

# Skiing Among the Stars

From the refined to the downright decadent, the Alps are a-twinkle with Michelin-starred restaurants. Tips down and lips poised, Leslie Woit skis straight for those Michelin stars.

BY LESLIE WOIT



**N**o one loves me, everybody hates me, and it's not because I'm thin, either. My two-week ski tour through the Alps fixed that. After nearly a dozen stellar Michelin-starred meals — more than 50 courses liberally paired with corresponding vintages, varietals, and the odd Negroni to get the ball rolling — I've been left with a muffin top, a pervasive low grade hangover, and an off-putting air of gleeful smugness. Who says skiing to lunch is for sissies?

My cunning alpine plan whipped my friends into a frothy *velouté* of jealousy: crisscross Switzerland and France to ski the best resorts, stay in the most glittering mountain hotels, and gorge my carnal appetite at a different Michelin-starred restaurant each and every day. Sometimes more.

Skiing to lunch, a *seriously* good lunch, and rolling seamlessly into Europe's most revered restos for a succulent dinner is nirvana for skiers like me — maybe like you, too — who love food and wine. Life-affirmingly magnificent food and wine. There is nothing more satisfying than a long morning in the powder or corduroy, skiing from lift to lift, past an onion-domed chapel here, through a clutch of fragrant hay-filled barns there, to arrive at the ultimate destination: a Michelin mountain temple of gastronomy. It's sybaritic, self-indulgent, and a whole mess of fun. Champagne and caviar, lobster lollipops, flaming soufflés... Like the Magi visiting the Messiah, join me as I follow the stars. We can make new friends later.

## LA MARMITE

St. Moritz

Michelin Stars: None (but you can't do St. Moritz without a visit to La Marmite).

[www.mathisfood.ch](http://www.mathisfood.ch)

"I don't give a shit about stars. A chef's philosophy is what's important." This from Reto Mathis. It's high noon and we're swilling pink champagne at his iconic restaurant La Marmite. "They have to be good," he declares. "The rest is B.S."

Bottoms up. My morning arrival via first class rail carriage revealed much about St. Moritz well before its impressive panoply of luxury hotels came into view. Snaking from Chur towards the snowy heart of the Engadine, I settled in among a bounty of matching luggage, hairless dogs, and fur coats. Their various owners appeared tanned, well dressed, and serene. But there's always one. Breaking the silence, a trout-mouthed woman hissed angrily into her phone: "I'm coming immediately to see you. My neck has fallen."

St. Moritzers come for the glamour and stay for the magic, including the kind served on-piste at La Marmite. With the timing of Houdini, Mathis'



*clockwise  
from top left*

- STAR  
ATTRACTIONS**  
1. Champfèr's  
Ecco St. Moritz  
2. Verbier's Le  
Chalet d'Adrien  
3. Zermatt's  
After Seven

## *Ecco St. Moritz is a gold-lined jewel box located in the five-star Giardino Mountain hotel.*

famous Alsatian *Flammkuchen* — truffle pizza — arrives. “Ja, I got this *tarte flambée* thing going,” he laughs, “then I pimped it.”

Harry Winston and hiking boots, polo ponies and sled dogs. Pimping your way round St. Moritz is so easily done. Though long-maned Reto Mathis doesn't have his own star, he is maestro to many. Head of the annual St. Moritz Gourmet Festival, for more than two decades he's invited the world's finest Michelin-starred chefs to cook at the famous ticketed event.

### **ECCO ST. MORITZ**

Champfèr

Michelin Stars: Two

[www.giardino-mountain.ch](http://www.giardino-mountain.ch)

After my extended pink 'n' pizza pit stop, the Engadine is awash in afternoon Alpenglow and I'm late for my date. With the flick of the maître d's finger my first Michelin lunch is ended just in time for dinner. I swoosh to the valley floor, where an immaculately dark-suited driver waits to usher my skis and me into a sleek black Range Rover and dispatches me swiftly to Ecco, a gold-lined jewel box located in the five-star Giardino Mountain hotel, tucked into the itsy-bitsy graffiti-etched hamlet of Champfèr. Out I spill onto a witty, royal purple carpet and roll to the door of an 18th-century convent school, now home to Ecco St. Moritz and Switzerland's youngest Michelin-starred chef, wunderkind Rolf Fliegau.

