

Monatsfrau Julie Ann Pedalino

‡ Julie, let's begin at the beginning: How did you start mountain biking?

I started mountain biking regularly a few years ago with friends I made in the cycling community in Kansas City. Although, I'm an outdoorsy gal and have been mtb curious for quite a while. A number of years back I lived in San Francisco and got the idea that I wanted to try mountain biking. I purchased a hard tail (that didn't fit of course) (and was horrendously heavy) and ran off to some trails to try it out. My adventure ended up as a hilarious disaster where I spent more time doing the old 'hike a bike' routine than riding. Nevertheless, there was a nugget of fun amongst all the struggle, and the fun bit was the memory that stayed the strongest in my mind. So the seed was planted many years ago, it just took a while to germinate!

‡ What do you like most about mountainbiking, what makes it special compared to other kind of sports?

Mountain biking is so special because it allows me to explore and experience wilderness in a unique way. Of course I love hammering on the road, but dealing with the cars (and all the pollution that goes along with them) can be quite frustrating. On a mountain bike trail, things just feel more relaxed and refreshing! I'm not one to race bikes, but I do love to travel with my friends who do and support them at their races. I've visited and explored some quite lovely parts of the country in this way - places that I most likely wouldn't have gone to otherwise.

‡ What has been your most beautiful / greatest bike experience? And your worst?

The most amazing times I've had on a mountain bike are hands down the trail rides I've done in Colorado. There are a surprising amount of high quality trails in the Kansas City area, but they generally trend to the technical side with lots of exposed roots and rock gardens. To be sure, the trails in Colorado can be technical as well, but I'm in love with the wonderful ribbon trails that zig zag along the side of the mountain - wildflowers, gorgeous vistas, and a little bit of speed.

‡ Which bike do you ride (preferably)? Can you tell us a bit about its setup, too?

My current MBT is a fillet brazed Pedalino 650b hardtail that I made with a True Temper tube set. Here's how I've set it up: Race Face Atlas handlebars (chopped because 780 mm is way too long for me!), Race Face Turbine cranks, chain ring (28t), and BB, SRAM GX 10 speed rear mech with a 11-42 cassette, Stan's ZTR crest with 2.1 tires mounted tubeless, SRAM Guide RSC hydraulic disc brakes (they rock!), Loaded Precision seat post, Yeti lock on grips, Cane Creek 110 series headset, Rock Shot 30 fork with 100mm of travel. The frame is powder coated metallic blue and I tried to get as many of the parts as possible in blue ano!

‡ You have studied fashion, then fine arts and worked as an artist and graphic designer for many years, but finally found your building bikes your true passion. How did this come?

What advice would you give to other female mountainbike riders?

Get out of your head, go at your own pace, don't worry about whether or not you're doing it 'right', and (perhaps most importantly) ride with folks who encourage and support you! I almost quit mountain biking after my first few tries because the people I chose to ride with pushed me into technical areas that I wasn't ready for and then shamed me for going slow and crashing. Those rides were stressful and emotional and they left me feeling like I just didn't have the right stuff to ride mountain bikes. Thankfully, I kept at it - at my very own slow pace, mind you - and eventually I learned to really love my mtb rides! Of course, I'm hardly a pro and there are still lots of trail features that strike fear in my heart when I come across them. But it's ok if I don't want to tackle that log or rock garden today, it

will surely be waiting for me tomorrow, or the next day, or whenever I'm ready for it!

‡ **You say: "I have come full circle with my bicycles". What's the story behind this statement?**

Well in a quite literal sense, I've designed cycling kits for my brand. Kits are fashion, and fashion design was my teenage dream job. So after departing from fashion after college, I have now returned, albeit in a total unexpected way!

