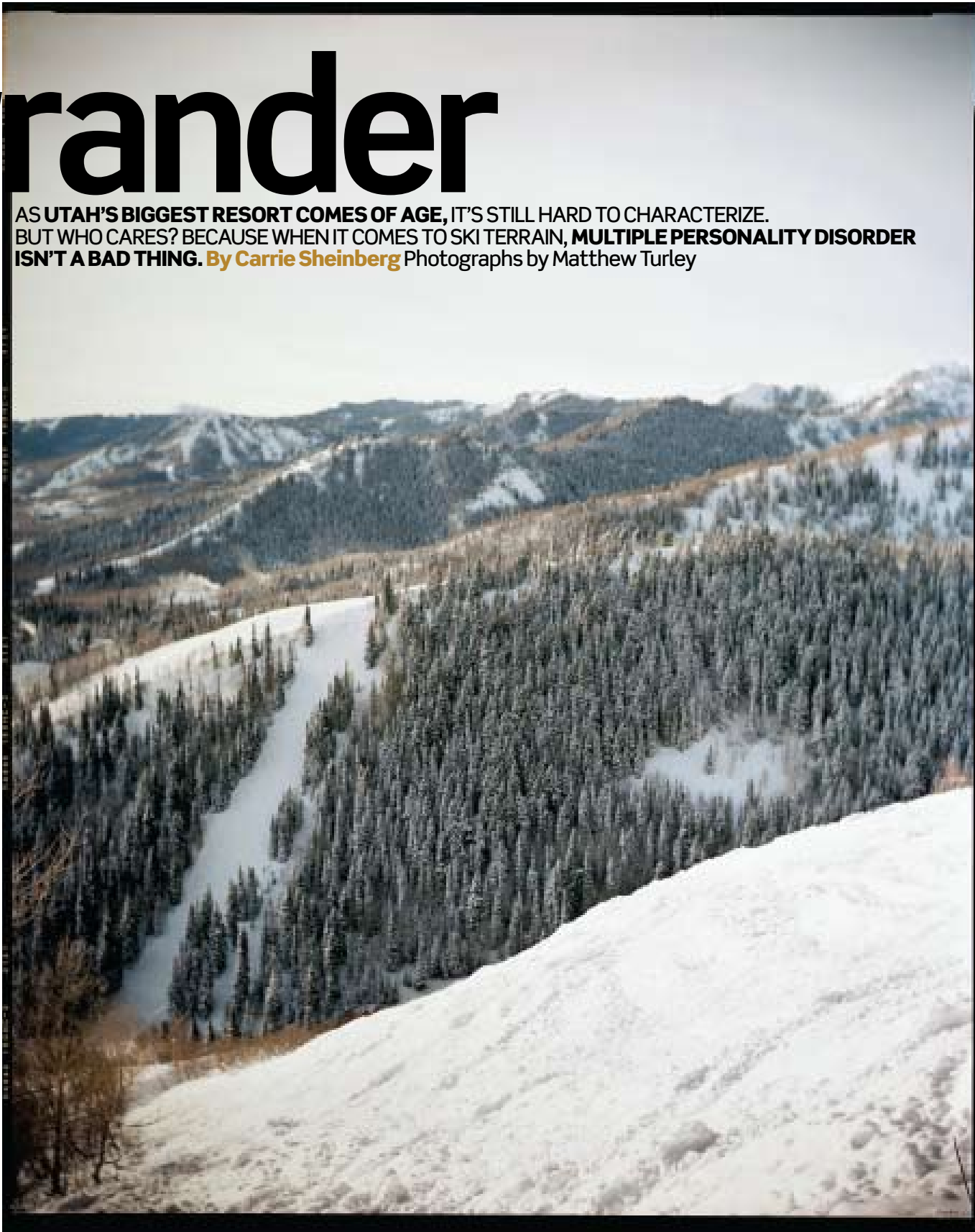
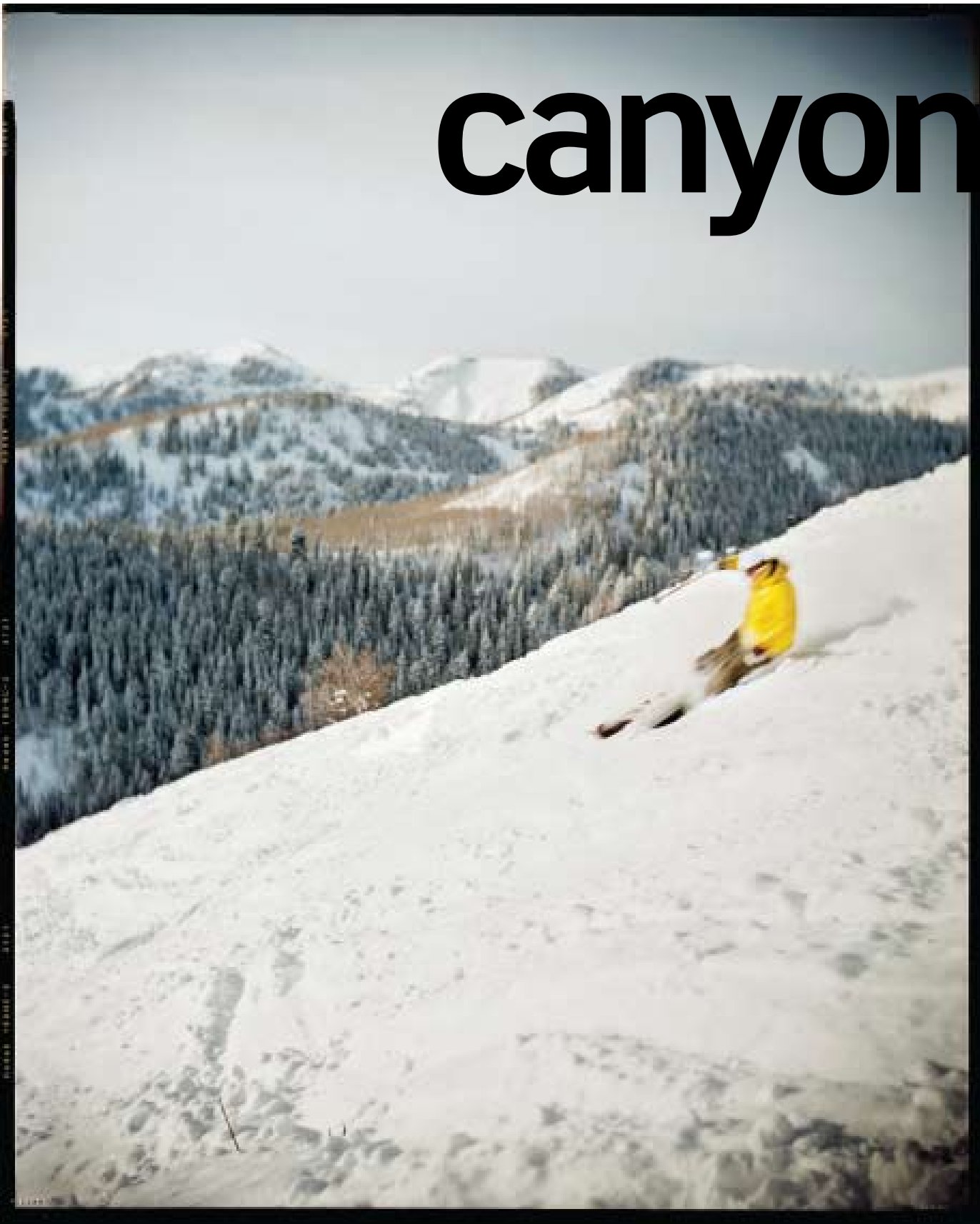


