



ITALY

THE SILENCE OF THE MOUNTAINS

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Sauze D'Oulx, Piedmont. Panoramic end-of-day view of the upper Val di Susa.

Tourism frozen and nature reconquered

*“The mountain in winter was not made for men
and was best left in peace”*

(Paolo Cognetti, *The Eight Mountains*)

The pandemic has exaggerated all the contemporary contrasts mountains feed off, turning everyday life upside down. The silence of newly desolate places normally used to crowds of skiers. Nature we should re-appropriate even though it has been anthropized and covered in cement for tourist purposes. An economy that has been dramatically put on hold, but that is also allowing the rediscovered magic of these places to breathe.

The drop in numbers out on the ski slopes has had a significant negative impact on alpine tourism and the economy. Last season in Italy, this segment attracted over four million people to mountain areas in the month of December alone. It generates revenues of between 10 and 12 billion euro as well as providing work for around 120,000 people. This year, however, it collapsed by 70%.

The journey made by five young photographers across the peaks that played host to the 20th Winter Olympics in Piedmont (Sestriere, Bardonecchia, Sauze d'Oulx) and the better known Valle d'Aosta (Pila, Cervinia) reveals that in this pandemic era of ours, the mountains are living a double life laden with meaning: it's a tale of closed ski lifts and empty hotels, devoid of Italian and foreign tourists alike, but also of new opportunity for enthusiasts to devote themselves to alpine or cross country skiing or snowshoeing, to get back to the roots of the relationship between sport and snow-capped peaks.

Images by: Alessandro De Bellis, Luca Farinet, Luigi Greco, Nicolò Nastasia, Matteo Montenero



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Ski instructors build a homemade obstacle for practicing their jumps during training.



Pila, Valle d'Aosta. Two cross-country skiers tackle a solitary climb. The pylons blend in with the snow-capped evergreens.



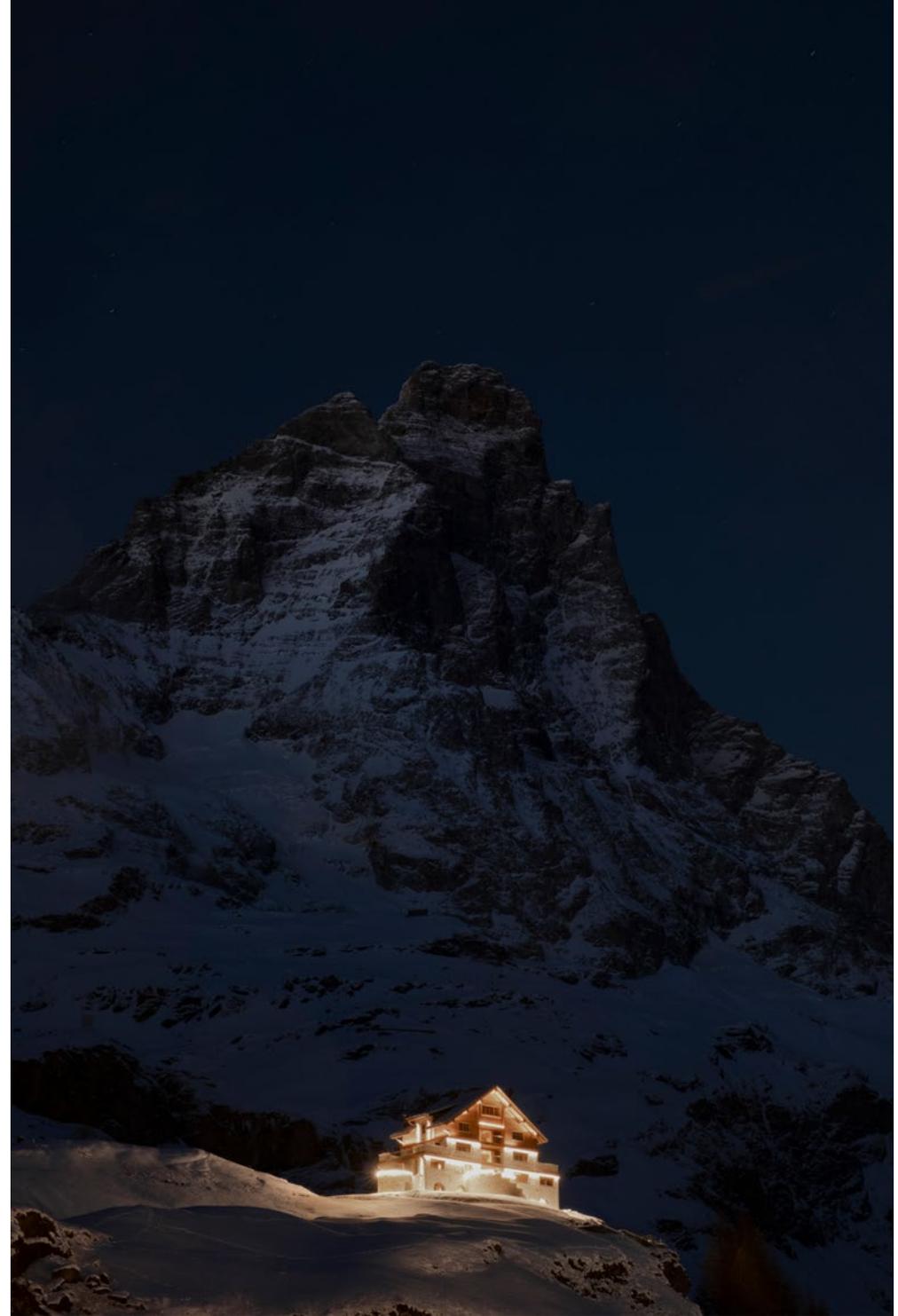
Prato Nevoso, Piedmont. A solitary, stilled chairlift blends into a background of gleaming white snow and a passing cloud.



