

# PERSISTENCE WITHOUT PREJUDICE

# Aaron Suski

WORDS BY Mackenzie Eisenhour  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Sean Cronan

## PRO SPOTLIGHT

**"THAT NIGHT, I HAD A DREAM...** He could lay to waste everything in his path. He left a scorched earth in his wake... I didn't know where he came from or why. I didn't know if he was dream or vision. But I feared that I myself had unleashed him."—H.I., *Raising Arizona*, 1987

Aaron Suski's skateboarding and lifestyle can be best described as hard, heavy, and durable. Far from a shooting star, Suski is more of a quietly present Arizona cypress—a tree best known for use as fence posts or timbers in mine shafts. His career, regardless of his sponsors, has not been punctuated by peaks and valleys, face tattoos and a loud

mouth, or contest trophies and his own TF with a tanning booth. Rather, Aaron reflects a steady growing and long-lasting presence in a crop that at times sees surrounding vegetation sprout and wither in the course of one harsh winter, or simply wiped out in droves by the occasional crown wildfire. His trajectory has remained constant—even as his geography has shifted seasonally between the dark grit of NYC streets and the dry, open silence of an AZ desert ditch. As the old expression goes, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." In Suski's case, those words could not ring truer.





**LET'S TAKE IT BACK.** How did skateboarding find you in the rural New York tristate area?

Around eighth grade I was involved with a youth group. It was kind of cool. We'd all hang out and do little projects and what not. One of my good friends, Willy, was in the group with me and we were actually doing this 24-hour fast at the time for one of the other family in the group's son who wasn't well. Anyway, we had all this free time and ended up going to the park across the street and sitting on the bench. We were watching the fountain and enjoying the evening, and out of the blue these couple of dudes just rolled up with a launch ramp rolling on their boards. They set it up and right away it was like *Animal Chin* [1987] right in front of us. These guys just started going off on the thing—360s, judos, whatever. I had no idea what any of it was, but we were both completely blown away. It might have been the fasting [laughs], but my homey and I were just stoked from that second on. The dudes were super cool too. They started talking to us like, "You guys should get boards, start skating." They planted the seed and we were hooked. Later on as we got more involved in our town's little scene we became really good friends with those guys. I still talk to one of them, my friend John, who lives in Portland. I can never thank those dudes enough for planting the seed.

**First legit setup?**

After the obligatory K-Mart toy deal I stepped it up to the Enjoy Jeff Grosso, Indys, Schmitt Stix Radials, and all the plastic add-ons. I remember thinking the Radials were rad because they had little hubs in them. They looked like rims or something. I would practice tricks in my basement for hours on end to get them under my belt before I went out on the streets [laughs]. We had a dirt driveway, so I spent a lot of time down in that basement.

**You could have been the next Rodney Mullen.**  
[Laughs] Yeah, I'm guilty of getting my pogo on.

**First video part you memorized?**

That's a funny one because I was at that church group again later on and we got our hands on a copy of *Sick Boys* [1988]. We watched it in the basement of the church and were psyched. I don't think there were any chaperones around at the time, but some of the voiceover was pretty raw for a church setting [laughs]. At least it seemed that way back then. But I was immediately a fan of the dudes in there like Natas [Kaupas], Tommy [Guerrero], Mic-E [Reyes], all those guys. I was so stoked when that came out on DVD.

**When did you start hitting NYC on skate missions?**

When we turned sixteen, one of my good friends, Frank Natiello, who actually rode for Zoo at one point and had some tricks in *Mixtape* [1998], would come pick me up in the boondocks. He actually lived way outside the city too but had access to a car. I would tell my mom that I was going to sleep over at his house for the weekend and then drive out to the city instead. My mom was actually a cop and an investigator, so she probably knew but let it slide. Frank was awesome. He was just super pumped to skate and film all the time. Wherever or whenever—good times.

**What were you guys hitting up? Brooklyn Banks and all that?**

Oh hell yeah. Brooklyn Banks, Midtown, Downtown—pretty much as much as we could. There were a lot of contests going on at the small banks at that time, so we would try to make it there for those. This was around '90 to '93.

**Did you make it over the wall?**

I made it over the wall. Probably not the first couple tries, but I eventually made it over. That was crazy though, right? Like over the wall and straight into traffic.

