

Advance booking: The upcoming books in Monocle's travel guide series with Gestalten include stop-offs in Barcelona and Mexico City. monocle.com/shop/books

Next week: We head to Gangnam, Seoul, to meet the bright hoteliers, retailers and locals changing their tune to bring the neighbourhood to life.

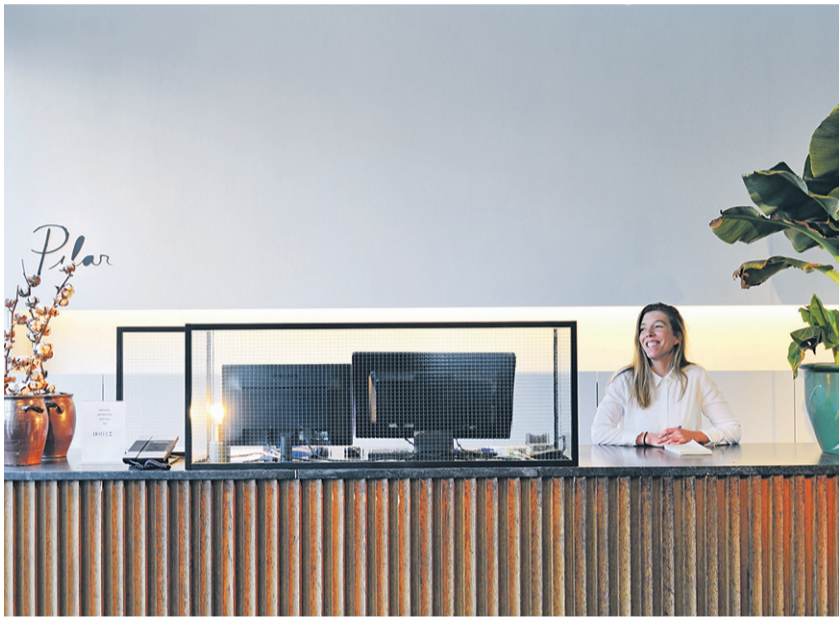
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HOTELS / ANTWERP

Pilar Hotel

Destined to be a lively new go-to venue in Antwerp's busy 't Zuid neighbourhood, the Pilar Hotel is a homely and eclectic place to bed down, grab a bite or meet people for a drink. All 17 rooms have high ceilings and plenty of natural light, some of them with views over the city's grand Royal Museum of Fine Arts. The largest room in the Pilar Hotel boasts a private terrace and looks out onto the leafy square outside. "We wanted to create a casual and relaxed place from where guests are inspired to head out and explore this quarter and the city," says Sam Peeters, one of the co-owners of Pilar (and also owner of Antwerp-based architectural firm Kontekst). **Debbie Pappyn**
hotelpilar.be



Photographer: David De Veeschauer

HOTELS / ZÜRICH

Hotel Helvetia

Thanks to a contract with the city of Zürich, Hotel Helvetia was able to expand into the adjacent townhouse and increase its offering to 37 rooms. Close attention to detail and the integration of local design and art were the guiding principles behind this extension. The new work adds a touch of freshness to this already celebrated destination, which is especially admired by locals and visitors alike for its intimate rooftop bar on which to spend summer nights. Its location between Zürich's rough-and-ready districts Kreis 4 and Kreis 3 and the postcard-pretty old town make it a solid springboard for shopping – and place it within stumbling distance of a few choice late-night bars. **Carlo Silberschmidt**
hotel-helvetia.ch



SHOPPING / GLOBAL

Stocking up

Last-minute stocking-fillers for fussy friends or loved ones:

- For the food-fond:** A cast-iron skillet from Owego-based Borough Furnace. boroughfurnace.com
- For the chilly:** Handsome headgear from Viennese maestro Mühlbauer. muehlbauer.at
- For the wine-lover seeking new pleasures:** A Swiss Pinot noir par excellence from Martha and Daniel Gantenbein (2015). gantenbeinwein.com
- For the host or hostess:** Singaporean-designed ceramics from Supermama. supermama.sg
- For the un-illuminated:** A Kalmar Werkstätten Billy TL table-lamp – with a black diffuser, naturally. kalmarlighting.com

