

ROXY LO



Mike Alden

by Adam Hunt

SOME YEARS AGO,

Roxy Lo found herself boxed in and frustrated. An experienced industrial designer, she wondered if her future would be filled with only bunny sprinklers and diaper bags.

"My most memorable year of consulting was when there was absolutely slim pickings for industrial design work," Lo said. That year, Lo was moving back from a year working in Hong Kong and decided to partner with a polyresin manufacturer. With Target as a client, the manufacturer asked Lo if she could design an animal-shaped lawn sprinkler for the department store.

"I drew a bunny with an opening for the hose to enter under its bottom and a series of holes on top of its head for water to come out," she said. "I am proud of this design because it was funny as hell and I was humbled as a designer."

She knew then there were only so many hose sprinkler toys a department store could sell. But little did she know then that

years later she would be designing a highly successful carbon bike for a top boutique bike brand. That bike is Ibis Cycle's flagship carbon Mojo, the radical redesign of the company's full suspension bike. More recently, she worked on the Ibis Tranny, the company's monocoque carbon fiber hardtail.

Lo's varied design experience outside the bike industry involved projects ranging from diaper bags for Pottery Barn, consumer electronics for Hewlett Packard and purses for Nooworks. Inside the bike industry, she was designing hydration packs for CamelBak and lighting systems for Light and Motion.

She first gained experience in industrial design overseas. After finishing school and working two internships at design consultancies, she got disillusioned with consultants and moved to Hong Kong where she secured a job as a marketing manager for a ceramics company.

"Target then subsequently stole me, when I did a product pitch to them, to be a technical design manager for their Asian manufacturers," she said. But working for a big company wasn't the right fit for her either.

"I was further disillusioned from working with a large machine, so I returned to the States," she said. Back home, she worked with Taiwanese manufacturers as a design liaison to their U.S. customers.

From designing sprinklers, dinnerware and diaper bags, Lo's career as an industrial designer made as about as dramatic a change as could be imagined. In 2003, she received a professional tap on the shoulder from a former coworker, who

was an engineer for Santa Cruz Bicycles.

Her former coworker introduced her to Hans Heim who had worked for Santa Cruz as president and general manager for about 10 years. Heim had begun to feel hemmed in while at Santa Cruz and wanted to explore new opportunities. After Ibis' bankruptcy in 2002, Heim, along with partner Tom Morgan and former owner Scot Nicol, decided to bring Ibis Bicycles back from the dead.

"When Hans left Santa Cruz, he thought it would be cool to try working with me on the new Ibis Mojo Carbon. Then at 27, I designed my first mountain bike," said Lo. Not only did Lo redesign the Ibis Mojo, she also became a partner in the newly revitalized company, too.

Spend any time with Lo and one of the first things that becomes readily apparent is her infectious enthusiasm and can-do attitude.

"I don't always travel the prescribed route," Lo confessed. One particular story describes this persistence.

When Lo was 10, her mother took her to a Chinese dessert shop in San Francisco's Chinatown. The store served fried ice cream in the form of a little crunchy ball with ice-cold vanilla ice cream inside.

"The next day after school, I came home, took out the frying pan and a gallon of vanilla ice cream and set out to make fried ice cream," she said.

She turned

the stove up to medium-high and threw in a scoop of vanilla. It melted immediately.

"I thought that maybe the stove wasn't hot enough and then recalled there was some liquid that made the ice cream balls sort of bubble and float. So, I poured a half cup of vegetable oil and turned the burner on high."

Little did she know that there was a missing ingredient called batter coating the ice cream.

"My mom came home to a sugary mess on the stovetop and an empty gallon of ice cream," she said. "She didn't get too mad at me when I told her that I was just trying to make her dessert before dinner."

Lo carried this sense of fun and confidence to her design of the new carbon fiber, full suspension Ibis Mojo. Her challenge was to design the bike around the well-regarded Weagle DW-Link rear suspension system. David Weagle's DW-Link system was initially designed for his own Evil Bikes but later adopted by some of the industry's biggest hitters such as Turner, Independent Fabrication, Pivot Cycles and Iron Horse.

What were her thoughts when she was given task of designing a carbon fiber frame around a pre-existing suspension design?

"My first thought? That it was like playing the most difficult connect the dots game ever," she said. "I was given four points in space for the linkage, then two points where the center of the wheels existed, then a point where the bottom bracket was. It was pretty intimidating but exciting because

there were no constraints or expectations."

"The DW linkage and other similar suspension designs were oriented differently on different frames," said Lo. "My approach was to use design to demystify how the suspension worked within the frame geometry.

"I wanted the frame to express forward momentum and strength. The shock alignment flows directly into the bridge between the top and bottom tube, which gives both structural and visual integrity where the bike needs it most," she said.

A quick look at the new Ibis Mojo Carbon and its overall design suggests forward motion rather than the "grasshopper pump" look of some other bikes on the market.

"The bike design is focused on complementing the engineering," she added. "I was mostly excited by the fact that we were going all carbon, which pulled our path away from the legacy of metals."

Lo speculated on what the future may hold for other frame materials that may be introduced to the riding public.

"Ten years in the future I can see new polymers coming into our horizon. Perhaps we can one day grow our bike frames to custom body metrics. I think that the future of the bike is in the way we ride, our ergonomic fit and component integration with the bicycle frame." ⚙️



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