



Snowshoes adorn a wall at the Hotel Firefly. Right, a chair in the lobby. Below, one of the suites



to cosiness – real fires behind glass screens (in nine of the rooms).

The bathrooms are ultra-modern, with bulbous basins, shapely baths, and taps which deliver a wide, smooth-flowing ribbon of water. The stainless-steel indoor pool, with its glass roof and shifting patterns of coloured lighting underwater, is one of the most distinctive in the Alps; and the hewn-granite steam rooms of the spa (including a 'Schnapsbrenner sauna') are equally unusual.

Hotel Firefly, Schluhmattstrasse 55, Zermatt, Switzerland (00 41 27 967 7676; www.firefly-zermatt.com).

Doubles from SFr610 (about £370)

THE SKIING

Zermatt's three high and snow-sure ski domains are dispersed over a huge area, and awkwardly linked; but the 180km of pistes offer superbly varied skiing and stunning views. The off-piste is extensive, too. Gornergrat is best for blue-run, family skiing; Rothorn and the Matterhorn glacier areas have more challenging, longer pistes. The link to Cervinia in Italy, on the other side of the Matterhorn, is often closed by bad weather; but it gives access to another 150km of pistes, including some excellent red runs.

ZERMATT Switzerland Hotel Firefly

Apart from its big, shield-shaped sign, there is little to make the Hotel Firefly stand out on this quiet street in the southern part of Zermatt. Its public areas – the slate-floored reception, the bar lined with chesterfield sofas, the hi-tech games room – are pleasant but unremarkable. Nothing on the ground floor prepares you for the design indulgence upstairs of the hotel's owners, Maria and Michael Kalbermatter.

The 14 bedrooms are styled as apartments (they have kitchens because there is no hotel restaurant, although breakfast is served in the rooms). Each has a decorative theme based on fire, water, air or earth. Distinctive features include walls of polished Veneziano plaster,

in big primary-colour blocks, yellow, oiled-wood floors, and furniture which is an effective mixture of new pieces made from reclaimed timber and modernist classics. Decorative devices are restricted to orchids, extravagant lighting and – the one concession



SAINTE FOY France, Yellowstone Ski Lodge

Last season, Yellowstone was a chalet offered by upmarket Descent International, whose brochure described it as being 'like a private Mayfair boutique hotel'. This season, Descent International is defunct; and Yellowstone has been converted into a hotel with six double/twin rooms, one with bunks in an adjoining room, another with a single bed in the dressing area.

On the first floor is a double-height, open-plan space enclosed by glass, stone and pine, furnished with dark leather and light fabrics in lime and grey. It has an 18-seat dining table with views across a terrace to Les Arcs, a sitting area around a large fireplace, and an open kitchen. Little changed from its previous incarnation, it might now be described as being 'like a chalet'. But sociable guests will probably enjoy the intimacy; and with rooms bookable by the night, they can always move on if they don't.

The bedrooms are all different but consistently stylish, with leitmotifs of animal skins, leather and dark wood plus splashes of bright colour (and photographs of 1960s Grand Prix racing, evidently an enthusiasm of the owner). The views from the lodge are fantastic, not so those of the building itself: the bare patches of stonework from which the yellow rendering have been removed make it look shabby rather than historic.

Yellowstone Ski Lodge, Sainte Foy Station, France (07885 282384; www.yellowstoneskilodge.co.uk).
Doubles from £392

THE SKIING

Sainte Foy Station is a small, purpose-built resort above the village of Sainte Foy. It has a ski area (well suited to snowboarders) with 32km of pistes and a considerable amount of off-piste, served by seven lifts; but it is best known as a base for exploring nearby Val d'Isère, the Paradiski area and La Rosière/La Thuile (which offers heli-skiing).