

# breaking the mold

## HOW ROXY LO'S FRESH DESIGN CHANGED THE BIKE INDUSTRY

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A BUSINESS CARD. Not the passing of one, but the designing of one. Roxy Lo didn't know it at the time, but the business card Hans Heim hired her to design in 2004 for Spokesman Bicycles in Santa Cruz, California, was a job interview—a test to see if she was capable of helping resurrect Ibis Cycles, returning the iconic brand to its former glory.

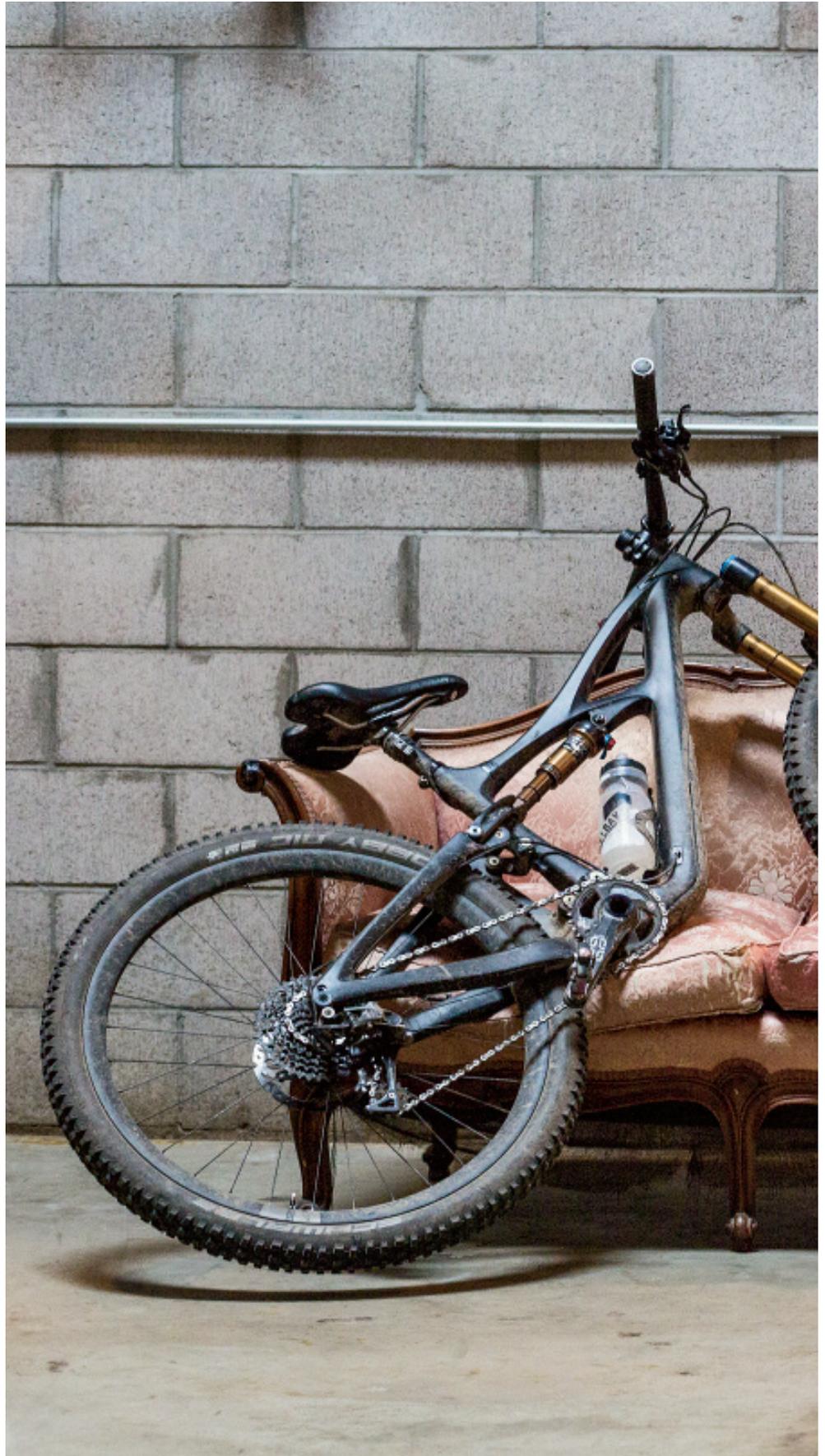
“I had never designed a business card before, but it was a good interview in hindsight,” said Lo from behind her desk at Ibis filled with computer screens, mirrors, a giant black cutting mat and a leather punch tool set. “At the time, I was working as a designer at Pottery Barn, and all I wanted to do was something other than high-tech and housewares.”

Not only had Lo never designed a business card before, she had never designed a bike. And when Heim—partner of Ibis with Tom Morgan and the brand's original founder Scot Nicol—asked Lo to become the fourth partner and pen the shape of a groundbreaking dual-suspension, carbon monocoque mountain bike, the design would be a huge leap of faith.

