

DOWNHILL ALL THE WAY

We're back on the slopes, but what's new? asks **Felix Milns**

With a huge amount of pent-up demand, rolled-over bookings and resilient skiers desperate to return to the slopes, the landscape for the coming season is looking more positive. This is particularly true of Switzerland, which successfully reopened all its resorts last winter, and those lucky enough to ski there enjoyed bumper snow conditions. Luxury chalet bookings for peak weeks in the prime Swiss resorts are now on a two-week minimum stay and already all but sold out, with more trust seemingly placed in Swiss pragmatism than Macron's moods.

The industry has inevitably had a few casualties, with chalet operators in particular reducing their stock due to the pincer movement of Brexit and the pandemic. There are, however, a host of exciting new openings, all desperate to welcome back UK skiers.

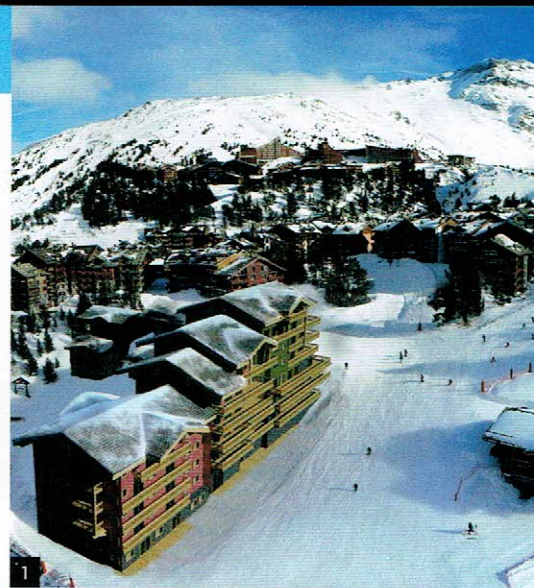
One significant factor putting the squeeze on chalet availability is that owners are booking up more weeks than usual, so if your heart is set on a chalet holiday it makes sense to take advantage of the still favourable booking conditions while you can.

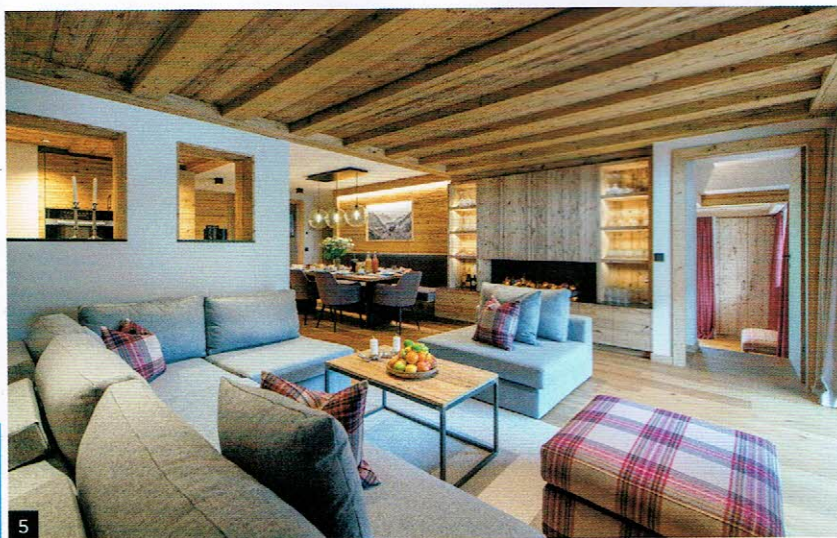
One such new opening is **Bear Lodge** 1 in Les Arcs (vip-chalets.com). A new addition to high-altitude Arc 1950, Bear Lodge is the brainchild of VIP Ski founder Andy Sturt, and the flagship of the relaunched VIP portfolio. Seven years in the making and the culmination of 25 years' experience, Andy designed it from the inside out as the ultimate chalet hotel, with 30 rooms and 12 chalet apartments.

