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In 1924, Thomas Mann published the novel »The Magic Mountain« – based on the impressions he had gained twelve years earlier while visiting his wife Katia, who was supposedly suffering from lung disease, at the Davos Waldklinik.
For a long time, the people of Davos struggled with the image of a tuberculosis center and felt vilified by the poet. One hundred years later, Davos is celebrating not only Thomas Mann's 150th birthday, but also 125 years of Schatzalp, his literary inspiration.

A current impression gives

The valley station of the Schatzalpbahn:
All year round, the funicular takes passengers in just a few minutes to an altitude of 1,861 metres to the former luxury sanatorium Schatzalp – run as the Berghotel Schatzalp since 1953.

125 Years of the Magic Mountain

From Luxury Resort to Event Location

View of Davos and the Landwasser River valley *from the terminus of the Schatzalp cable car at 1861 m above sea level.*

Medical equipment *from the Schatzalp Sanatorium.*

High valleys throughout the Alpine region remained isolated well into the 20th century. Farming families with many children had little to eat. Mountain farmers, particularly in Graubünden, sent their surplus hungry youngsters to the lowlands, primarily Swabia, for the summer as herding children. Hence, the term »Swabian children« or »Swabian walkers« is used for the seasonal migration of children. The fate of the herding children in Graubünden – particularly in the Alpine valley along the Landwasser River around Davos – changed due to the development of spas.

Tuberculosis treatments

The herding children brought little money with them when they returned in the fall, as their board and lodging were offset against their forced labor. It was a glimmer of hope for new sources of income when the first tuberculosis patients arrived in Davos in the winter of 1865.

The Mannheim-born physician Alexander Spengler continued the boom with his therapy of recumbent treatments in the Davos air. Elegant sanatoriums sprang up and attracted an international clientele. Wealthy patients often came with large entourages. Around 1900, more than 600,000 overnight stays were recorded per year. The guests brought new sports, such as bobsleighing, skiing, and ice skating, to the now fashionable spa town. Alexander Spengler himself was a passionate athlete; his skis are on display in the Winter Sports Museum, the former post office building in Davos Platz.

Healing on medical certificate

Even the less well-off found healing in Davos. In 1882, Dr. Alexander Spengler founded a tuberculosis sanatorium for poor patients, who were cared for by Bernese deaconesses. The renowned sanatorium was later named Alexanderhaus in his honor.

In 1997, the historic property underwent extensive renovations at a cost of approximately 13 million Swiss francs. As the „Alexanderhaus Clinic for Dermatology and Allergy," Spengler's former tuberculosis sanatorium was funded by German health insurance companies. Many allergy-plagued

patients cured their ailments at the Alexanderhaus.

Despite the switch from tuberculosis treatment to atopic dermatitis and other skin diseases, the clinic's demise could not be prevented. After more than a hundred years of serving patients, the clinic went bankrupt on November 29, 2004.

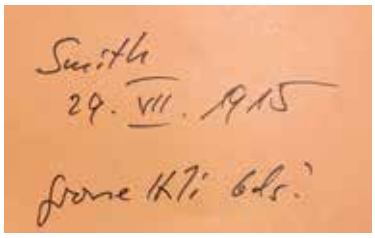
The building, the forefather of the folk sanatoriums, is now home to the trendy Hard Rock Hotel Davos. The hotel management offered: „Upon check-in, you'll receive a QR code that allows you to access Spotify playlists tailored specifically to the hotel." The shepherds of yesteryear, as employees of this hotel today, would probably deliver Fender® guitars with floor amps and headphones directly to the rockers' rooms upon request, as advertised by the hip event location. The employment situation has changed!

Entrance gallery *to the Berghotel Schatzalp; the toboggan run begins to the right behind the building.*

To the Magic Mountain

Davos became an expanding spa town and also made a name for itself through innovative architectural designs. Instead of gabled roofs, which were prone to dangerous avalanches in snowy winters, multi-story buildings with flat roofs were constructed.

Willem Jan Holsboer, the brainchild and financier of the Davos spa business, originally came from the Netherlands near Arnhem. He hoped in vain for his terminally ill wife to recover in the high valley. According to his vision, a luxury sanatorium was built above Davos Platz between 1898 and 1900. The sanatorium on the Schatzalp plateau was designed by Zurich architects Otto Pfleghard & Max Haefeli in the Art Nouveau style and constructed using a reinforced concrete skeleton structure, revolutionary for the time. Medical and hygiene requirements led to simple furnishings enhanced with decorative elements. Instead of carpets, inlaid ornaments adorn the terrazzo stone floor. Instead of oppressively heavy velvet curtains in the dining room, large-scale murals create a cheerful atmosphere – and still do today. The Schindler elevator, which transported patients when the hotel opened on December 21, 1900, still serves hotel



Label for an X-ray *photograph on a glass plate from 1915.*

***Recreational therapy** on the south-facing balcony – on the dividing wall to the right is a small door that the doctor could open with his key to quickly move from patient to patient during rounds.*

***Historic passenger elevator** from the era of the sanatorium.*

guests today – provided the previous user carefully clicked the metal door shut when leaving. Otherwise, one waits in vain for its ghostly arrival. Its dimensions are said to be large enough to fit a coffin.