**Who were some of the legends you saw skate back then?**

All the O.G. heads; Jeff [Pang], Harold [Hunter], Justin Pierce, [Sean] Sheffey, Hamilton [Harris], Ryan [Hickey], Mike [Kepper]. Seeing all that seriously just blew my f—king mind, man. I mean, I'd grown up in rural areas and to be that young and be exposed to that extreme of an urban scene plus the level of the skating was just shocking. Sh-t, New York is still shocking.

GAP TO BACKSIDE SMITH GRIND.





FRONTSIDE BLUNTSIDE.

**I MIGHT  
HAVE A  
MIDLIFE  
CRISIS  
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MAN... I'LL  
BE WEARING  
CHECKERED  
PANTS NEXT  
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PHOTO.**

**Did you come up with Justin Pierce?**

Yeah, for sure. Rest in peace, JCP. He was a good cat. I miss him dearly. We had the same birthday on the same year, so we always had a bond right there. We would celebrate together and everything. He lived in PA, right over the river from where I went to school in New York. Basically, we had our own little tristate crew: Justin, Frank, Jamie Story, Rich Arbitelle, and myself. It was some really solid times—we would always go on cool missions together.

**After seeing some of the older heads coming up, is it a trip to be on Zoo York now?**

Hell yeah. I mean, Zoo has been around for a while and I always liked what they were doing. And now to be a part of it after all these years is badass. It's kind of like a full circle—this being my third New York-based company, from Brooklyn Boards to 5Boro to Zoo.

**First time to AZ?**

I graduated from high school in '93 and ended up going to Buffalo State for a year. I only went there for two semesters, but it's weird because I met so many great people that I still keep in touch with today. It seriously felt like four years. We were skating so much and snowboarding. It was rad. I ended up back home the year after that and was kind of on the fence about going back to school. I loved it, but the winters were just so non-skate friendly. Fall was rolling in and one of my homeys mentioned he had an aunt out in Tucson. Looking back, it was pretty spontaneous. We called her up and she was cool with us staying there, so three of us packed up all we had went to the Greyhound station and bought tickets. We got out there, stayed with her for about three weeks, and eventually we all got jobs and got our own place. Then we were rollin' [laughs]. We got fully involved with the skate scene here [Arizona] and just loved it. We ended up staying a few years. I got my first package from Brooklyn Boards,

which was originally going to be called Tristate, out here around '95 and then have pretty much been going back and forth ever since.

**People claim you "blew up" with the back tail over the box at Tampa Am 2000. Would you say that's accurate?**

[Laughs] Yeah, I don't know about blowing up. That always sounds a little cheesy. But yeah, whatever, the stars were aligned. It was an opportunity. It was cool and I got a lot of recognition off of that.

