

Ski maps painter owns a niche market

By Matt McCue, 99U

Chances are you've seen a James Niehues painting before, but you didn't know it. His canvas is the ski trail map, which is often overlooked for its artistic value. But since 1986, Niehues has created more than 240 different maps for resorts on five continents including Aspen Highlands, Sun Valley, Vail, Whistler Blackcomb, and Big Sky.

For this ski season, the 70-year-old has designed the trail map for the newly-combined Park City and Canyons ski areas, now America's largest ski mountain.

Niehues's mastery of a single métier may sound familiar. One day you design something relatively obscure for a client, and they recommend you to a colleague. The referrals snowball until pretty soon you're the go-to book jacket, wedding invite, or font designer, whether or not that was your intent.

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