

DEPARTURES

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MINIMALISM
LITTLE
BLACK
DRESSES

GLOBAL
STRATEGIST
STRETCHING
THE
EURO

NECESSARY
LUXURY
10 THINGS
WE CAN'T DO
WITHOUT

RE-MASTERING
THE ART
OF LIVING WELL
NOW

THE BLACK
BOOK
SYDNEY
SAO PAULO,
MIAMI, VAIL

OVER
THE TOP
SKIING
IN
VERBIER
SEASON

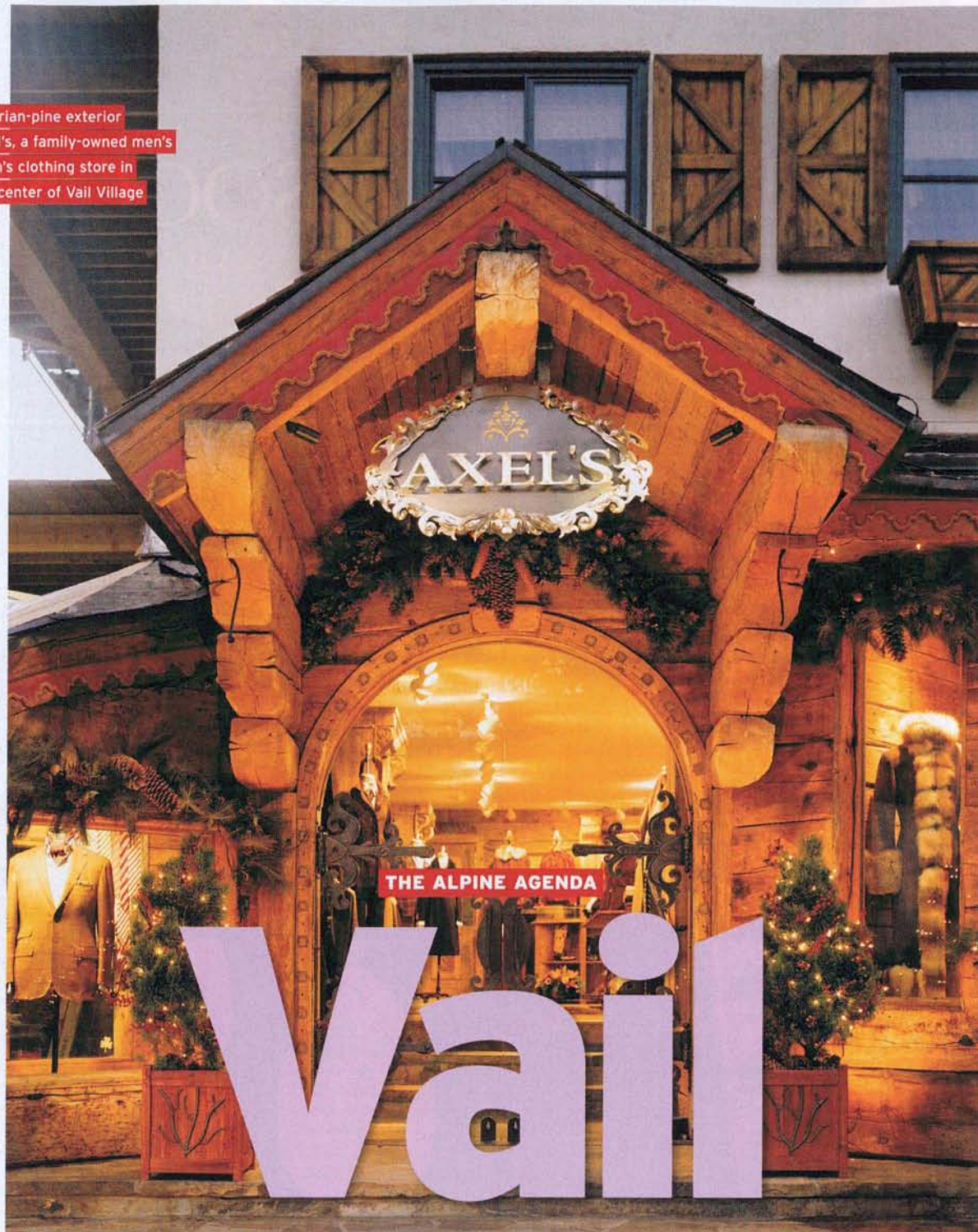
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PERSON
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CONSUMING
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TREND
REPORT



