

Hotelierefamilie Stettler

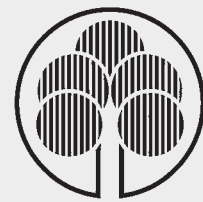
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PARKHOTEL
SCHOENEGG

GRINDELWALD 

Early History

On July 1, 1865, Grindelwald put a man into service who took up two important activities. On the one hand, he was the doctor of the village, on the other hand, he was the builder of the chalet "Schöneegg", a house that was to become a renowned and representative example of Grindelwald's hotel trade. His name was Dr. Gustav Beck.

On November 6, 1866, Dr. Beck bought a 1620 square meter lot at Gydisdorf to build a house. The price was 6000 francs. He immediately set to work. The charming chalet, still visible on the east side of the Parkhotel Schoenegg bears the year 1868. From the very beginning, Dr. Beck, who obviously was a man of vision, planned to build a guest house. As a neighbour of the thriving Black Eagle Hotel, he reckoned that he might also profit from growing tourism.

But things did not go as smoothly as Dr. Beck had expected. Grindelwald's voters refused to renew his contract as a doctor, and he left the village. On September 8, 1871, the Gydisdorf property was sold to Mr. Julius Beck of Biel, who probably was a relative. But half a year later, the Schöneegg guest house changed hands again. On April 12, 1872, Julius Beck resold it to his brother-in-law Hermann Goehrs for the same sum of 33 000 francs for which he had bought it. With apparent expansion in mind, the new owner signed a contract with an option right of the neighbouring lot of Christian Burgener. On September 29, 1881, Goehrs bought Burgener's property for 14 500 francs. As the buyer was absent, Gottlieb Stettler, a merchant of Grindelwald, acted as his representative. Thus the name of the future hotel dynasty appeared for the first time.

The house that was traded then does not exist any more. It had to make way for the construction of the Schöneegg Hotel. With the purchase of Burgener's property the owners guaranteed the future development of the guest house. Now, there was enough space for adding the necessary facilities.

Gottlieb Stettler, who probably got acquainted with Beck and Goehrs through his trading activity, saw the potential of the site and made his own plans with a long term perspective. On October 17, 1892, he bought the whole property for 45 000 francs. This purchase formed the basis of a Stettler dynasty that was to make its mark on the guest house and the Parkhotel Schoenegg for the next one hundred years or four generations.

The First Generation:

Gottlieb and Lucia Stettler-Kaufmann 1892–1910

The Stettler family has its roots in Eggwil in the Emmental. Gottlieb Stettler was born on March 20, 1840, in Schangnau. He became a merchant with widespread activities. He primarily bought and sold cattle and lumber. In the sixties of the 19th century he probably lived in Spiez on the Lake of Thun, from where he transported goods and passengers to Grindelwald. Since in those days the trade with glacier ice from Grindelwald was a thriving business, he took ice, which sometimes was bound for France or Germany, to the port in Neuhaus and from 1872 on to the railway station in Interlaken.

At the time, Stettler was probably employed as a coachman by a hotel proprietor in Grindelwald. It might have been the Eagle Hotel, for it was there where he met Lucia Kaufmann, whom he married in 1869. She was born in Grindelwald and worked as a cook at the Eagle Hotel. After her marriage she was fully occupied with her eight children that were born in quick succession: Alfred 1869, Ernst 1872, Lucia 1875, Friedrich 1876, Ida 1878, Bertha 1879, Adolf 1882, Martha 1884. The family lived in a house in the middle of the village where Mr. Stettler had established a bakery and a shop "with various useful things", as the Coolidge Guide reported in 1906.

After he himself had bought the hotel, he immediately began to construct a bigger one. Step by step he added a floor of guest rooms, a new west wing and a middle wing, thus enlarging the small guest house to the Schöneegg Hotel with no less than 110 beds. When he died on February 25, 1902, he left a respectable, well-established hotel enterprise.

The hotel was subsequently managed by his widow Lucia and the children, until Lucia died from a heart attack on January 10, 1910.

The hotel had a good reputation already. The 1895 edition of the Baedeker Guide lists the Schöneegg as a "quiet hotel off the dusty road with a garden; full board for 5 to 6 francs", recommending it with an asterisk, which was a lot of priceless publicity. The 1909 edition puts the Schöneegg in third place after the Bear Hotel and the Eiger Hotel. Only 11 out of 27 hotels were awarded an asterisk.

The Second Generation:

Adolf and Rosa Stettler-Schneider 1910–1968

Adolf Stettler, born on March 14, 1882, was the second-youngest child of Gottlieb and Lucia. He attended the schools in Grindelwald and went abroad to prepare himself for the management of the hotel.

