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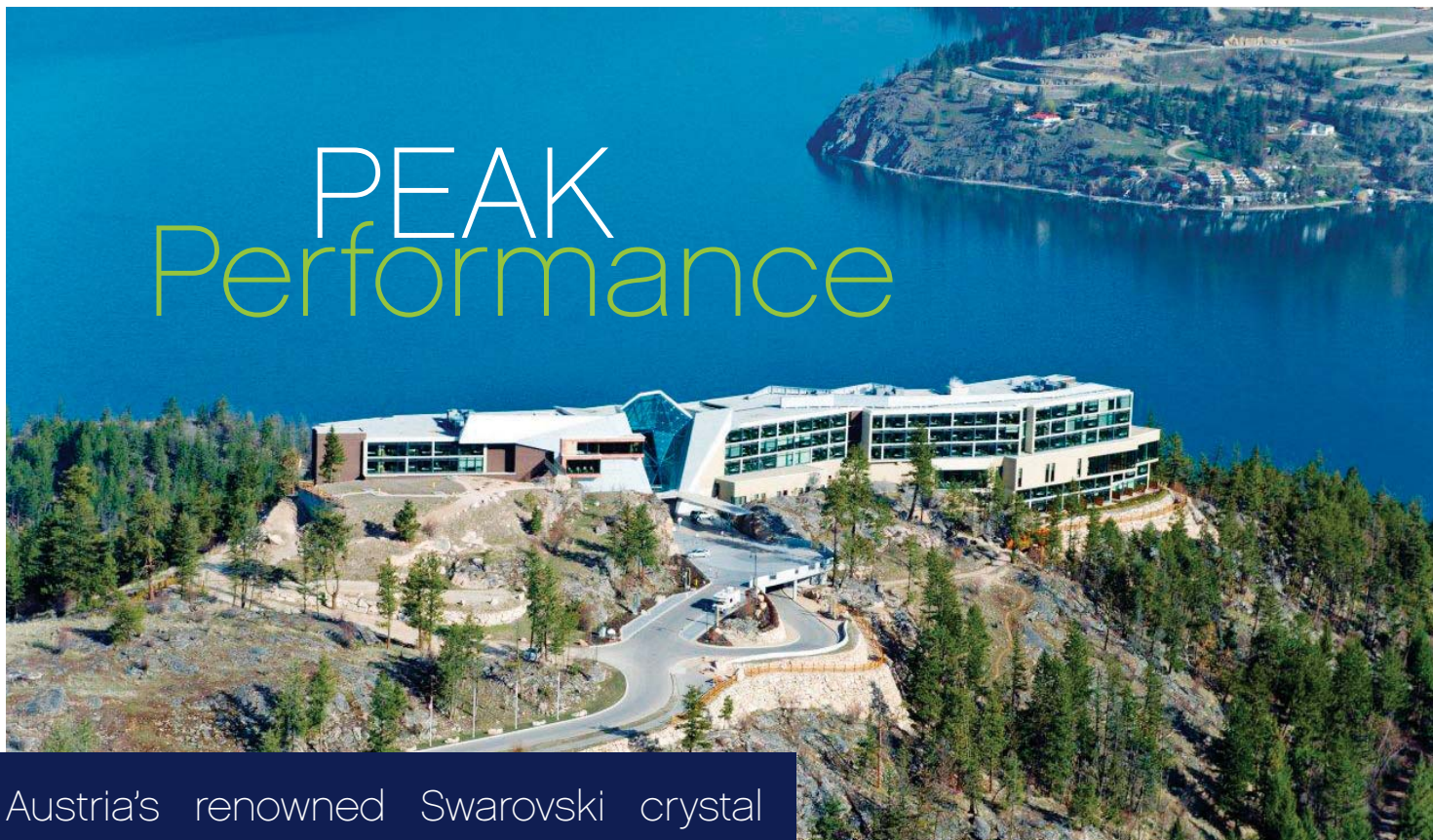
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Austria's renowned Swarovski crystal family marries high thread count pampering with European wellness traditions in western Canada. **By Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo**

**INTUITIVE DESIGN** An entire chapter could easily be written about the resort's architecture, designed by Cannon Design, Victoria, B.C., and nature-inspired interiors, created by SSDG Interiors, Vancouver, B.C. Its textures, colors, flavors and aromas are a true homage to the senses. In

Built high on a rugged, wind-swept granite cliff, five hours east of Vancouver it's no wonder why the search for Sparkling Hill Resort's home ended here.

Framed by British Columbia's transcendent Monashee Mountains and shimmering, 84 mile-long Lake Okanagan, the location is nothing short of breathtaking.