The Austrian-pine exterior at Axel's, a family-owned men's and women's clothing store in the center of Vail Village



People often talk about Vail and Aspen in the same breath, and while it's certainly true that both are luxe Colorado ski resorts offering some of the best skiing in the country, that's about where the similarities end. Aspen has celebrity cachet along with a Christian Dior boutique and flashy restaurants like the Nobu Matsuhisa-owned Matsuhisa. Vail, in contrast, has an almost European charm, locally run shops, and small chef-owned and -operated restaurants. Vail has always attracted moneyed

visitors, of course; it's just done so in a much quieter way, perhaps because of its humble origins. When it opened as a ski resort in December 1962, it had just two chairlifts and one gondola, and a daily lift ticket went for \$5.

Today there's still only one gondola, but the number of lifts has increased to 31, transporting some 54,000 skiers up the mountain each hour during high season. And lift tickets have crept up to \$90 per day, leaving some old-timers cringing. Such development hasn't really changed the resort's overall vibe, however. "It's keeping up with the Joneses," says one Vail

Vail

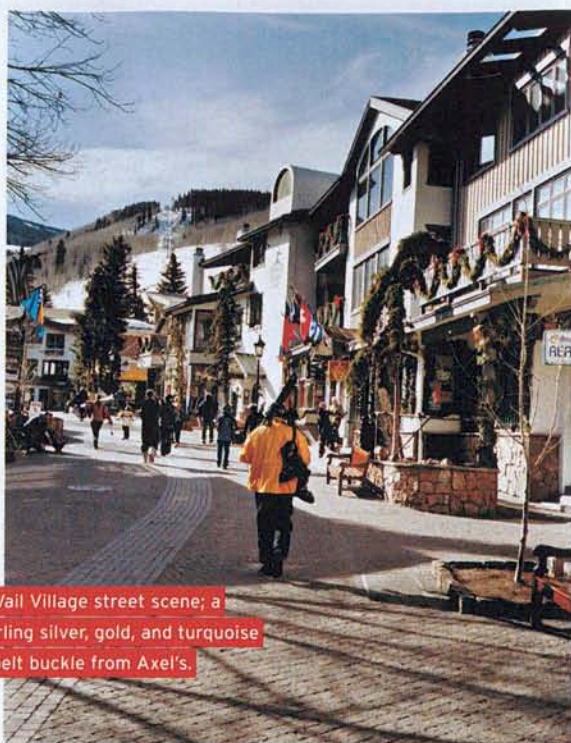
resident. “But people don’t come here for the glitz. They come for the snow and the terrain. And that’s not going to change anytime soon.”

In the last year the big news has been the Arrabelle at Vail Square, the area’s first new luxury hotel in 25 years (with an unprecedented room rate of \$1,350 per night), and the just-opened members-only Vail Mountain Club, right at the bottom of the Vista Bahn lift. Both are a part of Vail Resorts’ current \$1 billion renewal plan that’s ushering in the area’s brand-new look.

SLOPESIDE SHOPS

Like other ski towns, Vail has no shortage of souvenir T-shirt stores and gear emporiums. But pedestrian-friendly Vail Village, at the foot of the mountain, is also home to several long-standing boutiques and a handful of art galleries. Its heated walkways make browsing the quaint side streets, lined with white and brown wooden façades, easy.

Right in the center of the village, **Axel’s** is a favorite, loved for its European-meets-Wild



Vail Village street scene; a sterling silver, gold, and turquoise belt buckle from Axel’s.



are shorter and softer—almost like mink,” says Candice, who travels to Italy several times a year with her family. The store has a selection of gold and sterling-silver belt buckles, too, many of which are handcrafted throughout the West and accented with rubies, sapphires, and diamonds, along with a few small Italian labels such as Fabiana Filippi, whose superfine cashmere sweaters are great for layering.

