

UDO NEUMANN IS BOULDERING

Through his books, films and collaboration with Wolfgang Güllich, Klem Loskot and a new crop of world-class boulderers, "Udini" has revolutionized the sport. His newest book continues to usher bouldering into the future.

If all things related to bouldering counted as first ascents—films, books, photography, mixed media—Udo Neumann might just be the most prolific boulderer in history. Since 1982, when he began climbing, Neumann has been cranking out media at a feverish pace, not just documenting the sport, but altering the very way we understand the act of bouldering. Since bouldering seems to be many things for Neumann—an art form, a sport, a dance, a photo, therapy, a kick-ass time—I asked him what bouldering wasn't. "Nitpicking," he replied.

In March, Udini Mediaworks—Neumann's production company—published his latest project, a 237-page interactive e-book titled *The Art and Science of Bouldering* (www.artofbouldering.com, \$36). This book is neither an instructional text, nor a picture book, nor a book one should read in one sitting. Rather, it is an assemblage of striking photos (historical and contemporary), poetic musings, captions and, of course, personal visions of what it means to boulder.

Udo Neumann was there in the *beginning*. He co-authored the sport's most successful training book, the now classic but still relevant *Performance Rock Climbing* (1993), which brought professional sports-science theory into a sport where climbers were primarily pumping out on Bachar ladders and doing pull-ups on fingerboards. The book introduced climbers to training strategies we take for granted today.

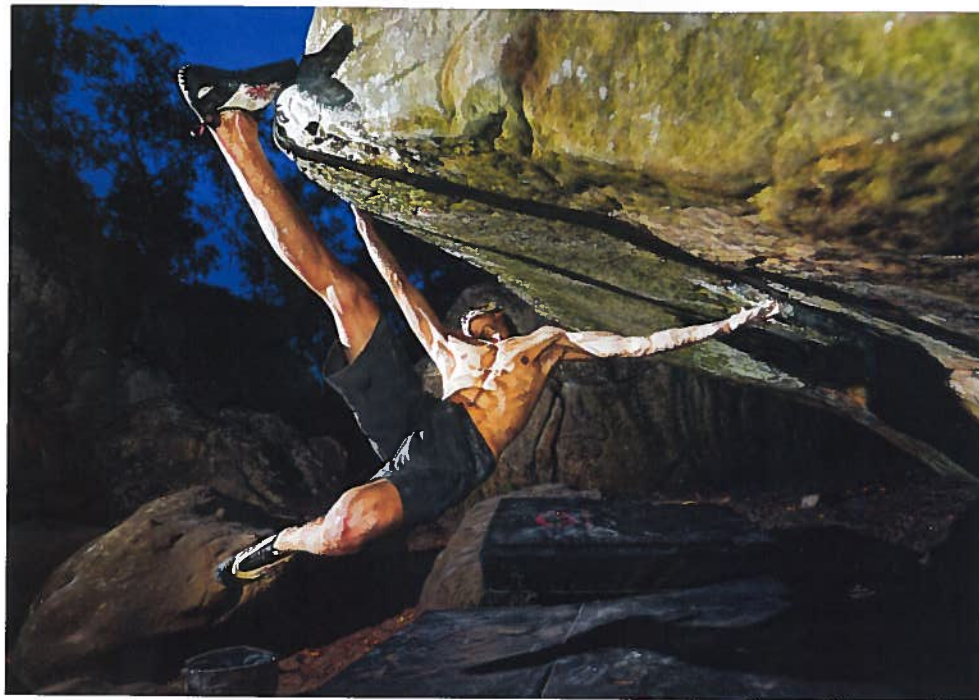
Neumann was an early bouldering devotee. He bouldered in Hueco in 1988 (before it had a guidebook) and, in what turned out to be one of the most mutually beneficial relationships in bouldering, Neumann brought the Austrian über-beast Klem Loskot into the limelight. He featured Loskot and other bouldering visionaries in a spate of highly charged and groundbreaking bouldering videos, beginning with *boulder!* (1996) and *Evolution/Revolution* (1998).