In a closet in the former doctor's office, now covered by a giant television screen, original X-rays on large glass panels and a volumetric measuring device were still stored this year.

The large balconies with their traditional lounge chairs evoke a Magic Mountain feeling when one imagines the doctor using his socket wrench to open the small door in the partition wall to access the neighboring patient.

The clock in the long hotel corridor recalls the strict regime from the sanatorium's time; Visits, length of stay, and temperature checks were carried out punctually and precisely recorded. The sanatorium had its own power supply and a weather station. From the very beginning, the Schatzalp was connected to the Swiss telephone and telegraph network, with dedicated service points on site. The post office was staffed until the 1970s. Mailed letters were stamped by hand with a Schatzalp stamp. In 2025, postcards could be purchased at the reception, but not stamps. Back then, if a hotel guest received a call during dinner, the concierge, Mr. Abrecht, would enter the room with measured strides and ask the guest to use one of the two phone booths. These phone booths are no longer needed and have been replaced by smartphones next to the plate.

Event Location

At first glance, it seemed strange to hotel guests to see computer printouts with bold letters and bold arrows plastered in the hotel's public areas, such as: „Piano Bar, Caution Door, Art Nouveau Lobby, Restroom…"

The meaning became drastically clear, however, when hotel guests were denied access to the dining room

and lobby. Then the entrance, with its overstuffed clothing racks, resembled a department store during a winter sale. Hundreds of visitors descended for lunch or dinner. The styleless printouts were intended to help them find their way around during their short stay.

The tranquility of lounging on the balcony was over when, at outdoor events on the Snow Beach, game instructions and award ceremonies were announced every minute via microphone. Sleep until after midnight was disturbed when the bass from the lobby's loudspeakers boomed all the way to the top floor. Such events took place several times a week.

The Funicular Schatzalpbahn

The tireless, already seriously ill Willem Jan Holsboer viewed the construction of the luxury sanatorium on the Schatzalp hill and its connection by mountain railway as a comprehensive project. Holsboer had already initiated the development of the Davos high valley with the Landquart-Davos narrow-gauge railway (now the Rhaetian Railway) in 1890. On April 29, 1899, the groundbreaking ceremony for the 716-meter-long funicular line took place. The starting point was behind the Kurhaus in Davos Platz (1557 meters above sea level). The carriages climbed to a height of 1861 meters. Scheduled service began on December 25, 1899, almost exactly one year before the Schatzalp sanatorium opened. During the final construction phase, the mountain railway facilitated the transport of materials and labor. The sanatorium guests naturally used the comfortable mountain railway. Hikers and winter sports enthusiasts

Stylish event ambience enriched *with orientation aid for event visitors.*

***The funicular** takes you into the magical world of Thomas Mann's novel in just a few minutes.*

increasingly appreciated the climb, which was now shortened to just a few minutes. The access road was converted into a toboggan and bobsleigh track in winter. Initially, it was hoped that bobsleigh racing would attract large numbers of visitors. In 1907, not only was a separate bobsleigh track built, but the Schatzalp Railway's carriages were also modified to transport the bobsleighs. In the first year of operation, 2,787 bobsleighs were transported. From then on, the toboggan and bobsleigh runs were separated. With the increase in skiing, the railway carried fewer and fewer bobsleighs. In 1910, only 1,080 bobsleighs were loaded.In December 1937, a ski lift was built above Schatzalp on Strela. For a time, the arduous climb over the rock gallery from the Strela Pass provided access to the Parsenn ski area, if the path was cleared of snowdrifts.

Later, the aerial cableway, known as the *Silbervogel*, replaced the hike. Allegedly due to unprofitability, the connection was shut down in 2001, and the entire Schatzalp-Strela ski area was closed the following year. After seven years of slumber, the Strela ski area reopened as *SlowMountain-Schatzalp* – without artificial snow and sound systems. A comfortable oldfashioned two-seater chairlift and two drag lifts were restored.

This year, February 2025, only one lift was running – plus a circulating cable serving as a mini-tug, which comfortably pulled skiers a short distance up to the Strela Alp mountain restau-

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