Directly across the courtyard from Axel’s is the **Squash Blossom**, an area pioneer that continues to stock artisanal jewelry from lesser-known designers. Husband-and-wife team John and Patti Cogwell fill their boutique with pieces by Gurhan, a Turkish designer who works in 24-karat gold. They have one of the largest selections in the country of Gurhan’s designs, as well as candy-hued cocktail rings from New York designer Alex Sepkus and more organic pieces from San Francisco metalsmith Sarah Graham, whose Rattlesnake Grass collection uses blackened steel and yellow gold. The largest

“IN VAIL, COWBOY BOOTS ARE ALWAYS APPROPRIATE,” SAYS A LOCAL INTERIOR DESIGNER.

West aesthetic and for its grand Austrian-pine exterior and full-length picture windows. Owners Janie and Axel Wilhelmsen have lived in Vail Valley since the eighties and opened their store here in 1990. (Axel actually purchased an old smokehouse in Austria so he could bring pieces back to the United States for the store’s cozy wooden interior.) Along with their children, Candice and Axel Jr., the couple works closely with small designers and tanneries across Italy to create English-style hacking jackets, coats inspired by those worn by Russian Cossacks, and most notably, an extensive collection of fur-trimmed sheepskin coats. “We use sheepskin from a particular herd that lives north of Milan, which is why these



Goat-leather cowboy boots from Kemo Sabe

cache of new pieces arrives in December, just in time for the holiday rush.

At the 14-year-old **DeMott Gallery**, a few doors down, owner and painter John DeMott carries works by 30 American artists, in addition to his own oils. We love the black-walnut sculptures of local fauna by J. Chester Armstrong and the life-size bronzes of Western wildlife by Utah-based Gary Lee Price (many of which appear in the front yards of the sprawling homes along Forest Road).

Self-taught metalsmith Jim Cotter transformed his small workshop—where he worked for nearly 40 years—into **J. Cotter Gallery**, a small showroom also in the village. Cotter, who now has a larger studio about eight miles away in Minturn, continues to turn out an assortment of one-of-a-kind contemporary

Vail

jewelry. There are cases of oversize cocktail rings in tanzanite, amethyst, and aquamarine, but even more interesting are the rings and cuffs in the Jackson Pollock series, which he's created using diamonds, free-form drip wax, and gold and other metals. Since the seventies, Cotter has also been working with textured river rocks he finds on hikes. With these he fashions his unique Stoneware series—rings and pendants accented with pearls, diamonds, and 14-karat gold.

color, finish, band type—is made to order. The longhorns, saddles, and sepia-tone Western photographs that adorn the walls are all for sale, too.

Former Olympic skiers Renie and David Gorsuch started their lifestyle boutique back in the early sixties in Gunnison, Colorado, but opened their largest **Gorsuch** outpost here in 1966. While they've added stores in Aspen, Keystone, and nearby Beaver Creek and launched a mail-order catalogue business, this multi-story location is the most comprehensive.

AT TABLE

Although it sounds kind of gimmicky, the Thousand-Year Breakfast at Vail Mountain Lodge & Spa's **Terra Bistro** is actually quite good (all the ingredients existed 1,000 years ago). Organic coffee comes from local roaster Vail Mountain Coffee & Tea, and omelets use cage-free eggs, artisanal cheeses, and the freshest vegetables. Then there's the quinoa sticky bun—as delicious as a regular cinnamon roll but without any of the guilt we now associate with ingesting



Gorsuch stocks cold-weather gear that's as fashionable for the street as it is for the slopes.

DAILY LIFT TICKETS MAY HAVE CREPT UP TO \$90, BUT THAT HASN'T ALTERED THE RESORT'S OVERALL VIBE.

