



Alpine luxury now in a rail class of its own

Excellence Class is setting new standards thanks to two key factors: a new level of service including a personal concierge and, most of all, a charming design that brings the Alpine setting to life with the highest quality materials.

The specifications were ambitious: Excellence Class should offer a new level of service to orchestrate the natural Alpine experience and visually stand out from all previous classes. This called for a winning design the likes of which could be achieved with leading agency NOSE Design Experience, who had already been responsible for a number of new vehicle models for Swiss railway companies. «Luxury travel is brought to life through spaciousness, quality fabrics and atmospheric lighting,» says NOSE Design Experience partner Christian Harbeke, explaining the ambitious concept. «Alpine motifs and materials of the highest quality design and workmanship can heighten each individual experience. We gained inspiration for the design by taking a trip aboard the Glacier Express to Zermatt and staying in various high-class mountain hotels.»

Panoramic single seats and spinning bar seats

First to catch your eye are of course the plush seats by Czech manufacturer Borcad – a combination of beige leather and fine fabric in «glacial shades», with each seat featuring a different pattern. The textile cover reduces some of the bulkiness and ensures a pleasantly comfortable ride on the up to eight-hour journey, while also giving an all-new quality to the somewhat disparaging term used in automotive interiors: «partial» leather. Although the idea of having swivel chairs had to be dropped due to a lack of space, multidirectional power-seat adjustment ensures maximum comfort. Also, by limiting the seating arrangement to two single rows, each guest is guaranteed a window seat. A contrast to the soft leather seats is provided in the form of table lamps that appear to be carved from glacial ice.

Equally exquisite is the hand-tufted Tisca carpet, which picks up on the irregular pattern of the seats. From floor to ceiling: an extraordinary centrepiece in the bar at the rear of the carriage is a huge compass, much to the entertainment of guests when going through helical tunnels – an amusing idea that can be found in no other train in the world. Not only this circular dome, but also the centre strip on the ceiling and the background of the backlit side friezes featuring silhouette-like mountain landscapes are finely gold-plated. Reference is also made to the Alpine landscape through the use of quartzite from the Rhine Valley for the bar and WC panelling. According to Christian Harbeke, the use of stone and solid walnut proved particularly challenging in keeping within the permissible total weight. «Designing the Excellence Class carriage was as complex as designing an entire train.»

Sonorous edelweiss and all-knowing tablets

Even the on-board technology is «state of the excellent art»: speakers may be present, but they are cleverly concealed in an edelweiss design. Simple headphones that provide guests with information every few kilometres have been replaced by a much more informative tablet for each guest with access to the on-board infotainment system. But Glacier Express travellers want more than just information from a screen – they also want fabulous photos to preserve the memories. Rather than making all windows anti-reflective (which wouldn't have been entirely possible anyway), passengers can open the windows in the exterior doors and, as of next year, in the newly designed adjoining bistro car.



Quote

«When designing the interior of Excellence Class, we strictly adhered to the basic design theme 'Alpine luxury'.»

Christian Harbeke, partner at NOSE Design Experience