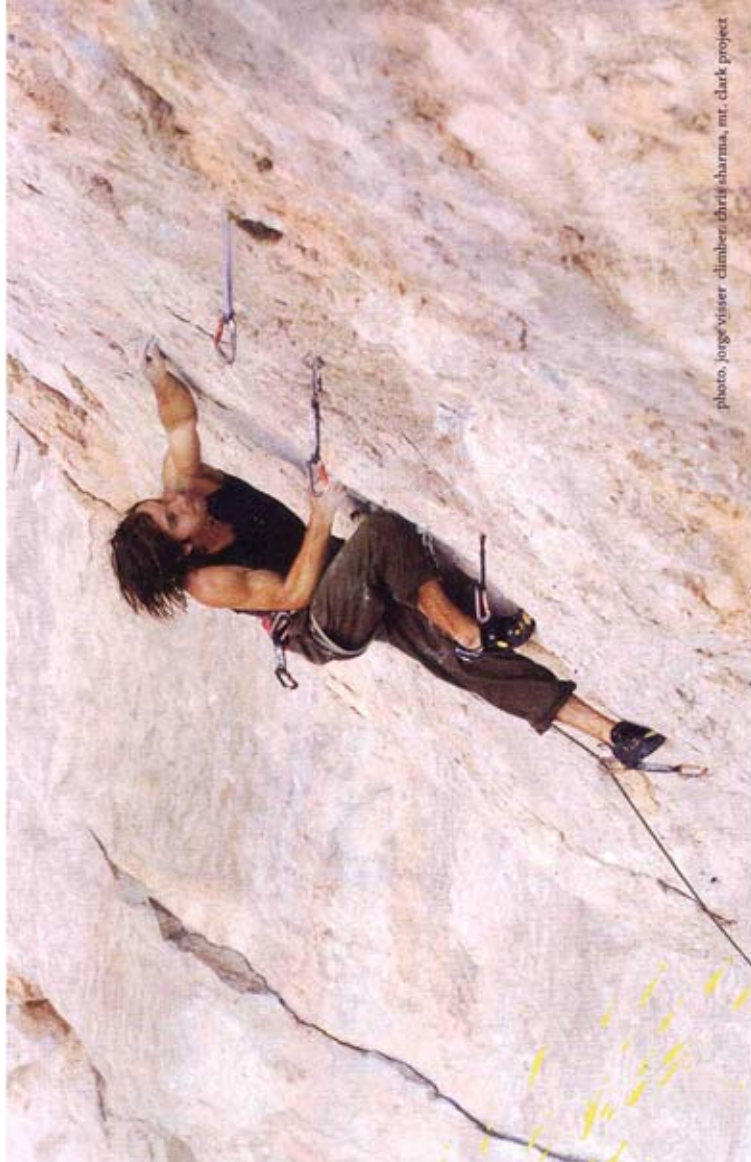


photo: jorge visser climber: chris sharma, mt. dark project



OPTIMUS PRIME

SHARMA SIGNATURE SERIES



WWW.EVOLVESPORTS.COM

411:1

THE GENERAL IN HPJC
PHOTO: DAN BRAJACK

ASK THE GENERAL

Featuring Kurt Smith

Kurt Smith got started climbing in California almost 30 years ago — longer than many of you, dear readers, have been alive. In those years, Kurt has knocked out classics, explored areas, and made scores of first ascents. From his early FAs, of routes like Burning Down the House (5.11c and still waiting for a second ascent), on Fairview Dome in Tuolumne meadows in 1984; to his padless fourth ascent of Ron Kauk's testpiece Midnight Lighting (V8), at Camp 4, Yosemite, also in '84; to big wall free ascents on El Cap; to Rifle Mountain Park ropegunning; to the more recent years spent slappin' 'em up in Potrero Chico, Mexico; to finally settling down (just a bit) in West Virginia's New River Gorge — Kurt has never once turned his back to the rock. Even when he's not climbing, Kurt helps soothe climber/land owner relations for the Access Fund and the Southeastern Climbers Coalition, organizing multi-media slideshows, competitions, clinics, and gear demos. Plus, he reps for Evolv, Sterling Ropes, and END footwear. His nickname's "The General" for good reason — climbing is his life, and The General leads by example.

So we figured if there's one person to ask ANYTHING, it's Kurt. The General keeps rock climbing history wrapped around his crimp hand. He's 30 years of energy, psych, and inspiration that we'd be foolish not to share with you. So go to urbanclimbermag.com/exclusive/askthegeneral and Ask The General. He'll select a few of your questions and drop the knowledge in each issue of Urban Climber Mag.

UC: Tell us where the nickname "The General" came from.

KS: Russ the Fish gave me this name. Our crew descended on J-tree and Yosemite in 1982-84 (Ken Ariza, Dave Hatchett, Tommy Thompson, and Rick Lovelace). We were young and motivated, and I usually started each day with a mission. I had so much energy and just couldn't get enough climbing back then. I was always looking for FAs — so I usually drove the bus those days! Naturally, the nickname stuck...

UC: When and how did this whole rock climbing itch start for you?

KS: Growing up in Lake Tahoe, I had the woods in my back yard and backpacking lead to rock climbing. Rick Lovelace, Tommy Thompson and myself were in the same grade, and Rick had the rope and set of hexes, which made us official. It all began with a 5.9 top rope at Ball Buster rock. Then I took a trip to the Valley in 1980 after I got my drivers license. Rick and I went down for spring break, stayed in Camp 4 and got our climbing on. I took a lesson from Don Reid at Yosemite Mountaineering School so my parents would chill. After that trip, I knew I was hooked and would never go to college and do the "usual" things. Climbing is my life and passion, and it has not faded over the years.

UC: Tell us what climbing means to Kurt Smith.

KS: Adventure, the unknown, fear, power, joy, commitment, and building the friendships with my partners. The adrenaline fix and the places that climbing takes you. It is my escape from the mundane, a way to take my energy and direct it in a positive way.

UC: What should readers expect from Ask The General?

KS: Expect the unexpected! Each era has its stories and mine spans the 1980s, 90s, and beyond. Joshua Tree, the Valley, and Tuolumne Meadows are my roots. Rifle, Shelf Road, Independence Pass are my Colorado days. Potrero Chico was my last hurrah in the 90's before settling down at the New River Gorge, where getting a real job took over. Climbing has always been my life, and I've collected enough memories and bits of history to share with everyone. Ask me and you shall receive. **UC**