grander

AS UTAH'S BIGGEST RESORT COMES OF AGE, IT'S STILL HARD TO CHARACTERIZE. BUT WHO CARES? BECAUSE WHEN IT COMES TO SKI TERRAIN, **MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER ISN'T A BAD THING.** By **Carrie Sheinberg** Photographs by Matthew Turley



canyons



ROOM TO MOVE The Canyons, Park City's fastest growing resort, offers 3,700 acres of terrain, most of it visible from here on After Shock.



THE FUNDAMENTALS Yes, you can get a beer in Utah. And powder? Got that, too.



March 24, 7:45 a.m., Park City, Utah.

The phone rings.

“Hey, it’s Jamie. I’m in the car headed over to the Cottonwoods. You guys want to join me?”

Still in bed, I peer out the window. The snow is coming down in dense sheets, piling up on a hot tub that’s looking more and more like a fresh-baked meringue.

“Nope,” I say without hesitation. “Today’s a Canyons day.”

Park City locals know what that

means—the kind of day where you wake up and you know you don’t need a brand name, and you don’t need to be seen. You just want to get your fresh tracks without being bothered. And for that, The Canyons is perfect. It’s a rich man’s cruising haven, a local’s powder stash, a child’s playground. It’s an anything-you-want, any-time-you-want-it center for instant gratification—a place that has everything a skier could want.