Shortly after his mother died, Adolf took over. In 1911, the 28-year-old Adolf married Rosa Schneider from Langenthal, who was six years younger. She was to become the epitome of a kind, caring, and sensible hotel proprietor, who left her marks on the house which she was to manage on her own after her husband's early death. She was born to a teacher in Lyss on October 27, 1888. After primary and secondary schools in Langenthal, where the family had moved to, she completed her education at the Commercial School in Neuenburg. In England she learned the English language. She was finally employed by the Schoenegg Hotel in Grindelwald, where she met Adolf. They had three children: Adolf (1912), Hans Rudolf (1914) and Heidi Elisabeth (1921).

Besides putting much effort into the hotel, Adolf Stettler was also a public figure. As a member of the local government and the president of the tourist association, he supported many projects (among them the "Nothaldenbahn", an idea that eventually led to the First chairlift) that enhanced the appeal of Grindelwald as a resort. On April 23, 1932, Adolf Stettler died at the age of 50. Dying in 1972, his wife Rosa outlived him for 40 years. After her death, a regular guest for many years, Dr. Cecilia Fox from England, pointed out the role Rosa Stettler had played in running the Schoenegg Hotel: "Grindelwald without her will not be what it used to be".

Adolf and Rosa Stettler left their marks on the hotel by initiating various steps of remodelling. After the end of World War I, Adolf Stettler was the first in Grindelwald to install running water in all the rooms. In 1947, Rosa Stettler, who was supported more and more by her son Hans Rudolf, had the whole house completely renovated. The charming tower and other lacy decorations were removed, and the whole third floor was reconstructed in a simpler way. While Rosa was still alive, the entrance hall was enlarged (1954), and the staff house was modernised (1960). In 1968, the third generation of the Stettler family took charge.

The Third Generation:

Hans Rudolf and Doris Stettler-Pflüger 1844–1987

Hans Rudolf, born on April 8, 1914, enjoyed a thorough education. Besides attending the usual schools in Switzerland and abroad, he was also trained to become a cook, a bartender, a waiter, and a hotel secretary. Returning home after his brother's death in 1935, he married Doris Pflüger from Rheinfelden in 1944, who had worked at the Beau-Site Hotel in Wengen. With her charming kindness Doris became a worthy successor to the charismatic Rosa. They had three children: Hans Peter (1945), Heinz Urs (1948) and Thomas Beat (1951). Like his father, Hansruedi was extremely active in Grindelwald, not only as a politician and a public figure, but also as an athlete in such sports as bobsledding, tennis, and curling.

Under the management of Hansruedi and Doris Stettler, the hotel underwent radical reconstruction. In fact, between 1968 and 1971 a more or less new hotel was planned and built, comprising a complex with indoor swimming pool, sauna, fitness center, and car parking. The costs amounted to approximately 1,5 million Swiss francs. In 1974, the entrance hall was remodelled, and in 1986, still under the responsibility of the third generation, the oldest part of the hotel, the chalet, was renovated.

In 1987, Hansruedi and Doris retired, handing over the responsibility in a new form. A limited company was founded with all the family members, even those not working in the Schoenegg Hotel, holding shares. The youngest son Thomas, who had been working at the Schoenegg before, became the manager, his father acted as chairman of the board.

Unfortunately, Hans Rudolf could not enjoy a long retirement: he suddenly died on June 14, 1996. – Doris, his widow, could celebrate her 90th birthday on August 21, 2011, physically and mentally as fit as ever.

The Fourth Generation:

Thomas and Anja Stettler-Köhler since 1987

Thomas Beat Stettler, born on December 2, 1951, was educated in Grindelwald, Goldern/Hasliberg and Trey/Waadtländ. Then he attended the Lausanne School for Hotel Management and acquired practical skills at the Parkhotel Schoenegg and in Berne and Basel. After travelling years in Mexico, the USA and Canada, he returned to Grindelwald and gradually prepared himself to take over from his father, which happened in 1987.

From the USA and Canada Thomas had brought back an enthusiasm for country music as well as Siberian huskies. Subsequently he became the driving force behind the former Grindelwald Festival of Country Music, whose president he had been for ten years. In a kennel behind the hotel, he kept a pack of huskies, with which he used to race through the countryside. For five years he had presided over the Swiss Club for Nordic Dogs. In the spring of 1982, he managed the first ascent of a 4000m high mountain with a pack of huskies, the Allalinhorn (4027m above sea level). In December 2001, the three remaining dogs were put to sleep because of old-age calamities. – But his love of dogs survived, and in summer 2004 Thomas and his second wife, Anja, adopted “Tschingel”, a young border-collie, who quickly became everybody’s darling and is the couple’s constant companion.

Thomas’ first marriage with Christine Schmitz ended in divorce in 1998.

