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WHERE TO STAY

INSIDER REPORTS ON THE TOP SPOTS TO BED DOWN. EDITED BY ISSY VON SIMSON



THE ROUND-UP: SWITZERLAND

FOR MOUNTAINS, FRESH AIR, INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND THOUGHTFUL LIVING, THIS ALPINE COUNTRY IS PARTICULARLY CRISP



RESTAURANT AT CHETZERON, CRANS-MONTANA

PHOTOGRAPHS: BRECHENMACHER/BAUMANN CUGINI, MARTIN GARDELLIANO, NALIES



CHETZERON, CRANS-MONTANA

Around 15 years ago, looking out of the window during a meeting about what to do with Crans-Montana's decommissioned gondola station, Swiss-Lebanese hotelier Sami Lamaa had the idea to turn it into a cracking hotel. He bought the derelict Sixties block on a spectacular 7,000ft-high mountain crest in the Swiss Alps and then sought feng-shui expertise from a sect of Taoist monks. Whatever they decreed appears to have worked: the soaring industrial building has been reimagined as a beautiful contemporary space. The restaurant was the earliest part to launch, upgrading regular ski-lunch stalwarts such as hot dogs and spaghetti bolognese to lobster bagels and slow-cooked lamb. The first of the now 16 bedrooms came a few years later – as Lamaa explains: 'Everything starts with the food; it had to be perfect before we opened the hotel.' Tucking into freshly baked bread and a fluffy breakfast omelette with spinach picked that morning, it's easy to see his point. Although food actually plays second fiddle to the environment. The mountains are integral to the design: the concrete walls are bare of paintings; the towering porticos frame 25ft windows that flood the restaurant with a skyline of rocky peaks; solar and photovoltaic panels provide hot water and electricity; and the bespoke potions in the bathrooms, crafted with edelweiss, bottle the smell of the custom-made pine furniture.

It's about as ski-in, ski-out as you can get in winter, and in summer, four-wheel-drives bump up the empty pistes delivering digital detoxers, climbers, romantics and foodies for hiking and yoga weekends. Just getting to the front door is an experience. GABRIELLA LE BRETON

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WHERE TO STAY

MAISON BERGDORF, INTERLAKEN

Finding out that the co-owner of this hideout also writes Gothic thrillers only adds to its appeal. But Mirko Beetschen's latest novel – about an abandoned hotel high on a Swiss mountain that brags an intimidating body count – is nothing like this place. Instead, the maison is a gorgeous 19th-century cuckoo-clock chalet – brought back to life by Beetschen and his partner, interior designer Stéphane Houlmann – that somehow manages to feel hidden right in the centre of the famous town. It's a very personal project with five bedrooms where you're invited to curl up with a good book, drink tea, eat just-baked croissants and gaze out at the mighty, snow-peaked Jungfrau. The interiors are a mix of vintage and custom-made furniture with contemporary art.

Walls are lined with fully stocked bookshelves and tapestries that echo the building's past. Beetschen admits to loving the atmosphere of old houses and the traces of their former inhabitants – and many of the details here belonged to the previous owner, the impeccably tasteful wife of the writer's childhood doctor. But the hotel also has a modern edge, with a sleek Foster kitchen, playful dining chairs by Dutch studio Spoinq and an almost Cubist fireplace with cement-clad wood panels that steals the show in the sitting room. Maison Bergdorf is not only a warm and imaginative space, it's also part of the growing trend for hybrid offerings – residences that double as galleries and allow guests to shop their look. In this case, many of the objects in the house, from lamps and books to blankets, are available to buy for those who love its originality and eclecticism. Perfect for design-obsessed bibliophiles. **ROSHAN McARTHUR**
BOOK IT Doubles from about £190. maisonbergdorf.ch





VILLA FLOR, ENGADIN

Ladina Florineth, the turbo-connected host of this curious seven-room guesthouse in the tiny village of S-chanf, grew up in the Engadin. Her father was a mountain guide and friend of the legendary art-world figure Bruno Bischofberger, the Swiss gallerist of names such as Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat who she met at a young age. After working in fashion in Geneva and Munich, Florineth returned here 11 years ago – ‘We all end up coming back to the mountains,’ she says – and bought the historic Art Nouveau villa overlooking the Inn River, slowly transforming it with flea-market finds and modern paintings. It has a big following among creatives – you might bump into the painter Julian Schnabel – he often stays here in the winter for weeks at a time – or architect Norman Foster and his wife Elena. Villa Flor feels as if it’s Florineth’s own incredibly stylish home, where a large-scale Schnabel work hangs beside the artfully cluttered desk that acts as the reception; the cosy wood-panelled drawing room is decorated with mid-century vintage objects; and the library is piled high with books. In the Engadin, contemporary art is everywhere. The Von Bartha gallery, an outpost of the respected Basel space in a 16th-century barn, is just a five-minute walk away. Florineth also uses the house to exhibit her favourite pieces. The start of this year saw a show from the renowned Memphis Group designer Nathalie Du Pasquier. To stay here is to be part of an exciting cultural conversation taking place in the most unexpected location. GISELA WILLIAMS

