

Matteo Thun

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Vigilius Mountain Resort

Wallpaper*

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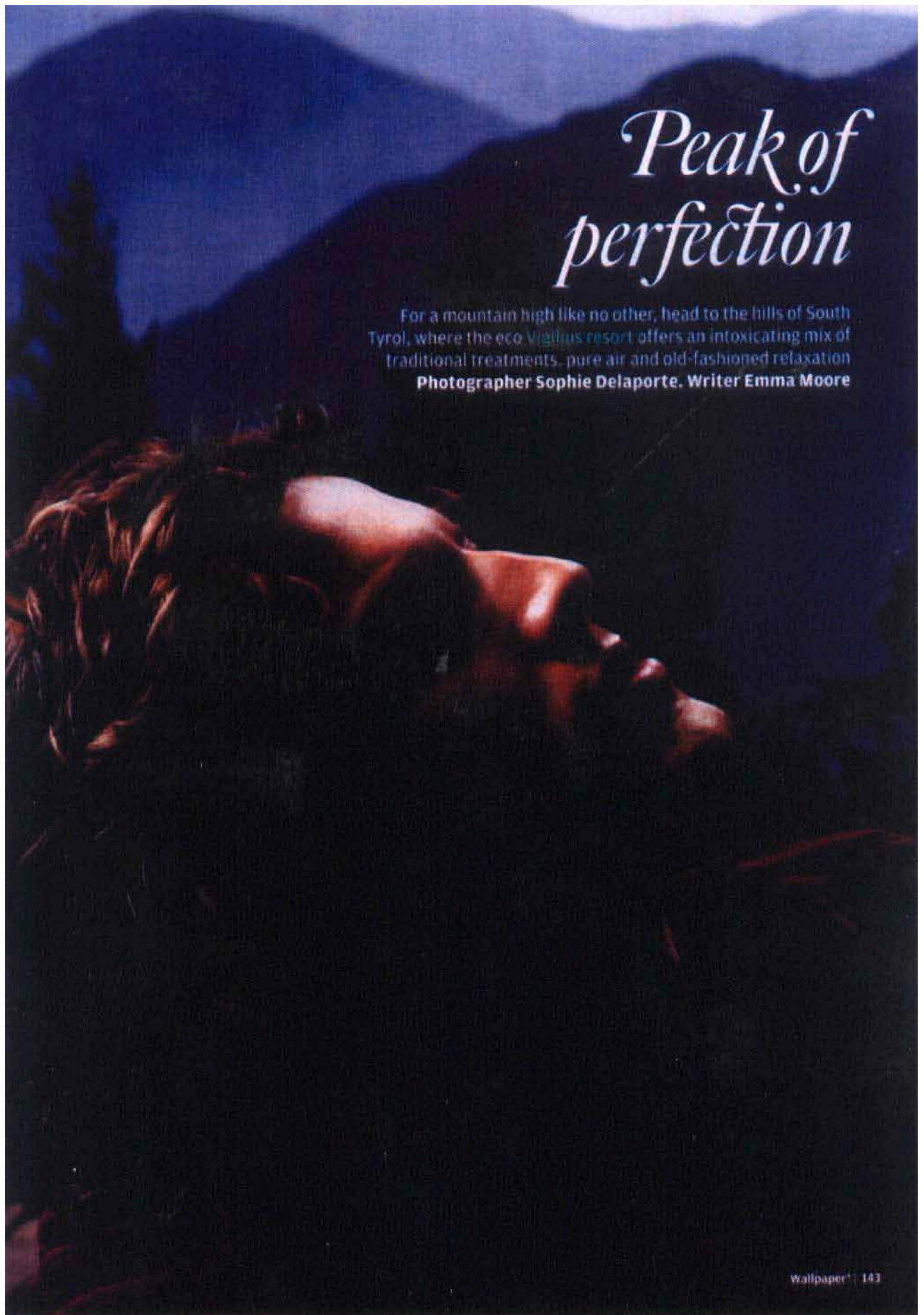
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Peak of perfection

For a mountain high like no other, head to the hills of South Tyrol, where the eco **Vigilius** resort offers an intoxicating mix of traditional treatments, pure air and old-fashioned relaxation
Photographer Sophie Delaporte. Writer Emma Moore



Besides the distant tinkle of cowbells and the intermittent clink of the cable car, Monte San Vigilio, a peak in the Italian Dolomites and the site of Vigilius, Europe's latest spa retreat, is gloriously silent. The notion that a spell in the mountains can restore a city-ravaged body is hardly revolutionary – in fact, before the typical spa break came packaged in Japanese bamboo and rang to the tone of Thai bells, it was the mountain retreat that served to restore vitality to the abused body. And now it seems that the salutary potential of the hills is once again a draw.

