

# French resorts go for ECO-CHIC!

Preserving energy, cutting emissions, clearing up rubbish, recycling waste products.  
Sally Ann Voak finds out if it really is ooh-la-la to be green?



**T**he French are making eco-chic their new ski buzzword. So next time you drop a sweet wrapper from a chair-lift, be very, very ashamed! In early May school children and volunteers in French resorts like Saint-Gervais, Chamonix and Les Contamines spend hours on the pistes clearing debris ready for summer activities.

This is all part of their green ethic. Blessed with a stunning environment which sustains the livelihood of most of the population, town hall planners and local mayors are signing up to "Croissance Verte" (Green Growth). It makes sense – investment in green technology is encouraged by the government by grants and tax benefits.

The French have a practical approach to saving the planet: if it's good for France and great for business, let's do it! Jean-Marc Peilleux,



*Cleaning the slopes...*

mayor of Saint-Gervais, is passionate about preventing Mont Blanc from becoming a consumer "product".

**“...if it's good for France and great for business, let's do it!”**

He says: "The mountain must not decline into a vast, polluted amusement park. We have to work at preserving the environment. It's our livelihood." Jean-Marc has put his ideas into action: school children collect litter, natural spring water is recycled to heat the town's swimming pool, eco-friendly materials are used to resurface roads, and, this year, you can use the highest

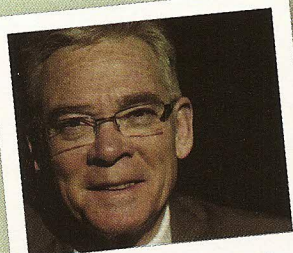
"dry" lavatory in Europe on the way up Mont Blanc at the Vallot shelter (4,562m).

In Les Saisies, the popular 1650m family resort, they are replacing their free buses with new electric models which are low-emission and using a new rapid rubbish collecting and sorting system. If you drop your phone, it is likely to be recycled within a few hours – so zip up your jacket!

As visitors, we can learn from the French experience. Some ideas are universally useful such as maximising natural resources, sourcing the latest materials to insulate buildings and recycling raw materials cleverly so the finished product is chic as well as functional.

You can now enjoy an eco-ski holiday in many resorts and even stay in an eco-chalet or hotel.

**So, join the greenies! ■**



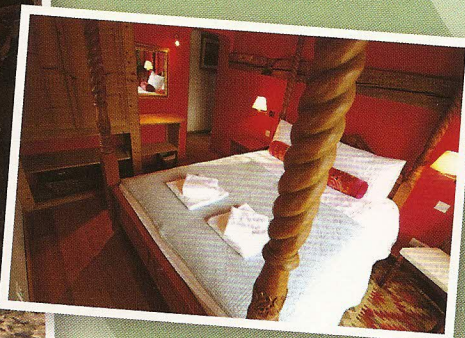
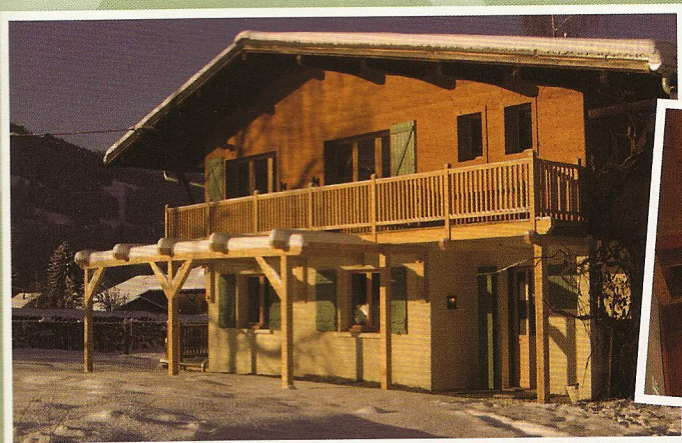
*Mayor Jean-Marc Peilleux*



*Electric shuttle-bus*



Chalet exterior and luxury bedroom



## OUR ECO DREAM HOUSE

Brits Martin and Jane Allen turned their eco dreams into reality by combining their own expertise with French craft skills

**They own the amazing luxury Chalet Le Kiwi Vert in Samoëns, Grand Massif. The couple bought it in 2009 and have spent thousands on achieving their dream. Step inside and it is a miracle of engineering, clever planning and imaginative recycling.**

Martin, 55, an engineer, explains: 'The project took 18 months to complete. First we had to gut the house, saving bits and pieces we knew we could use. Insulation is a homogenous material made from recycled gypsum and cellulose fibres derived from paper mixed with recycled water – but without any additives or preservatives. It's very solid, and you don't need as much plastering on top as you do with other materials; one thin coat is enough.'

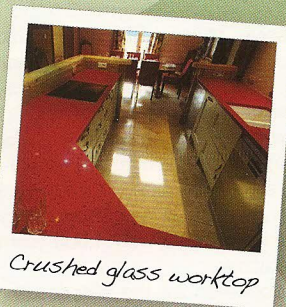
Chalet heating is produced by a ground source pump in the garden which delivers heat to the under floor coils, boot warmers, and outdoor hot tub. Solar panels top up the hot water when the sun shines so electricity is generated at minimal cost. Air extracted from the chalet is passed through a heat exchanger to recover up to 90 per cent of heat in winter. In summer, it stops the introduction of hot air – so you get instant air conditioning.

Jane, 56, designed the decor using rich, jewel colours and luxury fittings. She said: 'We wanted this to be a gorgeous place to stay, not just an eco-museum. The interior wood is recycled; beams, garden gate, the staircase, the four poster beds and the kitchen units. Our brilliant local chippie was kept busy and any furniture not made from scratch was bought off Ebay!'

The most stunning feature is the brilliant red kitchen worktop – made from crushed glass collected from a recycling unit in Bromley, south east London, and processed by a British company.

The position of the chalet is important too; there's no need for a car as it is two minutes' walk from the village and opposite the Grand Massif Express.

Martin and Jane are happy to share their tips for eco-splendour and if you would like to stay in their five-bedroom chalet (sleeps 9), full details are on the Alps Accommodation website [www.alpsaccommodation.com](http://www.alpsaccommodation.com). ■



Crushed glass worktop