

Mid-day at the Mittaghorn: A new century dawns

*Project for the rescue, renovation,
and reopening of an historic
hotel in Gimmelwald*





« If Heaven isn't
what it's cracked up to be,
send me back to Gimmelwald.»

Rick Steves

At a glance

The Hotel Mittaghorn («Mid-Day-Peak») was built in 1909 above the village of Gimmelwald along the walking path to the well-known village of Mürren. The original vision was of a grand Alpine hotel built on a small scale. In reality, it has mostly served out its first century as a modest inn. The hotel has been preserved in its original state and is an important witness to the history of tourism in this rural mountain village of the popular Jungfrau region.

The Mittaghorn, more or less unchanged since its construction, is in great need of renovation and refurbishment and can no longer be operated in its present condition. The new owners, Urs and Christine Zulauf, have already received the necessary permits for its renovation. For them, the name of the hotel is symbolic: the grand old building is only just now entering its mid-day and with the right investment now. it can delight guests well into the next century.

In order to preserve and continue the Mittaghorn, the Zulaufs purchased it in early 2021 following the death of its previ-

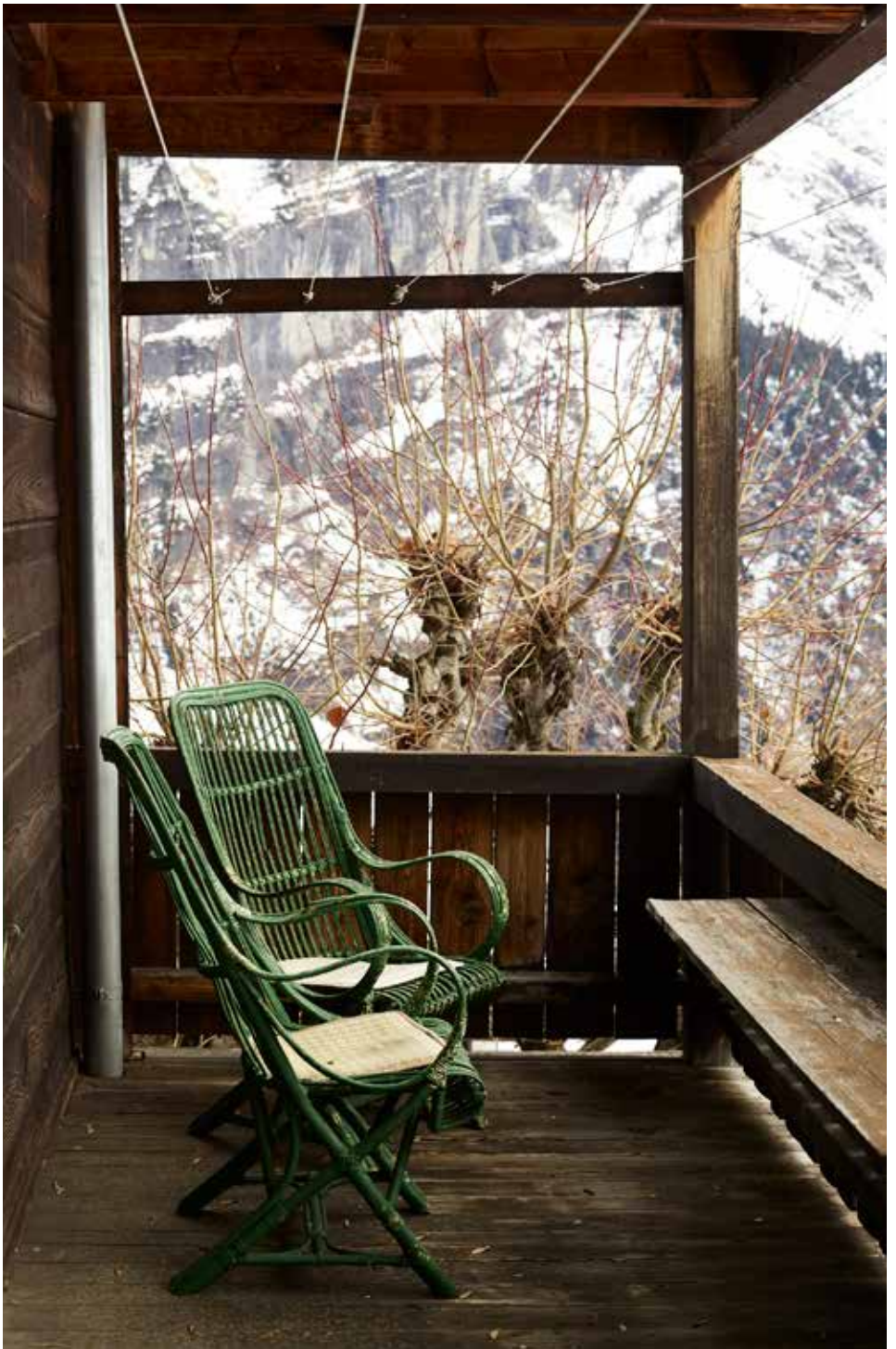
Rick Steves, « America's most respected authority on European travel»
<https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/read/articles/gimmelwald-the-swiss-alps-in-your-lap>

