

Split Seasons: Splitboard and surf guide Eric Gustafson

Eric Gustafson—Gus to his friends—is a surfer and snowboarder who splits his seasons of guiding and instructing between Utah and Cape Cod.

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Sliding through the East Pass of Silver Fork in the Wasatch backcountry, Gus makes a high slash on the wall of a gully, followed by short, fluid turns. His swallowtail splitboard allows for quick and smooth arcs that he calls “old school” compared to mine. But his tight turns are more surf-inspired than a product of nearly 20 years of backcountry snowboarding. Eric Gustafson—Gus to his friends—is a surfer and snowboarder who splits his seasons of guiding and instructing between Utah and Cape Cod.

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{mospagebreak title=Split Seasons - Page 2}

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Eric Gustafson, 51 (“Going on 20,” he says), is the owner of Fun Seekers, a summer and winter instructional outfit that merges his passions for surfing and boarding. In the winter, Gus splits 120 days on snow between guiding day tours in the Wasatch with Utah Mountain Adventures and instructing snowkiting. In the summer, he heads to Wellfleet, Massachusetts—on the wrist of Cape Cod’s geographic arm—where he and a staff of seven instruct windsurfing, kiteboarding, surfing and stand-up paddle boarding. Gus says that splitting his seasons between snow and water allows him to keep things fresh: “At the end of each season, I get the itch to move on.”

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{mospagebreak title=Split Seasons - Page 3}

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Gus didn’t begin sliding on snow until he was 17 when he moved to Mount Snow, Vermont from Clinton, Connecticut. He started working on the mountain making snow, and then as a patroller. In 1985, he moved to Utah, where he worked as patrol director at Solitude, and started exploring the Wasatch backcountry. But through that time, he was always on skis. “I was a die-hard skier even during my four years at Solitude,” he says. Then a friend who worked for Burton persuaded him to try snowboarding. “He was like, ‘Come on, you’re a surfer, you’re gonna love it.’ One day, UPS pulled up with a board and bindings, and I had no more excuses.”

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{mospagebreak title=Split Seasons - Page 4}

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Despite initially resisting snowboarding, Gus eventually worked to promote the sport during a time when snowboarding was not yet a mainstream winter sport. In the early ‘90s, he joined the National Ski Patrol Snowboard Demonstration Team, and was instrumental in getting snowboards accepted for patrolling. For him, it’s just another tool for enjoying the mountains. “I’ve always hated the skier/snowboarder rift,” he says. “The kite/windsurfer battle is the same thing—it’s just a waste of energy.”

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{mospagebreak title=Split Seasons - Page 5}

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“I moved back to Utah in ‘94 and started using a splitboard,” Gus recalls. His friend, Brett “Cowboy” Kobernick, had come up with the idea for the split, and Voilé began manufacturing them that winter. Gus went on to work for Voilé—on and off—for ten years. “You name it, I did it—put splitboards together; build bindings; customer service.” But his true passion lies in his guiding business, which he’s run for 19 years. Guiding and instructing allow Gus to split his time between the settings that he loves; the ocean and the mountains.

“I love the 100-foot dunes staring back from the ocean, and old-growth trees and the Utah-blue sky.”

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As we lap our way from Michigan City to Silver Fork to Days Fork, Gus’s passion for the mountains permeates his soft-spoken words. He has an indelible grin that comes from years spent in the sun, snow and water, and sharing those places with others. We drop into Emma’s Ridge and his turns are tight but effortless and smooth. “The ocean is dynamic whereas the mountain is static,” he says. “But otherwise, the mountain is just a big wave and you can be creative with it.”

Eric Gustafson – Fun Seekers

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