

ON PISTE

Edited by *Felix Milns*

SKI SPECIAL

SNOW DAYS

Hit the white
stuff this
winter

Bogner's AW22 season
sees you stylish on the slopes

FRESH TRACKS

What's new and cool on the slopes this season? **Gabriella Le Breton** and **Felix Milns** have the answers



▲ BUCKET-LIST TRIPS

Those with a passion for skiing, adventure and fine food need to add time well-spent with the Norwegian company **62° Nord** (62.no) to their bucket list. Experts at creating high-octane trips around Norway's spectacular fjords and mountains, its customisable six-day **Ski the Fjords** trip combines resort skiing, sea-to-summit ski touring in the Sunnmøre Alps and accommodation in two of the country's most lauded hotels, the historic **Hotel Union Øye** and boutique **Storjord Hotel**. Closer to home, **Scott Dunn** (scottdunn.com) has put together a luxury hut-to-hut ski safari in the Dolomites.



▲ ROCKIES RULES

Across the pond, **One Fine Stay** (onefinestay.com) is launching eye-popping new homes in three of Colorado's best-loved resorts: **Steamboat**, Breckenridge and Beaver Creek. Join the 60th birthday celebrations of Steamboat, home to cowboys and bottomless powder, by partying with 15 of your best buddies at **Gold Mine Lodge**, a towering pad built from genuine gold mine timbers, or take it easy in the comfort of the 12-person **Pioneer Lodge**, which boasts a large den, cinema room and hot tub overlooking the Rockies.



▲ CERVINIA CHIC

The Italian resort of **Cervinia**, which shares its high-altitude ski area with **Zermatt**, welcomes **Valtur Cervinia Cristallo Ski Resort** (crystalski.co.uk) this winter. Formerly a Club Med, the refurbished property has 92 bedrooms and suites, multiple dining venues, kids' clubs, a vast spa and a boutique. At the other end of the size scale, **Shed. HOTEL** (shedhotels.com) in Verbier has just 16 bedrooms, ranging from singles and doubles to groups. The latest venture from the Swedes behind Verbier's prized burger joint, **The Shed**, the hotel is tipped to be packed with hip Scandi types.

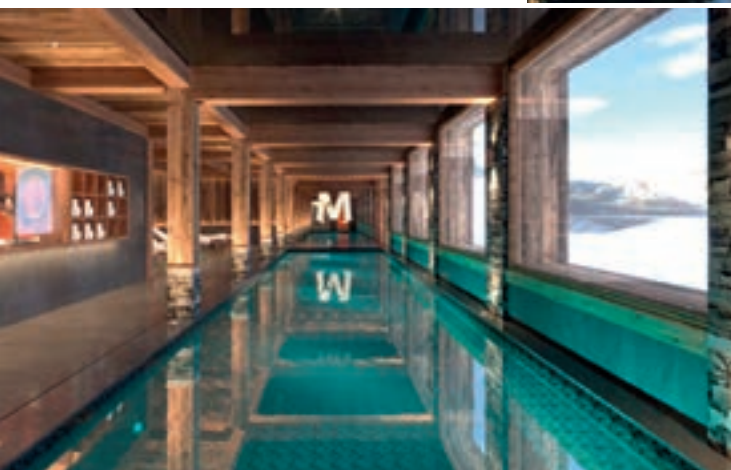


▲ SNOW GLOW

We all love to return from holiday looking and feeling refreshed, but if you want to return home looking younger, **Méribel** now offers some of the best spas in the Alps for pioneering cosmetic beauty treatments. **Refuge de la Traye** (refugedelatraye.com) is a charming cluster of traditional Savoie chalets on the slopes of Les Trois Vallées, whose rustic appearance belies a high-tech spa offering treatments including Vivace microneedling and HydraFacial, Mostleds light therapy and Iyashi Dôme infratherapy. New this winter, **Antarès Méribel** (antares-meribel.com) comprises a collection of piste-side chalets sleeping four to 18 guests with expansive wellness facilities and a non-invasive medical spa clinic featuring Biologique Recherche products and treatments.

MY CHALET'S BIGGER THAN YOURS »

In chalet news, the lavish **Palace Hotel Les Airelles Courchevel** is launching two suitably jaw-dropping chalets in the piste-entwined Jardin Alpin area. Linked by a secret passageway, **Chalet Airelles 1992** and **Chalet Airelles 1946** (leotrippi.com) each span six floors and can be taken together (sleeping 26-28 guests) or individually (eight and six bedrooms respectively). In addition to offering access to the amenities of the hotel, including three restaurants and **La Mer Spa**, guests will find state-of-the-art facilities in their own private palaces, including spa-worthy wellness facilities, private cinemas, games rooms and playrooms.



WHAT A WONDER »

In the Austrian resort of Ischgl, an old Paznaun dialect word for family togetherness, **Zalwonder**, is set to become a byword for luxury. With a rooftop infinity pool, 36 chic bedrooms, suites and apartments, the **Zalwonder** hotel (zalwonder.com) sits on the bank of the Trisanna river, a five-minute stroll from the Silvretta cablecar.



« FIVE STAR ARRIVES IN ST MARTIN DE BELLEVILLE

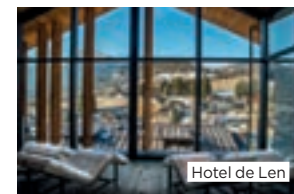
No longer a sleepy village tucked away in **Les Trois Vallées**, **St Martin de Belleville** is continuing its rise into world-class resort status with the launch of its first five-star hotel, **M Lodge** (mlodge.fr). With 25 bedrooms and suites, a Valmont spa and suave wine bar and restaurant, the ski-in ski-out property injects a hefty dose of luxury into this quaint village in the heart of the world's largest ski area.



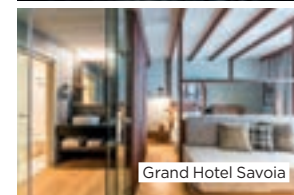
« SLEEP & PLAY

Good kip is an important part of your holiday but good play is equally so. With the new Mountain Academy kids' afternoon club from family specialist **Esprit Ski** (espritski.com), you can enjoy adult playtime safe in the knowledge that your kids are equally content, learning new activities such as snowshoeing, transceiver training and igloo building. Travel to **La Rosière** during the New Year week for the opportunity to meet Team GB's World Cup ski-cross athlete Ollie Davis, who learned to ski with **Esprit** and will launch the Academy on 5 January 2023.