In June 2000, Thomas married Anja Köhler from Ehingen/Baden-Württemberg, a highly qualified long-time member of the Schoenegg team.

Thomas Stettler, too, has committed himself energetically to matters of public interest. So he was a member of several communal commissions, e.g. the road-sweeping commission and the building and planning commissions.

In addition, for quite a number of years he had acted as chairman of the governing board of two important businesses, Grindelwald Power Station and Pro Bussalp Ltd.

Also he had been a member of the governing board of the Grindelwald Hotel-Owners’ Association for eight years; for four years he had acted as their vice president.

Anja Köhler, born on August 29, 1968, as a surveyor’s daughter, showed an early interest in the hotel trade. After her apprentice years at a hotel in the Black Forest she got her qualification for hotel management in 1990.

As she felt attracted by the Swiss Alps she found new hotel jobs at Engelberg and Lenk before she applied to the Parkhotel Schoenegg in Grindelwald. Here she started as a receptionist in spring 1992. After travelling through Australia she returned to the Schoenegg team in 1994. In Central Switzerland she became assistant manager of a hotel, proof of her advanced qualifications. Thomas Stettler, who had been divorced from his wife Christine in the meantime, now tried to win Anja back for the Schoenegg, not only as a team-member. He succeeded. From 1998 on Thomas and Anja ran the Parkhotel together, and two years later, they got married.

In 1987, when planning the future of the Parkhotel Schoenegg, the young managers took the necessary steps to adapt the facilities to the needs of the customers. “We want to be and remain a three-star house with four-star comfort”, said Thomas Stettler. The architect Peter Marti from Unterseen was chosen to design the reconstruction of the hotel. The outside was to obtain a new look, and the guest rooms on the three floors were to be rearranged.

The new look – a pale pink façade framed by blue eaves – at first stirred some controversy among the passers-by. But today the pale pastels are accepted and seen as an element enhancing the appearance of the village. Rearranging the floors reduced the number of guest beds from 100 to 85. In order to keep the hotel open, construction work was done during two periods, from April 3 to July 15, 1989, and from October 2 to December 15, 1989. The costs of the renovation including work on the chalet amounted to approximately 4,5 million francs.

Thomas Stettler introduced new techniques of management and communication. The reception desk was equipped with a computer and a fax machine, and in December 1989 the first edition of the “Schoenegg-Post” appeared, a trilingual newsletter for the guests with interesting information concerning the Stettler family, the Parkhotel Schoenegg and the Grindelwald area. This newsletter is still issued regularly in December, now with a new colourful design and in two languages, German and English.

The appreciation of art and the close ties of the Stettler family with sojourning artists account for the wall decoration in the corridors of the three floors. The first floor is decorated with paintings of the renowned animal painter Fritz Hug (1921-1989), the second with works of Walter Alex Diggelmann (1902-1987), and the third is dedicated to Alfred Heinrich Pellegrini (1881-1958), all artists having been regular guests for many years.

The reputation of a hotel largely depends on the quality of the employees. Finding them has become one of the major problems in the hotel trade. The Stettler family therefore is happy to employ numerous Swiss and foreigners that have been working for the Parkhotel Schoenegg for many years.

At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, more innovations and improvements were made in and around the Parkhotel: the "Firsthaus" and the "Chalet Männlichen", two smaller buildings at the back of the hotel, were remodelled as living quarters for team members (1993, 1995); the indoor swimming pool was renovated and equipped with wellness-installations, and another storey was added to it providing a private flat for the hotel-owners (1995); the Gydis Bar in the basement was turned into a "business corner" with a conference room and internet terminal (2000); the heating system was overhauled and updated (2003); the entrance and reception area were redesigned completely (2005); the surroundings of the hotel were remodelled and a cascade was integrated into the park, as an eye-catcher from the main street (2006); series of guest rooms were renovated (1993, 2007).

In the Chalet rooms also a part of the Hotel Oberland survives, for the carvings of 1947 from its former restaurant were integrated into the remodelling. Thus the Chalet rooms have been adjusted to contemporary standard according to the Schoenegg slogan of "modern tradition".

Between 2009 and 2011 there were huge projects of renovation and extension again.

The last 26 rooms became their modern outfit and within one year the Parkhotel Schoenegg has got a brandnew kitchen with all equipment for those days. Also the dining room was renovated and the 1868Stübli was born.

In 2012 there was a special occasion to celebrate – the 120year Jubilee of the Family Stettler running and owning the Parkhotel Schoenegg

The 2013 started with good news – Parkhotel Schoenegg is winner of the HolidayCheckAward 2013; rated as the most popular hotel for couples in Switzerland and worldwide under the best 99 hotels – also Switzerland Tourism gave us a gold medaille for being under the friendliest hotels in Switzerland

In June 2013 we celebrated the coming out of the story „Gydis Secret“ – a fable from the swiss Author Helmi Sigg – enjoy reading.