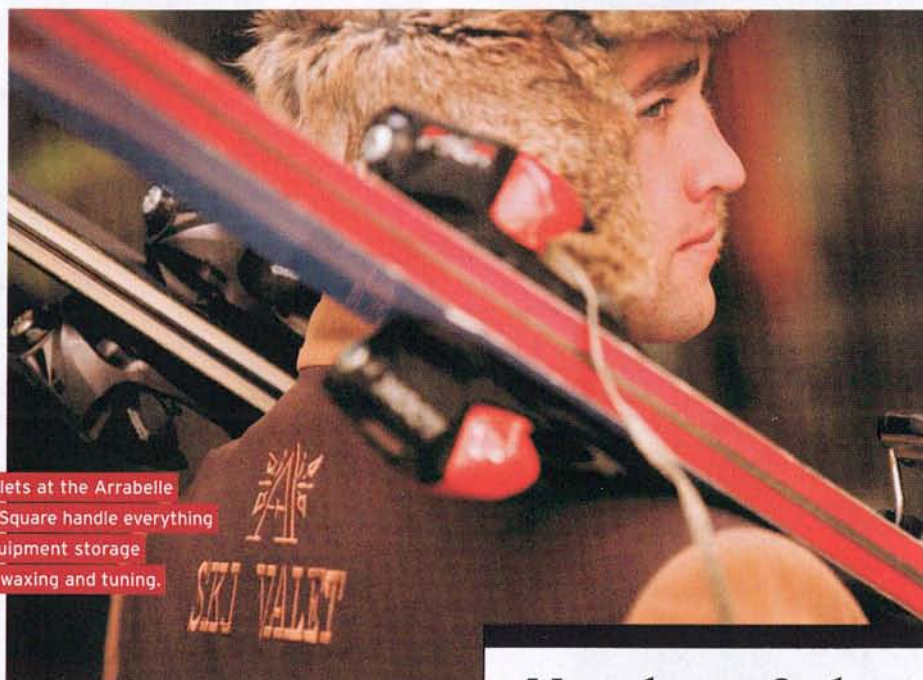
For more southwestern flair, there's **Kemo Sabe**, where boots from the likes of Lucchese Classics and Stallion Boots, both out of El Paso, Texas, line an entire wall of the store. Kemo Sabe's in-house designer collaborates with these labels to create styles in nearly every color and material imaginable, from the obvious (calfskin and suede) to the exotic (stingray and hippo), and these designs are only available here. "In Vail, cowboy boots are always appropriate," says interior designer Beth Slifer, whose eponymous design firm is behind the decor at the Arrabelle and Vail Plaza Club hotels. The store is also known for its custom Stetson cowboy hats; everything—shape,

It carries puffy bright Moncler ski jackets and Bogner ski pants to wear on the slopes, but our favorite finds were a mink poncho by Brunello Cucinelli and a wool blazer with velvet trim from Etro, which feel just right for après. There's an elegant home furnishings section on the lower level, where Alpine-inspired embroidered linens by Valombreuse are stacked beside hand-painted Austrian pottery and French crystal glasses, each etched with the image of a stag. On the second floor the knowledgeable staff members help skiers purchase or rent the latest gear, and they can also coordinate with concierges at several area hotels to have it picked up and dropped off.

white flour. Of the protein-loaded Body Fuel smoothies, the best is the Berry Tasty, which blends rice milk, agave, banana, blueberry, and strawberry. Tip: The place fills up quickly, so make a reservation—especially for Sundays. (Those eager to take the first chairlift of the day at 9 A.M. should head to **Marketplace on Meadow Drive**, in the center of the village, where the Gaucho Breakfast Burrito and the Healthy Hippie Mix—granola, berries, and flavored yogurt—are the things to order.)

While most skiers eat lunch at mountain restaurants—either **Mid-Vail** or **Two Elk**—nonskiers, or those intrepid enough to trek down for a meal, should go for

Vail



The ski valets at the Arrabelle at Vail Square handle everything from equipment storage to waxing and tuning.

the hearty buffet-style Skiers' Lunch at **Cucina Rustica** at the Lodge at Vail.

Of the more gourmet restaurants in town, several have amassed cult followings. **Kelly Liken** has earned acclaim for its inventive approach to seasonally focused cooking. (*Bon Appétit* recently named chef-owner Liken part of the next generation of female chefs to watch.) The space itself isn't much to speak of, but Liken draws attention to the table starting with her signature cocktails; consider the tomato consommé martini, a surprisingly refreshing blend of juiced, seasonal heirloom tomatoes and organic Colorado vodka. Liken works with area farms—in the summer, nearly 100 percent of the produce comes from local purveyors—and she's currently collaborating with farmers in Granby, Colorado, to help her start a small garden in Vail to supply produce for the restaurant. Fresh fruits and veggies aside, dishes here tend to be meat-heavy: Think elk carpaccio, crispy lamb sweetbreads, and rack of lamb atop a sourdough bread pudding. For dessert it's the sticky-bun sundae with caramel sauce.

