

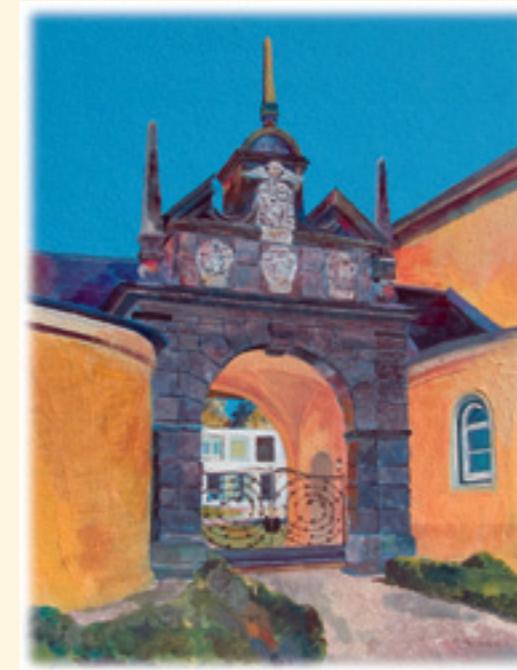
# HOTEL SCHLOSS VELDEN



THE CASTLE AT LAKE WOERTH  
ANDREAS AUGUSTIN

HOTEL SCHLOSS VELDEN

THE CASTLE AT LAKE WOERTH



*A Select Member of*



THE MOST FAMOUS HOTELS IN THE WORLD

### Sommerfrische

is an Austrian term, as tricky to translate as, for example, 'Zeitgeist' or 'Gemütlichkeit', which have long found their way into the English language.

Velden was created at the very end of the 19th century as a summer retreat for the jaded and worried people from the thick air and hurry of the crowded towns. They were in search for peaceful spots where they could relax, recover and – of course – also show themselves off during their 'Sommerfrische'.

'Sommerfrische' is a wider idea than summer vacation. It refers to a time in summer when the nobility moved to their country houses, to the alpine resorts, to the lakes and mountains of Austria. It stands for summer (Sommer) and re-'fresh'-ing (frisch)

Sommerfrische is the landlocked response to the posh seaside resorts of Biarritz, Brighton or – to stay within the borders of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy – Abbazia (Opatia), Rimini or Porto Rosz. 'Summer retreat' is what writers from the Brontë sisters to Daphne du Maurier would have said and Rosamunde Pilcher might still use.

Welcome to Velden's legendary Schlosshotel, today a retreat for all of us at all times of the year.



# *auch auf Deutsch -- in English -- in Italiano*

## HOTEL SCHLOSS VELDEN

Andreas Augustin  
presents  
The Most Famous Hotels in the World  
Schloss Velden

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All historic data has been carefully selected and put together during research with the objective of providing a general historical and entertaining overview. This work does not therefore claim to be complete. In this context we want to thank the managers of the house for their consequence in giving preference to historical reality over the advertising appeal of legends.