ous owner. Alongside the purchase, they founded the general partnership «Hotel Mittaghorn KLG» registered in Lauterbrunnen. This vehicle will be further transformed into a limited partnership to allow the entrance of new investors. Sixty percent of the equity capital required for the conversion has already been secured, and investors are currently being sought for the remaining share. Construction work can begin in spring 2024 at the earliest. In this case, the renovated Hotel can be reopened in summer 2025.

Urs Zulauf will initially operate the historic small hotel himself supported by an experienced partner and by his wife Christine and then turn over operations to young restaurateurs. The hotel will have six to a maximum of 11 rooms for up to 30 guests who will be offered a tasty and fresh breakfast and a three course dinner.

The offering is aimed at guests from Switzerland and abroad who are looking for personal attention from their hosts, immersed in the peace and quiet of a postcard Alpine village that is surrounded by the spectacular scenery of iconic Swiss peaks. The world-renowned Jungfrau region in which the hotel sits boasts extensive infrastructure for tourism. The Mittaghorn has historically been especially popular with guests from the United States.

Gimmelwald in October 2023







Gimmelwald near Mürren - Hotel & Pension Mittaghorn, vision around 1909

Core Idea

Urs and Christine Zulauf acquired Hotel Mittaghorn with a vision to safeguard it for the benefit of the village. The Zulaufs have a decades-long connection to the village of Gimmelwald. They have initiated a renovation project, and fully funded the planning for reconstruction.

«For the development of the village, jobs and living space are scarce. Thus, the rescue of the traditional Hotel Mittaghorn is very important. With its reopening, the mountain village will remain attractive for residents and tourists in the long term.»

Emil von Allmen, Farmer in Gimmelwald, former member of the cantonal parliament and vice president of the municipality of Lauterbrunnen

An historic hotel in danger of decay and decline could impact the charming mountain village of Gimmelwald, which faces challenges like emigration and has a population of just 103 permanent residents. This potential decline may also lead to the loss of 3 to 4 jobs in the long run.

The approved project includes an apartment for the hosts and 8 guest rooms accommodating 19 guests. There will be potential for expansion to 10 or even 11 guest rooms, accommodating 22 to 30 guests. The rooms will retain their historical charm, with the addition of integrated toilets and showers.

The dining room and bar will undergo a complete transformation, reverting to their original historic design and furnishings. A new kitchen, integrated into the dining area, will allow for innovative guest experiences and efficient operations.

The renovation will also include an additional arcade and a terrace on the uphill side of the hotel.

After its reopening, Hotel Mittaghorn aims to cater to its loyal customer base, including many North Americans, who today seek an upgraded experience. It will also attract new Swiss guests, especially those from the owners' extensive network, looking for a peaceful yet engaging destination, a personal-touch experience, and Alpine-inspired, simple and innovative cuisine.

Furthermore, Hotel Mittaghorn aims to become an attractive option for exclusive rentals by families and small corporate teams, offering a unique experience in a picturesque Swiss setting.

Gimmelwald as a tourist destination

Gimmelwald, an historic mountain village founded in the 1300s by the Walsers, is nestled on a rocky terrace 500 meters above the stunning Lauterbrunnen Valley, amidst the breathtaking landscapes of the Jungfrau region.

The Jungfrau region is a globally renowned tourist destination, known for its «Top of Europe» and «Top of Adven-



ture» experiences. It boasts the prestigious title of a UNESCO World Heritage site and welcomed 1.3 million overnight hotel stays in 2022.

Gimmelwald is an integral part of this region and enjoys close ties to the tourist hubs of Interlaken, Lauterbrunnen, and Mürren. However, what sets Gimmelwald apart is its serene, car-free environment, offering a peaceful escape. It still proudly maintains eight active homestead farms, preserving its authentic character.

