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GSTAAD LIFE

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ART AND ART DE VIVRE

HRH Princess Marie Gabrielle of Savoy in conversation with Bernard Piguet



REGAL FIRESIDE CHAT

HRH Princess Marie Gabrielle of Savoy and Swiss auctioneer Bernard Piguet discuss Gstaad, art and *l'art de vivre*.

You are a Gstaad habituée and regularly visit the Saanenland. When did you first come to Gstaad?

I first started coming to Gstaad in 1954 to spend time with my brother. During his schooling at the then all-boys Institut Le Rosey, I kept him company while he was here along with my sisters and our nanny. Like him, my Belgian cousins were also at school here in Gstaad but at Chalet Marie José. I think it was in the late 1940s when my mother's brother, Léopold, and his family arrived.

How would you describe the Gstaad of this era?

With no church or cinema, in those days the Gstaad Palace was the centre of village life. Simplicity reigned supreme. Money had no currency.

In how far has it changed or remained the same over the decades?

What I have noticed most throughout my years in Gstaad is that no architectural errors have been made. All the new construction that has appeared is all in keeping with the surroundings. It is very respectful of the character of the place and of the environment. This is most unlike other ski resorts. Over time I have also observed the different waves of visitors attracted to Gstaad.

Snow – or rather the threatening lack thereof – may pose difficulties in the future...

I believe the Saanenland remains attractive whether it snows or not. It is a beautiful spot, surrounded by such picturesque scenery and magnificent mountains; pastoral as well as bucolic.

HRH Princess Marie Gabrielle of Savoy and her brother, HRH Prince Vittorio Emanuele, in the garden of the Gstaad Palace, 1958



All photographs courtesy of HRH Princess Marie Gabrielle of Savoy

“Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté.” In these lines Charles Baudelaire might as well be enamoured with the Saanenland, when he evokes order, beauty, luxury, peace and pleasure.

Do you have a particular time of year that you prefer for your visits to the region?

When I skied, I enjoyed the winter months a great deal but these days I appreciate it all throughout the year, irrespective of the season. I still visit Gstaad often at weekends and during the holidays. I feel very at home in Gstaad as I am surrounded by friends and people whose company I enjoy. I have so many happy and fond memo-

ries here. One thing I still love doing is riding in a horse-drawn sleigh. It brings back such precious memories of rides with my father during my childhood. I love seeing Gstaad from the seat of a horse-drawn sleigh. To me, there's just something special about it.

You created the Foundation Umberto II and Marie José of Savoy in 1986. What is the aim of the foundation?

As the histories of France, Italy and Switzerland are intertwined with the House of Savoy, so too are Gstaad and my family. To that end, I felt it my duty to honour my father and the House of Savoy by creating a foun-



dation in Switzerland that bears his name. It aims to preserve the collections of books, paintings, miniatures, drawings, prints and photographs regarding the history of the House of Savoy. My books further underscore this.

Is the collection of artefacts accessible to the public?

The collection the foundation holds is not open to the public as such but access is granted to museums, universities and academic bodies for study and exhibition purposes. Most recently, I lent 12 religious shrouds or Saint Suaire prints for an exhibition in Turin, Italy. The original Saint Suaire was in my family for some 530 years. My father then left it to Pope Jean-Paul II.

What inspired you to create this foundation?

My father. As you, Mr Piguet, do with your children, my father took me to many museums as a child and I remember admiring many collections. A life-long bibliophile, the walls of his house in Portugal while in exile were lined with bookshelves. If daughters adore their father, I was no exception. With charm, wit and erudition, he punctuated the halcyon days of my youth never spewing venom. My father educated me, including in the appreciation of art.

What period or kind of art are you particularly interested in?

Though my books focus on court life as well as royal taste in jewels and the decorative arts, I'm most at home in the eclectic style of the 19th century, like the poetry of Baudelaire.

Before immersing yourself in the world of art at the École du Louvre in Paris, you received a degree in Italian, French and Spanish interpretation from the University of Geneva.

