

White Heights

Hotel or chalet? **Felix Milns** picks the chicest places to ski in style

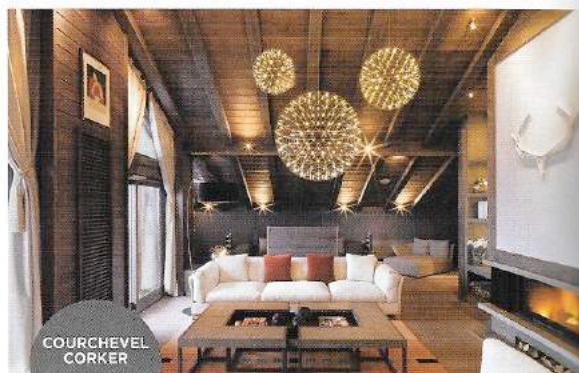


ITALIAN
GRANDE DAME

1 CRISTALLO, CORTINA

This splendidly traditional Italian grande dame first opened in 1901 and the hotel still retains that quixotic mix of Italian hospitality and formality. Immaculately dressed staff bid ciao and arrivederci, festooned curtains sashay every window and walls and ceilings are decorated with hand-painted trompe l'oeil flowers. The spa and vaulted poolhouse is equally ornate, though the glass-sided hot tub that overlooks the pool is a neat contemporary twist. New last winter was the kids' club, small but perfectly formed with an interactive magic carpet that children adore. Book a room facing the Tofane mountain for epic Dolomite views. The first *Pink Panther* movie was filmed here, and the presidential suite is named after Peter Sellers. More notorious in the '60s, however, was the Monkey Club, a nightclub attached to the hotel that was chief hangout for the jet set who crowned Cortina the Queen of Italian skiing. Having been closed for many years, the new-look Monkey opens this season with gold polished plaster ceilings and black and white shots of its illustrious past.

BOOK IT: Seven nights half board from £1,720pp, including flights and transfers. oxfordski.com



COURCHEVEL
CORKER

2 SIX SENSES, COURCHEVEL

Nestled between the snowy peaks of Courchevel 1850 are the new Six Senses residences; alpine in design and elegant in surroundings. Each apartment has been designed by the ever-sophisticated interiors company Morpheus London. The rooms – especially the penthouses – are tailored to lavish living, with vintage ski equipment set beside furs, and mood lighting illuminating glassy wine stores. Views stretch out over the pistes – as magnificent as they are alluring. Courchevel is one of the more joyous ski resorts in the French Alps; pizzas are topped with truffle, magnums of Moët flow like a melting glacier, and after a day on the slopes, drinking atop the opulent Le Panoramic, a restaurant high in the mountains, or a night out in town are perfect après-ski activities, though you shouldn't forgo a massage in the spa back at the apartments. For extra exclusivity, take one of Jetfly's private planes, which – in good weather – can land just a two-minute drive away from the front door.

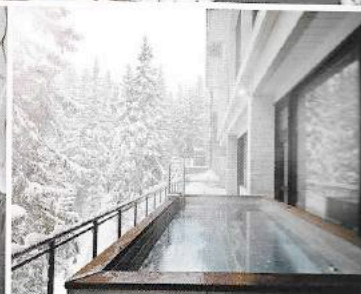
BOOK IT: A week's apartment rental, from €6,000 to €40,000. Jetfly flies direct to Courchevel from a number of UK airports. one-courchevel.com; jetfly.com/en