GLAMMING UP THE DOLOMITES



Hotel de Len



Grand Hotel Savoia



Chalet Doss

As the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics draw closer, the cosmopolitan town of Cortina d'Ampezzo is preparing for the show of a wintertime. For all its charming blend of Italian and Austrian mountain hospitality, Cortina has been slightly lacking in contemporary luxury. Spurred on by the coming Olympics, however, is new opening **Hotel de LEN** (hoteldelen.it). In the heart of Cortina, it channels its local heritage (len, meaning 'wood' in the indigenous Ladin language, features throughout) while also delivering impressive designer and sustainability credentials. So too do the refurbished rooms of the five-star **Grand Hotel Savoia** (grandhotelsavoia.cortina.it), inspired by the earthy majesty of the surrounding peaks. Set just outside town, the four-bedroom **Chalet Serge** (leotrippi.com) boasts a playful mix of traditional timber beams and contemporary artwork as well as access to the facilities of the neighbouring Dolomiti Lodge hotel. Further newcomers include the freshly renovated **Chalet Doss** (leotrippi.com), a secluded 400-year-old chalet just outside Madonna di Campiglio (sleeps up to 23); the quirky 33-bedroom **Badia Hill** (badiahill.com) in Alta Badia, which boasts a room with its own humidifier, some with private saunas and others with cinema-style plasma screens; and **Corvara's Movi Family Apart-Hotel** (movi.family.it) which, as the name implies, offers apartments and hotel rooms ideally suited for families.



**JACK
WOLFSKIN**
Alpspitze wool
base layer, £90



OAKLEY
Clifden sunglasses, £174



PERFECT MOMENT
Houndstooth
sweater, £285



INUIKII
Endurance
boots, £445



**CHLOE @ HURR
COLLECTIVE**
Goggles, rent
from £48



BELSTAFF Scooter
coat, £445

WHITE OUT

Ski style to look sharp on
the slopes this winter



**MONCLER @
NETAPORTER**
Maglia ski top,
£755; Infinium
ski pants,
£645



**GROUNDTRUTH @
GENEROUS APE**
Rikr backpack,
£290



FREE PEOPLE
Pippa packable
pullover puffer, £188



**CORDOVA @
NETAPORTER**
Summit hat, £390



**CELINE @
NETAPORTER**
Goggles, £480



GOLDBERGH
Phoenix
jumpsuit,
£749



PRADA @ MATCHESFASHION
Booties, £850

PHOTOS: UNSPLASH. FOR STOCKISTS, SEE PAGE 202

Will climate change cause many of
our favourite ski resorts to go extinct?

THE BIG MELT

What does the future of skiing look like in the face of climate change, asks **Abi Butcher**

If you love the mountains, it's impossible to ignore the changing climate – but this summer, images of collapsing glaciers shocked the world. The loss of summer skiing in the likes of Zermatt, Val d'Isère, Tignes and Les 2 Alpes signalled the beginning of what might be the end for skiing, unless we take drastic action.

These weather events back up warnings issued by scientists that a global temperature rise of 2°C will raise the snowline to 1,500m by the end of the century, affecting many of our favourite resorts including Méribel (1,450m), St Anton (1,304m) and Wengen (1,274m), and destroying low-elevation ski resorts like Schladming-Dachstein (745m) and Saalbach (1,003m).

With the future of the mountains – let alone skiing – hanging in the balance, everyone has to play their part – which, thankfully, they are starting to do. Rupert Longsdon, founder and CEO of luxury operator Oxford Ski, says clients are more receptive than ever to eco initiatives since the pandemic.

'Our very existence as a company, as an industry, relies on the beautiful snowy mountains,' he says. 'The initiatives we have in place [including partnerships with POW, ClimateCare and EcoSki] are increasingly welcomed by our clients. We must all have a long-term focus to protect our playgrounds for the future, before it's too late.'

PHOTOS: UNSPLASH



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Leo Trippi's clients expect new chalets to be built in the greenest way possible, like this one in Pescosta in Kronplatz in the Dolomites; a ski lift with solar panels at Flims in Switzerland



SKI RESORTS UP THEIR GAME

While triple glazing, heat recovery systems, solar panels, electric car chargers, recycling and electric vehicles are becoming commonplace in the Alps, the global energy crisis is sharpening focus.

Those resorts already ahead on renewables are in the best position while others rush to catch up. Some of the big changes in recent years include the French ski areas of Paradiski, Les Trois Vallées and Grand Massif now running lifts using renewable energy (often locally sourced hydropower). Serre Chevalier will produce 30 per cent of its entire electricity requirements by next year and in Méribel, recycling is mandatory.

Swiss resorts will be climate-neutral by 2050 in line with a country-wide government directive, but many go further. Zermatt has been trialling road surfaces made from recycled plastic, hoteliers hold annual sustainability summits and Laax has been constructing 'energy-plus' buildings. In Arosa, the Valsana Hotel (valsana.ch) is heated and powered entirely by geothermal probes and a pioneering ice battery. With a free shuttle service for guests travelling by train, fully organic spa products and toiletries, and local, sustainable dining, the Valsana is the real green deal.

In Italy, Pejo 3000 banned single-use plastics three years ago,

and in the Dolomiti Superski, lifts were opened and e-bike sharing introduced this summer to reduce the road traffic between the villages of Alta Badia.

The Austrian resort of Kitbühel is running one of the largest fleets of electric ski bus networks in the Alps, and the Tirol region has worked hard with neighbouring countries to expand rail services to benefit locals and guests alike. In Ischgl you can soak in the rooftop pool, saunas and hot tubs of the new Silvretta Spa (silvrettatherme.at) with a clear conscience – the spa runs exclusively on green electricity and is heated by geothermal energy and groundwater pumps.

