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Little gems

Saved from falling into disrepair

Its location near the Albula railway line is spectacular, its interior is magnificent and its cuisine is exquisite – and now the Kurhaus Bergün has been named historical hotel of the year. The luxurious grand hotel began welcoming guests in 1906, three years after the opening of the Albula railway line.



However, plans to make Bergün an attractive tourist destination as a high-altitude climatic spa resort failed. After a fire in 1949, the building was converted into a family hostel with apartments and its condition deteriorated significantly. Ten years ago, a group of regular guests, who had been visiting Bergün for many years, decided to save the building from going to rack and ruin. The property was lovingly restored in small steps. The reasons for the “hotel of the year” award mention the fact that the renovation was carried out in an exemplary fashion in terms of protecting its heritage. The award was presented by ICOMOS Switzerland – an association of heritage conservation experts. The hier-jetzt publishing house has produced a small guide featuring the 2012 award-winning hotels and restaurants. These include the “Hotel Bellevue des Alpes” on the Kleine Scheidegg, the “zum Goldenen Schäfli” restaurant in St. Gallen, the “Harmonie” in Berne and the “Berggasthaus Aescher-Wildkirchli” mountain hotel in Weissbad, Appenzell.

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The hotel: Kurhaus Bergün, +41 81 407 22 22; prices: CHF 75 to 100 per person. www.kurhausberguen.ch; the book: “Historische Hotels und Restaurants in der Schweiz 2011”; 86 pages, 131 illustrations, ISBN 978-3-03919-180-2, CHF 14.80, EUR 12.00

From ice hockey player to singer

Few performers enjoy widespread acclaim at their first attempt. Bastian Baker, just 20 years of age, had an immediate hit with his track “Lucky” and his album “Tomorrow May Not Be Better”. This former

semi-professional ice hockey player seized his opportunity and recorded tracks in Paris with support from British and American musicians. His winning brand of pop-folk and his angelic good looks have captured the hearts of young girls and impressed music industry

Music between the covers of a book

The “I Salonisti” ensemble has existed since 1983 and has been world famous since 1997 when film director James Cameron hired the musicians from Berne as the ship’s orchestra for his movie “Titanic”. The five musicians have long since returned to normal everyday life after the love story that attracted an audience of millions. However, standards in terms of quality and creativity have remained

just as high as ever for Piotr Plawner (violin), Lorenz Hasler (violin), Ferenc Szedlák (violoncello), Béla Szedlák (double bass) and André Thomet (piano). A wonderful book has now been published to mark the ensemble’s 30th anniversary with portraits of the musicians, a report on a visit to rehearsals, a musical history review of film and salon music, a tremendous homage to the Hungarian conductor György Mondvay, and much more besides. The book also comes with the DVD “Die Donau” with concert excerpts and text.

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I Salonisti, Stämpfli Verlag, 128 pages, paperback with DVD
ISBN 978-3-7272-1142-3, CHF 38.00

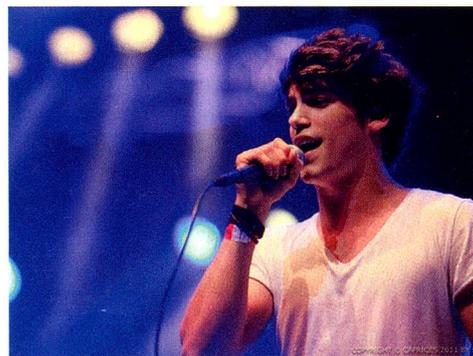


professionals. Even the French singer Mylène Farmer has been won over. Radio stations and the major festivals have opened their doors to him. The Lausanne-born artist has been performing at Switzerland’s concert venues for less than a year, initially just with his guitar and

then with his band. He hit the ground running in 2012 and performed in front of the entire Swiss nation in January at the broadcast of the Swiss Awards in Zurich and provided the musical entertainment at the Davis Cup in Fribourg in February, watched by Roger Federer. Encouraged by Stanislav Wawrinka, the singer even wrote the Swiss tennis team’s anthem, “We’ll Follow You”, for the event. His most famous track “Lucky” is full of good humour at which you cannot help but smile. Bastian Baker has certainly not finished trying his luck yet!

AW

www.bastianbaker.com



Bulletins

Agreement between federal government and OSA

Close relations have existed for decades between the federal administration, namely the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). These relations have now been formalised following the signing of a performance agreement. This sets out OSA services for the Swiss abroad (representing interests, maintaining relations between the Swiss abroad and their homeland, providing information and handling the administration of the Council of the Swiss Abroad) and the services provided by federal government. The agreement is also an important step for the coherent policy on the Swiss abroad that the Federal Council wishes to establish.