‡ **It seems quite a step from dreaming of building bikes to actually do it. How did you access and manage this challenge?**

It is absolutely a challenge to start out as a frame builder! The reality is that an investment needs to be made in order to have a workshop equipped with the tools needed build a frame. I was extremely lucky to get my start with Vincent Rodriguez at his bike shop, Velo+, because not only did he teach me, he also gave me full access to his tools and workspace. It was incredibly generous and I'm so thankful to have had that opportunity! I'm not sure I would have built more than one frame otherwise - it would have been completely overwhelming to have to tool up right away. Instead, I was given the space and time to play and learn while I worked on getting my own work space and tools at a pace that was manageable.

‡ **Building frames to me rather seems like a job for an engineer – not an artist. How and where did you get the needed knowledge and skills?**

There is certainly quite a lot of engineering involved with frame building. I'm very lucky to have a wonderful network of frame builders and mentors who not only help me get a better understanding of the principles behind what I'm doing, but also offer valuable advice about how to build sound frames and parts. We also have such a rich and well documented history of custom frame building to look back on and learn from. The information is out there, as long as you're willing to dig for it and do a bit of studying!

‡ **What makes your bikes special today?**

My bikes are special because of how I approach a design as well as all of the customization that goes into them. It's important to me to take a client's personality into account, and often times base the aesthetics of a design around their interests and unique personal qualities. The hope is to deliver a bicycle that a client can not only ride and be comfortable in but fall in love with and use to express themselves! My ability to do this has been greatly enhanced by my recent exploration into CNC machining - I can now bring a personal touch to almost every part of a frame, which is very exciting.

‡ **So, being able to deal with a CNC machine has turned out to be a key qualification for you?**

If someone would have told me five years ago that I would be able to design, program, and machine a part on a CNC milling machine, I would have thought they had lost their mind. It's surprising and amazing where the universe will take us if we stay open to possibility! Learning about and working with CNC machines has been a game changer for me as an artist and frame builder, and I've only just begun to scratch the surface of what is possible with the medium. With CNC I can customize almost every aspect of a frame. In addition to taking advantage of rotary axis machining for my bi-laminate lugs, I can now make have my very own Pedalino road dropouts (with replaceable hangers). Next on the list are dropouts for disc brakes and thru axle! I'm very excited to continue to explore and push into more sculptural and three-dimensional forms.

‡ **You're currently focused on steel frames. Why this?**

I build in steel for a number of reasons. Foremost among them is the buttery-smooth road

feel of a steel frame! It's also a material that is readily available, relatively easy to work with, and is machinable. That said, I'm definitely open to exploring other materials, like titanium and carbon fiber.

‡ **Do you have plans to expand your portfolio / technologies?**

One of the newest discussions around my shop is 3D printing with composites. Now that I have the ability to design parts in CAD, it's not a huge jump to creating designs that are appropriate for 3D printing. The technology is very interesting and robust - to the point that it is practical to 3D print very usable parts. I've considered myself to be a metal worker up until recently, but once I gave it some thought, it totally made sense to be working with carbon fiber as well! Carbon fiber frames are always branded in terms of their utilitarian aspects: weight savings, aerodynamics, etc. Why not have a custom carbon fiber frame that is all those things *and* beautiful? I have a ton of R&D to do before custom carbon is a reality, but it's definitely exciting and most certainly on the horizon.

‡ **You're not "only" designing the frame but its finish, too. To me this sounds like the easier part, but, as I learned, I am wrong ...**

I've only recently started to explore frame painting on my own, but it was always part of my plan to incorporate the finish work of a frame into the overall design concept. What I didn't expect when I was just starting was how much of a struggle it would be to sort out how that would actually work. I didn't (and still don't) have the shop space for a full on paint booth and sandblasting cabinet, and it took some time and creativity to find a solution that would allow me to unleash my full creativity in terms of paint.

What I've settled on for the moment is a bit of an unusual finish: I start by sending out the frames for a powder coat base. With a powder coat base, the prep work is handled by someone else which eases my workload), and the frames get with a very solid and durable foundation for paint. Once the powder work is complete, I then apply all of my additional colors and graphics, and finish off with a 2k clear coat. I've only finished a few frames in this manner, but so far the results have been very encouraging! One of those frames was just ridden at the Dirty Kanza 200, a local gravel endurance race with notoriously tough conditions that can be rough on paint jobs (and riders!). I'm happy to report that the frame completed the race with nary a scratch to be found. Durability is a plus, but the best part of all of this is that I can finally take advantage of all of my creativity and execute a complete vision for a frame build.

