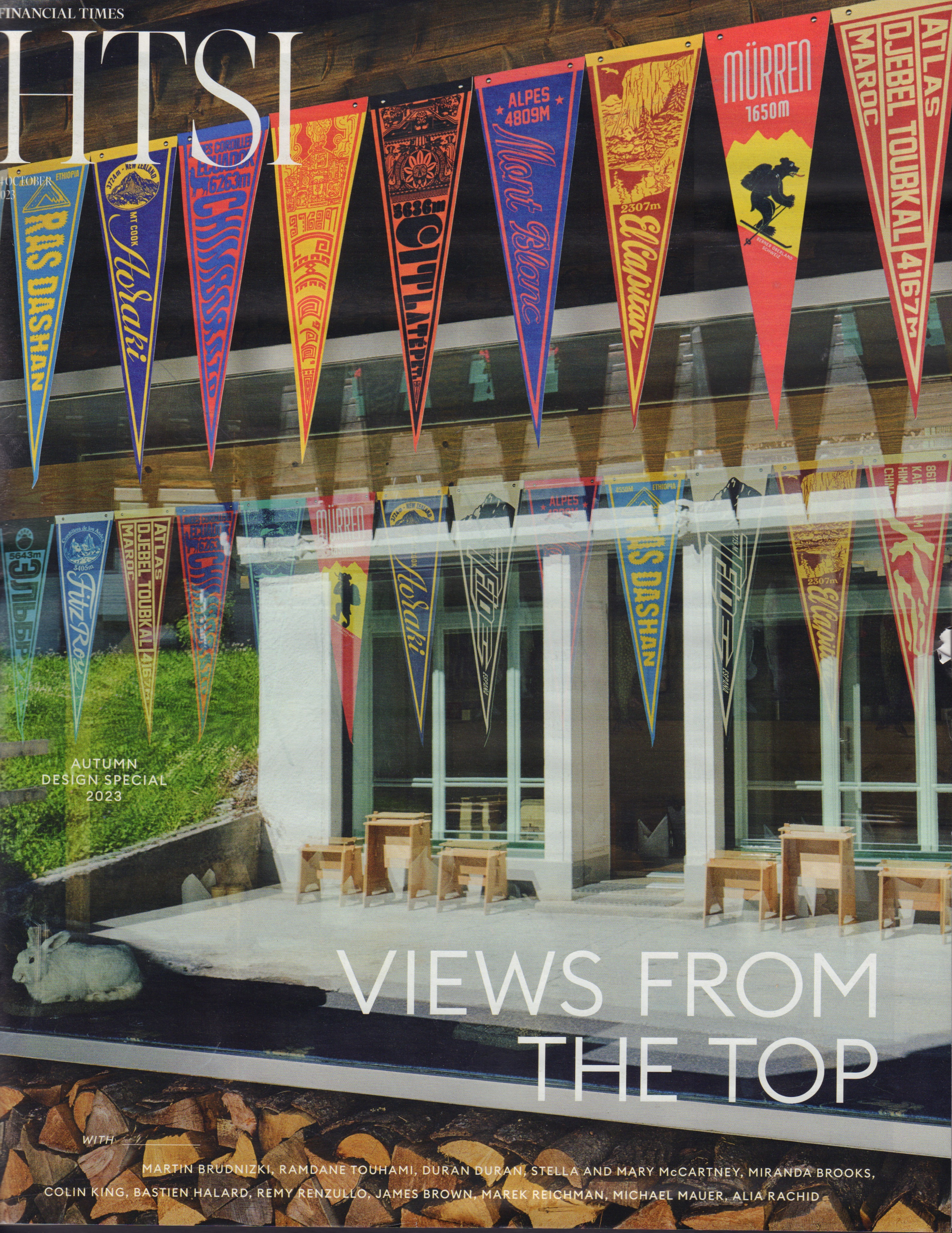


HITS

OCTOBER
2023



AUTUMN
DESIGN SPECIAL
2023

VIEWS FROM THE TOP

WITH

MARTIN BRUDNIZKI, RAMDANE TOUHAMI, DURAN DURAN, STELLA AND MARY McCARTNEY, MIRANDA BROOKS,
COLIN KING, BASTIEN HALARD, REMY RENZULLO, JAMES BROWN, MAREK REICHMAN, MICHAEL MAUER, ALIA RACHID

