

# A LIFETIME OF BEAUTIFUL THINGS

LEGENDARY SURFBOARD MAKER DAVE STUBBS IS NOW USING HIS TALENTS TO MAKE BESPOKE WOODEN BIKES, DESIGNED TO PERFORM AS WELL AS THEY LOOK. *BICYCLING* MET THE 56-YEAR-OLD AT HIS HOME IN SCARBOROUGH TO TALK BIKES, CARBON SKELETONS, AND WHY IT'S ALWAYS MISTY IN MISTY CLIFFS...

WORDS & PICTURES: MIKE FINCH



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When surfer Dave Stubbs decided to give up a degree in land surveying to make surfboards full-time, it's unlikely he saw himself planing down a wooden bicycle frame 30 years in the future.

In the world of surfing, Stubbs is a legend. His surfboards are highly prized, and his longboards have delivered two world champions. But he loves working with his hands; and over the years, he's continued to look for different challenges – including building bespoke wooden bikes.





**HAND MADE**

I loved making stuff with my hands, and I would go into town on my bicycle – carrying my boards under my arm – to visit a board maker. It was pretty hectic, carrying boards like that.

**SURFBOARD SHAPING**

I started off making surfboards when I was 16 years old. There was no money for surfboards in my family back then, so I started trying to figure out how to make them myself, while I was at school.

**EARLY SHAPERS**

I first learnt to make surfboards from a guy called Clive Barber, who took me under his wing and gave me pointers. I learned the basics of working with my hands from him.



**SCHOOL**

I hated school; I only really went to school for sport. I was first-team rugby and cricket captain. But then I started surfing, and gave up all the cricket and rugby – my parents were really worried, because they thought I was on drugs. Surfing wasn't as cool as it is now. When I made the Western Province team in surfing, they were a little happier!

**EXPANSION**

I have a real passion for making beautiful things, and bikes are beautiful things to make. Besides, the surfboard industry is in a shocking state, so I needed to expand!

**MISTY CLIFFS**

The mist in Misty Cliffs has something to do with the cold air from the south-easter hitting the warm sea. But I'm not a weather guy.



**RENOVO**

I was very inspired by Renovo wooden bikes. I saw what they were doing, and I started playing around with full-sized bike design.

**GRAVEL TRAVEL**

My friend Kyall recently rode my new gravel bike at the Double Century, and then – a week later – he took the bike on the green belt. The gravel bike was a turning point in terms of where I wanted to take my bike design.  
*The bonus:* You can get a 44c tyre in the back of the gravel bike..



**DESIGN INDABA**

In 2014, Nils from Woodstock Cycles in Cape Town got hold of me, and told me they were looking for nice things to display at the International Design Indaba. He put me in touch, and that's when I made my first real road bike.

**GUITARS**

Ten years ago I started diversifying, and making guitars. And then, nine years ago, I had my first child. A mate of mine brought back a balance bike from overseas, and I thought: "I'm sure I can make that for my son." That's how it all started with the bikes.



**I'M THE KIND OF GUY WHO, IF I CAN'T MAKE IT, I DON'T WANT IT. THAT'S WHY I BUILT MY OWN HOUSE.**



**I'M DRIVEN BY MAKING SOMETHING NEW, AND BY MY BELIEF THAT I CAN DO IT AND GET IT RIGHT. ALL THE BIKES ARE SO DIFFERENT, AND INDIVIDUAL.**



**A STUBBS WOODEN BIKE**

**GROUPSETS**

Getting the groupsets and components was tricky. It's like the mafia! But we finally got friendly with the right people. Although sometimes, I'm tempted to hop on a plane to China and go and get them myself.

**FINISHING**

Realistically, I could get a bike out in two weeks, if I worked flat out. But there's a lot of finishing work, and spraying, and that's what takes time.

**CHAINSTAYS**

I use a hydraulic press to press the chain stays into shape, with a heating board and a mould.

**HARD WOOD**

I use hard woods, such as European White Ash. It's the wood they use to make baseball bats, and it has excellent strength-to-weight properties.



**THE FIRST**

The first full bike I built was very complicated. There were too many steps, and more of a chance that things could go wrong. I knew I needed to simplify. Now, I basically make two triangles out of three pieces of wood. The wood is hollowed out, and I use carbon braids inside the wood to add strength, stability and stiffness. I pioneered the method, and no one else does that yet. It's basically a wooden skeleton infused with carbon.

**LIGHT + STRONG**

The biggest challenge, making a bike, is to make it both light and strong. I spent hours doing research on what people were doing with wooden bikes. It's amazing what you can find out on the internet these days.

**DON'T MESS WITH THE FORK**

I use a carbon fork because when it comes to that stuff, you don't want to mess around. The problem is that the wooden frame will last 100 years if you look after it, but the carbon will actually fatigue.

**SOFT RIDE**

Wooden bikes are a really soft ride, and very compliant. But it's still stiff, so it's really a performance bike. You get very little road vibration.

**THE INTERNET**

It's amazing what people give away on the internet. You can call up any bike on the planet and see all the dimensions. Part of my process was learning to design using a 3D program. But I've got the hang of it now.