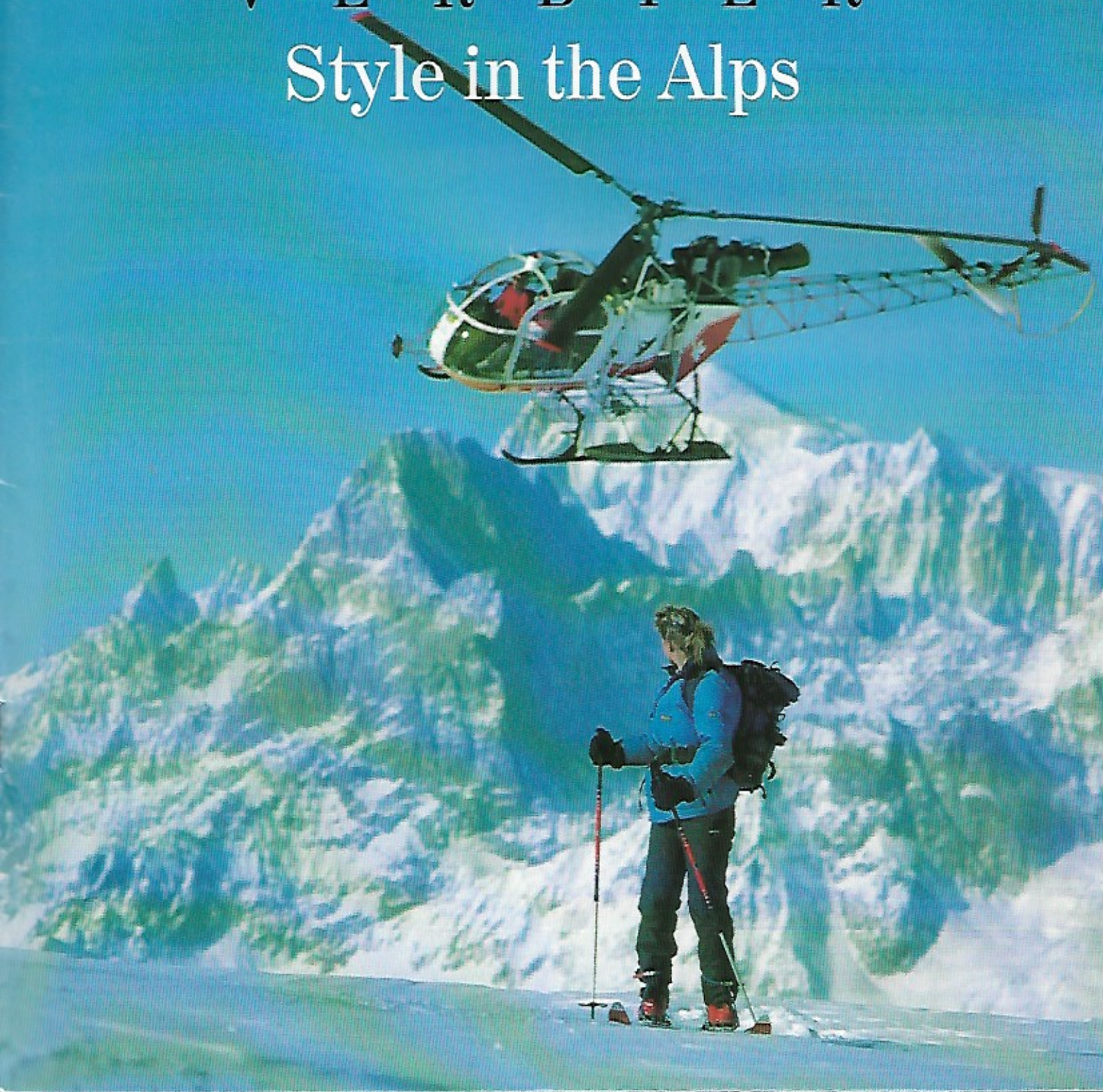


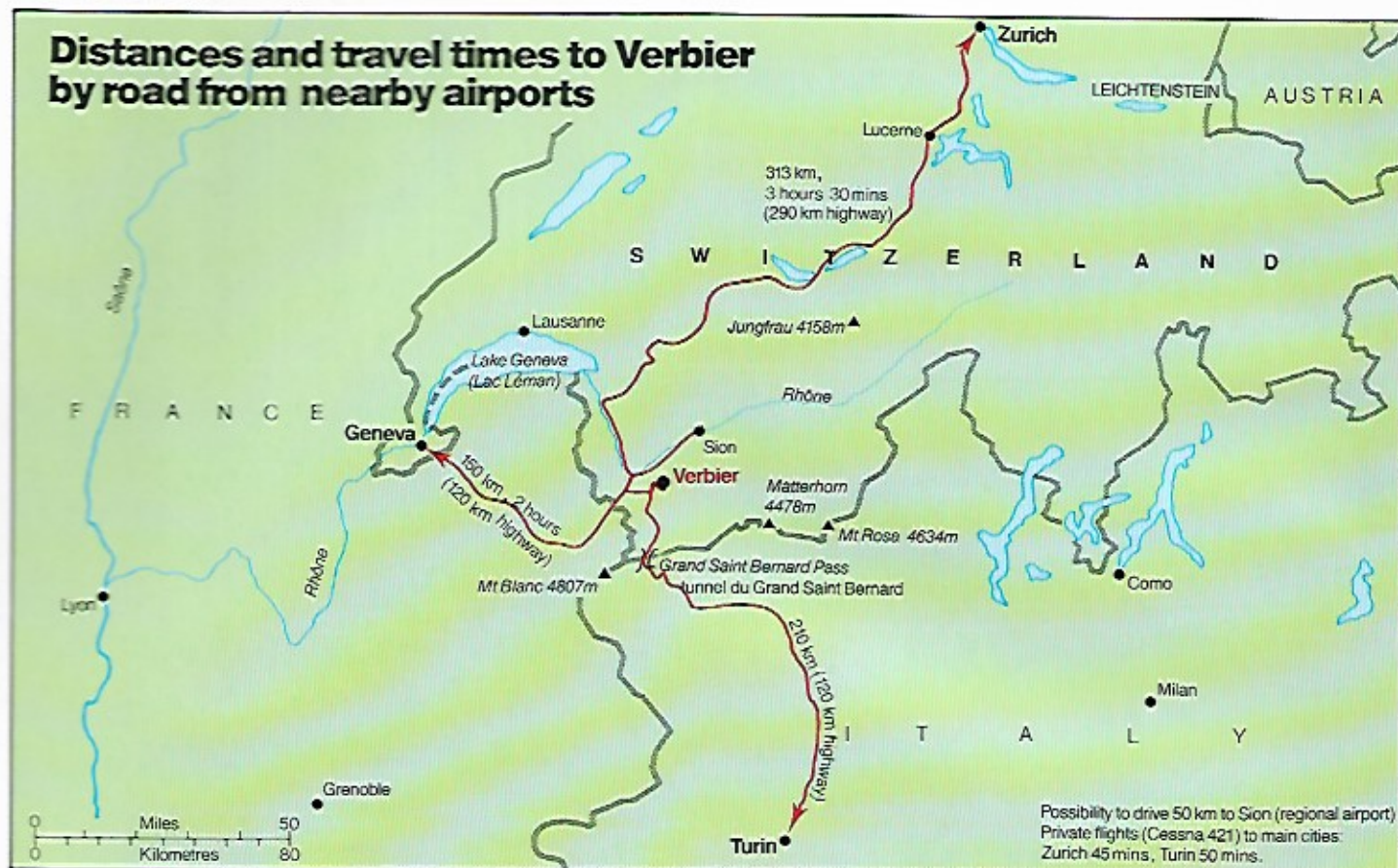
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Style in the Alps

