

60 YEARS of



SKI & BE SEEN

BY John D. McCown

PHOTOGRAPHY: Julia Dags

When you think about it, isn't it the people and places that make us love where we live? In our neck of the woods, only an hour or so from Manhattan yet a verdant, spacious, open-sky world away, certain people and places are home to us. Skip Beitzel is one of those people and Hickory & Tweed is one of those places.

Skip was seven years old in 1961 when Jimmy and Roberta Ross opened the ski and apparel shop at 410 Main Street in the center of Armonk. Then, and in annual visits after, the entire Beitzel family visited Jimmy Ross to be outfitted with ski equipment. Skip loved the place, loved its rustic ambiance. When he was old enough to secure an after-school and weekend job, he went to work for Jimmy. The lure of the store and the opportunity to learn from Jimmy kept Skip coming back. "I worked for Jimmy throughout my high school years at Horace Greeley and continued every summer when I was at University of Vermont. He was a great teacher," Skip fondly remembered.

Of the many things Skip learned about the sports business from Jimmy, key among them was the importance of insuring that every customer enjoy a great in-store experience. This augmented a strong foundation Skip had learned about business from his father, Spike Beitzel, a senior executive at IBM. But, it was Skip's own passion for an active lifestyle, especially for skiing in winter and surfing in summer, that would enhance his insight into the needs and wants of the store's customers.

Hickory & Tweed first opened its doors the same year that IBM established its headquarters in Armonk. The name of the store itself telegraphs the focus on skiing during the early days of the sport. Hickory was the wood used for first generation skis. Clothes made of tweed wool kept skiers warm. An early repeat customer of the store was Thomas J. Watson, Jr., CEO of IBM, who developed a close relationship with Jimmy Ross. In the late 1960's, the IBM head made a suggestion to his friend Jimmy. "We've had great success leasing mainframe computers to customers rather than selling them. For many of the same reasons, you ought to do that with skis". Inspired by that suggestion, Hickory & Tweed became the first ski

shop in the country to offer a ski leasing program. The success of that program was immediate and was quickly copied at other ski shops and has been ubiquitous since then. This innovation in ski retail started at Hickory & Tweed.

After graduating from college, Skip remained focused on sports and started the first skateboard park in the Northeast in Ocean City, New Jersey, which also happened to be his favorite spot for surfing. Wanting to learn more about business, Skip attended Harvard Business School. After graduation in 1980 with an MBA, he went to work for Young & Rubicam, a major NYC advertising firm.

In 1985, Skip and Jimmy Ross had a conversation that would alter the course of Skip's life. As they were walking on the beach in Ocean City, Jimmy told Skip that he was considering selling Hickory & Tweed and, if he did, there was nobody he'd prefer to sell it to more than Skip. Skip was progressing nicely at Y&R and clearly had a bright future, but the opportunity to recast himself into a career where his true passion lay was irresistible. Six months later, a transaction closed and Skip committed fully to his love affair with Hickory & Tweed.

While most of his business school classmates embraced Wall Street, Madison Avenue or some other large corporate address, Skip chose to return to his roots and go to Main Street. He gave up his Manhattan apartment and moved back to northern Westchester County not far from where he was born. Skip married Michaela and they began a family that would grow to include three sons. He leaned heavily on what Jimmy Ross had taught him about customer service. A clear template for him was the experiences he himself had as both a customer and an employee over two decades. What made Hickory & Tweed special then continues to make it special today, as all efforts are focused on optimal customer experience. Personal service was and continues to be the hallmark of that experience. The best merchandise and the best customer experience make shopping at Hickory & Tweed a treat.

Today the store is much larger than the shop Skip first stepped in sixty years ago. In almost 12,000 square feet, skis and bikes reign supreme - along with a full range of apparel to fit active lifestyles. There's even merchandise that carries the Hickory & Tweed brand - a testimony to how much Skip has built awareness of this special place across the country. Despite its size, Hickory & Tweed exudes a New England charm. The feeling of being transported to Vermont, to White Christmas, is such that you could find yourself thinking Bing Crosby will soon exit with skis on his shoulder. While the store is something a Hollywood set designer would create, the service and products delivered by Skip and his staff are state-of-the-art, resulting in five star online ratings. "This has been my go to place for 15 years", "You won't find a better shop anywhere" and "The greatest ski and cycle shop", are typical customer comments.

Skip talks about Hickory & Tweed with deep and abiding affection and with well-earned pride. "I just love the atmosphere here, particularly in winter when multiple families are getting outfitted with new ski equipment, as the smell of hot ski wax permeates the air. Everybody is happy and enjoying themselves. I've had customers tell me that they've never experienced more pleasant or effective customer service."

When Skip talks about Hickory & Tweed, he frequently uses the term 'family'. His love affair with Hickory & Tweed is a family affair. It's a family business with his wife Michaela and son Mac working full-time. Michaela is in charge of all apparel and fashion (along with Geri Moore and Debbie Coldwell) while Mac is focused on their growing online business. Pam Conte, whose mother, Dot, worked at the store for over 30 years, is also a huge presence. Skip's sister Tish Vredenburg helps maintain the financial records with Hickory & Tweed star Beth Yaffa.