Yes, aside from the École du Louvre in Paris, like your own mother, I pursued no history of art but rather an interpretation diploma in Italian, French and Spanish at the University of Geneva after secondary school, the Liceo Scientifico in Madrid. I speak 5 languages at varying levels: French, Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese. My mother tongue is Italian. These days I use French most often, on a daily basis that is. I am at ease reading a book in French or Italian, that doesn't make much difference to me. During summers I attended the painting courses of the Oscar Kokoschka at the "Sommer Akademie" in Salzburg. Dare I say, *tempo passati*.

Hopefully you will remain faithful to Gstaad and the Saanenland?

As for me, Bernard Piguet, I need no passionate entreaties. Gstaad remains a purveyor to royal households.

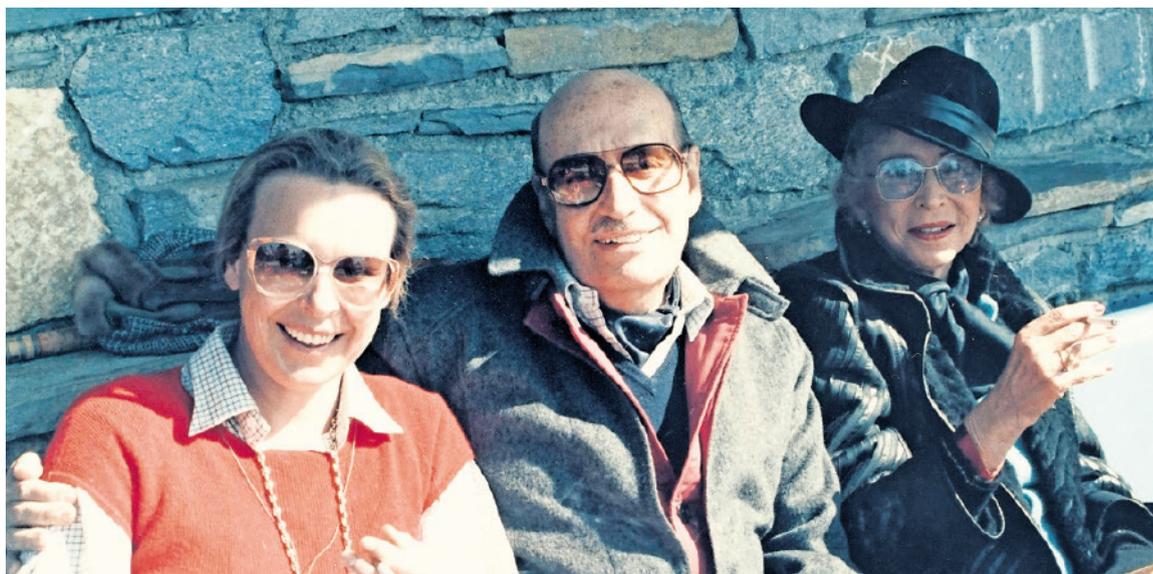
BERNARD PIGUET

HRH THE PRINCESS MARIE GABRIELLE OF SAVOY

HRH the Princess Marie Gabrielle of Savoy is the daughter of Umberto II, last King of Italy, and his wife the Queen Marie José, born Princess of Belgium, daughter of King Albert I of Belgium and Queen Elisabeth, Princess of Bavaria. Queen Elisabeth was the goddaughter and niece of Empress Elisabeth of Austria, "Sissi". Born in the midst of WWII just before France capitulated, HRH is living history and has been a lifelong resident of Gstaad.

BERNARD PIGUET

Bernard Piguet, like his surgeon father, did not answer the call of his family's Swiss private bank but rather his passion for the commerce of art and the art of commerce. After studying at the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Lausanne, Piguet pursued further training in the history of art in London before joining Sotheby's Geneva, after which he now runs the auction house that bears his name.



At the Eagle Club with her mother, Queen of Italy, born Marie José of Belgium, and Nelson Seabra in the late 80s

Opposite page: Gstaad, 1956.