A two-hour drive from Milan and five-minute funicular ride, Vigilius sits in sublime isolation 1,500m high. A stunning structure of slatted larch interspersed with glass and topped with a grass roof, it's almost invisible from a distance. Its design and ecological systems are pioneering, its simple curative methods and overriding philosophy to bring mountain life in all its health-giving glory into every inch of the retreat, a formula for the future.

Owner Ulrich Ladurner, a local made rich through the clever marketing of gluten-free food, describes his decision to develop the retreat as more emotional than commercial. 'I used to ski here as a child and have dreamed of owning a place on the mountain ever

since,' he says. He handed over the design to architect and designer Matteo Thun, also a local, who believes that any building should have minimal impact on the surroundings and whose ecological ethos drove the creation of a heating system that uses ground tree waste from the vicinity, natural insulating methods and the use of recyclable materials. Following the maxim laid down by Roman architect and engineer, Vitruvius, which declares that a building's materials should be sourced no further afield than the distance a cow could carry them in a day, he built Vigilius using larch, stone and clay all gathered from the hillside.

The all-local, all-natural ethos extends to the food, the furnishings, the spa therapies and the staff – apart from the manager and his spa manager wife who hail from the States, the Gabriele Strehle-led employees come from the valley. The water served in the retreat comes from Monte San Vigilio, as does the fruit. The kitchen, which feeds two restaurants – the informal taverna, open to passing hikers, and the more formal restaurant, ISOO – serves a blend of Austrian and Italian cuisine that is largely seasonal, indigenous and exquisite, if dangerously calorific.

The cornerstone treatment in the spa is the hay bath cure, a therapy practised in the Dolomites for centuries. Traditionally, it was used for complaints varying from unwanted pregnancy to arthritis. Its

power to stimulate blood flow is well-proven – expectant mothers and anyone with high blood pressure should steer clear, but if you want to attack cellulite or circulatory problems, you should opt for a daily dose of the hay, which is freshly harvested from meadows 2,000m up.

On fine days, yoga, meditation and qi gong are practised in the rooftop Paradise Garden, but old-fashioned relaxation in the form of board games, reading, luxuriating by a log fire or frolicking in the infinity pool (a fire placed by the pool means the last two activities can be enjoyed at the same time) are also encouraged. Conspicuously absent, however, is a gym. 'The mountain is our gym,' declares the spa manager, Jennifer Di Lonardo. Guests are encouraged to walk, ski, raft, sledge, mountain bike and paraglide. The last is surprisingly popular for its gratifying sense of achievement, the calorie-munching surge of adrenaline and aerial views of the Tyrolean valleys that no treadmill could ever afford.

Even those not given to raving will find Vigilius hard to fault. The mix of pure mountain air, legend-steeped treatments, awe-inspiring location and harnessed philosophy means you leave feeling you've experienced the best therapy known to man. *Vigilius Mountain Resort, Vigilsjoch, Lana, South Tyrol, tel: 39 0473 556600, www.vigilius.com* »

BEAUTY & GROOMING

AT FULL STRETCH

This page, she wears jacket, €238, by Versace. Cashmere trackpants, €405, by Malo. He wears cashmere jacket, €599, by Malo. Shorts €115, by Missoni. Wool yoga mat, €150, from Vigilius.

Opposite, the larch and glass exterior of the mountain retreat





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BEAUTY & GROOMING

WOOD LAND

This page, the rooftop
Paradise Garden

Opposite, she wears
merino sweater, €135,
by Calvin Klein. Knickers,
€74, by Laura Urbinati.
He wears boxer shorts,
€115, by Hermès.
For sleeping bag and satin
pillow, €6,245;
wooden words game,
€261, all by Prada

For stock lists, see
Resources, page 192

STYLIST: NICK VINSUN

HAIR AND MAKE UP:

ROBERTO RARDOZZI AT

VICTORIA'S MILAN

MODELS: RUTH REDARD AT

MADISON PARKS.

MARCELLO GELI D'AMICI AT

FUTURE MILAN