

INVENTORY: New opening

Sleek peak Austria

Alpine retreat The Comodo is breathing new life into the charming village of Bad Gastein.

Writer
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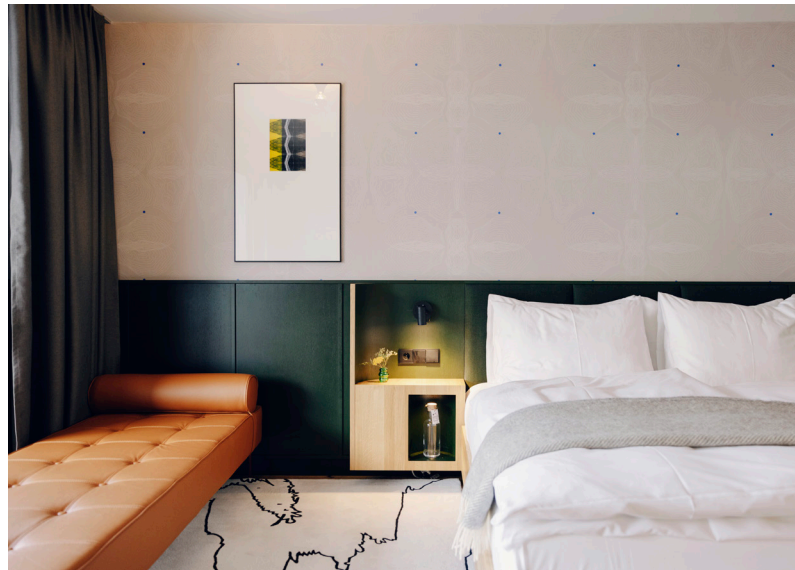
Photography
Amelie Niederbuchner

Barbara Elwardt remembers being anything but thrilled when a friend insisted that she visited Bad Gastein, a sleepy village in the Austrian Alps, 20 years ago. “I just didn’t see a reason for going to the mountains and not skiing,” Elwardt tells Monocle. Little did she know that she would return every year and eventually open a hotel there: The Comodo. And the skiing nearby goes on until late April.

It’s hard not to be charmed by Bad Gastein. The town, about an hour-and-a-half drive south of Salzburg, boasts a charming mix of belle époque buildings and 1960s modernism surrounded by the forested slopes of the High Tauern mountains. Once beloved by emperors and empresses for its recuperative thermal waters and underground caves, the destination fell into disrepair in the 1980s. However, creative openings in the 2000s including the Miramonte and Regina (as well as a rather convenient rail link from Salzburg and Vienna) started to awaken the town from its slumber. Elwardt compares the feeling here to that of Berlin in the 1990s. “It’s like a new beginning,” she says.

Elwardt teamed up with architect Piotr Wisniewski, to transform the hotel from a Kurhaus (“health resort”) into a contemporary mountain escape. “We were trying to evoke the ambience of a 1960s Alpine resort,” says Wisniewski as he shows us around the airy space. “It’s like a modern interpretation of an Austrian chalet mixed with Viennese coffee-house culture.” That is evident in the spacious lobby, which Wisniewski dubs the “living room”. A bar offers a good cocktail menu, while strong colours create a warm, cosy space that feels a world away from the stricter palette of Nordic minimalism. When it comes to stretching out with a book or newspaper, guests have options: Italian architect Gae Aulenti’s iconic leather lounge

1. Room with bespoke bed
2. Owner Barbara Elwardt
3. Bouquet on the bar counter
4. Pool with a mosaic
5. The Comodo’s homely restaurant De Leit
6. This way to your room...
7. Bottle-green bathroom



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furniture, Wisniewski’s custom-made and comfy Pebble couch or Mario Bellini’s 1960s Camaleonda sofa for B&B Italia.

