

Boots fit for a rodeo king

By Joseph Duerrmeyer

The renowned custom boot maker Ryder Gauteraux has selected Sisters as the perfect location for his new boot boutique, rounding out the selection of quality custom Western wear available in Central Oregon.

Gauteraux grew up in the mountains of Eastern Oregon near Mt. Vernon. His background would seem idyllic by today's standards.

"My dad bought 1,000 acres that butted up against BLM (Bureau of Land Management) land and built a large log cabin. We didn't have electricity or a phone. My mom peeled all the logs for the home," said Gauteraux.

The lifestyle was certainly different from that of the average horse lover and really shaped Gauteraux's ideas about the world around him. He believes that his background gave him a closer connection to horses and ranch life.

"It was not so much like 'Little House on the Prairie' as it was like living in an old Clint Eastwood movie," said Gauteraux.

Horses have always been a part of Gauteraux's life from his earliest memories.

"I grew up around horses, I must have been riding when I was three or four years old. I guess I have always been around them. My dad was a hunting guide and had a pack string, so there were always horses around and they were just a part of our life," said Gauteraux.

"My first horse was Cyrus, and my dog was Gabe. I used to go out into the mountains south of our ranch. It was our stomping ground. I even had a go-cart that didn't have a motor, so I would tow it to the top of the hill with my horse and then ride it down," he said.

Rodeo seemed natural for Gauteraux and he was trying out a variety of horse



photo by Joseph Duerrmeyer

related skills early in life.

"My dad caught me bulldogging sheep and he really got mad. I still remember that. We really had a great time and it was a great way to grow up," he said.

"I guess that I always knew that I was going to go into rodeo. I got my PRCA permit in '97 and filled it in '98. I have been everywhere on the rodeo circuit," Gauteraux said.

Gauteraux traveled the rodeo circuit riding bulls initially and then moving on to saddle broncs.

His roots kept his eyes on Oregon and after living on the Warm Springs Reservation for a while he was convinced that Central Oregon was the place he wanted to hang his hat.

From the perspective of a man who has faced the worst that rodeo can throw at a competitor, he began to think about the lack of custom quality leather goods. From there, it was only a matter of time before this real deal cowboy accepted the challenge and began his creative career.

In the image of Old West self reliance, Gauteraux taught himself all aspects of the trade. He read a few books, watched a video and soon was building his own leather goods. A natural perfectionist, his quality was soon noticed on the rodeo circuit and soon he was considered one of the best in the Northwest.

"I've been building boots for three years and chaps for seven. It's really just common sense. The work isn't that hard," he said.

Although rodeo fans might not realize it, his work is familiar to anyone who has ever attended a rodeo in the Pacific Northwest. Early in the events when the rodeo queens make their appearances, the fine leather work of Gauteraux is on display.

"I have been doing the queens' chaps for the Sisters

Rodeo for about five years. Just about every one around here uses my chaps — Redmond, Prineville — almost everyone in the Northwest uses my chaps," he said.

His business had humble beginnings. His first shop was in a seven-by-10-foot room, which was also the laundry room of his home. Then Gauteraux moved to Redmond where he lived for four years and started Western Ranch. The original boutique is still located in downtown Redmond.

Western Ranch grew over the years and diversified into a variety of Western leather goods including purses, belts, chaps and boots. Recently, Gauteraux decided that the other parts of the business were taking too much time away from his love of boot and chap making, and he sold the business, reserving the chap and boot portions of the enterprise for himself.

As he began to look for a new location for his business, Gauteraux decided that moving away from Redmond might open new doors for him. His search began, and Sisters was the hands-down winner in the competition. The Western-themed town, the friendliness of the people and the Sisters Rodeo were all important factors in his decision.

The building of custom boots is regarded by some as merely a vanity; however, there are many who find it difficult to obtain a pair of boots that fit.

"Sometimes a person has broken toes that never healed straight, or maybe the person is a 10 on the right foot and an 11 on the left foot. Peoples' feet sometimes have a lot of weird stuff, so I can design a boot to fit, even if there are a lot of problems," Gauteraux said.