This is both good and bad. Unlike most resorts that have long since been sterilized and commodified, The Canyons—Utah’s largest resort—is all over the map, figuratively as well as literally. The resort’s 3,700 acres are divided by eight canyons and six peaks, each with a different character. It’s as if the hill grew eight personalities but never signed up for therapy.

“It has always been a bit of a junk show,” says former Canyons ski patroller Todd Coleman, “which is exactly what’s endearing about the place.”

Is skiing or riding there a slightly

manic experience? Yes, but only if you crave sameness. Is it satisfying? Absolutely. Frustrating? It can be. But now, under new management—its fourth owner in 40 years—The Canyons has set out to embrace its slightly unfocused selves. It has decided to let The Canyons be The Canyons.

“Business people always say, ‘You can’t be everything to everybody,’” says Canyons president Mike Goar. “But when we took a long look at this resort, we said, ‘Well, why not?’ We have the size, we have a huge range of lodging and dining options, and we also have the ability to cater to more affluent guests. We really do believe we can provide something to everybody, across the board. We’re not the only one who can do it, but we’re one of the few.”

In our brand-obsessed culture, Goar’s approach is not without its perils. Everybody knows what “Aspen” means. Everybody knows what kinds of skiers go to, say, Hunter Mountain, N.Y. And we all know you’d better not bring your





OUTWARD BOUND As the locals well know, The Canyons has plenty of high-speed lifts. But even inbounds, a little extra effort reaps huge rewards.

fancy Bogner one-piece if you want to hang with the locals in Jackson Hole, Wyo. But The Canyons, recently purchased by the Toronto-based Talisker Corporation and now going through a drastic makeover in lodging and other slopeside amenities, is hoping that no matter who you are, there's a Canyons for you.

CANYON 1: THE LUXURY

To try out the newest Canyons experience, I check in for a few days at one of the luxe hotels springing up around the area's base. There's the new Dakota Mountain Lodge—a Waldorf Astoria property—with its 16,000-square-foot Golden Door Spa (see sidebar, page 76). There's Juniper Landing, with its huge

private townhouses. And then there's my place—the 558-bed Escala Lodges, a collection of six-story stone-and-timber-sided buildings. It's a monument to flatscreen TVs and round pillows, just steps away from the Sunrise lift and a hundred yards from the resort's central plaza, the Forum.

As I approach the massive hotel, I see



PLAN YOUR ATTACK FOR
A CANYONS POWDER
DAY: SKIMAG.COM/
CANYONS

GIVEN THE CURRENT STORM, **THAT SKULL-AND-CROSSBONES SIGN LOOKS LIKE IT MEANS BUSINESS.** I GO RIGHT, WHICH IS INBOUNDS, BUT NO LESS RUGGED.

a guest warming himself by the elegant stone fire pit near the soaring entry awning. As I get closer, though, I realize he isn't actually a guest. He's a construction worker in steel-toed boots, warming his hands between tasks. This property is so new, it's not quite done yet.

Before my car has even stopped, two uniformed Escala employees appear from behind sliding glass doors. They tell me that other than my 7-month-old son, Oscar, they'll take everything for me. Seriously: Please step away from the vehicle. My giant pile of baby gear and suitcases will be delivered to the room. The skis, boots and poles will be sent up to a locker area next to the hill. I can pick the skis up tomorrow morning, step out onto the snow and head up the adjacent chairlift. When I return from skiing, the valet

● SIGNPOST THE CANYONS

3,700 skiable acres; 3,190 vertical feet; summit elevation 9,990 feet; 350 annual inches; 165 runs; 17 lifts, including one six-pack, four high-speed quads and an eight-person gondola. Lift tickets: \$81; kids (7-12) and seniors (65-plus) \$48; under 7 free.

GETTING THERE The Canyons boasts one of the shortest airport-to-slopes commutes in all of ski country—just 25 to 30 minutes, depending on traffic and weather. Shuttles are abundant, or take I-15 south, then I-80 east.

LODGING There's been an explosion of high-end slopeside lodging. Clearly, the Canyons aims to rival its crosstown neighbor Deer Valley in that regard. In addition to the new Dakota Mountain Lodge (see sidebar, page 76) the Canyons' new Escala Lodges offer luxury slopeside suites (1- to 4-bedroom). They're family-friendly (up to 2,000 square feet), with all the amenities (\$199-\$3,750; 866-604-4171; thecanyons.com). The Grand Summit, also resort-owned, remains the closest to the gondola (\$154-\$2,911; 866-604-4171). In town, the Sky Lodge—a five-star boutique hotel—is sleek, metropolitan and right in the middle of

all the action (\$325-\$5,200; 888-876-2525).

