



Luca Pandolfi Slays Monviso's Coolidge Couloir

# Dream Lines

by Trey Cook

**L**uca Pandolfi is a tall, hard-charging Italian at the forefront of the extreme snowboarding renaissance that's currently going down in Europe. His list of impressive descents over the past few years includes the first complete snowboard descent of the west face of Mont Blanc, the west face of the Eiger, and the north face of Lyskamm.

Last spring Luca capped another balls-out season with what was arguably the year's most important big-mountain snowboard descent in the Alps: the first descent of Monviso, a peak that very few skiers have ever tried and upon which even fewer have succeeded. Trey Cook, *Kronicle's* European Correspondent and editor of *ChamonixInsider.com* sat down with Pandolfi this summer to hear about the experience, and his thoughts about putting it all on the line.

**Kronicle:** How long have you been backcountry snowboarding? When and why did you start riding such committing lines?

**Luca:** I started snowboarding as a freestyler in Sauze d'Oulx, Italy, but 10 or 12 years ago I began to search for fresh lines on snowshoes. But I didn't start riding committing lines until I arrived in Chamonix, because Chamonix just changes your point of view and awareness of what is possible and what is not. In Chamonix, I was able to combine my passions for alpinism and snowboarding.

**K:** This spring you made a gnarly first snowboard descent of Monviso (3,841m/12,602 feet) in the Cottian Alps of Italy. Tell us more.

**L:** It's an 1,100-meter (3,609 ft) line in the middle of the north face called the Coolidge Couloir that's consistently 50° to 55° for the first 600 meters (1,968 ft). It's really, really exposed and in the middle there is a big patch of blue ice. There hasn't been a complete descent in 12 years. The top 60 or 70 meters (200-230 feet) is just rock so we started skiing below that, made like three turns, and then went left through a southwest section where the snow was pretty slushy. The top is super exposed and when my partner Cedric [Bernardini] skied into this area, a slab ripped and took him with it. He somehow managed to stop like 15 or 20 meters (50-65 feet) before a massive drop and we were all like, "Holy shit!" It was really scary, man.

After that there is the ice patch that is also very exposed and mentally committing. Climbing past it on the way up we found a band of snow maybe four meters (13 feet) wide and only 20 to 25 centimeters (7-10 inches) deep, so there was still a big question about whether we'd be able to ski it. By the time we reached it there were clouds coming up the mountain; it was windy with snow crystals spinning everywhere

"I see a mountain and I want to paint on it."

# I can dream on the mountain."

and spindrifts falling in waves down the ice like a waterfall. If I made a mistake there I would have fallen 600 meters (1,968 feet) straight to the bottom, but it was all so magical I decided to go. I cased over to the ice patch and made two really light turns. The first went well but the second was backside and my board sank to the ice and started skipping...tack tack tack *tack tack tack* and this panic hit me. I was able to transition into another turn and *snap*, I knew it was good after that. It was magic, man, one of the best moments ever.



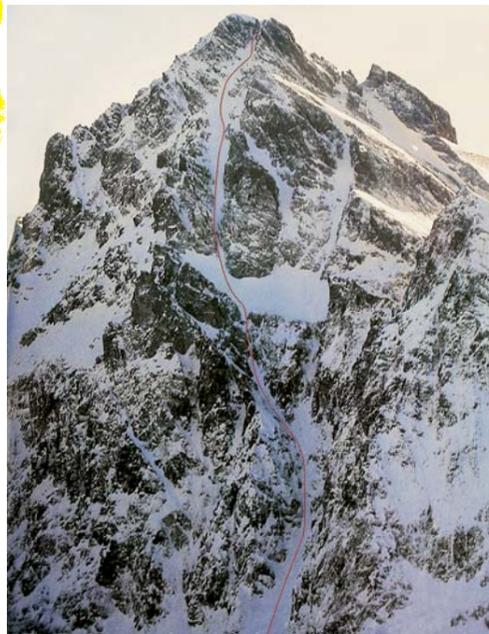
[above] Luca Pandolfi, fully frosted. [Nicklas Hansen] [facing page] Climbs like a dream: Luca leading the way up Monviso. [Cedric Bernardini]

"Every time I go in the mountains I'm scared and I'm pretty happy about that,

**because it's that fear that brings me home again."**



[above] Luca, tacking icy blue turns in the no-fall crux of Monviso's Coolidge Couloir. [Cedric Bernardini]  
[right] Line art: Luca left his mark on Monviso. [Luca Pandolfi]



After that it was wide open and I laid into some huge turns, and the snow was perrrrrrfect. It was a really complete descent—technical and steep with some big turns—and that's what I like best from a line.

**k:** So what is your approach to riding these big lines?

**L:** When I approach a line I like to ski it in a dynamic and fluid way, and when I have the chance to hit the gas, I hit it. I like style, man, which for me is about a lot more than just performance. It's about the complete experience. I like to ski from my heart rather than from my ego.

**k:** Everyone likes to see good style but for most people fear gets in the way...

**L:** You know, every time I go in the mountains I'm scared and I'm pretty happy about that, because it's that fear that brings me home again. Things go wrong when you lose the tension that comes with fear, when you think the difficulties are over and you're not in the present anymore. And for whatever reason, maybe you're tired or happy, you miss a sign and suddenly things go wrong. So that's why I think fear is important. I try to get a sense of it, metabolize it little by little until one day, it's like a spark: I'm ready, and you just go and you're in the moment and it's beautiful. A phone call, a few text messages and suddenly, like magic, different causalities come together to create a perfect moment, a few precious hours when the door opens. And if you have waited a long time for it and the door finally opens, then you have to seize the opportunity, step out of reality and jump through it.

**k:** So what's on tap for this coming season?

**L:** I would like to take another step and ride big mountains on another continent. I think it's the natural progression. I still have three big committing lines I want to ski around here, that I want to keep secret for now. I want to do something in the Himalaya because they are the biggest lines in the world, so we are organizing an expedition to go ski new lines in Pakistan. But because you never know about the political situation there we are also making a Plan B to go to South America.

**k:** Are you always contemplating new lines?

**L:** I love mountains. I look at a mountain and I feel like a painter, and the mountain is like a sheet of paper where I want to draw lines. It's super exciting for me, it's like it opens the door where all the dreams come from. I see a mountain and I want to paint on it. I can dream on the mountain.

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