

Peak condition

Monocle hits the best mountain slopes around the world in search of that perfect winter getaway

Beyond a good fire and a 14-tog goose-feather duvet, there are really no rules when it comes to mountain living. Through the proliferation of kitsch Swiss postcards and childhoods spent reading *Heidi*, log cabins tend to spring to mind when you think of cosying up on a mountainside. But a log cabin is really just the beginning, as our high-altitude home hunting proves.

Our tour begins in the French Alps, in the shadow of Mont Blanc to be precise. The daughter of one of Stockholm's finest mid-century furniture dealers, inspired by her design heritage, remodelled a former hotel into three apartments, each furnished with the finest Nordic designs – and including a sauna of course.

From here we head across the Atlantic to the frozen lunar landscape of Portillo in the Chilean Andes. Local practice DRN has built a surprising modernist mountain refuge overlooking a frozen lake. Continuing our journey east, we jump across the Pacific to the mountain village of Karuizawa in Japan's Nagano prefecture. Here is an unusual mountain residence, a bolt hole built by Japanese architect Kurokawa Kisho, pioneer of "capsule" architecture. Capsule-living and cosy mountain dwelling don't often go hand-in-hand but Kurokawa-san's design shows they're not mutually exclusive.

Finally we head back to Europe, and the outskirts of Gstaad, Switzerland, where Amaldi Neder Architectes has created an updated, inverted take on the log cabin. Ditching kitsch, the practice instead focuses on bringing out the quality of raw materials – pine and local stone – and, rather than dressing the house up with decoration, it's kept bare, allowing the craftwork to speak. Four very different homes in four mountain locations. And no Heidi in sight.

OI
Gstaad
The Swiss chalet with a modern makeover and an eye on tradition

WORDS BY *Ivan Carvalho*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Alessandro Costa*

Both locals and visitors to Switzerland agree that much of the country's charm resides in its Alpine scenery, an unchanging tableau of snow-capped peaks, verdant meadows and quaint chalets. So when Swiss practice Amaldi-Neder Architectes won a commission two years ago from a Geneva client to construct a holiday cottage on the outskirts of Gstaad, the firm was careful to keep one eye firmly on tradition.

"A Swiss chalet has the same iconic presence as a New York skyscraper. It's part of the collective imagination," says architect Federico Neder. Nonetheless, he and colleague Paolo Amaldi chose to update the log cabin look, albeit subtly, by emphasising well-crafted materials, in this case timber and stone, and dropping the kitsch decor.

Nestled on a hillside plot, the two-and-a-half-storey lodge is similar in size to the surrounding residences with which it shares an underground garage. It has a near identical façade of overhanging eaves, decorative brackets and a balcony railing crafted with an exclamation point motif common to the area. Unlike its neighbours, however, the Swiss pine cladding has been sanded and varnished to a darker hue, to give it the appearance of an interior space.

Inside, the architects did the opposite, covering the walls with panels of rough sawn Austrian timber dried in a steam-heated kiln. Lined with uneven grooves and blemishes, the wood resembles a well-worn fence. Flooring is made up of wide planks of smooth fir up to 10 metres in length, supplied by Danish manufacturer Dinesen, while support beams and the ceiling are done in local pine. "A sort of interior-exterior dichotomy comes out, giving substance and potency to the wood," says Neder. "There's no colour, no decoration; everything's neutral so that the texture of the material comes out."

The traditional chalet floor plan was inverted and the attic was left incomplete, to allow for a raised ceiling. The upper level, normally reserved for sleeping quarters, is without formal partitions and serves as a combined living room, kitchen and dining area. In one corner, food preparation takes place around a custom-made kitchen island in brushed stainless steel with a countertop in grey Cardoso stone created by a craftsman from the Canton of Fribourg. The architects' neutral colour palette extends to lighting fixtures, with slate-covered toggle switches in gunmetal grey and small wall-mounted mast lamps in weathered bronze. Throughout the house, ceiling lights are recessed and the air vents concealed in wooden grilles.

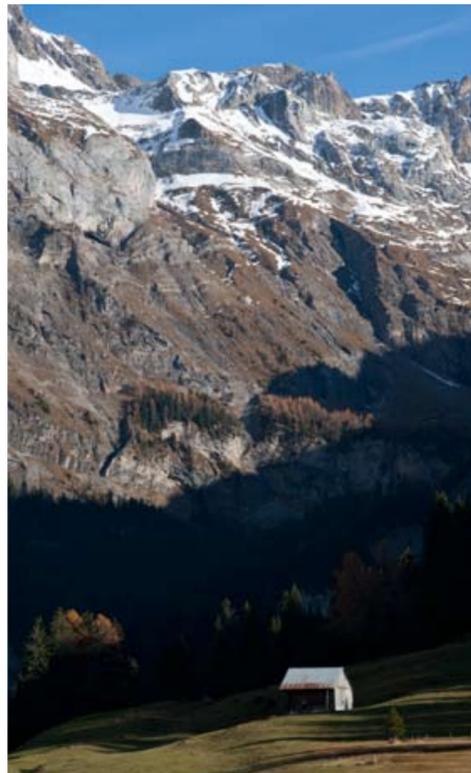
"With Federico, the concept was to keep everything feeling natural so you wouldn't tire of



things over time," says interior designer Laurence Rouveure, as she shows off the sitting area with its open fireplace and a low coffee table made from reclaimed wood from a barn in Megève. Head of London-based interiors firm Ardesia Design, Rouveure hired a local artisan to upholster sofas with premium suit fabrics from Loro Piana and Holland & Sherry. A Shetland wool, meanwhile, was used for the living room curtains.

