

The Cōmodo

BAD GASTEIN

Berlin-based practice WeStudio transforms a former spa facility into a contemporary refuge in the Austrian mountains.

Words: Guy Dittrich • Photography: © Pion Studio

The hotels that dot the slopes of Bad Gastein – a spa town in the High Tauern Alps – could unquestionably double for The Grand Budapest Hotel in Wes Anderson’s movie of the same name, their ornate façades gazing majestically at the Gasteiner waterfall.

A short stroll across town and with arguably better valley views than its grand neighbours, The Cōmodo has emerged from renovation; co-founders of Berlin-based WeStudio, Barbara Elwardt and Piotr Wisniewski, have transformed a functional five-storey block built in 1962 as a spa facility for employees of the Vienna City Administration. Elwardt, the founder of IOO Architekten for whom Wisniewski originally worked, also owns the hotel.

The Cōmodo is a contemporary refuge in the mountains. Supremely glamorous, it revels in the comfort of warm woods, deep colours and plenty of curves – all bathed in Alpine light. A hotel where every situation has been carefully thought through – “everything is considered” explains Wisniewski. Take the swimming pool; the broad blue-and-white stripes on the cushions of sun loungers pick up the detail of the oak lamella ceiling treatment whilst large globe pendant lamps are symmetrically suspended above the water. An Anderson-like attention to detail.





The hotel's Living Room features three adjacent seating pods, where classic and restored vintage finds are combined with new custom pieces evoking a '60s vibe



“We had a ‘60’s building with ‘60’s interiors,” says Wisniewski of his contextual starting point for the suave yet locally connected interiors, which include a gym and spa plus an unexpected 21-seat cinema. The hotel’s Living Room, the lobby-bar-lounge that overlooks the valley through a glazed façade, has three adjacent seating pods. “Some design classics and restored vintage finds are combined with new customised furniture evoking a ‘60’s vibe,” he continues. In the deep burgundy of Cōmodo red is the plump Camaleonda sofa by Mario Bellini for B&B Italia, which sits alongside a black leather seating collection by Gae Aulenti, designed for Knoll in 1976. The Pebble Sofa meanwhile is inspired by the soft shapes of stones from mountain streams and upholstered in a pale grey fabric from Kvadrat. Like the sun loungers, many other pieces of furniture and lamps, the sofa is a design by WeStudio, fabricated by Polish firm Piltex.

Rounded and curving forms are everywhere, softening the rectilinear building. There is gently fluted wood panelling on the bar counter. The same in the guestrooms, where the desks feature curved ends and tan leather chaise longues have cylindrical bolsters. The curvaceous volcanic form of the Etna ceiling lamps by Potsdam-based Mawa and the gentle radii of the Follow Me lamps from Marset reinforce the theme. Suites also boast semi-circular headboards reminiscent of works by Kelly Wearstler that inspired Wisniewski. The striking colours of the doughnut-shaped Ronda art piece from Zieta Studio, made by inflating sheets of welded steel, adds further flair. Wisniewski was like a kid in a candy store with shopping lists like these. More simplistically, much of Piltex’s seating uses lacquered, tubular-steel frameworks. And poetically, even the name of the hotel – derived from the Italian for comfort, convenience and cosiness – appears in a rounded font. This and the visual identity are the work of Munich’s Vision Alpbabet.

It is such attention to detail that shows the real love in an owner-operated hotel. Take the napkins, simple grey-and-white stripes but discreetly different. Not standard. A more substantial detail is the carefully ordered panelling in the valley rooms. “The whole layout is based on a 60cm module,” Wisniewski explains. Each panel measures 60cm x 100cm, so too the opaque bathroom window and the framed artworks. Bedside tables, every wardrobe module, and the bed and desk are arranged around this 60cm grid. This unobtrusive consistency provides calm. “It avoids the uneasy feeling imperceptible irregularities bring,” says Elwardt.

Wood panelling extends throughout the hotel, including the ceiling of the De Leit restaurant and the adjacent co-working space. Above the bar, mirrored panels raise the slightly lower ceilings. Panelling was a clear time-saver when it came to repositioning mechanical services and helped with the short construction time of just 11 months. Works were also kept simple with only a single column removed. And, as Elwardt reveals: “Austrian workmen have a motto saying it will always be ready on time,” referencing the 40-plus electricians on a single day in the immediate pre-opening period.

“The biggest sustainability gain is the almost unchanged reuse of the structure including elevator, stairwells – plus flooring and banisters – and swimming pool,” explains Elwardt. The property has new thermally and acoustically insulated windows, photovoltaic panels, underfloor heating and motion-sensitive corridor lighting, all helping to reduce energy usage. Originally 45 rooms, The Cōmodo now has 70, with nine rooms accessed via a bright yellow corridor on the lowest level. Further rooms facing the mountain are docked on the original concrete structure and built by regional carpenters in Austrian timber. Also crafted from timber are the sauna and sun deck on top of the



adjacent pool block. Here the original stainless-steel pool has been retained, as has terrazzo flooring in the stairwells and restaurant.

The restaurant, De Leit – meaning the people or community in German – is a play on the English word ‘delight’. On the menu are hearty portions of well-textured mountain food, think potato mash with crispy celery. Like the wines, all is locally or regionally sourced. Above is an air duct painted in a steel-like finish, which manages to look like a structural beam, whilst bread boxes hang from horizontal brass rods to save space on the counter beneath.

There is more fun with the artworks, sourced mainly from Berlin artists and photographers known to Elwardt, which supplement an artist-in-residence programme. Even the wallpaper is art. Amberdesign created an overlapping play on the contour lines of local mountains that mimics dragonfly wings and is custom-made by Architects Paper. Wisniewski commissioned the first sculpture, a gold-painted weathervane of crazy sorts, for the upcoming Art Garden.

A higher priority however is staff accommodation. Elwardt is determined that these 30 rooms will be connected, featuring the hotel’s design sensibility to attract the right calibre of employee. Additionally, a series of longer-stay suites with kitchenettes and saunas is under consideration. In progress too is the second Cōmodo hotel, a 13-room 1920s villa situated south-east of Berlin, to which an additional 16 suites will be added plus a wellness area, pool and small marina on the lakeside of Storkower See.

As a child Elwardt was fascinated by hotels and certainly, knew what she did not like following family holidays. Once she discovered the allure of Bad Gastein, caught in its nostalgic trap at the end of a U-shaped, glaciated valley, she returned often. When the property that was to be The Cōmodo became available she snapped it up, acknowledging “I would not have done it without Piotr.” The Cōmodo is a hotel project that has developed into a boutique brand of which they are rightly proud.



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Barbara Elwardt

Operator: The Cōmodo

Architecture and Interior Design: WeStudio

Branding: Vision Alphabet, Büroecco

Landscaping: Hutterreimann

Landschaftsarchitektur

Main Contractor: Spiluttini Bau

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