In the US, Vail Resorts made an 'Epic Promise' to reach a zero net operating footprint by 2030 and is tackling everything from food waste to energy efficiency, even creating terrain parks out of recycled materials (vailresorts.com).

SKI OPERATORS PLAYING THEIR PART

Operating sustainably is now a must for travel companies, and with carbon offsetting seen as a get-out clause, real action is being taken to streamline processes and reduce carbon footprints meaningfully rather than notionally.



Rather than buy your kit, why not rent it from EcoSki?



Luxury operator Leo Trippi says clients expect new-build chalets to have been constructed in the most sustainable way possible. Founder Florian Steiger, explained: 'Our clientele either directly expect this or indirectly assume that by investing into the best real estate developments, that we are state-of-the-art when it comes to sustainability' (leotrippi.com).

Operations now need to be cleaner and more efficient, too. Alikats in Morzine grows its own produce, composts food waste and even makes its own yoghurt to cut out unnecessary plastic (alikats.eu). Lagom, a sustainably-focused chalet operator run by the founders of Bramble Ski and Haute Montagne, offers clients the option to tailor their luxuries and cut back on consumables for a more pared back and sustainable stay. Lagom also contributes one per cent of revenue to local sustainability projects (levlagom.com).

Last year, Hotelpplan (owner of Inghams and Esprit Ski) appointed a head of sustainability, Prue Stone, who has scrutinised every aspect of the company's operation. She says: 'It's an overwhelming subject and not knowing where to start can often stop people in their tracks but I've been amazed by the momentum in our first year. It's a huge collaborative effort internally and we are integrating sustainability into the core values of everything we do.' (hotelpplan.com).

WHAT CAN WE SKIERS AND CONSUMERS DO?

We can change how and when we go skiing, by choosing short-haul and merging multiple trips per season into one, longer holiday. And we can stop flying – travelling by train reduces that cost by around 60 percent, driving comes a close second.

We can vote with our feet, by choosing a resort and operator in line with our own values and while on holiday live as we do at home; turning off lights, taking reusable bottles and coffee cups onto the slopes.

Skiers can make more sustainable choices with skiwear. Spektrum makes ski goggles from bio-sourced plastic, Icebreaker is now making Shell+, a merino waterproof ski jacket and pants; Patagonia's 22/23 winter range is 67 per cent made from recycled material and Artilect has nailed recycled fabric that also biodegrades.

If you don't ski often, why not rent kit instead? EcoSki last season launched the world's largest range of high-quality skiwear rental, a move being swiftly followed by brands including Rab, Picture and Decathlon (ecoski.co.uk).

EcoSki founder Rachael Westbrook says: 'The glaciers provide a lot more than just a winter playground. I always tell myself that every fraction of a degree matters and every change counts.' ■

CHOICES, CHOICES

When it's family fun or stylish sojourns you're after, we bring you the places we'd be happy to stay in



FORSTHOFGUT, Leogang

BEST FOR FAMILY FANTASY

A truly great hotel transcends our notion of what a hotel can be, and the Forsthofgut does just that. While many ski hotels are primarily a base for skiing, here the vast ski area is almost an adjunct. Drawing on Austria's spa culture and a deep connection with nature and sustainability, the hotel is truly a destination in its own right. Last season saw the opening of a new lake house, complete with split-level contemporary pine suites, onsen-inspired spa and zen Japanese restaurant, as well as a new family spa in the main building, complete with water slide, low temperature kid-friendly sauna and jungle-style splash pool. Sitting across the piste from the main hotel, the black slatted cladding and clean minimalist lines of the new lake house sit in the middle of a frozen lake, with outdoor onsen pools adjacent to melted sections of the lake, ice-cold bliss for those brave enough to submerge. The apex sauna building has a glass wall looking out onto the striking Steinberg mountain. All in all the new lake house is a wonderful foil to the waldSPA building, with its three stories of adults only spa and 25m outdoor lap pool. There are a series of intimate interconnected dining spaces in the main restaurant, where



you jump in and out of three daily changing menus; alpine, vegan and locally sourced. The food is excellent, with Mizumi, the new Japanese restaurant, already a firm favourite in the exclusive Leogang restaurant scene.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €400 on a half-board basis (minimum five-night stay or €460pn). forsthofgut.at

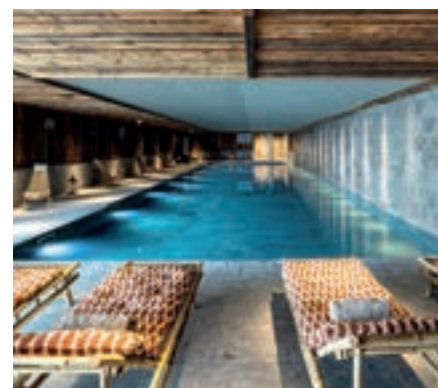


LE REFUGE DE SOLAISE, Val-d'Isère

BEST FOR REMOTE LUXURY

A whizz up the Solaise mountain, this cable station-turned-cool Alpine retreat is France's highest place to bed down. It's also superb for powder hunters who can be first out on the slopes before the gondolas have even moved an inch. The all-round mountain views are exceptional here – but so is everything else. The 16 cosy bedrooms and four chalet-like apartments are a mix of exposed stone and rustic timber, with soaring windows giving way to snowy panoramas. There's a 14-bed dorm, too, in keeping with the hotel's 'refuge' status. Roaring wood fires dot every corner, lining the way to restaurant Gigi (which has outposts in St Tropez and Paris). The never-ending breakfast buffet (try the homemade brioche) sets you up for the day. Then there's lunch and dinner – a hearty feast of nutty cheeses, grilled meats, pasta and traditional Savoyard dishes. The lively bar is perfect for an aperitif beforehand. Just make sure you leave time for the spa with its impressive 25m indoor swimming pool – or book a massage which uses Alpine herbs.