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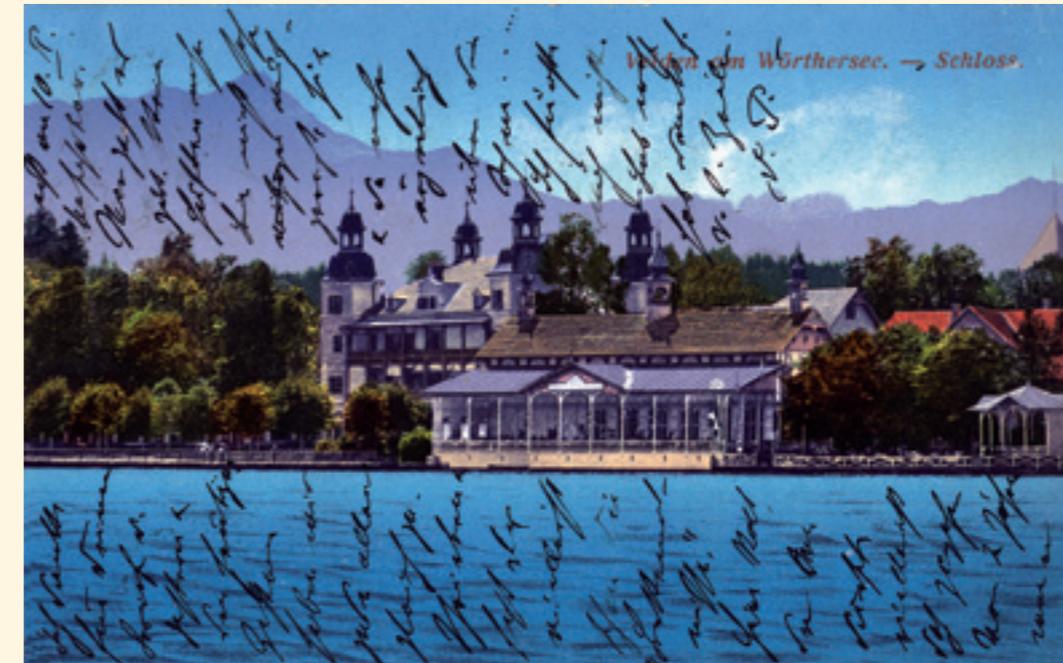
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## HOTEL SCHLOSS VELDEN



*Postcard from 1910: 'The overwritten idyll' is almost a piece of art.*

## READING INSTRUCTIONS

*Let me welcome you to my small guided tour through Schloss Velden's history. In this perfect setting, you will feel utterly relaxed. As background music I suggest Brahms' concert for violin, op. 77, which he composed at Lake Woerth. Contemporary connoisseurs were deeply impressed by its elegance I also recommend listening to it in the morning when the sun rises above the lake, smiling at the Seespitz.*

*Experience the feeling of a lawn beneath your feet again, for instance at the 'Beach-club'. The grass, still wet, will tickle your feet. Gustav Mahler, of course, is a good choice as well. He finished composing his Fourth Symphony here, its last movement – 'The heavenly life' – meant to be performed 'comfortably'. No problem, right?*

