

The tiny chalet's outer structure, **below**, dating back two centuries, has been carefully preserved. The first floor of the new interior, **right**, contains living and kitchen areas, **this picture**, with an Ikea trestle table and 'Superleggera' chairs by Gio Ponti for Cassina. 'Eames Elephant' by Charles & Ray Eames for Vitra. Details, last pages.



OF STONE & WOOD

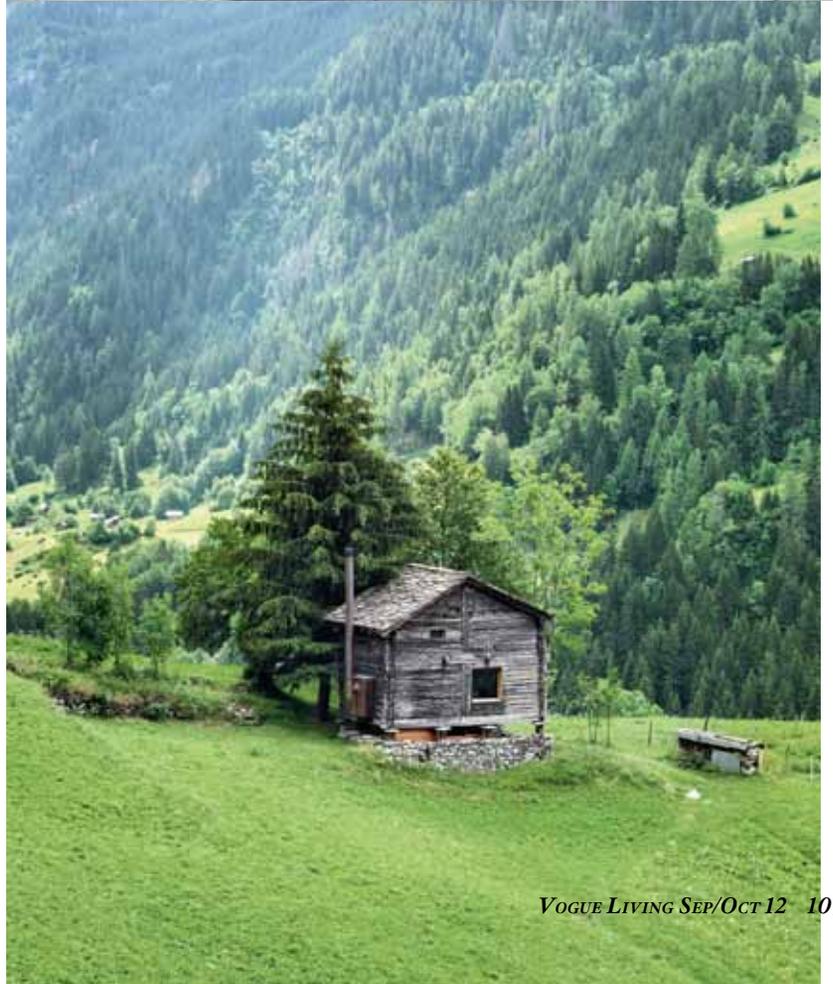
A Swiss chalet's historical shell from its former life as a granary belies the warm honey tones of its modern timber interior.

UP HERE IN the mountains, a legendary Swiss chalet is tucked away in the Val de Bagnes, not far from the exclusive resort of Verbier in Switzerland. This restored raccard, or granary, dating back to the 19th century, is an expression of the contemporary dressed as the historical, created by architect couple Vincent Rapin and Maria Saiz.

Left derelict for 50 years, the chalet had originally been built using wooden planks; interleaved beams held together without a single screw. Apparently more than 200 years old, the raccard may well be older still: the original timber boards appear to have been dismantled elsewhere and reassembled.

Its considered renovation is thanks to the passion of Rapin and Saiz. Like a hermit crab, their project "snuck inside an abandoned shell. Its outer skin is scorched by the sun in contrast with the smooth, soft surfaces of its larch [timber] interior." The architects preserved the outer features: the dry stone wall which forms the bedrock; wooden stilts topped with slate to prevent mice from climbing in (dating from when the structure was used as a barn); and interleaved beams.

Inside, the architects have constructed a timber box with a modern and functional interior. Larch is the main feature throughout – a locally sourced honey-coloured timber that ages particularly well. >





< The idea of regeneration instantly appealed to its owner, an old farmer who agreed to sell. The place was virtually in ruins and the designers took four years to draw up detailed plans of the new interior.

The home has a total surface area of 55 square metres (15 on the ground floor, and 20 on each of the two storeys) and the width is a mere 3.3 metres. These confined dimensions necessitated a layout inspired by naval architecture. “Space constraints such as these become very interesting,” says Rapin. “Each room is a concentration of architectural techniques and tricks aimed at gaining space.” Doors slide inside partition walls instead of opening into a room; partitions between rooms are as slight as possible; a chimney doubles as a stove at night; a stairway closes up by means of a sliding trapdoor to gain a few extra square centimetres; and a corridor separating two rooms serves as a playroom for the children, four-year-old twins.

This raccard may be small, but its detailed and meticulous layout – minimalist yet cosy – strikes a chord with the bourgeois-bohemian hermit that lurks within us all. FLORENCE SCHMIDT

Above: the granary’s original thick interlocked beams are held together without a single screw. A space-saving wall between the staircase and a bedroom, **above left**, contains a wardrobe on wheels that runs its entire length. **Below left:** a concrete tub inspired by deep Japanese baths. **Below:** furniture has been chosen for size: a Bovirke armchair by Danish designer Finn Juhl and ‘Table Box’ coffee table by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for Vitra.



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