



PHOTO: JEFF POTTO

# Fool's Gold

When a rare vintage snowboard popped up on eBay, no one knew if it was real, but that didn't stop the bidding from skyrocketing to over 20,000 dollars in this cautionary tale.

By Scott Yorko

**Y**ou never know what you'll find when you buy an old storage unit in Williston, Vermont, and start rummaging through its contents. It could have been a dead body, but luckily it was a snowboard.

eBay user "roxxxyvt" typically sells bright-

ly-colored skirts and pastel jewelry with the occasional eyelash extension kit—an unlikely purveyor of one of the rarest snowboards in existence, a dusty unicorn buried in a dark corner for 36 years.

"I bought a storage unit because it contained some clothes and furniture that looked interesting to me," read her item description. "Finding the snowboards was a surprise since they were not in view when I first looked at the unit." The listing was titled "snowboard Burton Boards by Stratton Mtn vintage used."

Only 28 minutes into the auction, the first bidder hit at 255 dollars. Within three hours, 53 people had viewed the page and two sent private messages offering to buy the board offline, one for 800 dollars, saying, "My grandfather had one just like it." By 8:00 a.m. the next morning, nine bidders had raised the price to 550 dollars. After two days and 27 bids, the auction was still climbing past 2,200 dollars for an old plank of wood with a rope attached to it. Word spread quickly.

“**Y**

ou are sitting on a goldmine!” read a message from keon\_2011 in Texas. “There are a few guys up there who will easily hit 5 figures for this and they will bid at end. With 10 mins to go. Good luck and good find!”

Meanwhile, in Vail, Colorado, Jarrett Packer was watching the auction and losing sleep: “They’re hooked, man! Especially with the storyline and the brilliant scheming. I just tried as hard as I could to make it look like somebody who knows nothing about snowboarding.”

Seven months earlier, Packer meandered through the Vail Ski and Snowboard museum, a tall guy with a patchy beard wearing a gray hoodie and blue skate shoes. Packer perused the archival collection of pro models—Shaun Palmer’s ‘93 Sims board and Craig Kelley’s ‘89 Burton Mystery Air. “All the early Burton hardware had flatheads with little notches in the screws...those are hard to find now,” he said.

And he would know. From 2008 to 2011, Packer paid his rent finding vintage snowboards online and selling them to collectors. For a fee, he’d help old shredders track down their first boards and any other sentimental decks with graphics from iconic magazine covers and movie posters. Big-time collectors with deep pockets relied on Packer to find them the rarest of the rare, like a mint-condition ‘85 Terry Kidwell Round-tail, or a ‘81 Barfoot with bungee cords he snagged for 50 bucks in Los Angeles.

Connoisseurs of these early relics make up a small-but-fervent clique. They know each other’s eBay account names and feedback rating scores. It’s like a chess match the way they watch each other’s bidding activity and try to see who they’re up against, calculating what they’ll need for the winning bid.

### The Big Players:

**Daryl Thomas** is a wealthy English businessman living in Switzerland with 15 Londonderrys and one prototype hanging next to a Muhammad Ali poster on his wall.

**Rick Alden** is the founder of Skullcandy with nearly 100 rare boards in his Park City mansion.

**Adam Roc** is a former pro skateboarder and LA-based marketing executive who outbid Daryl in 2014 for an original prototype at \$31,313.13.

**Vintage Winter** is an Oregon- and Colorado-based virtual vintage museum and broker of winter-sports antiques.

**Brooke Long** has about 1,000 boards in his Reno, Nevada, collection, including Jake Burton’s personal race board currently on loan in the Vail Ski and Snowboard Museum.

And then there’s **Dennis Nazari**, curator of the Utah Snowboard Museum and owner of Salty Peaks snowboard shop in Salt Lake City, Utah, which has a 50,000-dollar security system including 64 cameras with facial recognition technology. An encyclopedic motor mouth, Nazari has as

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Dennis Nazari guarding his collection in the Utah Snowboard Museum at Salty Peaks Skate & Snowboard shop. PHOTO: RYAN IRVIN

many vintage collection stories as he has boards on his walls, which cover the floor and ceiling of his 10,000-square-foot store. No one really doubts that Nazari has the largest collection in the world, although a few think it’s a ruse that he offers 79-dollar appraisals to people who don’t know what their boards are worth. Whether or not that’s a ploy to buy them on the cheap, Nazari rarely sells collectibles and has 20 years worth of eBay sales and board specs in a stack of three-ring binders.