Neumann's latest work—*The Art and Science of Bouldering*—is a gritty, eccentric manifesto that begins in 1982, when he first began climbing. Born in 1963 in Cologne, Germany's largest city on the Rhine, Neumann still calls the bustling metropolis home, but seems to have bouldered everywhere. Udo made early ascents (1989) of Fontainebleau's super-classic *Toit du Cul de Chien* (V6) and *King Cobra* in Yosemite (V8), and in a more recent era FA'd *Panda* (V8/9) in the hills of Spain's Jaizkibel. But he is no stranger to a rope. Neumann has put up 8a (5.13b) ascents in China, Iceland and Turkey, among other countries, and has put in his time on Yosemite walls, many of which he has completed in one-day speed ascents.

In terms of reading Neumann's latest book—"engaging with the book" is more apt—I found myself hopping from page to page, only to settle when I felt like it, much as a dog finds a nice spot to lie down. My eye scanned the page, putting the fragments together. Captions, image, text, seductive holds, laughing faces, people lounging, poetry, bouldering—it's all there. This text conforms to the *merz* tradition of German art,



Neumann's eye for aesthetic climbing movement is apparent in his photography. Here he captures Jonas Baumann making a first ascent in Fontainebleau, France.



Above: "The idea that climbing is dramatic is a signature of his work." Neumann snaps Baumann getting creative on a Fontainebleau boulder. Top right: Neumann and the German climbing team. Bottom right: Neumann is himself a bouldering devotee, here climbing on the sandstone of Jaizkibel, Spain.

a genre of Expressionist aesthetics whose underlying principle was that new entities need to be born from fragments. A boulderer finds and figures out a boulder problem in the same manner—thinking, experimenting, piecing it together. You can't isolate Neumann's sense of bouldering from his artistry, since both require an active creative process.

THE "ART" BEHIND THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BOULDERING

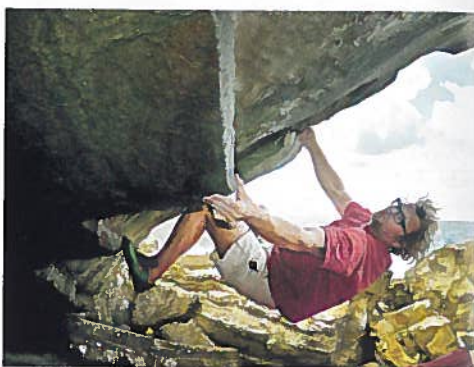
My own book on the art and philosophy of bouldering, *The Boulder: A Philosophy for Bouldering*, originally brought us into contact last year. What I found in Neumann was a climber who approached bouldering as a serious art form that deserved more than what you usually find—big numbers, ego-driven downgrading, sponsor-driven grade inflation.

I asked Neumann about the current state of climbing media, to which he replied: "I'm a bit disappointed by how current climbing films document how bodies move and that there is nothing new concerning the form/content question. A lot of look-alike work around nowadays!"

So, what has Neumann done to create new types of media? First you have to watch his "Climbing at the Limit of Human Performance" from 2001, a film that in my estimation ought to receive the award for first bouldering porn. How else can you describe a slow-motion close-up of fingers matching an edge set to the tune of a seductive yet melancholy trumpet? A boulderer moves up, the camera rewinds, and the climber explodes upward, lunging for a pocket. We know it's Klem Loskot, but that doesn't seem to matter. The boulder is not a prop for Klem, but rather, Klem is a prop for the boulder. The boulderer takes a back seat to bouldering, and the wandering trumpet and creative editing turn "just another go" into a sublime dance.

The idea that climbing is dramatic is a signature of Neumann's work. Consider his many clips on competition climbing. One might think that to showcase a World Cup competition, one would, at the very least, tell the viewer who the climber is and what problem he or she is on. Neumann does neither. His World Cup "reports," edited by himself and set to a cerebral electronica, are studies in bouldering movement. Often, he will use a split-screen format, showing multiple climbers simultaneously climbing the same problem.