‡ **Who are your customers?**

I definitely don't have a typical rider yet - the only basic similarity is that my customers tend to be local Kansas City folks. My sample size is pretty small, I simply haven't built enough frames for a pattern to emerge!

‡ **How is the journey, beginning from a new customer coming into your shop up to making him leave it with his/her new bike?**

Every build starts as a conversation where I discuss the basics with a client: What kind of bicycle are we building? What are the client's riding goals? What do they like or dislike about current bikes they own? What's on the 'must have' list? And so on. After that is done, I'll schedule a sizing with the client where I take some body measurements and set up the Fitmaster sizing cycle with the geometry I think would be appropriate for them. Once everything is looking good, I'll have all the information I need to get going with my CAD design. Fabrication takes at least a month, depending on the complexity of the build and whether or not I'm making custom parts for it. After frame fabrication comes the paint, which takes an additional two to four weeks. So, from start to finish, it's an approximately 3 months process.

‡ **Are you purely creating the frame or can I get a fully assembled bike from you? If yes: How do you pick the parts?**

I actually prefer to sell fully assembled bicycles! This allows me to be very specific about the design as well as dry fit parts during the build process as needed. I pick the parts based on feedback from the clients, my own experience with components, and suggestions from vendors. Spec'ing out parts for a build can be quite complex at times, but it's always fun to research bike parts!

‡ **I imagine it really really expensive to get myself a custom-made bike. Am I right?**

A custom bike isn't the cheapest way to go, to be sure. My frames start at \$1800 for a basic fillet brazed frame with standard parts and a one-color paint job. For some perspective, consider that I spend 50+ labor hours on the fabrication of a basic frame - considerably more for a fancy lug frame!

‡ **Are you able to make your living from building bikes?**

the process of doing trying to figure out how to make it happen. What I do is really more about creating art than running a business, so traditional business models don't quite seem to fit. For me, the goal isn't to crank out as many bikes and parts as possible, but to really spend the time necessary to deliver a bicycle that is soundly constructed, functional, unique, and has the ability to touch my clients on an emotional level. In other words, I strive to create interactive art! So the trick is going to be to figure out how to maintain this philosophy of building while providing myself (and hopefully others as I grow my business!) with a full and satisfying life.

‡ **Have you ever been confronted with reservations concerning your skills based on your gender?**

I've been fortunate to have been on the receiving end of very little discrimination or derogatory behavior based on my gender. I suspect that this is largely due to my habits as a solitary builder working by herself for the most part. However, when I have interacted with other industry folks it's been in a trade show setting for the most part, and everyone has been very kind and welcoming. Sadly, I have TFW friends and acquaintances in the industry with more traditional jobs who haven't had quite the same experience as me.

‡ **What's more challenging: designing a road bike or a mountain bike? Why?**

A road bike is definitely more straight forward than a mountain bike, simply because there are fewer variables to deal with. For example on a road bike, I can almost take it for granted that there will be ample clearance for 25-28mm tires and a standard crankset. When I'm designing a mtb rear assembly, I need precise and reliable measurements for tire width, tire size, crank length and q-factor, chainring size, rear hub spacing, and chain line. Once I have all of those variables sorted out, I create a detailed design in CAD and play the balancing act that is necessary to make sure that everything will fit properly. Often times I will need to add secondary bends to the chain stays and / or dimples for chainring and tire clearance. I use a to scale version of my drawing during building to make sure I've got the chain stays where they need to be, and once they are mitered and tacked I'll do a dry fit will all the parts as a final check. It can be a frustrating process, especially with the trend towards wider tires and 1x drive trains!