**Had you planned it out or was it just something like, "Yeah, I think I could back tail that?"**

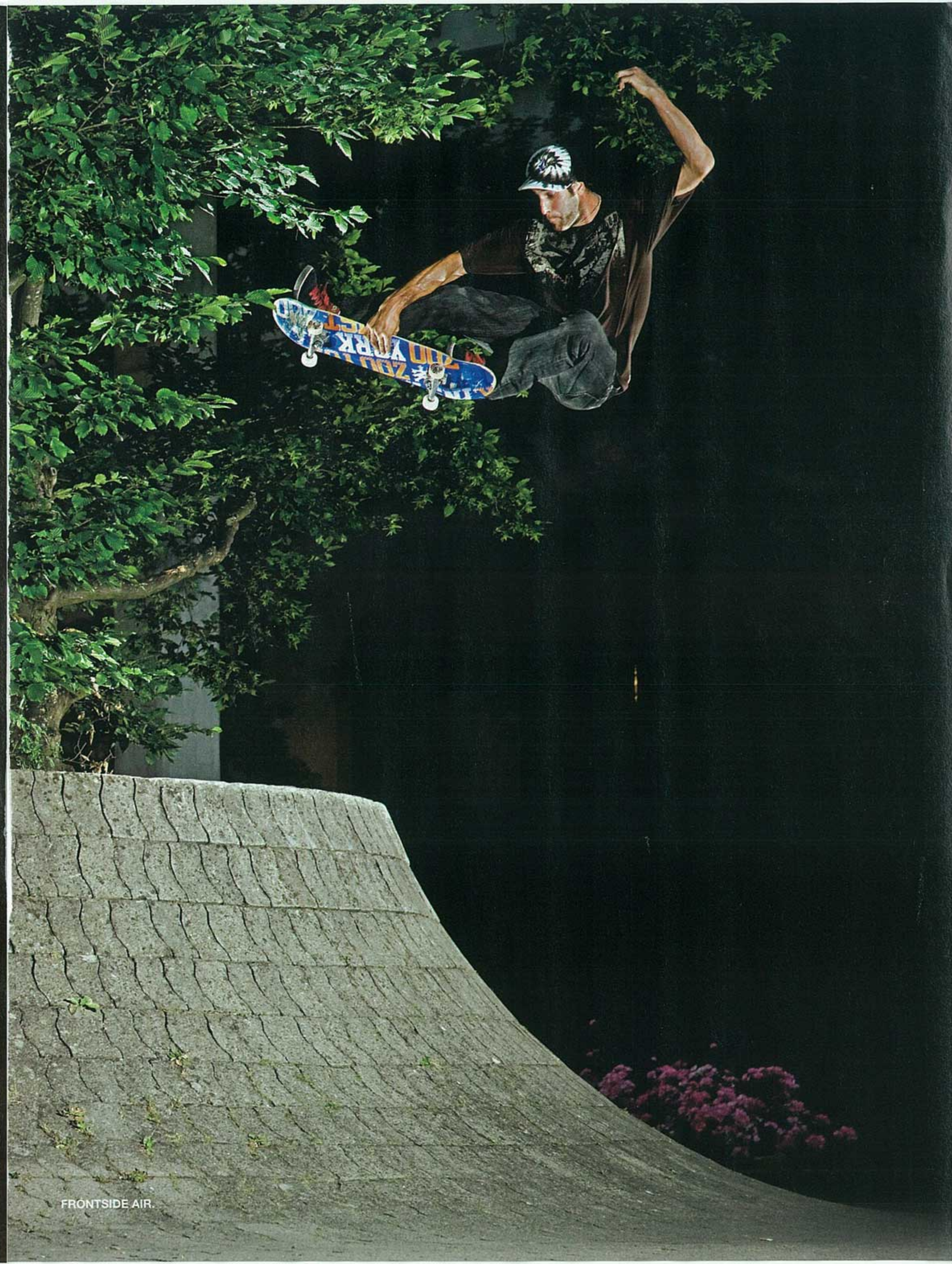
I can't even remember for sure. I think I was back lippping it and just figured, "Yeah, back tail could go down." It's funny because a gap to rail back then was just so new and such the thing, you know? The funniest part, honestly, if I remember correctly, that thing was really pretty low. And it wasn't like it was monstrous. I mean, I've skated way bigger gap to rails. But in that era that was just the craze.

**Dude, what are you doing? You've got to hype up your legacy right now.**

[Laughs] Oh yeah, right. So it was like twenty feet wide. Basically, it had the first Mega Ramp roll-in to the gap to rail. I just went for it, man. Fear is a sign of weakness.

**Do the fluke Suskis à la Marcus McBride on Hubba in *Trilogy* [1996] count?**

[Laughs] I'd actually seen Kevin Taylor do one like that too. But you know [laughs], it was all planned from my basement practice sessions. Dude, seriously, I don't know, I can't claim anything. I did some f—ked up backside five-0s because I couldn't do regular ones and it seemed like a better lock for me. I did it in a sequence for an Australia tour article to backside 180 out and somebody somewhere stapled my name to it.



FRONTSIDE AIR.









SWEeper.



GAP TO SUSKI GRIND.

I do feel like you were the first guy to purposefully sit on it that way though, if it's any reconciliation. Yeah, I mean, I was definitely going for my trucks. It wasn't like a back tail attempt. But I'm cool either way [laughs]—they can call it the Marcus grind. F—k it. I don't care. That's just the way I do my backside five-Os, man—perfect [laughs]. I guess it worked out. I got lucky. I'm definitely honored to have a trick with my name in it.

All right, getting into the crux of it—regardless of your sponsors through the years, skater-owned or suit-backed, you seem to remain the same guy that you entered skateboarding as. I feel like you could get on Deathwish tomorrow and not change a thing. Some guys change it up every other year. You don't seem to. Well, I don't know how a sponsor would change me. I'm just trying to be the dude I am. I know what you're saying. I mean, for me, I just roll, and the rest is pretty much scenery. I do me [laughs].

I mean if a dude came at you from Birdhouse and had been like, "We want you to wear this red logo shirt, shave, and you can't wear the cap..."

