

# Snowboard Collections Get Streamlined and Refined

A focus on discipline and changing demographics drives design

**In place of snow, last year brought tests of faith.** With slow sales and surplus inventory, the snowboard industry had plenty of opportunities for introspection. “Everyone from brands to shops has really re-evaluated what is important and necessary for their business,” offers **Tim MacKenzie**, Niche’s vice president of sales and marketing.

Fortunately, this served as a catalyst for change. Many brands are streamlining their collections and tightening their stories. “A good overall collection isn’t enough anymore,” says **K2** Sales Manager **Eric Hutchison**. “All your models need to be strong individually, because more and more dealers are just buying the home-run models from the brands they carry.” This shift has caused brands to re-focus on what consumers truly want. According to **Scott Barbieri**, vice president of **Anon** and **Burton** hardgoods, “Customers are looking for authenticity, durability, and value—stuff that works.”

The conversation around camber continues. Rather than being the means by which a deck is defined, camber has now become one more tool to better meet the needs of today’s riders. For **Capita**, “Every board features a custom camber profile that complements the overall design,” explains Product Development and U.S. Marketing Manager **Sean Tedore**. “At this point, I feel that camber profiling is a model-by-model process that can’t be lumped into categories.” This evolution has led to a resurgence in camber, as well as an increase in hybrid profiles that emphasize it.

Camber isn’t the only thing being resurrected. “A huge shift to old school shapes and blunted tips is making its way

back,” says **Signal** Marketing Manager **Joey Yorba**. In addition to good looks, refined shapes can offer everything from increased flotation in pow to better board presses on rails. These stories also appeal on the sales floor. “Board shaping continues to be an ongoing story and is something visual that consumers can actually relate to and understand,” says **Shawn Penrod**, **Ride** U.S. sales and marketing manager.

In addition to shapes, brands are also emphasizing core profiles. “The core is actually what makes the board respond, pop, flex, and feel,” **Nitro** Marketing Manager **Knut Eliassen** states. “We think [core profiles] will be one of the biggest new trends shaping the future.” Refining a core’s profile often involves carefully milling it to attain a specific flex or to shed weight from tips and tails.

Not long ago, brands directed much of their efforts toward creating a single board capable of tackling the entire mountain. Now the industry is also seeing a demand for specialized decks. According to **Pete Saari**, **Mervin’s** co-founder and creative director, “As the disciplines and riding styles within snowboarding continue to define themselves, board designs specific to rider style and terrain objectives continue to evolve.”

This rise in discipline-driven designs has brought a range of changes. Brands are placing a greater emphasis on how a board’s camber profile, shape, symmetry, core, and composite layups influence its overall performance. Retailers, meanwhile, are de-emphasizing camber profiles in favor of showcasing a board’s intended use. And brands and retailers are being rewarded for investing in niche products like street-specific decks, pow surfers, and splitboards.

As much as these new designs are based on specific terrain, they are also based on shifting demographics. As Saari explains, “Snowboarding has become more of a timeless pursuit, pushing on both sides of the age spectrum.” In part, this has led to increased demand for children’s gear, as well as premium products for women. “We were taken by surprise on how many girls came in the shops for mid- to high-end products last year,” says **Phil Grisé**, owner of Canadian snowboard shop **Empire**.

On the heels of an especially tough season, there’s optimism. Brands are tightening production with an eye toward creating the scarcity the industry needs to maintain healthy sales and margins. Citing a desire to grow their pre-existing accounts, brands also aim to improve the terms, service, and support they offer retailers. And although last season brought plenty of challenges, Nitro’s Eliassen says, “It is always when times are tough that we become most creative.”

— Michael Sudmeier



—Dennis Nazari, owner, Salty Peaks snowboard shop, Salt Lake City

## Tapping New Niches

“Deep powder riding and powder surfing are on the upswing—if you’re lucky enough to be in the areas that get the goods.”



## What to Watch at SIA

“My sights are definitely going to be set on those brands that are up and coming. Most of us calling the

shots within the industry are pretty old in relation to how long snowboarding has been around. The kids driving the sport—and ultimately deciding which direction snowboarding is going—are the voice that we need to be listening to.”

—Michael Toohey, buyer and Stowe store manager, Darkside Snowboards, Vermont



▲ Whether looking to rock things mild or wild, this quiver of decks can deliver. Niche’s Aether sports the art of Michael Sieben, while Capita’s Ultrafear and Signal’s Park feature shapes inspired by old-school designs.

