

HOUSE 0143

Sils, Switzerland
Küchel Architects

Architect Arnd Küchel certainly picked a powerful and resonant location – in the Upper Engadine valley, not far from St Moritz – in which to build a home for himself and his family. Here, the valley floor is broad and generous, allowing views out across a collection of lakes, including Silvaplana and Lake St Moritz, where the famous ‘White Turf’ horse races are held upon the frozen, snow-covered surface in winter. The house benefits from the openness of the lake plateau here, with the mountains towering over the valley to either side.

‘It is a fantastic place,’ says Küchel, who has lived in the area since he was five years old, when his family made the move from Germany to Switzerland. ‘If you move further along the valley, then it does become narrower, but at this point it’s wide and open. I have lived in this region for most of my life, apart from the period when I was studying architecture. I think it makes you strong when you can work in the area in which you grew up.’

Küchel bought a plot of land here, in the village of Sils, from his father-in-law; his wife also grew up locally and her parents used to own a hotel nearby. He took some inspiration from the vernacular barns and agricultural buildings of the area when designing the house, which is clad in larch above a layer of stone, with a generous entrance and hallway that looks big enough for a horse and cart. But the house is also contemporary in character, with a crisp outline, plenty of glazing and refined interiors in an organic, minimalist style.

‘We really wanted to use local materials as much as we could,’ Küchel says. ‘The stone and wood are from the area and we used local craftsmen. It was also important to blend the house with nature. If you see the house from the outside, you would never expect the big, spacious volumes that we have inside.’

Küchel established his practice in St Moritz in 1991, shortly after finishing his studies in Lausanne and Zurich. He has worked on a wide range of projects, including the conversion of the 1928 Winter Olympics stadium into a home for furniture retailer Rolf Sachs and a collaboration with Norman Foster on the Chesa Futura apartment building in St Moritz, and eventually added another office in Zurich.



The towering mountains of the Upper Engadine valley form a powerful backdrop to the house, with large picture windows that make the most of the views.



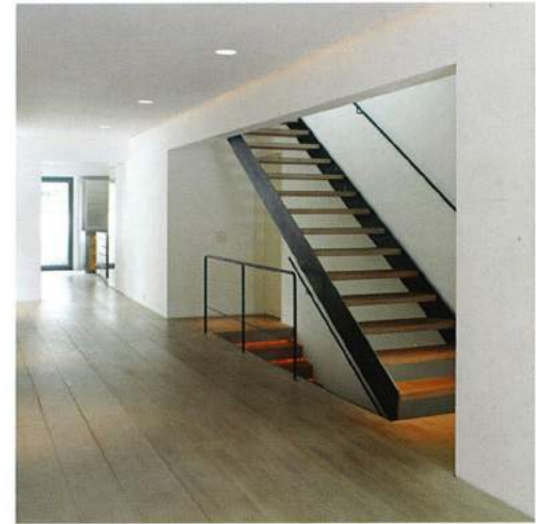


In Sils, Küchel wanted to complete the construction of the house in just one seven-month stretch in the middle of the year, when the ground would be free of snow. He designed the building with a prefabricated larch frame, sitting on a concrete base, which went up in just eight days. High-spec insulation was used throughout, including sheep's wool, which also helps to control humidity levels in the house, while the outside layer uses larch cladding. Küchel took great care to use natural and local materials as much as possible, while creating a sustainable home, with a ground-source heat pump providing winter warmth.

Inside, the house ranges over three floors, with a basement level, alongside a subterranean garage and storage area, holding a large, multifunctional family room, as well as guest bedrooms and a wine cellar. The ground floor has a spacious entrance area with oak floors that can serve as a cinema room and a space for parties and entertaining. The children's bedrooms and a study are also on the ground floor, as is a large kitchen at one end of the house, with bespoke banquettes in chestnut arranged around a dining table, which is Küchel's design.

The main living room is on the top floor of the house – a long, generous space that makes the most of the mesmerizing views of the lakes and the mountains through a long series of windows. A fireplace sits at one end, with a work and reading table at the other. The furniture includes contemporary pieces by Antonio Citterio and mid-century classics by Charles and Ray Eames, as well as more rustic items collected by Küchel over the years. The master bedroom and bathroom sit to one side of the living room, with a mezzanine library and television room above, overlooking the main living space.

Above all, this is a house that responds to the beauty of the location itself, making the most of the mountain scenery, while also seeking to respect the setting and context. 'In the winter you can just go out of the house with your skis and go cross-country or head up into the mountains,' Küchel says. 'And in the summer, you can go jogging or cycling, and the boys also love to go to the lake and fish. It is a very special location, between the mountains and the lake. It gives you energy, a sense of wellbeing.'



The front door was designed in sections and was partly inspired by the doorways found in the local barns, large enough to accommodate livestock or a hay cart. The main hallway is a generously scaled space that doubles as an additional reception room for entertaining.



The main sitting room is on the upper level of the house, with a large fireplace at one end and picture windows. The sofas are by Antonio Citterio, as are the armchairs covered in cowhide.





A mezzanine gallery, which serves as a television room, den and library, looks down onto the main sitting room. The furniture is a mix of contemporary pieces and mid-century design classics.



Above left and opposite The kitchen is a bespoke design by the owner, as is the chestnut dining table and banquette to one side.

Above, middle and right In the main living room, mountain photographs are hung alongside mid-century classics, such as this chair by Charles and Ray Eames.



Above The day bed in the mezzanine, high up in the caves, is also a bespoke design; the table is from B&B Italia.

Opposite The master bedroom is on the upper storey, alongside the main sitting room, and leads out to a private balcony; the bed is a custom design.