

l a s t r u n

James Niehues

You've probably admired this artist's work dozens of times—and then thrown it away. That's because Niehues, from Grand Junction, Colo., has painted trail maps for nearly 100 ski resorts around the world (that's Blackcomb, B.C., at right).

Born Dec. 22, 1945 (age 53)

Drawing Inspiration "I started drawing in the first grade, doodling in my notebook when I should have been studying. In ninth grade, I was sick in bed for several months. My mother bought me an oil painting set, and all I did was paint."

Getting On The Map "I worked a variety of jobs—as a technical illustrator, running a print shop and as an art director—before starting my 'second career' as a trail map artist at about age 40. I did the backside of Mary Jane at Colorado's Winter Park for artist Bill Brown. He was easing out of doing ski area illustrations, and I essentially took over his business."

Making The Scene "Whenever I can, I try to ski the area I'm doing a map of. It helps me understand what a skier sees and feels. My first priority is to make the map as accurate and realistic as possible. It has to do its job as a map first—then I try to make it pretty."

Bird's-Eye View "I work from aerial photos and topographic maps. I usually shoot the aerial photos myself. I was in Quebec, shooting Mont-Sainte-Anne from a small plane. We were bouncing all over. I had to use my credit card to scrape ice from the windows so I could shoot. The pilot finally motioned that we had to land."

Art Of The Deal "I use watercolors, and most paintings are 30 inches by 40 inches. I do about 20 projects a year, averaging two to three weeks a painting."

Glow Of Success "Big Mountain, Mont., is my favorite map. The mountain faces due west so I was able to paint it bathed in the alpenglow hues of light orange and pink. I took a chance, but the client loved it." —READE BAILEY

