I'm a Briton and I'm helping to keep the après-ski scene alive in the Alps

Richard Lett says he creates a festival vibe by importing British bands to play crowd-pleasers in French mountain resorts



Richard Lett first started working in hospitality in the Alps in 1993 (Photo: Richard Letts)

Katy Dartford

December 26, 2025 12:00 pm

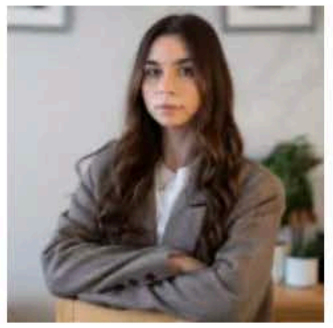
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Late afternoon in the Alps brings the first glow of fairy lights through falling snow. Outside La Terrasse du Village in Méribel, the Christmas tree blinks gold, and the air has turned sharp and cold.

Inside, heat rises and ski boots thud on the boards as British band The Wingmen tear through “Teenage Dirtbag” and “Chelsea Dagger”.

At Cocorico in Val d’Isère, Devon trio Pattern Pusher lead a crowd through Cher’s “Believe” while a skier downs a pint from his boot. In Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, Pink Miami glides from “Purple Rain” into “Lovely Day” as families wander in from the Christmas market.

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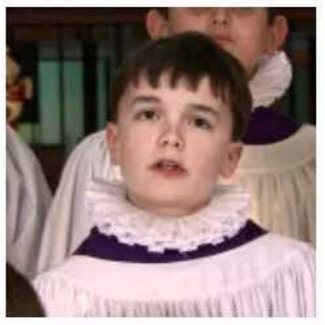
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Rich, from Sywell village in Northamptonshire, did not set out to reinvent Alpine après. In the early 1990s, the master’s degree he was due to start in Nottingham was cancelled. A chance chat in a pub with someone who had just worked a ski season convinced him to try the mountains instead. He wrote to



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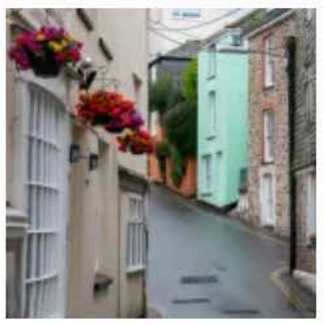
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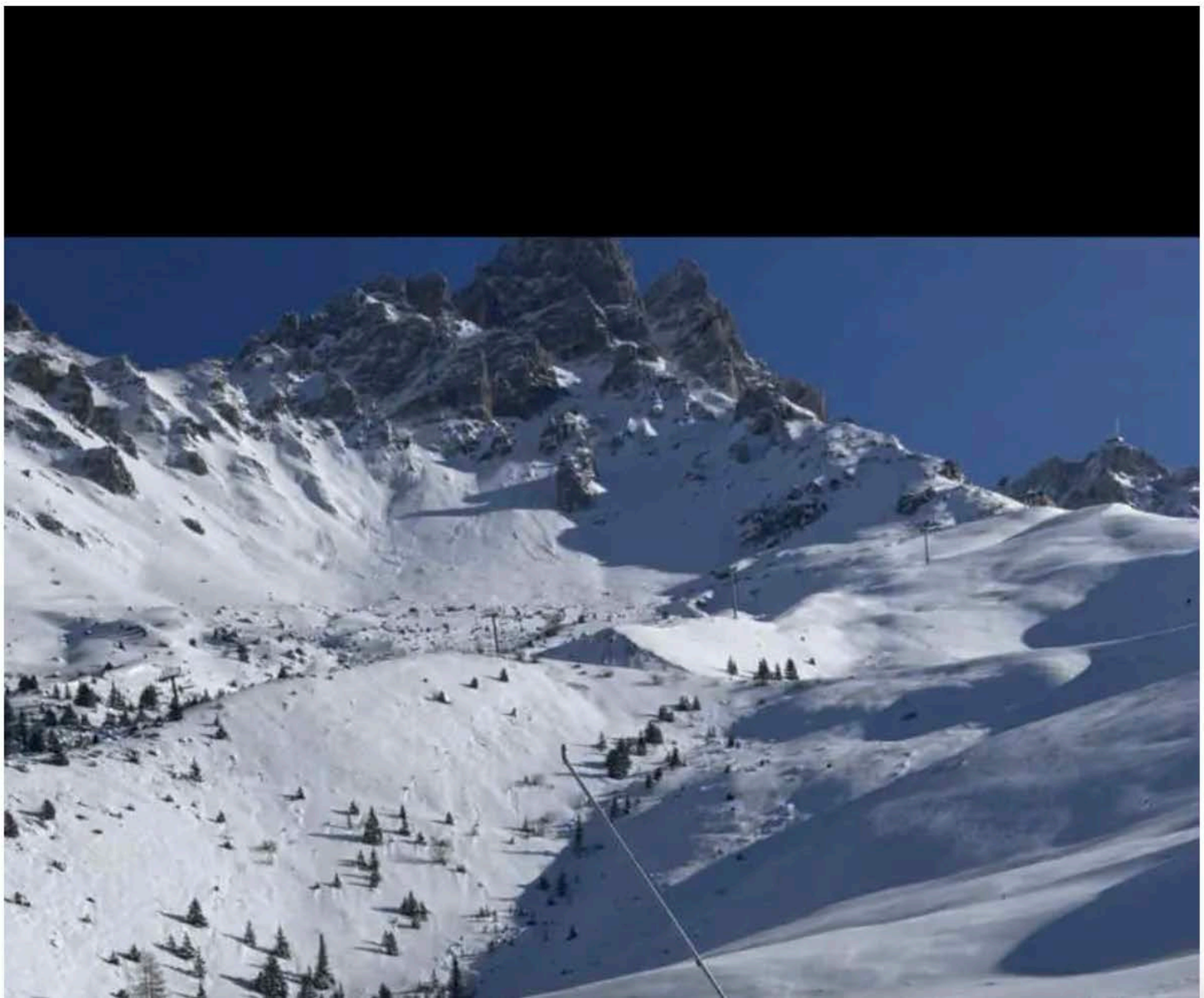
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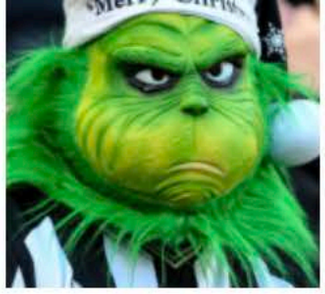
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tour operators by hand, and by winter 1993, was running a bar in Val d'Isère.

