

# Succession in the Selkirks

## A NEW GENERATION IS TAKING OVER B.C.'S BACKCOUNTRY LODGES

BY RYAN STUART  
PHOTOS BY RYAN CREARY

Nearing the summit of Mount Fang, the view goes from amazing to awe-inspiring. The peaks, glaciers, icefalls and cliffs of the Durrand Glacier come into focus in B.C.'s northern Selkirks. Looking around I spot our tracks here and there, disappearing in valleys and climbing back up to cols and peaks, crossing huge glaciers and plunging down steep mountain faces. It's visual proof of an epic week of ski touring with Selkirk Mountain Experience (SME). One day, all of this will belong to Florina Beglinger, the woman breaking trail to the summit.

Florina's parents, Ruedi and Nicoline Beglinger, built Selkirk Mountain Experience (SME) from wilderness into the thriving commercial backcountry skiing operation it is today. And they raised Florina and her sister Charlotte right in the middle of it, at Durrand Glacier Chalet. Now Florina is training to become a full mountain guide, like her dad, with the goal of taking over the family business.

"It's definitely overwhelming," Florina says. "But I love this place so much. It's my home. I can't imagine being anywhere else."

### THE TRACK TO SUCCESSION

Florina shares her dream of succession with several other second-generation lodge kids. Marty Schaffer gradually took over Blanket Glacier Chalet near Revelstoke from his parents, Al and Marion Schaffer. Jasmin Caton has done the same at Valhalla Mountain Touring, a backcountry lodge north of Nelson run by her parents for 20 years—she's now raising her own kids in the same tradition. Lars Andrews at Whitecap Alpine, north of Whistler, and Kate Devine at Selkirk Lodge, east of Revelstoke, are also second-generation owners. And in the Monashees, east of Kelowna, Aaron and Sabine Cooperman may be at least a decade from retiring from Sol Mountain Lodge, but already their two kids, Josee and Sep, are thinking about taking over one day.

Succession of any family business is a daunting task. For the parents it's learning to let go while still being supportive. For the kids, it's making the business their own while respecting what their parents created. To find the balance, every family has to establish its own route. For the Beglingers, the track to succession was more complex than most, but using the skills honed over nearly 50 years in the mountains, they are finding their way.

### WHERE TO START

Ruedi built Durrand by hand. He moved to Canada in 1980 from Switzerland to be a heli-ski guide in Revelstoke. The towering and snowy Selkirks sucked him in, and





Now 28, Florina Beglinger is finally where she belongs.

## SUCCESSION IN THE SELKIRKS



Of her father Ruedi, Florina says: He was great. He told me I could just give guiding a try."



“It’s my home. I can’t really imagine being anywhere else.”

by 1985 he built Durrand Glacier Chalet northwest of town. A few years later, Noline came to the lodge on a learn-to-telemark camp and volunteered to shovel snow. Whether Ruedi saw love or a woman who could work hard remains a family joke. The couple married and Noline started managing the lodge while Ruedi guided the guests. SME built a reputation for amazing food, professional hospitality and hard skiing. These days it offers mellow and fast-paced trips,

but back then it was known for big vertical and steep skiing. The latter is still true: the easiest route to one outlier hut is a 38-degree run through a crevasse-riddled glacier.

Charlotte was born in 1993 and Florina arrived at the lodge in 1995. When Noline was working, backcountry-ski-bum nannies looked after the girls in the family home, just uphill from the main Durrand chalet. During the ski season the girls were mostly home-schooled at Durrand, learning from many talented guests. Gym class was a one-hour ski tour to a knoll above the chalet. “I got a Smartie every time I stepped on Mom’s ski tail,” remembers Florina



Beglingerland in planning mode.

with a laugh. “It meant I was keeping up. I hated it most of the time.”

Regardless, Florina was always more interested in climbing and skiing than Charlotte. But tragedy struck at the heart of the operation when she was only eight. In 2003, seven people died in an avalanche at SME, including one of their nannies. “The avalanche scared the shit out of the girls,” says Noline. “It had a huge impact on their lives.”

The incident still haunts Ruedi, who was guiding the group. But he thinks it was the aftermath that really turned Florina off guiding. “It was the people that kept pushing the negative narrative, the shame and criticism of me,” he says. “She saw how much it bothered Noline and myself. She saw a strong negative side to the job.”