*Andreas Augustin*



*'Beachclub'  
From the Velden scetchbook by Manfred Markowski, 2007.*

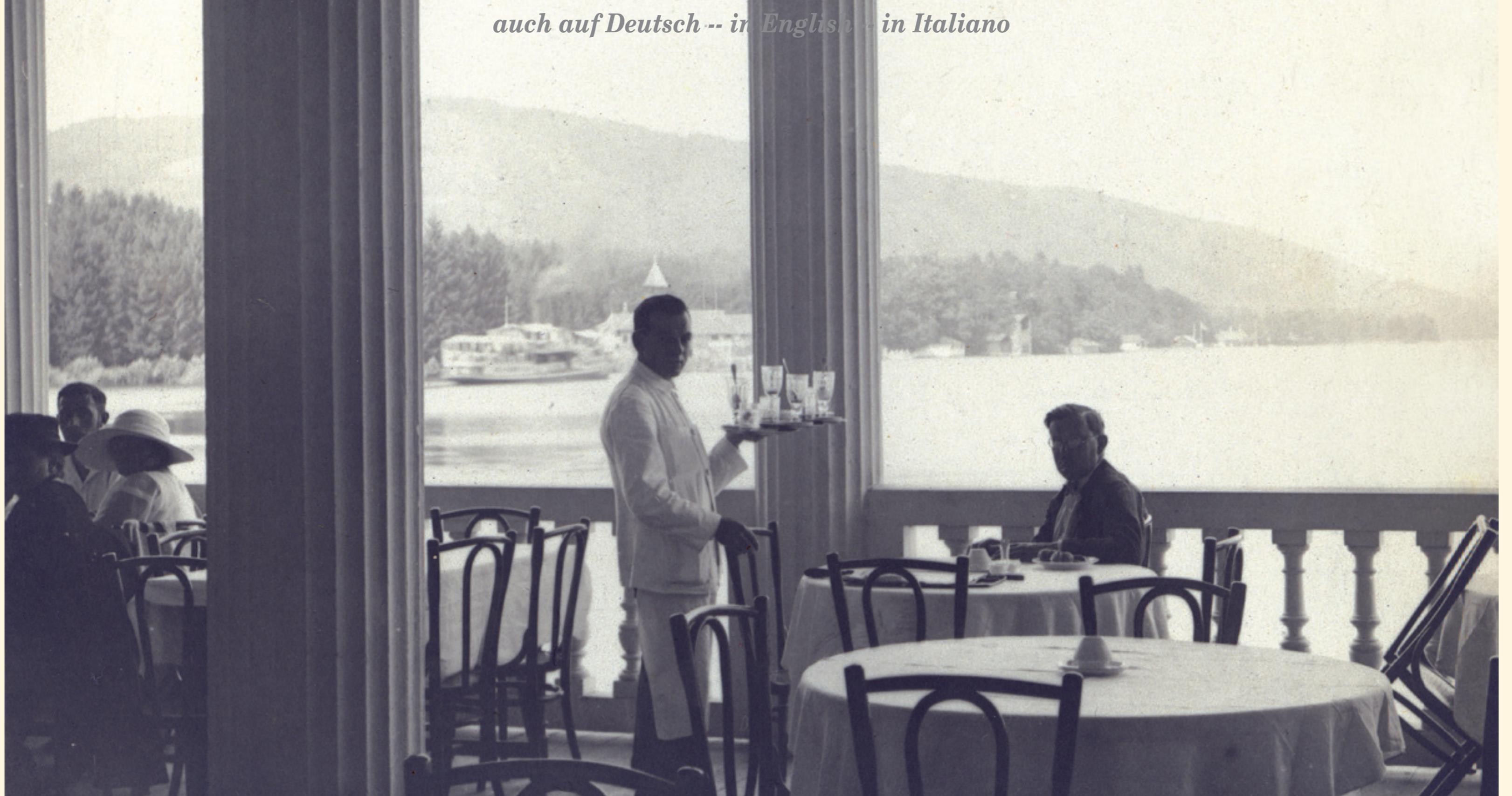
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1.

THE ANGLE OF THE SUN  
ARCHIVAL GROUNDWORK

With their feet stretched forward two ducks land on the water directly in front of the Seespitz terrace. As they fly in from the Schlosspark, we walk through a tunnel or on ground level from the castle to enjoy our breakfast here. The restaurant has been open since 7:00 a.m. The sun rises on the opposite side, with apparently only Lake Woerth between me and the centre of the universe.

'Business' starts slowly on the lake: a swimming motorboat filling station navigates from the eastern to the western shore and back again. We are on the lake's western shore. Soon, it will be very busy here. Right now, the lake's surface in front of the Seespitz is as smooth as glass. So smooth that a young man with his mono-ski steps out onto the jetty waiting for a motorboat, which approaches discreetly, as if its driver didn't want to interrupt. He is allowed a speed of 50km/h (31 mph) during the day, 25 km/h (15.5 mph) during the night and only 10 km/h (6.2 mph) close to the shore. 'Now, while the lake is still smooth it works best', rejoices the water skier.

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*Franz Moro is one of the fathers of tourism and Velden's lakeside baths. His family founded the first bathing institution, continued by the Ulbing family.*

*Left: Journey from Vienna to Velden: Scene at the Payerbach – Reichenau railway station where the actual mountain route of the Semmeringbahn begins. The first-class cars and the restaurant car were at the train's rear. People avoided sticking their heads out of the window as the small glowing coal particles emanating from the chimney had often caused severe eye injuries.*

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as Hotel Ulbing, a first-class house, but also the Schlosshotel and its first guests in that summer season: Mrs. Camilla Weishut, the wife of an industrialist with her four children, and two ladies from Vienna. In August, Baron Felix von Bruselle, treasurer in the service of the Emperor, arrived with his wife, son and a toddler from Graz, followed by a pharmacist, a factory owner and a chemist from Vienna.