Ecco's chef is young, culinary-ly brave, and faultless. In a gold filigree room, I join 27 other diners. Austrian Zalto stemware, weightlessly fine, is lovingly filled and refilled by upbeat all-female waitstaff. With eight courses ahead of us, we begin with delectable bites resting on pebbles and tiny beds of dry hay. Our poetic meal also includes a garden of cress with gold-plated Victorinox scissors for self-harvest, a coin of foie gras stamped with the Ecco logo, Norwegian lobster with pumpkin and sea buckthorn... oh, and a lovely quote from Robert Louis Stevenson: “Wine is bottled poetry.”

### **AFTER SEVEN**

Zermatt

Michelin Stars: One

[www.seven.ch](http://www.seven.ch)

The following day is a moveable feast on rails. Over seven hours, the Glacier Express winds from St. Moritz to Zermatt through 91 tunnels, more than 291 bridges, and across a universe of mountainscapes.

When my little red train enters the canton of Valais, I'm surrounded. No fewer than 38 peaks, including the Toberlone-tastic Matterhorn, tower above Zermatt.

So much for outside. Indoors, Heinz Julen is local boy done good — an internationally acclaimed designer and exceptional artist whose funky fixtures and furniture grace... well, everything. His Backstage Hotel is home to a groovy dine-in cinema, and Vernissage, a trendy art-bar, as well as After Seven, a one-star Michelin restaurant. Julen's signature chandelier, a hanging orchestra of spoons, chains, and musical instruments, dominates the airspace as we settle in for a glass of champagne. Soon, the waiter brings me the shopping list — at least, that's how it reads. Celery, red cabbage, Angus beef, coriander, guacamole, cashew nuts... a dozen ingredients are submitted for approval or rejection, and then Chef Ivo Adam gets busy accordingly. The high-concept surprises keep a-comin': A hunk of dough arrives to bake in its own hot stone, timed by an hourglass, and served with kitschy, mini-Matterhorn shaped butter. The vibe is urban baroque and so, too, is the meal itself. It's inventive and just a little wacky, like the Switzerland we love.

### **LE CHALET D'ADRIEN**

Verbier

Michelin Stars: One

[www.chalet-adrien.ch](http://www.chalet-adrien.ch)

Gateway to the largest ski area in Switzerland, Verbier (aka *Verbs*) rocks morning through night. From skiing the backside of Mont Fort, to catching a flashing glimpse of local wingsuit rider Géraldine Fasnacht, to boogying under Hotel Farinet's open roof with Prince Harry... respite from such happy hard-living is perched at the pinnacle of the village. Le Chalet d'Adrien, an inn of infinite charm and comfort, is home to our next starry spread.

The labor of love of “retired” CEO Brigitte de Turckheim-Cachart, one of the allures of the 29-room boutique hotel is the gastronomy. The hotel's 31-year-old chef, Mirto Marchesi, hails from the Italian part of Switzerland and is by all accounts a Swiss *terroir-iste*. The lamb from Cotterg grazes only miles from Verbier, fresh perch is teased from Lake Geneva, and frogs hail from Vallorbe just beyond. The white truffles are sourced from Alba and accompanied by my all-time favorite Corton Charlemagne; the flavors are fresh and Mediterranean, and the effect is a welcome diversion



*Clockwise  
top left*

**FOODIE  
FOREPLAY**

**1. & 2.**  
Courchevel's  
Le 1947 3. La  
Bouitte in  
St. Martin  
de Belleville



*La Bouitte earned the highest award possible: three Michelin stars, as well as galaxies of fans from around the world.*



from the rigors of big-mountain, late-night Verbier. Sit comfy and settle in. All that *dolce vita* is capped with a magic box of Swiss chocolates on wheels. The day's final accomplishment is making the climb to retire, replete and relaxed, one floor up. The wingsuit will have to wait.

#### LA BOUITTE

St. Martin de Belleville

Michelin Stars: Three

[www.la-bouitte.com](http://www.la-bouitte.com)

Poke me with a *fourchette à escargot* for saying this, but it occurs to me as I cross the snowy frontier at Le Châtelard that my heavenly days in Switzerland were only a pre-game warm-up — a fabulous bit of foodie foreplay — to France.