But while value is one arbitrary consideration, authenticity has become the biggest concern among collectors as fakes run rampant. More and more long-time snowboarders have reached an age and point in life where they have the means to fork over a few Gs for a meaningful piece of snowboard history or their own nostalgia. With that, the emerging market has become a breeding ground for scammers.

“It’s all just pressed wood and parts,” says Nazari of early homemade Burton boards. “How hard is it to go out and press another one and paint it the same way? All of a sudden, you’re turning 20 dollars worth of wood and a few hours of time into six grand. And so you really can’t blame the guys that are doing it for why they’re doing it, because if you can turn a few hours’ worth of work and some materials into that kind of money, yeah, all day long.”

One would think that with more collectors getting into the game—the Vintage Snowboard Trader Facebook group (VST) is up past 4,200 members—values would be skyrocketing. In some cases, they are, but with more reproductions popping up, “it devalues the real ones,” says Nazari. “And that’s what we’re seeing consistently, over and over and over again.” You can look up “Rare Vintage Burton Backhill” boards on alibaba.com and find cheap replicas from Indonesia selling for 95 dollars, about 2,800 under market value for an original. It’s reached a point where new postings with original wood boards for sale are met with more scrutiny than excitement.



Daryl Thomas's impressive collection of Burton Londonderrys and a prototype on display in his home in Zurich, Switzerland. PHOTO: FREDERIK VAN DEN BERG

You’d be hard-pressed to get through a conversation about counterfeit vintage snowboards without mention of the name Bob Novak. Originally from Muskegon, Michigan, Novak met Jake Burton in 1981 at a competition for Snurfers—thin planks of wood with ropes lashed to the nose and traction staples, a shorter predecessor to Jake’s early 1977 prototypes. Novak went out to Vermont the following year to hand-build about 2,000 snowboards for Jake as the first Burton employee. He came back with a truckload of boards that he sold to a bunch of friends and later bought them back when collecting became a thing.

An airbrush artist by trade, Novak once had a business selling replacement parts for old snowboards—fins, bindings, mats, and rubber straps—but is now dedicated to bringing back the classic Snurfer in plastic form. A big reason for this may be his apparent exile from snowboarding. “Novak strikes again!” read a recent Facebook comment when a VST member posted a link to some dubious parts for a mint condition 1984 Burton Backhill.

Daryl Thomas still has the “fakey” that Novak sold him for 12,000 dollars. “Bob crossed the line and invented a new model that didn’t exist, cutting out a Backhill to what he claimed was a [‘77] prototype,” says Thomas. “The sizing was all wrong and the parts all new, so it was really easy to spot with board in hand.”

“That board still smelled of fresh paint and lacquer,” says Packer, who was in Switzerland at Thomas’s house when it showed up. “No fading of the white lettering, the rope was made of what seemed to be a bathrobe belt, and if you look at the front matting on the nose side, you can see where the board was sanded down to remove old matting residue...you can clearly see this was made

from an ‘83 Backhill.”

Novak calls this accusation a “hissy fit” and sees what he does more as refurbishment of boards, many of which he specially made outside of the original Burton production runs. “You can find an old ‘68 Camaro and the tires are all freakin’ dry-rotted and cracked and the rubber’s falling off, but it’s an original car and it looks beautiful. What are you gonna do?” he asks in a deep baritone voice with a nasal Michigan accent. “You’re gonna put different tires on it. Does it hurt the value of the piece? No, it doesn’t. It actually helps the value of the original boards, just like in anything.” This is highly debatable, but the biggest bone most guys have to pick with Novak is that he doesn’t always specify that his boards are reproductions when he lists them on eBay.