Although many individuals purchase custom boots for the fit, there is also the consideration of style and the exotic for which there is a significant price to pay both in terms of money and time. At present, there is a six-month waiting list for a pair of Gauteraux boots and he will only make chaps for friends.

"They start at \$1,100 give or take a little because of the options," he said. "That is for an ostrich stitch top boot. Here is a boot that is anteater with a tooled top that is about \$5,000. That is one of the most expensive boots. I am working on a pair of \$8,500 boots that have fully beaded tops.

"I have an Indian lady that is actually beading the tops. They're going to be bad-ass."

Gauteraux already sees expansion of his business in the wind and is looking for some help, although he wants nothing less than perfection.

"I would like to have someone to help out part-time, maybe a high school student," he said. The person would help Gauteraux with his computer and book work and the cutting out of leather. "They don't really have to know anything. They just need to be meticulous. I can teach them everything as long as they are a perfectionist," he said.

Gauteraux Boot Company is located at 192 E. Main Ave. in Sisters, Oregon, and the phone number is 541-588-5007.

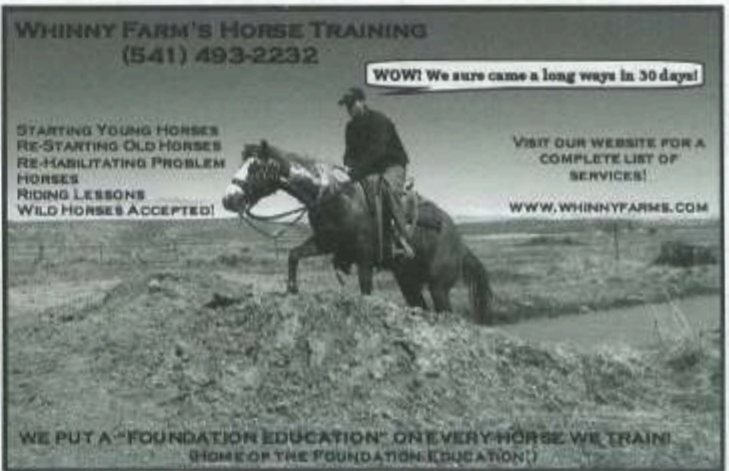
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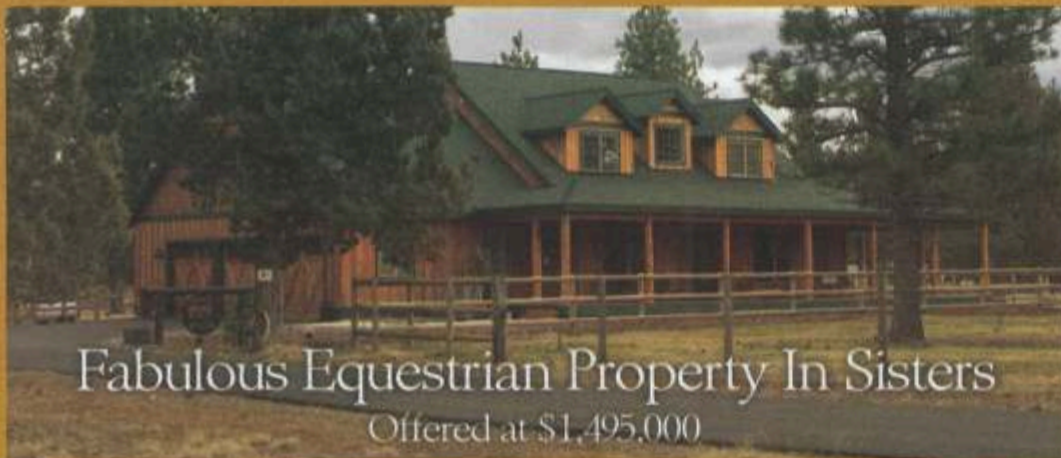
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