- For the house-proud:** An Aussie-made porcelain vase from La Petite Fabrique de Brunswick in indigo and white. lapetitefabriquedebrunswick.com
- For the writerly:** A masterly-made travel pen from UK firm Minimalux. minimalux.com
- For the well-read:** Any of the library of new titles from Fitzcarraldo Editions. The translation of German author Rainald Goetz's debut novel *Insane* is anything but. fitzcarraldoeditions.com
- For the crafty:** Kashiwan oak bowls from Kihachi Kobo, the oldest lacquerware manufacturer in the Yamanaka prefecture. kihachi-web.com
- For the recipient with everything else:** The camp-but-cutesy lettuce-like serving bowls from A Vida Portuguesa in Lisbon. avidaportuguesa.com

WINTERSPORTS / DIZIN

By royal appointment

A fabled location in Iranian mythology, the Alborz Mountains also offered excellent sporting opportunities for the country's ski-mad former Shah, who created an Alpine-style resort within a shortish drive of Tehran.

WRITER *Joobin Bekhrad* ILLUSTRATOR *Jun Takahashi*



There's something about the Alborz Mountains. In ancient Iranian mythology, Mount Damavand – the highest peak in the Alborz range – is the centre of the universe. According to the country's national epic, poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), Damavand is also where the demon king Zahhak was buried alive by a blacksmith named Kaveh. Such legends were all fodder for the last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was always one to celebrate the splendour and mythology of his ancient homeland. But it was the slopes rather than the stories of yore that likely first tempted him from leafy Tehran towards the snowy heights of the Alborz Mountains.

While the current Aga Khan, Prince Karim, represented Iran as a skier in the 1964 Winter Olympics in Austria, it was the Shah who popularised skiing among Iranians, and who helped realise the potential of the Alborz Mountains. In addition to being a playboy, fashionista, and "God's Shadow on Earth", he also happened to be a consummate skier. The Shah first developed a taste for the sport as a young prince at boarding school in Switzerland. As such, it was only natural that he returned to Iran with visions of cotton-candy pistes and pretty little things in *minijupes* still fresh in his mind. Although his daunting father, Reza Pahlavi, made Ab Ali a skiing destination in the early 1930s, Iran's slopes remained by-and-large barren and untapped. And so, in between dumping wives who bore him nothing but daughters and living it up in the palaces of northern Tehran, he set about completing the task that Daddy-o had begun.

Then 1953 saw the installation of mechanical lifts at Ab Ali and five-years later the Shemshak resort was completed. The Shah's work was far from over, however; for whatever reason, Ab Ali and Shemshak just didn't cut it for the monarch, who still preferred to hit the slopes in his beloved Alps, which he deemed a far cry from the higher, as yet sparsely-developed Alborz Mountains. And so, he set about creating the largest and most lavish resort Iran had ever seen. At long last, he thought, would he do the holy mountain of mythology some justice.

Opened to the public in 1969, Dizin was quite a scene. Its slopes sat 3,600m above sea-level and could be enjoyed for a good chunk of the year: November to May. Free for the locals – who, not surprisingly, happened to be the most astute skiers around – a day pass would set you back around only 20 *tomans* (between \$2 and \$3). Tehran is surrounded by the Alborz Mountains, so it wasn't particularly difficult to reach this ski destination. Bon vivants would, in their Paykans, Chevrolets

The big freeze

Height of Dazin above sea level:
3,600m
Opening year of Dazin resort: 1969
Year in which mechanical ski lifts were first installed in the Alborz Mountains: 1953
Original cost of Dazin day pass:
20 TOMANS

or Buicks, drive to Karaj on the outskirts of the capital – a Winston or local Zar cigarette dangling from their lips before taking the Chalus highway in the winding mountains.

If you couldn't wait to snack on sausages, bologna sandwiches, and baked-beans up top, there were always roadside dives where you could chow down on grilled liver: savoury fare, although not quite fit for a king. In his private suite, His Mage would most likely be seen by lucky hangers-on sipping champagne and slurping the finest Iranian caviar from the nearby Caspian Sea

off his hallowed fingers.

Such extravagance was, in the words of the New York Dolls, "too much too soon". Less than a decade later in 1979, the Shah left Iran in exile after being ousted by the disenfranchised masses outside his gilded palaces, leaving his grand designs for Dizin – and Iran as a whole – unfinished. High hopes for skiing aside, it was all downhill from here for Iran.

About the writer: Joobin Bekhrad is the author of numerous books of prose and poetry on Iranian culture. His writings have appeared in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, *Forbes*, *The Independent*, and *The Guardian* among others. In 2015, he was granted an International Award for Art Criticism by London's Royal College of Art.

NEWS

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