

# JETGALA

LIFE BEYOND FIRST CLASS



## BOEING 787 VIP INTERIORS

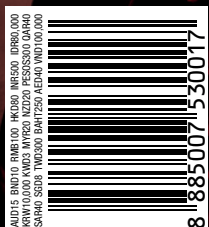
THE LOCKHEED JETSTAR | MODERN AIRSHIPS  
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WINGWALKER AEROBATICS | STRATOLINER

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November December 2011

## AUDEMARS PIGUET'S OLIVIERO BOTTINELLI

A BULGARI RETROSPECTIVE | STEFANO RICCI  
TOP TOKYO SUITES | A LANGE & SÖHNE  
UBS ON ASIAN PHILANTHROPY TRENDS



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MIKE WIEGELE HELICOPTER SKIING

by Roger Norum

# POWDER PLUNGE

THE RACE IS ON FROM ULTRA  
HIGH ALTITUDES IN DEEP SNOW

A view of 1.2 million acres of snow  
nestled in the Cariboo and Monashee  
mountain ranges



ANYONE WHO HAS EVER BEEN HELICOPTER SKIING CAN ATTEST TO THE FACT THAT IT IS EXTREMELY ADDICTIVE. Ask Mike Wiegele. Growing up on a farm in Austria and later escaping the country's post-war hardship to work as a carpenter in Canada, he suffered not a few setbacks to his skiing aspirations. Yet, today, Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing has become one of the most revered names for backcountry adventure skiing.

Wiegele's operation is set in the heart of British Columbia's stunning Cariboo and Monashee mountain ranges, which comprise the single largest heli ski area in the world: 1.2 million acres (4,506 sq km) of terrain and more than 1,000 peaks soaring above high altitude alpine glaciers and forested, gladed valleys. This is where warm air from the west meets cold, dry air from the north, generating more than 10 metres of pillowy powder each winter. Skiing down, you're nearly guaranteed to pass over parts of the planet few have traversed before.

Having long harboured a passion for ski racing, Wiegele competed throughout Europe and Canada during the 1960s. After coaching the Canadian National Team and serving as director of the Lake Louise Ski School, Wiegele cottoned on to the fact that the weather records of the region surrounding Blue River showed unheard of conditions — gentle wind patterns combined with over nine metres of annual snowfall, and the penchant for storms to drop a metre of powder in a single go. This prompted Wiegele to found his operation in that area and spend the next few decades building it up into a premier destination for high-powered downhill skiing, constructing chalets at nearby Lake Eleanor and investing in a fleet of high-capacity helicopters. Optimal year-round conditions mean that one can enjoy fresh glacier air in the summer months of July, August and September; and even when it's 30°C down in Blue River, there could be fresh powder on the peaks.

Days out with Wiegele are full-on experiences in alpine adventure. After a hearty breakfast at 7 am, guests receive instruction in transceiver usage, avalanche search methods and helicopter safety. Wiegele takes safety as a serious priority — apart from being in the Canadian Skiing Hall of Fame, he also founded the Canadian Ski Guide Association, which trains and develops ski guides out of young Canadians passionate about the mountains. Wiegele's advanced >>

WEATHER RECORDS OF  
THE REGION SURROUNDING  
BLUE RIVER SHOWED  
UNHEARD OF CONDITIONS



HIT HIGH ALPINE GLACIERS OR SKI THE  
TREELINE, WHERE HIGH-QUALITY LOOSE  
POWDER IS PROTECTED FROM  
THE WIND AND SUN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

The ultimate heli-skiing experience: big mountains, endless snow and unlimited vertical

The exclusive helicopter service fleet includes the Bell 212 and Eurocopter A-Star

More experienced skiers can practice their stunts

All images by John Schwirtlich of Certain Images

Wiegele's guides make sure guests get the best untracked powder in the safest environment possible



## CABIN CANADA

Set opposite the lake from Blue River's amenity-filled Heli Village, the lavish Bavarian House Estate can accommodate up to 18 guests in a five-bedroom, 9,000 sq ft chalet and three-bedroom, 6,000 sq ft cabana. The log cabin features stone fireplaces, a private spa, sauna, Wi-Fi and meals prepared by a private gourmet chef.

>> safety systems and contingencies are overseen by highly-trained guides who are certified and chosen both for their heli skiing experience and ski instruction ability. The guides meet several times daily to analyse snow conditions and plan routes based on snow pit data and information culled from remote weather stations.

Wiegele's 10 helicopters — five Bell 212 twin engines and five slightly smaller Eurocopter A-Stars — can accommodate several groups of multiple skiers, and there is the option of exclusive private use for one group. Following training sessions, the choppers lift the teams high into the peaks to look for pristine powder-filled runs. The reach of the helicopters offers guests the opportunity to experience backcountry serenity and beauty in ways one can only dream of on regular ski lifts. Up here, one can hit high alpine glaciers or ski the treeline, where high-quality loose powder is protected from the wind and sun. Furthermore, new tailored technology of rockered Atomic skis (skis with rocker shaped bases) allows skiers to float through off-piste powder with ease. All skis and boards are tuned and waxed nightly.

The ski area measures 128 km from north to south and 64 km from east to west, with 553 named trails. On a typical day, guests ski some 20,000 vertical feet — around eight to 10 runs per day — at elevations that range from 1,046 to 3,569 metres. During peak season from January to March, guests on private and semi-private packages can possibly ski for as long as 11 to 16 hours a day. Each is given a run log to record the date, trail name, and number of vertical feet skied each day — a good way to record one's adventure (and for bragging rights), though it is difficult to imagine that such an action-packed heli ski trip can ever be forgotten. 