

# ALPINE VISION

In this reconfigured St Moritz apartment with lakeside views, interior designer Kate Earle has combined contemporary elements with natural materials, resulting in a holiday home that has exceeded its owners' high expectations

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At the front of the apartment, two matching silk rugs by Luke Irwin unify the spaces in the large open-plan sitting room; at the far end is an informal area with an oak fire surround and in the foreground is a more formal entertaining space with a table from La Forge de Style



If they awarded degrees for attention to detail, Kate Earle would have a starred first. The interior designer, one half of Todhunter Earle, admits that part of the fun of a project like this apartment in St Moritz, a lateral conversion, is being able to use cleverly chosen details to surprise a perfectionist client who has seen everything.

Kate was on her mettle when she flew out to prepare the place for the first time the owner, her husband and their three children would see the finished apartment. She and her team arranged flowers and made the beds, with embroidered bedlinen to match the decoration of each room, placing a mouth-blown water carafe and shagreen tissue box in each. Even the embroidery on the bathroom towels was designed to match the corresponding bedroom – and bedroom owner. The elder daughter has a pale blue snowflake on her towels, while the son has a petrol-blue freestyle skier.

Kate had also asked chandler Rachel Vosper to create a scent especially for the house and to fill beautiful porcelain bowls with scented candles. She says the owner notices every detail: 'You sort of stretch yourself to make it perfect for a client like that.'

But lots more attention to detail – and to the bigger picture – was necessary before Kate got down to embroidered motifs on towels. The apartment is on the seventh floor of a glass building designed by Norman Foster. It is set on top of an older building in the centre of St Moritz, near Badrutt's Palace Hotel and overlooking the lake. A couple of years before they called in Kate, the owners had bought two apartments on the same floor, and it was then that they had them opened up. 'The views are beautiful and the position incredible,' says Kate, 'but the interior was all bland,

blond wood, with rows of spotlights and slab doors. It looked like an office – completely soulless and with a rather strange layout.' The owners had to negotiate a tunnel-like central corridor, weaving past bedrooms and bathrooms to get from the sitting room at one end of the apartment to the dining room at the other. So Kate got to work, with the Swiss firm Küchel Architects managing the builders on site, while back in London her team worked on reconfiguring the space with architects Studio Indigo. In the new layout, all the bedrooms are at the back, with the kitchen and the living and entertaining space at the front.

The owners wanted the place to have the warm, cosy feeling of a chalet, but still remain contemporary. 'So every room has wooden elements, and there are timber floors in the living areas,' says Kate. 'It is all oak by Schotten & Hansen, which has a clever process for fuming wood that takes the yellowness out of the oak. Many of the other walls are covered in wool and cashmere, which gives the rooms a wonderfully soft atmosphere, as well as great sound insulation.' It certainly adds to the comfort factor. The more relaxed end of the huge sitting room, with its big wooden chimneypiece, is a decidedly cosy space. The wall is lined in white cowhide, the L-shape sofa is piled with fur cushions, and the children can pull up a pair of stools, carved from tree trunks, on concealed castors. As the owner says, 'After a day on the slopes, coming back into the warmth here and gathering friends and family around the fire is a real joy.'

Two matching Luke Irwin silk rugs define the distinct areas in the room. The pattern is based on a piece of ancient Italian silk and has been recoloured by Kate. In the more formal entertaining

OPPOSITE Parallel to the formal sitting area is the dining space; the five-metre-long table made from a single plank of wood is by Hudson Furniture. The oak used throughout for the shelving and flooring is by Schotten & Hansen. THIS PAGE An L-shape sofa from Flexform and fur cushions from Willer create a chalet look

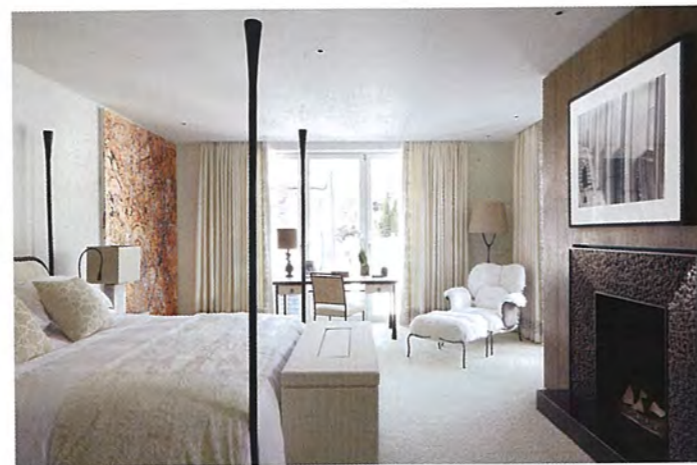


area, white Flexform sofas flank a bronze coffee table by La Forge de Style. It is hard to appreciate the scale of this room until you realise that the dining table just behind, made from a single plank of wood by Hudson Furniture in New York, is five metres long. Kate has avoided the distraction of serrated ranks of chair legs around the table by using a combination of benches and chairs. The family can sit companionably at one end when they are alone, but the table can seat up to 20 when they entertain.

The wooden and leather walls behind the table open and pivot to reveal a mini kitchen, with a fridge, a coffee machine and everything needed for breakfast; it is also used as a bar in the evenings. The real kitchen, which is behind the informal sitting area, is not large; the family does not congregate there, as the apartment building is serviced and a chef comes in to cook in the evenings.

The five bedrooms maintain the subtle colour palette. 'If you look out onto the most astonishing scenery, you don't want it to be too bright inside,' Kate says. Instead, beautiful textures - bronze, leather, fur, marble and petrified wood, as well as the omnipresent oak, wool and cashmere - complement the views of snowy mountains, fir trees and azure sky beyond the windows. All these materials are used in the main bedroom at the far end of the apartment. Here, a fur-lined chair contrasts with a bronze four-poster bed made by Francis Sultana, a velvet headboard meets beautiful linens, plaited-leather cupboard doors meet marble floors and embroidered cashmere curtains set off oak walls.

Walking back down the central corridor, Kate recounts how



a wall had to be removed to fit the single piece of petrified wood that makes the floor of the cloakroom. This is just one small detail among the myriad that went into the making of this calm, beautifully designed apartment, which makes its owners so happy. 'Kate has the incredible ability to exceed my expectations,' says the owner. 'We felt instantly at home - it's magical' □

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THIS PAGE In the main bedroom, oak-clad walls conceal the dressing area (top), while the rest of the walls are lined in wool from Holland & Sherry (bottom). Francis Sultana made the bed, which faces a Cindy Sherman photograph above the cast-bronze chimneypiece. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The main bathroom. Curtains in 'Crosslink' by Prints Etc and Yastik by Rifat Özbek cushions add hits of pattern to the son's room. The daughter's room has bunk beds by Todhunter Earle