### GUIDING LIGHT

“When it’s slippery like this, really stomp your skis into the snow,” Florina calls over her shoulder.

It’s day three of my trip in Beglingerland and we’re on our way to one of their two outlier huts, the Empire Lake Chalet. I can see the cozy little box far below, beyond the toe of the Forbidden Glacier. A long, rolling run in perfect, knee-deep snow awaits, but first we have to climb the steep ridge to Forbidden Peak. The fresh snow on top of a firm crust makes the skin track crumbly and unstable. The skiers are slipping. The split-boarders in our group are sliding right off the track. Only Florina looks like she belongs here.

When I finally reach the top, she greets me like I just summited Everest. “Nice work!” she cheers. Skiing with Ruedi is the opposite. He’s quiet and gruff; there’s no encouragement, no tips. But like Florina, Ruedi has charisma, people are drawn to ski and be with him.

As we wait for the others to top-out on Forbidden, I ask Florina about the avalanche’s legacy. “I resisted becoming a guide because I wasn’t confident I could handle the responsibility,” she admits. “Going out there every day, knowing there was a chance people could die, it was too much.”

Things started to change during her fourth year studying film and creative





Carry the card  
that shows **you**  
love snow days.

Get  
**500** bonus  
AIR MILES®†!\*

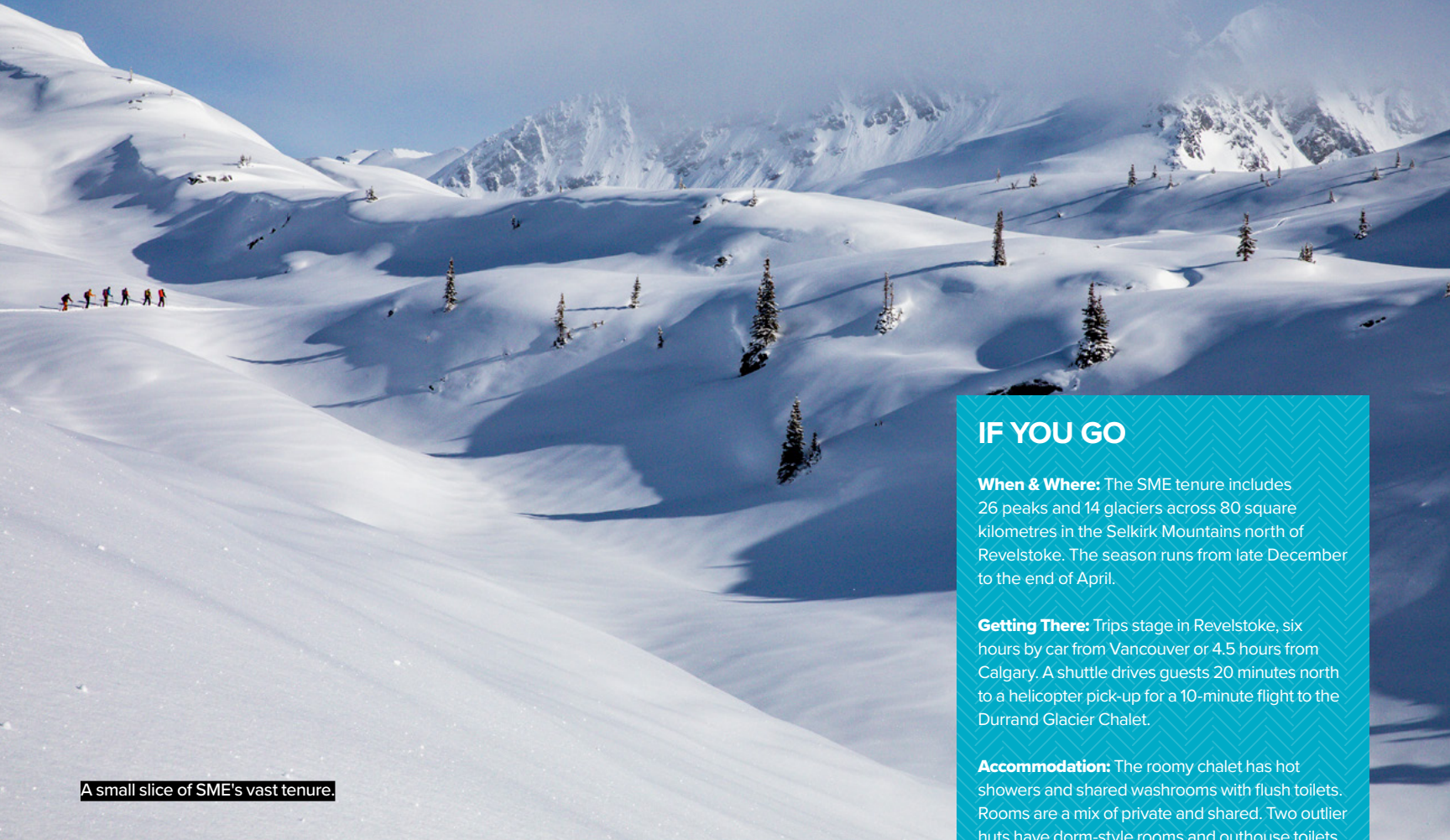
Earn 1 AIR MILES reward mile for every \$20 you purchase with the **BMO® Ski Canada Magazine MasterCard®\*** card. You also help support junior ski racing and other not-for-profit ski organizations and events across Canada at no additional cost to you.