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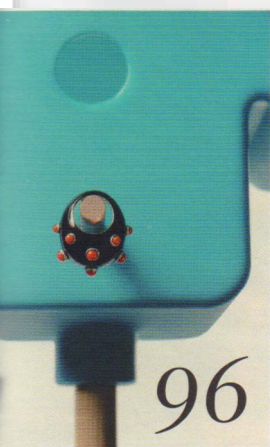
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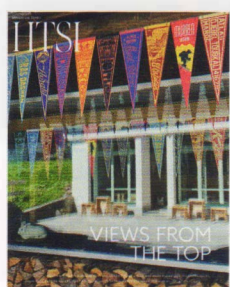
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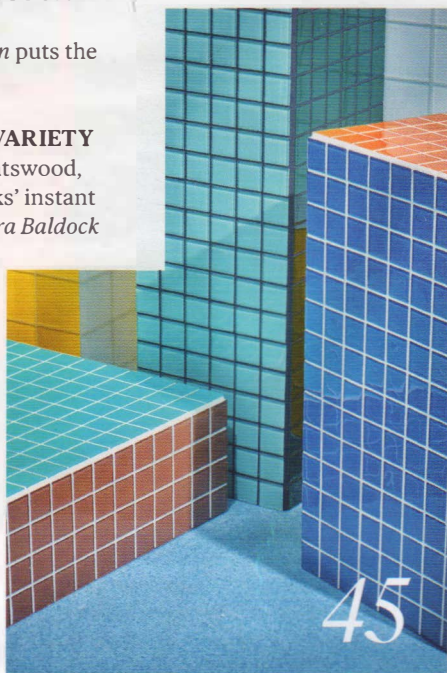


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ON THE COVER:
Photography by
BEAT SCHWEIZER

Custom-designed mountain flags of the world's most prestigious summits at Drei Berge Hotel in the Swiss Alps



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MÜRREN TESSIN

RESTAURANT
KAFFEE



BERGE HOTEL
SEIT 1907

KAFFEE
SCHOKOLADE
PFANNKUCHEN

KAFFEE
KOLADE
KUCHEN

SELF
SERVICE
OPEN
Laundromat
Wash-Salon

Left: Ramdane Touhami's
Drei Berge Hotel. Right:
Touhami in the hotel lobby;
a carpet designed by
his art-direction agency
ARI and inspired by David
Lynch's *Twin Peaks* hangs
on the wall

Branding guru, beauty
entrepreneur, fashion
businessman and print
obsessive, Ramdane
Touhami is making a first
foray into hospitality with
a mountain-top hotel in
Mürren. By *Jackie Daly*

PEAK PERFORMANCE

Photography by *Beat Schweizer*





Top: the hotel's façade. Above: the view from one of the rooms; the lamp is 1930s Italian. Opposite page: the lobby, with a Martin Visser sofa and (bottom left) 1970s magazine rack by Giotto Stoppino for Kartell

Murren is a slice of heaven that you want to gate-keep: a bucolic scene of chocolate-box chalets framed by Swiss mountains where one stands in the shoes of JRR Tolkien, who took scenic inspiration from this landscape in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The only transport to this cliffside village in the clouds, other than on foot, is via a meandering electric train or aboard a cable car: a heart-in-mouth ascent that begins at the waterfall-fringed village of Lauterbrunnen at the foot of the Bernese Alps and ends at the summit of Schilthorn, home to Piz Gloria, the revolving restaurant – and fabled movie lair of Bond nemesis Blofeld.

My ad interim home is the Drei Berge Hotel, a 19-key lodge owned by French-Moroccan polymath designer and entrepreneur Ramdane Touhami. He purchased the 1907 property, formerly the Bellevue, in 2022 and has since transformed it into his own curated world. His motivation for becoming a hotelier is as creative as commercial. "It's the only place I can express myself from A to Z, to do things totally my way," he says with Gallic swagger. "Basically, welcome to my home!"

Touhami's hand is in every detail, from the design of the plates and glassware at the dinner table to the

furniture (some pieces envisaged by his Paris-based art direction agency ARI, others vintage). The menus, guest literature, even the takeaway coffee cup-holders depicting a skiing bear were designed in Paris using his own special fonts (he's a font fanatic) and hand-printed by his printing operation, which includes his Swiss factory, the Société Helvétique d'Impression Typographique (or "SHIT"). Colourful ski-themed vintage posters, all from his own collection, are another not-so-guilty indulgence. The wholesome images clash with the on-off DJ's gigantic JBL sound system, which has found a home in the hotel foyer.

It's a world away from Officine Universelle Buly 1803, the cult grooming brand Touhami and his wife and business partner, Victoire de Taillac-Touhami, revived from a "lost Parisian perfumer" in 2014 and transformed into a global business before selling it to LVMH in 2021. There are parallels, however, in how they've honoured the charms of the old in new and inventive ways. "That's what we do," Touhami explains, referencing his team. "We are in the business of innovation."

This all plays out at Drei Berge Hotel: its façade, now forest green, has been "Touhamified" by way of quirky red-and-white striped shutters, while inside, traditional pine is juxtaposed with zig-zagging carpets that trace the pattern of the mountain peaks in funky colourways. A Japanese sunburst is painted on one door in eye-popping colours, and red-and-white chevrons reminiscent of road warning signs highlight door frames.

