

COUNTRY LIFE®

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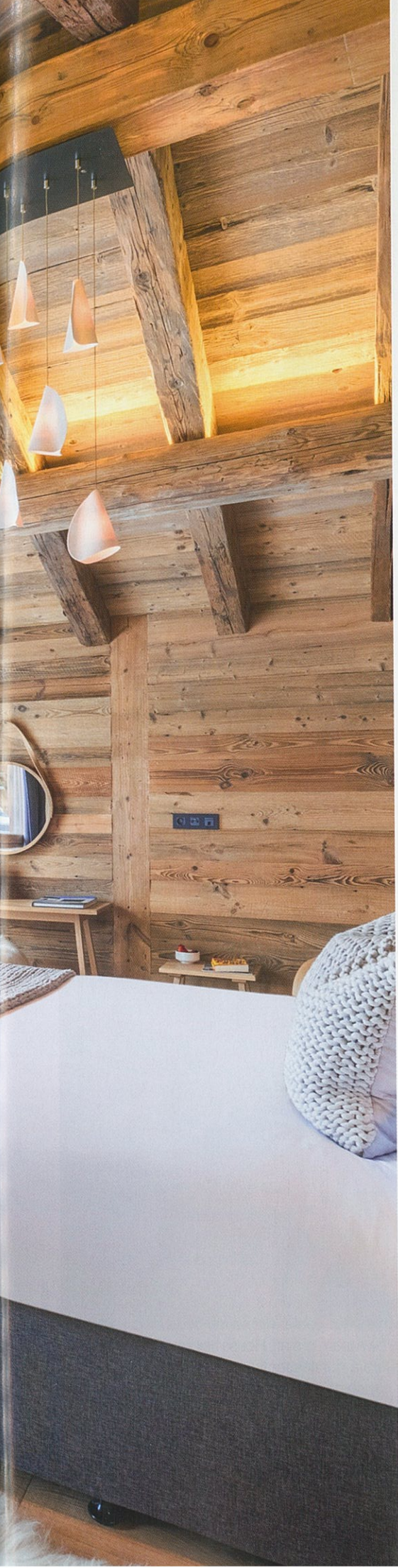
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How to create the perfect city garden
Great ideas for winter holidays

It's snow problem

Winter is just around the corner and we have selected our top five chalets so you and your friends can make the most of what the mountains have to offer





Chalet Sapphire, Morzine, France

The popular resort of Morzine in the French Alps is known for its location in the huge, cross-border Portes du Soleil ski area, which encompasses 15 resorts. Morzine's many beginner and intermediate runs make it perfect for families, but more advanced skiing is easily accessible at neighbouring resorts with a tap of your pass. The fact that it's a short, one-hour transfer from Geneva airport adds further appeal. However, there's a more tempting reason to consider Morzine for your next ski break.

‘My favourite spot was the outdoor hot tub with views of the Pleney run’

Chalet Sapphire was designed with a five-star boutique hotel in mind and offers a lot more than just a base. The Chalet Edit has handpicked this high-end chalet for its exceptional service, great food and impressive array of facilities. Industry expert Anna Sampson will tailor-make your ideal holiday, from essentials—such as childcare and ski lessons—to elaborate celebrations and private-jet travel. Upon arrival, relax and wait for the in-chalet ski hire in what can only be described as the biggest boot room I have ever seen. There are lots of amenities to take advantage of over the course of your stay, but you'll be distracted, initially, by the chalet's gargantuan feeling of space and exquisite décor—a combination of modern and Alpine chic. Quirky details, such as the enormous gong and swing chairs, complete the vibe.

Views of Morzine's mountain range are framed by the huge glass walls, but they are best viewed from outside, on one of the

balconies. The large, heated indoor pool, steam room, ice chamber, gym, games room-cum-bar and cinema room aren't to be overlooked—my favourite spot was the outdoor hot tub with views of the Pleney run, best enjoyed with a glass of Champagne in hand. As well as the hot tub, you'll find a sunken firepit and a hammam, plus a Bamford Spa treatment room with Bamford-trained therapists—the perfect place to relax after a day's skiing.

Whether it's driving you to the slopes, whipping up a pre-dinner cocktail or advising you where next to plant your poles, the staff at Chalet Sapphire will go above and beyond to make your stay the best ski experience you've ever had. *EA*

From €2,208 per person (sleeps 12) for seven nights, on a full-board (open-bar) basis, including daily afternoon tea and a resort driver (020-8133 1130; www.thechaletedit.com)

Chalet Hibou, Le Miroir, France

These days, everyone seems to be turning their hobby into a 'side hustle'. Chad Pike, who spends his days running the Tactical Opportunities fund for investment giant Blackstone, however, has taken things to a whole other level.

In 2008, Mr Pike took advantage of the post-crunch property market to snap up a beautiful old building in the Colorado ski town of Crested Butte. He turned it into a luxurious mountain bolthole and, in the process, created Eleven Experience, a travel company that aims to 'custom-make experiences that impact the people who impact the world'. Its portfolio has been expanding ever since and now boasts 11 destinations for 'adventure capitalists', who can choose between mountain-biking across Icelandic tundra, fly-fishing in the Marquesas and much else besides.