Velden, the Lake Woerth jewel which had been discovered only recently, attracted visitors from all over Europe. The *k.u.k. Südbahn* brought visitors to Carinthia. It took ten hours from Vienna to travel by train via the mountain track crossing the Semmering, and 11 hours from Budapest. From Berlin via Prague it took 20 hours, from Prague via Vienna 12.5 hours, from Rome 22 hours and from Paris 35 hours.

Travelling via the Semmering, the green Styria and finally Carinthia was as spectacular then as it is today. With a last short stop in Klagenfurt, the steam engine thundered along on its Lake Woerth route, followed by the second- and third-class cars. 45 minutes later it arrived in Velden. The sky wore a deep blue, the lake sparkled like an emerald, and the air was mild, with the sweet aroma of holidays. If you let your imagination flow, you can still experience it today, with much shorter travel times.

Guests stayed for weeks instead of days. Families arrived to spend large parts of the summer here. Each year, on 18 August, the Emperor's birthday, communities organised major celebrations. The festivities always lasted several days in Pörschach and Velden, culminating in a ball. When in 1899 the Emperor came to Carinthia for military exercises, he visited Wahliss in Pörschach and the entrepreneur showed him his properties. The Emperor enjoyed being shown around the area and also visited the villa number IX.

On 18 July 1900 Ernst Wahliss died in Vienna. His daughter Katharina Maria, who had married a Casati (1874–1965), inherited the hotel. Somewhat reluctantly at first, she finally took the helm, renovated the Parkvilla, modernised the spa and purchased the area of the Dietrichstein trust company, which once belonged to the castle. Many annexes such as today's ceremonial hall date back to that time. The court behind the castle is shaped in an 'L'. Today's 'O' developed a hundred years later. As promising as all the innovations were, the young lady was soon overwhelmed by the costs. Her father's 'mistress' was much more expensive than she had thought.

Soon, she seems to have become more than fed up. In 1909, Mrs. Casati sold the whole property at a remarkably low price — for 375,000 Kronen — to a Vienna-based association supporting children in need. Velden was shocked at this affront: from luxury hotel to holiday home for poor students.

The community attempted to limit the damage. This could not be done to an upcoming tourist resort. A holiday home for poor children in Velden's castle? Making both ends meet, it repurchased the Schlosshotel for 500,000 Kronen the same year, appointed a supervisory board and began searching for a hotel director.

Thus, the community itself turned into an hotelier. All leading hoteliers in Velden were members of the council and yet — or perhaps because of this fact — they didn't succeed in managing the hotel effectively.



After World War I the separation of Carinthia and its integration into the South Slavic Federation was impending. When the Carinthians had to decide whether they wanted to belong to Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia or to what was left of Austria, their choice was Austria. A fight ensued. To counter the advance of Slovene troops which occupied the country, an organised Carinthian defence formed against the directive of a lame and hesitant Viennese government. The defence was strategically planned by a provisional federal state government in Spittal an der Drau. During the Carinthian defence the castle served as the headquarters of Captain Karl Eglseer from December to May 1919.

The fights were dramatic; the Yugoslavs occupied Schloss Velden for more than a month; the interior decoration was devastated. In front of the castle lay the ruins of the burnt-down Seerestaurant.

On 10 October 1920 a decisive referendum was held in Southern Carinthia's border area, where the Slovenes accounted for approximately 70% of the entire population. 59.04% of the vote went to Austria — a considerable part (some 40%) of the Carinthian Slovenes had voted to remain in Austria.

In 1920 Velden has a population of 1,190. Despite the preceding war there is a relatively balanced ratio of 638 women and 552 men. The war has caused a recession, the financial situation is strained. Tourism returns only slowly to Carinthia. The community even decides to take up a

*Crisis? What crisis? The people from Velden are a sunny folk, even in difficult times. Here is a snapshot taken in the Schlossbad, always and at all times the most exquisite and elegant lakeside bath.*

loan as summer guests need to be supplied with food. The following ad is placed in the *Neue Freie Presse*:

'Alpine lakeside and climatic resort  
VELDEN AT LAKE WOERTH  
Summer season opened.  
Guaranteed board.  
Information at the Mayor's office.'

