

Kite



Alex Pastoc, the king of style. Pic by Andre Magarao

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Gaby slashing a monster at her home break in Margaret River, WA.

WAVE OF LIFE

GABRIELE STEINDL SHARES HER JOURNEY

This is my story, the story of my dream which came true with belief, commitment, hard work, taking a risk and breaking the rules of what society expects. >>>



Gabi bottom turn at her home break in Margaret River, WA.

"You want to become what?," my father screamed, holding his head with both hands, tearing out some of his hair whilst his face turned as red as a lobster. His face showed total shock, disapproval and non-understanding. My mum stood right beside him and tried to calm him down "Wolfgang please, let's listen first of all to what Gabi wants to tell us."

"Why on earth have I financed your education for you to become a surfer?"

"Professional kitesurfer dad, not surfer", I corrected him. A nurse stuck her head into the room asking whether everything was ok. My mum nodded "yes, thank you".

I had only just escaped the amputation of the big toe on my left foot, after returning from a life-changing trip in Morocco (where I learnt to kite) and was stuck in bed on the 15th floor of the Plastic Surgery Division of Vienna's biggest hospital. A cut on my foot that was stitched up without anaesthetic in the Sahara desert by a Moroccan doctor with no teeth had festered into heavy gangrene. If I would have waited another day to go and see a doctor in Vienna, my big toe would have been history.

"Dad, whether you like it or not, once I'm out of this hospital, I will be travelling to some really windy place to train all winter. And in the coming year I will be competing in the Kitesurfing World Cup. I want to become a professional kitesurfer and I know I can do it".

"You are crazy, completely crazy, what has come over you? How about your career, you're throwing everything away, Hong Kong, London,... you speak five languages, no, I won't allow that", he said.

"I'm 27 years of age dad, I'm sorry but that's what I will be doing, I just have to get out of here."

With a face red as a fireball, my dad ran out of the hospital room screaming "Our daughter has gone mad, I'm not going to support this."

Having grown up landlocked in Austria, the heart of Central Europe in a highly conservative home, I certainly did not have too many favourable factors going for me to become a professional kitesurfer. Today I'm looking back onto 13 years of travelling the world as one of the longest standing female professional kitesurfers in the history of the sport. My path, however, was anything but easy.

Ditching the corporate world for the beach

Being born and raised in Vienna with the nearest ocean many thousand kilometres away, the surfer-lifestyle seemed unrealistic. Following High-

School in Austria, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from a prestigious University in Scotland in my early twenties and moved to London where I lived and worked for a financial publishing house for several years. I then transferred to Hong Kong. Eventually I got bored of the finance industry, talking to bankers, lawyers, CEOs and stockbrokers. I applied and landed a once-in-a-lifetime job: Marketing and Distribution Manager for Action Asia.

A photo in the freshly printed issue of "Action Asia Magazine", then changed my life. Totally fascinated I stared at a surfer who glided on a board pulled by a huge kite over the water. In another photo, the guy even got airborne, seemingly flying through the air. Those photos stirred up immense emotions inside me. That new sport that was titled "A Revolution in the Water" seemed to me the perfect combination of everything that I loved: snowboarding, wakeboarding, sky diving and converged with my ultimate childhood dream of learning to surf. I swapped my high heels for sandals and threw it all away: top management position, trendy apartment in Soho and a good salary.

Rebirth

Shortly thereafter, I quit my job in Hong Kong, followed the voice of my heart and decided to live my dreams and become a professional kiteboarder.

Back then in 2002, my family and friends thought I was crazy and ruining my life and future. In those years as a professional athlete, nothing was served on a silver platter. I faced victories and defeats, burn-outs, as well as major injuries that could have meant the end of my career but I never gave up.

Several times in my career I adjusted my path and consequently my approach to the industry. Several times I was once again declared mad by others. I quit competing in the World Cup as the pressures killed my passion for the sport. Colleagues told me that I was mad and would lose my sponsors. I followed my heart instead of listening to them and successfully reinvented myself as one of the first true free riders in the sport.. I have organized media-projects all across the globe in search of new kiting-grounds since 2007. I capture my adventures with photos, words and film.

Today I live in Margaret River, WA, one of the most beautiful places that I found in my travels to over 50 countries. I've married an Aussie windsurfer Corey Jones and am now a permanent resident of Australia. This is my "Wave of Life", go and jump on yours. -K-