



For Dominique Gisin, nothing compares to Engelberg, her home. The sight of Mount Titlis makes her heart skip a beat.

In love with Switzerland

Text: Üsé Meyer **Pictures:** Iouri Podladtchikov

Dominique Gisin, Dario Cologna and Fanny Smith are three of the biggest names in Swiss snow sports. They have won gold at Olympic Games or World Championships. And all love their home region, where they have grown up spending every free moment in the snow. The photo portraits are by another Olympic gold medallist: snowboarder Iouri Podladtchikov.

Dominique Gisin was 11 when she moved with her parents and siblings, Marc and Michelle – both as well Alpine Ski World Cup racers – from the Upper Engadin in Graubünden to the Lucerne-Lake Lucerne Region. “Although we lived in the Engadin, I actually learned to ski in Engelberg. We used to spend all our ski holidays here at our grandparents’ holiday home. I still remember clearly: by the children’s lift in the Brunni ski area there was a big snow bank that was supposed to stop the kids that weren’t yet able to control their speed. But I always tried to go fast enough to get over the bank. I never managed... Now the Brunni ski area, with its new ski lifts, is more popular with families than ever. I was barely four when I skied down the very steep Rotegg piste in the Titlis ski area. →

Dominique Gisin (born 1985), ski racer, won gold medal in the downhill at the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. In March 2015, she announced her retirement from top-level competition after 14 years.

The Titlis Rotair ¹ cable car, with the world’s first revolving cabin, glides up to the snow-capped summit of the Titlis. During the ride, the cabin revolves once on its axis, giving passengers a spectacular panoramic view.

MySwitzerland.com,
Webcode: 28362



My Dad, who was a ski instructor, said: 'Just give it a try.' And it was great!"

From 2000 to 2004, Dominique Gisin was a student at the official Swiss Olympic Sport School in Engelberg. During this period, various injuries stopped her from competing in more than a few races. "The injuries barely allowed me to do any alpine skiing, so as a result I now know every winter walking path and every cross-country ski trail in the region. The Valley Trail towards the Fürenalp cable car is lovely, full of variety and wonderfully atmospheric. But of course, I also got to do Engelberg's well-known freeride runs with friends – it would have been a crime not to. My favourite off-piste run is definitely the Laub. It's in a class of its own in Europe. I haven't seen a slope like it anywhere: so long, so wide. But for me, nothing compares to Engelberg, it's my home. Each time I come back and see the 3,238-metre-high Titlis, my heart skips a beat."

Today, Dominique Gisin lives in an apartment on Engelberg's southern slopes, close to the village. After retiring from ski racing, she has more time again for family and friends. "On a cloudy day recently I went curling with a small group at Engelberg's Sporting Park. It was fun. My tactics weren't bad at all – I just couldn't get the stones to go where I wanted! And now I should have more chances to enjoy my mother's Älplermagronen (traditional mountain dish of pasta, potatoes, cream, cheese and onions). They're the best. But you can find delicious versions in local restaurants – such as the Restaurant Flühmatt, which you can reach via a beautiful winter walking trail."

"Davos is the perfect base for me right now."

Dario Cologna, Olympic cross-country ski champion, Davos, Graubünden

Dario Cologna grew up in the secluded village of Müstair in Graubünden, where he lived with his parents, brother and sister in a house not far from the Swiss National Park. "One of the highlights of my home region for me is definitely the convent of St. John in Müstair," he says. "You can feel 1,200 years of history come to life. And it's also part of my own background: I had my first year of kindergarten there. Back then I also loved the little Minschuns ski area above Tschier. I'd go up with my friends in the morning in the ski bus, and we'd carry on skiing until it got dark." →



Dario Cologna can be spotted here on alpine skis too, and no wonder: the impressive Parsenn ski area lies on his doorstep.

Dario Cologna (born 1986), **cross-country skier, is a multiple Olympic gold medallist, World Champion and Tour de Ski winner.**

The convent of St. John ² in Müstair, with its fine church frescoes, dates from 775 and is a UNESCO World Heritage Property. The Val Müstair Valley Trail ³ is 20 kilometres long and leads through forests of pine and larch. The 12-kilometre Parsenn run ⁴ starts at the summit of the Weissfluh and ends 2,000 vertical metres lower in Küblis.

MySwitzerland.com, Webcode: **28480**



When he was 16, the future cross-country ski star went to boarding school: the High Alpine Institute in Ftan in the Lower Engadin, another of Switzerland's five Swiss Olympic Sport Schools. "The location of the college, barely a hundred metres above the village of Ftan and surrounded by nature, is very special. A cross-country ski trail leads right past the school building, and from it you have beautiful views of the mountains all around and into the Val S-charl. During the week I'd ski there every day. The trail now even has a name: Loipa Dario Cologna."

