A St Moritz institution

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The lounge at the Suvretta House hotel provided three reasons why St Moritz, high in the Swiss Alps, is such a magnet for holidaymakers in both winter and summer.

The first two were visual. There was the view straight ahead – high above the ski jump that was a focus for the 1928 and 1948 Winter Olympics rise majestic snow-dusted peaks. The second was the view down the valley towards Italy with two lakes gleaming turquoise in the late afternoon sunshine.

The third was more gustatory. It was the perfect pastry - rich, crumbly but not over-sweet – at the bottom of my apricot tart, which, with a cup of tea, assuaged our hunger and thirst after a walk in the mountain air.

Suvretta House possesses not just magnificent views but also a rather extraordinary history, which involved at its inception a British Member of Parliament, and also a most unusual and demanding business model. Like the other five-star hotels in St Moritz, Suvretta House closes not just once but twice a year, initially after the ski season ends at Easter and then once the hikers, sailors and golfers have departed, between September and December.

C S Goldmanwas the MP who collaborated with the hotel's founder, Anton Bon, to finance this 200-bedroom landmark in 1911. Construction began on the stone and wood south-facing mansion in the forest in March and by December it was open for business. Two separate companies built each of the seemingly identical east and west wings, and it was only when a major renovation was undertaken eight years ago that obvious discrepancies in how each company had gone about their task emerged.

A major factor in Suvretta House's success is manager Vic Jacob and his equally dedicated wife Helen.Their approach to operating a hotel that is closed for six months of the year is endearingly simple. 'We run this place as though every day we are open counts for two,' he said, 'and my staff therefore have to be trained to maximise our guests' comfort and pleasure'. Such has been the success of this approach that any booking over the hugely popular Christmas and New Year period has to be for a minimum of fourteen nights – and there is always a waiting list!

While Jacob has developed an obvious enthusiasm for wine over the years, he is experienced enough to leave the kitchens in the extremely capable hands of German-born chef Bernd Ackermann, who oversees a vast kitchen domain.

Ackermann's remit extends far beyond Le Grand Restaurant, the most formal dining room that still requires a dark jacket and tie for men, to the more casual Chasellas restaurant a short uphill walk from the hotel as well as two mountain restaurants, Trutz, and Chamanna, which at almost 2700 metres above sea level is open only in the ski season.

But because this is Switzerland, although its proximity to the Italian and Austrian borders means that there is considerable culinary diversity on the menus, the emphasis on bread is extraordinary. As Ackermann showed me round the section where two bakers work from 1am to 7.30am every morning, he pointed to two large photographs on the wall which inspire them to produce 40 different loaves a day, some of which are subsequently transported by chair lift later that morning to feed hungry skiers.

We chose, however, to sample Swiss food, always so appetising at altitude, in the extremely comfortable Suvretta-Stube. Here Ackermann has cleverly designed a menu in three parts. The right-hand side offers simpler, classic dishes; the left-hand side his version of traditional Swiss dishes; while the middle lists his newer dishes, concentrating predominantly on this region's ingredients, including air-dried meats from the young Grisons butcher Hatecke; carpaccio of marinated lake trout; hearty barley soup; an excellent vegetarian main course of stuffed Swiss chard; and a saddle of rabbit with Savoy cabbage. As well, of course, as some excellent patisserie.

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