

## The Burnside Project

I come around the corner, and a smile comes across my face. I love it when there isn't a crowd. Only two other people braved the chill, and had the will, to get up this early. Upon arrival, my view is enhanced. Though I've seen it enough to burn an image into my subconscious, each visit brings new wonder. I climb onto the lower platform, and quickly scale the small wall to the upper. I nod at the other already standing there.

I've seen him before, but I don't need to know his name. A silent friendship binds us that rarely needs words. An occasional cheer or wince says more than the daily chat most are forced to endure. The sound of the second person rolls softly in my ears. His image creeps into the corner of my eye while I inspect my shoes. I scrub the soles back and forth on the pavement, out of habit, to insure a dry surface. I don't bother to watch him. I can hear him rolling smoothly down low. His slow, relaxed warm up run tells me he probably arrived short time ago. He makes his way up the back wall and his wheels go silent. The other one puts his foot on his tail and effortlessly rolls his truck over the coping. I watch him quickly drop away and coast to the hip. He glides past it, and I start to notice the entire view before me as he blends into a larger picture.

I see grey. Every shade of grey, in all its variety blends and curves from the lightest near whites, to a deepness rivaling black. The darkness overhead drones with the sound of a thousand automobile tires humming on the top of the bridge. Though designed for another purpose, it serves well as protection from the rain and weather. The sun and light, as well as the wind, come from the sides. The wind blows softly this morn, yet it nips at exposed skin. I know I will soon appreciate its soothing aspects as I warm up, so I try not to be bitter about it chilling my already cool body.

I hear the familiar pop of an ollie and my eyes automatically track its source. I turn in time to see him land on the transition. He landed the maneuver perfectly on the six foot ramp across from me. I whistle softly in appreciation. I follow his course and become interested in his choice of direction. He obviously knows the park well, and uses the knowledge to his advantage. So many others fall into the trap of using only a select few of the ramps, but he goes off the beaten path, and rides a side bowl and over the

small spine in the corner. He conquers most the obstacles with a fluid speed that belies the difficulty of his task. He goes in directions I don't expect, and it turns my mind toward thoughts of where I might ride soon enough.

The choices are nearly endless. Though only a couple hundred feet squared, not a large area, it is chock full of concrete delights. Formations of liquid rock, hardened into a myriad of varying surfaces that angle, bend, curve, and spill into the floor, from towering heights, to enormous pits. A vast array of shapes masterfully crafted to blend beautifully into an ever flowing form.

I scan over the park, ahead lies the upper bowl. A square pit elevated by transitional walls that make a six foot hip where they intersect at a right angle. The bowl sits next to, and is attached to, the back wall. It goes up twenty feet, and is rideable to the top. From there, I can choose to go left or right into the side bowls and banks, or turn and come back to my starting location of an eight foot transition that bends at a right angle and makes a pocket. Between here and there is an endless assortment of smaller terrain to make it different each time. I begin to devise a route, yet I know I will soon stray.

I cannot ride this place like a machine, for it was never planned or mapped out like a structure, but slowly created over time, shape by shape. It evolved from nothing to a living form that has its own energy. My course must change as I ride, because I do not work the terrain, but rather follow the energy of this concrete beast living under the Burnside bridge. Started as a project by a few who were dedicated, it has become much more than its name implies. My ears lose the roll of the other skaters wheels as he stops across the way. I put my foot on the tail of my skateboard, and effortlessly roll my truck over the coping.