The most recent addition to the Eleven portfolio is the seven-bedroom Chalet >



Left: One of the glass-fronted bedrooms of Chalet Sapphire in Morzine. Above: Heli-skiing is one of the many activities included with Chalet Hibou in Le Miroir

Travel Skiing

Hibou, which sits next to an existing Eleven property, the five-bedroom Chalet Pellerin, in the French mountain hamlet of Le Miroir. Like Pellerin, Hibou is beautifully appointed, with natural wood, luxurious soft furnishings, fur throws and tastefully eclectic artwork—all courtesy of Mr Pike's wife, Blake, and her interior-design company, No 12 Interiors.

‘From 10,000ft, we carved S-shaped trails through a blanket of untouched snow,’

There's also a hot tub with a spectacular alpine view, a steam room and sauna, a boot room, a media room and even a bar, and staff are on hand to cater to your every whim—whether that be a fireside Champagne cocktail or the evening meal, which sees classics, such as authentic French onion soup, expertly prepared by the in-house chef.

If you can bring yourself to venture outside, and you should, the chalet's own ski guides will take snow and weather conditions into account to select the best of five nearby resorts, including Val D'Isère and La Rosière. They'll also source lift passes, pack your skis and chauffeur you to the bottom of the day's first lift. Once on the mountain, they use deep local knowledge to seek out the best conditions and secret stashes of off-piste powder.

The pièce de résistance, however, is undoubtedly the chance to cross the Italian



The boot room at Chalet Hibou is the perfect place to start and end a day on the mountain

border and go heli-skiing. (Heli-skiing isn't permitted in France.) We clambered into a six-seat craft, which was little more than a fibreglass shell with whirling blades attached, and our guide directed the pilot to a spot that felt like the top of the world—a remote mountain peak, with no one else for miles around. From an altitude of nearly 10,000ft, we carved S-shaped trails through a blanket of untouched snow and reached the bottom totally elated. Then we did it again, this time from the top of a glacier.

After all that, it was time for a bite to eat. The most atmospheric spot for dinner is Hibou's own 'alpage'—an old farmer's hut a short snow-shoe from the main chalet, which has been repurposed as a private après-ski party pad. There's no electricity,

but there are candles for light, roaring fires for warmth and a barbecue for côte de boeuf, which is served at the long dining table.

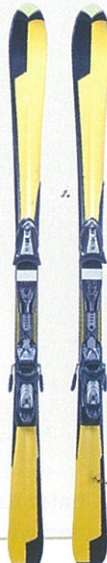
Apparently, Mr Pike's 'unofficial mission statement' for his ambitious side project is to make guests say 'that was the best day of my life'. If you love the mountains and have a taste for adventure, it'll come pretty close. *Edwin Smith*

From £7,100 per night, based on 12 people sharing on a full-experience basis. Price includes private concierge, full guide service, use of L'Alpage, all gear for activities, lift passes, in-house meals, all house alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, daily housekeeping and airport transfers to/from Geneva (001 800 903 7761; www.elevenexperience.com/chalet-hibou)

San Lorenzo Mountain Lodge, near Kronplatz, Italy

Ski chalets are a less-familiar concept in Italy, making them somewhat harder to come by. San Lorenzo Mountain Lodge—hidden in the Dolomite Mountains—plugs that gap.

There, a private shuttle stands ready each morning to transport guests to the nearest ski lifts, which open up to more than 60 miles of slopes. What makes a stay at San Lorenzo truly stand out from the crowd, however, are the charming hosts Giorgia and Stefano Barbini. Mr Barbini is a ski instructor who arms guests with the best insider knowledge; Mrs Barbini prepares superb, traditional Italian-inspired food, with regional wines to match, hand-selected from the amply stocked wine cellar. For foodies, the chalet is also within close proximity of a number of Michelin-starred restaurants. *Isobel Green*



From £15,100 for seven nights, which includes exclusive use of the chalet for up to 10 guests (www.sanlorenzolodges.com)

Heinz Julen Penthouse, Zermatt, Switzerland

Sitting on the peak of Switzerland's highest resort, I challenge you to not be entirely blown away by the beautiful vista that this penthouse offers—the carefully considered designs of architect Heinz Julen include broad skylights and vast full-length windows.

The triple-storey, four-bedroom property is accessed through a tunnel in the town's centre and has the benefit of a private lift that will transport guests to the heart of Zermatt within seconds—close enough to the slopes for the avid skier, far enough away to offer non-skiers a peaceful retreat.

Come twilight, snuggle up in front of the open log fire and take in that incredible view. *IG*

From £1,663 per person (sleeps eight) for seven nights, on a full-board basis (020-3504 7414; www.skisolutions.com)

House Hannes Schneider, Stuben am Arlberg, Austria

Nestled within the heart of an idyllic, pedestrian-only village with some of Austria's finest skiing on its doorstep, House Hannes Schneider is a salute to the golden age of skiing. The luxurious chalet—childhood home to ski pioneer Hannes Schneider—has an elegant, alpine-chic interior, complete with original beams, retainin its traditional charm.

When it comes to facilities, you'll find a sauna, hot tub, cinema room, full Sonos soundsystem and, of course a roaring log fire. Spread across four floors with seven bedrooms and its own team of staff, House Hannes Schneider offers a quintessential luxury escape with a sense of alpine authenticity, perfect for families and large groups alike. *IG*

From £2,245 per person (sleeps 20) for seven nights, on a full-board basis (020-3504 7414; www.skisolutions.com)