France is the home of the *Guide Michelin*, which was first published in the year 1900. Even then, tires didn't wear themselves out: Michelin stars originated in the company's desire to get Europe driving, and a Frenchman will drive a long way for a good meal. My road, of course, is white and fluffy, across Les Trois Vallées from Courchevel to Méribel, over to St. Martin de Belleville, and finally down a gentle meadow to the door of the Alps' all-time finest ski-in restaurant: La Bouitte.

I have been skiing to lunch at La Bouitte since it was a one-star at the edge of St. Marcel. And there it remains, right where René Meilleur opened it 40 years ago: the first restaurant of a self-taught chef in his home village. In 2015, La Bouitte earned the highest award possible: three Michelin stars, as well as galaxies of fans from around the world.

"*Plus de gras, plus de crème!*" His words go straight to my heart, though I know they're aiming lower. Two white-jacketed sous-chefs approach Chef Meilleur with a new dish for his approval, a comely palm-size tin of Petrossian caviar married with *omble chevalier*, egg, parsley, and cream. The result is top-heavy with caviar. He passes me the creation and I help myself to as huge a dollop as propriety permits. Possibly huger. "You are the first, you're in luck!"

I certainly am. I lucked into morning coffee and caviar with Chef Meilleur before lunch service begins and we sit down to talk about how he celebrated his third star last February. It was, he claims, work as usual until May. "And then we drank a lot of champagne." As always, Madame Meilleur is in front of house, and son Maxime co-chefs in the kitchen. "Nothing has changed since the third star,"

says Maxime with a grin, wielding a plate of saffron cream-filled beignets (to call them *donuts* would be like calling Catherine Deneuve *cute*). "We work hard and we deserve it."

Many agree. The day after the three-star announcement, 600 requests for reservations arrived, many from three-star groupies. One Hong Kong couple flew into Geneva, then hopped on a helicopter to St. Marcel, simply for dinner. They jetted home the following day.

#### LE 1947

Courchevel

Michelin Stars: Two

[www.chevalblanc.com](http://www.chevalblanc.com)

The next time a date makes a face about the price of house wine, I suggest making an immediate diversion to Courchevel. Specifically, the Cheval Blanc hotel. Here, a glass of the 2013 runs to 190 euros. Ah, to be Russian in the wintertime.

All in all, nearly 375 miles of trails link Courchevel, Méribel and Val Thorens. As befits the world's largest linked ski area, Les Trois Vallées are choc-a-block with a dozen Michelin-star restaurants. Ringing in at the uber-luxe heavyweight division, slopeside Cheval Blanc is for the luxe, by the luxe. Owned by Bernard Arnault, captain of the Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH) empire, it's decorated with striking Niedermayr prints and sumptuous furnishings, includes a Guerlain spa, oligarch-suited suites, a ski-in, ski-out Fendi boutique, and an other-worldly restaurant called Le 1947, a heavenly homage to a bumper crop of Château Cheval Blanc.

Coddled like resting babies are some 500 bottles of Cheval Blanc, 60 vintages deriving from 1940 to 2010, including the rarest, 1947, yours by the bottle for 47,000 euros, or the magnum for 127,000 euros. (We are told they sold one '47 last year, and it's drinking rather well.) The all-white room seats only 22 in space-age sleekness. Think: Jetsons airport lounge circa 2063, complete with sexy fur-ribbed waitresses in white go-go boots and dresses. Diners are encouraged to participate, and what better supplied kitchen party could one ask for? Begin with stand-up drinks around the service station and end, as I did, in the open kitchen browning my meringue with a blowtorch. The menu is inspired by local specialties, such as tartiflette and fondue, yet puts a distinctly *haute* spin on Savoyard cuisine. From gold flakes floating in the consommé to flaming soufflés light as



*clockwise from  
top left*

**SOPHIS-  
TICATED  
DINING**

- 1. Megève's  
Flocons de  
Sel 2. Le 1920  
at Chalet du  
Mont d'Arbois
- 3. Igniv by  
Andreas  
Caminada in  
Bad Ragaz
- 4. Chamonix's  
Albert 1<sup>er</sup>



high-altitude air, Le 1947 spins rarefied fun from inspired cooking and matchless wines.

