

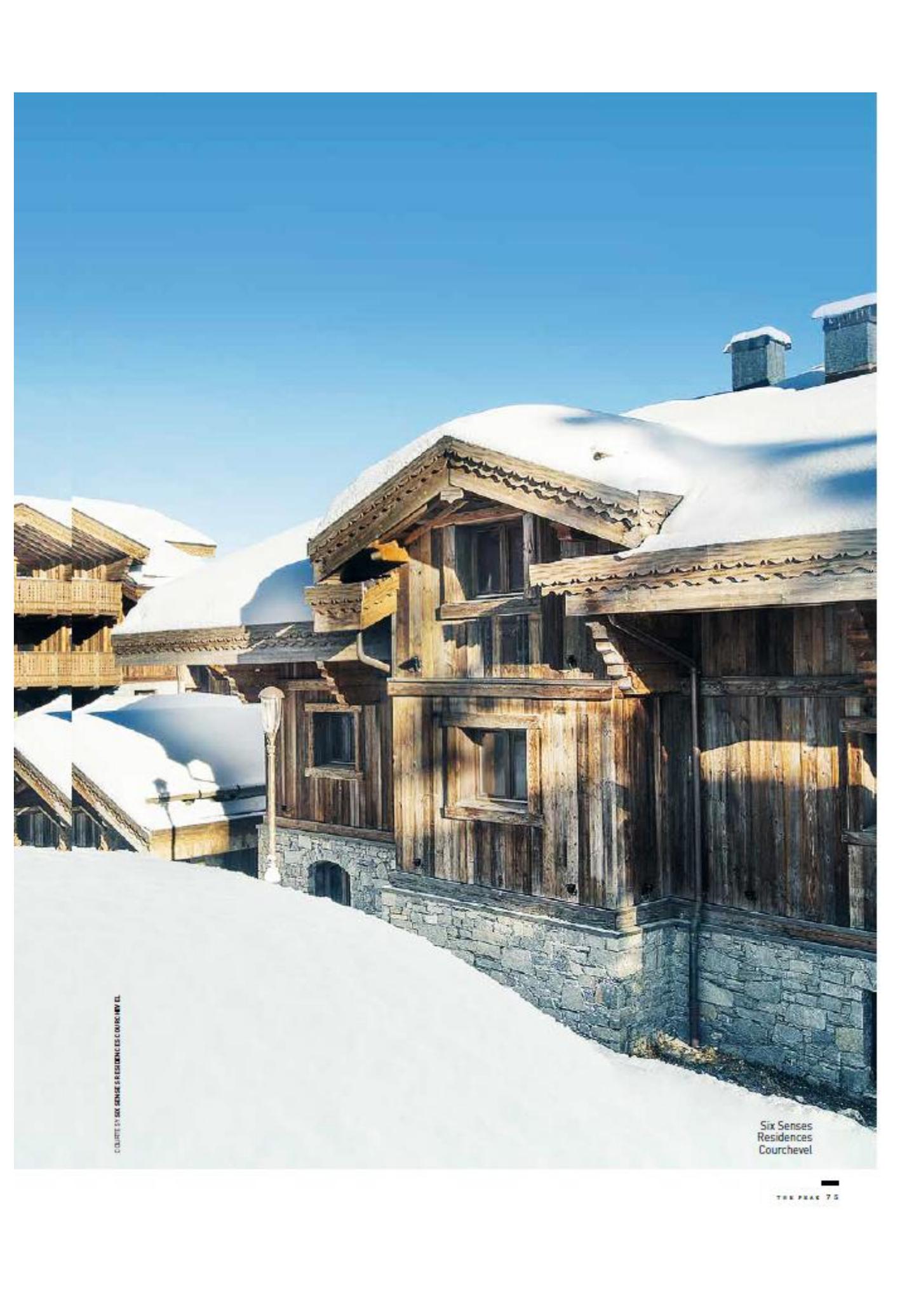


Ⓐ PORTFOLIO

# THE HIGH LIFE

The humble Swiss shepherd's hut has come a long way. Chalets are now a byword for European luxury, but expectations for the amenities that accompany these slope-side properties are booming along with demand, resulting in a fundamental shift in the market.