One of the secrets to the great experience customers receive when they come into the store is the attitude of the employees. Skip sees the employees as part of one big extended family, going all the way back to his own time as a teenage employee working for Jimmy. Just as Jimmy Ross mentored Skip, Skip has mentored hundreds of employees, not only in matters related to the store but also related to college and career decisions. Like Skip did, many of these "Tweeders" work on weekends, summers and during holidays from college. One member of this alumni group, Armonk resident Sonia Orlova, commented, "I feel lucky that I worked at Hickory & Tweed during high school and college because of how much I learned and because of the friends I made working there. Skip and Michaela were always supportive and encouraging, and always available when I needed some help or advice about my college or life plans, or anything." And when employees look forward to going to work as they do at Hickory & Tweed, that enthusiasm infects.



Skip and Michaela



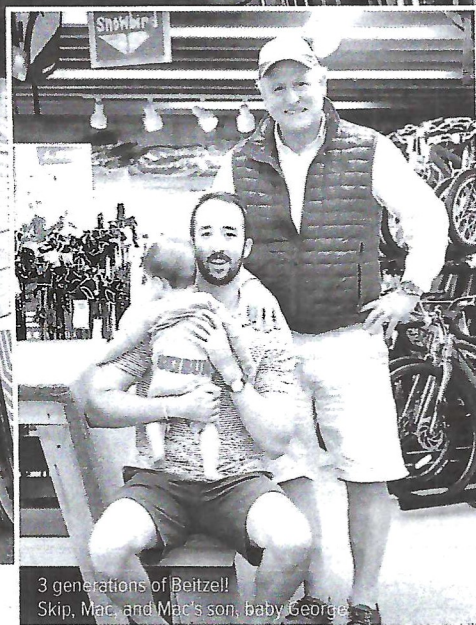
Also included in Hickory & Tweed's big, extended family are the legions of repeat customers. Over 3,000 families now participate in their ski equipment leasing program and that leads to lots of repeat visits and a strong bond between customers and staff.

Skip loves his life and it shows up in everything he does. He retains a passion for skiing (Stowe, Vermont and Alta, Utah are favorites), but what he likes the most about the sport is it is something the whole family does. His wife Michaela and sons Mac, Chase and Ryder are all excellent skiers.

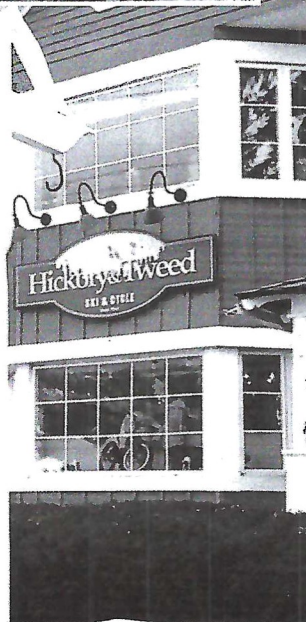
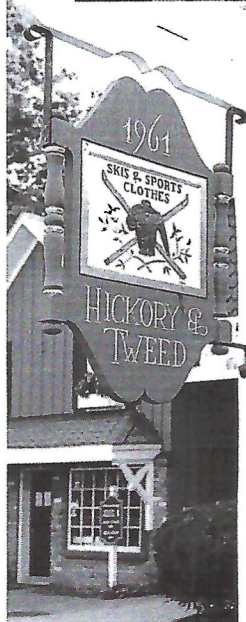
Skip's participation in and support of community activities is well known. He's a 25-year board member of the Boys & Girls Club in Mt. Kisco and a long-time member of the President's Council Board at Northern Westchester Hospital. In 2014, the Armonk Chamber of Commerce named Skip Citizen of the Year. The Beitzels are members at the Bedford Golf & Tennis Club.

At some point, the reins to Hickory & Tweed will be turned over to Skip's son Mac. Much like Skip, Mac grew up working at the store. His plans include growing its online business. "I know part of the future is more online", Skip admits, "but I'm a store guy and for me there is nothing quite like walking around to see if we can do something to improve the experience of a customer."

At Hickory & Tweed, business is personal to Skip and the Beitzels. Because of that, generations of customers from Bedford to New Canaan and beyond think of coming back to Hickory & Tweed as coming home. That's a special kind of love for a special kind of store.



3 generations of Beitzel!
Skip, Mac, and Mac's son, baby George



THE PEAK OF SKI CHIC

At Hickory & Tweed

BY JOYCE CORRIGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY: Julia Dags

Oprah saying, "Skiing is the next best thing to having wings" kinda explains why ski fashion is famous for its flights of fancy. On the slopes, at the resorts, and in the streets, skiwear and apres-ski coalesce into a dazzling collage of fluorescent color, whimsical Nordic knits, sexy leggings, cheeky pom pom hats, and hot-pink mirrored goggles. For six decades the puffer jacket, skin tight legwear and chunky boot silhouette has remained the same. No other pro sport has so indelibly influenced mainstream fashion.

