

VOGUE

ARABIA

OCTOBER 2024

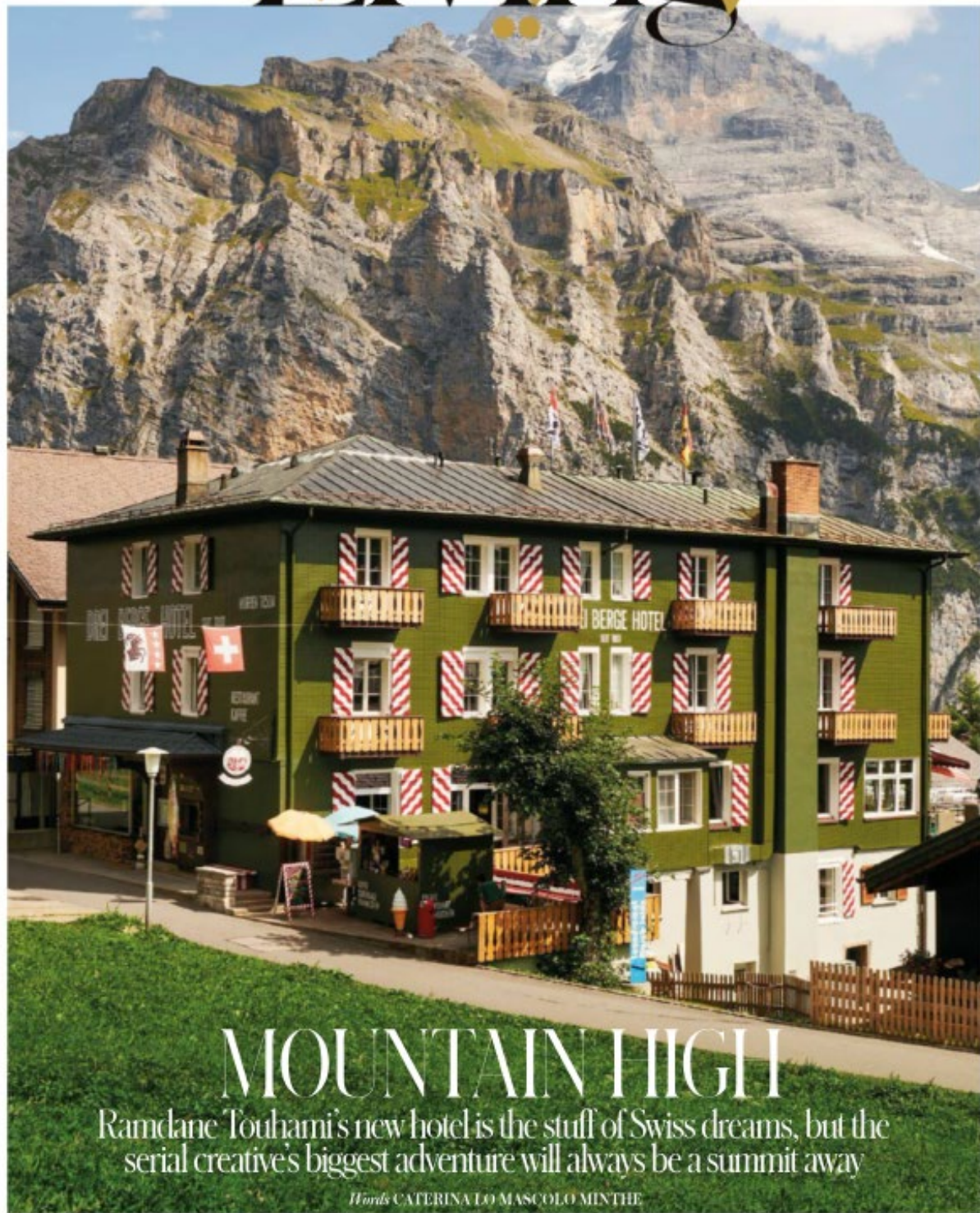


It's a GIRL!

"BECOMING
A MOTHER
IS MY MOST
IMPORTANT
ROLE YET"
SALMA ABU DEIF



Living



MOUNTAIN HIGH

Ramdane Touhami's new hotel is the stuff of Swiss dreams, but the serial creative's biggest adventure will always be a summit away

Words CATERINA LO MASCOLO *Mint* THE

Riadane Touhami



Riadane Touhami, the Moroccan-French creative entrepreneur, is sitting comfortably in his 5 000sqm home-slash-office in Paris. Around him are rows of books, many of them about alpinism and anarchism; there are catalogues, vintage magazines, objects of desire, Japanese movie and mountain posters, and a sign that reads "Disobedience is the True Foundation of Liberty." He won't be here for long, however. Tonight, Touhami is flying to Bangkok... for the weekend. As it turns out, far-flung, two-day trips are his thing. "I'm done with Europe. I know it from A to Z. All the countries and all the cities. I just did my hotel," he says, in reference to the Drei Berge Hotel in Switzerland, "and I'm buying a farm in the South of Italy but after that is finished, I'm done." The upcoming Italian venture in question is a 50-hectare property, a portion of which he rents out to a different friend each year for one euro. "They have to work on the farm for two weeks a year. This is the idea," he explains. "My father is a farmer. This is my background. I'm happy to have a farm. It's just a funny project."

Yet, for all his Mediterranean blood having grown up in the South of France, his real passion lies somewhere between the earth and the sky.