BOOK IT: From €450 per night. lerefuge-valdisere.com





HOTEL CAPPELLA, Colfosco

BEST FOR DOLOMITE DREAMS

Dating back to 1969 and taking pride of piste-side place on the sunny plane of Colfosco, the family-run Capella has undergone a radical five-star facelift, transforming from traditional chintz to contemporary South Tyrolean style. The hotel extended by slicing off the front and rear of the building, extending out and adding new facades and frameless glass balconies to all rooms. Which is perfect as here it is all about the view. Kick back on the Kettal-style furniture and to the south you have a direct view into the Val Mezdi in the heart of the Gruppo Sella massif, one of the most iconic off-piste routes in the Dolomites, while north the dramatic limestone peak of Sasslongher stands sentinel. Inside it's all about understated comfort. Well designed and discretely lit rooms have suede headboards and simple large format oak panelling throughout (locally sourced of course), plenty of storage plus a bench and hooks by the door to hang your outerwear. Retained from the previous incarnation are the family matriarch's impressive art and artefact collection, and a trippy panelled ceiling in the bar that could only come from the tail end of the sixties. A large spa with indoor and outdoor pool also looks out onto the Val Mezdi, and even the family-friendly sauna comes with a view. And the food? This being Italy you will eat like royalty.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €504 half-board.

hotelcappella.com



HYGNA, Alpbach

BEST FOR ROMANTIC RETREAT

Regular winner of the prettiest village in Austria, Alpbach is well known for its chocolate-box charm and sloped chalet style, so much so that all new buildings have to follow its architectural north star. So it's no surprise that this new collection of pine-clad bijoux chalets in their own private enclave ooze traditional Tyrolean charm. Developed on an old farm and clustered around a central barn are 11 chalets, all with private terrace, sauna and outdoor hot tub. Perfect for those wanting peace and privacy, a delectable breakfast box of fresh eggs, hams and juices is delivered to your door each morning, and you can pre-book a private chef for evening meals. Each chalet has a fully functioning kitchen, wood burning stove and comfy day bed downstairs, while upstairs the master suite has a glass wall looking up the wooded flanks of the Reitherkogel peak. The enormous bed can be set to vibrate, allegedly good to soothe those après-ski muscles. Star of the show is a shared pool carved out of the barn in a style reminiscent of Soho Farmhouse. Open to the elements at either end, contemporary sculpted chandeliers hang from the barn rafters over the stainless steel pool. Hire a car as it's a five minute drive to the Alpbach gondola, or two minutes down to the small satellite area of Reith, well worth visiting for an hour or two's night skiing on perfectly prepared floodlit groomers.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €522 for two on a half-board basis. hygna.at



LE CHALET ZANNIER, Megève

BEST FOR INTIMATE SOPHISTICATION

Celebrating its opening a decade ago, Le Chalet does not seem to have aged at all. A small collection of 12 suites spread over several rustic timber-clad chalets, the feel is as timeless yet refreshing as it was on opening. Another revolution of the old-meets-new wheel, the vibe is very pared back, with simply textured walls, exposed beams, roaring log fires, hay-lofty four-poster beds and smart antiques. Each suite has its own living area, fireplace, and balcony with beautiful mountain views, complete with quirky hayloft platforms and secret doors. Founder Arnaud Zannier is a devout disciple of the Belgian aesthetic inspired by the interiors of Axel Vervoordt, and you can see his influence everywhere. Even in the subterranean spa, the walls, floors and ceilings are all cast in the same russet tone. You can feel the stress slip off you like a bathrobe. The restaurant is nearly as cocooning as the spa, but if you can bear to go out again after the skiing day, it's only a short ten-minute stroll down into the historic centre, for shopping, horse-sled rides or nightlife.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €765 half-board. zannierhotels.com

BEAR LODGE, Les Arcs

BEST FOR SKI-IN SKI-OUT CHALET GROUPS

Rising like a phoenix from the pandemic ashes, Bear Lodge is VIP Ski's new flagship collection and a pet project of CEO Andy Sturt that's been ten years in the making. A collection of fully serviced chalet-style apartments in a large building built on the corner of Arc 1950, it's the ultimate snow-sure ski-in ski-out option, the DNA at the heart of everything VIP Ski. It's also the first new build in Arc 1950 since its inception 15 years ago, and the only chalet-style offering here. Working with a trusted developer Andy laid out the architectural spaces around where he wanted to put the large communal sofas and essential storage that every good ski chalet needs, optimising the design to suit a modern chalet holiday. Each apartment has either a floating wood or water vapour fire and a simple palette of greys, pine and stone cladding, and what it lacks in flair it more than makes up for in function. The modern European menu is as good as ever from VIP, with the black-clad chalet hosts on hand with afternoon tea, champagne and canapes. Take a dip in the shared 15m indoor pool and spa, or sink into the sofas at the luxe cinema with nightly screenings for up to 20. There's also a slope-side sports bar/club-style restaurant and hotel rooms for individual guests, which can also be used to accommodate additional guests who can join apartment guests for meals. Perfect for flexible parties.

BOOK IT: Doubles from £1,339pp per week on a seven-night chalet-board basis, including flights and transfers. vip-chalets.com



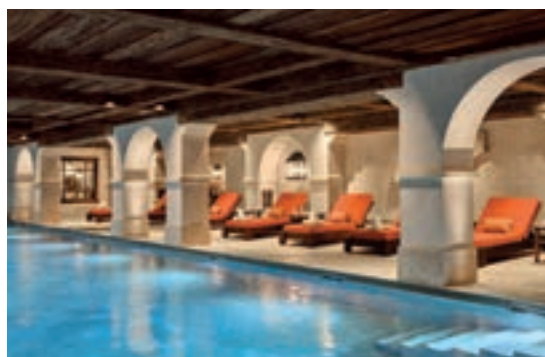


LES AIRELLES, Val d'Isère

BEST FOR SLOPESIDE STYLE

After a muted pre-pandemic debut Airelles Val d'Isère threw open its doors last winter, like a girl finally allowed to go to prom, and has not looked backed since. Taking inspiration from the fairytale-like cosiness of the original Airelles hotel in Courchevel, the look here channels a Middle Ages meets Renaissance haute époque look, but with a refreshingly contemporary twist. Vermeer replicas sit on rough-cast plaster walls and a large fireplace crackles in the stone flagged reception, while staff sport Savoyard chasseur outfits. The vibe continues throughout the large rooms, with vintage furniture, super kingsize beds and large flat screen TVs hidden in ornate gilded mirrors. Yet the playful piece de resistance is the main restaurant, the third outpost of Paris's famed Loulou, where freeze-dried fossilised flowers run all over the Ralph Lauren tartan panelled walls and ceilings to create an enchanted forest feel. By night live dj sets are streamed in from the bar to add to the lifestyle vibe. The modern European menu totally delivers. Don't miss the scallop and truffle carpaccio or the raw purple artichokes with aged parmesan. Lunch is served on a spectacular slope-side terrace on the Front de Neiges to a rocking live DJ set and is sure to become a Val d'institution. If you are lucky enough to be staying you can head straight from lunch to the Greco-roman spa.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €1,200 half-board. airelles.com



