

Ah, Courchevel, Courchevel...

COURCHEVEL DOES NOT EVEN KNOW THAT IT HAS EXPERIENCED A NUMBER OF SERIOUS UPS AND DOWNS IN THE FAR-AWAY FROSTY RUSSIAN WORLD IN THE COURSE OF THE LAST TEN OR FIFTEEN YEARS. AFTER ALL THAT, PEOPLE STARTED TO COME HERE SIMPLY TO SKI AND TO HAVE REST. ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THE VILLAGES OF COURCHEVEL HAVE BEEN LIVING THE SAME CALM, COMFORTABLE AND TASTY LIFE AS IN THE LAST TWO HUNDRED YEARS

by IGNAT SAKHAROV

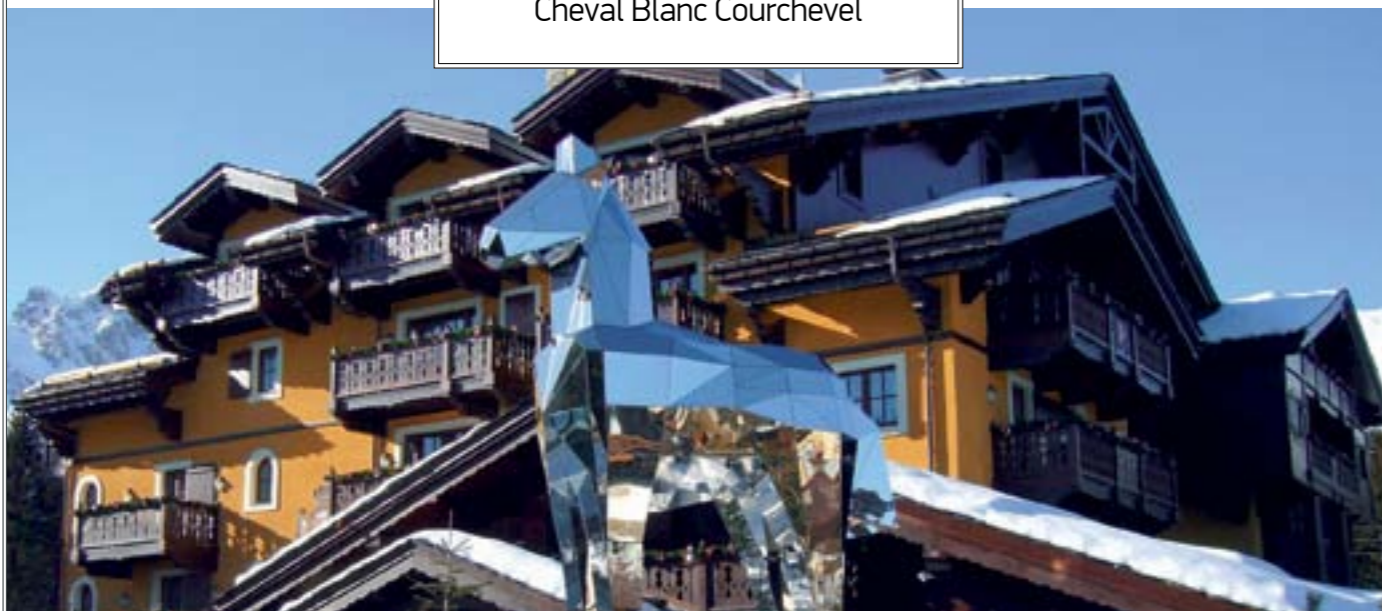
Le Strato

A lot of glass, wooden sculptures, columns from dark earthenware, playful chequered furniture, very modern art on the walls, windows like in 16th-century castles, a bar with scoop armchairs, multi-coloured chairs in the restaurant, plush upholstery of the sofas, gilded light holders, a personal fitness trainer. It is a little strange to look out of the window from an interior brought here, it seems, from

Berlin or Singapore, and see grey rocks not far away and the fir-trees where the squirrels cavort in the snow outside. You seem to be watching Discovery or Animal Planet from, well, Berlin or Singapore. But this false impression is easily shattered as soon as you emerge from this shell and reach the chairlift, which is very close. Contrasts are the basis of any major effect, and here they are in full swing. >>

best of the best

Cheval Blanc Courchevel



Pastel shades, warm glow, wooden beams, play of crystal, a warmed-up pool, a lounge bar, designer-made sheep of wood and wool in the corridor, a spa with the full Guerlain assortment, Louis Vuitton boutiques. Fendi and Ski Service are also there — in the latter you can buy skis with the La-croix design or a Nidecker snowboard. The chairlift is just a few steps away, the way it should be in any serious hotel at

this point of the world. Which is, strictly speaking, not that difficult: the size of Courchevel is such that being far from the chairlift means being submerged in the snow outside the town boundary. As for radical differences which make Cheval Blanc Courchevel unlike its brethren, it is, probably, the unusual combination of following all strict and nebulous norms of high class with the purely French self-irony.