Oh no. No. See, that's not me. I mean, yeah, you should promote your sh-t and wear the shirts and stuff, but it can't control you to that extent or you never knew who you were in the first place. Wait, are you sayin' I should change sh-t up? Should I get a Mohawk or something [laughs]?

I'm just saying, times are rough, man. You need a gimmick these days. You might want to rethink your marketing stance. No, honestly, I think it's rad. I've just seen so many pros roll with the tide. It's cool to see somebody make tide. I don't know if it's a good thing or not. I might have a midlife crisis coming up, man. I might be in for a big change—just blow your philosophy and your observations out the window. I'll be wearing checkered pants next time you see me in a photo [laughs]. Is there a question involved in this? On the real

though, there's a lot of changes going down in skateboarding right now. Everything is now, now, now. It's changed a lot throughout the years. I've just been trying to roll.

How accurate is the film *Raising Arizona*?

Damn, that's funny. We were seriously just talking about it last night. I've actually never seen it. I keep getting told I'm slacking and I need to update my AZ heritage. Ask me next week—I'm going to go rent it.

How is fatherhood treating you?

Sophia's fifteen months right now. Fatherhood has been good. It's definitely a trip. She's awesome. She's really funny. It adjusted my life in many ways. It's been amazing. I have to admit, it's a lot of time management right now—which pushes me to organize my life a little better. It's all worth it. But it's like, go skate here, be home at this time, that kind of stuff. Organization is definitely not my strength, so this is teaching me a set of new skills.

Are you holding it down for Starr Skates? Is that like Tucson's FTC?

Yeah, still holding it down, for sure. It's the only solid skate shop in town, so I gotta support that. It's been around for a while and it's been through its changes, as has skateboarding. But it's cool. It's right around the corner from my house and it's got a good crew running it. We chill there for sure.

Run down Randy Colvin's "wedge" ditch gap.

I took a couple half-ass shots at it. I'm thinking I could do it, but the speed is a huge factor. We had it as a King Of The Road challenge last year—just to try it. So we went to Randy and asked his advice on how to do it. He told us, "Get towed in by a motorcycle." We didn't have one. It's large, man. No joke. And the thing is you land and the bank is fine, but then you hit all these cement tiles. Each tile has an inch gap between it, so if it gets sketchy, you're definitely going down. Randy and Colby [Carter] are still the dudes.

**A BUNCH OF DUDES MOVED TO PHOENIX. IT WAS KIND OF LIKE, "YEAH, WHY WOULDN'T YOU?"**





OLLIE.

**I MIGHT BE  
STEREO-  
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OR THE  
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Did you trip out on the AZ migration a few years back?  
Ronnie Creager, Rob Welsh, et cetera...  
Yeah. A bunch of dudes moved to Phoenix. It was kind of like, "Yeah, why wouldn't you [laughs]?" Especially Phoenix, for skating there's just so much urban sprawl and sh-t going up so fast—ditches, street spots, parks... What do they have now? Like 30 parks within twenty minutes of each other? I wasn't surprised at all. It's harsh though. You gotta be a warrior out here. Just like in the Northeast where you battle through the winter, out here you battle through the summers. The heat can drive you insane.

Mandatory Satori Wheels tour story?  
[Laughs] What? Should I think of one right now?

I just always hear, "Dude, their tours are the best."  
They got a good thing going. It's like they're putting out something completely different, you know? I mean how many people get asked about their wheel sponsor in an interview? I feel like their roots, no pun intended, just shine through.

How good is Chaz Ortiz?  
Yeah, he's good, man. He goes for it. I'd sum him up as consistent. But damn, he's getting it thrown at him. Good for him. It's different from what skateboarding offered me or what I got out of it, but to each his own. He's killing it.

Would he get it if you sat down and explained to him that when you were getting your first boxes you were still working as a carpenter? Like that there was no Gatorade sponsor back then.

Yeah, he's pretty receptive. I think he understands that this is temporary. He seems pretty mature for his age. He's got a couple years under his belt. But, you know, the more skateboard history goes on, the more there is. You can't really expect him to log the whole thing in immediately.

You think these kids will be ready if it really goes back to grassroots like we saw?  
Some of 'em will. Some of 'em won't. Some are going to shine, and some are just gonna get weeded out. I think he'll [Chaz Ortiz] be one of the one's that shines.

