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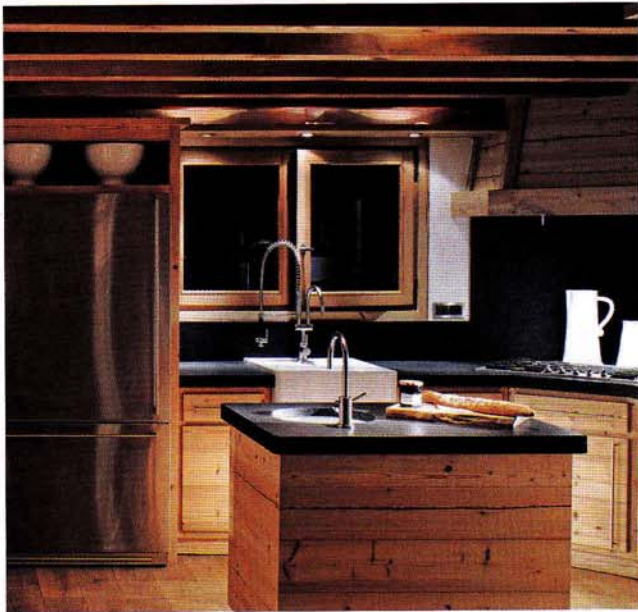


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give a welcoming Alpine feel



THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

Your choice of materials is crucial to the overall feel of the kitchen, says ski chalet designer Nicky Dobree, 020 7627 0469, nickydobree.com; fermedemoudon.com. Here, she has used distressed pine contrasted with worktops in thick stone and appliances in stainless steel to reflect the light.



LUXURIOUS COMFORTS

Indulging in a relaxing, recuperative spa treatment provides the perfect end to a long, hard day on the slopes. For the owners of this French chalet with its pretty porch overlooked by the adjacent snow-clad trees, Yvette Walters has transformed a simple dip in a hot tub into a romantic experience.

HOW TO FIND THE PERFECT CHALET OR APARTMENT

Katrina Burroughs's essential guide to what and where to buy

Chalets and ski apartments can be smart investments, with leaseback deals netting owners up to five per cent of the value of the property each year.

WHICH COUNTRY?

Switzerland and Austria are overtaking France for budget-conscious buyers. Some of the prettiest mountain hideaways, including funky modern chalets by architect Eric Papon, 0041 27 451 20 30, papon-archi.ch, are in the Swiss Alps. The low-key, lower-altitude Austrian resorts offer both winter and summer activities, with opportunities for mountain biking and hiking. In France, where mountain biking is also popular in summer, many developments are complexes of apartment blocks, with restaurants, swimming pool and entertainment laid on.

VALUE FOR MONEY?

Austria currently offers the best value, with property prices around the €3,000 per square metre mark; properties in France can cost 50 per cent more. In Bad Gastein, Austria, 70 minutes from Salzburg, two-bedroom apartments bought off-plan cost €265,000. In Switzerland, two-bedroom apartments in Vevey, part of the Verbier ski area and an hour and 45 minutes from Geneva, cost CHF515,000 (€176,000 more than its Bad Gastein counterpart). In Avoriaz, France, a four-bedroom apartment in the spectacular high-rise Amara Residences bought off-plan costs €925,920.

OLD OR NEW, APARTMENT OR CHALET?

Buyers tend to prefer new, as the 1970s developments have fewer bathrooms and pokier kitchens, while exteriors and common parts can look dated. Apartments are popular rentals, usually with a management system in place, but chalets still have huge appeal. After viewing traditional Swiss chalets like Chalets Mura at Les Collons, also in the Verbier ski area (two bedrooms, CHF375,000), you may find it hard to love a monolithic apartment block.

WHO SHOULD I BUY THROUGH?

A specialist can advise on local amenities and rental income in several countries. Established names are: Alpine Angels, 01225 442128, alpineangels.net; Erna Low Property, 020 7590 1624, ernalowproperty.co.uk; and Investors in Property, 020 8905 5511, investorsinproperty.com.

WHO WILL HELP ME RENT IT?

The French government offers a leaseback scheme: property buyers avoid the 19.6 per cent VAT as long as a management company can rent it out on their behalf. Some developments also offer a guaranteed rental return of three to five per cent. Alternatively, you could place your property with a UK holiday rental agency such as the Oxford Ski Company, 01865 398130, oxfordski.com. ■

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