



gs
MAGAZINE

issue 70 www.gsmagazine.co.uk

Inspiring Hospitality Design

Les Menuires

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the ski resort of Les Menuires has undergone considerable infrastructure improvement and development as it reinforces its position as the most innovative and affordable family resort in Les 3 Vallées in France.

It's an interesting resort as, unlike most of Europe's skiing destinations, this was built during a period of architectural experimentation and much of its centre is representative of that era. It has an urban character and several of its central buildings look strangely out of place in the mountain valleys. But this too provides Les Menuires with a unique identity and charm.

Situated at an altitude of 1,850 metres in the heart of Les 3 Vallées, the largest ski area in the world with 600 kilometres of runs and 200 ski lifts, Les Menuires guarantee great skiing from the beginning of December to the end of April. It boasts one of the largest ski kindergartens in France, as well as wide beginner's pistes, fun sliding zones, a vast selection of apres-ski activities for all ages, and good quality, value for money ski-in/ski-out accommodation. Currently 60% of its clientele are families.

More recently, as the resort has expanded, the architecture has become more traditional. Smaller chalet style accommodation built in clusters are dotted around the mountainside like



satellite villages. These properties are designed to be more spacious and welcoming and offer more modern facilities and services such as fitness studios and spas.

Hotel accommodation is plentiful although amongst the best is Le Chalet du Mont Vallon (www.hotel-montvallon-menuires.com) in the neighbouring area of Les Bouquetins and hotel Kaya (www.hotel-kaya.com), with its magnificent unspoilt views across the valley. Kaya is in the Village de Reberty, which at 2000m is the uppermost village within the district. This four star boutique hotel offers all modern facilities including a swimming pool, a spa, a very good restaurant which extends to an outside terrace

and large comfortable rooms. Like all Les Menuires' hotels, this is a ski from the doorstep property and the inter-linking slopes, ski lifts and shuttle bus services makes cars virtually redundant.

There is also a wide range of quality restaurants to visit, worthy of special mention are la Maison de Savoie in Reberty (www.lamaisondesavoy.com) and the brilliant local farm restaurant Chantacoucou (www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com) just outside the picturesque village of Saint Martin de Belleville.

To find out more visit: www.lesmenuires.com or www.st-martin-belleville.com

The development of Les Menuires put an end to a rural way of life that had existed for centuries. Predominantly a cattle rearing community, the valley was known for its high altitude pastures. Small communities lived in the villages but it was pretty much unpopulated apart from that. The development of the resort was widely welcomed as it provided new employment in the building and services industries. The master-plan is now virtually complete, between the resorts of Les Menuires and Val Thorens there are 47,000 beds available (far less than the originally intended 100,000) so whilst it is popular it is rarely overcrowded.

Building properties that have to endure extremes of temperature requires a process that has developed and improved over time, new systems and materials have helped enormously in this endeavour as explained here by architect, **Loïc Devineau** of **STUDIO ARCH**.

In the 1970's the first projects which were designed for ski resorts were insulated from the inside, leaving concrete parts exposed to the cold, the rain and the sun. The wide range of temperatures - from minus 20°C at night to plus 35° on sun-exposed parts by day - quickly damaged the unprotected parts.

Since the mid 1990's all of our projects are insulated from the outside. This kind of insulation solves two major problems: it protects the structural parts of the building and it helps reduce energy consumption. Regarding the second point, the thickness of thermal insulation regularly increased between 2005 and 2009, going from 10cm to up to

25cm for wall insulation and from 30cm to 40cm for roofs.

Before thinking of the heating sources, it is necessary to think first of the envelope. It is important to consider each singular point which could be a source of heat loss and/or a condensation point. For example, balconies are not the extension of the inside concrete slab as it used to be, but they are borne by brackets or by a secondary frame. Another singular point is the parapet, it is now insulated on three faces to prevent heat loss.

Composite walls can be different: Timber-frame for facades and floors, and a concrete core inside - this composite allows to increase the number of prefabricated parts and therefore to reduce the construction activities duration, which lasts only for the summer season at high altitudes.

The use of a concrete core allows to increase the thermal inertia of the building and thus its thermal comfort.

Concrete structure with an insulation on the outside facade.



In this case, the insulation is either mechanically stuck or placed in a secondary frame.

Heat sources are usually a combination of two systems: the main sources are wood (pellets or wood chips) or gas that can be combined with thermic solar panels for hot water. These are preferably installed on the facades - not to be bothered by the snow and to gain

the radiation effects from it.

Air distribution is operated by a dual-flow controlled mechanical ventilation in order to save energy and to avoid condensation points.

Studio Arch are one of France's leading architectural firms in the field of sustainable mountain tourism development.
Tel: +04 79 34 04 33
www.studio-arch.fr