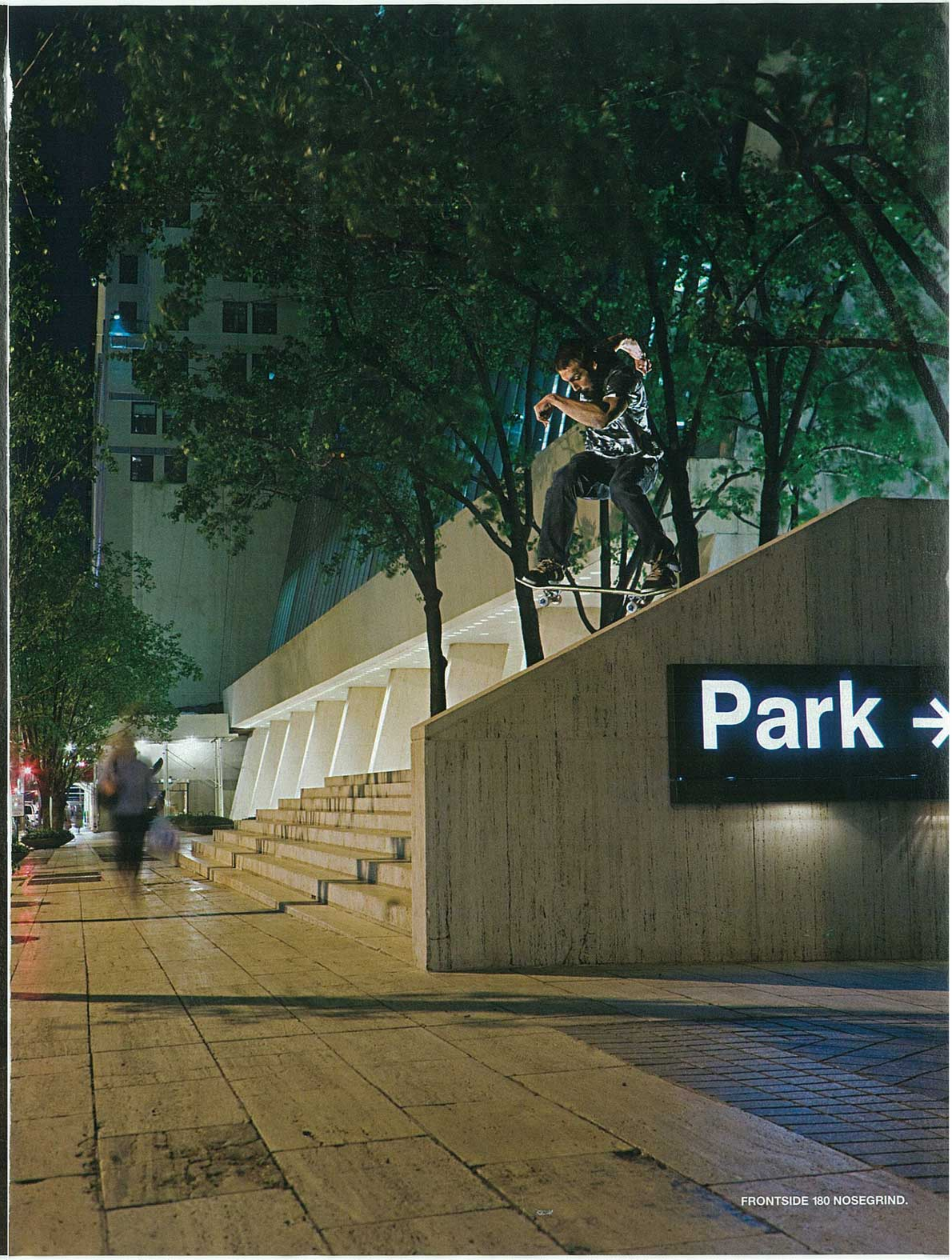
When does *State Of Mind* drop?  
It's scheduled to drop in April. I'm just doing the hustle shuffle right now. I got shoulder surgery a few months back and now I'm back on it. I was doing good before the injury, but now I just gotta hustle. My friend Josh has been on it filmer-wise and super cool, so we're taking care of business. I'm super appreciative of having Josh out here.

Is it a trip when those dudes come out as opposed to seeing them in a big office in New York?  
No doubt. It's a pleasure having them here on my home turf. I wish they had more time 'cause it's like you want to show them the whole vibe. I wanted to do the whole nine—fire in the backyard, take them up to the mountains, all that. But we're filming right now, so it's strictly business. Another time they gotta come out and enjoy some of the other things that the desert has to offer.