STORY SOPHIE KALKREUTH



COURTÈS SIX SENSES RESIDENCES COURCHEVEL

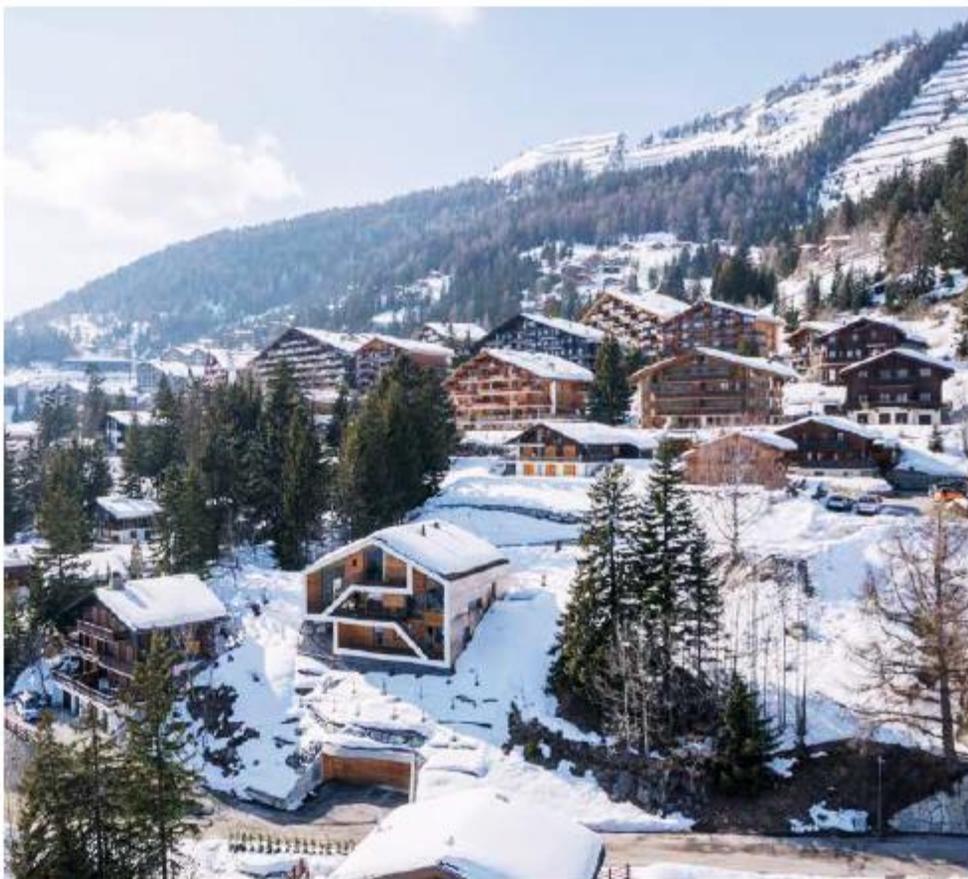
Six Senses  
Residences  
Courchevel

Located on a sunny, south-facing slope overlooking Switzerland's Rhône Valley, Anzère is a quintessential Alpine village. Dotted with snow-coated huts and fir trees and surrounded by frosty mountain peaks, there is a charming symmetry to the place. Each house, while different in scale, is remarkably similar in form and features a gently sloping roof, pointed eaves and an ornate wooden balcony.

There's only one hut that breaks the mould, or if not breaks it, at least bends it. Designed by Amsterdam-based architects SeARCH, it has large vertical windows, smooth-edged eaves and a streamlined balcony that zigzags down the façade; much like the tracks a skier leaves in fresh powder. Nestled further into the mountain than the other chalets, it looks like it has always stood there, smoothed by centuries of falling snow.