Sophie Günzl, the oldest daughter of hotelier Christof Mösslacher, rented the Seerestaurant and the Seevilla (Schlossstöckl). When inspecting 'her' Schlosshotel, she found it to be devastated and asked Franz Baumgartner for help. The great Lake Woerth architect arrived and started planning. Many of his plans, however, for instance the construction of a sanatorium, failed to see the day. But the Seerestaurant would offer a key example for successful lakeshore construction. The building had two floors, with a terrace open on three sides. From the loges on the second floor one was able to observe the people downstairs as they entertained themselves in the hall. A roof terrace with blue chairs and tables opened up great vistas over the lake.

The summer seasons brought new guests but hardly any regulars. The hotel had been without a management for more than ten years; then it had closed. The Great War had turned the memories of earlier times into the 'good old days'. It was a long time since members of the nobility had walked through the castle door. Sometimes an illustrious name on would turn up the guest list, but many had lost their usual spending power. The last Austrian Emperor lived without financial means in his exile in Madeira, where he died in 1922. Wandering around Europe, the once powerful Habsburgs had no land and no titles. The continent had a

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*Swan song of the monarchies: in the centre the Siamese King Prajadhipok Sakdidejana (Rama VII) who laid the foundation stone for the political structure of today's Thailand before he abdicated.*



*The exiled Spanish monarch Alfonso XIII visits Velden with his entourage, spending a beautiful week in August at the Schlosshotel.*



*In the summer season of 1929 Nelly took guests on panorama flights over the lake. On the amateur photo one makes out the new attic rooms of the hotel. Right: Austria's Federal President Wilhelm Miklas in Velden.*



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In 1928, Baumgartner and Bulfon extend the castle's roof. 12 rooms are added. While the towers are not integrated, three times three street-facing windows are added below three circular roofs. The façade of today's main building develops.

Alexander Spitzmüller-Harmersbach, the last minister of finance of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, his wife Ernestine and his son Octavian visit the Schlosshotel that same year. Nobody knows that he will be called to Vienna once again as a trouble-shooter in the early 30s, at the peak of the Great Depression. Velden became his retirement residence, where he died in 1953.

In the summer season of 1929 Nelly appeared. Not a creature dwelling in the lake like a certain Scottish legend but a flying boat taking tourists from Velden on panorama flights over the lake. It started and landed in front of the castle and the price for one tour was 100 Schillings. Today's hotel owners are considering joining the fun and reinstalling a flying boat. Flying was very popular at that time. Hermann Köhl, the first pilot who crossed the Atlantic from the East to the West, i.e. from Europe to the United States (Lindbergh had been successful from the West to the East one year before, in 1927), visited the Schlosshotel.

From 1933, Austrian tourism suffered from Hitler's extortionate thousand-Mark sanction forcing every German tourist to come up with the almost exorbitant sum of 1,000 Deutschmarks before being permitted to enter Austria. The background was the following: Hans Frank, the Bavarian Minister of Justice, had been expelled from Austria after a diatribe against the Austrian Federal Chancellor Dollfuss. The sanction was Hitler's revenge. Tourism, one of the main sources of foreign exchange, had been hit hard. While 3,400

German guests had visited a large Velden in 1932, only 192 came in 1934.

In search of a beautiful place many a weary exiled monarch whose office had fallen prey to the spirit of the time (annulment of the world's large monarchies from Russia to the Austro-Hungarian throne), visited the Lake Woerth holiday paradise. Schloss Velden became a playground for exiled monarchs. In 1935 Spain's former King Alfonso XIII visited Velden with a large entourage, spending a beautiful week in August at the Schlosshotel. As he had moved into permanent quarters at the Grand Hotel in Rome, the excursion into the much cooler Velden was a relief during the Italian August holidays.

