



BOTTLE BANK: Some of the priciest wines rest in the Hospiz's cellar

COURTESY OF HOSPIZ HOTEL

GRAPEVINE

Quantity and Quality

Slope off for oversized bottles of fine Bordeaux in an Austrian ski resort

By **ANGELA LEUKER**

THE PHRASE APRES-SKI conjures up crowded bars, the sudden, fierce glow of a shot of schnapps, voices straining over blaring music and melting ice puddling around snow boots. But in the tiny village of St. Christoph, 1,800 m up in Austria's famed Arlberg skiing region, the family-owned five-star Hospiz Hotel and nearby Hospiz Alm ski lodge offer a more refined way to kick back after a day on the slopes. Together they boast one of the world's prime collections of Bordeaux—much of it in large-format bottles.

Some of these babies range upward of an eye- and cork-popping \$3,000. But that's something the well-heeled patrons of both establishments seem to take in their stride. Bordeaux connoisseur and former Hospiz owner Adi Werner (his son Florian took the reins in 1997) started collecting supersized bottles in 1980 after he learned of those supplied by French wineries to the 19th century Russian Imperial court. He persuaded renowned producer Château Haut-Marbuzet to start thinking

big once again, and other major producers like Château Mouton-Rothschild and Château Cheval-Blanc also obliged.

Today the collection includes nearly 2,000 Balthazars (12-L bottles), Nebuchadnezzars

(15 L) and Melchior (18 L) stored in custom-made racks beneath the ski lodge. The remainder, including the oldest and priciest wine, a rare 1895 Chateaux D'Yquem retailing at \$21,420, are kept in the hotel's 600-year-old cellar. The two cellars together hold more than 70,000 bottles worth \$4.9 million. "Fine wines age more slowly in large-format bottles and stay at their peak for longer," Adi says. "To share one with friends is an unforgettable experience."

And best attempted with something to line the stomach. Here, too, the two Hospizes lay on a posh alternative to the raclettes and pizzas that often sustain skiers. The hotel's gourmet restaurant has all the trappings of a top-notch eatery—crisp table linen, sparkling silverware and crystal glasses—but with friendly, unstuffy service. It's headed by Klaus Lettner of *Die Jungen Wilden* (the young, wild ones), a group of hip chefs who aim to attract young people to their profession by breaking the rules of food preparation and presentation.

Lettner's menu features such unusual combinations as grapefruit and mint ravioli with caramelized chicory and sea bass, and bacon-wrapped oysters with champagne sauerkraut. Chef Rüdiger Linke at the ski lodge offers an eclectic mix of Austrian classics and international cuisine; a favorite is Tyrolean roast duck with red cabbage and dumplings. It's tempting to just skip the ski bit and get right down to the *après*. —Reported by **Gerald Diglas**

ON SHOW

THEY'LL MAKE YOU A STAR

Dreaming of making it into the world of head-turning celebrity? Well, why wait? Now you can just pay to be admitted. The French company Soirée de Star provides the kinds of experience usually reserved for Kate Moss, Brad Pitt and their A-list cohorts: head to a premiere, paparazzi in pursuit; then step out of a stretch limo onto a red carpet to pose between beefy bodyguards as snappers jostle for position and an adoring press pack asks you to tell them how

you came to be quite so fabulous. Anyone can stage their night as a notable with Soirée de Star's celebrity-status package. Since its launch last year, the company has magicked up hundreds of swanky evenings for clients eager to turn that run-of-the-mill marriage proposal into something a bit more dramatic, or otherwise treat their loved one to the kind of evening Paris Hilton might find pleasantly routine. Prices start at \$362 for an hour-long package, while tailor-made all-day glitzfests that can include limousine rides, hovering photographers, red carpets and four hysterical fans cost up to \$4,234. Soirée de Star offers its staged stardom in Paris, Nice, Cannes, Toulouse, Barcelona and Madrid. It's not unusual to spot celebs on the streets of those cities, but now the heavenly body you're chasing might turn out to be more earthbound than you thought. tel: (33-1) 47 49 80 77; www.soireedestars.fr —By **Sayem Mehmood**



WHO'S THAT GIRL? It could be you on the red carpet

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