Though it has become a byword for European luxury, the Swiss chalet had humble origins as *chaletet*, or shepherds' huts. Their function was part seasonal residence and part dairy farm, as the herders would preserve the milk produced during these months by churning it into butter and cheese. During the Romantic period, when European nobility developed a taste for the 'simple' life of Alpine villages, the chalet became appropriated as a luxury residence. Boosted by the growth in tourism, the chalet's function as a holiday home proliferated further, particularly at purpose-built ski resorts.

The chalet's distinctive architectural style – the sloping roof and muscular wooden beams – has remained largely unchanged over the years, but design studios like SeARCH are starting to adapt the alpine archetype to modern lifestyles. "A Dutch client, who was not satisfied with the cluttered layout of the chalet design, asked our advice on adjustments," explains project architect Tjerk Boom.



Boom's team drew inspiration from the Grand Chalet, an oversized chalet located in Rossinière, Switzerland known for being the former residence of the French painter Balthus, for Chalet Anzère. The designers referenced traditional details like large roof overhangs and wrap-around balconies for the chalet exterior, but took a radically different approach inside. The chalet has spacious interiors (over 5,000 sq ft), but in a departure from tradition, the living areas are bright, airy and conceived as one clear volume.

The garage was moved from the back of house to front, to facilitate parking, while an elevator carved into the mountain leads to the house's three levels. The first floor houses a guest room, while the main living areas are nestled in the middle floor, looking out towards the striking mountain views. The owner's sleeping quarters are on the top floor, snuggled under the pitched roof.

All floors have access to three-metre-wide terraces that are connected via stairs, with each level offering sweeping views over the Dent Blanche Massif and the peaks

**LEFT AND BELOW**  
The chalet in Anzère features an unconventional facade

**RIGHT**  
Blanche Chalet pays tribute to Quebec's La Malbaie region



of the Matterhorn, Dent Blanche, Dufourspitze and Weisshorn. "One general theme of our office ... is the way of connecting the [building] with its direct urban or landscape context," says Boom.

SeARCH is not alone in this approach. A rising number of designers are choosing to integrate chalets further into their mountain settings through the use of large windows, terraces and flow-through spaces that bring the Alpine light inside. "Traditional small chalet windows - which make rooms dark - are being replaced by large panorama windows, and open-plan, loft-style interiors are finding favour," says Line Février, general manager of Le Chalet Zannier, a mountain retreat in Megève, France

that embraces the new airier look in its three chalets, private cottage, and wellness centre.

The trend is taking hold across the Atlantic too. Earlier this year, Canadian studio ACDF Architecture completed the Blanche Chalet, a 4,200-square-foot holiday home that reinterprets the architectural vernacular of Quebec's La Malbaie region. The boxy cottage features details typical of local wooden barns: large sliding doors, lime plaster finish and exposed wood. The living spaces however, are placed on the second floor to maximise views and include a cantilevered glass-enclosed living room, which extends dramatically into the forested landscape. "We



wanted the house to have a fluid connection between the interior spaces and the exterior, including the lake and the forest," says project architect Maxime Frappier.

In Aspen, America's affluent alpine playground, designers are making modern adjustments to conventional lodge-style homes. Rowland + Broughton studio, led by husband and wife team John Rowland and Sarah Broughton, has become known for pushing conventional boundaries.

For Black Birch, a recent Aspen renovation, the designers stretched an existing cabin, streamlining the structure's traditional gables for a cleaner look on the exterior, while opening up the interior with interconnected spaces and substantially more glass. "The

original lodge-style home was pushed and pulled through the prominent gable ends to expand to 6,400 sq ft in size and bring more natural light in," says Amanda Christianson, director of operations at Rowland + Broughton in Aspen.

At the entry, a previously enclosed stairway was replaced by an open wood and steel double-height version that gives way to the living room and kitchen, separated by a double-sided granite fireplace. The restrained interior palette also offsets the textures of the mix of modern Italian furniture and handmade artisan pieces and natural materials.

Rather than a passing style fad, the trend towards the new type of alpine home may be indicative of broader changes to the tastes and





**LEFT AND BELOW**  
Black Birch is defined by a streamlined design and interconnecting spaces

demands of a new generation of skiers. A report from Savills into the Alpine property market, released in October, suggests that skier demographics are shifting and that Alpine resorts will need to realign their offerings to flourish in the future.