3 TOTEM, FLAINE

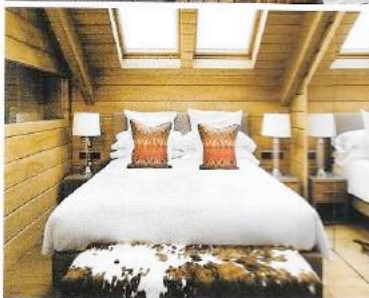
The rebirth of the Hotel Totem is the first in a new range of budget-friendly three star contemporary ski hotels by famed French hoteliers the Sibuet family, under the catchy banner of Terminal Neige. My iPhone may have spellchecked this to Terminal Beige, but the truth is anything but. Flaine was designed as an avant-garde experiment in the late-sixties by famed Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer, and its stark utilitarian concrete has long divided opinion. The Totem had been closed for ten years, but its reopening suggests Flaine's time has come again. The Sibuet family have stripped the building back to its magnificent concrete and exposed ducting, and the result is a triumph. Sputnik light clusters with filament bulbs hang over the bar, old arcade games double as coffee tables and squishy Patricia Urquiola-esque sofas sit back to back by a bespoke Marcel Breuer fireplace. Classic rooms are a shade small, but well designed with cowhide cupboards and black wool walls. Art is everywhere, the hotel takes its name from the Picasso Totem pole outside, surreal art films project on a loop in the bar and graffiti art in the staircases traces the history of art in Flaine. **BOOK IT:** Seven nights B&B from €630pp. terminal-neige.com



MODERN REVIVAL



SPANISH CHIC



4 EL LODGE, SIERRA NEVADA

Not many people know you can ski in Southern Spain, but the Sierra Nevada mountains stretch up and over 3,000m, higher than most Alpine resorts. The skiing is surprisingly good and, last winter, the team behind the Marbella Club redefined the hotel landscape with the opening of El Lodge. A boutique hotel with a chalet feel, El Lodge cocoons you the moment you walk in. The furniture and interiors have been designed by Andrew Martin – lots of mirrored trunk furniture, black felt pool table, cowhide Louis XIV armchairs and warming bookshelf wallpapers – which give real soul to the chalet-style timber and stone cladding. Ornate antique tills bookend the zinc-topped bar and even the boot room looks like a cosy lounge, with giant leather sofas to flop into at the end of the day. A huge terrace overlooks the piste, so you can ski straight from the door, and the outdoor pool – heated to hot tub temperature – is the highest in Spain. Perfect for an off the beaten track short break, or combine with Granada, one hour away, for a ski/city break. **BOOK IT:** Doubles from £260 B&B. Flights with British Airways (ba.com) to Malaga and Granada, from £84 return. ellodge.com

5 CLUB BELLEVARDE, VAL D'ISÈRE

Val d'Isère is VIP ski's spiritual home, and the newly expanded Club Bellevard is a VIP home from home. Two large adjoining slope-side chalets have been knocked into one über-pad sleeping 24, and you can still ski from the door. The club chalet concept allows you to book by the room but, unlike a hotel, here you still get a real chalet feel. The first floors of both buildings have been opened up to create one vast open-plan living area with high vaulted ceilings. Prop up the zinc-topped bar and help yourself to ice cold beer on tap, or chill out and make new friends while sinking into the wraparound charcoal sofas, given a clubby contemporary feel with flashes of bright orange cushions and lighting. The food is great with more choice and flexibility than a normal chalet due to the club format, plus you get access to the VIP drivers. The balcony fittingly has not one but two large hot tubs where you can watch the sun set over the peaks, but the cherry on the trifle is the new swimming pool and spa area; you are travelling VIP after all.

BOOK IT: Seven nights chalet board from £659pp, including flights and transfers. vip-chalets.com



