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## Well-Done in Velden

*Capella's first hotel provides an authentic Austrian experience and a hint of things to come.*



PERHAPS IT WAS the Champagne that put me in the mood to go parasailing. Never in my life had I considered being pulled through the air by a motorboat, but then, never before had I drunk two glasses of Dom Pérignon Vintage 1999 at breakfast. Within half an hour of the meal, one of the personal assistants at the Schloss Velden hotel had arranged everything, and there I was, flying 300 feet over the Wörthersee in Velden, Austria. A parachute trailed behind me, women in bikinis lounged on sailboats below, and on the western shore of the lake, bright in the morning sun, the newly reborn Schloss Velden rose to its four spiking towers, like a golden crown upon this modest resort town in the Carinthian Alps.

Schloss Velden first debuted as a hotel in 1891. Nearly a century later, the neo-Renaissance *Schloss*, or *château*, became a private residence, but an opening-night party this May marked a new chapter for the property—as well as for a veteran American hotelier. Schloss is the first hotel in the Capella Hotels & Resorts chain, which former Ritz-Carlton president and COO Horst Schulze founded in 2005. In 2006, Schulze teamed with Austrian firm Hypo Alpe-Adria-Bank International, owner of Schloss Velden, to convert the property back into a hotel. The partners spent \$175 million renovating the *château*, adding a contemporary wing, and preparing the staff for Schloss Velden's unveiling.

Instead of Dom Pérignon, Roederer Cristal flowed at the launch party, while Schloss Velden's Saxon chef, Silvio Nickol, prepared a four-course meal for a ballroom full of visiting dignitaries. But the hotel revealed its true character the next day, when, after most of the dignitaries had gone, the food and wine kept coming at a celebratory pace, and

the service remained sublime. A staff member improvised for me a private tour by boat and taxi of nearby Klagenfurt on zero notice, a doe-eyed young woman gave me a massage in the spa, and Sacher torte and wild-berry schnapps appeared in my room before bedtime. When I asked for afternoon tea to wash down a phalanx of Austrian pastries, I specified Darjeeling. "Will that be spring- or summer-harvest Darjeeling?" replied my waiter, without skipping a beat.

The waiter's preparedness may have been partly attributable to the presence of his boss, who described to me his expectations for Schloss Velden over tea. "We want the hotel to be a global experience in the conveniences guests have in their rooms, and in the sense of elegance, but we do not want to get away from providing a local experience of Austria," said Schulze, who was born in Germany and now lives in Atlanta, where Capella is based. "We provide a local experience by not seeing ourselves as a place to sleep but by seeing ourselves as your expert in the region."

Schulze plans to duplicate this approach at each of Capella's properties, which, by 2009, should include hotels and resorts in Ireland, Mexico, Colorado, Germany, and Singapore. With its Austrian property, the company has established an impressive benchmark. Visiting a hotel at launch is akin to tasting red wine in the barrel; just as you have to anticipate how the wine will mature, you can only guess at how a new hotel will develop over time. Schloss Velden appears poised to deliver on Schulze's own expectations and offers a promising preview of what to expect of his brand. —ALAN BEHR

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*Schloss Velden's restored 19th-century château and new contemporary wing sit on the banks of the Wörthersee in the Carinthian Alps.*