Sweet Basil opened in 1977, when the resort was still being developed, and became an immediate hit with locals and frequent Vail visitors. Chef de cuisine Brian Brouillard has been in town for almost a decade, and he reinvents the mainly American dishes here regularly. Reservations,

Members Only

If Vail had the equivalent of Yale's Skull and Bones, it might be Camp Robbers, the no-frills private club frequented by the area's oldest families and rumored to have been started by the resort's founders. Sitting in an undisclosed location on the west side of the mountain, it has long been the choice place to hang out and compare notes after a day on the slopes. And while Camp Robbers's membership rolls remain a well-guarded secret, this winter the far less clandestine yet far more luxurious **Vail Mountain Club** opens. The 15,000-square-foot Alpine-style space is at the base of the Vista Bahn lift, prime positioning for midday refueling or end-of-day rendezvous. Membership, which starts at \$150,000, is capped at 400, and the club has all the amenities one would expect in a ski town: food catered by the Lodge at Vail, a full bar, two private sundecks and two hot tubs, heated underground parking, and slopeside ski valet service. 250 Vail Ln.; 970-754-4252; vailmountainclub.com



taken two months in advance, are a must for dinner, and the top tables are those along the back, overlooking Gore Creek.

At the base of the mountain's Golden Peak lift, **Larkspur Restaurant** is one of the most popular spots in town, perhaps because chef-owner Thomas Salamunovich, who has cooked in kitchens from San Francisco to France, knows how to excite his customers. An open kitchen and a massive glass-encased wine cellar (with some 7,500 bottles) create drama, and although billed as the standard-sounding "seasonal New American," the menu reflects a thoughtfulness not seen elsewhere in the town. Salamunovich pairs pork belly with Colorado and Asian peaches in a soy-honey glaze and coats Alaskan halibut in a pistachio-sage pesto. For dessert, pastry chef Kim Guertin has been churning out unusual flavors of gelato like pumpkin.

Vail's best-kept restaurant secret has to be **Osaki's**, a nondescript sliver of a sushi joint tucked behind Masters Gallery in the village. While good sushi might be the last thing one would expect in a ski town, the restaurant has a stealth bomber in chef Takeshi Osaki, who comes from Nobu outposts in Aspen and Los Angeles. "Osaki's is so small and intimate that discovering it is like finding a little powder stash at the end of the day," says longtime resident Tony Vangalis. Since the place seats only 22, reservations are necessary. Those who get in should eschew spicy tuna rolls in favor of the chef's Omakase tasting menu.

STAYING PUT

Despite the impending arrival of both a Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carlton in the next two years, the biggest hotel chatter in town still surrounds the **Arrabelle at Vail Square**, which opened this January in Lionshead, a five-minute drive west of the village. Over the last four years, the entire area has been overhauled: In place of the rickety gondola building and timeworn condominiums there are now pastel façades (shades of Disneyland, but a few snowstorms will surely fix that) and an ice-skating rink, plus several low-key dining options. The Arrabelle itself, a 500,000-square-foot hotel built in the style of a classic Bavarian lodge, has 36 guest rooms—the ones on the second and third floors have the

Vail

finest views—and 50 private residences, some of which are available to rent. Deep reds and creamy beiges accent each room's walnut furniture, but mountain views are the real focus and best taken from the spacious balconies. The heated floors, whirlpool tubs, and gas fireplaces make it hard to leave the rooms, as do the affable butlers, who handle everything from drawing the bath to stocking the fridge with favorite snacks. Thankfully, ski valets are on hand to help guests get up, outfitted, and out onto the slopes. They warm boots and bring coffee, while guests sit by the lobby's grand fireplace, and they wax and tune equipment, making sure it's ready and waiting at the base of the Eagle Bahn gondola, just a few steps from the hotel. After the mountain closes at 3:30 p.m., the wraparound veranda



Chef Kelly Liken in the kitchen at her namesake restaurant

\$9.75 million, open right onto the peak, and owners have access to the property's guest amenities, including room service, the spa, and the fitness center. Ownership also grants access to private ski valet service and membership in the Vail Mountain Club (see "Members Only"), plus heated underground parking—a much-appreciated rarity in a town where winter temperatures can plunge into single digits.