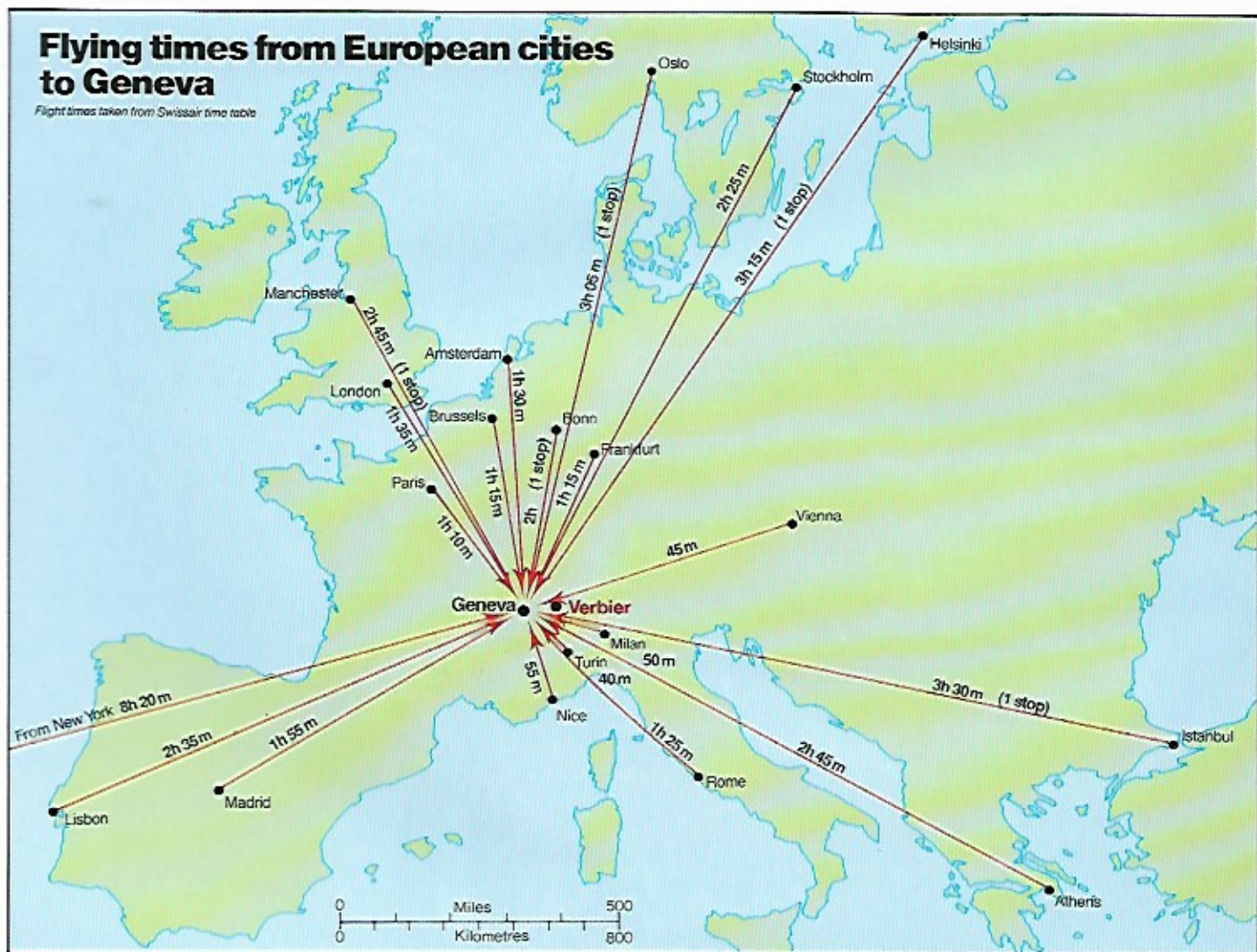


Distances and travel times to Verbier by road from nearby airports



Flying times from European cities to Geneva

Flight times taken from Swissair time table



VERBIER

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*Front cover: Verbier is renowned for helicopter skiing. A short flight takes you to some of the world's best runs.
Right: Celebrating 100 years of winter sports in Switzerland.*



THE QUEEN'S AWARD FOR
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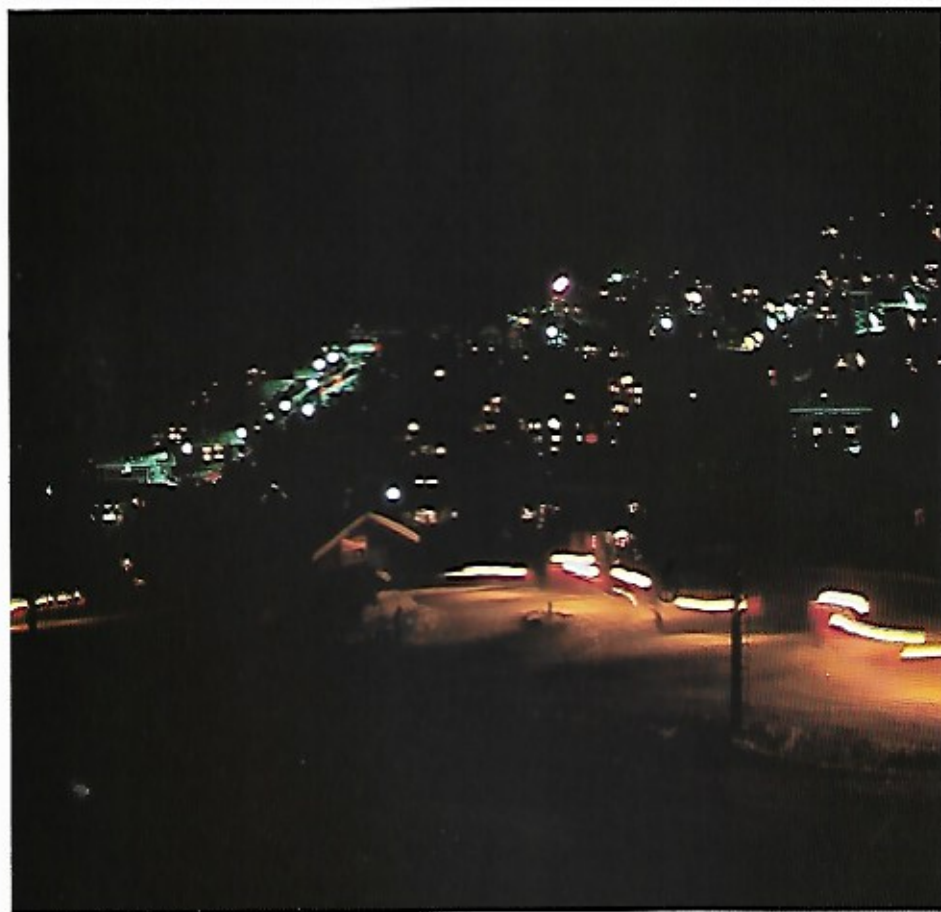
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A resort for all comers and all seasons



Set in the Val de Bagnes between Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn, Verbier attracts the glitterati of Europe and beyond. Its traditional chalets have also made it a favourite place for the intimate house-party.

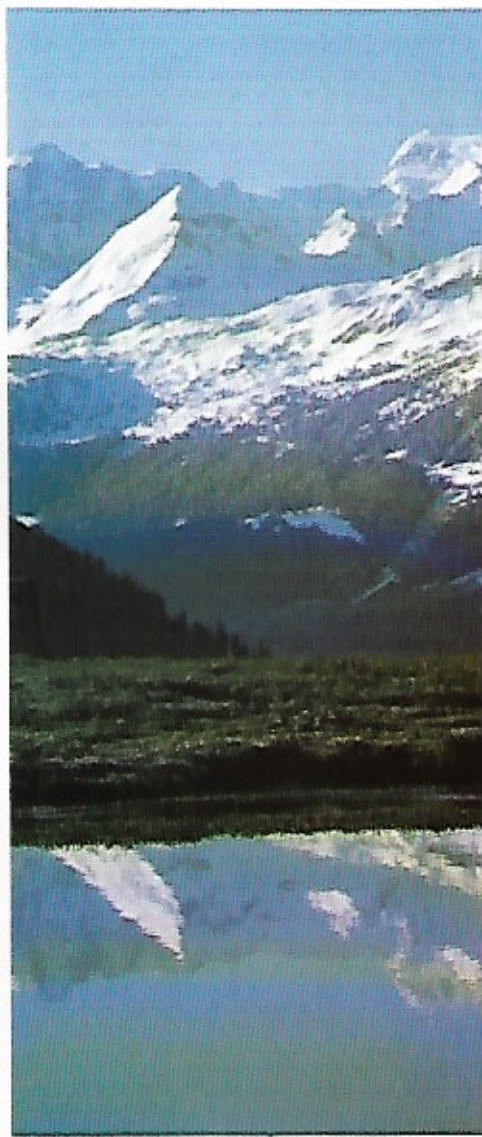
From royalty to rock stars, the well-heeled of Europe and beyond have found the winter charms of Verbier hard to resist. Set in the Val de Bagnes between Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn, the Swiss resort is indisputably one of the world's leading ski centres. And efforts are under way to turn it into a resort for all seasons with the construction of an 18-hole golf course, a conference centre and a new cable car to the summer ski fields of Mont-Fort.

