

Aspen Insiders' AUTUMN ADVICE

By Connie Naylor

Chris Davenport knows mountains. The two-time world champion free skier has conquered the slopes of seven continents and created an enduring buzz by skiing all 54 of Colorado's 14,000 ft. peaks in one year. Featured in more than 35 ski films, he's also an ESPN ski commentator and guides uber-adventure treks to places like Antarctica. The man who could live anywhere has called Aspen home for the past 18 years. The reasons extend far beyond its world-class winter sports.

"I guess you could say fate brought me to Aspen. I came to the University of Colorado where I was a ski racer," Davenport, a New Hampshire native, said. "I moved to Aspen upon graduation, got a job at Snowmass working in the race department putting on races and events. I had plenty of free time to ski for myself and a good job that kept me on the mountain every day. I began competitive free skiing where you ski the most difficult terrain in front of judges and was fortunate to become a sponsored athlete. Now I take people all over the world so they can share my joy of skiing. Honestly, I could live anywhere, we have that kind of freedom, but I think I stay in Aspen because it is so much more than a skiers' town."

Aspen, he said, is "like a city in a small package. It's not just a skiers' town or an artists' town or an outdoorsmen's town. There's a thriving art and music scene and great schools. That said, these mountains are amazing. There is great skiing and climbing and hiking and mountaineering and all the outdoor sports that I live and breathe every day. My wife and I have three boys and it's a great place to raise a family. The notion that Aspen is just for the



rich and famous is not our town anymore. This is a town of progressive, forward thinking, adventure-some people."

An adventuresome spirit brought artist and gallery owner Tania Dibbs to Aspen when she too was fresh out of college. "I had degrees in biology and art from the University of Virginia. I was trying to get my head around becoming an artist as opposed to being a doctor or lawyer, as was expected of



someone who grew up where I did, outside of Washington D.C. I just knew I had to be here." In order to live where she liked, Dibbs worked as a ski instructor and lived for a time in a converted tool shed. "An art career can take a long time to build. I had my first show in 1993, five years after I got here," she explained and credited the support of locals with much of her success. "People are so supportive," she said. "It's like they are really happy to see someone achieve her goals. It's so nice to be in a town that's really the best of both worlds. Here we have people with a great appreciation for art and culture who also love an active lifestyle. There couldn't be a better combination."

That active lifestyle keeps people on the mountains throughout autumn. "It's a great time for mountain biking or hiking," Dibbs said. "From a visual perspective, autumn is almost surreal; the light is much as it is right before an eclipse. There's a great deal of contrast. Because of the altitude and the angle of the sun the light is amazing, the sky is an amazing shade of blue. In fall it's nice to go up to Independence Pass or hike up to Cathedral Lake. And, it's fun in town, too. The restaurants also have great deals with their fixed price menus. It's just a great time to be here."

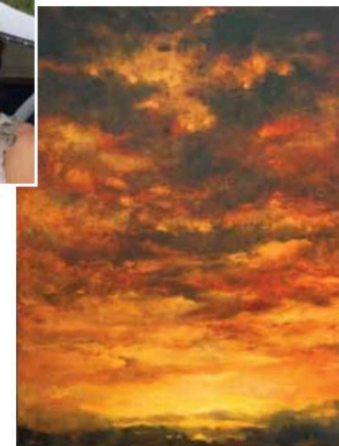
Chris Davenport agrees. He typically packs up the family and travels to South America in August for ski season beneath the equator but always tries to be home in autumn. "September and October are my two favorite months," he said. "Of course I love July and the winter, but the fall is the best. You've got all the trees changing so it's incredibly beautiful. The days are warm, the nights cool, and you can smell winter in the air. There's that anticipation that ski season is coming. People are excited. Our small mountain town gets quite busy in summer and winter, but in fall it's a nice, easy pace. You always see people you know and there's parking everywhere."

Dibbs added that September offers a full roster of special events. "In October, things slow down because there are fewer people, but it's truly a four-season resort area, now. There's a lot going on."

"Fall is great," she said then paused and added, "but in any season it's a wonderful place to be. Wherever I travel, I am always so happy to come back here. Aspen is more beautiful than wherever you've been. Everything is better here. Better restaurants, better scenery, better recreation, better people and for me better opportunities. I am sure I sell more art in Aspen than I would if I were in New York. Even in the recession we are still in business because there is simply no place better than Aspen." ■



Tania Dibbs' painting Sorcerer, 48" x 36" oil on canvas



BRIAN IN ASPEN PHOTO: ART BURROWS

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