For a bit more seclusion, Rock-Resorts' **Game Creek Chalet** is an Austrian-inspired private cabin that's 10,500 feet up the mountain and accessible only by Sno-Cat in winter. Upon arrival guests receive a Champagne welcome from the mountain valet before settling into the three-guest-room space, with its carved doorways, high ceilings, and plush down comforters. A private chef

“PEOPLE COME FOR THE SNOW AND TERRAIN,” SAYS ONE RESIDENT. “AND THAT’S NOT GOING TO CHANGE.”

on the second floor of the Arrabelle's great room becomes a go-to gathering spot, serving small plates from the hotel's French brasserie, Centre V, along with the requisite warming libations.

If proximity to the slopes is a priority, the Alpine inn-style **Lodge at Vail**, at the base of the Vista Bahn lift, is the place to stay. Nearly all the 165 rooms and suites have been renovated in the last year, but guests should ask for one of the 23 rooms and suites in the International wing, which are larger and have oversize mahogany sleigh beds, comfy leather chairs, LCD televisions, and terraces. The Rocky Mountain-influenced 11,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, meanwhile, which opened this past summer, has 11 treatment rooms; the 105-minute fireside massage



Vail Mountain Lodge & Spa's Terra Bistro is the choice for organic cooking.

and the in-suite soaking tub are perfect for soothing achy ski legs.

Should one choose to make things more permanent, the most coveted real estate on the mountain right now is the hotel's **Lodge at Vail Chalets**, a collection of 13 homes that was just completed this winter. The homes, which range from 3,700 to 5,700 square feet and start at

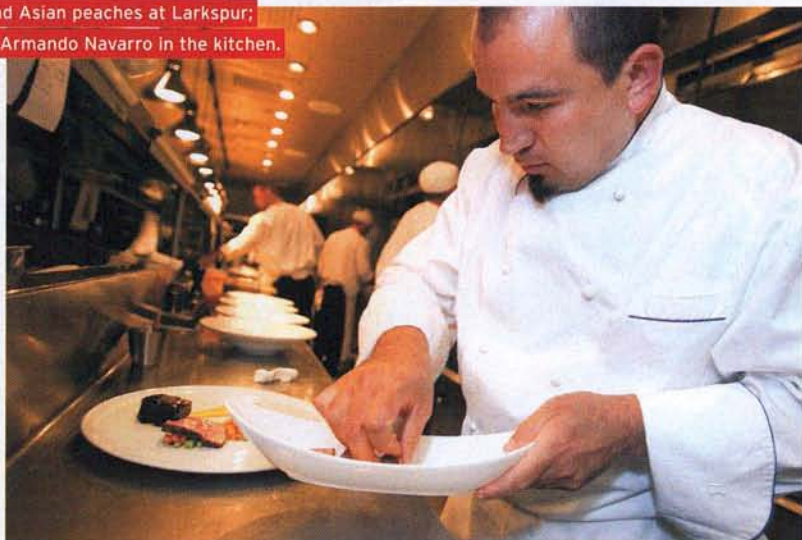
prepares hearty dishes of Colorado lamb and salmon, and the mountain guide returns daily with lift tickets and to give private ski instruction.

On the eastern edge of Vail Village, further removed from the bustle, the family-run **Tivoli Lodge's** old-Tyrolean charm is captured in its floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace and its windows overlooking the mountain. The Lazier family first opened the ski-in/ski-out hotel in the

sixties, though longtime Vail habitués will hardly recognize the property, which from 2004 to 2006 was rebuilt from the ground up as a \$30 million, 62-room hotel. For a drink straight off the slopes, order the Indini. Made with chocolate liqueur, it's the signature tippie of Brown Hound Lounge, the popular bar adjacent to the hotel lobby. The property has two



Pork belly is paired with Colorado
and Asian peaches at Larkspur;
chef Armando Navarro in the kitchen.