The royals of Sweden and the Netherlands are among the celebrities Verbier has welcomed. Others have

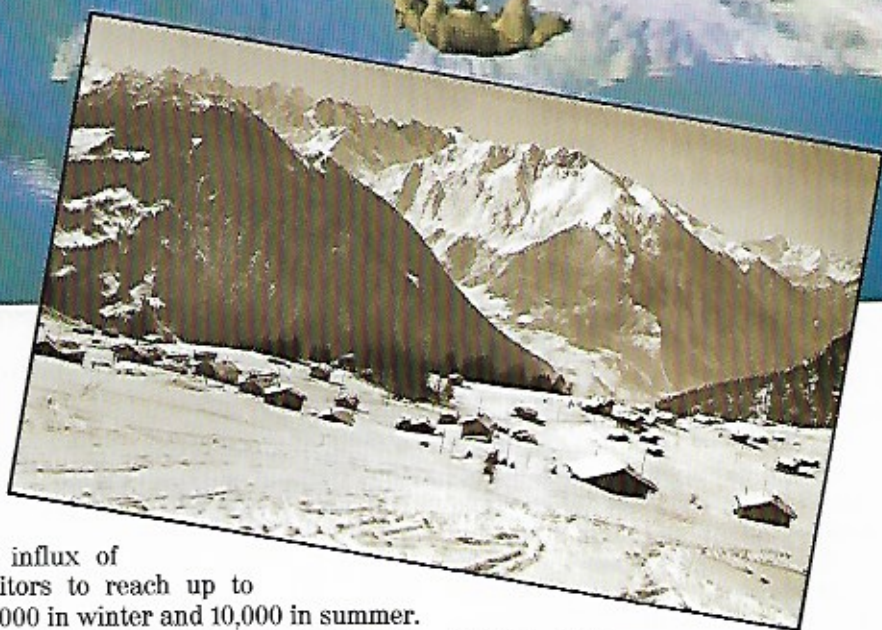
developed a more permanent passion for the place. Diana Ross and husband Arne Naess have a chalet in the resort. Ease of access has made Verbier a favourite with second-home skiers from Geneva and the Rhône valley.

The village stands on a sunny, south-west facing balcony at an altitude of 1,500 metres. The climate is mild and dry, with little mist, and the winter sunshine is particularly intense. It is reached by a 10km hairpin road from Le Châble (800m), a few minutes drive from Martigny, the large town at the crossroads of south-western Switzerland and the capital of the vineyard canton of Valais.

Access by car is easy, with uninterrupted motorways to Martigny from all parts of Switzerland, except the south east. Geneva residents can reach their weekend chalets in as little as two hours taking the north bank of the lake. The more direct, and more picturesque,



but slower route is via Chamonix and the Col de Forclaz, and road and rail are kept open throughout the winter. The Great Saint Bernard road from Martigny to Aosta and Turin – Napoleon's Italian invasion route – is also open all year round, thanks to a road



tunnel beneath the pass.

Martigny is one of Europe's major rail thoroughfares, with efficient internal and international services, via Lausanne and Basel. There are direct trains to Geneva, two hours away. Frequent trains make the short journey from Martigny to Le Châble, where a telecabin climbs from a car park beside the station to the heart of Verbier and on to the snow fields above.

Skiers discovered Verbier in the early 1930s. The Swiss Ski School was founded there in 1933. Four years later, a development company was set up for the purpose of "increasing tourist facilities, attracting foreign visitors, taking all measures helpful in preventing the disfigurement of the region and in improving the stay of guests".

The pioneers could hardly have envisaged the eventual scale of their creation. Today, Verbier's resident population of about 1,300 is swollen by

an influx of visitors to reach up to 30,000 in winter and 10,000 in summer. However, the town has clung tenaciously to the traditional low-rise chalet style of building, in sharp contrast to the tall apartment blocks found in comparable modern French ski resorts.

With over 1,000 chalets, short transfer journeys from Geneva airport and a huge, exciting ski area, Verbier has become the capital of the chalet-holiday industry – and the home of the chalet girl. Shortly before Christmas each year, a migrant flock of British girls settles in Verbier for a four-month

sojourn. For little more than token pocket money, the girls play hostess to thousands of gregarious holidaymakers of sociable age who prefer the intimate house-party atmosphere of the chalet to the comforts of an hotel.

Foreigners with a longer-term interest in Verbier can buy property, although prices are almost as steep as the surrounding mountains. The Swiss have passed laws limiting the transfer of property to aliens. However, plenty of permits are now available.

Sponsored supplement 3

A home of your own in the Swiss Alps?



A quota system makes it difficult for foreigners to own a chalet in Switzerland, or even an apartment. But Verbier still has permits available and rental income pays the running costs. By Alec Snobel

A gem of a ski station, Verbier explains why Switzerland has unique appeal among outsiders as a place for holiday homes, residence and eventual retirement. And you might be excused for thinking that there's a lot that needs explaining.

For a start, there is a restriction on foreigners owning homes and land in Switzerland, which doesn't exactly make you feel welcome. It is a quota system, on a diminishing scale, reducing by 10% a year. Last year, 2,000 permits were granted for issue to aliens (compared with 5,000 in 1980); this year, there are 1,800.

Permits are allocated only to recognised resort areas of the French-speaking cantons and the distribution is uneven. Generally, resort authorities hold an annual allocation and wait for applications from developers. New properties are favoured above old ones, and the re-sale market for foreigners is limited. Also there is a permanent shortage of individual chalets so foreign buyers are usually only offered apartments.

And there are other restrictions. You may buy just one property and, historically, the limit for living accommodation is 100sqm and for the plot size 1,000sqm. Also, the purchase must be primarily for "own use" as a secondary residence and you are expected to occupy it for at least three weeks each year. This is to prevent your making long-term rental contracts of one year or more.

You may purchase only in your own name because foreign companies are not authorised to buy residential property. Nor may foreigners establish a Swiss company for the purpose of buying property in Switzerland.

As a foreign owner, you may be prohibited by contract from selling the property within five years of the orig-

inal purchase date except with special authorisation. It is possible to plead *force majeure* – a death in the family, chronic illness or bankruptcy. Under old legislation, you could sell only to a Swiss national or permanent resident. Even under current law, you may sell to another foreigner, but only after 10 years.

As an alien property-owner, you are unlikely to be allowed to spend more than six months a year in Switzerland. Permanent residence there is granted only if you are over the age of 60, your children are older than 18, and you have an adequate proven income.

You may donate property to family members in direct line (children or parents) and you may will it to any family members. But if you bequeath it to an unrelated person, he will have to dispose of it within a fixed period.

Despite the restrictions, buying property in Switzerland can make financial sense. The strength of the Swiss currency means an investment there will almost certainly produce a capital gain on re-conversion to virtually any other currency. There is no exchange control.

Additionally, Swiss real estate has historically appreciated at about the country's rate of inflation, averaging 4½% a year over the past decade. Rental income has yielded enough to cover all the running costs of the property, although not mortgage repayments.

Other factors that make Switzerland one of the most popular choices for international investors are its political stability, a high standard of living, confidential banking, industrious people, efficient and extensive transport and communications and a sophisticated lifestyle.

Homes and apartments are always well-built. The materials are of the highest quality and the workmanship excellent. Laundry rooms and ski stores are usually included in the price, along with an efficient concierge.

A *station sportif* with 170 ski instructors and an altitude span of 1,500m to 3,300m, Verbier is located in 6 Sponsored supplement



Verbier favours the traditional chalet, with its high-quality workmanship.

the Valais about two hours' drive from Geneva up a side valley en route to the St Bernard Pass. Televerbier provides 47 lifts, 200 miles of marked runs, 15 snow-cats for tracking the runs, a safety service with avalanche dogs, and a shuttle-bus service within the resort. It gives access to the huge Quatre Vallées skiing region, so fairly claims the best winter sports in the Alps.

The resort, noted for a dry climate, sits on a sunny south-facing plateau.

From Mont-Fort, the highest ski station, my hosts – estate agent André Guinnard and ski pro François Perraudin – pointed out Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. Glaciers and snow-capped peaks glistened in the balmy October sunshine, no fewer than 55 over 4,000m. With a new cable car – the biggest in Switzerland – facilitating access to the highest point, Verbier will now be able to offer the best in summer skiing too.

Not that it is dependent on that, efforts are being made to develop other leisure activities. The melted snow reveals a network of glorious walks among Alpine meadows and forests,

ABC for the foreign buyer

Once you decide to buy a property in Switzerland and authorisation is granted, the legal proceedings are straightforward and the estate agent or developer will steer you through. (It is accepted Swiss commercial practice to buy through an agent and there is no cost-saving in making a deal direct with a developer.)

First, a private contract between the vendor and the purchaser is drafted and signed and a 10% non-refundable deposit paid. Once the property has been paid for, the funds are held in escrow until registration. The purchase is finalised with the signing of a notarised deed of sale. Ownership of the apartment is certified by entry in the land registry of the canton concerned.

The purchaser either signs the deed himself or can give power of attorney, which should be legalised by the Swiss consulate of his domicile, or by a solicitor recognised by the Swiss authorities. The notary witnessing registration must practise in the canton where the purchase is located. The notary usually acts for both purchaser and vendor, but his main duty is to the latter.

