

Struck down by cabin fever

ARCHITECTURE / EUROPE

Sensitive architecture and tasteful interiors will have you swooning after these holiday homes in the woods.



Photography: Mathieu Ooster

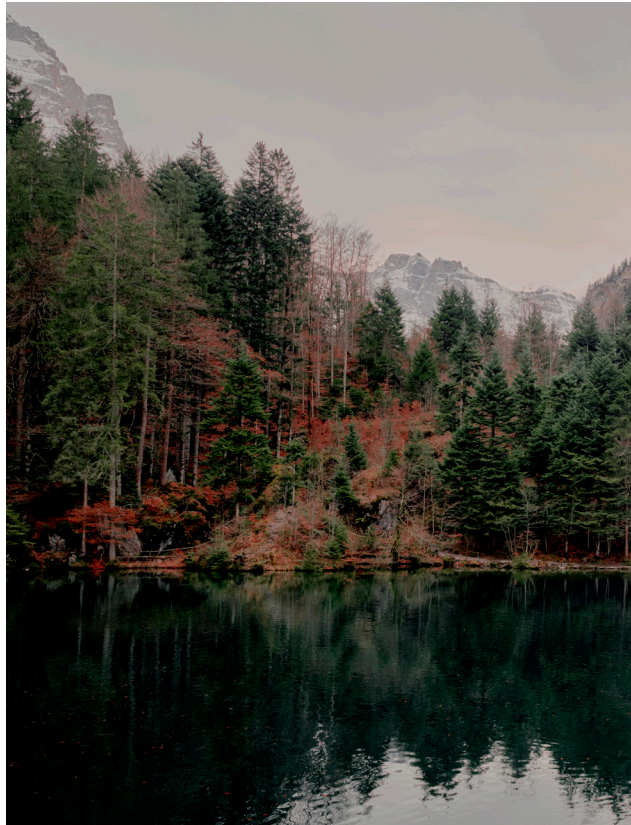
Almost all architecture is enhanced by the landscape that it is set in. For proof, one only needs to look to the *strickbau* (log cabins) and contemporary holiday homes of Alpine Switzerland. Savvy architects here are carefully positioning residences to make the most of striking lake and mountain vistas. As a result, many of these buildings are imbued with a strong sense of place and connection to the wider environment, despite many being cosy winter hideaways, where owners and guests spend their time indoors. MONOCLE hit the slopes to visit a selection of holiday homes that are making the most of a prime position in the Swiss countryside.

WATERSIDE WONDER

CABIN 01 / LAKE BLAUSEE

Blausee Treehouses

The first thing that strikes you about the small Alpine lake of Blausee is the vibrant colour of its azure waters. “It’s a trick of the light,” says Stefan Linder, who co-owns the lake and the surrounding nine hectares of land. “The colour is created by the sun reflecting against the forest on this side of the mountain. It refracts against the bottom of the lake and creates this amazing blue.” It’s about as postcard perfect as Swiss scenery gets;



a crystalline pool surrounded by mossy green boulders and lush pine forests that sprawl up the towering mountain peaks encircling the lake.

Blausee’s picturesque qualities have been attracting visitors from around the world to this corner of the Bernese Oberland for more than a century. The land was purchased in 1878 by Swiss businessman Johann Caspar Leemann-Boller, who built a hotel on the lake’s shore and added an alpine freshwater trout farm a few years later. Both are still running; the latter is Switzerland’s oldest producer of freshwater trout and regularly named the country’s finest in taste tests.

Eight years ago the previous owner was on the search for a buyer. “He was 72 years old and there was nobody in line to take over after he retired,” says Linder. “He asked me to find a solution because there were various interested foreign buyers but he was keen that it stay in Swiss hands.”

Linder teamed up with fellow entrepreneurs André Lüthi and Philipp Hildebrand to buy Blausee. The lake remains one of only a handful of the 1,500 in Switzerland that is privately owned. Visitors can enter the surrounding park if they pay a small fee, which is put towards maintaining the land and its walking trails.

Linder has overseen the introduction of a handful of new structures to the park over recent years, including a small lakeside café and shingle-roofed lake house that was designed by Zürich-based architect Thomas Hildebrand. This year the latest addition to Blausee was unveiled; three wooden cabins hidden within a dense thicket of trees that adjoins the hotel. Each cabin can be hired in its entirety by guests who are looking for an experience that will immerse them in the natural landscape.