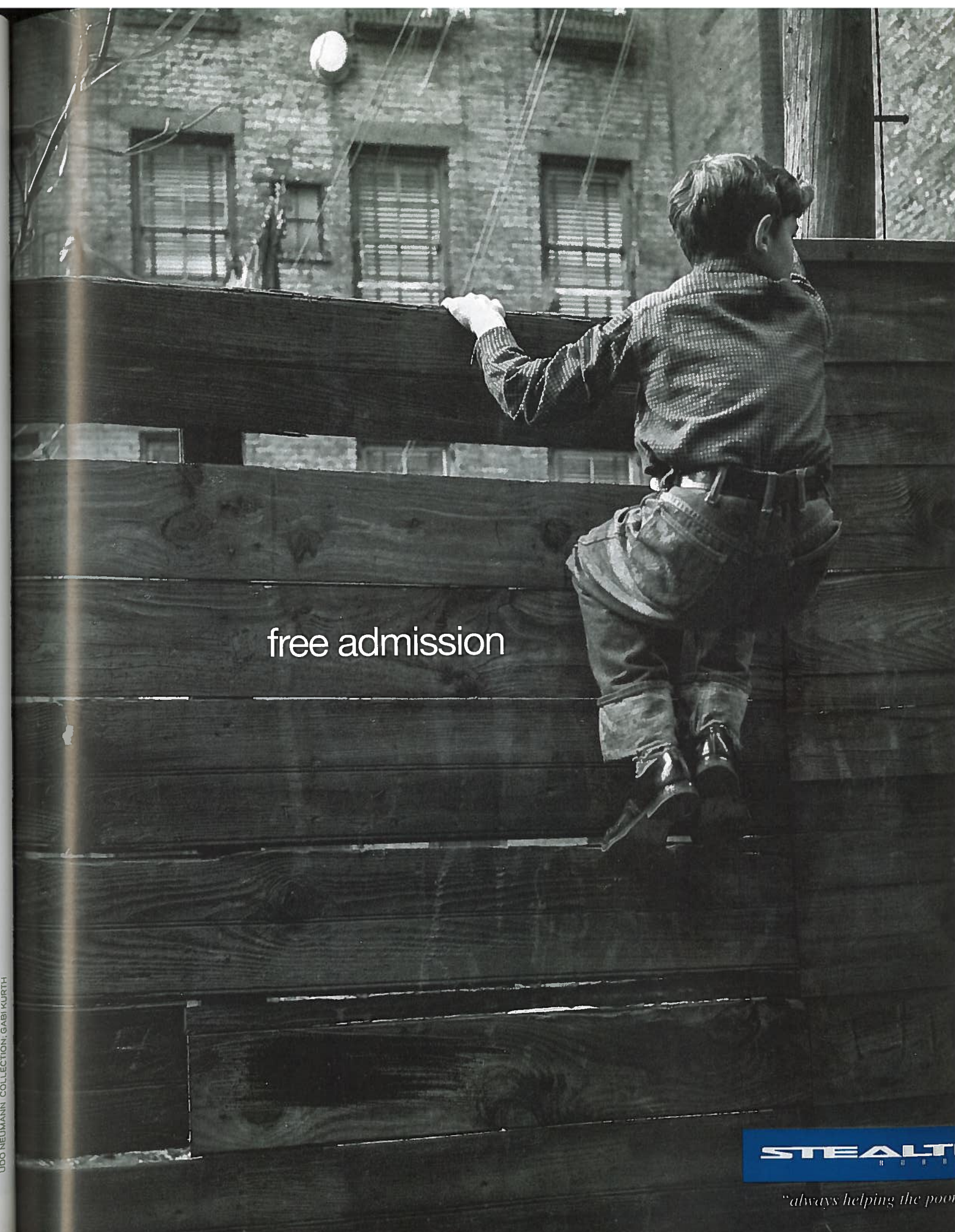
He said: "Climbing is tricky to film because of the occlusion of the wall. Because of that we haven't seen anything truly 'Matrix'-esque in a climbing film yet. For the future though I have some ideas for shooting climbing movement as it has never been done before. I'm currently planning a gym here in Cologne where we will have TV-studio-like possibilities. Once this is set up I can produce incredible climbing-movement images!"



THE "SCIENCE" BEHIND THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BOULDERING

Now it's time to talk about getting strong, the thought on every boulderer's mind. Did I mention that since 2009 Neumann has been the head coach of the German climbing team, and has had a hand in mentoring the recent phenom Jan Hojer? It was Hojer who, in a training video, campused from rung one to nine. While this is not the same as skipping rung five on, say, Ben Moon and Jerry Moffatt's schoolroom board, mainly because of measurement differences (why doesn't campusing have universal measurements so achievements can be compared?), Hojer's one-to-nine campus move is the most impressive thing done on a campus board in the last few years.