“We basically gambled the entire rebirth of the company on the Mojo design,” said Lo. “If the public didn't accept carbon on a full-suspension mountain bike, we would have been sunk. Fortunately, the pendulum swung in the right direction.”

While Ibis certainly wasn't the first company to produce a carbon full-suspension bike—Trek, GT and Cannondale had all plowed that terrain before—Lo's reinvention of the Mojo changed the way people looked at long-travel mountain bikes. The Mojo was carbon from head to toe, offered 5.5 inches of travel and yet climbed like a goat. It also changed the public's perception of Ibis, transforming a brand known for classic hardtails and quirky full-suspension bikes to a company with a reputation for pushing the cutting edge of mountain bike design. Ten years later, the Mojo remains relevant.

“As a testament to its design integrity, we used the original Mojo molds for more than seven years, which is virtually unheard of. We still see demand for more ‘Mojo-esque’-looking frames, so I think





by kurt gensheimer | photos: brian vernor

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that speaks to the value of the original Mojo design.”

Not only was the Mojo revolutionary from a design and capability perspective, but the way in which Lo and her colleagues created the frame was also unique.

“Suspension bikes to that point had lots of triangles that were designed by engineers,” said Lo. “Aesthetics was just a happy coincidence. With the Mojo, from the outset we integrated design with engineering. Hans liked that I had no preconceived notions about how a frame should look and trusted my design sensibility.”

The original design also served as a foundation for a succession of frames Lo has sculpted since, including the Tranny 26, Ripley 29, Tranny 29 and the recently released MojoHD3. With each project, Lo works closely with Heim, engineer Colin Hughes—the fifth Ibis partner—and suspension wizard Dave Weagle, who continues to license his dw-link designs to Ibis.

“DW delivers the suspension layout in 2D, a sheet of paper that defines seat tube angle, headtube location, circles for the wheels and a few dots for pivot location,” said Lo. “Then we take it to a 3D model while making sure all drivetrain components fit properly. This process is repeated about a dozen times.”



It doesn't take long to realize how passionate Lo is about her profession. She is driven by designing and creating products that are relevant, desirable and enduring.

“If the product is only superficially marketed as innovation, but really not, I tend not to want to get involved,” said Lo. “It's absolutely essential for me to know that my client or company values

the integrity of my designs through the entire production process.”

When asked about the recent trend of female-specific frame geometry, Lo gave an equally insightful and candid response.

“We aren’t a specialty frame manufacturer and we don’t have the time or desire to pander to women with stereotypical colors, superficial marketing trends or model names,” said Lo. “We sell to very savvy cyclists who do their math and research their purchases. Our customers appreciate that our bikes perform and are tested by a world-class athlete who happens to be female.”

Of course Lo is referring to Anne-Caroline Chausson, the winningest mountain biker in history with 12 UCI Downhill World Championship titles. Chausson has been an invaluable resource for Ibis over the years, providing critical rider feedback to make designs better for both men and women. In a male-dominated industry, the innovation, imagination and dedication of Lo and Chausson are among the most significant in the history of the sport. Quite simply, mountain biking wouldn’t be what it is today without the presence of these two remarkable women.

“We want our bikes to fit our riders like a glove and deliver the best performance possible. When those two things happen, people have fun, which is our ultimate goal,” said Lo. “I have countless women who tell me they are so glad their bike fits and isn’t specially colored or named to cater to their gender. We never exclude women when we make our models, so saying we need to consider making female-specific frames implies we don’t already.”

Although she is well known for her frames, Lo also has significant design involvement with Light & Motion, a light manufacturer

about an hour south of Santa Cruz. The companies are different in their design integration, but Lo’s problem-solving mind works the same for both products.

“I enjoy learning about how things work, so it’s definitely fun to dabble in lots of different types of innovations and technologies, especially when it results in a beautiful product that exceeds our expectations.”

Lo believes strongly in a healthy balance between work, life and home, which for her is a 500-square-foot cabin deep in the Santa Cruz Mountains. And when it comes to projects that are mind-numbing and stress-inducing, Lo never lets herself get to that point. “I ask for help, work with my colleagues and build myself up for success, not stress. Of course, every project puts butterflies in my stomach before its release, but no matter how positive or negative responses are to my designs, I can filter the constructive points from the bullshit.”

When asked what advice she has for women looking to break into the bike industry, Lo says don’t hesitate to grab a broom.

“Be prepared to start off sweeping floors and know that even at the highest level, sweeping floors is not beneath you; it’s part of your passion for the business. Dedicate your life to this sport and love it unconditionally. Promote positivity, don’t pander to trends and surround yourself with people who inspire you and push you to be a more creative and dedicated person, no matter what gender. If we can bring more sensitive, thoughtful and passionate people into our sport, it will attract the absolute best talent and help our industry thrive.”