

Leon Basin enjoys the challenge and creativity of rollerblading



Roll With It

Leon Basin has a message: rollerblading is back, and he wants you to try it

BY SHERI RADFORD // PHOTOS BY KK LAW

It was 1994 and Leon Basin was 12 years old, growing up in Tel Aviv, when the rollerblading craze swept the world. He wanted a pair. His parents, having watched Basin lose interest in swimming, chess, martial arts and handball, were hesitant to buy shiny new skates that might end up mothballed under the bed, so he saved every cent until he could afford to purchase a pair of his own.

It was love at first skate.

"What I really got into as a 12-year-old kid was the skate park and doing flips and tricks and jumps, the cool part of skating," Basin says. Soon he became so good that he started winning competitions, getting flown around the world and being given free gear. Over the next few years, as rollerblading lost its lustre for most people, Basin remained devoted. "It became uncool but I stayed with it."

When he was 17, his family left Tel Aviv for Toronto. Basin quickly bonded with the rollerbladers in his new home. "It was a really easy way to move to Canada, because being a good skater, I was instantly accepted by all the skaters," he says. "They are still my best friends." But Toronto didn't feel like home. "I wanted to move to BC, because it has better weather, better for skating." He and another skater packed up a car and headed here.

Basin recognized a void in the Canadian retail scene: no stores stocked the specialized equipment he needed. He began ordering skates and parts online for himself and a few friends. As more and more people asked him to order skate supplies, he saw potential. While working 90-hour weeks at two jobs, Basin started an online store for dedicated skaters. Once again, he was saving every cent to put toward rollerblades.

In 2010, Basin quit the two jobs and opened his first physical store, Shop-Task, here in Vancouver. It was so successful that locations in Toronto and Montreal followed in 2011 and 2012. Everyone employed in the stores,



from the sales clerk to the accountant, is a rollerblader, and each one is passionate about the sport. "That's our goal, to make rollerblading popular," Basin says. "That's my personal mission statement. I want to make it more accessible, make it more affordable, make it cool."

To encourage a feeling of community, Shop-Task holds free skate sessions every week at Sunset Beach. Anywhere from five to 40 people show up to learn simple tricks, such as skating around cones, and to skate around the seawall. Visitors and beginners are always welcome. If you don't own a pair of skates and aren't ready to commit to buying a pair yet, Basin recommends renting from Yes Cycle (page 69).

For a more challenging skate, Basin suggests the Seymour Demonstration Forest (off Highway 1 in North Vancouver). He

enjoys the novelty of new skate parks, because they allow him to "be more creative. It's untouched ground." He does, however, also like Bonsor Skatepark (near Metrotown in Burnaby) and Chuck Bailey Skatepark (in Surrey). When asked what his favourite spot to blade is, he raves about "zooming through downtown, using the city as obstacles, surfing the streets."

Basin is so enthusiastic about rollerblading and the idea that it's coming into vogue again that he had "rollerblading is back" printed on his business cards. After a few minutes spent talking to him, you'll believe it, too.

Join Leon Basin on Sunday nights in the summer at Sunset Beach (Map 1: D3). Learn simple tricks at 6 p.m., then skate the seawall as a group starting at 7 p.m. For more info, call Shop-Task (page 39). [W](#)

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