

US Ski and Snowboard HOF 2021

Dave and Renie Gorsuch

Fusing the Alps and Rockies to create a unique style, Olympians built Vail-based, family-run retail empire founded on mountain elegance; supported numerous causes.

Any skier or rider who's visited the flagship Gorsuch store in the Clocktower building on Bridge Street in Vail—or has merely received the sublime Gorsuch catalogue in the mail—knows this iconic mountain lifestyle retailer offers an experience like no other. Gorsuch delivers the expected expertise and service in hardgoods backed by an extraordinary collection of premier, luxury apparel. It then overwhelms the senses with a glittering array of antiques, furnishings, fine china, silver, and collectibles. Over the decades, this unique, idyllic shopping experience usually included one of Dave Gorsuch's Bernese Mountain Dogs wandering by amidst the stores smartly merchandised wares.

The elegant, upscale approach is particularly notable given the relatively humble roots of the founders. Dave grew up (and started skiing before his second birthday) in hardscrabble (and now defunct) Climax, Colo., located at 11,300 feet near the summit of Fremont Pass, halfway between what is now Copper Mountain and the town of Leadville. His father worked at the Climax Molybdenum Mine, and with friends installed a rope tow there. They also added lights for night skiing, which proved popular with the Tenth Mountain Division troops training nearby at Camp Hale. Meanwhile, out east in the Adirondacks, Renie Cox was tearing up the slopes at tiny Snow Ridge (vertical drop: 500 feet) in upstate New York, where she was mentored by Otto Von Allmen, a 10-time Swiss national champion and a three-time winner of the Lauberhorn.

Dave and Renie met at the 1954 Junior Nationals in Jackson Hole, fell in love, competed in the 1960 Olympics at Squaw Valley (Renie finished ninth in slalom, Dave was 14th in GS and downhill), and then married. Packing up their assorted national ski title hardware, they eventually moved to Gunnison, 45 minutes from the just-opened Crested Butte ski area. Renie taught school and paid the bills, while Dave attended and won NCAA

championships for Western State College. Ski friends flocked to their apartment because the Gorsuch couple knew how to mount bindings. With skis leaning precariously against every wall of their cramped abode, it didn't take long for the boards to come tumbling down, destroying one of the newlyweds' few precious things, a set of Tiffany candlesticks. "That was it," recalls Renie. "If we were going to mount bindings, we were going to charge for it."

They rented an abandoned Standard gas station, with an apartment above the garage, and moved in. As a first indication of their developing sense of style (and with zero budget), they covered the walls with burlap and barn board. They attended their first SIA show in spring 1962, smartly choosing to carry Head skis and Bogner apparel. Renie knitted several dozen hats, and when they didn't have enough new model inventory to fill the ski racks, they threw in old pairs to complete the look.

So began the quest for quality that would establish Gorsuch as a globally venerated retail brand, a business that would regularly achieve \$50 million in annual sales. Dave and Renie opened the flagship Vail store in 1966, and soon became the first U.S. retailers to make regular buying trips to Europe and to visit factories there. Gorsuch was named the Ski Retailer of the Year in 1969 (and again in 2003) by the industry trade group, SIA (Ski Industries America). In 1976, they started their signature catalogue, which reached a peak circulation of 3.5 million and showcases the best in fashion, models, locations, and photography. (The many Gorsuch catalogues are also available today in digital format). The flagship Vail operation spread to 10 more storefronts, including in Park City, Beaver Creek, Snowmass, and in the Little Nell Hotel at the base of Aspen Mountain. It also drew the Gorsuch sons, John, Jeff and Davy, to play significant roles in the business.

Gorsuch backed racing in the Vail Valley and beyond from the beginning, supporting various World Cup and World Championship events, plus ski clubs around the country. For a quarter century, Dave and Renie donated equipment for thousands of kids to take up the sport around the U.S. They supported various non-profits in the Vail Valley, including the Vail Mountain School, the Vail Valley Medical Center, the Steadman Hawkins Foundation,

the Jimmie Heuga Foundation (Renie was a founding board member), and Ski Club Vail. Both are enshrined in the Colorado Ski Hall of Fame and in the Colorado Business Hall of Fame.

Dave passed away on June 26, 2021, but Renie can still be found on the floor of the Clocktower store and elsewhere, always keeping tabs on the family business. Besides the three Gorsuch sons, there are 10 grandchildren.

Career Accomplishments

Born: Dave (Sept. 22, 1938, Climax, Colo.); Renie (Sept. 15, 1938, Lowville, N.Y.)

1950s: Dave wins the U.S. Junior national slalom in 1953 as the youngest skier to ever participate in the event; becomes combined champion in 1954 and '56. Renie wins national slalom title in 1956.

1960: Dave and Renie marry.

1962: The couple open a small retail ski shop in Gunnison in an old gas station.

1966: Launch Vail store on Bridge Street, the flagship of a retail network that would expand to 11 storefronts.

1969: Gorsuch earns honor as SIA's "Ski Retailer of the Year" (and again in 2003).

1972: Begin annual buying trips to Europe, setting foundation for Alps-Rockies style.

1976: Gorsuch catalogue launches, available in several topics, from men's and women's to home and even getaways.

2000: Begins supplying 300 pairs of skis annually to the Outreach Aspen program.

2002: Dave enters Colorado Snowsports Hall of fame; Renie follows in 2007.

2012: Dave and Renie enter Colorado Business Hall of Fame, and Renie eventually receives the “Golden Bear” award for service on the Vail hospital board.