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Alpine Love Nest

Perched on a glistening piste in Les Trois Vallées, trendsetting lovebirds flock to Méribel's ski-in ski-out Hôtel Le Coucou to nestle in the peak of luxury. Emily Williams hits the slopes to reveal the romantic edge of this stylish avian-inspired boutique.

What greater place to clear your mind after the adrenaline of wedding celebrations than up in the mountains, surveying the snowy summits and storybook villages that huddle into the valleyside? At high altitudes, your head is quite literally up in the clouds, away from the humdrum of everyday life, and re-attuned to the presence of each moment. All you start to think about is tackling the challenge of your next ski run, cosying up by the fire with a creamy hot chocolate, or ordering another round at an après bar while dancing on the tables. It's true, the French Alps has something for everyone: the adventurous, the party-goers, the peace-seekers, and in this case, the love-struck newlyweds on luxury 'ski-moons'.

After a two-hour scenic drive from Geneva Airport to Méribel, passing glass-like alpine lakes and soaring snow-capped peaks, we arrived at our niveous hideout with a welcome that felt like a warm hug. Hôtel Le Coucou's General Manager led us into the lobby, an orb of ambient light with a hand-illustrated ceiling dome by Matthieu Cossé, depicting owls and the hotel's playful cuckoo motif. As we marvelled at the fresco from below, our voices began to echo like the calling of birds... I could already tell that every design detail here was orchestrated with love.

Hôtel Le Coucou is part of the family-run Maisons Pariente collection of French boutique hotels, cultivated by the Co-Founder

of the 1970s fashion label, Naf-Naf. Patrick Pariente and his two daughters, Leslie and Kimberley, have channelled imagination and charisma into each new property as if building their own private homes. The Méribel outpost is joined by three sister hotels, Hôtel Lou Pinet in Saint Tropez, Hôtel Crillon le Brave in Provence, and the soon-to-open Parisian address, Hôtel Le Grand Mazarin. Every lodging has its own distinct personality that both captures the soul of its destination and radiates with artistic flair.

The mastermind behind Hôtel Le Coucou's homely, intimate and effortlessly cool aesthetic is the Paris-based architect and interior designer, Pierre Yovanovitch. Across the ten tiered floors that follow the gradient of the slope, lashings of mustard, salmon-pink, forest green and blonde pinewood frame postcard-worthy window vistas and the quirky furniture within. Beyond the entrance hall, we encountered an endearing nook of bold bouclé armchairs with headrests in the shape of teddy ears. I smiled like Goldilocks, ready for a quick fireside nap while the bears carved their way through the enchanted woodland.

Upstairs, my comforting suite was a chic embodiment of a cuckoo's nest. Think little coat hooks in the shape of bird beaks, accent wooden chairs sculpted into owls and an eye-catching polka dot carpet reminiscent of speckled plumes. Complete with a lush

Travel

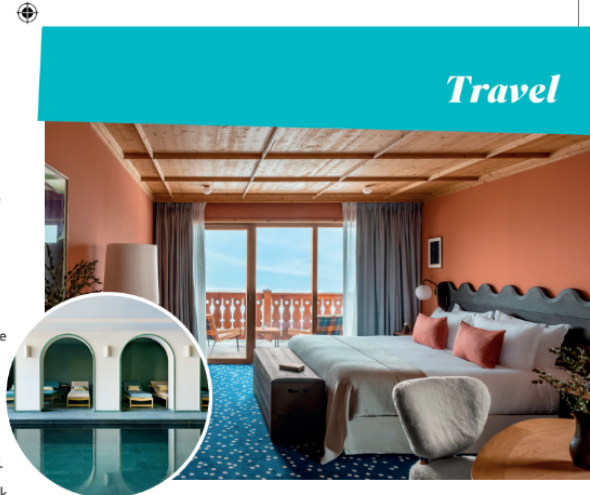
king-size bed, a curved corner seating area with a mini-bar, a walk-in wardrobe and a deep marble-encased ensuite bathtub, it was a characterful reincarnation of a classical chalet. That's before mentioning the superb bird's eye balcony views that looked out directly over the ski run.

The hotel's snug yet avant-garde atmosphere glides from each of the 55 rooms and two private chalets to the cocoon of wellness found at the Tata Harper Spa. Chosen for its natural toxin-free formulas and treatments, the Vermont-based skincare brand is the guardian of this slopeside sanctuary, complete with heated pools, a hammam, Jacuzzi, sauna, fitness suite and six treatment cabins including one for couples. I experienced a heavenly full-body massage here beneath a cloudlike duvet, before stepping through the wall of sleek archways to wallow in the heated outdoor pool, where the rising steam swirled in a fine mist through the frosty air.

They say the early bird catches the worm, so each morning, I'd sink into my new branded suede slippers to join the thermal-wearing crowd at breakfast, equally eager to catch the day's fresh powder. Biancaneve, fittingly translating to 'snow-white', is the restaurant backdrop to the immaculate buffet, where a smorgasbord of flaky pastries, yoghurt and granola bowls, fruit, eggs, cured meats and local cheese fuelled us for the thigh-burning slopes, guzzled down with a frothy cappuccino and a zingy ginger shot. In the evening, this same spot transforms into a refined Italian eatery, serving delicious antipasti, pizzas and pasta topped with generous truffle shavings - the Gelato Montecato sharing dessert is also a must-try for any sweet cravings!

As the sun started to peak over the crest of the mountain, it was time to buckle up in the hotel's ski boutique, where the staff expertly fitted my boots (with a built-in heating system!) and seamlessly stored the rental gear throughout our stay. A brilliant instructor from Oxygene Ski & Snowboard School greeted us at the hotel's take-off terrace each day and navigated us through the largest ski area in the world, all while building our confidence and technique on the slopes.

Connected by a web of red, green and blue runs that spill down the



resort map like toothpaste, I started to realise that the route possibilities in Les Trois Vallées are truly endless. With skiing being just one of many activities on offer, couples can also try snowmobiling, hot air ballooning and pony sledding through the Mission Black Forest piste. During our stay, we got the opportunity to go snowshoeing, a magical hike through the winter wonderland wearing racket-like footwear that made fresh tracks in the deep snow. Burrowed between the glamorous resort of Courchevel and the lofty heights of Val Thorens, Méribel is a gateway to it all.

Skiing straight back into the hotel knowing that a hot drink and homemade crêpe were waiting at the bar was a heartwarming feeling, but to keep things varied, we also checked out the rocking après scene at Le Rond Point Bar across the piste, which came to life in the late afternoons. Either way, the ultimate end to our evenings at Hôtel Le Coucou were the hearty mountain feasts. At Beefbar, we delved into succulent meat cuts from Australian Wagyu to Japanese Kobe, served with super kale salads, carpaccio and ceviche on fun emoji-printed plates. And at the 16-seat Fumoir, we dipped crusty bread and crudités into gooey cheese fondue and raclette by the fire. Sheltered under the eaves as the snow fell silently overhead, this is the alpine love nest you've been waiting for. [W.H.](#)



Nightly rates at Hôtel Le Coucou start from €460 on a half-board basis. To book your romantic winter ski-moon, visit lecoucoumeribel.com

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