



## Josune Bereziartu

First woman to climb 5.14b, 5.14c, 5.14d, and 5.14d/15a. Age 49, lives in San Sebastián, Basque Country, northern Spain.

**W**hen I was trying *Honky Tonk* [5.14b redpoint, 1998], it felt like I was fighting against a barrier, a wall, and no matter how much I pushed, I couldn't move. [Yet] the encouragement of friends made me want to do it even more. I didn't want to disappoint them. More than a physical barrier, it felt like an insurmountable mental barrier. So I trained hard. When I finally clipped the chains, honestly, I did it because I had acquired a physical level much higher than what the route demanded. Climbing 5.14b was a barrier; once I reached that milestone, other climbs felt more accessible.

**Hard climbs require a kind of perfectionism**—an obsessiveness, an isolation that takes you away from everyday life.... If you are too afraid of failure, anxiety takes over: Learning to live with the disappointments that occur while rehearsing a climb is important. Getting up again after failing is one of the best things I've learned from climbing. And the patience that you learn carries over to other parts of your life.

### [Upon redpointing *Bain de Sang*, as the first female to do 9a/5.14d, in 2002]

My feelings were lovely: I enjoyed those days around Lausanne, post-climbing dinners with Swiss friends, the surroundings, the quiet life of the place. It was beautiful. But looking at it now, I think I had a general recognition that that was the beginning of the end of my career as a top-level sport climber. I felt lots of things: surprise, admiration, envy, sometimes indifference... But I realized that I had done a lot of what I set out to do.

**I've tried many routes that I have not been able to finish.** When I tried very athletic or physical routes, it was common to overtrain. I'd fall into big physical potholes. I'd lose faith. I always climbed out of those potholes by stepping back and thinking, What is going well for me? I'd focus on the positives, and regain that feeling of confidence. I've learned that returning to your strengths and routines can help you regain balance.

**[In 2005], seven years after *Honky Tonk*, I climbed *Bimbaluna*,** a 5.14d/5.15a, and onsighted a 5.14a. Weirdly, I felt an emptiness inside me. I felt like I had done everything, and I no longer had any more energy to keep progressing and pushing.

### Alpine climbing eventually became more important.

Routes like El Ojo Critical, a 400-meter 8a [5.13b] that Rikar [Otegi, her husband] and I did. The difficulty plus the commitment and risk created a new challenge. In alpine climbing, the partnership comes first. Sport climbing feels more selfish: It's just you and your project, your piece of wall... Mountaineering, emotionally speaking, is extraordinarily intense. Each ascent leaves a huge mark on you. The relationship with the environment and your partner is more rewarding.

**These days, it seems to me that when a woman repeats** a difficult climb, be it a boulder or a route, she automatically talks about how "Maybe it's not that difficult" or "It's soft." That seems so unfair. Don't sell yourself short.

**When you break the mold,** some people's egos and status get upset, but that is how progress happens. When I became the first woman to climb 9a, very few men had climbed this grade. I shook the tree, and a year later many other climbers joined the 9a club.

**Looking at my career** with the perspective of age, I've learned that it's important to maintain your freedom and to follow the things that excite you—not what others expect you to do. I still like to climb classic routes, or sometimes boulder with friends, but I no longer feel the need to climb. My passion today is road biking. I am happiest on my bike, traveling over great mountain passes in the Pyrenees and Alps.