Cervinia, Valle d'Aosta. A closed ski lift pass office, with empty houses and snowy mountains in the background, wait for guests who won't be coming.



Cervinia, Valle d'Aosta. A Scottish girl, who should have been enjoying her fourth season of working on the Cervinia slopes, is now unemployed but can't get back home.



Cervinia, Valle d'Aosta. A brightly-lit chalet, a glimmer of hope in these difficult times, stands out against the imposing backdrop of the Matterhorn.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Ski instructors enjoy a ski mountaineering trip organized to keep them fit during the pandemic.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. An empty chairlift engulfed by the silence of the surrounding mountains.



Rochemolles, Piedmont. A sauna at the Chalet della Guida Hotel provides a carefree, optimistic backdrop – a stark contrast to the situation in the outside world.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. A welcome sign highlights the poignant irony of the shot as very few guests will get to see it this year.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Pulling off a risky trick. With no proper runs and parks, snowboarders attempt their jumps in extreme conditions.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Yuri, a former member of the Italian national snowboarding team and now an instructor. "Mountains are my life. As I am from Cesana, these slopes are where I developed my passion over the years".



Pila, Valle d'Aosta. Equipment used to ready the slopes lies unused this season.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. A pristine winter landscape unsullied by visitors.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Ski instructors rest in a bivouac at the end of a training session.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Solitary shelter in the mountains.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Adriano, the long-time owner of the Village Café, one of Salice's cult hangout spots. "They say that my place is the busiest in Salice, but this year I've had to stay closed and that's left a bad taste in my mouth".



Sestriere, Piedmont. A woman takes a solitary walk in the snow with the imposing profile of the mountain and the frozen lake in the background.



Cervinia, Valle d'Aosta. A small group of snowboarders has built a short run with an obstacle to practice their moves.



Sestriere, Piedmont. Piles of snow attest that someone has been through here. In the background, the snow cannons work away on an empty slope.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Ski mountaineers make their way up the mountain by following the route beneath the closed ski lift.



Sauze d'Oulx, Piedmont. Ski instructor Ettore shot during a break in a bivouac. "This year, I have a lot of free time so I am trying to spend as much time as possible on my greatest passion, snowboarding".



Cesana, Piedmont. A snowboarder adjusts his boots before his next jump.



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