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First look inside Chamonix's luxurious new high-altitude mountain refuge



Terminal Neige Montenvers boasts some of the best views in the Alps CREDIT: LESLIE WOIT

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By **Leslie Woit**

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The Alps' most spectacular peaks just got more exciting. Thanks to a lovingly chic restoration of the high-mountain Grand Hotel du Montenvers, the famously challenging ski resort of [Chamonix](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Chamonix-resort-guide/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Chamonix-resort-guide/>) is now also the place to go for the most [romantically](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/galleries/the-worlds-most-romantic-ski-resorts/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/galleries/the-worlds-most-romantic-ski-resorts/>) rustic getaway in [France](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/Best-French-ski-resorts/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/Best-French-ski-resorts/>).

Perched 1,900m above sea level close to the [Mer de Glace glacier](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/freeskier-sam-favret-ice-cave-chamonix/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/freeskier-sam-favret-ice-cave-chamonix/>) and the fabled Vallée Blanche off-piste route, the century-old refuge has been sympathetically sexed up by Maisons et Hôtels Sibuet, with the same imitable bon chic, bon genre touch that's brought sparkle to hotels including the Terminal Neige Totem in [Flaine](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Flaine-resort-guide/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Flaine-resort-guide/>) and the seriously luxe Fermes de Mairie in [Mégève](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Megeve-resort-guide/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Megeve-resort-guide/>).

Terminal Neige Montenvers is perched at 1,900m CREDIT: THOMAS POULET

The newly-renamed Terminal Neige Montenvers has 20 rooms sleeping up to 69 people, and has been jazzed up with funky graffiti by artist Wozdat, vintage industrial lighting, sleek bathrooms and retro fabrics. All this is complemented by the rich, weathered patina of the hotel's original 1880s wood and granite bones.

When I visited in January 2018, record snowfall and high winds in the Alps meant I couldn't ski to the hotel via the Vallée Blanche - the Montenvers is located 17km into the 20km run, where the final stage to the hotel is a climb of 420 metal stairs and then a lift. Instead I boarded the tiny red cog train that snakes between Chamonix town and the Montenvers several times a day.

Alighting 20 minutes later I found a violent pink late-afternoon alpenglow in full swing, and the icy spectacle and fearsome peaks revered by so many early visitors to the Mer de Glace on show from the very edge of the train tracks. Goethe, Byron, Hugo and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein revelled in the glacier's "glorious presence-chamber of imperial nature", as Dr Frankenstein put it.

The bedrooms look out over the Mer de Glace

Inside the hotel, it's high-alpine drama meets eclectic panache. After checking in at the tiny reception-slash-bar, I found my spacious Family Hiker Room up a curving crimson-carpeted wooden staircase. The double bed, sofa bed and bunk beds in these rooms can accommodate up to five people, and like all bedrooms - which also include cosy 15m² doubles and rooms to suit groups of three or seven - have ensuite toilet, basin and shower.

No scratchy blankets in this bunk room

Floors are lined with cushy sound-absorbing matting, a twilight glow emanates from tiny windows and miners' lamps. An old wooden chimney becomes a bookcase, and leather travel trunks double as bedside tables.

The bathrooms are high spec too, fitted with grey stone, powerful showers and retro basins and taps, and stocked with the Sibuet's Pure Altitude toiletries. The largest suites have a claw-foot tub and Mer de Glace views.

The world's most remote ski chalets

– though in the Sibuet spirit, beds come with fluffy duvets and pillows rather than simple scratchy blankets.

After our extended outdoor photo call to revel in sunset over the needle peaks of Les Drus, a crackling fire warmed the dining room and bar where, together with newly-made friends from Geneva, Paris and Normandy, we succumbed to apero hour.

A crackling fire warms the dining room

After starting with planchettes of charcuterie and carafes of Apremont wine, everyone decided to eat by the fire, rather than in the adjacent dining room. Soft French rock floated through the air as we selected from the half-board menu of tartiflette, diot polenta or a fondue of tangy Beaufort, Gruyère and Abondance cheese. Lilly, the resident mastiff, drooled stoically by the door.

As in all refuges, after the eating, the drinking and the stargazing, there was nothing left but bed - and this isolation means the Montenvers best suits the one or two-night stay typical of traditional mountain refuges. No smelly snore-fests here though - the duvets are white and fluffy, the walls delightfully thick.

The Montenvers is unlike any other mountain refuge

My night passed in a blink, and I woke to fragrant coffee and a buffet breakfast complete with fresh croissants and bread, jam,cheese, fruit, and choice of eggs. Some guests set out on showshoes or to check out the tiny glacier museum room and gift shop next door. I headed down to Chamonix on the train to see if, on this bluebird day, the Vallée Blanche and Mother Nature were ready to play ball.

Need to know

A standard room at Terminal Neige Montenvers (<http://montenvers.terminal-neige.com/fr/#!hotel-chamonix/montenvers-mont-blanc>) costs from €190 a night for two people, half board, or €130 for single occupancy. A night in the dorm room costs from €85 per person half-board. Return train journey from Chamonix €32.50, including access to museum and ice cave.


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