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## Chalet chic for mountain living

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Are we about to see the end of antler chandeliers?



The Vigilius Mountain Resort, situated above Merano, Italy

**W**hen the Alpina Gstaad hotel opened at the end of 2012, in spite of years of protest from local residents, it made waves both locally and abroad. And not only because it was the first newly built five-star hotel to open in the exclusive Swiss ski village of Gstaad in 100 years, but because it broke with a well-established design tradition, too.

Although the building's exterior façade was constructed in traditional chalet style, the interiors showcased a novel mix of contemporary objects and lighting alongside rustic surfaces. Dramatically lit walls of rough local stones and wood repurposed from centuries-old Swiss farmhouses serve as a dramatic backdrop for leather-covered columns, a

hammered brass bar and, in a Japanese restaurant called Megu, organically shaped tables and chairs designed by the innovative French designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance.

There is little doubt that Alpine architecture has made great strides in the past two decades (think Matteo Thun's low-slung wood-and-glass Vigilius Mountain Resort above Merano in Italy, or the dramatic iceberg of a Norwegian hiking cabin created by Jarmund/Vignæs AS Arkitekter); designers of Alpine interiors, on the other hand, have continued to stick with a clichéd mix of antler chandeliers and cowbells. But that is starting to change, symbolised by the opening of the Alpina Gstaad hotel.

"People are not looking for a traditional mountain look, especially here in the Rocky Mountains," says Eddy Doumas, founder of the Colorado-based Worth Interiors. "Our clients want their mountain homes to be warm, cosy and family-friendly, but they also want their interiors to be modern and chic. The trick, he says, is to take "rustic organic materials and install them in a clean fashion, or combine contemporary industrial material and create organic shapes with it". In a residential penthouse designed by Worth Interiors in 2013 for the Four Seasons in Vail, the team created a modern-looking fireplace out of smooth squares of different coloured local stones, and hung a showpiece spiked-metal chandelier by Jean de Merry that resembles a giant sea urchin.



Blue knot garden lambswool cushion, £69.95, from liberty.co.uk



Other designers are doing the opposite: creating furniture with modern lines out of organic materials. "We bring outdoor materials inside," says Colorado-based architect Hans Berglund. "We mix steel beams and huge windows with a variety of wood grains and natural stone which creates

interior spaces that are both refined and welcoming.”

Will Wick of Wick Design in San Francisco said that, for the interiors of a mountain retreat he helped design in Big Sky, Montana, last year he combined tribal African elements like wooden bowls and handcrafted baskets with mid-century modern furniture to accentuate the owner’s contemporary art collection.

Many contemporary architects and designers agree on one thing: the importance of wood, a sustainable building staple plentiful in most mountain regions, as the go-to material for the construction of everything from surfaces to furniture. “Wood radiates warmth,” says the Norwegian architect Einar Jarmund of Jarmund/Vigsnæs AS Arkitekter. “It’s [also] a material that is easily transported and requires very little energy to use.”

We constantly try to create a sculptural architectural object that mimics nature and stands in contrast to it

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Larch wood bathtub by Matteo Thun and Antonio Rodriguez

In many of the Nordic homes designed by a fellow Norwegian, the architect Reiulf Ramstad, one can sit back into the wooden walls. Inspired by the sparseness and efficiency of historic mountain architecture, Ramstad designs interior spaces in which windows are used as furniture. “In several of our interiors we create microspaces where you can sit in a façade. We use windows not only as a way to let in natural light but as a place where you can sit and read a book,” he says.

Matteo Thun, along with one of his partners, Antonio Rodriguez, designs bathtubs made entirely of larch wood (a design inspired by Japanese bathing culture) that look beautiful in Alpine homes. Montana-based architect Larry Pearson of Pearson Design Group has created walls of logs that are visible from two sides and are both functional and visually interesting. “It’s like an art installation,” he says. “It’s a very playful idea. Every time that one restacks the wood the wall

changes. The wood itself can be split or round. There might be some remarkable art on the wall but sometimes the most interesting sculptural element in the room is how the cord wood is stacked.”

Design firm Highline Partners, which is also based in Montana, went a step further and, for the bathroom of a luxurious guest cabin completed last year, it created a ceiling of suspended logs with embedded lighting. Also, says Todd Thesing, founding partner of the firm, “With the wood planks for the cabinets under the sink,



©Audrey Hall

we used a technique that timber framers used in ancient Japan. They would burn the wood instead of stain it and the carbon would seal the wood. It makes the surface look like it's lacquered."

Natural materials often appear more contemporary and dramatic with the help of well placed lighting. When considering the interiors of the new Alpina Gstaad, the primary architect Elisabeth Wampfler, of Jaggi & Partner AG, points out that artificial lighting was just as important as natural light.

"We used a lot of indirect lighting to give a warm atmosphere," she explains. "It makes the rooms much cosier than a direct light source. Also the light was used to accent the organic surfaces of natural wood and stone, casting shadows and adding depth."

Other interiors, such as the Chalet La Transhumance in the Three Valleys region of the French Alps, conceived by the designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance in 2011, were inspired by the sculptural quality of the surrounding mountains.

"In some way, we are constantly attempting to create a sculptural architectural object that both mimics nature and stands out in contrast to it," says Einar Jarmund.



Duchaufour-Lawrance says that "one of the first things I was thinking about as I designed the top-floor space of the chalet was about when the snow is like a skin covering the rocks and everything becomes smooth and organic".

Using a mix of concrete and resin he created the thin skin that shapes the stunning central fireplace, which appears to emerge from the floor like a small crater.

The entrance to the master bedroom is like that of a cave covered in snow, shaped out of lacquered white wood panels edged with Corian. And while he used concrete for the floor surfaces rather than the expected wood, he says that it is wonderful to walk on because it's heated. "You can walk barefoot on the floor and never feel cold."

Given carte blanche by the owners, almost all of the



Suspended wood ceiling by Montana-based Highline Partners



The five-star Alpina Gstaad hotel in Switzerland

furniture in the chalet is also designed by Duchaufour-Lawrance, except for a dramatic spiral installation of lights created by Johanna Grawunder.

Sleek chairs with edges that seem to be cut from one piece of wood are sourced from his collection for the Italian furniture company Ceccotti. A custom-made table of carbon fibre looks like a shelf of ice.

Despite its futuristic minimalism, the owners love spending time in the house, especially in the winter. According to Duchaufour-Lawrance: "It's like being in a cocoon."

*Photographs: Vigilius Mountain Resort; Tiziano Sartorio; Audrey Hall; Jaggi & Partner AG*

*Slideshow photographs: AL&K; Bernhard Angerer/ Wien*