

The dream of endless winter

Lucas Swieykowski lives for powder snow and spends his whole life in one season: winter! The pro freerider commutes between the Engadin and Argentina; his favourite mountain: the Corvatsch.

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Snow, ice and rock:
Lucas is happiest
in the high mountains
of the Engadin.

Lucas trudges through the deep snow, breathing heavily. He is walking along a long mountain ridge in order to access an untouched slope. Eventually he reaches the start of his run. He peers cautiously into the abyss. The snow looks perfect: powdery and deep, just as he likes it. Before Lucas sets off, he checks his equipment: his avalanche airbag is ready for action, his goggles are in place, his ski boots firmly buckled up. One last deep breath, and he launches himself into the untouched snow.

Up here on the Corvatsch, the 37-year-old knows his way around. He loves this high mountain, its steep flanks, its mischievous hollows and long runs. "I find all the technical challenges I seek as a skier," he says. "And what always bowls me over, time and again, is the view over the lake-strewn valley. In early winter, when the lakes haven't frozen over yet, the scenery reminds me of the fjords in Norway."

The art of reading the snow

Lucas places his turns precisely and dynamically to make the snow spray up as much as possible. His run down the long couloir ends with a whoop of joy right by a chairlift, where he meets other freeriders who congratulate him on his stylish line. They compare notes on runs they have done, on the consistency of the snow and their assessment of the

avalanche risk. About 30 centimetres of fresh snow have fallen in the last two days; even more up at 3,300 metres.

Every day, the professional freerider studies different weather reports, snow-fall charts and the avalanche bulletin. Where has the most snow fallen? Which direction is the wind coming from? How are temperatures changing? Such questions occupy Lucas's mind constantly. "Because a good powder day begins with good preparation," he says. Up on the mountain, the questions continue to fill his head: do the forecasts and reports match my observations? What does the surface structure of the snow tell me? Are there signs of natural avalanches? The veteran skier evaluates the conditions: "The wind wasn't as strong as expected," he says in English, "and that's good."


Skiing rather than studying

Lucas Swieykowski was born in the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires. He learned to ski at a young age: he and his family regularly spent holidays in Bariloche, probably the best-known ski resort in South America. When Lucas was 11, the family moved permanently to Bariloche, and skiing became the focus of his life. He became involved in the local alpine club and soon completed all levels of Argentina's ski instructor training programme.

Always looking for the perfect line: freeride skier Lucas Swieykowski (above).

Light, deep powder: Lucas's favourite kind of snow (below).



An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain slope. The snow is bright white and shows tracks from skiers. In the lower center, a skier is captured in a dynamic turn, kicking up a spray of powder. To the right, another skier is visible further down the slope. In the upper left, a group of people is gathered on a small rocky outcrop. The overall scene is one of a pristine, high-altitude ski environment.

**In the heart
of the couloir:
“On the
Corvatsch
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I seek.”**

After he finished high school, Lucas went to Sweden, where his grandfather had lived for a long time. The young skier intended to study in Lund, like his elder brother, but he realised this was not his path: he wanted to ski and earn his living that way. In order to work as a ski instructor during the Argentinian summer, too, he travelled to the northern hemisphere: first to the USA, then to Canada, and later Europe, France, Austria, Andorra. And finally to the Engadin, which has become his second home.

It all began with a bar job

But even Lucas's work as a ski instructor did not give him the satisfaction he sought. He wanted to ski more for himself and gain new skills in powder snow and open terrain, where real adventure lay. And he dreamed of a career as a freerider. Lucas confesses: “If I can't be outdoors in the mountains, I become weird with time. I have to feel the elements: the wind, the cold, the snow spraying in my face. And the feeling of gliding over deep powder snow and riding a mountain slope in a controlled way is simply incomparable.”

As chance would have it, a friend got him a job in St. Moritz – not as a ski instructor but in a bar. Since then, Lucas has been spending every winter in the Engadin. “The magic of this valley

grabbed me immediately: beautiful, mighty mountains with a superb network of lifts that take you up to high-altitude alpine terrain. The possibilities of finding good snow and long runs here are virtually boundless.”

Skiing boring? Never!

Lucas's first winter in the Engadin was also the springboard for his career as a professional skier. He had the opportunity to take part in the Engadinsnow event with the world's top freeriders. “We abseiled from the Corvatsch cable car straight into the competition slope, which was scattered with cliffs,” Lucas remembers. “It was crazy!” Sponsorship deals soon followed, and Lucas began to travel the ski world and carry out film projects. The Engadin became his base for the winter. “I was in Japan, Alaska, Russia; and every time I came back to the Engadin, I was amazed how good and beautiful this valley is for skiing.”

Lucas spends the Engadin summers in the Bariloche winter. “I have family, friends and a home there,” he says. In Argentina, he continues to work as a ski instructor and also increasingly as a mountain guide, having completed this tough professional training, too. In this way, Lucas lives the dream of the endless winter. Skiing all year: doesn't that ever get boring? “No way! I always

find new aspects and constantly develop my skills. Today I look at mountains in a totally different way to 10 years ago. When I saw the Piz Palü for the first time, for example, I thought: I'll never go up there. Since then I've been up several times – and skied down.”

High up on the Corvatsch, Lucas is preparing for his next run. He is standing by the legendary Furtschellas Couloir: he has skied down dozens of times, but every time it's a new feeling, he says. “The snow is always different, so you never know exactly what to expect on the way. That's precisely why I'm a freerider,” Lucas says – and disappears in the powder.



Sensational mountain terrain

The Corvatsch is Silvaplana's local mountain. The summit station, 3,303 m above sea level, is the highest in Graubünden. corvatsch.ch

Another perfect powder day! Lucas can't wait for more...