"THIS IS THE ONLY PLACE
I CAN DO THINGS
TOTALLY MY WAY"





The 49-year-old serial entrepreneur has long been a risk-taker – both creatively and in business. At 18, he dropped out of boarding school to set up a T-shirt company, which became the streetwear line Teuchy. Despite spending 10 months on the streets of Paris, he created the skate brand King Size and the clothing label Résistance during the '90s. His fashion acumen led him to head menswear at the London store Liberty in 2003. Four years later, his respect for 19th-century Empire style informed his resuscitation of France's oldest candlemaker, Cire Trudon.

ARI was born in 2013 and Buly the year after – he ran the two concurrently, while working as a consultant via his agency for luxury houses such as silversmith Christofle. Christofle's CEO Émilie Metge Viargues named Touhami as the master of reinvention at last year's launch of the brand's Touhami-led "new look": "I thought about who is the guy, the one who can understand how to make an old brand cool again... I sent him a DM on Instagram... he is very much a star in France."

Given Touhami's voracious ambitions, it's no surprise to discover he's already planning more hotels – five worldwide in the next five years – and that's just in the hospitality sector. "I am launching 15 new businesses in the next two, *voilà!*" he says between business calls. He's a cool character – dressed on the day we meet in a white T-shirt and combats, with beads strung around his neck – but hanging out with him is akin to orbiting a tornado. I finally find his pause button when mentioning his newly acquired antique printer, operated in Paris by the skilled Benoist Dallay: it stops him in his tracks. What does he use it for? "It uses a very old 18th-century technique with weights that was about to disappear," he explains, rapturously. "I bought it because it had 16,000 monograms." Among his other obsessions is saving print techniques, fonts and machinery and other pre-industrial craft skills.

**"I'M LAUNCHING
15 BUSINESSES IN
THE NEXT TWO
YEARS – VOILÀ!"**



Top left: the breakfast room, with its custom-designed carpet by ARI and 1960s Hans Kögl wall lamp. Above: the hotel has two restaurants overseen by chef Ryutaro Kobayashi. Above right: Touhami with his Old English sheepdog, Tonton



His printing operation feeds other businesses, including the publishing studio he established two years ago with WAM magazine, and has since expanded to incorporate another title, *Epoch*, and the bestselling book *Comment sortir du monde* by Marouane Bakhti, which is printed on pink paper. "We now plan to do four or five books a year," he says. "I won't say it's a business yet, but it's working."

Useless Fighters, a consumer magazine about the mountains, which Touhami is producing with his friend Léonard Vernhet, launches in 2024. The two met on the skateboard scene 25 years ago, before Vernhet co-founded Parisian provocateurs Ill-Studio – a creative force known for fashion collaborations as well as producing publications. Vernhet says their magazine "is for people who are into the sport" but their approach "is high-end fashion".

Useless Fighters will be stacked on the shelves of Touhami's Parisian bookshop La Pharmacie des Âmes, which opened in January on Rue Vaneau in the city's seventh arrondissement. Described by *Le Monde* as a "leftwing bookshop in a rightwing neighbourhood", the books, by authors involved in social struggles, are displayed within a wood-panelled space that radiates a certain breed of bourgeois elegance. "I've collected thousands of mountain magazines, from the radical movement of the '60s, '70s and '80s, which will be sold there too," Touhami says. "And we're launching a channel like Netflix with [former music-label owner] Émile Shahidi where people pay a monthly fee to access images

from mountain sports.” Vernhet nods. “There’s also going to be a gallery in Paris,” he says. “We’re offering custom mud baths for creatives...”

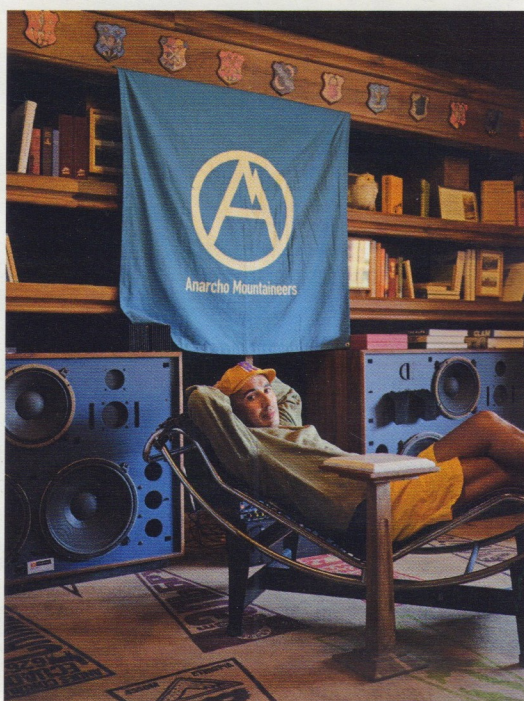
Vernhet is not the only talent who has teamed up with Touhami. He’s gathered several stars at his new independent podcast studio, Pseudo Radio. Presenters include the French TV-radio host Pascale Clark, the fierce food critic François Simon, and Rokhaya Diallo, the French journalist, author and filmmaker who is a prominent anti-racism activist.