Hildebrand is also behind these new structures. Each has vast, floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto the surrounding woodland and, once the leaves have fallen, the mountainsides beyond. “What’s really special is how the views change according to the season,” says Hildebrand, who positioned the cabins to optimise their outlooks. Connecting their inhabitants with Blausee’s spectacular natural landscape was the architect’s main priority when working on the project. “Our daily lives keep moving further and further away from nature and that has created a real longing for it. I wanted to tap into that.”

For inspiration, Hildebrand drew heavily from his time in Japan. “My partner is half Japanese so we usually go there every year,” he says. “Japanese people have a really spiritual way of connecting to nature and their homes have a more symbiotic relationship to the natural world. In Switzerland, our relationship to nature is more pragmatic. So I wanted to combine those two sensibilities.”

The buildings were constructed using locally felled pine wood, which also forms the interior and exterior cladding. For the bathrooms and flooring, Hildebrand opted for the same stone that makes up the mountainsides surrounding the cabins: a deep grey Mitholzer-Kieselkalk limestone sourced from a quarry located a few kilometres up the valley.

The cabins were decorated by Danish-Swiss interior designer Ruth Kramer, who also runs the

“We wanted to create something calming and timeless to allow people to unplug and give the feeling of being a bit off-grid”

Brücke 49 hotel in the mountain village of Vals. She chose the furnishings to complement the views, with a soothing shade of pale duck egg blue for the walls, slate grey and mossy green textiles and wooden furnishings from Denmark’s Carl Hansen & Son and India’s Phantom Hands. The interiors are warmly lit by lamps from Santa & Cole and Michel Anastasiades, while a wood-burning stove in each cabin adds to the cosy atmosphere. “We wanted to create something calming and timeless,” says Kramer. “To allow people to unplug and give the feeling of being a bit off-grid.”

The cabins were prefabricated by woodworkers in the nearby town of Frutigen and took seven months to construct. Once the foundations were fully prepared, the modular elements were lowered onto the site using a helicopter and slotted together. “This is a really modern construction and wood has come really far with this kind of prefabrication,” says Hildebrand. “That is what I love about these kinds of projects: using local, traditional materials allows you to combine architectural progressiveness with heritage.”

[blausee.ch](#)

• HESTER UNDERHILL

(1) A Santa & Cole lamp adds warmth (2) The Blausee Treehouses are hidden by the woods (3) Lakeside location (4) The moss and slate colours of the textiles echo those in the landscape



RUSTIC RENOVATION

CABIN 02 / GSTAAD

Chalet Saanen Gstaad

French architect and designer Thierry Lemaire is known for his angular furniture and impressive portfolio of high-end interiors, which includes a renovation of the Elysée presidential office. His latest project, however, is a little more personal. In the Swiss town of Gstaad, Lemaire teamed up with his sister, interior designer Sophie Prezioso, to renovate and redesign a chalet that she purchased as a holiday home. Lemaire looked after the furniture and architecture, and worked hand in hand with Prezioso on interior design and decoration.

The 16th-century building was originally a farmhouse and the pair wanted to keep its rustic character while introducing contemporary design elements. They remodelled the interior to introduce more natural light. Partitions were removed to create more space for the dining area, while the old barn on the first floor became the main bedroom. “It was important to ensure that the space was comfortable and welcoming,” says Lemaire.

The architect wanted to create “a cosy and timeless environment”. To do so, he chose materials and furniture in contrasting styles and textures. Rough melez wood and smooth Hainaut stone was used throughout, while old paintings and vintage furniture mix with more modern pieces; one of the architect’s Koumac armchairs is placed beside a large window, creating a relaxing spot to enjoy views of the snowy landscape.

The result? An Alpine holiday home that feels contemporary but still reflects the original qualities of the building. “It’s a house that is somewhere between elegance, authenticity and preciousness,” says Lemaire. [thierry-lemaire.fr](#)

• AMY VAN DEN BERG



“Chalet Saanen Gstaad is a house that is somewhere between elegance, authenticity and preciousness”



(1) The interiors of the Chalet Saanen Gstaad mix rough woods with smooth stone (2) The chalet is owned by interior designer Sophie Prezioso (3) Koumac armchair designed by her brother, Thierry Lemaire (4) Aux Losanges has distinctive hand-painted communal areas (5) One of five spacious bedrooms

ARTISTIC ESCAPE

CABIN 03 / TSCHIERTSCHEN

Aux Losanges

In February, the mountain village of Tschierschen will receive an influx of art enthusiasts. An exhibition of works by Swiss sculptor Hans Josephsohn will open at Aux Losanges, a residence that doubles as an arts venue.