VIP VAL D'ISÈRE



LITTLE GEM



6 NIRA MONTANA, LA THUILE

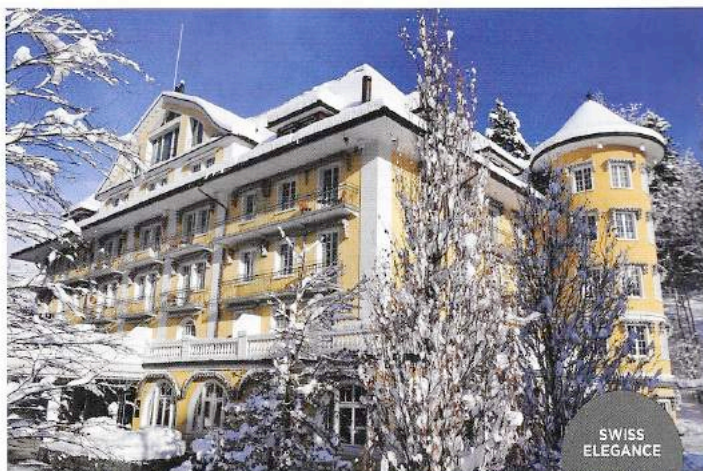
Best known as an Italian gateway for heli-skiing, La Thuile is one of the Aosta valley's little gems. Lift-linked to the French resort of La Rosière, in the shadow of Mont Blanc, you don't need a helicopter to find decent (and generally uncrowded) skiing over both the French and Italian borders, and the Nira Montana is as good a reason as any to winkle out La Thuile. The resort is more about ski than chi-chi, but the Nira pitches it just right to soften the edges. The rooms are simple and comfortable, with Cole & Son Birch tree wallpaper, aged pine cladding and tree trunk bedside tables. A corten steel fireplace warms up the lounge and be sure to eat in the mezzanine level of the restaurant, floating above the other guests. The spa is the star of the show, where sunlight streams in through the south-facing windows across a contemporary Corian white pool. Follow the frameless glass stairs up to über-calming relaxation rooms and saunas.

BOOK IT: Seven nights B&B from £1,175pp, including flights and transfers. shisolutions.com

7 LE GRAND BELLEVUE, GSTAAD

It is not hard to see why Gstaad is one of the most exclusive resorts in Europe – gentle alpine air, dramatic scenery and proper peace and quiet make it a very appealing hideaway. Despite being in the heart of town, Le Grand Bellevue feels like a well-kept secret thanks to its intimate size and soothing atmosphere. It offers old-school luxury with a playful update – despite being recently refurbished there is no boring beige minimalism here. There are plenty of corners to curl up in – a wine library, cosy cinema, spa with seven different saunas and plenty of fireplaces. The 57 bedrooms are as elegant as the public spaces, with mesmerising views of the Saanenland mountains, huge beds, deep baths and lovely Bamford products. The Michelin-starred food is sensational. Warm up after a day out with the Hot Chocolate Menu, afternoon tea or raclette at Le Petit Chalet. For a healthier option there is also a sushi bar. In the warmer months there is a grand garden to enjoy, which rolls down to Gstaad's main street. Whichever time of year you head up to Le Grand Bellevue, you're sure to come back down with rosy cheeks and a spring in your step.

BOOK IT: From around £500 per room half-board. (bellevue-gstaad.com)



SWISS ELEGANCE



CHICHI CHALET



8 CHALET CHOUQUI, VERBIER

It is impossible to get out of the wrong side of the bed when that means peeling back fur covers, throwing wide the doors to welcome the crystalline air and sitting down to breakfast in a room that has dramatic, three-sided mountain panoramas. What Ski Verbier Exclusive's owners don't know about the slopes there really isn't worth knowing, as David Pearson and Tom Avery have around 25 years' experience organising ski trips there. Tom just so happens to be an intrepid explorer, who has endured record-breaking trips to the South and North Poles, so there really is no one better placed to advise on carving up the snow. Here you get the service you'd expect in a five-star hotel but without being on best behaviour: champagne is ferried out to the snow-surrounded hot tub at a click of the fingers; fireplaces roar all day long; you can leave a trail of towels around Verbier's biggest private pool if you so wish; or pilfer the Bamford minatures; and call on the 24-hour chauffeur to shuttle you home from The Farm Club at 3am. No-one will mind, this is your home from home in the snow.

BOOK IT: One-week from £3,600pp, based on 18 sharing. ski-verbierexclusive.com. Swiss flies from £39 one-way. swiss.com