"The goal always was to be completely surrounded by nature, along with having easy access to an airport," describes President and general manager, Hans-Peter Mayr, the veteran Austrian spa developer who, yearning to bring European wellness traditions and innovations to North America, found a like-minded visionary in Swarovski crystal empire patriarch, Gernot Langes-Swarovski, to build Sparkling Hill.

"We knew this was it the moment we came here!"

A more brilliant partnership could not have been forecast. Together, they shaped the untamed mountain's 172 acres into a stellar, \$122-million, 152-room luxury European wellness resort that opened in May 2010 to rave reviews. And, with floor to ceiling windows throughout, there isn't a single room that doesn't have a magnificent view of this glorious landscape.

"The outcome exceeded even our expectations," beams Mayr, describing the construction process and how each section of the 240,000-square-foot resort evolved. "As each of the three levels were built our visual vantage point of the lake and mountains was continually being raised, each time framing such spectacular views that made it hard for us to decide which were the most beautiful. And, as it turns out, they all are!"

fact, in assembling its core elements the design team was enlisted on a veritable scavenger hunt to gather and study the property's surrounding natural features — mosses, stones, soil, grasses, leaves, branches, bark, etc. — from which the interior design template was translated and born, explains Mayr.

The minimalist atrium lobby with its soaring 360-degree views of the mountains and lake is a study in showcasing the purity of natural space. At its core are three, massive and utterly spectacular fiber-optic-wired crystal chandeliers that make it irresistible to gaze skyward, both in awe and curiosity. The ideal place for viewing is the low slung, buttery-soft, cowhide seating area that is so inviting it should come with a warning — and a time limit. Paired with delicious, rough-hewn mahogany tables all set against floor-to-ceiling windows with stellar views of the mountain-rimmed lake, Sparkling Hill brings new meaning to smart casual.

More than three million fiber optic-illuminated crystals (at a cost of \$10 million) are strategically placed throughout the resort to capture and showcase an ever-changing light show. And the touches range in size — from the crystallized signage on the washrooms to those found on the backs of dining chairs, to the four-story-tall, 600-pound crystal in the on-site boutique.

The same detail was paid to each of the stylish 149 guests rooms and three, 1,200-square-foot penthouses regarding design flow, layout and amenities. Which is why the sumptuous custom-designed Kohler soaker tubs (for two) take center stage in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows with unabated views of the mountains or lake rather than being shielded behind doors and walls. A duel



panel system of privacy and blackout shades allow guests to moderate light and privacy, although you will be hard pressed to find a reason to miss a moment of your prized view.

Rooms are spacious and sumptuous with powdery soft white linens and duvets, crisp natural wood finishes and earth tones, custom-made king size memory foam beds, and a flat screen television that handsomely divides the sleeping area and bath.

The near-absence of traditional art work and signage throughout the resort is apparent, and not missed a bit. A chance to cleanse one's visual palette and allow the panoramic views top billing, perhaps? I learn from Mayr that the minimal use of signage is no accident. "We want your guests to interact with our staff, to feel invited to ask questions," an especially important antidote to our over-fed minds and hi tech lifestyles.

**SPA NIRVANA** Dedicated to the whole body wellness, the palatial 40,000-square-foot KurSpa features over 100 different treatments and 48 treatment rooms, exercise and relaxation rooms, swimming pools and seven aromatherapy steam and sauna rooms offering an array of temperatures. In addition to every kind of massage imaginable, the most unique treatment is the -166F degree cold therapy sauna — a treatment that has been known to Europeans like Mayr for decades. By exposing the body to a lower tem-

perature for a series of three-minute sessions, blood flow increases and blood vessels shrink, which reduces inflammation and brings safe and long-lasting relief to expansive array of ailments, including arthritis and joint pain, explains Mayr.

Just ask Inge Kotschner, 72, a German-born area resident who has painful rheumatoid arthritis in her hands and knees with her first cryotherapy treatment. "It's an amazing experience to have such instant relief," says Kotschner. Accompanied by spa personnel, guests dress in light clothing or a swimsuit and foot wear with extra protection for body parts that chill quickly, including ears and hands, and a light surgical face mask to protect the nose and lips. Guests enter through two small pre-chambers (which reduce air exchange between the cold sauna and the two outer rooms) before moving into the main chamber to remain for up to three minutes. Safe and effective, the blood vessels protect vital organs while the body's core temperature is maintained. "And the relief lasts for nine months before I need to go back for another series. It's amazing!"

For those who prefer a little sweating with their pampering, guests can soak up the moist, fragranced heat inside the panoramic sauna. Or, slip inside the granite tiled salt steam. The natural salt cave microclimate works as an anti-allergic and anti-fungal remedy while slowing skin aging and smoothing wrinkles. Follow with an invigorating cool down in the 40-degree, chilled white marble peppermint and eucalyptus-scented igloo, complete with the sound of crackling ice from an unseen audio feed.