To cater to the digitally connected “Y” generation, some ski resorts now offer free access to Wi-fi on the lifts as well as slopes. Others are moving away from the traditional, rustic look of hotels and lodgings and shifting toward more contemporary designs favoured by a younger consumer group. In addition to updating hardware, resorts must also offer new experiences to property owners, says Jeremy Rollason, director of Alpine homes with Savills in London. This includes organising cultural events and reinvesting property taxes into resort facilities such as health spas, children’s play areas and other amenities.

“The X generation was quite happy with a fondue and glass or two of *Glühwein*, but millennials want sophisticated wine bars, live music or celebrity DJs, internet everywhere and world-class restaurants that

offer all day Brassiere-style food,” Rollason says.

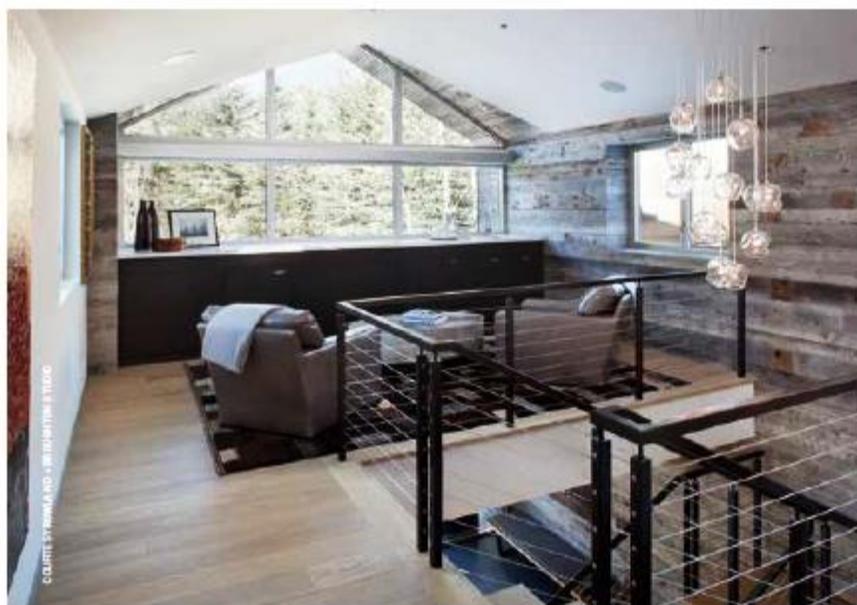
Paying attention to lifestyle demands is important, as today’s buyers largely purchase ski homes for the lifestyle perks. “Demand is driven increasingly by cash buyers with disposable income, rather than speculators looking for investments,” says Rollason. The ski homes market is niche and characterised by relatively low volumes. Although demand at Alpine and American resorts has grown steadily since 2013, most ski homes generate a return of between two and 2.5 per cent in reality. “Alpine buyers today do not expect such investments to produce huge rental returns, but instead are satisfied to ensure that such an asset requires low personal maintenance so they can maximise their enjoyment,” says Alex Koch de Gooreynd, a partner at Knight Frank and director of the Swiss Property Network.

For new-build resorts this means more emphasis on property management, amenities and an updated design aesthetic. Last year, the Six Senses Residences

Courchevel made a splash when it announced the property would come complete with a Six Senses spa, a gym, an indoor pool and private ski-in-ski-out concierge service. The project, which bills itself as the “first fully-serviced residential development in Courchevel 1850,” includes one- to three-bedroom apartments and a selection of duplex penthouses priced from US\$2.1 million to US\$13.8 million. The residences, which resemble timber-framed miniature chalets, have private wine cellars and triple aspect balconies overlooking the slopes. Interiors come in a palette of taupe and cream courtesy of designer Alain Foillet. Morpheus London, a company known for creating bespoke mansions, also prepared a customised furniture package for each apartment.