For decades, Gimmelwald has been a beloved destination for a loyal group of regular visitors, especially from the United States. This holds particularly true for the cherished Hotel Mittaghorn. In 2022, Gimmelwald's three guest-houses collectively accommodated approximately 14,000 overnight stays (not including the Hotel Mittaghorn).

History of the Hotel Mittaghorn

The Hotel Mittaghorn, located in Gimmelwald, was originally constructed as a hotel in 1909 and operated continuously until December 2019.

In 1962, a powerful windstorm damaged the original cross gable roof, which was subsequently replaced with the gable roof that stands today. Aside from the addition of a utility shed, the hotel and its surroundings have seen no significant exterior alterations.

However, notable changes were made to the interior, and these did not always result in the best aesthetic outcome. The guest hall and bar room on the first floor, known for their impressive height, were partially modified with a recessed wooden ceiling, and the original extended two-part windows were covered with wood, resulting in a darker ambiance.

The Mittler family took ownership of the hotel in 1954 and continued to manage it for over half a century, notably under the stewardship of the legendary Walter Mittler. Walter, who passed away at the remarkable age of 95 in December 2019, still welcomed occasional guests even



in his final year. His friendship with travel expert Rick Steves opened doors for countless American guests who frequented both the hotel and the picturesque village of Gimmelwald. In fact, Walter Mittler's name is synonymous with the hotel, affectionately referred to as «Walter's» by many guests. Some of the cherished memorabilia, photos, and documents that showcase this history will remain on display and accessible to guests.

Rick Steves, renowned for his travel guidebooks dating back to 1976, and later for television travelogues and package tours, has become the trusted source for American travelers exploring Europe and Switzerland. Gimmelwald holds a prominent place in his Switzerland guide, reflecting his deep admiration for the village and its surroundings.

«My long-term home away from home, Hotel Mittaghorn — set to reopen in ... after the death of its long-term proprietor, my good friend Walter Mittler — is a black-stained chalet with eight balconies, huge views, and a few tables shaded by umbrellas on its tiny terrace.»

Rick Steves, <https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/read/articles/gimmelwald-the-swiss-alps-in-your-lap>

General constraints imposed by construction law

The Hotel Mittaghorn is situated outside the designated building zone of Gimmelwald. It is part of a group of farm buildings and residences that forms a dispersed settlement area connecting Gimmelwald with the village of Mürren above it. New construction is now forbidden in this zone. However, as the hotel already stood before these regulations were implemented, it can undergo renovations and limited expansion under a «grandfather clause», allowing it to continue its operation in full compliance with local planning laws.



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To obtain the building permit, the new owners had to plan an avalanche protection system. They have done so and the project was approved by the authorities granting the construction permit. The hotel is located in a high-risk avalanche zone, and cantonal building regulations mandate comprehensive safeguards. These safeguards must be designed to withstand an event that statistically occurs roughly every 300 years. Building the required protection involves significant and exceptional expenses. Despite Gimmelwald's potential for a gradual decrease in the average annual snowfall, the region is still susceptible to occasional heavy snowfalls during winter. Furthermore, the general trend of global warming increases the risk of rapid temperature fluctuations, potentially leading to a transition from heavy snowfall to rain. In such a scenario, there could be an immediate and substantial risk of snowslides.

Construction project

The current construction project is led by Rausser & Zulauf Architects based in Bern and led by Urs Zulauf's brother Jürg Zulauf. The plan includes the creation of a substantial avalanche protection structure behind the hotel. This wedge-shaped barrier serves as a safeguard, redirecting the powerful forces of an avalanche or debris flow away from the building. The design's wedge shape makes its protective purpose immediately apparent to observers, with concrete shielding the existing, lightweight wooden structure. The height and dimensions of the structure are determined following the expertise of geologists and civil engineers.

The triangular design of this protective structure adds an appealing visual element, avoiding the need for traditional side facades. It integrates seamlessly with the existing architectural style seen in other buildings in the Lauterbrunnen Valley, where wooden construction is combined with more solid elements. This approach maintains the character of the original hotel building.



The protection wedge is easily identifiable as a functional element, housing a new fireproof stairwell and various adjacent rooms inside. Additionally, a new terrace is planned on the roof of the wedge, accessible from the top floor.

«The construction project exemplifies how a building that is characteristic for its locality can be restored and transformed despite the addition of protective structures, without losing the existing spatial and spherical qualities.» (Translation of German original text)

*Kantonale Kommission zur Pflege der Orts- und Landschaftsbilder OLK,
Fachbericht 31.8.2022 zum Baugesuch*

The entrance is being relocated to the side facade for operational convenience. The new portal allows guests direct access to the upper-floor rooms and keeps the dining area free of reception traffic.