APRÈS & DINING

No shortages in this department, either: There's Adolph's, a local institution, with rich Swiss ambience, fondue, raclette and walls adorned with ski racing memorabilia (435-649-7177). At the resort, The Cabin offers legit fine dining at reasonable prices in the Grand Summit (435-615-8060) and the Viking Yurt offers mountaintop dining—candlelit, wood stove-warmed and accessed by sleigh (435-615-9878). In town, Prime raises the preparation of steak to an art form (435-655-9739). Try Wahso (435-615-0300) or Shabu (435-645-7253) for different takes on Asian fusion. And even if you're based at The Canyons, the amazing seafood buffet at Deer Valley's Snow Park Lodge is worth the trip. The best après-pizza-and-beer dive has to be the Sidecar (435-645-7468). And check out Downstairs, the chill new Main Street lounge of actor Danny Masterson (*That '70s Show*).

INFO 888-226-9667; thecanyons.com





PRETTY FACES In Silverado Bowl, off the old Golden Eagle lift, one turn's as good as the next—and guaranteed to put a smile on your face.





ALL SMILES Lunch at Lookout Cabin (elevation: 8,300 feet) is haute cuisine, Canyons-style.

will be waiting for me with my shoes in hand. Apparently, the Escala policy is that I'm not allowed to do anything for myself. I really like the Escala policy.

CANYON 2: THE ADVENTURE

Feeling guilty after all the pampering, I decide to ease my conscience with a little self-flagellation. I head out the Escala's huge wooden doors (full disclosure: a nice man named Bryan hands me my skis), intending to enjoy some of the five feet of snow that has fallen in the past three days. My destination: the Ninety-Nine 90 lift, which gets its name from its elevation and serves some of the wildest terrain at The Canyons.

By the time I get to the top, it's snowing sideways. To my left, there's a skull-and-crossbones sign on an out-of-bounds gate, which indicates that once through, I'm on my own. I know from experience that this gate, along with the one on top of Peak 5, accesses some of the most beautiful lift-served backcountry in North America. But given the current

THE SPACE TEMPTS ME TO GO FASTER THAN I SHOULD, SO I DO. WHEN I GET TO THE BOTTOM, I FEEL LIKE I HAVE JUST BURST OUT OF A BANZAI PIPELINE TUBE.

storm, that skull-and-crossbones looks like it means business. I go right, which is inbounds, but no less rugged.

I take the High Traverse across a 30-degree snowfield toward a stand of ancient spruce trees. Soon, I'm on a north-facing slope—an advantage in the spring, when the snow on many southern slopes is thinning.

The point on the compass is no small matter. "All great resorts have a 'true north,' so to speak—a real north face," says Chip Carey, The Canyons' former vice president of marketing. "And because The Canyons is made entirely of canyons, all of its peaks have

DAKOTA MOUNTAIN LODGE

The new Dakota Mountain Lodge,

flying the Waldorf Astoria flag, is The Canyons' first foray into high-luxury lodging—and a big step for a base village that is starting to live up to the mountain.

Set far-right as you drive up the access road, the Dakota at first blends in with the other rock-and-timber lodges. But inside, the vibe is decidedly metropolitan—a welcome change from the usual rustic-Western. The lines are clean, the furnishings sleek. The guest rooms aren't huge but creatively shaped and spacious enough, some with balconies that have indoor/outdoor fireplaces and hot tubs. Other luxury touches include 42-inch flatscreen TVs and gleaming kitchens. From the lobby, the glass bridge near the front desk leads beyond the water-wall and into the 16,000-square-foot Golden Door Spa. Nearby is the Spruce restaurant, which already has outposts in San Francisco and Singapore. Outside, Dakota guests can board the Frostwood Gondola, which takes them directly to the Flight of the Canyons Gondola.





EARLY TREE TIME Make turns while the snow flies, which is often enough at a resort that averages 355 inches annually.

one. Super Condor, Sidewinder, Peak 5, Ninety-Nine 90 and so on.”