Hôtel Le Lana



Walls with stripes, oak panels and tissue wallpaper, high quilted bed backs making the beds similar to thrones, Italian plastering, dark-coloured mosaic, huge beams under the ceiling, red-and-gilt bed covers, rough stone in the bathrooms, Ionic columns in the restaurant, breakfast with a view of the ski slope. On the outside, the hotel successfully imitates a chalet; inside, it asserts its pal-

ace nature with equal conviction. Grey walls and carved balconies make it similar to a regular Alpine house, only much enlarged; imagination even suggests that some sheep, equally huge, should be grazing nearby. But inside there is virtually nothing to help a guest imitate a wayward traveller who comes to be warmed up in a house of a local gamekeeper.

best of the best

Grandes Alpes Private Hotel



Simple lines, straight surfaces, natural wood that almost looks like porcelain, well-set sunlight which leaves the shadows no chance on a sunny day, furniture that seems to have escaped from a modern art museum, tissue lampshades, a snowy valley behind the windows. And it is not just about its careful service, sushi and sashimi at Le Bizan restaurant or the massage menu at the Valmont spa. Eve-

ryone who has secretly dreamt of furnishing the city apartment with wood but rejected this idea, unwilling to live in a village house, should be walking along the hotel, making photos — and making queries — all the time. How it happened that the designers managed to turn an interior with such quantity of wood into an almost New York chic place, is a mystery. But they did manage it.

Aman Le Mélézin



Panoramic windows, oak boards, a pool worthy of Olympic competitions, mediaeval-looking light fixtures, bright marble. The designer who was inventing furniture covers was at some point gripped by the Art Deco spirit which never released him until everything was done. Which, of course, made the interior very memorable. Aman Le Mélézin is not a chalet as such, it is rather an Alpine castle which only

makes us believe it is a chalet. It hovers above the pistes with its rather monumental bulk, and it seems this is where the master of mountains and gorges should live — you know, the one that comes out to meet the skiers and ask them three questions before letting them go further. Those who cannot answer will have to be corrected at the spa, massaged with hot stones. After hammam procedures, of course. >>

best of the best

White 1921



Geometric ornament on the walls, dark-grey mosaic in the spa, blue floors, windows with illuminators in the conference hall, white wooden balconies with a view of the piste and chairlifts, abstract paintings, a team of specialists to prepare the guests' ski equipment, a Louis Vuitton boutique, curtains which seem to be made of the hide of plush animals. It seems that Jean-Michel Wilmotte, the architect

of this hotel, wanted to make his brainchild memorable. It should be noted that he reached that goal. The boutique hotel looks rather like a Wild West saloon or a Soviet establishment dacha very close to Moscow. But, surrounded by the village tradition, it looks unforgettable, while the well-designed internal world of the enterprise makes one's sympathy grow to the level of true affection.

L'Apogée Courchevel



Wooden balconies, wooden ceilings, plaster and stone, dark furniture so minimalistic that any Scandinavian would have envied it, soft dispersed light, rolls with eel and amberjack, mountains behind almost any window you look from. The hotel is a captivating mixture of tradition and modernism — a peaceful chalet outside and something remotely like the Alpine Star Trek interiors by India Mahda-

vi. But the most important thing, of course, are the chairlifts 100 metres away from the entrance and the spa centre Sisley, where you can shape up after using these chairlifts as instructed. Another unexpected benefit of L'Apogée Courchevel (a member of the Oetker Collection) is a kid's club, the largest in the area. You can send the beloved child there and study the hotel in every minute detail.

best of the best

Le Chabichou



Solemn curves of bed backs, canopies, patchboard wooden ceilings, playful wall bracket lamps, velvet pillows, chequered armchairs, wooden statuettes, auteur cuisine of Michel Rochedy and Stéphane Buron which has already received two Michelin stars. Le Chabichou tries to present itself as a French village house, but it does feel it is rather funny. That results in the strange but captivating merger of

village chintz and the pompous, almost Parisian high style, which makes Le Chabichou (Relais & Châteaux) captivating from your first look at it. Irrespective of the quantity of light wood that attempts to send a guest into rural remoteness, the play that makes a prince pretend he is a shepherd is immediately obvious — the service, cuisine, and the space-image pool give it all away.