He likes to occupy new spaces and, at the Drei Berge, Touhami believes he has found a middle ground between “bullshit hip” and luxury hospitality offerings. The rooms have a cool, quirky aesthetic, where beaten-up vintage camping chairs reside beside sleek midcentury classics. Monogrammed towels await in the bathrooms, and the beds were handpicked for comfort – the bedlinen, containing a mix of cotton and wood, is so soft that Touhami bought part of the company that makes them. “It’s not very expensive at around £300 a night but has great service like The Ritz,” he says, smiling. “I want to do something more human, with the feel of home. We’re even making our own toiletries – and they’re not Buly!”

But why Switzerland? “I grew up in the countryside in Bressols, France, with maybe 20 houses, but we experienced racism and we kept to ourselves,” he says of his early life with his Moroccan parents. “Then another family moved there from Switzerland, and my mother made friends with them. So I had this fantasy – I looked at the pictures, read the history, and decided I would go there as soon as I had the time and money.”

He fell for Mürren because it is overlooked by “three of the four holy mountains” – he finds time for hiking alongside his work schedule rather than “holidaying”, which he “hates”. But the move is also a canny business decision: he has settled in the region at a time when the cable-car company is investing in a new fast-track line, which will bring more tourists to the slopes.

Those who want to relax after skiing and hiking will find a sauna among the hotel’s amenities or amusement by spotting the many tongue-in-cheek design twists at every turn: from a giant knife and fork hung on a door to fabric freshwater fish dangling from hooks on the wall of one of the hotel’s two restaurants, which serves river and lake fish. Ryutaro Kobayashi, Touhami’s personal chef for many years, now oversees the culinary arm of his operation. The menu at the Drei Berge fuses Asian with Swiss and Italian influences, but the chef laughs when I ask him about the brief: “We did many tests back in Paris, the menu changed many times,” he says, hinting at



Touhami’s perfectionist nature. He’s also determined: they have taken over a store opposite the hotel, which will become a pâtisserie-bakery by winter. Back in Paris, Touhami has signed on two properties destined to open as restaurants in November 2024 – one, a French *izakaya*, will be led by Kobayashi – and he is already scoping out properties in Japan and further afield.

When I suggest his ventures are passion projects, Touhami is dismissive. “Non,” he says swiftly. “I don’t think like that. For me it is about curiosity. With Buly, I had to do nine years in this box of being focused – 51 stores later, I am done. Now my team and I can do crazy, stupid things. I don’t care if not all of them make money. I am willing to burn millions because two of the businesses will make billions. I know this.”

Alongside the Alpine hotel, he is also developing a line of outdoor clothing. He presents some prototypes of what he plans to be a 700-piece range (including jewellery) that is handmade and totally plastic free. “The brand is called Drei Berge, like the hotel. It’s my big obsession because microplastics are everywhere: in the water, even on top of the glaciers. I’m very pissed off about that,” he says. “We found natural sports fabrics from the ’30s, much like what George Mallory wore to climb the Himalayas.

They weren’t fools, it was amazing technology. We are playing it as a super-hardcore movement – anti-plastic. The problem is it’s expensive and only a few will be able to afford it, but if we can lead the way, I’m happy.”

As with his printing projects, his packaging or his hotel rooms, Touhami’s genius is in the detail. The clothing line was another opportunity

to “show off”. “I’ve created my own cotton cashmere material for the sweatshirt. I tracked down the only guy who could do it, it took three years. My mountain shoes are handmade in Veneto, all leather with a rubber sole. Even the frames for the glasses are animal horn,” he says. “We are addicted to plastic because it’s convenient. I don’t want a world that is convenient. I want one that is very complex. Convenient is for Americans. For other people. It’s a word I hate.”

Back at the Drei Berge Hotel, Touhami’s creative playground, the entrepreneur is acknowledged as a “man of details”. “He takes everything to another level, which is amazing,” says the hotel’s manager, Yasmina Abdelilah. She adds with a grin: “Ramdane loves to try new things, so I don’t think we are done yet.” ■ HTSI

“NOW WE CAN DO CRAZY THINGS... I AM WILLING TO BURN MILLIONS”

Top right: the reception area. Above: Touhami in the lobby on a lounge chair by Charlotte Perriand and flanked by vintage JBL speakers. Left: a guest room, with the wooden bedframe by ARI and a lamp by Bruno Gecchelim