On this particular canyon’s north face, which is the highest of all of the resort’s north slopes, the snow has piled up in giant, lightweight mounds. I dive in. It’s steep. Within moments, I’m chest-deep. The drooping branches are close on each side, and it’s intensely quiet. I can hear

myself breathing. The trees are the only ones watching. The trunks are spaced far enough apart that I can really pick up some speed. Now I’m flying. The space tempts me to go faster than I should, so I do. And when I get to the bottom, I feel like I have just burst out of a Banzai Pipeline tube after a quick and scary disappearing act. I like it.

CANYON 3: THE OPTIONS

I was married near the midmountain terminus of the Flight of the Canyons Gondola a couple of years ago. It was beautiful—mountain peaks rising up around us, a stream running below us, clear skies. And just like me on my wedding day, when I was presented with more life choices than I ever thought



RED SKY AT MORNING The Canyons at sunrise. A new day dawns, pregnant with possibilities.

possible, you'll find you've got some decisions to make, starting with your choice between the Saddleback Express high-speed quad and the High Meadow fixed-grip, which diverge up separate drainages. Each welcomes everybody—regardless of ability—with a range of terrain options.

It's here that I meet up with Canyons instructors Wally Wahlquist, Heather Fielding and Bob Lutnicki. They know the area better than I do and are about to take me on a tour of some of their favorite stashes. Wahlquist, especially, would know where to look: He helped install the resort's first lifts—three Riblet Tramway chairlifts—in 1968, when the place was called Park City West.

With the log-sided Red Pine Lodge and its cafeteria disappearing behind us, we head up the Saddleback lift into a gently gladed hillside called The Pines. The trees up here have been thinned to let intermediates try glades for the first time. But on big powder days, even experts love to hit the wind-protected Pines first thing in the morning as a warm-up for the bigger and steeper canyons above.

“The great thing about this resort is that everybody gets to see this,” says Fielding, gesturing to the sunlit slope. “Most ski areas force their beginners and intermediates to stay at the bottom; but here, those skiers get terrain that's right for them in the middle of a real big-mountain experience.”

We take a tour of all Saddleback has to offer, from glades to wide-open, family-

WE TAKE A TOUR OF ALL SADDLEBACK HAS TO OFFER, FROM GLADES TO WIDE-OPEN, FAMILY-FRIENDLY CRUISERS AND SOME OUT-OF-THE-WAY FAVORITES.

friendly cruisers and some out-of-the-way favorites. Call Wally when you get there, and he'll take you. It's worth the trip.

CANYON 4: THE OLD SOUL

Two canyons to the right of Saddleback is the Super Condor Express. It's a high-speed quad, but in its first incarnation,

in 1968, it was a long, slow double known as Ironhorse. I still shudder when I hear that name, which recalls one of the most uncomfortable moments of my life. The lift stalled for 20 minutes, and the other person on the chair with me was the boyfriend I'd just broken up with at Tower 3. Can you say, “Want to get away?”

Luckily, Murdock Peak—home to the Super Condor lift and, just below it, the last original lift left on the mountain, Golden Eagle—is big enough to do just that. With its broad expanse of expert and intermediate terrain, this canyon, along with the Sun Peak lift and terrain, constituted the entire Park City West ski area 40 years ago.

The unpolished, wide-open, mature, even lived-in feel of Murdock is one of the reasons locals still flock here—to be able to head into huge, open terrain at what still feels like its own, retro ski area. Todd Coleman, the former patroller, learned to ski here in his elementary school's Learn-To-Ski program. Now a school teacher, he brings his own

STORY CONTINUED ON **PAGE 118**

○ A GRANDER CANYONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 80

students. “We take 100 kids every Friday and Saturday, and you would have no idea we were there. The place is that big.”

But the reason for Condor’s early-morning draw on a powder day is more prosaic: Its lower elevation means it’s often the first truly expert terrain that patrol can open first after a storm, so you can get plenty of turns while they’re still shooting down loose snow over on Ninety-Nine 90 and Peak 5. Of course, Condor is not just about powder. It also has world-class groomers and acres of bumps and steeps.

CANYON 5: THE SKI HOUSE

The Canyons has expanded “pod by pod,” says Barry Stout, director of the resort’s ski school. “And we’ve done a better job with each pod,” he says. By that logic, the Dreamcatcher, Dreamscape and Peak 5 areas—the ones most recently developed—should be the best-organized on the mountain, and they are. There are

few intersections, and lots of fall-line terrain. All of the areas encompass an enormous on-hill real-estate development called The Colony. Beginners who want to dream big—at least when it comes to square footage—can cruise on long, gentle trails past some of this country’s most capacious ski chalets. And by the way: Families skiing with little kids will find these lifts and trails pleasantly empty.

