



Solid Turns

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Personal attention from instructors and specialized “boutique” classes can make a good skier great.

Something bad happened to my skiing a couple of winters ago. Just like an Indy car driver, I could turn left, but at the end of every right turn, my downhill ski washed out from under me, and I started stiff-kneeing my left leg. I took my skis to the best tuner in town and my boots to the best boot guy. Turned out that it wasn’t the gear. It was moi. Frustrated, I signed up for a private lesson, not a class, because I wanted it to be all about me. I needed a good diagnostician to pay attention only to my turns, to take them apart and fix them, so I would be skiing consistently all the time.

The Beaver Creek Ski School linked me up with Todd James, who had recently been on the Beaver Creek men’s demo team that finished seventh out of 54 teams at an instructor competition called the Swiss Synchro Ski Championships. Training other instructors was part of his job, so he was very good at spotting and correcting even minor technical flaws. He quickly drew a bead on my major ones.

James led me to a wide ballroom run that still showed corduroy well into the day and watched me ski. He started adjusting my right turn in a slow, measured and purposeful way. In a ski class — or any other sports or fitness class for that matter — there’s usually only time for do-this, do-that instruction. But one-on-one time enabled him to guide me into feeling what I was doing, not just him telling me what to do.

Many of the best ski instructors in the world come to Colorado, and anyone who wants to learn to ski or to ski better can benefit. If your technique needs a fast fix, a private lesson with a high-level instructor like Todd James will do the trick, but for skiers and boarders of all levels, small, specialized classes like those listed here can be

a fun way to tweak your technique.

Aspen

In addition to the Ski & Snowboard Schools of Aspen's standard offerings, the resort hosts independent workshops for intermediate and stronger skiers. "It's never too late" — to ski moguls, that is — is Joe Nevin's mantra. The former Silicon Valley tech-head and part-time Tahoe ski instructor retired early and moved to the Aspen area, where he began teaching skiing. He found that many of his baby-boomer contemporaries had given up on the bumps. Some had trashed their knees over years of hard mogul skiing but found groomers too boring.

In developing Bumps for Boomers, Nevin came up with new techniques. At the beginning of a three- or four-day clinic, students trade their skis for short skiboards for a few hours. The short boards with wire bindings initially feel wobbly and unstable, but they demand balance and control, and that's why Nevin uses them to help people break old habits and build new skills. Once back on their own, more stable, regular skis, skiers transfer those skills and are able to ski moguls more smoothly and with greater control. During the clinics, students learn tactics for finding the smoothest, most knee-friendly line through the bumps and how to set up for each mogul. Voilà: Skiers are back in the bumps again. For details on Bumps for Boomers, visit bumpsforboomers.com or call 970.989.2529.

Former two-time world freestyle champion John Clendenin also hangs his helmet in Aspen, where he runs two- and three-day adult camps. While Nevin's emphasis is on learning to rein in aggressiveness and refine control to keep skiing moguls, Clendenin takes another approach. The Clendenin Ski Method camps help skiers accommodate the march of time by starting on an indoor ski simulator to develop whole-body skills and then transferring those skills to the mountain. The method encourages comfortable, natural hand position, natural balance, maintaining constant contact with the snow and absorbing terrain changes with the whole body. For skiers who can't get their fill of Clendenin, a seven-day Camp with the Champs is held in Portillo, Chile, in September. Some camp dates are even set up as reunions. Find more on the Clendenin camps at aspenmethod.com or by calling 877.SKI.DOCS or 970.544.0324.

For 12 years, Aspen instructor Cary Thompson has been evolving an approach that helps skiers and snowboarders get the feel of the mountain by harmonizing their turns

with the terrain. His organic, Zen-influenced approach enables skiers to move their bodies in the direction of travel and to the hill itself, like a windsurfer adjusting to the waves. Thompson also draws on animal analogies because creatures that move on four feet instead of two naturally adapt to their terrain. He traveled to Arapahoe Basin last May after the Aspen areas had closed to work with former Colorado governor Dick Lamm and his wife, Dottie. Thompson teaches Ride in Harmony to up to five people regardless of ability levels. He recommends a minimum of a half-day lesson, which can be booked directly by requesting him by name at any Aspen-area ski school desk or by phoning 970.274.0365. His Website, rideinharmony.com, addresses skiers, telemarkers and snowboarders.

Vail

Vail's most innovative programs are offered occasionally during the ski season, particularly at off-peak times when lodging values abound. Margaret McIntyre infuses the Feldenkrais Method of structured movement, neuromuscular re-education and whole-body awareness into skiing. Unfamiliar buzzwords notwithstanding, McIntyre's system helps intermediate and advanced skiers achieve flowing, natural, fear-free skiing. McIntyre's second Integrated Skiing Workshop, Dynamic Skiing for Life, this season takes place January 11 – 15; the indoor instruction takes place at the Mountain Haus in Vail Village. See integratedmovementmaui.com for more information on McIntyre's Integrated Skiing, and call 800.475.4543 or 970.754.4300 to make a reservation.

Free of the self-consciousness and competitiveness endemic in co-ed classes, women-only workshops with female instructors in a supportive setting can help women's skills soar. Vail offers several permutations for intermediate and advanced skiers. Sessions this season include Her Turn (January 30 – February 1), Girlz on the Edge (January 13 – 15) and She Skis (equipment testing February 26 – March 1). Get more info at vail.snow.com/winter/ss.adult.specialty.asp or by calling 800.475.4543 or 970.754.4300.

Steamboat

At Steamboat's Billy Kidd Skiing Camps, coaches help skiers learn racing skills, whether or not they themselves have recreational racing ambitions. High-level racers such as Olympic medalist and world champion Billy Kidd learned to carve turns before shaped skis were invented. Today's equipment virtually mandates carving, which underscores the importance of learning how to do it right. Kidd and his hand-picked coaches use on-mountain drills and running gates on racecourses plus video analysis to boost skills. One-day sessions take place on Mondays, and three-day camps, including a

take-home DVD, happen Monday through Wednesday for much of the ski season. More info is available at Steamboat.com; the ski school takes program reservations at 800.299.5017.

Arapahoe Basin

Take on the steep and deep with classes at Arapahoe Basin, including some specifically for telemarkers. Tele Days, which are available four mornings and afternoons a week, enable freeheelers at all levels to hone their skills.

Other specialty programs are half-day Women's Tele Clinics and five-hour Tele Steep Camps and Extreme Mountain Clinics that utilize A-Basin's unsurpassed steeps, chutes and other technically challenging terrain. Such programs are offered several times a month. For details, go to arapahoebasin.com or call 888.272.7246.

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