The *strickbau* was renovated by London and Zürich-based practice Caruso St John in 2017 and has been at the centre of the village’s cultural life since the mid-20th century. Built as a home in 1869, the structure served as a restaurant (known as Café Engi), exhibition and concert space. Its future hung in the balance until Zürich-based couple Armin Zink and Stéphane Lombardi, who used to visit Café Engi after hikes, purchased the property in 2015. A plan to turn it into a holiday home changed when the town’s mayor suggested they give it a “public dimension”. “It set Zink and Lombardi’s imaginations alight,” says architect Adam Caruso. “So we created a house that works like a turn-of-the-century salon: it is a private residence but there are concerts and exhibitions where some of the interiors become accessible to the public.”

At the heart of the public areas is a double-height foyer with a concert grand piano and panoramic windows. Guests can choose from one of five large bedrooms – each with a distinct identity – that are complemented by four common rooms. The architects also designed built-in beds and cupboards, which were inspired by the traditional painted furniture of Swiss farmhouses. “By containing a diverse set of interiors and atmospheres, the house is a world in itself,” says Caruso. [aux-losanges.ch](#)

• POLINA MOROVA



Growing ambition

FURNITURE / ITALY

Living Divani CEO Carola Bestetti reveals how her family’s furniture company is managing unexpected growth and supporting the design community.

Writer Nic Monisse
Photography Luigi Fiano

Family-run Italian furniture firm Living Divani has enjoyed enormous growth in recent years. While small by regional industry standards, the Lombardy-based company finished 2021 with a turnover of €26.4m, 38 per cent more than in 2020 – momentum that it has maintained into 2022. This is thanks, in part, to the leadership of Carola Bestetti, the company’s second-generation CEO. Building on the work of her parents, who established Living Divani in 1978, Bestetti has sought to diversify the brand’s offering and cement its status in the globally important Lombardy design scene.

While many people had dire predictions about the future of the furniture industry due to strained supply chains, Living Divani has had a successful year.

Yes, we’re growing. We grew nearly 40 per cent in 2021 and we’re about to close a further 10 per cent up on that this year. That growth is obviously extremely positive but you also have to be able to manage it.

How have you managed it, given that Living Divani has had year-on-year growth for a number of years now?

No one would have expected this industry to grow as much as it has in the past few years. It has been bizarre. But Living Divani has diversified as a company and that has increased our visibility and led to further growth during the pandemic. Pierro Lissoni has been the company’s primary designer since the early days but we needed to bring in other perspectives and add some variation to the products so we gave opportunities to young designers, which has allowed us to diversify. While we have been

doing this, we have respected our DNA and been very consistent in what we do. That approach pays back.

Can you tell us about the DNA of your company?

Living Divani is family-run so we deal with people and interact with our clients and customers on a personal level. I’ve always said that the space that you live in is not only defined by the furniture you put in it but also by the person who lives there. The furniture simply enhances the person. To make Living Divani different from our competitors, we always try to return to that heritage. We bring things back to a personal level and consider the consumer when making decisions.

You’re trying to build those personal relationships through your gallery space in Milan. What role does that space play?

The idea is to use the gallery to show different typologies of creation and design and to give visibility to a young generation of talented designers. We’ve done one show so far, a graphic exhibition with

“No one expected the furniture industry to grow as much as it has in the past few years”

Gianluca Vassallo, but we have plans to do more. We want to showcase jewellery and fashion too. The hope is that this will reveal a different approach to what design could be, especially for furniture designers.

It seems as if you have an ambition to further strengthen the design community here.

Can you tell us about the relationship between your makers and the other furniture companies in Lombardy?

We’re all connected. We all rely on the outsourcing of components, so much so that most of the suppliers we use are the same. And if we want to know how one of the other companies has designed something, we can just ask them. [livingdivani.it](#)

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