The current first-floor dining space will be transformed into a new bar and lounge exclusively for hotel guests. The previous guest lounge will serve as the new dining area, featuring an open kitchen towards the rear. A tiled woodstove will divide this open space, permitting separate or combined use of the bar, lounge, and dining room.

The existing wooden framework and facades will be largely preserved to maintain their historical charm. Following the original historical design, two pergolas, resembling those on the south facade, will be constructed on the north facade. To ensure the avalanche protection structure does not extend beyond the building, the attic will be raised by one meter.

Key construction figures

Floor space

737 m²

Net floor space

587 m²

Main floor space

431 m²

Total volume

2'187 m³

Volume old building

1'422 m³

Volume new building (avalanche wedge)

766 m³





Urs and Christine Zulauf

Owners and operator

Since the beginning of 2021, Urs Zulauf and his wife Christine have become the sole owners of Hotel Mittaghorn through their partnership, «Hotel Mittaghorn KLG», registered in Lauterbrunnen. Urs Zulauf has had a deep connection with Gimmelwald since his youth. Christine Zulauf has been active for years on the board of Gimmelwald Tourism. They both spend a significant amount of time at their residence in Gimmelwald, just a five-minute walk away from the hotel, often with their children and grandchildren.

Urs Zulauf plans to personally manage and oversee hotel operations after reopening. In this he will be supported by an experienced restaurateur and his wife Christine. After the opening phase, the operation and, if possible, the ownership of the hotel will be transferred to the business partner.

Planned Hotel offer

Running a small hotel sustainably and profitably is a challenge, but it's achievable, especially in the captivating Jungfrau region. Success requires a high level of dedication and personal involvement from the operators. With guidance from hospitality industry experts, the project initiators have crafted a business plan designed for long-term investment recovery.

The envisioned long-term plan entails offering rooms for approximately 270 operational days each year. Over the weekends and in summer the offer will include a simple but fresh and seasonal three-course dinner while outside of this timeframe the hotel will operate on a bed-and-breakfast basis. This approach caters to guests seeking extended stays while allowing operators the necessary downtime for rest and preparation.

Additionally, the hotel will be available for hosting family and corporate events, and passersby can access self-service drinks and snacks. The hotel will be open year-round, with two brief breaks between seasons.

Target Customer Groups and Market Positioning

In light of the substantially better offering of both comfort and cuisine, the room and board prices in the Hotel Mittag-horn will be considerably higher than in both its previous iteration and also for the rooms at the other guest estab-

lishments in Gimmelwald. The owners will reposition the Mittaghorn as a premier lodging and dining option in the village.

The loyal regular guests of the Hotel Mittaghorn are to remain target guests. Some of them no longer visited the hotel in the years before its closure because the old hotel no longer met their increasing requirements for comfort. The revitalized Mittaghorn will welcome this dedicated customer base back with open arms.

In addition to this traditional clientele, the hotel wants to embrace the «chambre d'hôtes» and «tavolata» concept, focusing particularly on Swiss customers who are looking for peace, a personalized atmosphere, and fresh cuisine in the Jungfrau region. This concept also allows for the integration of single travelers and provides an oasis in the bustling tourist region.

Finally, the offer is also aimed at families, groups, and teams of 10 to 20 people who want to rent the hotel exclusively for meetings, seminars, and courses, especially in off-peak months.

Charming Historic Alpine Boutique Hotel

The revitalized Hotel Mittaghorn aims to highlight its unique identity as an historic Alpine boutique hotel. Throughout the Alps, from Slovenia to Monaco, one can find numerous charming hotels such as this one, typically managed with dedication and personal commitment by their owners. Hotel Mittaghorn, perched above Gimmelwald a few meters away from the transalpine long-distance hiking trail «Via Alpina», takes its deserved place within this category.

The hotel is actively seeking collaborations with other historic hotels in Switzerland and via the Swiss Historic Hotels association. The construction project places emphasis on preserving the fundamental historical structure, striving to retain the essence of the guest parlor and guest rooms while incorporating necessary new elements. In doing so,



the hotel appeals to those who appreciate historic mountain hotels with personalized management.

To further enhance its transalpine character, the hotel in the Walser village of Gimmelwald plans to offer a distinct culinary experience, particularly in its wine selection, echoing the spirit of the region.

Funding

The financing of the rescue and renovation of the Hotel Mittaghorn is not yet secured.

Talks are currently being held with investors, banks and charitable institutions.



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