HOTEL DE VERBIER, Verbier

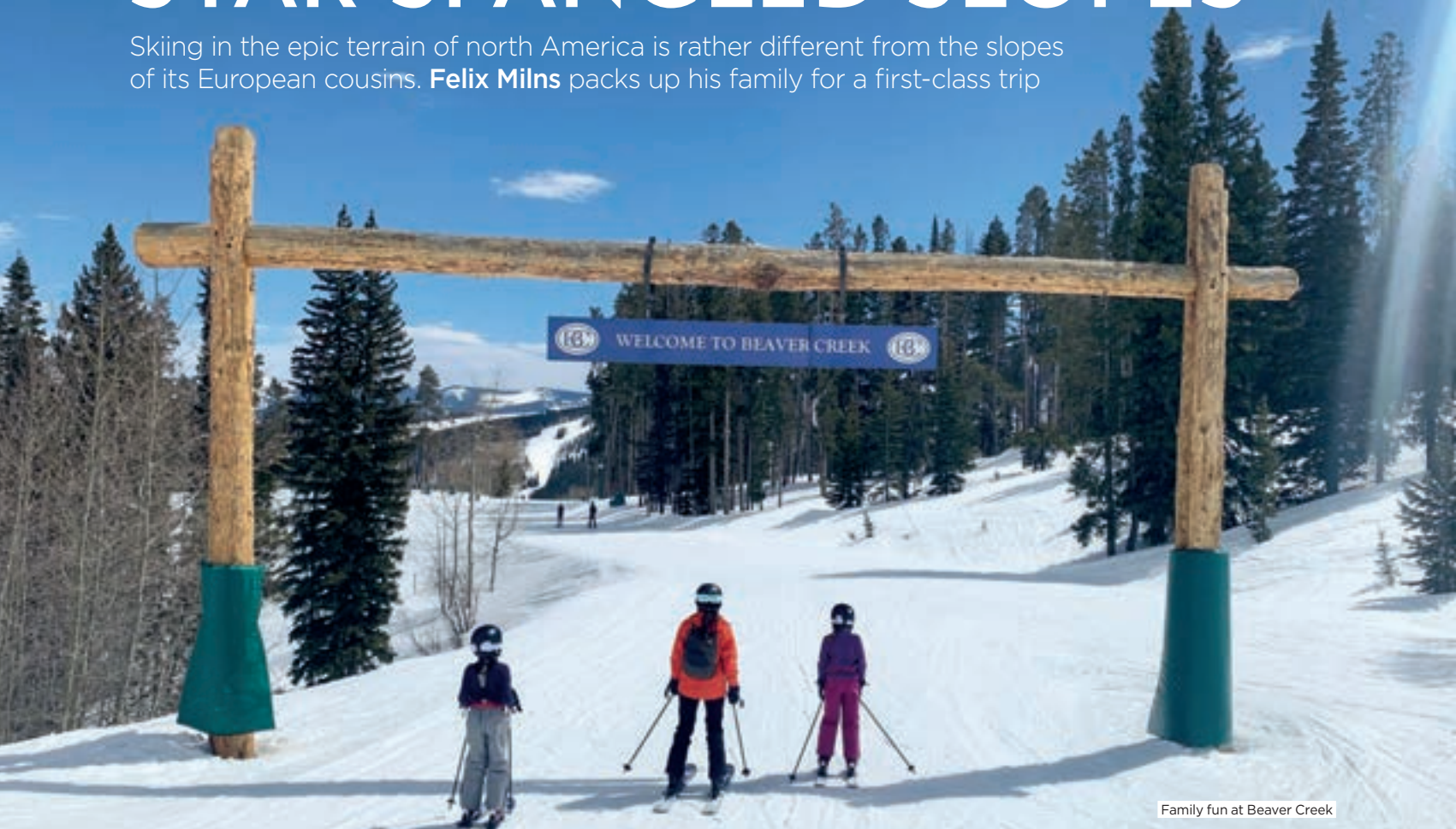
BEST FOR BOUTIQUE BOLTHOLE IN CENTRE OF TOWN

The oldest hotel in Verbier has undergone a spectacular refurbishment to become one of the most stylish and convenient beds in town. Just off the Place Centrale, what was an old Inghams club hotel has now become a chic boutique retreat. Previously a labyrinth of three disjointed buildings, the hotel has been sympathetically reclad in chalet style timber and completely reimaged internally. Bang in the heart of town it's super convenient for stepping out, yet triple glazed and fully soundproofed for a great night's sleep. Versailles parquet flooring, sheepskin furniture and retro-meets-modern colourful ski shots (all from local photographers) give real warmth to the lobby bar area. The colour scheme is all about earthy colours of the mountain. Think grey polished plaster walls and upholstered headboards in grey, brown and green, with flashes of luxury in the green rainforest marble bathrooms. The attention to detail of the new Swedish husband and wife team is second to none, from the petrified wood coffee tables to the Spirit of Nomad linens and pottery sourced from a small Swedish artisan. The Scandi feel continues with the Amundsen sport clothing uniforms, though the excellent restaurant, La Nonna, run by the restaurant group behind Le Rouge, has more of an Italian feel.