The legal expenses paid by the purchaser vary from canton to canton, but usually work out at between 2% and 5% of the purchase price and include lawyers' fees, purchase tax and the legal cost of registration.

The whole conveyance takes about six weeks, but, if you can get hold of a notary, the transaction can be completed in as little as 48 hours.

Swiss banks encourage non-residents to take out mortgages by offering advantageous terms. Generally, they lend up to 50% of the purchase price over 10 to 15 years. Currently the interest rate is running at a very tempting 6.5%. You can raise the loan to 60%, but at a higher interest rate, at the moment about 7.25% on the extra tranche.

You are not allowed to amortise the loan over a shorter period than stipulated in the contract unless the bank gives specific approval. However, you could negotiate a loan on current account; that involves opening a credit line in a bank, stating the maximum loan authorised, its period and yearly amortisation. The amount of the loan can be varied within the fixed limits; interest will be charged on the balance outstanding.

In both cases, the loan is secured on your Swiss property. Buyers can also negotiate credit conditions on other guarantees, such as a securities portfolio deposited in the bank. Interest rates in Switzerland are never fixed at the time of the loan agreement. They vary each year from term to term, and are fixed by a bank commission in each canton.

As a property owner, you become liable to Swiss property tax. For foreign owners, it is an annual lump sum calculated on the capital value of the property and estimated income, on a forfait basis, whether you let your apartment or not. In Verbier, the figure is about 1% of purchase price. If the property is mortgaged, interest charges may be offset against the

property tax.

Generally, you have to pay annual maintenance charges. In Verbier, the total amounts to, for an old unit, 2% to 3% of the purchase price or Swfr60/65 per sqm; for a new unit with oil-fired central heating, 1.5% to 2.1% of the purchase price or Swfr60/65 per sqm; for a new unit with electric heating, 1.5% to 1.9% of the purchase price or Swfr60 per sqm. The charges cover taxes, insurance, water, electricity and co-owner expenses such as heating, concierge and administration.

There are constraints on rental income (which is why aliens are prohibited from granting letting leases of more than one year) and, by law, foreigners are allowed to rent a property in Switzerland for a maximum three-year period. However, you may let your apartment as much as you want on a short-term basis. A Swiss company or agency may not give a guaranteed income to a foreign owner on his apartment, since this would make it a financial investment; it can give only an estimate of the return on short-term rentals.

The rental agency will require a commission of between 15% and 30% of the rental income. The lower figure is more common in Verbier, the higher in places like Gstaad and St. Moritz.

Any profit on resale of property is liable to capital gains tax, which varies from canton to canton and takes into account the number of years the property was held, the rate of inflation and the cost of improvements. Allow at least 10%.

and the popular par-54 pitch-and-putt golf course – soon to be complemented by a full-size championship one.

There is also a riding school, a 98sqkm nature reserve and a year-round sports centre made of massive beams. This latter features a heated indoor swimming pool, curling rink and squash courts, boosted in summer by 10 tennis courts and outside swimming pool. And if all this – plus mini-golf and bowls – gives you cramp, there are saunas, jacuzzis and solarium to sooth away the aches.

There may be a quota for foreign property-owners, but Verbier at present has more than enough to meet demand. There are 475 permits for aliens for the Valais canton as a whole this year and the limit of 57 for the Commune de Bagnes, which includes Verbier and adjacent villages, has not

been reached. And even when it is, there is a backlog from previous years and there could be more on the way.

Moreover, as M. Guinnard, head of the Verbier association of estate agents, explained: "Some communes, such as Zermatt, do not want any permits for foreigners whatsoever. Their allocation is therefore returned to the cantonal authorities for second distribution. We could apply for some if we needed them."

Verbier is enjoying a property boom. In the past year, sales of apartments there totalled Swfr93 million, Swfr78 million new property and the balance in resales. In addition, chalet sales amounted to nearly Swfr15 million – though this is not pertinent for aliens because they are usually excluded from that market by the 100sqm living-space limit for them: chalets rarely

come that small. (In fact, there is some flexibility with that 100sqm; if you have, say, 10 children, the authorities will take a realistic view of the amount of space you need – in one such case, as much as 279sqm was permitted.)

The average cost per square metre of new property in Verbier is estimated to be Swfr4,750. Resale prices – averaging Swfr3,728 per sqm – are sometimes fanciful, sometimes justified. The only person to advise you on the subject is a professional in the locality.

In the case of new property, there are discounts to be obtained, by buying off-plan and paying stage by stage. Early buyers of Verbier's popular Residence Boischalet apartments paid 6% less than those who waited for completion. Seven units in this balconied chalet block are still available for foreign buyers at prices from

Swfr160,000 for a studio to Swfr550,000 for a four-room flat on the third floor.

Residence Flaminia illustrates the type of accommodation on offer. Situated near the main cable-car station with a dazzling view over the Alps, it is accessible by car. A large chalet-style building, it is run on aparthotel lines, offering management and a rental service.

It features wooden exterior walls, with a sloping roof and a high standard of insulation. Living room and bedrooms have wall-to-wall carpets, with wood panelling or rustic pebbledash walls. Kitchens are equipped with electric stove, refrigerator and freezer and dishwasher. Bathroom fittings are of top quality.

A three-bedroom unit costs from Swfr670,000. Management charges are estimated at Swfr50 per square metre per year, or 1.8% of purchase price. Property tax is 1% of the purchase price per year. Conveyance comes to 2.3% of purchase price.

Prices are climbing. Pilouhe, a chalet with six furnished rooms, priced at Swfr2 million on October 1, was re-tagged at Swfr2.11 million by October 17. In the same period, a three-room apartment in the new Etoiles du Sud block rose from Swfr495,900 to Swfr500,000. And there was a steady stream of viewers at such attractive developments as Colline and Aphrodite and the chalet Kiiltomato, one of a few individual chalet resales available for a foreigner with Swfr760,000.

The price of chalets and land is essentially a matter of supply and demand, taking into account situation, upkeep, size, access and so on. This kind of buy calls for the opinion of one or two agents well acquainted with the region. In addition to Guinnard, there are some 18 others in Verbier - Abati, Vittel, Debeco, Agival, Selz and Valena, to name a few. They jointly represent virtually all the new developments, expressing their individuality only in resales and chalets.

In round figures, you could expect Swfr3,000 to Swfr4,000 a year in rent



Subject to a space limit, foreigners can rarely buy chalets as such property tends to be too big.

from a studio; Swfr4,500 to Swfr6,500 for a two-room flat; and pro rata up to between Swfr10,000 and Swfr14,000 for a five-room suite. Chalet yields are on the same scale.

But do remember that foreign-owned Swiss property must not be treated as an investment. It is to be used and enjoyed. Certainly the evidence at Verbier is that more and more people are doing both. There is a permanent community of over 1,000. They are joined for long winter sport and summer holidays and weekend breaks by chalet owners from Geneva's financial community - and, indeed, from London and other capitals of Europe.

Restrictions on foreign ownership have led to the development of alternative ways to invest in Swiss property. The most popular schemes involve so-called aparthotels, with sale and leaseback arrangements. However, things can go wrong.

Management and maintenance charges for such facilities as bars, restaurants, saunas, swimming pool, room service, laundry and reception have soared. Also, because of the need to have accommodation available for paying guests in high season, investors have found their own usage confined to the tail-end of the year, when most of the staff are on holiday and many of

the facilities closed.

Moreover, there may be a change of management, with a deterioration in standards and concurrent increase in charges and, as there is virtually no resale market for such units, you can be locked in indefinitely.

In Verbier, the Vanessa Hotel has sold apartments to aliens (Germans, British, Italians, French and Arabs), offering them rental income plus personal usage for 28 days split equally between summer and winter. To stay longer, they have to pay half the rate ordinary hotel guests are charged. Management reckons rental income covers payments on a 60% mortgage, but the project is more like an expensive timeshare investment than property ownership.

As president of Verbier's estate agency group, Guinnard has reservations about all such schemes and refuses to represent them. But if you're interested, the well-run four-star Alba Hotel (Tel: 010 41 26 70171) has some suites available, producing a rent yield of 6%.

Contacts:

A list of Verbier agents is obtainable from:

Office du Tourisme,
Case Postale 323, CH-1936 Verbier,
Valais, Switzerland
André Guinnard is at:
Guinnard Immobilier,
CH-1936 Verbier, Valais, Switzerland

ski fantastique, which has 20 instructors and accepts only private clients for technical schooling or off-slope skiing; and Swiss Ski School, with up to 170 instructors offering a full range of tuition.

The Swiss school gives class teaching for 2½ hours each morning, for adults and children of all abilities; competition classes for children; bronze, silver, gold and diamond ability tests and an all-day nursery.

