

INSTANT EXPERT

# Ski posters

Conjuring snowy peaks and the glamour of après ski, it's no wonder vintage ski posters are whooshing out of the salerooms, says AR expert **Katherine Higgins**

Looking back at my school days, there is one memory that outshines all the others – my first ski trip. Cervinia, an Italian resort at the foot of the mighty Matterhorn, was my alpine base. I remember the excitement of getting up at dawn to start the journey that would lead us to the snow and, eventually, to the image etched in the mind's eye of anyone who has skied – that panoramic, truly breathtaking view from the top of the mountain.

With subject matter so inherently captivating, it's no wonder that ski posters have such a loyal following. Like most skiers, I'm the first to head for an image that promotes a resort I know – Cervinia, Verbier and the Trois Vallées are all personal favourites. Ten years ago when the market was in its infancy, I paid £300 for a 1940s poster full of flags, poles and a puffing French National Railways steam loco. Then, as now, it summed up all the romance of the sport, the thrill of the journey and my perpetual thoughts of a *chocolat chaud!*

## When did skiing posters first appear?

Thanks to the discovery of what appears to be the first ski – carved in wood and around 8,000 years old – we know skiing has long been an essential part of human survival. But the notion of skiing for pleasure wasn't truly formalised until the 19th century, when intrepid explorers

took on death-defying challenges. In 1894, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became an unlikely champion when he completed the world's first ski tour, crossing the Alps near Davos. Dressed in Harris Tweed, he was accompanied by two brothers, who owned a local ski shop.

Wealthy Europeans who had read of such exploits were keen to have a taste of what the snow could offer. As more people travelled, villages grew into fashionable destinations and small hostels made way for luxurious hotels, many of which commissioned artists to design attractive posters. By 1908, rudimentary steam-powered drag lifts were replaced with electrically-driven cable cars; by 1910 ski clubs were established, and competitive downhill skiing and slalom racing was de rigueur. When the first Winter Olympics took place in Chamonix in 1924, the 'Golden Age' of skiing posters had begun.

## Which were the first places to market themselves with posters?

Villages such as Davos, St Anton, Mürren and Wengen (at the heart of the new downhill and slalom racing) were quick to recognise the benefits of striking promotional posters. In many cases it was the grandest hotel in the resort that used posters to lure patrons in, although Europe's competing railway firms were equally keen to ensure travellers went



**KATHERINE HIGGINS**  
Having trained at Christie's, Katherine is one of the Roadshow's miscellaneous experts and a regular contributor to Miller's guides. She has a keen interest in vintage fashion and jewellery.

## TOP OF THE TREE

### ST MORITZ by EMIL CARDINAUX (1877-1936)

Lithograph in colours, 1920, printed by Wolfsberg, Zürich, 128 x 92cm.  
Estimate: £10,000-£15,000

This is a wonderfully nostalgic scene of skating at The Palace Hotel, a landmark in the exclusive St Moritz resort. Hopes are high for this star piece of lithography from 1920, to be sold by Christie's in January and a mirror image of the ski poster that holds the current European record at £23,900.

Interestingly, it's not the artist that's key here – you could find a late 1920s Cardinaux poster for around £2,000. The interest comes through the graphics and the subject matter. As an aside, those who can afford to ski in St Moritz today make very good bidders at auction, which adds to its value!



ORIGINAL SKI POSTERS; CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD 2009

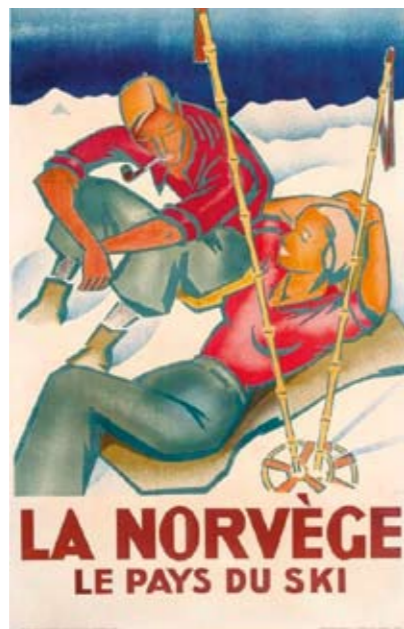
THREE OF THE BEST



**NURSERY SLOPE**

Winter Sports in France  
by Vecoux  
Lithograph in colours, 1947  
Estimate £700-900

Similar to the first ski poster I bought, this is a colourful image that's familiar to all skiers from a good French printer (Paul Martial, Paris). Without people or reference to a specific ski resort, it's a beginner's piece. Other good starting points are the more unusual resorts such as Chile or Yugoslavia.



**RED RUN**

La Norvège, Le Pays du Ski  
by JE  
Lithograph in colours, 1936  
Estimate £1,000-£1,500

With its pared-down graphics in the style of a woodcut, this was printed by Norsk of Oslo. It's a charismatic image evoking the romance of the slopes and a lovely reference to the ski-wear of the day. It's held back from being a top league piece due to the fact that it's country-led rather than resort-focused.



**OFF-PISTE**

Winter Sports in the French Alps  
by Roger Broders  
Lithograph in colours, c1930  
Estimate £4,000-£6,000

This is a true masterpiece of ski poster design that combines a top-tier artist and his link to PLM, with exquisite deco graphics. Figurative studies evoke the most interest as enthusiasts are fascinated by period clothing and travel to the slopes. The elongated lines, bob haircuts and striking make-up further define the Jazz age.