BOOK IT: Doubles from 350CHF/£314 B&B. hoteldeverbier.com ■

STAR-SPANGLED SLOPES

Skiing in the epic terrain of north America is rather different from the slopes of its European cousins. **Felix Milns** packs up his family for a first-class trip



Family fun at Beaver Creek

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this winter, Vail has long championed family skiing in North America, so it was a natural choice for our first stateside family ski trip. Fittingly we were staying at The Lodge, the very first hotel built in Vail village. In those days The Lodge essentially was Vail village, today the heated streets of the pedestrianised resort are lined with fashion boutiques, art galleries, cutting edge restaurants and live music joints.

The story of Vail began when two ski patrollers from Aspen, Pete Seibert and Earl Eaton, set out to create the 'next great ski mountain'. Pete had fought in the Second World War with the 10th Mountain Division and had completed ski mountaineering training near Vail, and the vision of those mountains had stayed with him for 20 years. What he eventually re-discovered were the hallowed back bowls, a sequence of steep north-facing bowls linked like a daisy chain, but miles from the nearest infrastructure. To access them they first needed to develop the front side, not to mention a healthy dollop of investment.



That first winter lift tickets cost \$5, for a skeleton offering of one gondola, two chair lifts, eight ski instructors and nine runs. By the end of the sixties President Ford was a regular visitor and today it's not only the third largest ski mountain in the US, but Vail Resorts now own 37 different resorts across North America and beyond. This year they added their first European resort to the roster, with the acquisition of Andermatt in Switzerland.

As Vail resorts have grown so has the concept of the mega ski pass. While rival Aspen has rolled out the Ikon pass, offering access to 45 different resorts across North America and beyond, the Vail Epic Pass covers all 37 of the Vail resorts plus access to over 20 more partner resorts worldwide, including the Trois Vallées, Verbier and St Anton.

Two of the key differences between skiing here and Europe is the treeline is much higher in the Rockies, and there is no such thing as off-piste. All of the in-bounds terrain is avalanche controlled and the trees, which run all the way up to the 3,400m summits, are thinned out and 'gladed' to create gladed tree skiing areas next to beautiful wide-open pistes dotted with individual trees and small copses. It's a very different feel to following a tightly cut piste through the trees in the Alps, and defines how skiing is taught here.

There are kids' adventure zones in each of the separate mountain areas, with twisting trails running through wigwams, old wild west shopfronts, mini jumps and switchback turns, designed not just for fun but as part of a wider philosophy of terrain-based teaching. The instructors use these parks to get kids used to making the tight turns they will need to develop their skiing through the trees, bumps and steeps. We enjoyed them every bit as much as the kids, and after a few days the training paid off as Maisie (12) and Imogen (10) were confidently bouncing though powdery moguls, whooping with delight.

There is a huge amount of terrain to cover, with flank after flank of beautifully groomed runs, adventure parks and glades, the skiing really is world-class. And that is before you even get to the back bowls. Skiing these remote descents feels like a real adventure, especially when you catch sight of an elk wandering through the woods.

When you commit to flying across the pond to ski it makes sense to explore more than one resort, so we opted for a twin-centre stay, splitting our time between Vail and nearby Beaver Creek, which proudly proclaims itself the 'World's Best Luxury Family Resort'.

Set on a smaller scale, the heart of the pretty purpose-built village is an outdoor ice rink, surrounded by comfy seating areas and outdoor fire pits, where fresh cookies are handed out after skiing every day. It's a charming ski-in ski-out village famous for the Birds of Prey Downhill, one of the fiercest men's courses on the world cup circuit. Thankfully there's also plenty of intermediate and family-friendly terrain to balance out the double diamond blacks.

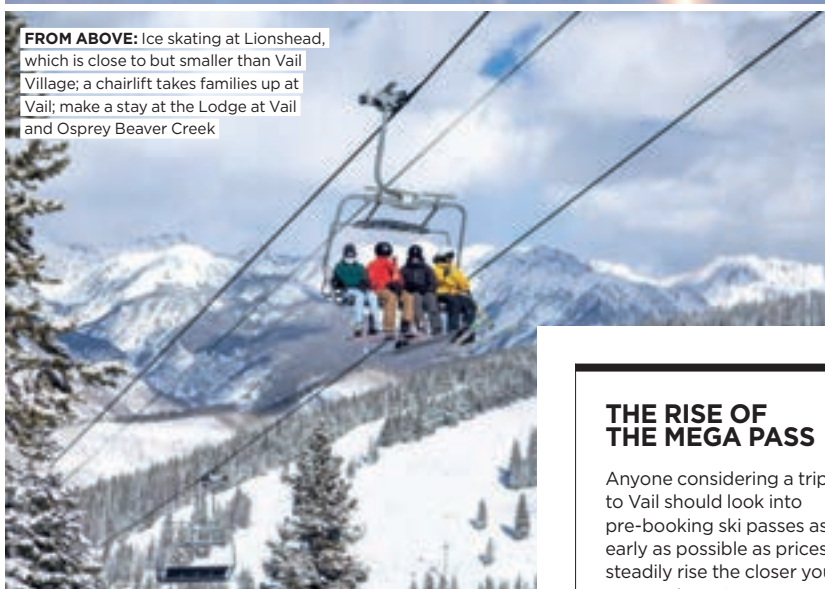
New for last winter was McCoy Park, a gentle bowl with two new lifts in another Elk protected area. Wildlife is never far away here, some of the glades of the Grouse mountain sector were closed during our stay as a mother and baby moose were on the loose, and that connection with nature is celebrated at Zach's Cabin, an elegant rustic cabin where you can catch a sunset snowcat up to for dinner.

The sleigh ride takes you up through the interconnected roots of the Aspen trees above the Ritz Carlton at Bachelor Gulch, to the cabin where 12m high ceilings and a monumental stone fireplace form a glorious backdrop to a dinner of Bison short ribs or Colorado beef tenderloin. It's a rare example of great on-mountain dining; while you can eat spectacularly in the village bases, the giant self-service refectories on the hill in both resorts are a far cry from the family-run mountain restaurants of the Alps. It's best to accept this head-on and come to enjoy the scenery, service and world-class skiing, that tartiflette can wait for another season.

