

# COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

FEBRUARY 2013 £3

## WOLFGANG PUCK

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A STORM FOR  
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## SUMMER HOUSE

WHY IT'S  
TIME TO BUY  
ABROAD

## TRUE ROMANCE

Heliskiing at Whistler

# BLADE RUNNER

*For superior thrills and some of the best and most reliable snow in the world, head to Canada says Felix Milns*



hump', 'Whump', 'Whump' go the helicopter blades as our intrepid pilot Troy takes to the skies, kicking up his own mini snowstorm as we huddle down on the drop-off point on what

is to prove one of the finest runs of my life. The run is Paradise, the resort Revelstoke and we are in for a treat.

It has been snowing almost constantly over the last few days, giving us a daily top up of 20 to 30cm of fresh powder. As we stand on the ridge surrounded by frozen wind-sculpted 'snow ghost' trees, the sun peeps through the clouds and we see the glorious powder before us.

It is heli-skiing on Viagra, the perfect combination of epic snow and supreme terrain. Unlike many heli-ski operations which only operate on open, gentle terrain, Revelstoke has the perfect combination of high altitude intermediate-friendly descents and some of the best tree skiing in the mountains.

Deep in the wilds of British Columbia, snow hole Revelstoke is an old railroad town with very pleasant echoes of Jackson Hole. It was, until five years ago, purely a heli-ski destination, then Revelstoke Mountain resort was born. And what a mountain it is. It tops out at 2,447m, offering 1,713m of lift-accessed vertical, garnering Revelstoke the acclaimed title of the highest lift-accessed vertical in North America.

It is a true fall-line mountain, everywhere you look is a freeride paradise, with snow-encrusted pines stretching up to the very summit. Bumps, bowls, rollers, risers and drop-offs, this mountain has it all. It reminds



**THIS PICTURE** The helipad at Big Horn  
**BELOW** Felix hits the slopes

me of a mix of Alagna, Andermatt and Alta (a triple-A combination).

The resort blueprint is for 21 lifts and 115 runs. Even now however, with the gondola and a couple of chairs, it has 27 marked trails, endless inbounds 'off-piste' and enough lift-accessed skiing for at least a fortnight. And then there's the heli-skiing. Revelstoke is one of very few resorts where you can heli-ski and cat-ski direct from the resort centre.

Whereas most heli-ski lodges are very remote, if you get a no-fly day in Revelstoke you simply jump on the gondola. It was an opportunity too good to miss for pioneering British investors Michael and Chris Kirkland, who bought a plot with the USP of its very

own helipad. Michael tells me 'our aim was to build the best heli-lodge in the world', and they may just have done it. Built to an Alpine aesthetic on a gargantuan North American scale, Big Horn more than lives up to its moniker. Eight bedrooms all come with hole-in-the-wall fires, iPads and superking beds, but with the added finesse of antique writing desks, bespoke stationery and hornrimmed magnifying glasses.

There's an indoor pool, outdoor hot tub, games room with bar, pool table and glitter ball, home cinema, gym, dramatic blood-red dining room, chef's table tepanyaki grill, plus a wonderful living area with soaring double height ceilings and a wall of glass overlooking the valley. And did I mention the private helipad?

The Chalet is run by husband-and-wife team Pete and Leesa Hughes, Brits who cut their teeth running Descent chalets in the Alps but have now settled permanently in Revelstoke. It's that kind of place, once bitten, forever smitten.

Revelstoke is still a young resort and is very much a skiers' mountain, so if you are serious about your snow put it right at the top of your list. One option is to combine it with Kicking Horse, another pioneering BC outpost a couple of hours drive along the 'Powder Highway' that began life as heliski terrain.

The broad mountain flank is defined by three enormous ridges, Redemption, CPR and Terminator; big names for big ridges. You can track along and ski myriad steep lines down either side of them, and you can choose between tight couloirs to well-spaced glades. Take your pick between runs like truth, dare or consequence. You will not be disappointed, it is another grade A ski hill.

The resort is a few years further on in its development, so the base station area is more developed



THIS PICTURE AND LEFT  
If you feel like staying slightly  
outside Kicking Horse resort,  
head for Nita Lodge

and there is a good selection of well-priced lodges and condos. There's also one of North America's finest mountain restaurants in the shape of the aptly named Eagle eye restaurant, the highest in Canada. It serves up a mean mountain lunch, think wild sockeye salmon, elk tenderloin and prosciutto-wrapped scallops.

Both of the Powder Highway resorts owe a huge debt to Whistler, the big daddy of Canadian ski and the model upon which the new kids on the block are based. Yet it is a couple of generations ahead in terms of its resort development. The Intrawest purpose-built 'Disney' style may not be to everybody's taste, but it is a lot better looking than many 1970s French resorts. One option is actually to stay slightly outside the resort in somewhere like the Nita Lake lodge, a beautiful timber-framed hotel looking out over its own frozen lake.

The lift-accessed skiing across the Whistler and Blackcomb mountains is larger with more developed lift infrastructure than the Powder Highway resorts, but Whistler is also an ideal way to dip your toe in the hallowed waters of Canadian heli-skiing. You can book a day trip with Whistler Heli Skiing, who will bus you out from the 'powder hut', right in the centre of town to the south coastal mountains which, according to our guide Kirk Becker, 'run all the way up to Alaska, not quite forever but it may as well be'.

We flew up to a high shoulder on Ipsoot Mountain (meaning 'Hidden Mountain'), a majestic powder peak with over 30 different routes down. The snow was as light and fresh as we had hoped for, and, as we bounced through turn after heavenly turn, it struck me that the big hitters of Canadian skiing's past, present and future all held the same ace card; some of the best and most reliable snow in the world.

## THE DETAILS

Bighorn Lodge (020 3432 0726; bighornrevelstoke.com) offers 7 nights chalet board from CAD\$4,030pp (approx £2,540), based on full occupancy, exclusive hire only. Not including flights or transfers. For heliski enquiries contact James Orr Heliski (01799 516964; heliski.co.uk).

Ski Safari (01273 224 060; skisafari.com) offers 7 nights B&B at 4\* Copper Horse Lodge in Kicking Horse from £1,259 pp. Including flights and 7 days SUV hire.

Bailey Robinson (01488 689700; baileyrobinson.com) offers seven nights B&B at Nita Lake Lodge including BA flights and transfers from £1,585pp.

Whistler Heli (+1 888 435 4754, whistlerheliskiing.com) offer three-run day packages for C\$850pp.

For more information visit [britishcolumbia.travel/ski](http://britishcolumbia.travel/ski)



Big Horn offers the latest mod cons combined with elegant touches