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NICK MULGREW: I've known you since we were in high school and even then you were a pretty creative and unusual kid – a product of circus school and a multinational upbringing. What led you into skating?

YANN-XAVIER HOROWITZ: Skateboarding found me in a weird way. Individuality and creativity were the most important things for me when I was growing up, so being expressive and original and working from the heart came naturally. In fact, from a young age I had set my sight on being an Olympic gymnast, but as I got older I realised that gymnastics is a frigid sport with too many rules for me. I needed something with no guidelines, no coaches and no set routine. Skateboarding came to me while I was at circus school, and I realised that skateboarding was one thing I could make my own. Even though skateboarding is universal, I could create my own style and have complete freedom. I knew from the moment I started skateboarding, at 10 years old, that I wanted to master it and that it was going to be my passion.

NM: But unlike a lot of kids with lofty dreams, you could realistically achieve what you wanted. You'd won some local comps and had your first national magazine cover – on the now-defunct Blunt mag – by the time you'd left school. You seemed like you had a good idea about how to fulfil your ambitions; but did you actually have a plan?

YXH: The fact that I was quite established in the South African skate scene from a young age definitely helped me with so-called "important" decisions at the end of high school. Personally I condemn high school and parents for forcing teenagers into quick, brash decisions for their future. Skateboarding was a choice I had made quickly, but I knew it was something that I was good at. The skate industry is a tricky one, as it's about knowing the right people and being confident in yourself and what you stand for. The right sponsors – the ones that are willing to invest in you as a personality – definitely help. It all comes down to the fire you have inside of you too. In any industry you're going to have to work your ass off to get where you want to be, but if you have that fire nothing can stop you. I'm lazy at heart, so it's taken me a little longer to get this right.

NM: It's weird that you say you're lazy at heart, because you're always working and travelling. What's been your favourite place to ride – Barcelona? Cape Town? Or back home in KwaZulu-Natal?

YXH: Every city has its own flavour when it comes to skateable architecture. Barcelona has fluid and organic spots that litter the city, mostly due to the brilliance of Gaudi's architecture. No matter where you are in Barcelona you'll find a group of skaters shredding up a perfect spot they found on the way to the beach or even while they were cruising to the corner store to get beer. On the other side of the coin, there is the rigid architecture of Berlin and London, which are much more challenging to skate and force you to be more creative; to take something cold and boring and give it some life, even if it's



for double hours. If I had to choose one or two places it would be a close battle between Amsterdam and Cape Town. Both have good concrete spots, amazing streets, good weather and – most importantly – no bees!

NM: What's the best part of skating in KZN in particular? Is it the familiarity you have with the place?

YXH: Yeah. It's also because there's so many kinds of spots there. If you wanna skate transition, you can skate transition. If you wanna bomb hills, you can bomb hills. There's the beach. There's so much variety, and the vibe is great. You seldom get kicked out of spots. You get cities like Johannesburg where you'll have five or ten minutes at a spot and then the guards come and you have to get the fuck out. In Durban you can skate anything, any day.

NM: Has attempting to break through onto the international stage been a challenge as a South African? South Africa is, geographically and culturally, an isolated country, but skating is so globalised nowadays that it's hard for me to tell if it's been a hindrance or a help for you.

YXH: Luckily I have had sponsors that can afford to help me out with flights and travel budgets when I go over to Europe. It's just about meeting up with the right people in each country and getting as much exposure you can as possible in the skate communities and in magazines there. For most South African skateboarders – and South Africans in general – it's just too pricey to go over to Europe or the States for a solid time. If we weren't so isolated geographically there would be plenty more of us playing the scene over there. Most of us have to make do with social media and YouTube to get our stuff out there.

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NM: What does your average day look like? **YXH:** When I'm in Cape Town, if I have the day off, I'll have a really nice breakfast and try go to the beach. Then I'll get hold of a photographer or filmer and go skate around the city, or take a drive out to the suburbs. Once everyone's all dirty and sweaty and tired we'll go grab some beers. If I'm working, I'll do the same amount of stuff, just around a shift.

NM: So you have to supplement your skating with other income.

YXH: I work at Clarke's Bar and Dining part-time, three or four shifts a week. The more skating I get done, though, the more money I can make from it.

NM: And what do you do when you're on tour?