BOOK IT: The Lodge at Vail costs from \$635 room only (based on two people sharing a King Room). For more information visit vail.com/plan-your-trip/stay/vail-lodging. Osprey Beaver Creek costs from \$547 room only (based on two people sharing a King Room). For more information visit beavercreek.com/plan-your-trip/stay/beaver-creek-lodging



FROM ABOVE: Ice skating at Lionshead, which is close to but smaller than Vail Village; a chairlift takes families up at Vail; make a stay at the Lodge at Vail and Osprey Beaver Creek



THE RISE OF THE MEGA PASS

Anyone considering a trip to Vail should look into pre-booking ski passes as early as possible as prices steadily rise the closer you get to winter. It may even be worth buying a season pass, as this will also give you a week's skiing in Les Trois Vallées, unlimited skiing in Andermatt, and multi days in Verbier, St Anton and beyond. Not to mention Japan.

Taking this into consideration the Epic season pass is incredible value. Prices start from \$859 (if bought early), but the flip side is extremely high lift ticket passes in resort, and large crowds of day skiers on bluebird powder days. As more and more resorts partner with the Epic or Ikon pass the trend looks set to continue. Visit EpicPass.com for more information on all available passes, which also include 20 percent discount on group ski school lessons and equipment hire. ■

LEAP OF FAITH

Felix Milns takes the trip of a lifetime as he freefalls down the Eiger

In the mountains there are views and then there are views. And then there is the jaw-dropping, nerve-shredding, back-tingling view as you stand looking down from the rudder of a helicopter hovering next to the summit of the Eiger.

I had been advised to savour this moment during the on-ground briefing, so I took a deep breath and looked first down at Grindelwald in miniature, and then across to the majesty of the Eiger and its famous north face. Terrified and exhilarated in equal measure, I was going to do this!

Michael, my tandem pilot, gave me the signal - it was one small step for him but one giant leap for me. It took a moment for the realisation that we were freefalling to hit me. My ears were popping like crazy, and the Eiger was flashing in and out of vision as we span like a rampant fidget spinner around the axis of the drogue - a mini parachute that tandem jumpers pull after a few seconds to keep freefall speeds



down to a mere 130mph.

You start the jump with your hands crossed over your shoulders then open out your arms into the classic flying position, arms and legs arcing skywards.

There are many incredible destinations for tandem skydiving, but this is surely one of the most spectacular. For Michael there is no competition: 'Most of the time when you skydive you are looking down, but here you also get to look up, at one of the most iconic mountain faces in the world. Most jumps take place out of a Cessna; it is so much more thrilling to jump out of a helicopter. It's like a limousine for skydivers.' And, because of the short flying time and efficient operation, no more fuel intensive than a plane.

The helicopter ride itself is spectacular. Taking off from Interlaken you fly up through the valley before rising above the sun-kissed pistes of Männlichen. The runs here, leading across to Kleine Scheidegg, are some of the most beautiful in the world, facing the holy trinity of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau peaks. And the views were even better from the sky. The sun refracted on the domed top of the Jungfraujoch, Europe's highest railway station, and ice started to form on the panoramic windows of the heli as we neared the summit of the Eiger.

You jump from 4,000m above sea level, pretty much in line with the Eiger's peak, and freefall for around 45 seconds before pulling the main chute at 1,500m above ground level. Dropping into a classic paraglide position Michael piloted

Felix gets the ultimate
adrenaline rush



us in giant swirls groundwards, handing me the reins to steer us for a section, as he pointed out different areas of the mountains and town. The ground was rushing up to meet us and after a few minutes flight we came skidding back down to earth, bum first.

It's impossible to immediately process what you have just done, but thankfully there are plenty of ways to relive it. I had opted for a video - filmed by Michael from a GoPro on his wrist - which was Dropbox-ed over to me the same afternoon along with selected hi-res stills, delivered almost as slickly as the jump itself.

BOOK IT: The Helicopter Skydive Eiger Jump is CHF 690 per person. Video/pictures start from CHF 120 (skydiveinterlaken.ch). For more information on holidays in the region, visit jungfraueregion.swiss ■

ON THE MOUNTAIN TUCKER TRAIL

We all know that, after a hard morning's skiing, lunch is the only thing on our mind



LA BOUITTE

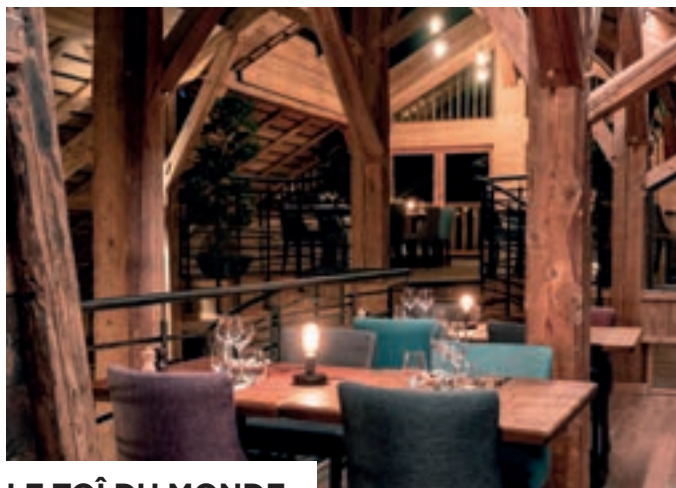
ST MARTIN DE BELLEVILLE, THREE VALLEYS, FRANCE

The Restaurant: The tiny Savoie village of St Marcel, in a quiet corner of the Three Valleys, is home to this exquisite restaurant and hotel, owned and run by the Meilleur family for more than 40 years. What began as a raclette and fondue restaurant now has three Michelin stars, with chef-owners René and Marie-Louise, and their children Sophie and Maxime, serving Savoyard specialities to those who make the extra effort to find this gem. The chalet hotel has also earned five-star Relais & Châteaux status for its 15 bedrooms and spa.

Standout Dish: Chamois (mountain goat) in brown broth, poached foie gras, cranberry beans and chopped lovage.

Don't Miss: The cheese trolley. La Bouitte offers a selection of 40 local cheeses from the Savoie and Haute Savoie regions.

