

the wood-paneled library where a portrait of Nietzsche gazes over the wooden carrels: “This family enterprise is not a milk cow. The money that we earn has to return to the hotel.”

The trick, says his 34-year-old son Patrick, is to keep the past and present in balance: to honor what is august and unique about the Waldhaus without being stuffy or precious. Most guests would prefer that nothing change, and their devotion depends on the fact that nothing does. Room keys are still actual keys, with a heavy metal fob. Talking on cellphones is forbidden in common areas. The hotel spa is being expanded, but not much can be done to make the guest-room floor corridors, long as railroad box cars, more efficient to heat.

For the last three decades, the Waldhaus has hosted a Nietzsche conference, usually in September; the owners are proud of the hotel's

other German literary connections, too. What other enterprise would boast on its website that the Marxist social theorist Theodor Adorno was a guest? (He visited every year between 1955 and 1966.) Two operas have been staged in the tennis courts (“Anna Bolena” and “Le Nozze di Figaro”), and numerous pianists — Rudolf Serkin, Dinu Lipatti, Andras Schiff — have given concerts in the festival

hall, which doubles as the dining room. In 2008, the Swiss theater director Christoph Marthaler devised a play for the hotel's centenary in which actors portrayed the regular guests, reciting poetry to each other and snoozing in the armchairs in the lounge.

In the evenings, string trios accompany the cocktail hour, followed by dinner and sometimes entertainment: a talk about the Engadine by a 94-year-old native of St. Moritz, say, or a lecture



**TIME AWAY** Clockwise from left: the Waldhaus's third generation of owners, Rolf and Rita Kienberger, with their children Urs and Maria on the dining terrace in 1953; one of the hotel's 20 perfectly preserved bedrooms; a scene from a play by Christoph Marthaler staged in the hotel; in the Salon Bleu, a 1910 Welte-Mignon mechanical piano; the nearby Nietzsche Haus, where the philosopher wrote some of his greatest works during the 1880s.

by the historian Fritz Stern, a “dear guest” since the 1970s. “The owners operate the hotel as if it's not just a hotel,” Assayas said. “It's the soul of the area.”

One afternoon, I walked down the hill to the Nietzsche Haus, the modest home-museum where the philosopher worked on some of his greatest books, including “Beyond Good and Evil” and “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in a tiny, dark room before the onset of his psychosis in 1889. (He visited in the summer but wrote to his mother in Naumburg often, asking for warmer socks.) I considered trekking farther, to locate the large pyramidlike rock by Lake Silvaplana where in 1881 he first conceived of the idea of “the eternal recurrence” — the notion that, if time is infinite, events will reoccur infinitely. But my days in Sils-Maria being finite, and my chances of a return visit being small, I eventually retreated to the Waldhaus lounge to read the philosopher's vatic words in English while gazing at the mountains. ▀



TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT: HOTEL WALDHAUS SILS (2)