Address Book

Stores

Axel's 201 Gore Creek Dr.; 866-655-2935; axelsltd.com

DeMott Gallery 183 Gore Creek Dr.; 970-476-8948; demottgallery.com

Gorsuch 263 E. Gore Creek Dr.; 970-476-2294; gorsuch.com

J. Cotter Gallery 234 E. Wall St.; 970-476-3131; jcottergallery.com

Kemo Sabe 230 Bridge St.; 970-479-7474; kemosabe.com

Squash Blossom 198 Gore Creek Dr.; 800-323-2339; squashblossom.com

Lodging

Arrabelle at Vail Square From \$1,350 to \$3,100. 675 Lionshead Pl.; 866-662-7625; arrabelle.rockresorts.com

Game Creek Chalet From \$4,275 to \$5,220. 675 Lionshead Pl.; 866-662-7625; arrabelle.rockresorts.com

The Lodge at Vail From \$479 to \$7,300. 174 E. Gore Creek Dr.; 877-528-7625; lodgeatvail.rockresorts.com

The Lodge at Vail Chalets From \$9.75 million. 151 Vail Ln.; 970-754-4250; vrdc.com

One Willow Bridge Road Penthouse From \$1,955 to \$4,825; 970-479-9990;

peakpropertiesvail.com

Tivoli Lodge From \$400 to \$1,600. 386 Hanson Ranch Rd.; 800-451-4756; tivolilodge.com

Tyrolean Chalet From \$2,850 to \$7,760; 970-479-9990; peakpropertiesvail.com

Restaurants

Cucina Rustica at the Lodge at Vail Skiers' Lunch, \$70. 174 E. Gore Creek Dr.; 877-528-7625; lodgeatvail.rockresorts.com

Kelly Liken Dinner, \$120. 12 Vail Rd.; 970-479-0175; kellyliken.com

Larkspur Restaurant Dinner, \$140. 458 Vail Valley Dr.; 970-479-8050; larkspurvail.com

Marketplace on Meadow Drive Breakfast, \$13. One Willow Bridge Road; 970-477-4370; marketplaceonmeadowdrive.com

Mid-Vail Lunch, \$40

Osaki's Dinner, \$100. 100 E. Meadow Dr.; 970-476-0977

Sweet Basil Dinner, \$120. 193 Gore Creek Dr.; 970-476-0125; sweetbasil-vail.com

Terra Bistro at Vail Mountain Lodge & Spa Breakfast, \$34. 352 E. Meadow Dr.; 888-794-0410;

vailmountainlodge.com
Two Elk Lunch, \$40

LIKE ASPEN, VAIL HAS ALWAYS ATTRACTED MONEYED VISITORS—IT JUST DOES SO IN A QUIETER WAY.

outdoor hot tubs but no spa or restaurant. A shuttle bus, however, picks guests up right outside the hotel for the five-minute ride over to Lionshead.

Although most of the centrally located homes along glitzy Forest Road can't be rented, Peak Properties has a firm handle on the best of what's available, with two places of particular note. The first is the 5,800-square-foot **Tyrolean Chalet**, on Gore Creek. The four-bedroom, six-bathroom residence has a huge kitchen, a game room with a custom-made foosball table, and a home theater that seats ten and has a 78-inch projection

screen. There's a built-in après scene, too: three patios, a hot tub, and a gas grill.

Peak Properties' other top rental, now only in its second year in the company's portfolio, is the penthouse at **One Willow Bridge Road**, a four-bedroom, four-bath condo that overlooks Gore Creek and sits right in the village; it's one of only a few of the condos at this private residence club that are available for rent. The open kitchen has Wolf appliances, granite countertops, and a wine fridge, while the rest is tastefully done in cheery toiles, white crown molding, and wood flooring.

There's maid service, so linens and towels are changed daily and bathrooms are stocked with Gilchrist & Soames bath products. Since the club is run by the nearby Sonnenalp resort, guests are able to order room service from its five restaurants—serving everything from fondue and raclette to southwestern fare—and have access to the full-service spa. A Crestron touch pad controls the flatscreen TVs, surround-sound system, gas-burning fireplace, lighting, and drapery, and a keyless entry system provides access to the residence club's lounge area, library, infinity pool, and two hot tubs. —**NANDITA KHANNA**