We're here to help.™

Plus, get 500 bonus AIR MILES reward miles with your first purchase.\*

\*Apply online at [bmo.com/ski](http://bmo.com/ski) or call 1-800-263-2263.



A small slice of SME's vast tenure.

writing at the University of British Columbia. She missed Durrand and thought she might want to be a guide. She didn't want to lose the family business, but, as a people-pleaser, she worried she was thinking of returning to make others happy. The confusion tore her up. She

**“**Whether Ruedi saw love or a woman who could work hard remains a family joke.**”**

called home, hoping to talk to her mom about it, but her dad answered. “He was great,” she says. “He told me I could just give guiding a try.”

Now 28 years old, Florina is an Association of Canadian Mountain Guides full ski guide and is working on the ice and rock portions of her full guide accreditation. As a leader, she comes

across as comfortable and confident, like this is where she belongs.

It's also obvious she's not the boss yet. Ruedi runs a regimented operation. We start skinning at 8 a.m., have a break at 10:15 and are home by 3. Friday's snack is chocolate crois-

sants and dinner is fondue. Furniture in the huts stays where Ruedi placed it 20 years ago. Florina rolls her eyes at the strict Swiss ways. “People always ask me what I'll change when I take over,” she says.

“I used to think I'd change a lot, but I've realized if we want to ski extreme stuff it has to be this way. The rules and policies are there for good reasons.”

There is no formal succession plan. Ruedi is 68. He tells me he wants to guide full time until he's 70 and part time until he's 90. Florina's

## IF YOU GO

**When & Where:** The SME tenure includes 26 peaks and 14 glaciers across 80 square kilometres in the Selkirk Mountains north of Revelstoke. The season runs from late December to the end of April.

**Getting There:** Trips stage in Revelstoke, six hours by car from Vancouver or 4.5 hours from Calgary. A shuttle drives guests 20 minutes north to a helicopter pick-up for a 10-minute flight to the Durrand Glacier Chalet.

**Accommodation:** The roomy chalet has hot showers and shared washrooms with flush toilets. Rooms are a mix of private and shared. Two outlier huts have dorm-style rooms and outhouse toilets.

**Gear:** Guests bring ski gear, clothing and personal items. SME supplies bedding, food and safety gear, including beacon, probe, shovel and air bag backpack. High-quality touring skis and boots are available for rent.

**Cost:** \$3,950 per person for a standard, week-long, all-inclusive trip based out of the Durrand Glacier Chalet.

[selkirkexperience.com](http://selkirkexperience.com)

return has energized Nicoline. “I'm committed to helping her for as long as she needs me,” she says.

That's perfect. “I'm definitely not ready to take over,” says Florina.

But she's getting a little more comfortable with the idea every day. At the top of Mount Fang she checks in with everyone one last time, pushes off down the glacier and calls over her shoulder, “Let's go home.”