The unhappy King of Siam Prajadhipok Sakdidejana (Rama VII) also rediscovered his smile in Velden. He had laid the foundation stone for the political structures of today's Thailand, when – pressured by the Peoples Party – he signed the country's first constitution on 10 December 1932. He abdicated in 1935.

First monarchy, then republic – if only it were easier. Austrians found it hard to adapt to the new form of government. The country became plagued by upheaval in a quasi-civil war. Following the Nazi coup in 1934, which culminated in the assassination of Federal Chancellor Dollfuss, Austria's Federal President Wilhelm Miklas took a summer holiday in Velden. He did not stay at the hotel, but enjoyed his meals at the Schlossrestaurant. A Nazi commando had planned to kidnap him in Velden, but failed to do so. Unimpressed, Miklas visited the fifth international tennis tournament held at the Schlosshotel's splendid new tennis courts.





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5.

STARS AND TOQUES  
THE BRITISH AT THE CASTLE

What a performance! Perfect combinations are passed on. Moving forward together, moving backward in harmony – a performance arranged like choreographies by Maestro Petipa. The ensemble members are headed by a person who dances round the tables among them. Like a lucullan corps de ballet they buzz through the room, coordinating to satisfy our needs. Their first soloist is the Maître d'hôtel.

Oh please forgive me, I've wandered off a bit, revelling in the culinary heaven of Silvio Nickol, chef de cuisine at the fine dining restaurant Schlossstern. I'm particularly enthusiastic about the performance of the service staff.

We've had the first summer season after the re-opening of the hotel and Silvio Nickol's cuisine has won the hearts of gourmet critics. While in earlier years the owners of the hotel used to pray to God the chef would make a return the next summer season – with the notable exception of Franz Schruf who came back 25 consecutive years – things are somewhat different at the Schlossstern today.

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*During the Autokorso, a Car Parade (staged for the first time in 1951), tourists from all over the region crowded the streets to watch the glossy luxurious limousines rolling along the promenade.*

*The scene was reminiscent of an advertising spot: attractive people (primarily women who decorated the bonnets), rich or at least handsome drivers, beautiful flower arrangements, and expensive limousines.*



*Up to 5,000 (!) cars participated. You may thus rest assured that automobile events at Lake Woerth started off with a high standard.*

*Rubbing shoulders with the stars: racy cabriolets and their drivers like internationally renown playboy Gunther Sachs (top) – who caused a furore in Velden – or teen heartthrob Peter Kraus. With a little bit of luck you saw both of them (centre left).*



*Rock'n'roll fever at Schloss Velden. See previous double page: There is always something going on!*

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6.

## GOLDEN TIMES HIGH SOCIETY

The hot stone has a soothing effect, its curve perfectly adapting to my body (it is actually the other way round, of course). I'm dozing on one of the two heated stone loungers, at the far end of the sauna, right in front of the snow grotto. It is one of the very few snow grottos in the world. There is one in Dubai, I have heard, and another one on the North Pole.

Farther back, in the womb of the hotel, my wife takes great delight in a lunar-cycle treatment. There is nothing better, she says. According to its respective cycle, either waxing or waning, the power of the moon optimally supports purification processes. They are experts here at the castle, dedicating 3,000 square metres (32,300 square feet) to the well-being of guests, with saunas, steam baths, relaxation areas, massage rooms, a tea bar, and the large pool.

'A fitness centre and a professional golf simulator round off the programme' you would probably read in an advertising brochure. Daniela, one of the personal trainers, has taken me on a Nordic walking tour across Carinthia (at least it felt like it). Thereafter,

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## THE STORY OF A FAMOUS HOTEL

BUILT AS THE RETREAT FOR A PRINCE, CONVERTED INTO A HOTEL FOR THE PERFECT VACATION, GROWN INTO A WORLD CLASS RESORT. THE HISTORY OF SCHLOSS VELDEN IS THE FASCINATING TALE OF ONE OF THE LEGENDARY AND UNIQUE HOTELS OF EUROPE.

*A Winter Tale, by Manfred Markowski*

