

grand hotel kronenhof - **the history**

Introduction

It is the year 1850. On 13 September, for the first time ever, a man stands on the still unnamed highest peak of the Eastern Alps. Johann Wilhelm Coaz is the first to reach the top and decides to name the peak after the owner of the mountain pass inn - Mr Bernini.

When Swiss forestry engineer and mountain topographer Coaz and his two assistants finally reached the „pure, untouched ground“, it is already 18.00 h. They climbed the Piz Bernina only with the help of nailed shoes, a hemp rope, headscarves against sunlight, and long sticks to probe crevasses.

These are the great pioneering achievements that marked the beginning of tourism in the Engadine - wanting to get as close as possible to the imposing four-thousand-meter peaks to admire them - and sometimes even to climb them. Pontresina, located in the heart of the Bernina region in the Upper Engadine, benefitted profoundly from these new leisure activities.

Coaz was not the only pioneer however. Andreas Gredig laid the foundation for a legend celebrating its 170th anniversary in 2018 - the Grand Hotel Kronenhof.

The founding 1848 - 1870

In 1848, Andreas Gredig (1806 - 1877) from Gräsch,



Prättigau, in the canton of Graubünden settles in Pontresina. He buys an inn called „Rössli“ in Pontresina's oldest housing complex „Laret“ for his son Lorenz (1829-1905).

The Gredig family could not possibly foresee that without their entrepreneurial vision 170 years ago, Grand Hotel Kronenhof, as we know it today, would not exist. There was a long path ahead, including several changes – starting with a renovation and changing the name from „Rössli“ to „Gasthaus zur Krone-Post“. Later, Lorenz Gredig extended the inn between 1860 and 1870, by adding the adjoining old schoolhouse, which was rebuilt by the Grisons master builder Nikolaus Hartmann (sen.). Furthermore, they also took over two outbuildings on the opposite side of the street.

Glory and splendour 1872 - 1898

Unlike St. Moritz, Pontresina was not known for its luxurious grand hotels in the early days, but the existing buildings were used as modest guest houses. Nevertheless, thanks to the explosive development of tourism in the Upper Engadine, the „Krone“ flourished, and more space was required to accommodate the guests' celebrations. Nikolaus Hartmann senior first built a new valley-facing dining room with a new kitchen beneath it. He then constructed the „Bellavista“ wing with luxurious lounges (Salle de Conversation, Salle des Dames, Salle de Billard)

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and guest rooms with their own private lounges. Lorenz Gredig also gives the hotel a new name to match its new upgraded appearance: „Hotel Kronenhof and Bellavista“. Between 1896 and 1898, the Kronenhof experiences its most significant expansion to date: it is converted to a horseshoe-shaped, three-wing layout with a forecourt (Cour d'honneur). The expansion was executed by the architects Jacob and Georg Ragaz. The main entrance was placed directly under the dome in the middle of the forecourt, the large, well-lit lobby in the center and elegant lounges on both sides and a magnificent grand restaurant - as the hotel still remains today. The hotel offered over 350 guest beds and a tennis court was built in the large terraced garden.

Around 1901, one of the emblems of the Kronenhof emerges: the ceiling frescos in the dining room. Otto Haberer, a Bernese artist composes the four seasons: the delicate colors of spring, the full summer, the hunting goddess Diana as a symbol of autumn, and the cool blues and grays in winter. Otto Haberer is said to have immortalized himself in one of the small round windows in the hall. The frescoes are among the key elements, which make the hotel one of the most significant Neo-Baroque buildings to the present day.

In 1905, the patron Lorenz Gredig passes away and his son Lorenz Gredig-Fanconi takes over the management



of the grand hotel.

The Belle Epoque brings the nobility to the Engadine, as guests from all over the world enjoy spending their holidays in Pontresina. The journey to the high valley now becomes quite pleasant: from the summer of 1903, the Rhaetian Railway transports the noble clientele comfortably from Chur to Samedan and from 1908 one could travel by train to Pontresina in winter as well. Lorenz Gredig-Fanconi builds an ice-skating rink and plans for a new room wing with a separate ballroom. In 1914, World War I breaks out and all plans come to a sudden halt.

Hard times 1914 – 1945

War and economic crisis years were a great burden on the Kronenhof. Despite all challenges, the Gredig family tries to adapt the hotel business as well as possible to the difficult circumstances. This is where Lorenz Gredig's business sense comes in, as the wine shop proves to be a secure source of income during the crisis years. The trade with the wine from Valtellina allows the family to survive the tough times and at least partially make up for the dwindling number of guests.

