

The Architect of Megeve

Baroness Noemie de Rothschild was influential in developing Megeve as a ski resort . In 1924 she was looking for a village which could be developed as a rival to St. Moritz. Megeve, with its rolling pastures and pretty mediaeval centre, was ideal,

Henry Jacques Le Meme came to Megeve in 1926. One of his first commissions was to build Chalet Noemie for Baroness de Rothschild , which is now part of the Domaine Du Mont D'Arbois and still owned by the Rothschild family. He built more than 200 chalets in Megeve and was instrumental in setting out the megevan style. He took as his template a typical Savoyard farmhouse and transformed into a contemporary building. (The term “chalet” originally meant a shepherd’s mountain hut, not a farmhouse)

There are three elements to his design: a ground floor covered by masonry housing the ski room, garage and similar offices, the first floor, which was the main living area having a sunny balcony, and the upper floor housing the bedrooms.



Chalet La Cordée

The Chalet La Cordée (above) and Chalet L'Igloo (next page) both illustrate this. But he also loved using colour in his buildings, particularly red, white and blue. Look at the use of the colour red in the Chalet de L'Inconnu. (next page bottom) Sadly L'Igloo is a little neglected and the paintwork has faded.



Chalet Igloo



Chalet de L'Inconnu



This chalet is on the road up to Rochebrune. I am not 100% certain it is by Le Meme but it has all the right attributes, particularly the attention to detail in the woodwork. Look at the balustrades – simply carved but adding a little extra to the whole design.



Above are pictures of a shutter and the windows at La Cordée. Look at the details, not only on the shutter but also above the windows, the balustrades and the door. When we took these photographs the owner was there, and she was delighted that we showed interest. She said that La Cordée was one of the first chalets that La Meme built. It is just along the road (away from town) from the Hotel Sylvana, on the right hand side, behind a high hedge.



I have put in this picture of Chalet Les Elephants to show a different use of wood decoration.



This is the Chalet Hurlevent. What I like about this is the quirky positioning and sizes of the windows, the porch mirroring the roof and the beautifully carved and coloured joists.



The three chalets above - Chalet Les Epennys, Chalet Le Tout and Chalet La Campana are all up a little side road past Rochebrune. Look at the detail on the shutters but in particular note the chimney stacks – these are very typical of Le Meme’s style.



If you walk up the Calvaire, you will pass a number of Le Meme's chalets. The best known are the two above, Chalet Ombre Blanche at the top and Chalet Le Cairn. These are not good photographs but if you go and look at them you will see they all have the signatures of Le Meme's work.

Le Meme did not concentrate solely on domestic buildings. He built College Le Hameau, the large, white, institutional looking building on the road up to Mont D'Arbois. This started life as a boys' school but is now owned by a French Union for the use of its members.

He also built Le Grand Soleil (at the foot of the first drive leading up to the Hotel Sylvana) initially as serviced apartments and a restaurant though it is now apartments,



and L'Ours Blanc. -also apartments.

Le Meme also built himself a studio which is at the top of the stairs leading up to the Calvaire. This had an apartment for himself and his wife on the ground floor, for his mother and aunt on the first floor and two additional rooms for guests. He was influenced by Corbusier in his design.

You can see the studio from the blue ski run, the Calvaire, which takes you from Mont D'Arbois to the centre of town. If you look up just before you take off your skis you will see a russet coloured building.



For those of you who have stayed at our chalet Les Clochettes we are told that this was probably built by a follower of Le Meme. When we bought it it still had some of the original fitted furniture, designed by the architect. Unfortunately we could not keep the bedroom furniture although there is a wardrobe in Bedroom 3 which is original and the sideboard in the dining room was also part of the building.

I am still exploring Megeve to find further examples of Le Meme's work. It is fascinating.

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