

Mountain high: interior designer Claudia Silberschmidt's Swiss chalet stays true to its 1970s origins



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Zurich-based interior designer Claudia Silberschmidt fell in love with this chalet 25 years ago, when she first saw it CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

The owner of this stylishly cosy chalet in Arosa, Switzerland, first saw it 25 years ago, when she stayed in it with a friend. Even then, she felt at home.

Claudia Silberschmidt, a Zurich-based interior designer, had holidayed at the resort since she was a child – her great-grandfather was the architect of its renowned Valsana Hotel, and her father was born in the village. She and her husband, Peter, skied past the chalet several times in the years after she first visited it, and always coveted the place.



The chalet finally came on the market in 2016, and Silberschmidt jumped at the chance to buy it
CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

"It's right on the slopes, no car traffic, just pure nature," she says. "The house itself is no beauty, but it's the perfect size and has a very good spirit." So when it came on the market in 2016, they jumped at the chance to buy it.

The chalet, built in the 1970s, still had its original fittings and furniture. Rather than set about modernising it, the couple and their teenage daughter, Lara, spent their first ski season after the purchase here without making any changes, to soak up the atmosphere and get a feel for how they would make it their own.



"We wanted to adopt that 1970s feel and not force a wooden 'mountain chic' look on to its existing style, which attracted us to it in the first place," says Silberschmidt CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

"We wanted to adopt that 1970s feel and not force a wooden "mountain chic" look on to its existing style, which attracted us to it in the first place," says Silberschmidt. "We just wanted to freshen it up."

The main structural change they made was to remove the wall separating the kitchen from the sitting room, creating one open living space. The bathrooms were also replaced, and the stairs on the middle floor were moved to allow more privacy for one of the bedrooms.

The kitchen table, comprising stacks of spruce planks, was custom-made to Silberschmidt's design, inspired by a pile of freshly milled timber she saw while driving to Arosa one day.



The custom-made kitchen table, was inspired by a pile of freshly milled timber Silberschmidt saw while driving to Arosa one day CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

"I wanted a 'no-design' table, just something very simple," she says. The booth-style corner seating around it, covered in orange linen, is a nod to 1970s dining style.

The pale tone of the table fits with Silberschmidt's requirement that any new wood added to the interior had to be light in colour, to contrast with the palette of greys and rich browns she had chosen for the walls, and the charcoal fittings in the kitchen.

In the living area, the original wood-paneled ceiling has been preserved and painted the same grey as the walls, with its reliefs highlighted in Persian blue.



American Navajo meets 1970s Swiss Alpine style: this chalet is far from cliché CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

"A lot of people are afraid of using dark colours on an interior wall," says Silberschmidt, "but I'm convinced that nobody feels uncomfortable in this space because we combined the dark colour with some bright and happy details. The effect makes the room feel larger, because all of the contours and reliefs would have been lost if we'd painted it all the same shade."

A wall of display and storage shelves spans the kitchen and sitting area, uniting the spaces and containing a selection of copper cooking utensils. The warm, reflective tone of copper is a recurring motif, appearing on the lamps above the kitchen worktop, on the cube coffee tables, and in accessories such as the vintage milk container on the landing.



"It's right on the slopes, no car traffic, just pure nature," says Silberschmidt of the raw beauty surrounding her chalet CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

There are splashes of colour and pattern, such as the upholstered bench at the kitchen table – inspired by Navajo-style motifs and designed by Silberschmidt for her Zurich concept store, Frohsinn – which chimes tonally with the rug in the sitting area.

But in general, the decoration is calm and simple, the better to enhance the stunning views of the mountains. Silberschmidt replaced the 1970s windows with modern, energy-efficient ones, choosing dark frames to intensify further the contrast between the comfort within and the snowy landscape outside.



The decoration is calm and simple, the better to enhance the stunning views of the mountains: this is a house that doesn't take itself too seriously CREDIT: GAELLE LE BOULICAUT

When asked to pinpoint the style of the chalet, she replies, "I would say somewhere between American Navajo and modern 1970s Swiss Alpine – with a healthy dose of humour thrown in."

It may not be a place that takes itself too seriously, but it's one that extends a warm welcome to all who enter. "We love arriving," says Silberschmidt, who spends her time here grilling food on the open fire with family and friends, and reading on the sofa. "It's an all-in-one kind of a space and it works so well. It's perfect for recharging life's batteries."

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