Downstairs, the architects made space for two master suites and two smaller bedrooms. To break up the all-wood monotony, black and white prints of Sicilian landscapes were hung on the walls and fabric mounted in place of a headboard. Additionally, the larger bedrooms have ensuite bathrooms with a shower, tub and basin in Turkish limestone and the smaller bathrooms are lined in grey Tadelakt plaster. "It's a Moroccan material for hammams that we decided to bring to the Alps to mix things up," says Neder. The same plaster, in a lighter colour shade, appears in the basement steam room. It's situated by the garage so returning residents don't have to step far to unwind after a day of kicking up powder on the local slopes.

Across the hall sits the energy source for the spa and the rest of the house, a biomass stove that is fuelled by wood pellets made from compressed sawdust to heat water and keep the chalet's rooms cosy. "We had a local Gstaad company install it," says Neder. "The biomass takes a few days to heat up the entire house in the cold months – so when they leave after their stay the owners turn it down so it burns slowly but never shuts off." A good thing too, as outside temperatures in winter can dip to a shivery minus 15C. — (M)



Three architects
Who we'd count on to build a mountain retreat

OFIS Arhitekti
Ljubljana-based OFIS are doing what Slovenia does best: meticulous design fit for purpose. In the town of Kranjska Gora, high up in the Julian Alps, they have created an urban cube that is both practical and suitably fitted to its mountain surroundings. We love the solid, lozenge-like shapes and the preference for local building materials (here diagonally cut slate tiles) that give the area brooding mountain charm. Contemporary Slovenian doesn't come much better than this. *ofis-a.si*

AE5 Partners
With offices in Milan and Tokyo, this practice brings together two of our favourite design traditions. The Italian flair and urbane attitude to good living is as visible as AE5's Japanese attention to detail and commitment to design integrity. The new House M has beautifully transformed a traditional Japanese *kura* (warehouse) into a home. Grids of timber louvres create permeable walls offering fragmented mountain panoramas. AE5 has a knack for designing retreats that feel as at home in the Dolomites as they do in Nagano. *ae5partners.com*

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson
Pennsylvania's BJC is a dependable name in US architecture circles and has a reputation for mountain lodges and remote, almost lumberjack structures from Maryland to Utah. The Grand Teton Visitor Center in Wyoming is a masterclass in architectural carpentry on a huge scale. BJC's local projects are equally ambitious in the use of wood. The practice excels in creating that classic North American lodge, whether super-size or something more modest. — DMP *bcj.com*



Three places
The perfect spot to build a pad in the peaks

Uludag, Turkey
Twenty kilometres from the city of Bursa and a short drive from Istanbul, you can find a winter wonderland at Uludag ("Sublime Mountain" in Turkish) with an abundance of activities for ski and trekking enthusiasts. Alongside the lively bar and restaurant scene, the area is teeming with flora and fauna – spot rare owls, woodpeckers and even golden eagles in the nearby nature reserve. There's also a great Mediterranean climate in the off-piste season.

Revelstoke, Canada
Still relatively untouched by tourism, Revelstoke in British Columbia is the quintessential Rocky mountain town. Unlike crowded Banff, where there is currently a property-buying freeze due to over-crowding, Revelstoke is just being discovered. With everything from winter skiing to summer hiking – and a new bevy of fine-dining options – here you can find true isolation mixed with an impressive (and growing) set of amenities. Get in quick before everyone else catches on.

San Martino di Castrozza, Italy
The Alps hardly come more alpine than at San Martino (or Sankt Martin am Sismunthbach – we are in an officially bilingual region of northern Italy after all). The magnificent peaks of Vezzana and Cimon della Pala rise above the village, providing an immense backdrop to your modernist chalet. With a pied-à-terre in the Trentino, you can also savour some of the region's best dishes in the many Osterie Tipiche (taverns) that can be found. And when it comes to hitting the slopes, the skiing, trekking and mountaineering in the valley are among the best in Italy. — DMP

- | | |
|---|--|
| 01 Ground floor bedroom with Austrian fir walls | 09 Bedroom with converted sewing machine table |
| 02 Mountain views from main balcony | 10 Living room with open fire |
| 03 Train controller's lantern in bedroom | 11 Stairs leading to basement |
| 04 Valley of Gsteig | 12 Exterior in sanded Swiss pine |
| 05 Vintage yachting flag in bedroom | 13 Stainless steel kitchen |
| 06 Steam room with shower | 14 Bedroom cupboard detail |
| 07 Light-filled dining room/kitchen | 15 Winter warmer essentials |
| 08 Ski room with metal hangers | 16 Playground/living room decked out in vintage French leather |
| | 17 One of the main bedrooms |