And for six decades Hickory & Tweed has been selling ski-resort-worthy winter fashion alongside their top-flight ski equipment. During Covid, while business attire and party clothes were stranded in a retail tundra, ski wear brands were reaching new peaks. Lucky for us, all the hip new California lines and the iconic, European heritage labels are alive and well and flying off the shelves at H & T. "Almost every other sport was shut down, but people could still ski!" says Michaela Beitzel, partner and buyer at H & T. "At the same time, the wholesome, radiant athletic look and luxe athleisure trend of oversized knits and leggings was everywhere." Completing the look: sporting sun-kissed cheeks glowing from outdoor exercise, naturally. "Who doesn't want to look super healthy right now?" says Beitzel.

And who doesn't want to have fun? "Ski fashion is always feel-good fashion, promising escapes to places like Stowe, Sun Valley, Aspen and Vail," adds Geri Moore, a longtime H & T buyer. To get customers in the mood, owner Skip Beitzel fires up the snow machine outside the shop. "Customers can't get enough," laughs Michaela.

"Ski clothes also make any body type look good," adds Michaela. "Stretch pants are so slimming, it's become everyone's winter wardrobe staple". Which has been the case since Maria Bogner first introduced stretch ski pants in an array of colors in the late 50s. Soon Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor were wearing them around town and the rest is history. "We've carried Bogner for 60 years and we continue to do fantastically well with it," says Beitzel. "Also with Bogner's younger, edgier Fire & Ice collection." While runway fashion might emerge from Paris, Milan and New York, skiwear's most influential brands spring from the mountain meccas—Colorado (Obermeyer and Spyder), California (Patagonia), Germany (Bogner and Schneider), and Scandinavia (Helly Hansen, et al). "Amundsen of Norway is new in America but already one of our top sellers," notes Michaela. "Their mixed material jackets and vests and their colorful anoraks are old school and cool, at the same time. Anoraks are having a serious comeback. Holden is another up and coming new brand out of Ventura, California," she adds. "Really classic with a twist. The down hybrid pullovers are getting a lot of attention."



TAKE A POWDER!

Left: Jacket, Bogner Fire & Ice; ski pant, Kjus; hat, M. Miller; sunglasses, Vuarnet.
Right: Jacket and hat, Bogner Fire & Ice; ski pant, Helly Hansen; Ski boot, Nordica; skis, Black Crows

"We never followed trends: we buy what we personally love and our customers depend on us for that," says Michaela. Depend on them also to stock both the cutting edge, and trusted luxe outerwear brands. "Our brand reps become like family members, who we've known forever and are thrilled to see from year to year," she muses. "Klaus Obermeyer, the brand's founder, used to yodel for us personally whenever we met him at the ski shows. And he's still skiing (and yodeling) at 101!"

Skiing in style will keep you forever young.

THIS SEASON'S FASHION FINDS

MAKE MINE ALPINE

Left: Jacket, Parajumpers; Apres-pant, We Norwegians; shearling mitten and slippers, Toasties-Paris; Backpack, Amundsen. Right: Coat, Schneiders Salzburg



SKI SWEATER WEATHER

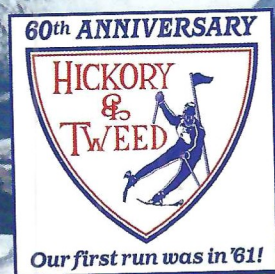
Left: Nordic and zip neck sweaters, Bogner; pant, Ohsho; sunglasses, Vuarnet; tote, Toasties-Paris. Right: sweater, Krimson Klover; turtleneck, Bogner; pant, Kjus; hat, M. Miller. Ski boot, Technica



MOUNTAIN GIRL

Coat, Schneiders Salzburg; bandana, Toasties-Paris; Bag, Amundsen

LOOK GOOD SKIING EVEN WHEN YOU'RE STANDING STILL.



Check out our great winter fashions from Amundsen for men and women.

Hickory & Tweed invites you to choose from our wide selection of fashions for the great outdoors from Amundsen. Based in Norway, Amundsen knows a thing or two about dealing with the cold. We offer Amundsen outdoor wear for men and women, including:

- ◆ Jackets/Anoraks
- ◆ Sweaters
- ◆ Vests
- ◆ Pants
- ◆ Caps
- ◆ And more

Of course, skiing is in our blood, so when you're here be sure to go upstairs to check out our great selection of equipment.



Ski & Bike
Celebrating our 60th Year

410 Main Street, Armonk, NY 10504 ♦ 914.273.3397 ♦ hickoryandtweed.com
Mon-Sat, 10-6 ♦ Thurs 'til 7 ♦ Open Sundays 12-5