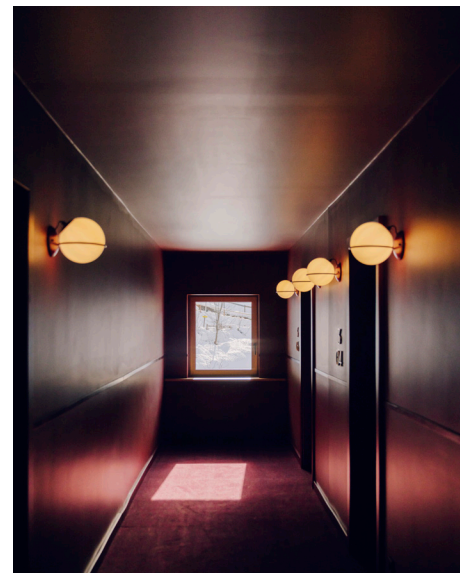
“Many of the pieces that you see here are from my personal collection,” says Wisniewski, gesturing towards a Type 200-190 chair from the 1960s designed by Rajmund Teofil Halas that he calls a “Polish classic”. The compact and light pieces were originally designed to sit in Soviet social housing but Wisniewski wasn’t shy about updating them. “We covered them with leather to give them a more luxurious appearance,” he says.

Though the furniture has been sourced from all over Europe, the design language, says Wisniewski, needed to link back to the site and its rich history. With shades of burgundy and bottle green, and materials including oak and pine, the interior mirrors the valleys outside. Geographical references to the mountains, forests and valleys are also incorporated into the designs on the custom-made wallpapers and carpets designed by Gosia Warrink.

The surroundings are vital to the experience of staying here and all 70 guestrooms and suites feature floor-to-ceiling windows with views of the valley or woods, plus artworks by emerging and established talents from Austria



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Bad Gastein address book

Eat

Himmelwandhütte: A rustic hut with meat from the hunt and top regional cuisine (try the *Topfenstrudel*).
+43 66 4910 9530

Bellevue Alm: One of the oldest huts in Austria, dating back 600 years, offering hearty classics including fondue and *Kaiserschmarrn* (shredded pancakes and compote).
gastein.mondihotels.com

Waldhaus Rudolfshöhe:

Guesthouse also run by a pair of former Berliners who keep tables for walk-ins, though booking is strongly advised.
rudolfshoehe.at

Drink

Hotel Regina: Cosmopolitan flair in an incredible old building with a fantastic bar. Good hosts, good cuisine, good drinks. A Monocle favourite.
dasregina.com

Café Schuh: No-frills Italian café offering good espresso, pasta and homemade cakes.
+43 6434 6269

Visit

Sportgastein: Undeveloped plateau with an impressive panorama offering long walks in summer and perfect snow for freeriding in winter.
skigastein.com

Reedsee: Unspoilt mountain lake with breathtaking view. (Accessible only in summer.)



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and beyond. The rooms also have nice touches, such as a cleverly integrated suitcase rack and tasteful carafes next to the beds: Bad Gastein’s mineral-rich, spring-fed tap water is a treat too. It also feeds into the pool, which offers striking views onto the valley, as well as a sauna. The pool is also unusual for Bad Gastein, a town in which spas and treatment areas were traditionally underground. This one offers massages, treatments and facials – not a bad option after a day on the slopes.

There’s also a gym, yoga studio, cinema and, unusually for a mountain resort, a co-working area. The restaurant eschews fanciness in favour of hearty, alpine seasonal favourites, from braised beef in red wine to Austrian dumplings. “In the Alps, you need comfort food, not *ikebana* [strictly-ordered Japanese floral arrangements] on a plate,” says Elwardt. The simple but sumptuous fare was conceived by Berlin chef Max Jensen and is served in the light-filled, wood-panelled dining room or, when the weather allows, outside on the terrace. Even the wines – many Austrian and organic – are listed by mood rather than winery.

The most exciting bit? The Comodo is just the first in what is slated to be a series of hotels that Elwardt plans to launch with Wisniewski over the coming years. The next site, for which Elwardt has already bought the plot but about which she’s keeping shtum, will be in a town just beyond Berlin. Watch this space. — thecomodo.com