YXH: On tour, I usually wake up hungover, getting the day started at about 11 or 12. Then pretty much I just go with the flow, either in the city I'm in or the one we're travelling to as a tour. We drive around, with a guide if we have one, and every now and then we'll come across something and say, "Shit, cool, we can skate that". It's pretty much just getting as much skating in as possible and keeping everyone on the same page.



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so that when you get to a spot you can bang it out in ten minutes. I find I get a lot more film and a lot more photos when I'm on tour because of that. It's all I have to think about.

NM: What are your prospects of skating full-time?

YXH: I'd love to skate full-time, because then I could have more time to focus on other things. I'm gonna see how I do next year in Europe; get bigger sponsors, get more money. Skating pays my rent, but not all my living expenses. I want to get the point where skating pays both, so then when I'm not skating I can sit at home and write and get in touch with the artistic side of myself again.

NM: And you think that's a possibility?

YXH: Yeah, I think it is. I just need to be super-focused. In skating, to get sponsored, the sponsors have to see the fire inside of you. You have to show them that you're willing to, like, half-kill yourself for the company.

NM: Is it a chance thing?

YXH: As with anything, it's who you know. You might be chilling with someone who owns an amazing company. You don't get many opportunities in South Africa. You have to go over there.

NM: What's your favourite tour story from when you've gone "over there"?

YXH: Recently I was skating with a bunch of well-known skaters from the States and Europe through Belgium with RVCA – I was a bit of the wildcard thrown in there. They had taken us to a whole bunch of breweries and monasteries, and throughout the day we'd go from brewery to skate spot, brewery to skate spot. They were just getting us drunk and getting us to jump on our boards and get some footage from it. At first everyone was on edge, because no one knew each other, but it worked out and it was awesome. Sometimes drinking and skating go hand-in-hand. You fall and you don't feel anything and you loosen up.

Apart from that, any tour with Adidas South Africa is great because it's with good friends in cool spots. I really enjoyed the Durban one out of the edits I've been in, mostly because I had no idea this city I knew so well would look so good on camera.

NM: What's your favourite kind of spot, then? 'Transition'?

YXH: Natural transitions, yeah. Brick banks, transitions built into the side of buildings. Stuff that wasn't built to skate, but is somehow perfect for skateboarding. Also, anything quick; anything you have to be quick on your feet for. The harder it is to skate, the more exciting it is for me.

NM: As in many sports, there are no (or at least very few) openly gay or bi professional male skaters, and in fact, there are men who have left the sport because of homophobic sentiments. Attitudes have changed hugely over the years but do you feel like the sport has opened up?

YXH: It's always the hardest for the one coming out to their employers, peers and the public. I just hope that one day it doesn't have to be talked about, debated or brought up in the spotlight. It may be a taboo subject for some, but if the individual concerned is doing what they love and loving the way they want behind closed doors it shouldn't even have to be shared to the public. Thankfully I think our generation is generally way more understanding and almost welcoming to openly gay and lesbian people. I think that people have begun to open up globally, both in and out of sports, which makes it easier for people to talk about.

NM: I ask this because, as someone who only causally consumes skate media, I get the feeling that skating is a hyper-masculine space, and is marketed as a masculine, hetero-centric pursuit. As a homosexual male in the sport, does that feel the same from the inside, or are you mostly too busy skating to worry about it?

YXH: There will obviously be a few people that can't wrap their heads around the whole thing, but these are the people I don't give the time of day to, so I guess I try my best not to worry about it and let my skating do the talking. My sponsors don't give a fuck, I don't give a fuck and in the end, no one should really give one. I am just another sponsored skateboarder. I'm comfortable about the skate world knowing I'm gay but I am worried it's slowly turning into a gimmick. If people were going to say either, "Hey, there's Yann-Xavier the skateboarder!" or, "Hey, there's Yann-Xavier the gay skateboarder!", I'd prefer the first option. Most people would. I could say I am an activist by speaking out about it but I'm not going to turn it into something bigger than what it actually is - it's just me living my life.

NM: And so what are the next steps for you in your life and career?

YXH: I guess I want to just travel as much as possible and eventually get my pro model out of the blueprints, and enter a few contests and get cemented into the European and American skate scenes. I'm filming two full-length video parts coming out early 2015 – one for Adidas Skateboarding SA and the other for Familia – which will keep me busy.

NM: Finally: what are you riding at the moment?

YXH: Adidas Skateboarding, RVCA, Familia Skateboards, Stance socks, Baseline Skateshop and Your Mom's wheels.