Les Airelles

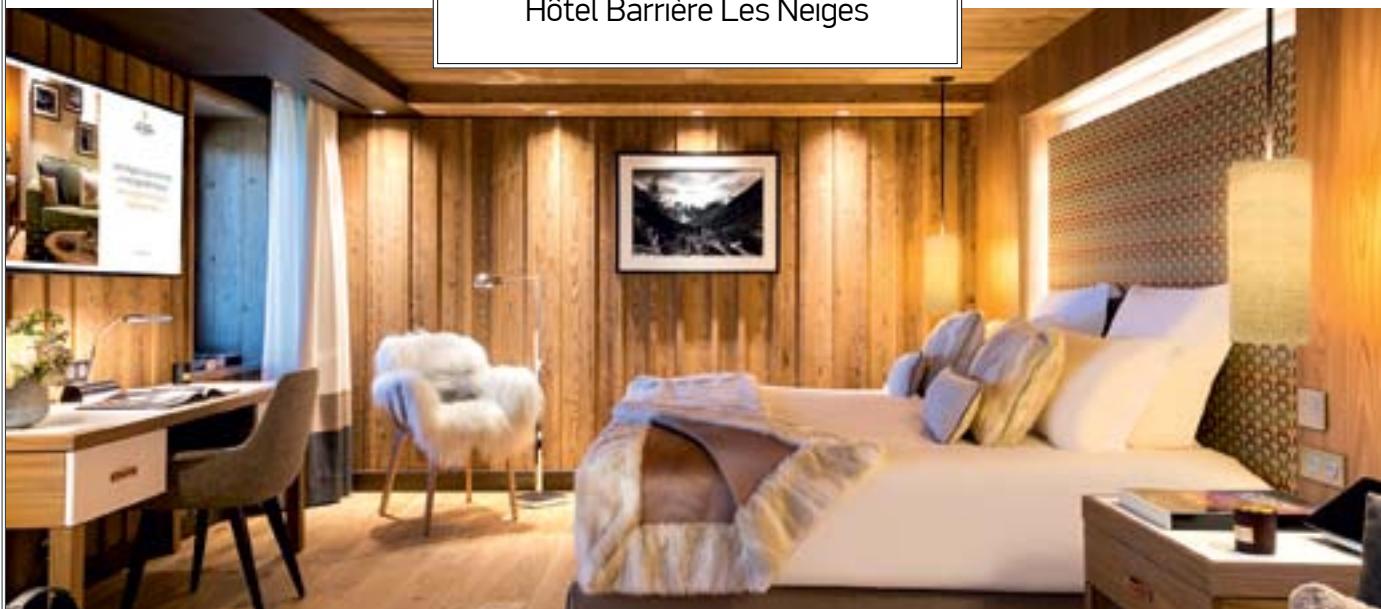


Terracotta floors, oak beams, carved wooden panels and ceilings, mosaic walls in the spa, an open-air jacuzzi, painted towers, mantelpieces, cast iron candleholders, Gothic script, crystal lamps, semi-circular balconies, a Michelin restaurant, a mountain bird's eye view. The style of Les Airelles (The Leading Hotels of the World) is very Alpine, but not very French. The decorations of the stucco façade, the

bay windows and Gothic extravaganza remind more of the architecture of Basel and Lucerne, Swiss towns where the beauty of such kind grows anywhere you look at. Which, of course, does not make your impressions worse — on the contrary, it provokes interest for an even more arduous study of Alpine territories, disregarding national borders. Especially since they are pretty ephemeral in these parts. >>

best of the best

Hôtel Barrière Les Neiges



Wooden panels, wooden ceilings, a lot of wood everywhere, old-style black-and-white photos on the walls, armchairs and sofas covered with something that looks like sheep skin, marble the colour of Alpine snow, a full-scale mantelpiece, wooden high-tech in the hall, which looks even stranger than it sounds. This hotel is so close to ski pistes that if you make a wrong turn, you might end up

in the spa centre with the hammam and sauna or the private hotel movie hall. Which probably will not be that bad for the unfortunate skier. He will be even luckier if his route takes him to the table of Fouquet's restaurant, whose French menu has a strong Swiss accent; or to B Fire, the place where one can meet Argentine cooking traditions, unusual for an Alpine chalet.

La Sivolière



Dark wood of the walls, light-coloured hides on the beds and armchairs, fir-tree branches right in front of the window, mantelpieces of natural stone, hundreds of fatty decorative candles, a ski lounge right by the slope, where your boots will be warmed up and you will be offered anything even remotely connected to ski and snowboards, a dog-watching service. This hotel is located a little bit further from the centre

of Courchevel than the rest. The difference in the distance is no more than a few hundred metres, but the impression is being almost secluded from humanity, among wild nature; of course, this effect can be mostly ascribed to the snowed-in fir-trees surrounding the hotel. Combined with a very detailed service, this false seclusion from civilization creates an impression of special cosiness. 💎