



A gold medal home



WORDS: Laura May Todd
PHOTOGRAPHY: Frederic Ducout

Conceptual artist Rolf Sachs cuts a well-known figure in St. Moritz. He's involved in many aspects of life in the town, from business to culture. But he also made an interesting choice when it came to his home, and it certainly raised eyebrows among locals





In the lofty confines of St. Moritz, even shelter is a competitive sport. But not necessarily in the way you might think. Nestled along the curves of the historic Olympia Bob Run, around the corner from the Kulm Hotel, is one of the town's (and Switzerland's) most fascinating architectural stories.

Completed in 1928 by local architect Valentin Koch-Robbi, St. Moritz's Olympic stadium is the last remnant of Switzerland's Olympic history. It was used in 1928 and 1948 as a venue for ice hockey and figure skating – but you won't find winter sports within its walls any longer. The red-toned concrete building, composed of a long, low-slung volume and a multi-storey observation tower, is now home to Swiss conceptual artist and entrepreneur Rolf Sachs.

"I was taking a walk when I first saw it," Sachs says of his introduction to the building in 2001. "I turned to my wife and said, 'I think I know what our house will be.'" But it wasn't as easy as simply laying claim to it. By the time Sachs began making enquiries into the once glorious stadium, it was a derelict mess, disused for years and on the verge of collapsing. At the time, the building was property of the Kulm Hotel. As luck would have it, its owners, Greek shipping magnates the Niarchos family, just happened to be old school friends.

"It might sound arrogant but I think I was the only person who could have got this house," he says, sitting serenely at an antique Swiss wooden table in the stadium's second-floor living room. Peering out from round, dark-rimmed glasses with an infinitely affable air, Sachs, at first, comes across as more professor than playboy. But don't be fooled: they don't call him "Mr. St. Moritz" for nothing. In addition to his career as an artist – he's known for a conceptual approach that



Opening spread
Exterior view of Rolf Sachs' home

1
Toboggans designed by Rolf Sachs
in the living room

2
A photograph of the former stadium
hangs above a ledge



AROUND THE TABLE

When he's not hosting at the Dracula Club, Sachs treats his home like a satellite location, a de facto hub for his sprawling social circle and tight-knit family. "I have guests here almost every night," he says. "Between me and my children, there's always someone staying here." Above the 20-seater dining table, Sachs has hung a series of vintage lamps and one imposter: an orange water bucket he smuggled out of the Centre Pompidou in Paris



1



2



3

“Every creative is somehow drawn to the start of modernism, when we didn’t decorate things anymore”

covers sculpture, objects, light and installation – and his wide-ranging business interests, Sachs is president of the Dracula Club, an esoteric midnight institution in St. Moritz. His father, the photographer, industrialist and St. Moritz mainstay Gunter Sachs, founded the club in 1970.

“It was hugely polarising in the village,” says Sachs of the task of transforming his stadium home. In order to change the zoning restrictions, he was forced to hold a local referendum. “Everybody said forget it,” he says of the process, which spun out into a seven-year ordeal. “You’ll never get the house. This is impossible.” But Sachs won easily, a testament to his gregarious nature and popularity within the Alpine town.

Once the change of zoning was firmly secured, Sachs – who lives part-time in Rome and London – set to work converting the stadium into his winter retreat. “It’s all local materials and local traditions,” he says of the renovation, which was stitched up by local firm Küchel Architects in typical Swiss fashion, making good use of honey-coloured Alpine pine and larch, weathered to a steely-grey hue on outdoor elements such as the roof terrace and exterior staircase.

