

Cigar Snob

JULY / AUGUST 2019

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ALPINE ESCAPE

A night photograph of a snowy mountain slope. In the foreground, a light display spells out 'Mountain on five' in orange lights. The background is a dark sky filled with blue and white bokeh lights, and a large red firework bursts in the upper right corner.

BY ERIK CALVIÑO

exit room 212 at 9 AM on day 1 to make my way down for breakfast. I close the door and turn in the direction of the stairs when the aroma of premium cigar smoke jars me and makes me pause the way you do when you feel as if something is off but you can't put your finger on it. Just then a gentleman casually turns a corner and comes into view leaving a trail of cigar smoke in his wake. "Guten morgen!" he says as he walks by. I manage to stammer out a "good morning" in return.

The previous evening's pre-event kickoff party had us smoking carefree at the dinner table in Panorama, the hotel's main restaurant. We followed dinner with an epic, once in a lifetime wine flight accompanied with cigars well into the night at the hotel's enclosed rooftop, Skybar. But too much wine, not enough sleep, and an acute lack of morning coffee apparently reset my conditioned response to indoor smoking. I glanced back at the gentleman once more, probably to make sure one last time that he was really smoking in the hotel's hallway. Finally I shook off the cobwebs, pulled a Rocky Patel Vintage 2003 Cameroon from my jacket pocket, and embarked on the life-changing experience that was Mountain on Fire 2019.

The event, which is built around 3 days of world-class gastronomy, wine, spirits, and Rocky Patel Premium Cigars, is essentially a takeover of the family-run, four-star Superior Hotel Schöne Aussicht (schoeneaussicht.at) set in the breathtakingly beautiful Ötztal Alps of Western Austria. For the duration of the event, the hotel is closed to the general public; the only guests are those taking part in Mountain on Fire (mountainonfire.com). So with the exception of your guestroom and the wine cellar, all areas of the hotel are cigar friendly.

In addition to the food, drink, and cigars, guests have the opportunity to test drive the latest Mercedes-Benz AMG models up and down the exhilarating, mountainous roads. I never found myself without a glass of wine or champagne long enough to drive but I won't make that mistake next time.

The event's itinerary builds up to a fireworks display on day 3 where they quite literally set the mountain on fire with the event's logo. The fireworks and synchronized flamethrowers dance and explode to the music while you stand in awe of the spectacle before you. And for the last hurrah, the party shifts to the pool and spa area where we ended the night in the heated infinity pool with snow coming down from above, a glass of Möt champagne in one hand, a Rocky Patel Decade in the other, and a DJ's music being accompanied by the sweet sounds of Beatrix Löw-Beer's violin. It was a surreal and fitting conclusion to an incredible three days at Mountain on Fire 2019.



Winemaker Albert Gesellmann with his 6 liter Mathusalem bottle of "G"



Thomas Korb and hotel owner Erwin Fender-Haselberger



Rocky Patel, Rich Castiano, Erik Calviño, and Albert Gesellmann



Isolde Hilpert-Hoffmann, Jörg Schöbel, Beatrix Schöbel, Rocky Patel, Helmut Hoffmann



Marcus Weibull, Martin Brix Nelson, Marie-Louise Nelson, Mats Andersson, Alexander Nettleingham, Patrick Ahlin



Whisky specialist Andreas Trattner

DAY 1

After breakfast, the day started with a “meet & smoke” with the help of Gosset champagne and Rocky Patel cigars. We entered the day as mostly strangers but after multiple meals together, the Gosset champagne, a wine tasting in the hotel’s beautiful cellar, and a single-malt Scotch tour de force by whisky expert Andy Trattner we ended the day as life-long friends. The men who organize Mountain on Fire – Erwin Fender, Kolja Kukuk, and Jörn Brattke – did an amazing job of ensuring that there is flexibility, variety, and a high level of excellence in all of the activities they’d planned. But without a staff to ensure that every detail of the experience was executed to perfection, it would mean nothing. The staff’s mentality was precise but laid back: “If you want to attend the wine tasting that is starting now, go downstairs to the wine cellar, but if you want to skip it and relax, don’t sweat it.”



Harald Braunstein of Weingut Erich Scheiblhof



Rainer & Angela Büchsenstein



Thomas & Bettina Egger



Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. h. c. Günther Bonn & Gökhan Senli, Philipp Kugler



Nakamura Nobuhiro

DAY 2

After an espresso to get the engines revving, we took a quick shuttle up to Gampe Thaya (gampethaya.riml.com) for a cozy Alpine breakfast. The food was an example of a well-executed, Alpine breakfast using all-natural products grown on the family's farm. It was the kind of food I could have every day of my life with no complaints. Soon after breakfast, Rocky got the party started with a seemingly endless supply of The Patriot wine from Tesch Winery. Dinner was no less outrageous as it was kicked off with the opening of a Nebuchadnezzar (15-liter bottle) of Taittinger champagne.



Christopher Thornhill and Peter Weinhofer of Weingut Esterhazy



Klaus Fetzner, Marita Dürringer of Weingut Capannelle



Vlasta and Fabio Canonica



Rocky Patel and Dino Canonica



Kolja Kukuk Managing Director Europe Rocky Patel Premium Cigars, Filip Markowski, Todor Markowski



Mountain on Fire organizers Kolja Kukuk, Jörn Brattke & Erwin Fender-Haselberger



Beatrix Löw-Beer

DAY 3

Day 3: Nothing could have prepared me for day 3. As we made our way up the mountain via gondola to ice Q, the famed restaurant at 10,000 feet above sea level, it was difficult not to have a little extra pep. We had just been handed a glass of champagne for the ride up to the spot where they filmed the pivotal and most iconic snow scenes in 007 Spectre. In fact, they have built a 007 museum next to ice Q, which was one of the Mountain on Fire activities that I passed on, and will most certainly not miss next time. The view from the rooftop terrace at ice Q was unlike any I've ever seen. At 10,000 feet or just above 3,000 meters, the valley before you is known as the "valley of the three-thousands" because you are surrounded by 250 peaks above 3,000 meters. It was mesmerizing; I simply could not turn away from it. Then came the food, the wine, and the release of a European exclusive Rocky Patel. The meal was capped by a presentation from sweet wine rock star Gerhard Kracher. The procession of impossibly rare and outrageous dessert wines from Kracher have taken up permanent residence in my dreams.



Gerhard Kracher, owner of Weingut Kracher



Eva Graf, The Honorable Arthur Seudieu, Wolfgang Graf



Alexander Nettleingham, Niels Mache, Patrick Ahlin, Marcel Ellinghaus