In St Moritz, Switzerland, The Grace St Moritz Apartments promise a similarly seamless lifestyle with an onsite spa fitness centre, restaurants, martini and cigar bars and a 24-hour concierge. Housed in a hotel built in 1906, the project is currently undergoing an extensive overhaul by Divercity Architects and Fifth Element design. The original hotel portion will retain some period Belle Époque features, while the new annex will feature 17 apartments with generous proportions and deep windows to capture the Alpine light. Prices start from £613,585 (HK\$5,929,900) for a studio and £3,566,300 for a two-bedroom apartment.

Supply is limited in St Moritz, particularly for non-Swiss buyers, and de Gooreynd says the strength of the Swiss Franc has not dissuaded international investors who are attracted by the strong economic environment and lifestyle. Nevertheless, currency fluctuations do affect cross border sales. According to Savills, ski home prices have remained broadly static



COURTESY OF NIKKA AND O'NEILL ARCHITECTS STUDIO

**BELOW**

Six Senses Residences Courchevel is equipped with a spa, gym, pool amongst other amenities

**OPPOSITE**

The Grace St Moritz Apartments boast generous proportions

in resorts across the European region and international buyers and sellers have largely found profits or losses dictated by currency movements. In 2015 a weaker Euro opened up exclusive resorts to UK buyers. Now, in the wake of the EU referendum and the weakening of Sterling, Swiss Alpine property has become 8.6 per cent more costly

to GBP buyers (May to September 2016), while French or Austrian Alpine homes have become 7.6 per cent more expensive.

Globally, Europe continues to offer the largest number of resorts and the highest property prices. The Alps are host to 82 per cent of the world's largest ski resorts and attract 44 per cent

of global ski visitors annually. Courchevel 1850 and Gstaad are the region's most expensive, with prices averaging US\$3,278 per sq ft, followed closely by St Moritz. In the US, the ski property market has also recovered from the post-housing crash, but land is more readily available than in tightly packed European resorts, so prices per square foot are generally lower. Only Vail stands apart as an ultra-prime resort on par with the top European competition at US\$2,636 per sq ft.

For the time being, the cachet and exclusivity of owning ski homes in established resorts continue to lure wealthy buyers to Courchevel and Gstaad or Vail and Aspen over newer destinations like Niseko. This includes buyers from Asia. "We have sold to Singapore and Hong Kong nationals," says Jeremy Rollason. "They like Verbier and Chamonix for their rich diversity of nightlife and skiing." Switzerland in particular has benefited from an emerging Chinese market offering dedicated holiday packages and mandarin-speaking



COURTNEY HARRIS/STIMULUS CONSULTING



ski instructors. Across Switzerland, overnight hotel stays by Chinese guests increased 33 per cent last year.

But market dynamics are set to change. By 2020 the world's ski resorts are forecast to attract more than 420 million ski visits per annum, with the largest growth happening in parts of Asia and Eastern Europe, including China, South Korea, Bulgaria and Kazakhstan. And if the last

few winters are any indication, established resorts will have to contend with other climatic changes too.

Winter has become increasingly unpredictable in recent decades, and warmer air temperatures mean that snow doesn't stick around as long. Snowmaking is a possible solution, but it comes at a steep cost, averaging US\$500,000 annually for most resorts. In the

short term, this could make resorts at higher altitudes favourable. High-lift resorts in Europe include St Moritz in Switzerland, Tignes in France and Sölden in Austria. Zermatt also has an exceptionally long ski season, with its highest lift reaching nearly 4,000 meters.

Increasingly, resorts are marketing themselves as year-round destinations, offering everything from glacier skiing to bouldering and paragliding. According to Douglas Elliman's Joshua Saslove, summer, not winter, is Aspen's busiest season as the town hosts a packed social calendar of music, food and cultural events, many hosted by the acclaimed Aspen Institute.

The upcoming buyer is, it seems, a buyer who wants it all – and the market is gearing up to accommodate that. “Y generation skiers are tomorrow's ski property buyers,” says Savills' Jeremy Rollason. “If they get a consistently good experience, they will return year on year and eventually buy when they sell their tech company or receive a windfall.”