Cantonal bank discards clients

The Zürcher Kantonalbank has closed the accounts of all its clients residing in the USA. Its clients received a letter just before the end of the year announcing that they would have to transfer all their assets to another bank by the end of February.

Shaqiri to move to Bayern Munich

Xherdan Shaqiri, the 20-year-old attacking midfielder, will move from FC Basel to Bayern Munich in the summer. Shaqiri, who joined FC Basel in 2001 as a junior player just before his 10th birthday, has been part of the first-team squad since summer 2009. The transfer fee paid by Bayern Munich for Shaqiri has not been disclosed.

5.5 million motor vehicles

There were more motor vehicles on the road in Switzerland in 2011 than ever before. Around 420,900 additional vehicles are now using the roads, with the total number standing at around 5.5 million. This represents a 2.2% rise compared to 2010. Congestion on Swiss roads has increased significantly as a result.

Excluding the Swiss abroad

The government of the canton of Basel-Stadt is calling on Parliament to reject an FDP proposal to introduce the right to vote in Council of States elections for the Swiss abroad. This is despite the fact that in summer 2011 the Federal Council asked the cantons to allow the Swiss abroad to vote in Council of States elections. They are currently entitled to vote in 11 cantons.

Federal Council opposes election by the people

The popular initiative "Election of the Federal Council by the people" is unnecessary, according to a Federal Council decision. It recommends that the electorate should reject the initiative at the ballot box. The reason given is that the election of Federal Councillors by the Federal Assembly is a proven system – the main parties, regions and linguistic groups are represented on the body and it has always succeeded in establishing a basis for Switzerland to be successful in overcoming the challenges of the era concerned.

Quotations

"Switzerland's attempt to remain neutral forever makes me think of a virgin who makes her living in a bordello but wants to stay chaste."

Friedrich Dürrenmatt

"All the parties support concordance, but there is no concordance on what concordance actually is."

Antonio Hodgers, National Councillor for the Swiss Green Party, at the Federal Council election

"I suspect the USA will only offer a deal once the lemon has been completely squeezed."

Economics Professor Peter V. Kunz of the University of Berne on the tax dispute with the USA

"Politicians cannot keep on playing nursemaid to a financial centre out of control."

Fulvio Pelli, outgoing President of the FDP. The Liberals, at his party's Delegate Conference

"Conquered nations must either be made happy or destroyed."

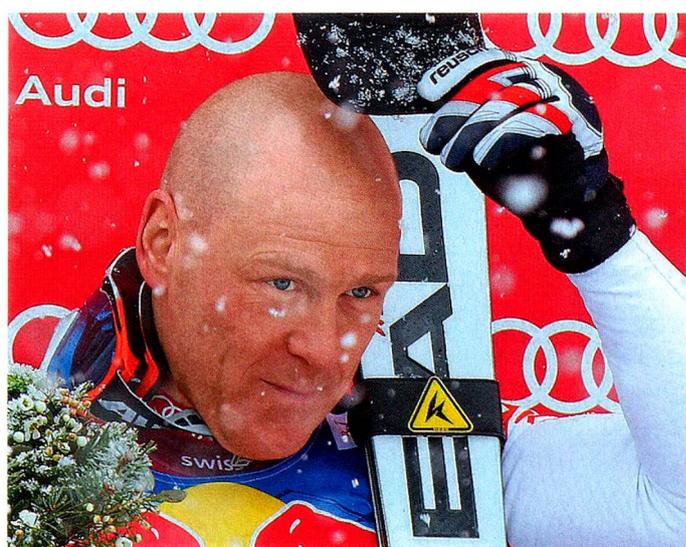
Niccolò Machiavelli

"I have not been elected Federal Councillor for my linguistic abilities."

Alain Berset when asked to answer a question in English at his first appearance before the media

"We want immigration that benefits the nation."

Christian Levrat, President of the Swiss Social Democratic Party



"The day has finally arrived. I will retire from ski racing at the end of this season. This is a very emotional moment for me and a major milestone in my career and my life. I have led a very privileged life as a professional skier over recent years and have enjoyed many wonderful moments. Being a ski racer was and is a dream job. I have been reflecting upon this decision for some time. I am sure I have chosen the

right moment to retire from professional sport", Didier Cuche told his fans on 18 January. Two days later, he won the legendary Kitzbühel downhill for the fifth time in his career. No skier before him has achieved that. "It's like a Hollywood movie script. After announcing my retirement, I could not have imagined such a happy ending. Kitzbühel is definitely my race", Cuche concluded.