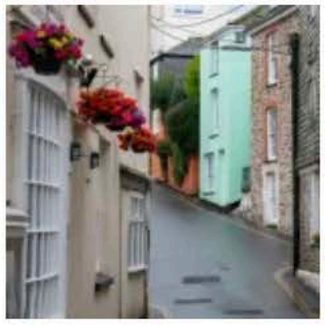
This festive noise can be traced back to one man: Richard Lett, the founder of Après Ski Bands, the agency behind thousands of live gigs across the French Alps each winter. "We create that festival vibe everywhere," the 54-year-old tells *The i Paper*. "Not just on New Year's Eve – all season."

By his mid-twenties, he was operations director for a major hospitality group, overseeing bars, restaurants and hotels across Val d'Isère, Val Thorens and Chamonix. A big part of the job was organising musicians. "I was the one saying, you've got Monday, you've got Tuesday, stop arguing," he says. That was when he realised the gap. "People would turn up with a guitar and no paperwork. Venues didn't know what to expect."



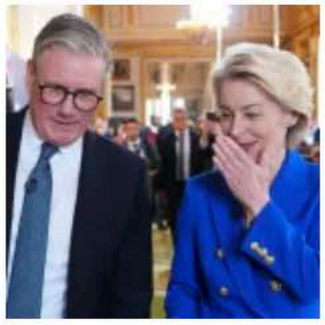


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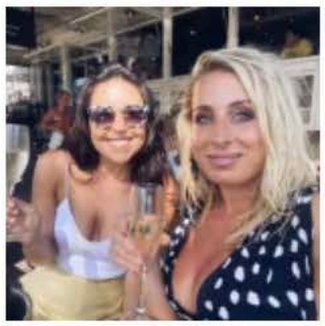
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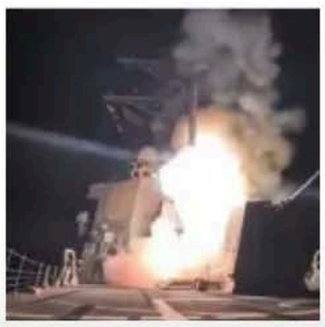
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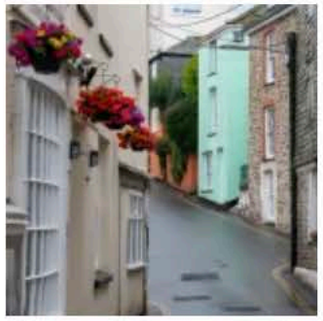
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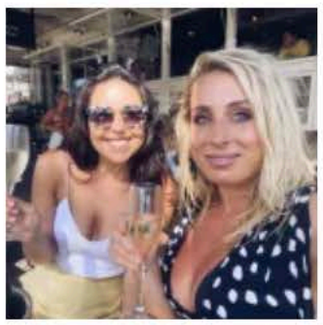
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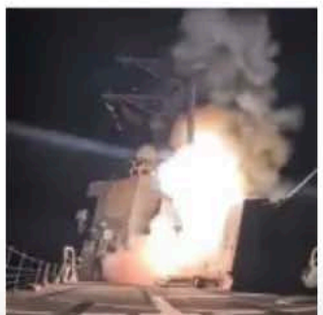
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Lett brings British bands to the mountains – and it's proven a hit with tourists (Photo: Richard Lett)

The Alps, he explains, are almost empty outside tourism. "It's like the Hebrides. There aren't musicians living here." So he flew back to Britain to scout bands and bring them out. When the hospitality group dissolved, he built a dedicated agency to coordinate everything properly. "It just snowballed. Six hundred gigs in our first season, then a thousand, then two thousand. Now we're at about six thousand a winter."

The sound he champions is, by design, a British export. France has Folie Douce with its dancers and cabaret DJs, but the terrace-shaking après format comes straight from the UK pub circuit. "If you're 19 in Britain, you can gig five nights a week," he says. "That doesn't exist in France."