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SIGNAU HOUSE, ZURICH

In the bourgeois thickets of the city, minutes from the river yet worlds away from the austere, blue-chip banks lining it, lies Signau House. Its residential neighbourhood of iron gates and imposing shuttered houses doesn’t suggest that this was once the Swiss HQ of Universal Pictures. Inside, it’s easier to imagine a producer striding across the parquet floors, cigar in hand, and the black-tie parties that were held in the dining room. But it’s not glitzy. Instead, this grand and handsome Swiss-German house – with sweeping ceilings, vast windows and a splendid wooden staircase – deliberately skirts the flouncy romance of French equivalents. The owners have preserved the heritage with consideration, carefully commissioning EMI Architects whose loyalty to the building’s original character is palpable. A private cinema takes up the basement, and all the way up to the third floor a blend of contemporary and early-20th-century furniture populates the spaces, some from the owners’ own homes, some from their travels, such as the Art Deco lamp suspended over the dining table. On sunny mornings, breakfast is served in the English garden where Roger Moore was known to enjoy a tippie: a feast of Swiss cheese, cured meat, yogurt, brioche and bread. In the afternoon, grab a cold beer from the Smeg honesty bar or head to lively neighbourhood restaurant Bohemia and Tyler Brûlé’s *Monocle*-magazine café, where the coffee is indisputably good but the global, new-age aesthetic now errs on mainstream – unlike Signau House. There’s nowhere in the city like it. It’s not a business hotel nor is it a gilded dowager along the lake’s shores, but its streamlined elegance tells a story that is distinctly old-Zürich in character. ROSALYN WIKELEY

BOOK IT Doubles from about £260. signauhouse.com





BRUCKE 49 HERBERGE, VALS

Swiss-Danish owners Thomas Schacht and Ruth Kramer, a creative director and a fashion designer, broke rank in this deep Graubünden valley when they opened their first B&B. Gone were the gingham curtains and knotted pine chairs of traditional chalets; in their place, a bright, airy kind of mid-century, Nordic-like interior that felt not only different, but also cleverly relevant and just as rooted. Last year, the pair extended their methodology to the *herberge*, or inn, next door. The 18th-century building now has three apartments, where Schacht and Kramer have rolled out that same successful riff on Alpine styling via Scandinavia – a blend of muted colours, clean lines and rustic character. Tongue and groove lines the walls – some is the original cladding – while cheese plants sit beneath low beams, and sleek dark kitchens add an urban nod. The top-floor studio and the two larger flats below attract the usual hiking and skiing crowd, but the Herberge is also base camp for design buffs, nature lovers and families wanting to hole up and relax. In the mornings, everyone wakes with the first rays of sunshine streaming into the bedrooms along with the sound of church bells before breakfasts of local cured meats, fresh coffee and homemade jam. And at night the soft crackling of the wood fire lulls everyone to sleep. On the doorstep are the five lifts that make up the tiny ski resort of Vals, and nearby the rather extraordinary Peter Zumthor-created spa with its famed thermal waters. A low-key hangout that punches well above its weight. EILEEN STAGAT
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HOTEL WALTHER, PONTRESINA

What makes many grande dame Swiss Alps hotels quite so glorious is that they are still independently and passionately run by a third or fourth generation of the family. But at Cinderella-castle-like Hotel Walther, just down the mountain from St Moritz, current owners Thomas Walther and his wife Anne-Rose have also shaken things up a bit. Shortly after they took over from Thomas's parents, they instigated a major facelift in time for its 110th birthday – not just a regilding of the elegant belle époque interiors, but something innovative and fresh and clever. Local designer Virginia Maissen swept in, adding deep-green ceilings to the oak-wood lobby and rich Prussian-blue silk to the main restaurant. Artist Rolf Sachs, son of playboy Gunter Sachs, has turned dozens of vintage milking buckets into a dramatic light installation, and the reception desk is now a massive 20-tonne cube of marble created by sculptor Viet Rausch. And though Sachs, who occasionally stops by the hotel for a drink or lunch, believes that some historic spaces should remain preserved as an homage to their past, the risk that the Walthers took to reinvent this one was well worth it. Using a designer such as Maissen, who is sensitive to the traditions of the area, has meant that the place attracts a whole new crew while still keeping loyal regulars happy. Paintings by Italian artist Sandro Fabbri hang above a bar at which Lenin is rumoured to have slurped a Pilsner, though the crowd now is a mix of perfectly coiffed matrons and smart young families. Here is a hotel maintaining a balance of old-world charm while keeping a firm eye on the future. GW

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