If money's no object, look no further than **Chalet Marmottière** 2 in Verbier (oxfordski.com). Spread over 1,500sq/m, there's a huge indoor pool, air hockey table, pool table and poker room, nine bedrooms and stunningly sophisticated interiors.

Courchevel 1650 continues to grow in popularity as an alternative base to the glitz of 1850, with **Chalet Bacchus** 3 (leotrippi.com), a Leo Trippi favourite in the exclusive Belvedere area. There's the latest must-have, a ten-metre indoor pool, plus indoor spa and home cinema.

Another interesting chalet apartment development is the **Chalets Caseblanche** 4 (peakretreats.com) in St Martin de Belleville, that most beautiful corner of Les Trois Vallées. **Chalet Felicita** is a bijou addition close by the brasserie run by the Michelin-starred team behind St Martin's famed La Bouitte. Also opening in St Martin is **Chalet Duchesse** (chaletduchesse.com), with both of these available self-catered with optional add-ons, an increasingly desirable post-Covid trend. St Martin continues to evolve with the new Belgian-inspired four-





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starred **Hotel Le Lodji** (lodji.fr). Aside from La Bouitte this is the resort's first luxe hotel.

Staying in France, Ski Solutions (skisolutions.com) recommends the new boutique **Hotel Diamond Rock** in Tignes Le Lac. A little architectural gem, it combines asymmetric lines and a sophisticated palette with the warmth of a mountain hideaway. Flaine gains a second affordable yet funky hotel (to complement Terminal Neige) in the shape of **Rockypop** (rockypop.com) in a building originally designed by Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer. Perfect for a short break with friends.

Several new chalets in Italy offer a more off-piste option, with **Chalet La Fenice** (oxfordski.com) one of very few chalets in Cervinia, giving backdoor access to Zermatt and absolutely top-end service and design. Alternatively, **Cesa del Louf** (leotrippi.com) in Alta Badia is a gloriously remote new luxury property close to Arabba in the heart of the Dolomites.

While in Austria, Bramble Ski (brambleski.com) is launching three new chalet apartments to their outrageously delectable Lech portfolio at their **Brunnenhof** 5 residence, an ultra-modern alpine development a short walk from the chairlift and village centre. Also in Lech is the new **Chalet Arla** (arlalech.com), combining a contemporary mountain aesthetic with the finest materials, to great effect. For a complete getaway head for the **Hygna** (hygna.at) ground on the sunny Reith plateau in Alpbach where eleven new luxury chalets have been designed in classic Alpbachtal form and share a communal spa and Soho Farmhouse-esque pool in a converted hayloft.

Across the pond Aspen Snowmass celebrates 75 years of skiing and, should flight restrictions allow, the new residences at **Aspen Valley Ranch** 6 (avresidences.com) feature a collection of atypical world-class mountain homes in an 813-acre gated ranch. Meanwhile, the much-loved **Limelight Hotel** (limelighthotels.com) has had a full refurbishment and the new **Alpin Room** (aspensnowmass.com) restaurant in Snowmass brings a taste of the Alps to the Rockies.

With British visitors currently able to fly to Canada, Whistler is gearing up for winter with a new Fairmont Gold micro-hotel opening as part of the **Fairmont Chateau** 7 (chateau-whistler.com). Not to be outdone the **Four Seasons** (fourseasons.com/whistler) has fully refurbished all its rooms and suites.

Who knows what après will look like, but Oxford Ski reports skiers are less worried about Covid than whether mountain restaurants will open for lunch. From what we hear, tartiflette will be firmly back on the menu. ■



DON'T BUY, RENT...

Before you splurge on the latest Fendi ski suit, give a thought to EcoSki, a new rental skiwear service. After each rental, items are cleaned, re-waterproofed and sterilised and when they reach end of life they will be fully repurposed and recycled. Brands include Patagonia, Marmot, Ortovox and Icebreaker. ecoski.co.uk