### ALBERT 1ER

Chamonix  
 Michelin Stars: Two  
[www.hameaualbert.fr](http://www.hameaualbert.fr)

Welcome to Chamonix, geological heaven inhabited by the gastronomic gods. Alpinism is religion around here — from Mont Blanc, to the birth of extreme skiing, to classic descents like the *Vallée Blanche* that wind through serac-dappled snowscapes. All that and there is but one true luncheon: Albert 1er.

One century, two stars, and four generations of hospitality welcome us to the Relais & Châteaux temple of elegance. Perrine Maillet, great-granddaughter of the founder, is at front of house; her husband, Chef Pierre Maillet, is at the helm. Delicate plates and glittering cutlery arrive and depart with flourishes worthy of a Moulin Rouge performance. A surprise from the kitchen, oyster truffles, is delivered by a waitress in a sober yet elegant ink-black suit, a lick of scarlet bra strap peeking out. The overall effect whispers: “*I am French, I mean business.*” This is beautiful, sophisticated dining: Bresse chicken with truffles tucked under the skin, foie gras with beetroot, balsamic and green apple, plus an unforgettable — as in, I will remember forever — Chartreuse soufflé. In the shadow of Mont Blanc, Albert 1er is the ultimate refuge.

### FLOCONS DE SEL

Megève  
 Michelin Stars: Three  
[www.floconsdesel.com](http://www.floconsdesel.com)

Skiing and great food are the yin and yang of high mountain living and there just aren’t enough days in the week for enough of both. So gourmands, take note. One of the big fromages, Megève’s Flocons de Sel, is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the best possible reason: Chef Renaut loves to ski.

Paris-born Emmanuel Renaut’s passions show on his schedule and his plates. He earned his stars through the early 2000s, and in the same glittering decade opened the airy, pale-wood post-and-beam restaurant with rooms in the hills above town.

At front of house is Madame Kristine Renaut, the charming and capable wife of the chef, forging a formidable German-Franco match. Equally balanced are Renaut’s ingredients. From trips to the cellars of a Beaufort cheesemonger, the local baker, and the local apiarist dedicated to honey bees, Chef Renaut begins with the finest and makes it so much better. Roast lamb en cocotte, vegetable millefeuille, delicate lemon butter, and a cheese board that stops

time. And as special as was our meal, I was in for further surprise...

### LE 1920

Megève  
 Michelin Stars: Two  
[www.mont-darbois.fr](http://www.mont-darbois.fr)

After a glorious day on the slopes of the resort that Baroness Rothschild built, we’re sumptuously settled into what was originally her own hotel, Chalet du Mont d’Arbois, high on the hill in rarefied old-world elegance. But time flies when you’re living like a Rothschild: the champagne bottle’s dry, the fire in our suite is ebbing, and the dinner bell has gonged. As we are shortly to discover, Michelin attracts Michelin. With us once more is Chef Emmanuel Renaut, paying ultimate compliment to Le 1920’s Chef Julien Gatillon.

That Chef Renaut chose Le 1920 for his birthday dinner en famille with a full complement of poised, pretty children, says it all. Who wouldn’t be impressed by game, butter, and cheese from Ferme des 30 Aprents, belonging to the Rothschild family? The wine list also draws heavily from the family vineyards. We luxuriate in *gamberoni* from the Gulf of Genoa, lobster from Brittany, sole from Finistère... Subject of a second Michelin star in this year’s round of prizes. Baroness Mimi would approve.

### IGNIV BY ANDREAS CAMINADA

Bad Ragaz  
 Michelin Stars: Three  
[www.igniv.com](http://www.igniv.com)

After an indulgence-packed fortnight, I alight from the train for a grand finale: matching a three-star clincher with the taking of the waters at a high-tech, luxury, medical spa. This historic Swiss thermal spa resort has more than 70 doctors on-site, and hosts everyone from Roger Federer to, one imagines, a few Brides of Frankenstein.

After a slimming massage and beautifying La Prairie facial, the robes come off for the final performance. Sure, there’s a low-cal option, but there is also a delectable three-star restaurant in resort. It’s called IGNIV, from the Rumantsch for “nest”, and I’m zeroing in on the goose liver meringue with the physique of an ostrich and the reach of an Andean condor. Too late to hold back on the tantalizing, creative and lip-smacking five-course sharing menu now. Besides, after two weeks of the world’s most gorgeous gastronomical adventurism, why should I? There’s always Bad Ragaz aqua-gym and liposuction in the morning. 