In addition, it provides private technical lessons and organises ski races, the best-known of which is the ski speed event for all comers, the Super-G on the Savoleyres slopes. Entrants compete against the times of well-known ski racers or among each other. During these races, the slope is closed to other skiers.

The school also hires ski slopes, equipment and staff to organise company ski races. New winter sports, such as ski surfing and ski boarding, have been introduced.

Both schools provide qualified guides for touring in the surrounding mountains.

Verbier shares a vast network of ski-lifts with other resorts, of which the biggest is Nendaz, in the mountains



A network of ski-lifts links Verbier to villages of the Quatre Vallées.

rising to the south of the Rhône valley between Sion and Martigny. The village and its neighbours refer to their ski region as Les Quatre Vallées (the Four Valleys). However, the main Verbier/Nendaz lift system actually forms a long circuit rather than a series of interconnected valleys.

The two centres had become notorious for lift queues at various points around the circuit, but Verbier has done much to ease the flow by increasing lift capacity and creating alternative routes. Verbier-based skiers no longer need to travel via Tartin to

reach Mont-Fort, and it is now possible to return from Nendaz to Verbier via Tartin as well as via Savoleyres (involving off-piste skiing and a bus ride).

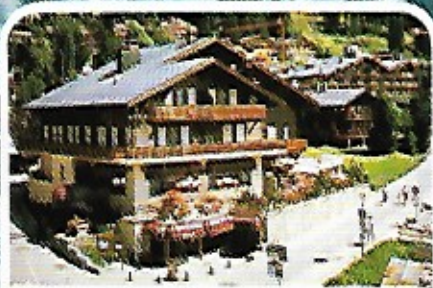
The 1987 winter season sees the introduction by Televerbier of the biggest aerial cableway in Switzerland. Already nicknamed Jumbo, the giant cabin takes up to 150 skiers from Verbier to the summit of Mont-Fort in only half an hour.

There are two versions of the Quatre Vallées lift pass, including or excluding skiing on the glacier. Do read the small print carefully: if you are found to have the wrong pass at high altitude, you will have to pay a heavy on-the-spot fine. The pass is one of the most



Some of the best skiing is to be found on the highest massif of the Alps, reached by helicopter.

THE FIRST PLACES IN VERBIER



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HÔTEL GRAND COMBIN ③

Tél. (026) 7 55 15 - Télex 473.795



HÔTEL VANESSA ②

Tél. (026) 7 01 41 - Télex 473.621



HÔTEL ALBA ④

Tél. (026) 7 01 71 - Télex 473.171

①

②

③

④



expensive in Europe (Swfr235 for a six-day week), but there are discounts of up to 40% for families.

Verbier's ski area is not the most smooth-running in the Alps; the links in the circuit are not perfect, and Verbier itself is big. But there are plenty of compensations and, for good skiers, there are few more exciting, beautiful and varied areas in the world.

It has long, steep runs that every self-respecting skier must tackle and survive, if not conquer, before retirement, and the names of Tortin, Mont-Gelé and Mont-Fort are known and respected by experienced skiers the world over. These impressive runs, most of them deemed too perilous to be categorised as official pistes, are the source of endless discussion in the bars of Verbier. Several are more often discussed than skied.

Apart from offering the challenge of difficult runs, Verbier's long circuit of lifts provides access to huge areas of off-piste skiing without encroaching on them. No resort can match its range of genuinely off-piste skiing.

In good conditions, the easier areas are skied as a matter of routine by

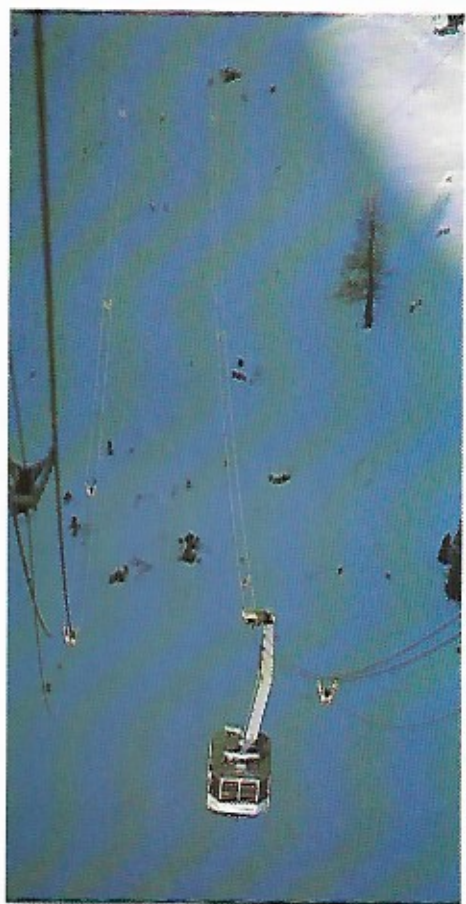
Above: Runs that every self-respecting skier must tackle and survive – and fun runs too.

Right: To the top to enjoy a magnificent panorama.

thousands of moderate skiers (one itinerary is a vital link in the Verbier-Nendaz circuit), and snow conditions soon become piste-like. The gentler slopes may not thrill the skier hungry for untracked territory, but they still offer the pleasure of a landscape uncluttered by pylons and cables.

Helicopters enable skiers to get more quickly into the mountains, especially the Combin and Trient ranges. A 10-minute flight will take you to the summits of such well-known runs as Val d'Arpette and Combe d'Orny, or to the Glacier des Follats. A mountain guide will organise the whole journey for groups of three skiers for about Swfr950.

There is also great scope for ski touring, as Verbier lies mid-way between Chamonix and Zermatt, the two ends of the Haute Route. And Verbier is the finishing post for the Patrouille des glaciers ski-touring race.



A sporting chance all year round



Left: The chamois is just one of the wild creatures that abound in the mountains.

Below: A dip in the pool makes a refreshing change from the piste.

Known mainly for its skiing, Verbier was one of the first among the bigger resorts to develop alternative sports to attract tourists the whole year round. By Philip Singleton

During the winter months, provided there is not a dearth of snow, alpine resorts do a roaring trade – as long lift queues and crowded bars all too often testify. Nevertheless, the seasonality of the income can present big problems, especially for the major centres.

Building a hotel costs a lot more half way up a mountain than it does elsewhere and, if that hotel lies empty for seven or eight months of the year, losses are bound to ensue. Long periods of unemployment for lift operators, ski instructors and hotel staff create social problems for mountain communities, which have become increasingly separated from the traditional pastoral farming that was their mainstay in the past.



Consequently, most of the bigger resorts, sometimes with government assistance, have been making great efforts to attract holiday-makers during the long, snowless months. And none more than Verbier, a resort that

has always been seen as a place that offers good skiing and not much else.

In many respects, Verbier starts with a significant advantage in the alternative sports contest: it is a lot easier to get to than most of its rivals – Zermatt or St Moritz – being a mere 90 minutes by car from Geneva. That means that if the weather is good, people will happily drive up for one or two nights. At the same time Verbier lies in an area that is largely unspoilt, with the Lac du Mauvoisin national reserve – one of Switzerland's oldest – on the opposite side of the valley. New species of flora have been found in the vicinity as recently as 1984.

The natural wealth of the Val de Bagnes – at some 293 sq km (113 sq miles), Switzerland's largest communal district – will always be one of its greatest attractions. Only the most leaden-footed visitor will not be rewarded for his trek through the mountains with the sight of the chamois and bouquetin (a goat-like creature with long, heavy horns). More patient observers may come across the snow-hare, the black eagle, the muskrat or even the lynx. In the upland pastures, wild strawberries and blueberries grow in abundance during the summer months. The hiking routes are well established, and often begin with a cable-car ride up the mountain. Guides are available to take visitors to the most interesting spots.

As far as mountaineering goes, the Val de Bagnes offers the best opportunities to the less experienced climber, in contrast to its skiing, which is on the more demanding side. The mountaineering school is staffed with veterans from many Himalayan expeditions, and the intermediate climber can gain experience learning from among the best in the business.

These natural assets have been bringing people to Verbier for many

years but, to make the town a "complete resort", the inhabitants have been opening up a whole new range of leisure facilities for use not only in summer but in winter too. As Patrick Messeiller, managing director of the tourist office, explained: "In winter, not everyone wants to ski every day; the weather might be bad, or some members of the party might be non-skiers. You have to offer these people something else to do."

The biggest investment in this direction has been the building of an extensive sports centre a short distance from the town centre at a cost of Swfr22 million. The centre opened in 1983. It is equipped at present with eight hard outdoor tennis courts, an ice rink, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, two squash courts and a gymnasium. In addition, there are two large



saunas, a solarium, jacuzzis and a large restaurant.