‡ **How much of you is in each bike?**

I would imagine that there is quite a bit of me in each frame! It would be difficult me for to depersonalize the process of frame building. In fact, doing so would effectively silence my voice as an artist a defeat the purpose of me making art in the first place. That said, I really do see my frame building as a collaborative process. It's a conversation between the client and me, and without the client's input and ideas the work wouldn't have a chance to develop into something special. This collaboration is a big part of what keeps

me engaged with frame building! If I'm working in a bubble, insulated from the world around me, I lose interest with what I'm doing rather quickly. I'm so grateful to be able to create artwork in a way that involves other people. It's truly a rich and rewarding experience!

‡ **Do you think one not loving to ride bikes him/herself was able to build a good bike?**

It would certainly be difficult on an emotional level to create an outstanding bike if a builder didn't have a basic love and appreciation for the cycling herself. I do think it would be possible to build a perfectly functional 'by the books' frame, but I'm not sure the end product would have the extra bit of magic that takes a bike from standard to spectacular. Aside from the intangibles, I personally rely heavily on my own field testing in order to expand and improve on what I'm doing. It would be quite a handicap if a builder didn't like to ride bikes! And then I would wonder, why even do it?

‡ **Of all bikes you already have created: Do you have a favorite? How does it look like?**

Hands down, my favorite build is the 650c road bike I built Doug Fattic during the frame building class I took with him. It's my favorite because it is an absolute blast to ride! It's super snappy, responsive, fast in the corners, AND there is no toe overlap. Now, I realize that toe overlap somewhat of a controversial subject, but for me it was quite bothersome and I while I had adapted to it on other bikes, I didn't realize how much it was really stressing me out until it was gone! I'm a huge proponent of proportional wheel sizes, especially now that I have direct experience of how much of a difference a small wheel bike can make on overall ride experience. The 650c wheel diameter may or may not be technically 'slower' but it sure as heck feels faster than my 700c bike because I'm more comfortable, and therefore better able to handle the bike and ride the brakes less!

‡ **Have you already build (a) bike(s) for yourself? If yes: How easy or difficult was this? Why?**

My first handful of bikes were all for me - I'm my best test subject! The only difficulty was getting the sizing correct, but honestly in those early days I really was just winging it in so many areas that sizing wasn't as critical. It was more about getting some practice frames under my belt and building confidence as a fabricator.

‡ **Is there a bike you're dreaming to build once? If yes: please tell us about it!**

This is such a fun question! I've got lots of exciting ideas rattling around in my dreams. The ones that will probably get built the first is a pair of matched kitty-themed 24 inch fat bikes for my mother and me. I promised my mom a fat bike from practically day one of my frame building journey! Of course I would need one too, because they just look like so much fun!! I'm also dying to build myself a 650b cyclocross race frame and fork. There are some tire manufacturers that are finally starting to come out with 650b cross tires that could even pass the UCI tire width limit!! Skinny 650b tires are something I've been lusting after for a while, and I'm super keen to add a 'for real' small wheel cx bike to my stable. I mentioned carbon fiber earlier in our interview, I've got mental plans for some really wild 3D printed lug designs going that I'm hoping to bring into reality, too!

‡ **At the end of our interview: What advice would you give to other female mountain bike riders?**

Get out of your head, go at your own pace, don't worry about whether or not you're doing it 'right', and (perhaps most importantly) ride with folks who encourage and support you! I almost quit mountain biking after my first few tries because the people I chose to ride with pushed me into technical areas that I wasn't ready for and then shamed me for going slow and crashing. Those rides were stressful and emotional and they left me feeling like I just didn't have the right stuff to ride mountain bikes. Thankfully, I kept at it - at my very own slow pace, mind you - and eventually I learned to really love my mtb rides! Of course,

I'm hardly a pro and there are still lots of trail features that strike fear in my heart when I come across them. But it's ok if I don't want to tackle that log or rock garden today, it will surely be waiting for me tomorrow, or the next day, or whenever I'm ready for it!