After the war, a renovation is due, which first takes place behind the scenes: The kitchen was extended, and a new heating system installed. Gradually, the guest rooms receive private bathrooms. Previously, luxury was defined

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by the elaborate decorations – not even the luxury suites had their own private bathrooms. Instead, guests shared bathrooms down the hall. Only after 1900, the luxury guest rooms were equipped with their own private bathrooms.

When the Winter Olympics take place in the Upper Engadine in the center of St. Moritz in 1928, the international jet setters once again take over the region. Architect Nikolaus Hartmann (jun.), son of the „Krone’s“ master builder, designed the wooden „ice pavilion“ with a sun terrace in 1933 by the hotel’s own ice rink.

A few years later, in the oldest part of the hotel, an arched ceiling is created for the tavern and Swiss stone pine panels for the „Kronenstübli“ follow. Things were looking up again for tourism in Pontresina before the world’s political situation changed again completely.

The Second World War made Switzerland an „alpine fortress“. The few guests left were mainly domestic and stayed in the oldest part of the Kronenhof. As if the war were not already enough of a burden, Lorenz Gredig-Fanconi dies in 1940 at the age of 81 and his family must take care of the succession. His six children continue to run the business: Lorenz Gredig-Stünzi (Council Member of the Canton of Grisons and Vice President of the Swiss Hotel Association), Andreas Gredig (Director of the hotel since 1945), Christian Gredig (head of the wine shop), Giachem



Gredig (responsible for agriculture), Thomas Gredig and Margerita Gredig, their only daughter.

The new millennium

20 years after the first winter games, the Olympic flame returns to St. Moritz in 1948, attracting an international crowd. Pontresina becomes a haven of discretion and tranquility, next to its glamorous neighbor. The tourist boom remains even after the Olympic games ended. In the 1950s, Lorenz Gredig the fourth, son of Christian Gredig, welcomes business men and artists, nobles and movie stars. The upswing is also followed by new structural additions: in 1963, the Kronenhof receives an indoor pool as well as an outdoor swimming pool in the large hotel park.

In 1975, the management was taken over by a woman for the first time: Rita-Angela Gredig, daughter of Andreas Gredig, leads the 140 employees for almost ten years. In 1984, the house is leased out. But due to one of the 16 Gredig-heirs wanting to inherit cash, the family must break its 141-year-old tradition: The hotel is sold in 1989. The new owners are Swiss private investors Hans C. Bodmer and Andreas G. Schmid. They lead the traditional house with great commitment into the new millennium until autumn 2002, when the five-star hotelier Henry Hunold from Zurich takes over the lead.

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The Grande Dame today

Two years later, the Grande Dame of the Engadine hotel industry changed hands again: in the spring of 2004, the AG Grand Hotels Engadinerkulm, owners of the famous Kulm Hotel St. Moritz, bought the Grand Hotel Kronenhof and its properties. The new owners arranged for extensive renovations. First, in December 2004, the west wing, the former patrician Villa Ganzoni, with 29 elegant rooms and suites was constructed. The following year, seven more rooms facing the courtyard are completely renovated, after they have not been used for 20 years. The corridors on the upper four floors are also refurbished. However, the over 100 years old Pitch Pine Wood from the old corridors is reused for the new parquet floor of the Gourmet Restaurant Kronenstübli.

In 2007, Heinz E. and Jenny Hunkeler take over management of the Kronenhof. One year prior, further renovations had already been set into motion: an underground car park with 100 parking spaces, 28 additional rooms and suites and a more than 2000 m² large wellness area were built. The Greek owners, the Niarchos family, invest around 35 million Swiss francs in these renovations. From April to November 2007, the staff housing and the kitchen were rebuilt. During this time, the entire hotel remained closed. Since the construction of the three-wing complex in the 19th century, this has been the greatest renovation the Grande Dame has undergone.



In spring of 2009, nine more rooms were renovated. Two individual corner suites „Bellaval Suite“ and „Engiadina Suite“ in the Ganzoni wing are added. Additionally, the courtyard is rebuilt in the original style with cobblestone.

Since 2013, Marc Eichenberger is managing director at Grand Hotel Kronenhof. In 2015, he initiated the renovation and modernisation of the ski room. For the 2016/2017 winter season, the last major architectural change takes place: The renowned French interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon re-designs a total of 13 rooms and suites. His trademark is the combination of historical and local elements with classic timeless elegance. For example, white-glazed pine, mint green bedspreads and delicate earth tones give the newly designed rooms a natural lightness, while selected pictures and lamps recall the history of the house.

Today, one can hardly distinguish the numerous constructions that took place over the years. Both the old and new building fit seamlessly together thanks to skillfully standardized architecture. The past and the present, as well as tradition and innovation are all combined into one at Grand Hotel Kronenhof. In 2018 the Grande Dame celebrated her 170th birthday. Today, history continues to live on in the walls of Grand Hotel Kronenhof.