The resort features several swimming and lounging pools: The



### THE "SCENIC SIP" Exploring Okanagan Wineries

The Okanagan Valley is renowned for its spectacular vineyards producing premium quality wines that regularly win national and international wine competitions. Why not spend a day sampling the award-winning wines from the region's internationally acclaimed wineries. Over 20 wineries are located in Kelowna with well over 100 in the whole Okanagan Valley region. The sun-drenched valley surrounding Kelowna is dotted with farm-gate wineries too, where each vintage is bottled by hand. All winer-

ies offer wine tasting and many have facility tours to teach visitors the art of winemaking. Many wineries have unique and delicious food services available with spectacular lake and valley views. Spring, summer and fall wine festivals offer hundreds of activities focused on wine making, tasting and touring.

### FAIRWAY FUN

#### Golf Kelowna's 18 Epic Courses

Averaging over 2,000 hours of sun every year, the Okanagan offers one of the longest, driest golf seasons in Canada. Vine-



Kur Spa Indoor Pool

heated indoor whirlpool, masterfully designed with powerful jets that deliver a nonstop massage to legs and torso; the indoor pool with its underwater music system and starry crystal adorned ceiling; and the outdoor infinity pool with its phenomenal views of the lake.

Be sure to experience each of the beautifully designed, ergonomic sitting, meditation and napping areas located throughout the spa. From the plush spa lobby lounge to the winter white leather chaise lounges in the tea and serenity relaxation rooms to the generous stable of ultra-comfy lounges in the pool area.

**CUISINE WITH A VIEW** Sparkling Hill features two uniquely themed bistros, each featuring sweeping views of the lake. Peak-Fine is the main restaurant and home to sumptuous breakfast and European-inspired dinners made from fresh and local seasonal ingredients. The menu changes daily and all signature dinner entrées are paired with a selection of award-winning wines from internationally acclaimed wineries and the vineyards of the Okanagan Valley. The European-inspired Barrique and Java coffee and wine bar is ideal for an afternoon coffee with fresh baked pastry, or a late evening plate of tapas with wine. For a more private dining experience, corporate dinner or special occasion celebration, Gernot's accommodates up to 40 guests with rich leather seating, a stone fireplace and an extensive wine bar.

To work off those calories, guests have access to a state-of-



Peak Fine Dining

the-art fitness studio as well as more than 7.5 miles of on-site hiking trails.

Just steps from the resort, the Okanagan Valley is a nature-lovers paradise with world-class golf on over 150 golf courses, including the famous Predator Ridge Golf Resort, and spectacular driving tours of the valley's world class vineyards. Cradled within a spectacular range of mountains, pristine lakes, pine forests, gardens, orchards and vineyards and sandy beaches, the Okanagan Valley boasts long warm summers and short mild winters making it possible to enjoy outdoor sports nine months out of the year. In cooler months, snow-capped mountains and pine filled forests are a haven for skiers, boarders, snowmobilers and outdoor adventurers of all types and levels.

Steeped in nature, refined by man. Sparkling Hill is every bit of what its visionaries imagined: an ultra-stylish European styled resort and wellness refuge for the mind, body and soul.

**Rates:** From \$195-\$430 per night CanadianCdn. based on room type and season. Penthouse rates from \$500-\$720 based on season and floor level.

**Contact:** 877-275-1556; [www.sparklinghill.com](http://www.sparklinghill.com)

**Getting There:** From Vancouver, it's hour-long flight to the Kelowna Airport followed by a scenic, 25 minute drive to the resort. {stb}

yards, orchards, semi-desert terrain, rolling hills and expansive lakes, make the golf courses in the area some of the most picturesque in the country. With courses for all skill levels, mild weather, stunning scenery and 19 exceptional courses, Kelowna is a must-play destination for every golf enthusiast. [www.GolfKelowna.com](http://www.GolfKelowna.com)

### FARM FRESH

#### Orchards, Gardens & Blossoms

From April to October, Kelowna celebrates the bounty of its many orchards and gardens with special festivals for its apples,

peaches, plums, pears, apricots and cherries. Because of the region's microclimate and predisposition for a long growing season, visitors have ample time throughout the year to learn about the produce and flora of this fertile region and tour stunning floral gardens, take tractor tours of orchards and stroll vineyards. Discover over 60 varieties of lavender at a local lavender farm. Learn about indigenous plants at gardens specializing in xeriscape gardening. Or, experience the symmetry of Kelowna's elegant Japanese garden and numerous English gardens. [www.tourismkelowna.com](http://www.tourismkelowna.com)