“Luckily, this building was true Bauhaus,” he says, which worked in his favour when devising the layout. The interior follows a consistent geometry. A knee-high ledge runs along the entire perimeter, creating a visual flow around which

Sachs built the home’s proportions. It also left space for his collections of trophies and winter sports paraphernalia, souvenirs from his involvement in the Cresta Run and St. Moritz’s various sporting clubs. “Every creative is somehow drawn to the start of modernism, when we didn’t decorate things anymore,” he says. The building’s Bauhaus bones allowed him to easily extrapolate a defined interior aesthetic, with his

1
Sachs has acquired an impressive collection of mid-century seating, including this lounge by Charles and Ray Eames

2
Locally sourced larch timber has weathered to a steely-grey tone on the terrace and exterior staircase

3
Sachs cast this skeleton toboggan from specialised amber resin to commemorate 125 years of the Cresta Run

1
Local stone and clusters of Alpine
pine line the staircase leading to
the home's second floor

2
A Cresta Run trophy is displayed
alongside ephemera from the first
St. Moritz Olympics in 1928

devotion to early modernist art and design setting the visual tone. Above the well-stocked bar hangs a series of geometric drawings from the early 20th century. "Then I collected some Bauhaus furniture," he says – the next obvious step.

In the home's main living room, whose picture windows look out over Lake St. Moritz and the mountains, chairs by Gerrit Rietveld define the space. De Stijl explorations, such as his "Red and Blue Chair", and a pair of Utrechts sit alongside a first run of the "Zig Zag Chair", a museum-worthy score for an early modernism devotee. He built out the collection with seating by Charles and Ray Eames, Achille Castiglioni and Donald Judd, all lit up by a Jenga-like table lamp by Frank Lloyd Wright, designed for his Taliesin home, and ethereal floating paper lanterns by Isamu Noguchi. His own design, a bisected wooden sleigh, sits as a coffee table in front of the stone hearth. The room's centrepiece is, perhaps, the most telling token of Sachs's Bauhaus zeal. A Carlton shelf by 1980s

Memphis founder Ettore Sottsass sits black and burnt against the whitewashed wall, the result of a kill-your-idols kind of project by Maarten Baas. In 2004, the Dutch designer set the shelf alight – alongside a trove of rare and covetable design pieces – leaving the once-colourful modernist revolt charred to a crisp. One imagines Rietveld would approve.

Plopped on one of the shelf's outstretched arms is a non-descript army-green woollen cap – perhaps a collectable piece of contemporary art? "It's Rem Koolhaas's hat," he chuckles. "He needs to come and pick it up."

Not all of Sachs's belongings hold such rarefied pedigrees. In the ground-level kitchen, an orange-painted metal bucket hangs above the kitchen table, living as a house lamp. It was stolen from the Centre Pompidou in Paris in a low-stakes heist Sachs masterminded to entertain his then-teenaged children. (The bucket is an archaic safety measure once in place in French museums in case of fire.) "I smuggled it out under my coat," the artist says with a roaring laugh. "The children loved it." The table it hangs above is another product of his own design. With seats for 20, it has a glass top, underneath which Sachs has poured a snow-like substance. Buried in the white is a phrase written in neon lights: "Das Salz in der Suppe".

"It means 'the salt is what makes life worth living,'" he says with a wink. But the table's message, like most of Sachs's work, can be taken in a multitude of ways. "I call it my cocaine reserve," he jokes, but quickly clarifies: "Everything has to have a little bit of humour, always. That is really my main goal." ✨

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..... MR. ST. MORITZ

Rolf Sachs (born in 1955 in Lausanne) is a multidisciplinary artist and designer whose work spans domestic objects, experimental lighting, sculpture and painting. He has exhibited at the Museum for Applied Art in Köln, Galerie von Bartha in St. Moritz, Design Miami Basel and London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Alongside his work as an artist, he has created set designs for opera and ballet, including the Wiesbaden Staatstheater in Germany and the Opera of Monte Carlo.



KING OF CLUBS

"St. Moritz has a great history of scarves," Sachs says of his own sprawling collection, which tops out at more than 200. "We call the town the Capital of Clubs because there are so many sports and social clubs and each one has its own club scarf. It is a rare occasion that someone sees me without one"