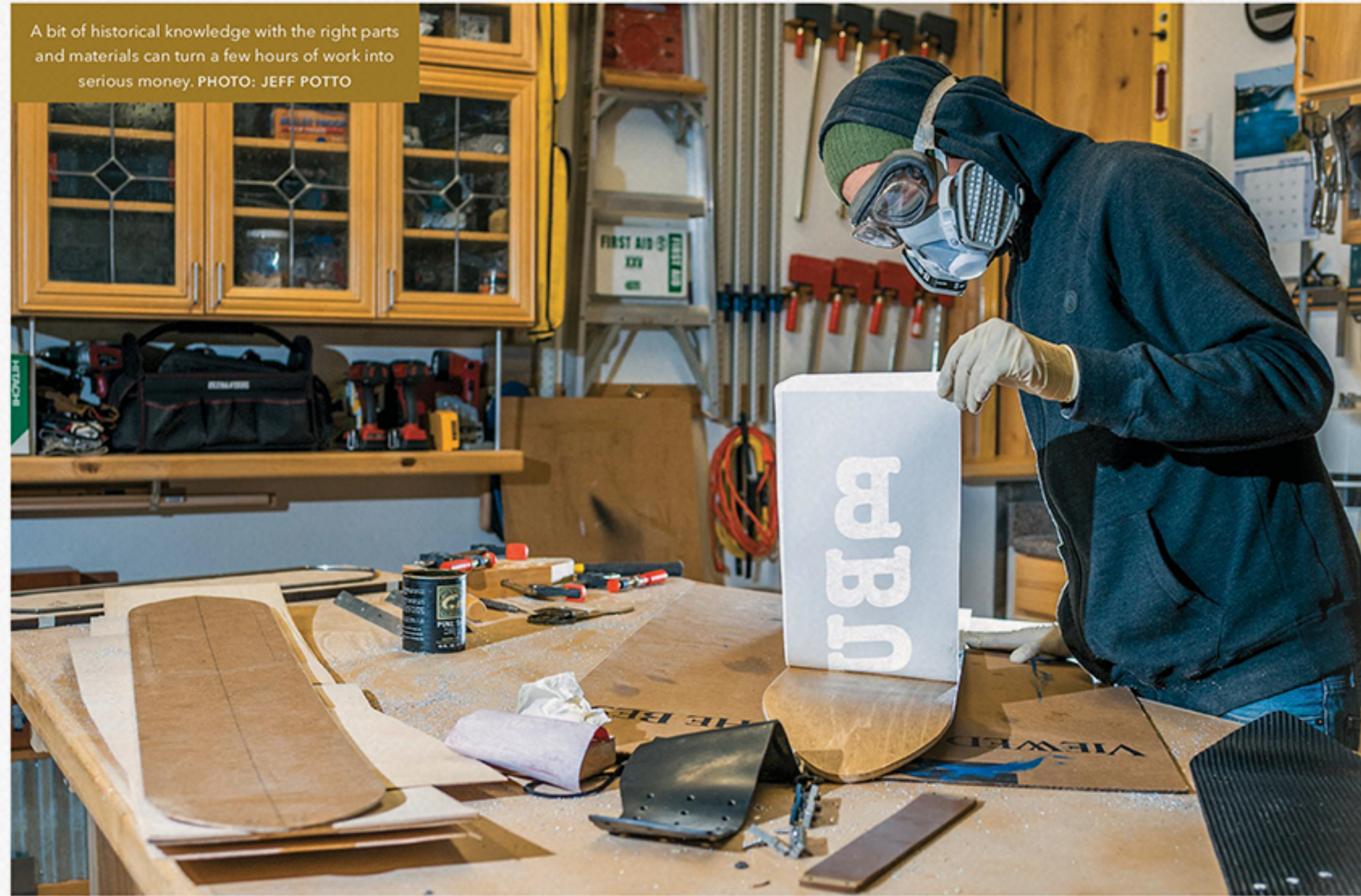
Nazari is undoubtedly in that camp: “Novak’s been caught, pretty much red-handed, doing reproductions, and I told him a long time ago, ‘Dude, you could make some serious money doing what you’re doing, but not ripping people off.’”

After spouting an impressive catalog of closely detailed specs on 30-year-old board dimensions and hardware sizes, Novak insists he’s washed his hands of snowboarding. “I don’t wanna hear about snowboards anymore. They ain’t changed in 30 years, and they’re never gonna...You won’t see me strap another one on again,” he stammers. “Snowboarders don’t hang around here [in Muskegon]. We got guys Snurfing, and we know what it’s about!”



Bob Novak’s “refurbished” Londonderry [right], which he supposedly cut out of an ‘83 Backhill [left] and sold for 12,000 dollars. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DARYL THOMAS

A bit of historical knowledge with the right parts and materials can turn a few hours of work into serious money. PHOTO: JEFF POTTO



Snowboard reproduction is similar to the international art market in that many fakes are sold as expensive original works without the collector ever knowing. The difference is that unlike a one-of-a-kind painting, no one is quite sure how many original vintage snowboards are still out there, stashed away in some dank basement.