Today the Parkhotel Schoenegg presents itself in a thoroughly positive light. Its appearance in the village ambience is fully satisfactory: from its elevated position above the main street a well-kept, ornate-free hotel-building painted in grey/pale pink colours looks through the trees of the park across to Glacier and Eiger – this appearance is particular and unique, indeed. The quality of the hotel supports this appearance: in 2006 this "three-star hotel with the four-star comfort" has been graded as a "superior hotel", thus promising the best of comfort and first-class service. The obliging hotel-owners and the attentive, cheerful staff take care of every guest individually: here you find the personal and trusting atmosphere of a medium-sized family hotel, in which everybody knows the people around, and which is far from the anonymity of mass accommodation. It is due to this spirit – cultivated already by Thomas Stettler's parents, grandparents and great-grandparents – that the Parkhotel can rely on a considerable number of loyal regulars, among them families who have frequented the hotel for several generations. And every year the hotel gains new friends, who discover its charm for themselves. – Thus the prognoses of the modern Schoenegg run by Thomas and Anja Stettler are quite encouraging.

The History of the Chalet "Oberland"

On March 19, 1930, Schoenegg owner Adolf Stettler bought the "Oberland Hotel" close to the Grindelwald railway station. It had been built in 1893 as a boarding house for transient guests. But two years after the purchase, Adolf Stettler died, and his wife Rosa, who already ran the Parkhotel Schoenegg, had to look for a tenant for the "Oberland". Several tenant families, more or less successful, followed each other. In 1979, Heinz Stettler, second son of Hans Rudolf and Doris, took over. Born on January 19, 1948, Heinz had been trained for the hotel business and had later sailed around the world as a steward for the Royal Viking Company.

In 1985, the "Oberland", almost 100 years old now, was torn down to make way for a modern residential and commercial complex. The new chalet-style building was opened one year later. It contained a cosy restaurant decorated with elements of the former "Oberlandstube" and soon became a favourite meeting place for tourists and villagers alike.

In 1986, Heinz married the Portuguese Maria Martins, and the couple now ran the "Oberland" together. They had three children: Jacqueline (1986), Jennifer (1987) and Sven (1992). – The marriage was divorced on June 20, 2007.

At the beginning of the new century a change in consumers' behaviour reduced the "Oberland's" profits, and the Stettler family council decided to alter its purpose. Hans Graf and his family, who already had a sports shop in the eastern annex of the "Oberland", took over the restaurant and, after remodelling it, moved into the larger space with their shop. Other branches in the "Oberland", a bank and a firm of trustees, kept their former premises.

Thus the "Oberland" was given a new look and a new purpose in 2007, and Heinz Stettler, the recent hotelier, now became the real estate manager of his house. The "Oberland" can be taken as an example of changing times – but it remains a valuable trump card of the Stettler family.

A Stettler Property in Canada

The Stettler family chronicle would be incomplete without the „Rocky Mountain Ski Lodge“ in Canmore/ Alberta, property of Hans Peter Stettler, first son of Hans Rudolf and Doris. – Canmore became known as the site of the cross-country events during the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. The town is a gateway to the Rocky Mountains for mountaineers and skiers alike.

Hans Peter Stettler, born on September 28, 1945, was trained as a hotel manager in Switzerland and Canada. From 1968 on, he worked for five seasons as a mountain guide for Mount Assiniboine/Canada. In 1973/74, he acquired the Canadian and Swiss diplomas as a mountain guide and ski instructor. For several winters, he guided heli-skiing adventures in Canada, and privately he climbed a number of the highest mountains of the Canada-USA area.

In 1977 he married Silvia Brun, a hotelier's daughter from Rheinfelden, in Canada. They became the parents of four children: Natalie (1978), Patric (1979), Mireille (1980), and Dominic (1983). In 1979 Hans Peter and his family settled in Canada for good. In 2004 Hans Peter and Silvia decided to get divorced. – His children Natalie and Patric followed the family tradition and were trained as hotel managers.

First Hans Peter had bought a motel, the "Skiland-Motel Canmore" (1989), which had only 25 rooms; to meet the demands of the Olympics, it was enlarged to 45 units. In 1991, he also purchased the neighbouring "Rocky Mountain Chalet", and the two businesses were united under the name of "Rocky Mountains Ski Lodge".

Also in sports, Hans Peter played an active role. He organized a "pre-heli-ski program" as preparation for heli-skiing and acted as chairman of the Canadian Mountain Guide Association, to name only two of his activities. Thus he continued the long tradition of Swiss guides in Canada.