As much as Neumann brings an aesthetic eye to climbing, he has brought research-backed training principles to the sport; he has an M.A. in sports science. Most American climbers first heard of Neumann through *Performance Rock Climbing*. Already into numerous editions, this book is arguably one of the most successful climbing training books ever published. Neumann and Goddard introduced a systematic approach



free admission

UDO NEUMANN COLLECTION, GABI KURTH

STEALTH

"always helping the poor"



"You can't isolate Neumann's sense of bouldering from his artistry," as seen in this image of Daniel Woods winning the 2010 bouldering World Cup in Vail, Colorado.

UDINI FILMS:

Neumann has produced the feature films "Performance Rock Climbing" (1993) to go along with the seminal book, and "boulder!" (1996), which came out the same year as Ben Moon and Jerry Moffatt's "The Real Thing." For some context, Ben Pritchard and Moon's masterpiece "One Summer: Bouldering in the Peak" hit the shelves around 1994. Josh Lowell's "Rampage," basically the first major bouldering film in the United States, didn't appear until 1999. Boulderers in the mid-1990s looking to get their fix had two options: the Brits and Neumann. Later forms of Udini Mediaworks include: "Evolution/ Revolution" (1998), "Climbing at the Limit of Human Performance" (2001), "Evolution/ Revolution 2" (2002) and "Psicobloc 101" (2005).

UDINI IN PRINT:

Print works include Neumann's "Performance Rock Climbing" (1993), which he co-wrote with Dale Goddard, "Der XI. Grad" (the 11th or 9a grade; with Loskot), "Lizenz zum Klettern" (1995), "Lizenz zum Bouldern" (2010), and "The Art and Science of Bouldering" (2014).

to climbing—replete with graphs and tables backed by the latest research—and helped systemize training in our sport.

"The groundbreaking aspect of *PRC* is the 'weakest link' approach and the three characters," Neumann says.

The three characters in *PRC* function like archetypes of climbers, in the sense that these characters (like all climbers) have different strengths and weaknesses. *PRC* does address the specific challenges faced by these types and offers training advice based on these individual challenges.

Today's World Cup bouldering competitions test not only a climber's strength but, more important, his or her weaknesses. What *Performance Rock Climbing* introduced are principles that we now take for granted—periodization, working weaknesses, visualization, etc. Today, there are climbing coaches and complex training principles, and all of these apply Neumann and Goddard's concepts.

For a long time, there was a major difference between American competitions and their European counterparts. On the whole, U.S. competitions have traditionally tested in-your-face brute strength (think of all the old-school Salt Lake comps), while European comps forced the climber to apply force in non-traditional ways, mainly via volumes and feature climbing. Sequences were hard to discern. Only in the past five years or so have we adopted the European model. From a coach's perspective, this means that you

have to give your climbers something beyond weighted pull-ups and one-arms on monos. "Now days, especially since the volumes, you know you have to be able to apply force to the wall in super weird body positions," Neumann said in a recent interview with the magazine *The Circuit*.

How is that strength developed?

A brilliant section in *The Art and Science of Bouldering* is titled "The Ten Commandments of Physical Training." Commandment #5 speaks of increasing your volume by only 20 to 40 percent per year. Once you plateau at, say, V10, you tend to increase your volume since your ability to undergo intense workouts plateaus. This becomes a huge time commitment, but it doesn't need to be if you cycle in periods of intensity with periods of recovery.

All boulderers who enter their mid-30s realize they didn't rest enough in their 20s. Pulley injuries become more frequent. That shoulder starts talking to you a bit more, cautioning you against hard gaston moves. Drop knees become as risky as land mines.

Commandment #8 is called "Develop a Recovery Instinct." All boulderers who enter their mid-30s realize they didn't rest enough in their 20s. Pulley injuries become more frequent. That shoulder starts talking to you a bit more, cautioning you against hard gaston moves. Drop knees become as risky as land mines.

Neumann described his own positive process of aging: "The journey of bouldering was never meant to be a brilliant flash of spectacle and show, it was always intended to be a lifelong pursuit of improvement and one that doesn't need to end once the body begins to show signs of age. When exercising with my athletes, for example, I'm often confronted with the sad truth of not quite being in their league—but stop bouldering? No, not while the mind is still young. Not if the soul still seeks adventure, and challenge and play."

Francis Sanzaro is a writer and climber based out of Baltimore, Maryland. He recently published *The Boulder: A Philosophy for Bouldering*.

Metolius Super Chalk Team

"Super Chalk, it's almost like cheating."
- Chris Sharma

Answers are available at www.metoliusclimbing.com