"I went to Mürren, population 452, and I was speechless. Before I even reached the hotel, I knew I was going to buy it"



The perpetual climber formally committed to his landscape of choice with the purchase of the Drei Berge in 2023. He first discovered the surrounding town of Mürren from the book *The History of a Mountain* by geographer Elisée Reclus. "He's also a bit of an anarchist like me," quips the creative. "I knew I wanted to buy a hotel – a place where I can go and work a bit. I went to Mürren, population 452, and I was speechless. You're in front of the oldest mountains – the Jungfrau, the Mönch, the Eiger, and at the end of the valley, the Breithorn, one of the most beautiful mountains." These are the highest peaks in Switzerland and the valley's water is reportedly the purest in the world. "Before I even reached the hotel, I knew I was going to buy it," says Touhami. "I didn't care about the price, the size, whatever. I bought it straight away."

He set out to renovate the building – which dates back to 1907 – by creating a graphic redesign in bright colors. There is an abundance of Swiss woodwork and vintage furniture that gives guests the impression of being in a cinematic bubble. Touhami imagined the 19 rooms and suites with exacting detail, from the monogrammed linen sheets to the bathroom amenities infused with Drei Berge's bespoke scent. The restaurant offers traditional mountain cuisine revisited by Japanese chef Ryotaro Kobayashi. Swiss food is infused with Italian and Asian

culinary contributions to propose a balanced, seasonal menu. The hotel's concierge service offers sports like skiing and hiking trails, tennis, and yoga, and leisure activities like paragliding, outdoor camping, sauna, and cinema nights. A Land Rover Defender is on hand for regional tours to explore the forest roads and lakes.

The cliffside village, located at 1 650 meters in the Bernese Oberland Alps, and which purportedly inspired panoramas featured in *Lord of the Rings*, is several hours from Paris and can be reached by train and cableway. "I'm very happy; there are no cars in my village, no pollution," Touhami says. He adds that today, it's snowing in Mürren. It's mid-September and this phenomenon has only occurred twice in the past 50 years. Touhami is visibly curious about everything and one can practically see his serotonin peak when he is caught by surprise. It's this insatiable appetite for discovery that keeps him diving into projects: a print factory, a podcast, books, magazines, silk-screen and design studios, the oldest printing factory in Europe, a mountain clothing range, videos, bespoke jewelry and furniture, and a Parisian café. "I have to really sit to tell you all the stuff we are doing," he says. "I have no idea."

The multihyphenate explains that he is a doer, first and foremost. "I think after. And many times I regret it – but I don't care," he adds, paradoxically. "I still do it. We see where it takes us. Sometimes I

OPPOSITE AND ABOVE Swiss woodwork and vintage furniture give guests at the Drei Berge Hotel the impression of being in a cinematic bubble. The building – which dates back to 1907 – benefited from a graphic redesign in bright colors. **RIGHT** The restaurant offers traditional mountain cuisine revisited by Japanese chef Ryotaro Kobayashi. Local food is infused with Italian and Asian culinary contributions





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE
Touhami imagined the 19 rooms and suites at Drei Berge with exacting detail, from the manogrammed linen sheets to a bespoke scent

stop the company, sometimes I crush it, sometimes I keep it. Sometimes people are scared about failing and everything. I'm not. It's part of the thing. I've failed many times and I've succeeded many times. I like the balance of it and I learn a lot from both."

Touhami remains insatiable before his self-made buffet of creativity. So what drives him? Boredom? Curiosity? An extraordinarily short attention span? "There's a political thing," he states. "First, to be able to show that people like me can make it. Also, there's this fight about taste. I want to show that people like me can have a particular taste. Europe, especially, decided the taste of the planet. Telling the world: 'We are the ones who have the taste, you guys follow.' Creativity — like love — it's a bourgeois concept. I want to show that people like me, of Arab origin growing up in France, from a poor family, can have a different way to say it and do things."

The serial entrepreneur may have some 20 people working for him, but he is a one-man show. "It's a real dictatorship. I decide everything," he says with a grin. "If some people want to bring their idea, they

"Europe, especially, decided the taste of the planet. Creativity, it's a bourgeois concept. I want to show that people like me, of Arab origin growing up in France, from a poor family, can have a different way to do things"

are more than welcome to, but I barely listen to them. I'm not interested. It's horrible to say, but I'm interested only in doing my ideas, not other people's. If they want to create an idea and it's good, I say, 'Guys — start your own thing, I will help you.'" Touhami recalls a collaboration where he "gave the keys to someone" and was left behind. "I have a big paranoia for that, so I prefer to do my own thing. It's my life. I want to own my ideas and produce them. People may tell me, 'You're going to make mistakes,' but please, I want mistakes because I learn from them, and I assume them 100%. It's fantastic."

Touhami's past creative endeavors span streetwear, a concept store, and beauty. He garnered international attention for successfully relaunching the ancient French candle house Trudon and, in particular, for revamping the centuries-old beauty brand Officine Universelle Buly alongside his wife, Victoire de Taillac. The company was sold to LVMH in 2021, and he admits that he didn't enjoy working with his significant other. "We did it and I didn't like it. Actually, the reason I sold Buly was that. I didn't want to work with her anymore," he says of De Taillac, who is currently the director of image and communication at Buly. "It contaminates the whole thing — the whole family thing. Afterwards, we only talked about that. I have advice to give anyone: Don't work with your wife."

The two, who are very much together, share three young adult children. Touhami says his daughter just called from Tokyo, asking him to help her purchase a Comme des Garçons jacket. "It's a very funny thing," he muses. "There was not a single moment in my life where I thought one day, I will send money to my daughter for shopping in Tokyo when she stays in my apartment. I mean, never in my mind." He goes on to describe the blessing of having a close-knit family and feeling like "this crazy dad who took them to live all over the world." Life, he says, is a journey — for him and for his children. "I dream to be my kid, actually. What was my dream when I was young? It's to live like them." □