Three million Swiss francs went into a computerised heat-exchange system, which controls the temperature of the ice rink, swimming pools, piped water and general heating. According to the centre's director, Pierre Bruchier, the

system is so efficient that the annual electricity bills are about half what they would be using conventional equipment.

Next year, a curling rink will be added, together with five indoor tennis courts and five more outdoor courts. By then, new and existing courts will have

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artificial grass surfaces. These improvements will cost Swfr6.75 million.

Members of Verbier's governing council – the commune – admit candidly that the centre is unlikely to make a profit for some time, not least because of the interest that has to be paid on an original Swfr12 million of bank loans, but they insist that the facilities the centre provides are a *sine qua non* for any leading resort.

Another major investment is the new 18-hole golf course being prepared on the gentle slopes immediately above Verbier. The golf club already has an 18-hole course for "approach golf" (par 3 holes) near the town centre, and a permanent membership of more than 300. The new course, which will cost Swfr7 million, has been designed by Donald Harridine, the man responsible for the layout of more than half of Switzerland's 32 courses. The first holes should be playable in the summer of 1989.

At a glance, the sheer cost of usable land around Verbier – typically Swfr500 per sqm – would seem to make such a project impossible (but earlier this year one plot was sold for more than Swfr1,500 per sqm). However, the new course is to be situated

Above: *Mountaineering offers an alternative to skiing for the fit.*
Below: *When the snows are melted, the golf course comes into its own.*

within two avalanche zones, where permanent construction is forbidden. There, land is priced at a mere Swfr5 per sqm. The avalanche danger itself, of course, melts away with the snow every spring.

Marcel Nicollier, president of the golf club, described the course as "not very long, but very technical." Most of the fairways will lie across the slope, with the first hole at the top of the slopes and the last at the bottom. The total length of the course will be 5½km, with a par of 70 or 71.

The course opens up new opportunities for golfers in Switzerland. As Nicollier explained: "Every single golf



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A curling rink is to open soon, while paragliding is already on the menu.

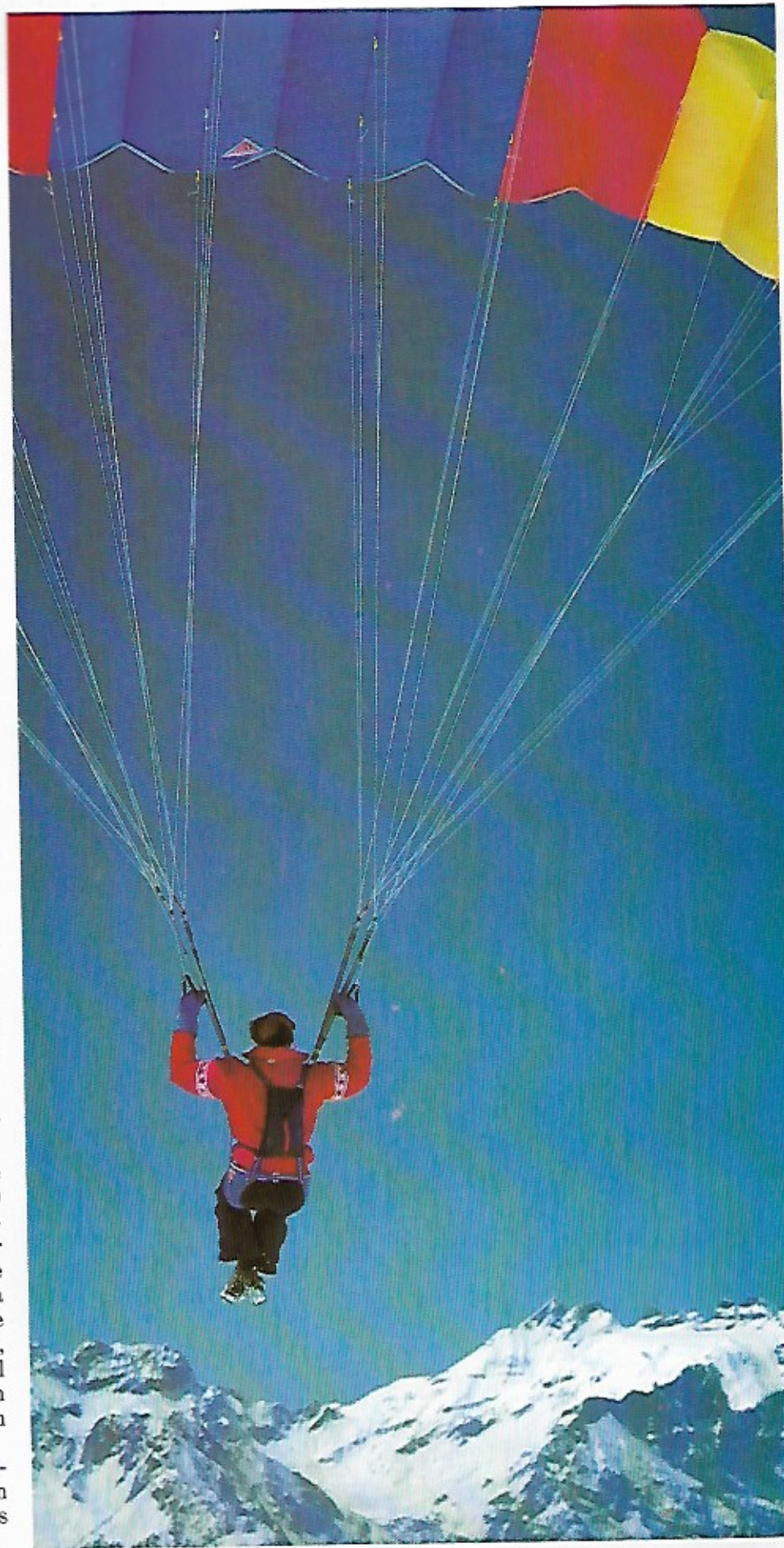
club in the country has a long waiting list. They really don't want any new members... We are the only club that is prepared to accept more." The club is looking for a permanent membership of up to 700, leaving room for 350. At the moment, permanent membership costs Swfr5,000, with reductions for couples and younger applicants; however, prices will be going up by some 60% on January 1 1988.

Verbier has also become a leading centre for paragliding, an activity that involves running or skiing off the side of a mountain, with a steerable parachute on your back. Experts can take advantage of powerful air currents to stay up indefinitely, much like hang-gliding.

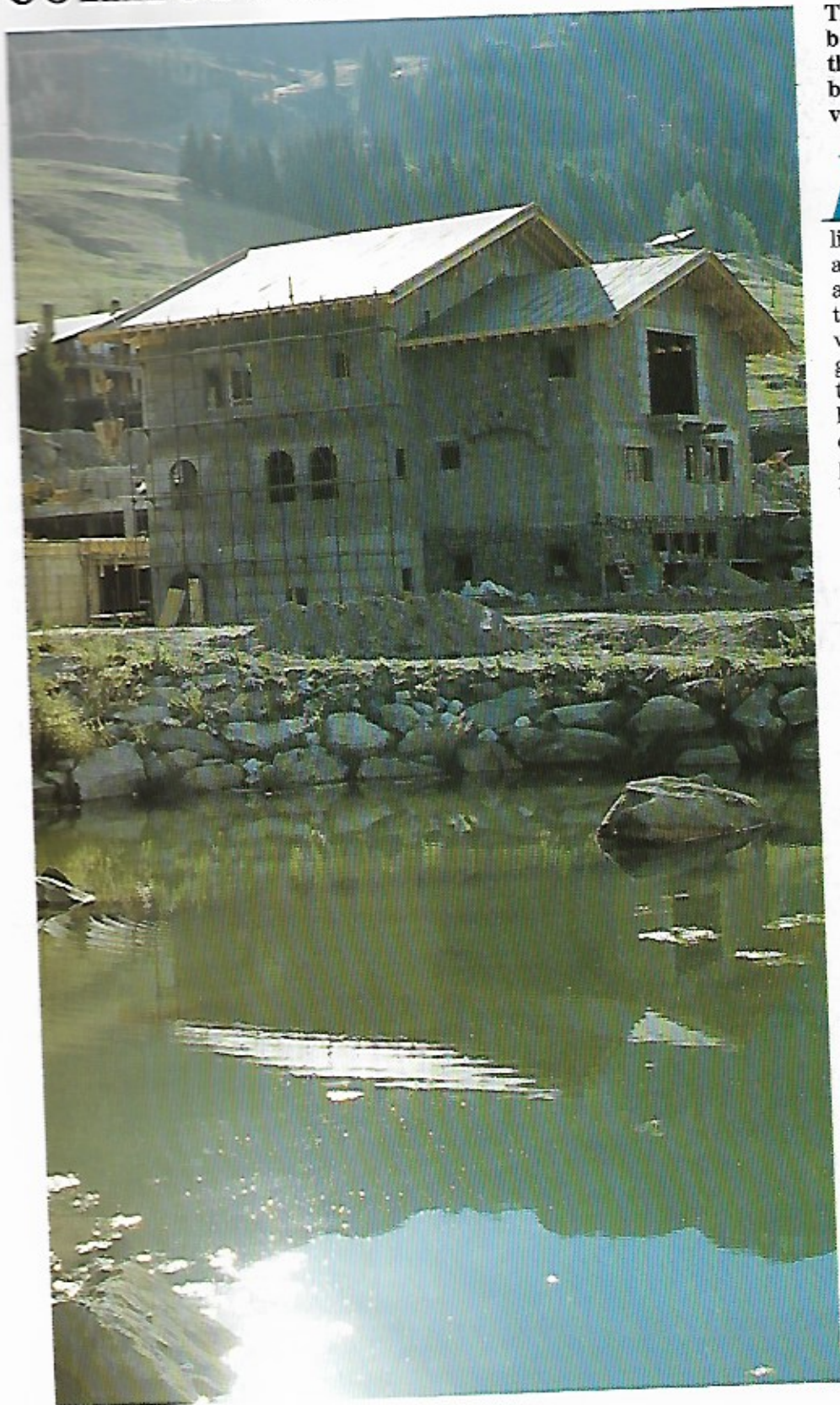
The resort has its own paragliding school, with marked landing and take-off points. Last July, Verbier held the first world championship with 270 competitors from 12 countries. On several occasions, there were a hundred or more 'wings' in the air at the same time, and on any fine day you can see a queue of tiny figures leaping off the small peaks above the town. In future, however, they will have to be careful not to land on the new golf course! In any event, the resort intends to hold an annual paragliding week each July.