“When I go out with my grandkids, there are so many places to go, and we have so much fun,” says Carey, the former Canyons vice president. “We go up to the top of Peak 5, and there are all those beautiful long runs, and nobody’s on them. As much as the Canyons has blossomed, you go out to the flanks and, boy, you don’t mind skiing with your 3-year-old.”

Giant log homes and Western-style castles dot the woods along the wide, groomed boulevards. These runs will relax even the greenest skiers—especially when they realize they don’t have to make the mortgage payments on any of those slopeside mansions.

CANYON 6: THE ROMANCE

If there’s one department in which even Canyons fans admit a shortcoming, it’s on-hill restaurants. As the area has expanded, its resources have not gone into traditional base lodges or food service as much as into the skier’s on-hill experience. But there are two exceptions, and they’re about as romantic as it gets.

Lookout Cabin, a lunch spot, perches on a spiny ridge at the top of the Short Cut lift. The views from there are spectacular—literally 360 degrees of The Canyons resort and the rolling Uinta basin. I once enjoyed Kobe beef burgers served on linen tablecloths there—and then skied, slowly and poorly, out the door after dessert.

That was a few years ago. Tonight, after a long ski day, we bundle up for a 25-minute sleigh ride up the hill in near total darkness to the tiny Viking Yurt. The stars are out, and the cold has set in, but I’m warmed by my husband and 30 of our soon-to-be closest friends. When we arrive, the proprietor, Joy, greets us with a glass of warm glogg, a traditional



TAKE THE PLUNGE

JOIN SKI'S ADVISORY BOARD

Join our Editorial Advisory Board and start bossing the editors around.

We're looking for input on what you would like to see in SKI Magazine—and what you'd rather not—from covers and resort coverage to instruction and gear.

We're all ears. To be part of the SKI team, go online and complete our brief registration form at walkercommunications.com/survey/skirp09.

Nice to have you aboard. See you on the hill.

SKI

Norwegian drink. It gets romantic fast under the circular, wood-framed tent. Aquavit is served in stone chalices. Candles are lit (there's no electricity, just a wood stove). And somebody starts playing torch songs on the baby grand. During the five-course meal, a man proposes marriage (accepted!). Another couple celebrate their 37th anniversary. The rest of us drink a lot, eat more and enjoy the company of newfound pals.

CANYON 7: THE PARTY

The last day of my visit coincides with one of The Canyons' most popular spring events. In addition to annual resort-sponsored community happenings like fireworks, farmers markets and free summer concerts, the Canyons holds a pond-skimming bash each spring. It draws a hundred or so contestants—skiers and snowboarders costumed in various stages of undignified. They slide down an in-run and try to skim across a snowmaking reservoir. About half make it. Some don't even try. There's music. There's laughter. There's disaster. My

favorite contestant this year? Octomom.

It's all part of Spring Gröv, a two-week music extravaganza. On my way back to the Escala, I can hear Bob Marley's famed reggae band, the Wailers, doing their thing in front of 5,000 bouncing spring-fever revelers in the Forum. And even though the events signify the end of the season, they mean a lot to the resort, year-round. "That history of free music is something we're going to continue to hold on to," says Canyons marketing chief Todd Burnette. "The pond-skimming and other events—we're trying to keep a fun atmosphere. Besides, for this place to really be a success, we need to be part of the community."

CANYON 8: THE POTENTIAL

I've always felt that the word "potential" is both a curse and a compliment. On the one hand, having potential suggests future success. On the other, it suggests existing shortcomings and the huge pressure of trying to achieve what's possible. Burnette, Goar and others readily admit there's still a healthy-sized

to-do list. Topping that list: This giant ski area desperately needs another way to get up the hill. The gondola alone is simply not enough. In addition, more restaurants and facilities are needed east of Red Pine Lodge. And the snowmaking system hasn't kept up with the explosive growth in skiable acres.

But The Canyons' enormous potential is exactly what lured Goar away from his comfortable perch of 27 years at neighboring Solitude. "As big as the resort is already," he says, "it's still in its infant stages, and that's incredibly exciting. It's one of the only new and developing major North American alpine resorts. It isn't the only one, of course, but this one is established enough to be real."

Potential, of course, is never enough. Instead, and luckily, it's reality that draws people. And no matter which canyon or personality you're attracted to, there's one suited to your particular needs, hidden in the snowfields and valleys above Park City. "It's the mountain that keeps people coming back," Wahlquist says. "It's big, and it's just that good." ●