“In 1946, Erna Low offered a ski break in Saas-Fee. The journey included a three hour ascent on a mule ;

their way. Throughout the 1920s, France's PLM (Paris Lyon Mediterranean railway) was at the forefront of promoting its destinations through posters, while the USA followed suit slightly later. In 1929, the New Haven Railroad ran the first ski train from New York's Grand Central station to the newly-opened ski centres in New England.

**When did skiing turn into a popular holiday option?**

In 1930s Britain, the pioneering Viennese tour operator Erna Low led the first winter holiday tours to resorts in Austria,

introducing a new breed of traveller – the package holidaymaker, albeit of the upper-middle class variety – to the Alps. Your package, priced at £15 in 1932, included German lessons, ski hire and 10 days full board. Ski lift passes were not offered as there were no ski lifts at the destination – they were yet to come!

Ski posters were placed, as they are now, in Erna Low's London headquarters to help travellers choose where to go. Even in 1946 you had to be dedicated to get the most out of your skiing holiday. A break in Saas-Fee (a location described as 'most attractive') was offered for £35 5s

(roughly two months' salary). To get there, you had to do the three hour ascent 'by foot or on a mule'. By the 1950s, charter flights and weekly snow trains had improved the journey, while the creation of the chalet party (another Erna Low idea) transformed the experience.

**Who were the big-name poster artists?**

It's no surprise to find that the artists who designed the most striking ski posters were often more than competent skiers themselves. Artists such as Emil Cardinaux (whose poster for the Palace Hotel, St Moritz, became the most expensive European ski poster ever sold when it fetched £23,900 at Christie's in 2004), Burkhard Mangold, Hugo Laubi, Herbert Matter and Martin Peikert are all worth looking out for. American ski poster connoisseurs adore Sascha Maurer for the very same reason – his innate ability to capture the magic of the pistes.

The most highly regarded ski poster artist is Frenchman Roger Broders, known for his work with the PLM railway, which captured deco style so perfectly. His clean lines and bold colours took advertising images to new heights encapsulating, more than anything, the social aspect of a holiday on the slopes.

**I'd love to buy a vintage poster – what are my options?**

Launching into the ski poster market is easier than you might think. A good starting point is to focus on locations you have visited. After that, what you select is governed by how much you want to spend. These days, entry level is around £500 for a clean, undamaged design that dates from the 1950s or one of the as-yet unappreciated photographic posters from the 1970s. Posters for popular resorts tend to be the most expensive.

**How can I be sure that my poster is an original?**

To help with dating, study all your potential buys at close range. Ski ;



Above *Megève* by Kama, lithograph in colours, c1935, estimate £1,200-£1,400 Left *Chamonix Mont-Blanc* by Francisco Tamagno (b1851), lithograph in colours, c1900, estimate £10,000-£15,000

## ONE FOR INVESTMENT

### PHOTOGRAPHIC SKI POSTERS

Real life skiing images and the notion of photojournalism gradually encroached upon graphic artists' poster work after World War II. In the 1960s, photographic images were ideal for offset lithographic printing. They could be issued quickly, which was key for ski resorts facing an increasingly competitive travel market. Posters by one of the most respected alpine photographers, Perren-Barberini, can sell for around £700-£1,000 but there are plenty of cheaper options too – this striking poster from 1968, which features a skier descending a powder run in pleasingly retro gear, is £380. Keep your eyes peeled for great photographic posters – they are set to rocket!



## USEFUL CONTACTS

- Christie's, 020 7752 3206; christies.com. The leader in the field of ski poster auctions. Its next sale is on 21 January (prices from £500 upwards)
- Original Ski Posters, originalski.com. Includes some great photographic posters from the 1960s.
- Erna Low, 0845 863 0525; ernalow.co.uk. The first provider of ski trips as we know them today, it still uses vintage posters for inspiration in its brochures.
- Helen Winder, 07884 421816. Extend the life of a collectable poster by having it linen-backed by this specialist.



Posters were never meant to last a lifetime. Condition affects value and damaged posters are best avoided

Above *Gstaad* by Seiler, lithograph in colours, 1942, estimate £3,000-£5,000

posters from the desirable deco years were printed using stone lithography, so they have large areas of flat colour, which gives the designs real depth. Offset lithography, which came in after the war, is a photographic method of printing where the image is made up of tiny coloured dots, rather like a picture in a magazine.

Remember too that posters were never meant to last a lifetime – they were printed in large sizes on thin paper for pasting on billboards. Posters measuring 102 x 64cm or 127 x 90cm on reasonably thin, matt paper are likely to be original. You may also find clues in the small print that will help you identify a poster, such

as the printer's details or other information that could help you trace a precise date and print run number. To save costs, today's printers go for smaller reproductions – typically 51 x 71cm – and use high grade, silk finish paper.

### How should I display my posters?

Condition does affect value, and posters with tears, folds or other damage are best avoided. If the paper is very thin, you may want to consider having it linen backed by a specialist restorer. A good display tip is to opt for UV-filtering Plexiglas as a framing material to protect the colour and quality of the paper. 