



The sexiest ski room on the slopes

The early season snow, and deserted runs, above the Fahrenheit Seven hotel at Val Thorens

ROB FREEMAN discovers the secret of the prize-winning Fahrenheit Seven hotel at Val Thorens

It seems simple doesn't it - but so many ski hotels get it wrong. Apart from a comfortable bedroom, what is the most important room in a ski hotel?

Many, me among them, will say the ski and boot room. And how much thought is usually given to it? Not much. The worst feature being there is nearly always a woeful shortage of benches where you can sit down and put your boots on. The rooms are cramped, the lockers too small and it's damp, humid and crowded.

But not at the Fahrenheit Seven hotel in the lofty French resort of Val Thorens. This is a gem, a paragon among ski rooms, the sexiest ski room on the slopes. It's so good that if the hotel had overbooked on the day I arrived I wouldn't be upset if the nice people at reception had said I had to sleep in the ski room. In fact, they could charge a bit extra for the privilege.

It's a work of wonder and luxury. It has comfortable benches stretching into the far distance. It has a bar - yes, in the ski room - for an immediate apres-ski drink. Actually, the bar also serves coffee as you get ready to hit the slopes in the morning.

The lockers are spacious and not located in

narrow hard-to-navigate rows. And get this, the ski room even has a bar football machine, which in my case could distract me from skiing for a large part of the morning. I love bar football.

Peer around a corner and there's another super surprise. The ski rental shop is just feet away - with, in this case, one of the best array of interesting skis I've seen in a rental shop for a long time, including some wonderful Faction Prodigies, my favourite skis at the moment.

And, once all set to go, there's no awkward climb up a narrow stairway to get to the slopes. This is all on one level - out the door onto the piste and the guaranteed good snow of Europe's highest resort, with the speediest lift system in France and direct link to the rest of the Three Valleys resorts of Les Menuires, Meribel, La Tania and Courchevel.

Now I might have gone on a bit about the ski room, but it shows the attention to detail at Fahrenheit Seven and how the owners have got things right.

The hotel, with its sister property in Courchevel Moriond (what we used to call Courchevel 1650), is the brainchild of two couples. Veronique Vidoni and her husband Stephane already had a wealth of experience running hotels when they met their



A beast on the piste above Courchevel (the deer that is, not Rob).



FRENCH NEWS

ARC 1800: La Folie Douce is opening in Arc 1800 and visitors can enjoy après-ski until 7pm each evening as well as a choice of three restaurants. The Folie Douce will also be open in the evenings for diners every Thursday.

LES 2 ALPES: Two new chairlifts and a new gondola will go in to service this winter. The Pierre Grosse 8-seater gondola links the La Fée sector to the glacier. A new 8-seater detachable chairlift in the Les Crêtes area has replaced the existing quad chairlift, and there is a new detachable quad chairlift in the Le Thuit sector and provides a faster connection to Les Crêtes. The existing Super Venosc fixed chairlift on the Vallée Blanche area is being realigned over a shorter, faster route.



LES GETS: The resort which is part of the huge Portes du Soleil region is opening two new ski runs this winter. A new blue slope has been designed to make it easier for moderate-level skiers to return to the base of the 'Perrières Express' chairlift. A new ski touring 'piste' has been designed to allow tourers to ascend the slopes without needing to go up the downhill runs.

SERRE CHEVALIER BRIANCON: A new 6-person high-speed chairlift has replaced the Eychauda, making it much faster to go from Monétier to Villeneuve, and the Cibouët chairlift has been replaced with a quad chairlift.

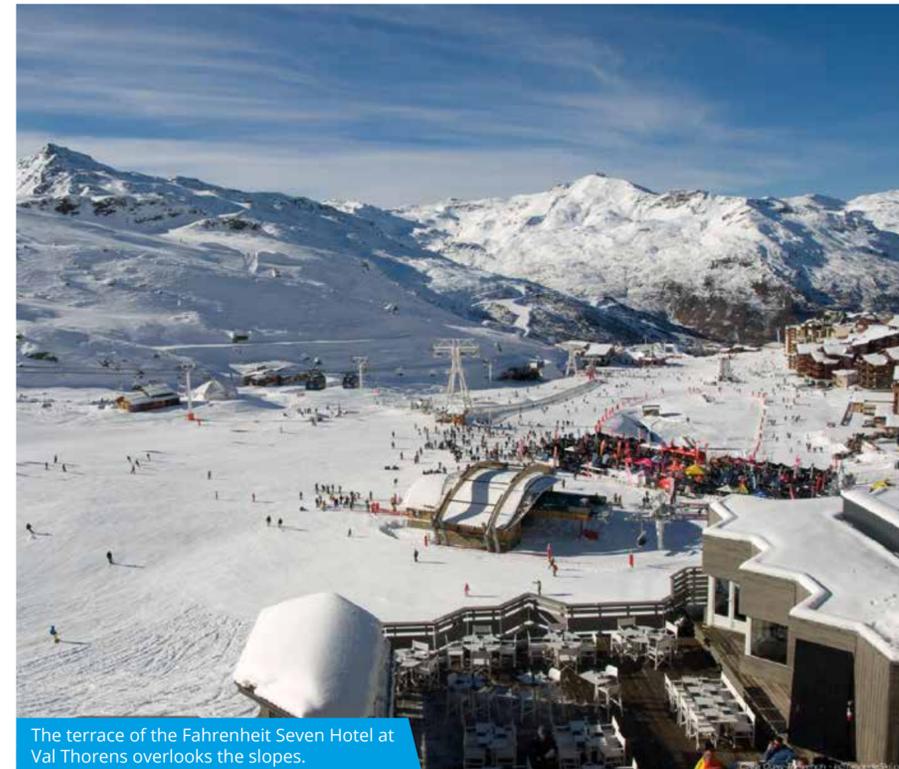
COURCHEVEL: A new 4-seater chairlift, Grandes Combes, links the new 4-star Hôtel L'Écrin Blanc to the Courchevel 1850 ski area. There is also a new gondola lift with 10-seat passenger cabins between Le Praz and the Courchevel 1850 area.