Despite all the skepticism that meets every old "woody" board resurfacing on eBay, people still score big at yard sales and thrift stores all over the country. Sometimes sleepers just pop out of nowhere.

In the winter of 1979, an 18-year-old girl named Patty was working in Stratton, Vermont, fresh out of high school. She and some friends were partying on a big farm property with a bonfire and wandered into the barn, which was full of snowboards. "It was loaded with them," she says. Apparently Jake Burton had rented the place previously and left a bunch of his work behind. Patty's fingers got sticky. "I took two and I just happened to take a patent-pending board," she says. Both boards sat in an attic for 35 years until her 90-year-old mother learned that a heroin-addicted relative had sold one online for 1,000 bucks. Left with the prototype, Patty called Burton's customer service department in 2012 and was offered a free snow outfit in exchange for the board. She declined, then got in touch with Vintage Winter, who helped her sell it for \$12,000 without posting it on eBay.

In 1977, two years before the first Burton snowboards went into production, a high school dishwasher named Chris Einwallner was helping a bartender named Jake stencil some graphics on a few marine-wood boards in the basement of Stratton's Birkenhaus Inn. As a thank you for the labor, Einwallner got to keep one of these original prototypes with a waterski-like toe piece in the middle and a doormat on the tail.

"It was just hanging in the rafters of my laundry room," says Einwallner, now a real estate agent in Portland, Oregon. "I had the thing long enough and was just gonna get rid of it, but did some researching to see if I could get a few hundred bucks for it." And that he did, topping out at \$31,313.13 on eBay in July of 2014 to Adam Roe, the CEO of a retail-marketing firm in Los Angeles. This is still the highest-selling snowboard on eBay to date.

The winning bid.

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Bidding has ended on this item.

snowboard Burton Boards by STRATTON MTN vintage used

Item condition: Used  
 Ended: Sep 19, 2015, 8:25PM  
 Winning bid: US \$30,100.00 [77 bids]  
 Shipping: \$4.04 Standard Shipping  
 Item location: Williston, Vermont, United States  
 Seller: roxxxyt (1337) | Sell



The wrong hardware is a dead giveaway for reproductions. PHOTO: JEFF POTTO



"Unlike a one-of-a-kind painting, no one is quite sure how many original vintage snowboards are still out there, stashed away in some dank basement."

Explaining the cutthroat competitive nature of vintage-snowboard trading to a layperson can really get the experts fired up, especially when it comes to fakes. No one likes their passion being undermined by someone trying to cash in on unsuspecting enthusiasts.

Packer has moved on from brokering boards, taking up a radon mitigation business in Denver, but still has a chip on his shoulder for scammers out there. Worried that emerging collectors will continue to get ripped off, he hatched a plan to make a fake board from scratch, post it on eBay, and show TransWorld readers just how easy it is to punk even experienced collectors.

Picking the right model to replicate was crucial. Jake Burton stenciled "STRATTON MTN. VERMONT, USA" on his first few production boards in an effort to get the local mountain to start allowing snowboarding. Supposedly he made less than six of them before Stratton sent him a cease and desist notice, and he quickly changed the name to Londonderry. This would be an easy reproduction that would have collectors salivating.

Packer ordered eight sheets of "rock maple wood veneer" from a supplier in East Aurora, New York. He and a friend made the mold out of insulation foam that they cut and trimmed to shape. After gluing the pliable sheets together, they fused them against the mold with a 100-dollar vacuum bag used for pressing skateboards. To make stencils for the graphics, it wasn't hard for a local art guy to identify the font of the lettering from an old photo of Jake riding an original and match the paint color. Procuring the stainless steel flathead screws with the right amount of dimples was a challenge that sent Packer calling around to old hardware stores in Vermont, seeing what they had leftover from 38 years ago. The spongy vinyl of the original traction matting proved hardest to source, but a close replica would suffice in a photo. It's also impossible to find twisted ropes anymore in place of braided ones, so he borrowed one from another board in his collection with the plastic handle.

Then it came time to list the fake, which he caked in dry Colorado dirt and photographed outside a beige storage unit. Sounding overzealous and salesman-like with a "BUY THIS NOW! WON'T LAST!" approach would surely reek of suspicion, but what about the lucky, unsuspecting recipient of a life-changing windfall? That's what Packer was going for when he posted the board as roxxxyt, the account name of a female friend from

Vermont with a positive track record selling Pinterest-worthy accessories. The key was sounding cute and naive while staying calculated.