British musicians arrive knowing how to read a room, shift from ABBA to Arctic Monkeys in seconds, and turn "Sweet Caroline" into a terrace-wide chant. "It's all thriller and no filler," says Rich, who now lives in Meribel. "Every song has to be instantly recognisable." The audience mix helps: roughly 40 per cent Brits, 20 per cent Scandinavians, and 20 per cent French, with English as the shared language. "The Brits and the Nordics are the big drinkers," he says. "The French come and take photos first, then might join in."

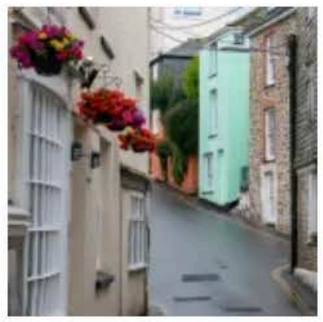
Despite global trends towards drinking less, après is booming, he says. Late-night gigs have dwindled, but daytime terrace sets and early-evening hotel music have surged. "People feel healthier having a few beers at four in the afternoon rather than at midnight. And it's a holiday. Even in economic downturns, people still come and still party."

Christmas is the peak. "New Year's Eve is the busiest night of the year. Around 90 gigs in one night." Christmas Eve shows the cultural contrast. "For Brits, the 24th is a massive night out. For the French, it's oysters and a five-course meal." His musicians learn carols for hotels, and in Méribel, places like the Rond Point run singalong sessions with song sheets handed out with *vin chaud*. Some British bars are so busy that Rich tells them to stick with a playlist of Christmas classics and a bit of tinsel.



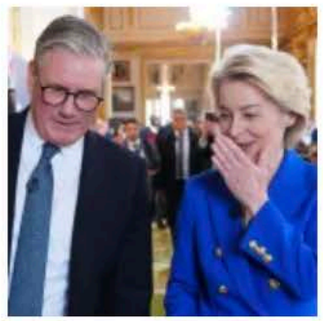
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Rich spends the winter moving between valleys, checking on bands and keeping the operation going as vans break down in snowstorms and musicians ski to work when the roads freeze. “It’s a travelling circus,” he says. “But it works.”

At Christmas, with terraces lit up and the air filled with song, his influence is easy to spot. The British-leaning après culture that now defines many Alpine resorts owes much to the network he built.

“It’s still growing,” he says. “People will always want that release at the end of the ski day.”

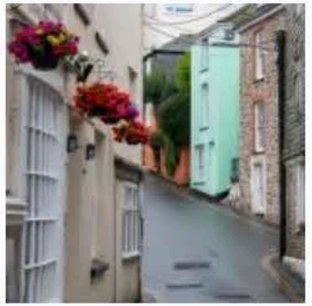
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