PORTES DU SOLEIL: A new lift connection between Avoriaz and the Swiss side of the giant cross-border Portes du Soleil ski region is opening this winter. The old Léchère triple chairlift is to be upgraded to a high-speed six-seater chair and a second new high-speed six-seater, named Cases, will carry on from the top of that lift to a new border crossing point with Switzerland, accessing runs down to Les Crosets on the Swiss side.

LA PLAGNE: Various events are being planned this season to celebrate Aime 2000's 50th anniversary.

LES ANGES: The French Pyrenean ski resort of Les Angles is upgrading its main gondola to a 16-seat model, the first of its kind in the country. The Pèlerins gondola will transport skiers and snowboarders to the Bigorre plateau.

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The terrace of the Fahrenheit Seven Hotel at Val Thorens overlooks the slopes.

now business partners Glen De Unger and his wife Claudia, who were on holiday at the time in the French resort of Megeve.

The two couples found they had the same idea when it came to what made the perfect ski hotel and they decided to join forces and make their vision a reality. The two hotels were opened within about a year of each other, Val Thorens in 2015 and Courchevel Moriond in 2016.

They're both ski-in ski-out and both have become two of my favourite Alpine hotels - particularly Fahrenheit Seven in Val Thorens of course, because of the bar football in the ski room.

That's not just my opinion - they were last year jointly voted the World's Best New Ski Hotels.

They are both rated four-star but they have the relaxed feel of a club, with, for France, the most friendly and helpful staff you can imagine. Not, it must be said, qualities always on show in French

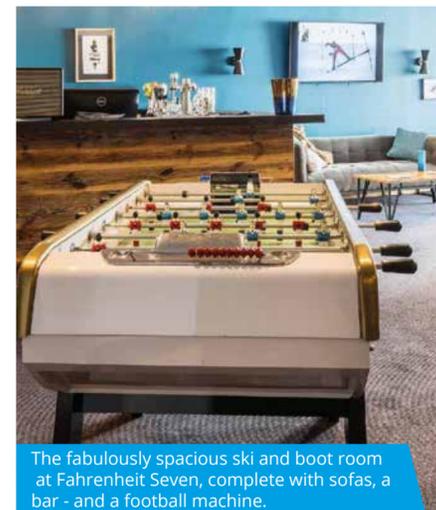
hotels. Even in the ski rental shop they give the impression your visit has made their day.

Veronique, a Catalan from Perpignan, explained the philosophy: "With Fahrenheit Seven we imagined our ideal hotel. Our clients are treated as if they are in our home and their well-being is our greatest concern."

Skiing is a passion for the whole Vidoni family - the couple have five children, with the eldest, Sorbonne graduate Chloe, 23, already playing a major part in the hotel business.

Stephane said: "We live in our hotel (the Val Thorens one) with our customers, which means we live at their pace. It's only between seasons that we find time for more calm."

And the ski room? "Yes, it's possibly the most important room in a ski hotel," agreed Stephane. And if I really wanted to, he added, I was very welcome to sleep in there.



The fabulously spacious ski and boot room at Fahrenheit Seven, complete with sofas, a bar - and a football machine.

TRAVEL FACTS

Fahrenheit Seven Hotels:
www.fahrenheitseven.com

More information on Val Thorens at:

www.valthorens.com/en

Courchevel at:

www.courchevel.com/en

Info on the Faction ski range at:

www.uk.factionskis.com

British ski holiday companies who offer the Fahrenheit Seven hotels in their programme include: Crystal, www.crystalski.co.uk and Inghams www.ingham.co.uk/ski-holidays