Packer knows what the diehard collectors are looking for, so he made sure to back up the story with a few misleading clues, like the old 15-dollar fishing rod that roxxxyt listed simultaneously with part of the Stratton board nudged into the corner of the photo. Her most recent sales also included an old Burton Backyard, an item normally fetching around 3,000 dollars that she supposedly sold for only 250 via Buy It Now, which made collectors go ape shit, Nazari included. "I just got a look at the board you sold for 250 and realize you didn't have any idea what you had,"

he messaged through his eBay account. "I'm sure that is the case with the current board you are selling and I'm sure you have had some very lowball offers for it." This is exactly how Packer intended it to look when he posted the first board and had a friend snag it immediately, later cancelling the transaction.



Jake Burton hand-made his earliest models in the basement of Stratton's Birkenhaus Inn. PHOTO: JEFF POTTO



Specific red cap nuts and flathead screws can be difficult to find.  
PHOTO: JEFF POTTO

**T**he private messages poured in, lowballing, warning against lowballs, congratulating on the find, desperately pleading to make a deal off of eBay (one French-Canadian guy even offered to pay 7,500 dollars in monthly installments), and naturally included some very specific questions about the board's features—whether the inserts were brass or galvanized and if the lettering was raised or screen-printed.

As things revved up, so did Packer's conscience. "It's hard for me to be dishonest," he said. "That's the biggest challenge. It just makes me question what we're doing and why we're doing this." The guilt was tough for him to bear after eight years of sobriety, which calls for honest reconciliation with everyone in his life whom he may have deceived in the dark days. "Bob [Novak] did this for real," he says. "It's hard to imagine he was able to swallow that pill on a daily basis knowing he was going to take thousands and thousands of dollars."

What started as a public-service warning was teetering on the edge of an emotional meltdown for Packer, whose life revolved around snowboarding since the '90s, when he traveled around with a few sponsors, including Nitro.

But the 10-day auction forged on, the price climbing steadily to the very end.

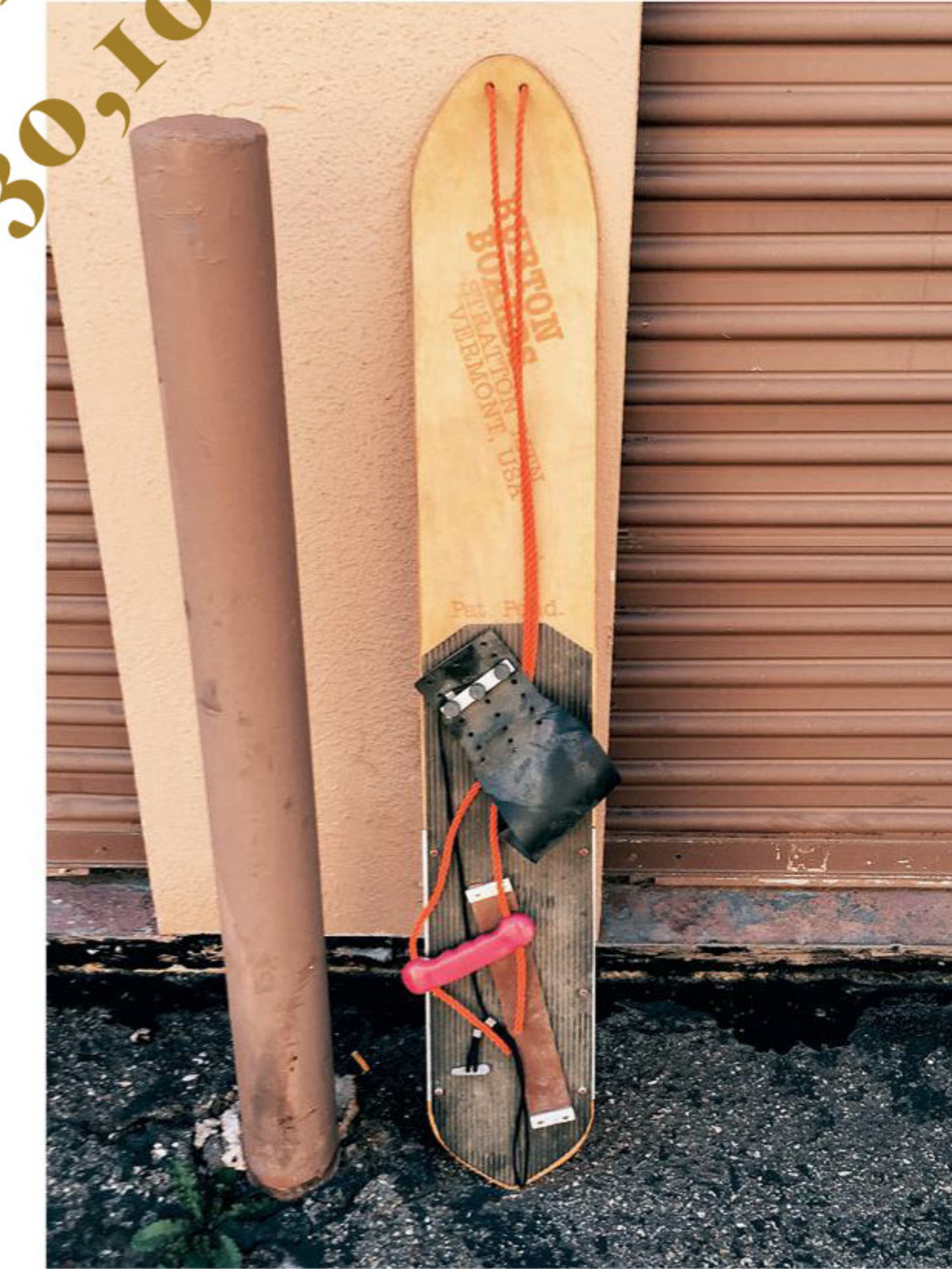
A few big collectors, including Daryl Thomas, messaged about the board. It's hard to say which of them may have bid with a privatized or alternative account, but the final few moments blew up. For the last four days of the auction, two particular bidders battled it out in 200-dollar increments until someone else posted 10,500 dollars with three hours left. The auction went dead until the three-minute mark, when a new bidder who'd stayed silent since the second day came back in with a surge, hitting 12,900, then 13,500 a minute later in an effort to fend off anyone else gunning for the finish line. He bumped to 15,700 just 47 seconds later and then 17,900 with just over a minute left. In the last six seconds, Dennis Nazari came in hot with a big bid for \$21,699.99 for a piece of wood with some dirt on it. But it wasn't enough. Packer had been ready with a 30,000-dollar bid and one more just above that from another account to make sure no one else actually won, cancelling the transaction later on.