Since 2006, Dario Cologna has been sharing an apartment in Davos with his brother, Gianluca, also a professional cross-country skier. "Davos is the perfect base for me right now," Dario Cologna says. "It's great for training and everything else – restaurants, going out, seeing an ice hockey match. And because the Parsenn ski area is right on my doorstep, I do most of my alpine skiing there. My favourite way to end the day is skiing the 12-kilometre run from the top of the Weissfluh down to Küblis. Another fabulous experience is cross-country skiing in the beautiful Sertig valley. If you really want to treat yourself, stop to eat at one of the two restaurants at the far end of the valley before riding back by bus or in a horse-drawn sleigh. A good meal in Switzerland – like a cordon bleu – is one thing I always specially look forward to after spending time abroad. And to relax now and again, I enjoy meeting friends in a bar for a beer. Though to be honest, the most relaxing thing of all for me is some gentle training on my cross-country skis."

"You won't find a mountain panorama like this anywhere."

Fanny Smith, ski cross world champion, Villars, Lake Geneva Region

Fanny Smith grew up in Gryon in the Vaud Alps with her parents and brother. When she was eight, the family moved into a chalet in neighbouring Villars-sur-Ollon. "I looked up to my big brother from a very young age. When I was just one, I would stomp around the whole house in his ski boots and desperately wanted to get on skis, just like him. I was finally allowed at the age of two-and-a-half. When I was seven I entered my first ski race on the piste of Les Chaux. This run from Croix des Chaux to La Rasse is still my favourite piste: long and full of variety.

Long before my first race, my father took me on a paragliding flight from Le Grand Chamossaire, secured in a →



Fanny Smith (born 1992), **ski cross racer, has won various titles including overall World Cup winner in the 2012/13 season and 2013 World Champion.**

⑤ The thrilling and scenic Piste des Bouquetins down to Villars is a delight for experienced skiers. The Refuge de Solalex ⑥ is a cosy mountain restaurant at 1,460 metres, above Villars-Gryon. ⑦ The snow-blanketed hamlet of Ensex in the region of Col de la Croix offers a glorious view of Mont Blanc and the Dents du Midi.

MySwitzerland.com, Webcode: 28459



Thrills and adrenalin – that's what Fanny Smith loves about ski cross. She also gets a kick from freeskiing in her own ski area, Villars-Gryon.



VICTORINOX



SWISS CHAMP



I.N.O.X.



SPECTRA



EXPLORER JACKET



FRAGRANCE

FUNCTIONALITY IS PART OF OUR FAMILY



MAKERS OF THE ORIGINAL SWISS ARMY KNIFE | VICTORINOX.COM

child harness. I still love doing it: what a view during the flight! Lake Geneva, the Jungfrau, Les Diablerets, Mont Blanc. You won't find a mountain panorama as varied as ours anywhere else."

At the age of 14, Fanny Smith joined the Swiss Olympic Sport School in Brig as a boarder, but left formal education at 16 to devote herself 100 per cent to ski cross. "Ski cross is about thrills and adrenalin – I need that. Of course, I've also looked for kicks in my own ski area. I get them from freeskiing. We locals know all the good routes, needless to say... All right, then, I'll reveal one of them: it starts at Croix des Chaux, leads at first down the black piste, but then you turn to the south and ride through the forest towards Frience – it's nice and steep, and usually has great powder."

The ski cross world champion has remained loyal to her home village despite her success. Today she lives in a rented apartment in Villars-sur-Ollon. "When things aren't going so well for me – such as after my injury in 2011, or after the disappointment at Sochi in 2014 – I find strength and peace again at the hamlet of Solalex. The place has a really special atmosphere! And its location is gorgeous, with views of the Miroir d'Argentine cliffs, their rock walls as smooth as glass. In winter, you can walk up to the restaurant in Solalex and then toboggan back down. And if you're wondering why my heart belongs to ski cross, you can find out here in the Villars-Gryon ski area, on the ski cross course. The piste is easy, but has all the right features: bumps, rollers and jumps... And as it happens, the course is called Fanny Smith." *



Iouri Podladtchikov (born 1988) is a successful snowboarder and talented photographer. His family settled in Switzerland in 1996, and Podladtchikov has competed for Switzerland since 2007. After winning the 2013 FIS World Championships in half pipe he crowned his career with a gold medal at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. His speciality in the half pipe is the YOLO Flip, which he created: a dazzling cab double cork 1440 (switch double flip with four rotations). Podladtchikov devotes any spare time he has to photography: he says capturing people's beauty is enriching for him.

lovemeorleavemetodie.tumblr.com