Finally, if all the alternative attractions fail to attract, the punter can always turn to summer skiing, thanks to the giant new cable-car at Mont-Fort.

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Conferences with comfort and class



The international conference has become a growth industry to rival the personal computer. And Verbier means to be in the first rank of venues. By Philip Singleton

Every year brings a fresh crop of international conferences to add to the hundreds already established. Nations, agencies, institutions and corporations have begun to adopt an increasingly global approach to tackling problems and promoting development, and this lies behind the growing demand for professional get-togethers. So, catering for conference has become an industry in itself, with organisers and centres competing to provide the best all-round package in the best location.

But what constitutes a "good location"? This depends largely on where the delegates are coming from. But peaceful – and preferably scenic environment, and good communications are essential. A "holiday atmosphere" is also not considered a bad thing.

Verbier has begun to attract the attention of the conference organisers in recent years. Not only sports associations, but banks, building contractors and medical bodies have held summer conferences there – so making do with relatively modest facilities.

These conferences have centred on the large, four-star Hotel Alba on the western side of town, close to the Sports Centre, and backing on to a golf course. It is virtually the only hotel with rooms big enough for lectures and sizeable meetings, although gymnasiums and school assembly halls have on occasion been drafted in to help.

It is not hard to see why Verbier should qualify as a desirable conference location. It is just 90 minutes by car from Geneva (two and a half hours from Zürich, 75 minutes from Bern) but offers all the seclusion of a small Caribbean island – with almost

The hameau – luxury conference facilities with sport on the doorstep

same amount of sunshine. In winter, it is rarely if ever cut off even by the heaviest snow falls, and it enjoys reliable telecommunications, where other alpine resorts are still prone to power cuts and downed telephone lines.

Sports facilities, from ice-skating and summer skiing to golf, also provide an admirable recreational background. The scenery, which takes in the peaks of the Grand Combin (4,313 metres) and Mont Blanc (4,807 metres), speaks for itself.

Anything that promises to bring visitors outside the skiing season is very welcome in Verbier and, from 1990, the town will possess some outstanding new conference facilities, thanks to an ambitious development called the *Hameau de Verbier*. The Sfr60 million project is the brainchild



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"LE HAMEAU DE VERBIER"

A host of activities is offered in this ideal leisure centre, built in typical Valais style: close to Le Rouge and Les Esserts ski slopes with a golf course to come.

Architecture Pierre DORSAZ - CH - 1936 Verbier tel: (26) 7 51 51 telex: 473 292 telefax: (26) 7 79 19



of local architect Pierre Dorsaz, and involves the construction of a "village within a village" covering some 30,000 sqm.

The hameau (hamlet), which is already under construction, will consist of a group of luxury chalets, grouped around a small semi-circular piazza and a manmade lake. Its centre, underneath the piazza, will be an extensive underground complex with an amphitheatre, seating 350 people, an exhibition gallery, a museum of local history, a small film theatre and a winter garden. Although the complex is below ground, it will not rely entirely on artificial light, thanks to the inclusion of high windows that draw light from the above square.

At ground level, above the entrance to the underground complex, will be two large seminar rooms commanding spectacular views across the valley. The superstructure of this central section of the hameau is already in place and construction is pressing ahead.

Delegates to a conference would have a choice of accommodation. A new hotel, with 100 beds – and a useful number of single rooms – is to be built on the northern corner of the hameau. More important, however, will be the 16 separate chalets, divided into apartments and each with an underground car park, to keep the driveways clear. The chalets, like everything else on the site, will be finished in traditional style, including the chapel giving on to the piazza.

The whole complex is situated uphill



Top: Work has begun on the underground complex and seminar rooms above it.

Above: A model of the conference centre – a village within a village.

from the centre of Verbier, and is traversed in winter by a piste that leads directly to the foot of the main Medran lift station. Four smaller drag-lifts operate from around the perimeter.

For the summer, there will be the new 18-hole golf course running along either side of the hameau, due to open in 1989, as well as tennis courts. Even the obligatory fall-out shelters will be roomy.

The idea behind the hameau is to create a luxury complex that is conveniently situated to enjoy all the sporting possibilities of Verbier, while

having its own separate identity. This, of course, offers the ideal combination for the conference organiser.

The project is being financed by Dorsaz, together with three banks: Union Bank of Switzerland, the Banque Populaire Suisse and the local Banque Cantonale du Valais. Loans made so far total Swfr17 million, on 20-year terms, with interest rates of between 5½% and 6%. Further funds will be raised through the sale of the chalet buildings as they are completed. The complex will have its own permanent administration to handle maintenance, and take bookings for the various facilities.

It will be interesting to see if this bold initiative pays dividends but, judging from recent trends, the hameau, if fully realised, should have little difficulty in attracting customers.

Verbier: Après-ski

HOTELS

L'Alba ★★★★★

A relatively quiet, if somewhat impersonal hotel, with a predominantly Swiss clientele, although it is favoured too by some Italians, French and Americans. Its restaurant, open to the public, offers traditional and *nouvelle cuisine*, but no *fondue* or *raclette*. The hotel's large lounge and piano bar, around a large open fire, are popular in the evenings.

Les Quatre Vallées ★★★★★

A beautiful, chalet-style hotel, right in the centre of town, just 200m (220yds) from the slopes. Its large, south-facing balconies have excellent views of Mont Blanc and Le Grand Combin. There is no restaurant, but it has a breakfast room and a large, comfortable lounge, with a great fireplace and natural pine bar. Very quiet, with beautiful décor, it is considered the best of Verbier's luxury hotels.

Barc Hotel ★★★★★

The Barc is quiet, almost retiring, but its bar and restaurant are typical of the Valais. One of its principal attractions is its après-ski lounge.

Hotel Grand Combin ★★★★★

A charming, but smart, mountain hotel, with a mainly English clientele in winter, the Grand Combin is one of Verbier's really good hotels. Jacky's Bar is a favourite with residents and other visitors.

Rosalp ★★★★★

The decidedly cosy Rosalp is widely reckoned to have the finest hotel restaurant in the Alps. Located at the bottom of the main lifts at Medran, it has as its chef *nouvelle cuisine* pioneer Roland Pierroz, who is credited with raising the standards of cooking throughout the resort. Meal prices are high, but then any "gastronomic adventure" is expensive. The hotel is undergoing extensive alterations to meet increasing demand.

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Vanessa ★★★★★

Offering something different from the usual mountain-inn atmosphere, the Vanessa attracts a mixed clientele that includes Scandinavians, Italians, Canadians and Swiss. It has a friendly bar, open to non-residents, and a restaurant renowned for its Chinese *fondue*. The cellar has a range of quality Valais wines, as well as excellent Bordeaux and Bourgognes.

Le Ver Luisant ★★★★★

Located at Savoleyres, Le Ver Luisant has a magnificent terrace offering a panoramic view of Verbier. The décor is rustic Valais, much loved by its family clients. There is a restaurant and bar, both open to non-residents.