Minutes later, the auction was posted to the VST Facebook Page, where everyone had kept quiet about it to cut down competition. "I didn't win @. Another board reaches 30K," said Bryan Sutherland, a known board hoarder from Vancouver, Washington, whose collection supposedly numbers in the thousands. "...I am jealous. What a great piece of snowboard history."

Several collectors rumored that Jake Burton had bought the board for his personal stash. Others claimed they talked to the seller on the phone, which also never happened.

**"I've never bid that kind of money on a board, ever," says Nazari. "I knew it wasn't going to go cheap."**

**SOLD**  
**\$30,100**



The storage unit was a nice touch that backed up the story. PHOTO: roxxxyvt

"My initial reaction was, 'Too good to be true,'" says Thomas. "Some pieces looked brand new while others were too dirtied up. But by the end of the week, I changed my mind and bid 18 thousand just in case."

"I've never bid that kind of money on a board, ever," says Nazari. "I knew it wasn't going to go cheap." At first, he told people he thought it was fake, but then after a close look at the photos, changed his mind. "The second board and backstory added some credence that really helped twist me towards it... I think the only guys who could do that besides Bob [Novak] would be from Craig's factory [at Burton]."

That would explain some urgency in the seven messages Nazari sent roxxxyvt as the auction wound down: "HI I HAVE SENT YOU SEVERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS BOARD OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS...WHY HAVEN'T YOU ANSWERED...without a response from you i will have to encourage the high dollar bidders to stay away from your auction and label this board a reproduction" and in a last-ditch effort, "it would be well worth your time and effort to give me a call BEFORE YOU MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE TWICE!"

Had the auction been real and the sale gone through, it would have been a clear case of fraud, punishable by jail and hefty fines well over the cost of the board. The item was 100 percent fake, as was the auction listing and the seller and the whole story behind it, but how would anyone have known? Even the most experienced and most skeptical collectors still couldn't resist. Most bidders asked to buy the board off of eBay, where they'd minimize competition but wouldn't be covered under eBay's Purchase Protection program.

For any collectors looking to complete their archival quiver, it may prove wise to wait for a lucky thrift store find and keep major transactions on eBay, but that could mean letting another dusty unicorn get away.