What foods do you eat or not eat and why?  
I'm a part-time vegetarian [laughs]. No, I'm a conscious eater. Sometimes it's kind of hard to maintain, especially on tour. But for the most part I take into consideration what I put in my body. I'll eat some meat and fish here and there, but other than that I'm pretty much all vegetarian. I do the best I can. I mean, none of us are perfect.

Is it health or is it ethical?  
It's both. I'm just trying to do my best to live green and be conscious of what's going on. Eating meat causes so much pollution. I don't think a lot of people really make that connection and plus the quality of meat isn't what it used to be. Too much sh-t is fed and injected into these animals for faster production.

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FRONTSIDE 180 NOSEGRIND.





TRANSWORLD  
**SKATEboarding**  
FRONTSIDE NOSESLIDE



*Jack Sabback*

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# Aaron Suski

## PRO SPOTLIGHT

**Do you have any sort of established spiritual beliefs?**

Sure, I think by growing up in the country I've gained a profound respect and connection with nature. When I'm out on a hike or camping trip it's like a meditative state for me and totally intriguing. It's like my sanctuary. Some people go to church, I go to the mountains. It's great. I mean, who doesn't appreciate a good swim in a lake or river and checking out the serenity. It's not called the "great outdoors" for nothing. However, it's not going to be so great when everything is all screwed up. That's why I just want to try to give back a little in my lifetime and have less of an imprint. I don't want to take all my life. I want to go out with a little bit of class. But that's just basic humanity.

**How will we as humans ultimately overcome the current seemingly dire situation we are in?**

We need more education in that field. It's like we get taught to recycle, but it was like this one theme week in school and then we forgot about it. This is the planet we live on, and what we take is what we should give. Big companies are based on immediate survival. We should be based on the long-term. This kind of issue can result in more jobs too. It's a win-win. Maybe some people would take a fall but other people would rise. I mean, it's completely in line with our system of economics. Especially recycling. It's just amazing to me that some cities still don't have recycling bins available to people. Who is running these places? It's going to create jobs, make money for the city, and help us get on the right path at the same time. The big wheel is really big, and it will be hard to get to spin the other way, but, ultimately, we won't have a choice. It's a big job. We got a lot of work to do.

**What can skateboarders do to make this right? Anything specific?**

I mean, they can do what anybody else can do—recycle, reuse, and reduce. Have you ever been to the grocery store and the dude is putting your one candy bar in a bag?! And if you have a bottle of water he might even double bag that sh-t. I'm always like, "Are you serious? Just give me that, I'll carry it, thanks." It doesn't even make sense to me. It's like they are so far from the thinking that what they are doing is wasteful. I have my own reusable bags anyway and try to use them as much as I can. And I don't want to come off as a saint. I cut corners just like anybody else. But I'm trying to be as conscious of it as I can and do what I think is right. This interview is rad because I can play my part and hopefully that will open up that kind of thinking for people. I might be stereotyped and criticized, or the dude with the FTW attitude might not buy my board, but f—k it. It feels good to give insight on important issues.

**Last piece of jewelry you bought?**

[Laughs] It cost me about ten bucks. We drove up to Colorado a couple months ago and on the way back we stopped just outside of Gallup, which is all Indian reservations. I bought this really cool turquoise teardrop necklace. I lost it. But it was around my neck for a couple months.

**So no diamond-encrusted initials?**

[Laughs] No. To each his own, but as skateboarders I feel like we need to be like stealth ninjas. Get in and get out. We need to be like chameleons and just blend in—dirty, grimy, whatever. Wearing flashy jewelry is fine, but you never know where you're going to end up either. I mean, wearing diamonds in the hood? You're just giving people reasons to f—k with you. You don't need to be flaunting. But hey, if that's your thing, cool.

**Last time you drank champagne?**

New Year's in Durango, Colorado while watching a cover band play.

**Last clean shave?**

[Laughs] About five months ago. It scratches my daughter when it gets out past a certain length.

**Last question. What would you put in your fantasy factory?**

[Laughs] Oh man. A super-wide mini ramp, drum kits and guitars all over for sure, a lot of art—paintings and sculptures. I'd take a Jacuzzi, all solar powered, of course. I'd harvest all my water off the roof. My friend just got into mountain climbing, so maybe a climbing wall. I don't know, I'd be lying if I said I'd turn it down, but you know, in AZ I'm pretty much already living in it. ○