

# What am I doing here? : Gstaad, Switzerland

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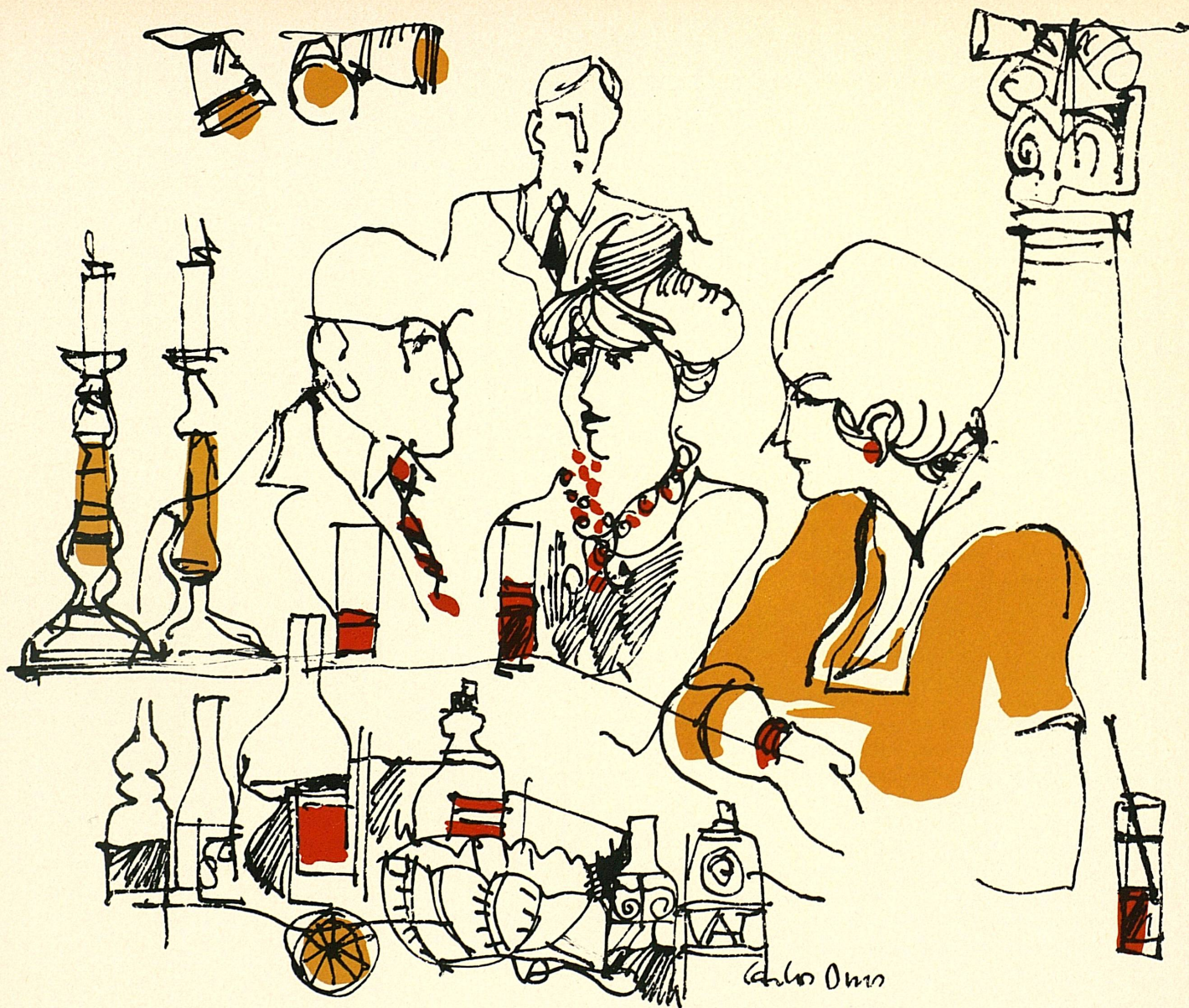
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to the irreverent Americans), is holding hands with Count Poniatowski of Paris, another big deal. For the moment. The pleasant man who looks like John Kenneth Galbraith is indeed J. K. G. The tall blonde young man who looks vaguely German is actually Italian: Prince Victor Emmanuel, son of King Umberto, and the Americans call him "Old Vic." He is with his sister, Princess Maria Gabriella of Savoie, and how is out-of-season royalty faring these days?

Not too badly, although Old Vic has to work during the week at a bank in Lugano, almost within sight of the Italy he has been banished from forever. He prefers that to living with his family in Portugal, land of the dead dynasties. For weekend kicks, he roars around Gstaad in a blue Jeep late at night, firing his pellet gun at various objects. The Swiss are

most permissive about deposed royalty, as long as the bills are paid ("In Switzerland," somebody once ob-

served, "the customer is king, and the king is only a customer"—a neat arrangement).

## WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

### GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND

HERE I AM, in the Pearl of the Bernese Alps, and I can't even pronounce the name of the place. The "g" is more or less silent, as in "gnu", or even "nu?" It's a one-syllable word with the accent on the second syllable: you tie yourself into a knot and spit it out, zo—"gSHTAAD." However you call it, it's one of the premier ski resorts of the world, and, in my creaky condition, I wouldn't ride a pair of skis if they had training wheels. This being the case, you might think I feel as out of place as an astronaut on a cable car, but here you are

wrong. There is more to Gstaad than idiots sliding down slopes on sticks. It is also a people-watchers' paradise, a name-droppers' Nirvana, and a well-beaten capital of the well-beaten jet set. Look, ma, I'm in the jet set! You can tell by the Swissair labels on my bags, including the ones under my eyes.

EVERY AIRLINE has its gimmick these days, even safe, sane, sober Swissair. In fact, it has two gimmicks.

As soon as you board in New York, the stewardess hands you an Irish Coffee. This not only warms you up and fortifies you for the perils ahead, it makes you homesick, if you happen to live at the Buena Vista. Swissair's second gimmick is no movies. "We took a poll of our passengers," reported Phil Schaub, public relations director for North America (there's a territory), "and whereas 65 per cent of our European customers wanted movies, 65 per cent of our American didn't. The issue is still up in the air."

SOON, SO WERE WE, ploughing through the night to Geneva. In the icy truth of dawn, the DC-8 floated low across the great lake and touched down with a slight, reassuring rattle of crockery and bottles (I forgot to tell you—Swissair flies at the rate of one calorie per mile). There to meet us was handsome, gray-haired Hank Ketcham, father of "Dennis the Menace," who has lived in Geneva for years, drawing the dirty deeds of the little monster. He had been alerted that we were bringing him a care package from Trader Vic—2 bottles of his favorite nectar, unavailable in Europe: Vic's Navy Grog. "Welcome!" he called out as we stumbled down the gangway. "Hank!" I shouted, throwing out my arms. The carefully wrapped bottles crashed to the floor of the Geneva Airport with a sickening plop. Every bone in their bodies was broken, and Hank and I stood

there, weeping softly, as the precious fluid—the very blood of life—oozed out. Every now and then, he tried to get down on all fours, but I restrained him. "Glass in the tongue," I said gently, "is no way to start the day." The tears still glistening on his cheeks, he put us in his black Mercedes and silently drove us to the railroad station.

AS YOU MAY have gathered by now, getting to Gstaad is not exactly the same thing as driving to Daly City. After flying all those hours, you take a train to the charming lakeside city of Montreux (home of Vladimir Nabokov and Josef Krips) and transfer to a narrow, three-car electric Toonerville that snakes up and up through the mountains to Gstaad—in all, a four-hour journey, while your stomach as well as your heart is still on San Francisco time.

IT WAS a fantastically beautiful morning, and warm. Rousing myself from evil thoughts about what I could do to a Vanessi's hamburger, I gazed drowsily out at the snowy mountains and, far below, Lake Leman. All Switzerland seemed to be melting, and I reminded myself how impossible it is to write about snowscapes without resorting to clichés. Snow on rooftops does look like the icing on a cake. Pine trees clustered richly on a white slope do look like mink on ermine. I was still groping for a new image when Gstaad at last appeared—a perfect toymakers' village

(yes!) set amid picture postcard peaks (why not?). "Welcome!" read the note at Lisa and Stanley's chalet. "Off skiing. See you later." We drew the curtains and fell into bed. Good morning and good night.

From the "San Francisco Chronicle"

Drei meisterliche Photographien von Avenuen und Arenen des Wintersportes in Graubünden. 1. Bild einer Schlittenfahrt von Pontresina ins Rosegtal im Wechselspiel von Licht und Schatten. – 2. (nachfolgende doppelseitige Aufnahme) Pferderennen auf dem St. Moritzersee. – 3. Tanz auf dem Eis in Flims.

Trois merveilleuses évocations des sports d'hiver aux Grisons: 1. Jeu d'ombres et de lumières et course en traîneau de Pontresina dans le Rosegtal. – 2. (page double suivante) Courses de chevaux sur le lac de St-Moritz. – 3. Danse sur la glace à Flims.

Tre eccellenti fotografie di sport invernali nei Grigioni: 1. Escursione in slitta, da Pontresina per la valle di Roseg. 2. (immagine sulle due pagine successive) Corse ippiche sul lago di S. Moritz. – 3. Danza sul ghiaccio, a Flims.

Tres fotografías magistrales de las avenidas y de los palenques del deporte de invierno en el cantón de los Grisones. – 1°, fotografía de un paseo en trineo de Pontresina al valle de Roseg. – 2° (fotografía de la doble página siguiente), carrera de caballos en el lago de San Moritz. – 3°, danza sobre el hielo en Flims.