Le Farinet ★★★

Situated in the village square, Le Farinet is a splendid old hostelry decorated in old-fashioned mountain style. Its restaurant lacks charm, but the cuisine is between classic and modern. The large sunny terrace has fine views.

Le Mirabeau ★★★

The welcoming warmth of its large lounge fireplace and the good Scandinavian atmosphere make up for

Le Mirabeau's lack of a restaurant. It is a quiet hotel, just five minutes from the slopes.

Parc Hotel ★★★

The Parc is renowned for its comfortable rooms and sunny balconies. Le Postillon restaurant and King's Bar are typical of the area.

Les Chamois ★★★

The chalet-style Chamois offers only B & B. There is TV in the lounge, and no room telephone service.

Hôtel de la Poste ★★★

A family-style hotel with free indoor pool and a restaurant offering *raclette* and *fondue*. The basement bar is popular also with non-residents.

Hotel de Verbier ★★★

Small and central, the Verbier's accent on youth has attracted a young English clientele. Its large terrace and pub-style bar are particularly popular.

Le Rhodania ★★★

The Rhodania is somewhat noisy because of its on-street location, but its rooms have been refurbished in chalet style. It has a large lounge and first-floor terrace.



RESTAURANTS

Alba

The hotel restaurant offers quality traditional cuisine – and the camaraderie of the piano bar afterwards.

A la bonne Banquette

Less expensive than some, the Banquette offers pleasant, fairly simple cuisine. Despite its town-centre location, it has a rustic atmosphere.

Le Braconnier

Popular with a local clientele, the Braconnier specialises in scampi and fish dishes. The prices are reasonable.

Le Caveau

By far the best cheese restaurant in Verbier, it attracts crowds and gives a warm welcome. The cheese cellar

must be visited. Clients include ski instructors for a 6pm aperitif and bankers discussing stocks or sport.

La Chaîne Valaisanne

Fairly priced and charmingly built of Haut Valais wood, this is a safe bet for perfect local cuisine, with specialities: *fondue*, *raclette* and other dishes of the Valais.

Chez Martin

Martin is considered the top Valaisian chef, but his restaurant could be more welcoming. Nevertheless worth a visit.

L'Ecurie

Although pricy, given the slightly cramped conditions, it offers excellent grills and home-made pasta in a charming, quaint setting.

Au Fer à Cheval

Pascal and his staff always have a

smile and welcoming greeting. The pizza, pasta and Valaisian dishes are good in quality and price. Popular with the young, especially Swedes and English.

La Grange

Friendly and well run, La Grange is next door to a very popular gastronomic restaurant, where you would have a long wait. The prices are fair.

La Luge

A place where you have to book because of its popularity with foreign visitors. Its red meat is excellent, and it offers good local wines. The atmosphere is among the best. Do try the home-made apple-slice dessert.

Au vieux Valais

The décor is a bit cold for the mountains, but the terrace has a



panoramic view, and the cuisine is no-nonsense, scrupulous Valaisian.

Au vieux Verbier

This is where everything happens. When the skiers come down for lunch it is one big open cocktail party. Meticulous, fast and hot service.

Higher Restaurants

La Camargue

A charming chalet run by two very fashionable ladies, the Camargue offers accomplished regional cuisine, Chinese *fondue* and home-made preserves.

Le Carrefour

During the day, the Carrefour has a family and mountain atmosphere; in the evening, it is a choice restaurant, specialising in excellent desserts. Good rarebits and *fondue*.

Dany

The dishes are simple, but the welcome from the owner is warm and the view of the valley quite splendid.

Les Gentianes

At 3,000m (9,600ft), this is the highest,

best and friendliest of the higher restaurants. Self-service and good for the price.

La Grange à Marmottes

Good-quality cuisine in the evening and first-class lunchtime snacks for the skier by day. The setting is very pretty and typically Valaisian.

Le Mignon

Situated at the foot of the red run, the Mignon offers light meals or a more elaborate menu with créole specialities.

BARS

L'Arlequin American-style bar, popular with Rosalp residents and non-residents. Excellent cocktails served by an amusing barmaid.

Jacky's Bar A Swiss bar where you'll find people from Lausanne and Geneva, and many golfers – because Walter adores golf!

Le New Club An après-ski and evening haunt for many, especially the Swiss. Stylish and pleasant.

Offshore Original rose décor and alcohol-free. Popular with the young who watch videos and films about skiing feats.

Piano Bar The Vanessa's bar has a splendid range of Scotch whiskies. Always a good atmosphere.

Le pub du Mont-Fort Very popular with the chalet girls and Swedish visitors. A relaxed, young and entertaining atmosphere.

Le pub Nelson Very popular, very young and overrun by English visitors.

NIGHTCLUBS

Le Farm The very rich English are very much at home here. A large fireplace, excellent music and two very friendly managers. Service good.

Le Scotch Good value, with a mainly English clientele.

Le Tara Cosmopolitan and local, with a mountain style that the owner lovingly preserves. A favourite with people in their thirties. Lively.

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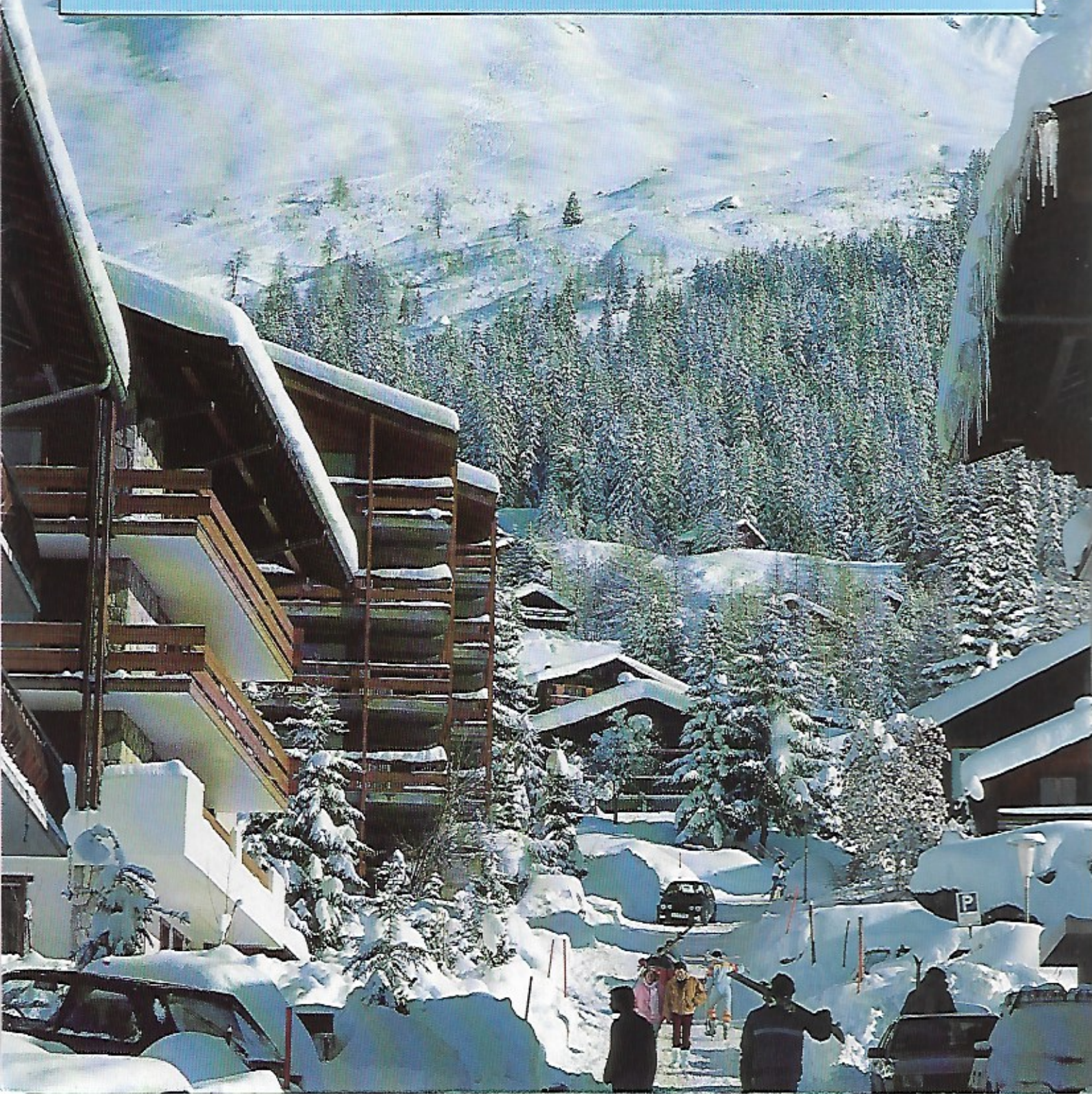
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