The Essentials: You'll need to book, and you can either walk from St Martin (around 20 minutes) or La Bouitte will collect you by car. +33 479 08 96 77; la-bouitte.com



LE TOÏ DU MONDE

FLUMET, VAL D'ARLY, FRANCE

The Restaurant: Florent Perrin inherited this former farmhouse, dating back to 1886, and has completely renovated and transformed it into a carbon-neutral eco lodge. Set in Val d'Arly, between the Aravis, Beaufortain and Mont Blanc mountain ranges, much of the produce used in the open kitchen comes directly from Le Toi du Monde's garden. Everything else is sourced within a 10km radius and there is an on-site smoker to cure local fish and meats. The high-ceilinged restaurant has been awarded a Bib Gourmand and Etoile Verte in the Michelin Guide for its sustainable cuisine.

Standout Dish: While the menu changes seasonally, one dish is a constant – Le Tartiflette Tatin, an upside-down tartiflette, made using a secret recipe from Florent Perrin's grandmother.

Don't Miss: Le Toi du Monde holds regular concerts by the region's best musicians on the terrace with far-reaching views of Mont Blanc.

The Essentials: Booking advised. Also a four-star Gîte de France eco-lodge sleeping up to 20. +33 479 10 63 53; letoidumonde.com



BÄREN RESTAURANT

WENGEN, SWITZERLAND

The Restaurant: 'Why go far away for food when all the good things are close by?' is the philosophy of Willy and Therese Brunner, owners of the Bären Hotel and restaurant, who serve only home-grown, locally grown or regional products. On the menu is Grindelwald lamb, Wengen beef, game from local hunts, fish from nearby Lake Thun and Lake Brienz, and of course locally produced mountain cheeses and butters. Even the herbs and flowers used to decorate the dishes are grown in the hotel's garden.

Standout Dish: Pulled wild boar burger with red cabbage salad, fried onions, Bären French fries, cranberry sour cream served in a homemade bun.

Don't Miss: The vegan and vegetarian options, which include celery root schnitzel, pumpkin burger and herb soups.

The Essentials: Booking advised, though a small selection of dishes are now available as takeaway. +41 33 855 14 19; baeren-wengen.ch

HENDL FISCHEREI

LEOGANG, AUSTRIA

The Restaurant: Taking pride of place opposite the Asitz top station in the Leogang ski area, this restaurant began life as a simple hut selling BBQ and roast chicken. Today, with its floor-to-ceiling windows and retractable roof offering panoramic views of the surrounding peaks, it's now one of the most sought after tables in the valley – with bookable private areas including a Zermatt cable car and Champagne box. However the simple, tasty, barbecued food remains the same and the chicken still takes centre stage.

Standout Dish: Huwi's half a roast chicken, served with stone-baked bread (€12.50).

Don't Miss: A heli-cab home. Hendl Fischerei partners with Sennair to take guests (and their ski equipment) directly back to their accommodation — with or without a sightseeing tour on the way.

The Essentials: Booking is essential, especially for the private booths. +43 6583 20 800 800; hendl-fischerei.at



CHALET ETOILE

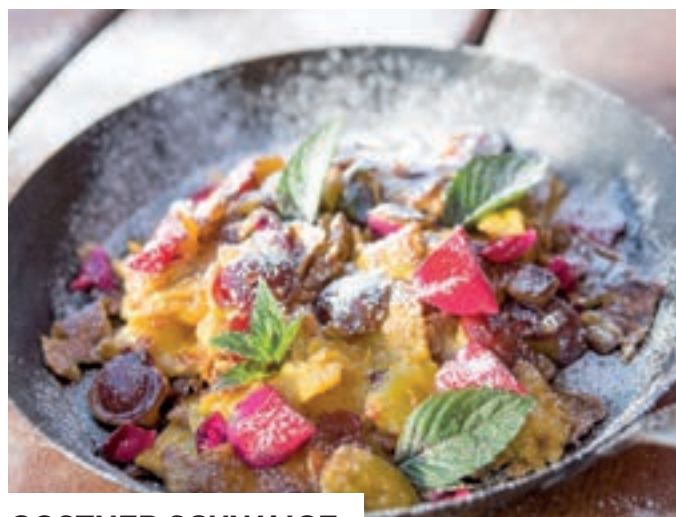
CERVINIA, ITALY

The Restaurant: Built in 1974 by Cesare Frassy, Chalet Etoile started life selling simple sandwiches. Now it does a roaring winter trade with the whole family involved. Cesare's Swedish wife, Ulla, who came to Cervinia as a chalet girl, is now head chef. Their son Kalle buys the all-important local Italian wine while his girlfriend, Hanna, is the pastry chef. The Frassys' daughter, Caroline, is front of house and her chef-husband, Alessandro, works in the kitchen with Ulla, introducing new dishes. The Swedish-Italian cuisine has an Asian twist, a nod to the time Caroline and Alessandro spend in Bali every summer.

Standout Dish: Best-sellers include reindeer ravioli, lobster and king crab.

Don't Miss: The evening private dining experience where the restaurant is decorated with candles. Guests are collected from their accommodation or the village by skidoo.

The Essentials: Tables must be booked several weeks in advance during high season. +39 1669 40 220; chaletetoile.it



GOSTNER SCHWAIGE

ALPE DI SISI, DOLOMITES, ITALY

The Restaurant: A 'schwaige' is a type of mountain hut where you cook your own goods, and this refugio is run on the simple philosophy of serving local produce from the surrounding Seiser Alm. Now a family affair, chef-proprietor and renowned local character Franz Mulser, along with his wife, Petra, and parents Michl and Julla, serves food inspired by the surrounding meadows and sourced from the farm that has been in the family for more than 500 years. It also has four suites sleeping between two and four.

Standout Dish: 'Heublüttensuppe' – a soup made of hay from the alpine plateau, flowers and 15 herbs, served in a bread crock.

Don't Miss: Cheese from the family's farm, set at 1,900m beneath Mt Schlern, including petal cheese, mountain saffron cream cheese and an edelweiss camembert. Best enjoyed as part of a 'Marende', a type of Tyrolean ploughmans.

The Essentials: Booking is essential, and if you arrive by train, the family will happily pick up guests from the station. The restaurant is only open for dinner by reservation in the evening.

+39 347 836 81 54; aussergost.com/en/gostner-schwaige ■