



The architect Arnd Küchel chose the most extraordinary of locations in which to build a home for himself and his family – between the lakes of the Upper Engadin valley, not far from St Moritz. Here the valley floor is broad and generous, allowing views out across a collection of lakes, including Lake Silvaplana and Lake St Moritz, where the famous White Turf horse races are held on its frozen, snow-covered surface in winter. Küchel benefits from the openness of the plateau here, with the high 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 farther 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.'

Küchel bought a plot of land here, in the village of Sils, in 2006, from his father-in-law; his wife, Corina, also grew up locally, and her parents used to own a hotel nearby. Küchel took some inspiration from the vernacular barns and agricultural buildings of the area when designing the house,

which is clad in larch over a base layer of stone. But the house is also decidedly contemporary, with a crisp outline, plenty of glazing to make the most of the views, and refined, beautifully detailed 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 local to the area, and we used local craftsmen. It was important to blend the house with nature. If you see it from the outside, you would never expect the big, spacious volumes that we have inside.'

Arnd Küchel started his own practice in St Moritz in 1991, shortly after finishing his studies in Lausanne and Zurich, rather than taking the traditional route of working for other architects first. He waited six months for the phone to ring, but has been busy ever since, working on a wide range of projects from houses to hotels and adding another office in Zurich. There was the conversion of the 1928 Winter Olympics stadium building into a home for the London-based furniture retailer Rolf Sachs, and collaborations with Norman Foster such as the Chesa Futura apartment building in St Moritz.

Küchel wanted to complete the construction of the house for himself, his wife and their two sons in one seven-month stretch in the middle of the year,

## NATURAL HIGH

With its clean lines, open aspect and inspired use of local materials, an architect's own Swiss chalet is every bit as exhilarating as the mountainous landscape that surrounds it. By **Dominic Bradbury**. Photographs by **Richard Powers**



**The living-room** To make the most of the mesmerising views of the mountains and lakes, the architect Arnd Küchel designed his own living-room as a long and generous space on the top floor of the house, with a fireplace at one end and a work table at the other, along with a scattering of rustic timber chairs collected locally over the years. The sofas are by his friend Antonio Citterio for Poliform ([poliformuk.com](http://poliformuk.com)), and the low pouffe-style coffee tables are by B&B Italia ([bebitalia.it](http://bebitalia.it)). There's also a good showing of mid-century classics, with chairs and stools by Charles and Ray Eames, such as their sculptural La Chaise lounge chair, available from Vitra ([vitra.com](http://vitra.com)), and lighting includes Arne Jacobsen's AJ Floor Lamp, manufactured by Louis Poulsen ([louispoulsen.com](http://louispoulsen.com)).

**The mezzanine** Overlooking the main living-room a mezzanine holds a library and television-watching space. 'I have always had the feeling that if you have a television in the living-room, then it just doesn't work, so you need another level,' Küchel says. 'You can watch TV without disturbing anyone but still feel that you are sharing the same space overall.' A small window helps ventilate the house naturally in summer, allowing hot air to escape from the very top of the building.





**The kitchen** 'For the way we live, we like to have the kitchen as a central point, and you should be able to go in and out of it easily,' Küchel says. The kitchen sits at one end of the house on the ground floor, with bespoke units complemented by a kitchen table that he designed himself with a steel base mounted on wheels for ease of movement. The banquette alongside the table is another bespoke piece, made in chestnut; the bench is a local vintage find. Küchel has been collecting photographs of the mountains around St Moritz for many years, and a row of old black-and-white prints are displayed against the wall behind the table. The suspended ceiling lights are by Flos (flos.it).

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when the ground would be free of snow. He designed the building with a pre-fabricated larch frame that went up in eight days, sitting on a concrete base. High-spec insulation throughout includes sheep's wool, and a ground-source heat pump provides winter warmth.

'It is very ecological,' Küchel says. 'Before I studied architecture I studied biology, and I have always wanted to do a house where every material has been tested to make sure that there are no toxins of any kind. We did an enormous amount of research in the office to find materials that are natural in every way, and the house is very well insulated, so we hardly use any energy.'

The house was designed over three floors, with a basement level holding a multi-functional family room as well as guest bedrooms and a wine cellar. The ground floor has a large entrance area that can serve as a cinema room and a space for entertaining. The children's bedrooms and a study are also on the ground floor, as well as a large kitchen at one end of the house, with bespoke banquettes in chestnut around a dining table to Küchel's design.







The main living-room is on the top floor of the house – a long, generous space with a series of windows giving mesmerising views of the lakes and the mountains. The furniture is a mix of contemporary pieces by Antonio Citterio with mid-century classics by Charles and Ray Eames and more rustic pieces that have been 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 respecting its 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 well-being.' *kuechelarchitects.ch*



**The exterior** The house, which sits in a small village between two lakes not far from St Moritz, uses local stone with larch timber cladding; its design was inspired by traditional farm buildings in the area. A garage connecting with the basement level provides additional storage.

**The entrance hallway** Küchel designed the wide, broad entrance hallway to be a welcoming introduction to the house itself; its large doorway in four segments is the modern-day equivalent of a barn door. The generous space can also be used as a cinema room or for entertaining.

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