

Chesas engiadinaisas

The traditional Engadine houses uniquely shape the character of the valley's villages, including Sils. These houses, adorned with sgraffito, are popular subjects for photographs. The sgraffito technique involves scratching ornaments and geometric patterns into the still-soft, light-colored lime plaster, revealing the darker layer beneath. The sgraffito often contains symbolic motifs, serving as decoration, protection against evil spirits, or an expression of prosperity. Engadine houses often date back to the 16th to 18th centuries. Over time, however, they have been remodeled and adapted to changing needs. Engadine houses are constructed of solid stone walls. A typical Engadine house consists of a living area and a farm section with a stable and barn. The farm section, with its hayloft, is usually oriented to the south to ensure proper drying of the hay and prevent hay bale fires. The barn's characteristic vertical wooden walls are fitted with ventilation slots to ensure good air circulation for the hay. The close connection between the residential and agricultural sections is demonstrated by the „Sulèr“: A large, drive-through entrance leads into a wide corridor that goes to the „Talvo,“ the hayloft. From the „Sulèr,“ the living area, stable, and cellar are all equally accessible.

The living spaces are designed for multiple generations. They are usually located above the barn to utilize the animals' body heat. The „Stüva e chadafö“ – living room and kitchen – were formerly the only heated rooms in the house. Engadine living rooms are paneled in wood. Those who could afford it had a Swiss pine room installed. The whole family gathered in the Stüva on long winter evenings. Above the stove was an opening, a kind of hatch, which, via a small staircase, provided access to the bedroom. A vaulted ceiling is typical for the kitchen – formerly with an open hearth and chimney. A few Engadine houses still retain the bread oven, which faces outwards and looks like a small house built into the wall.

Deep-set windows and bay windows are typical features of Engadine houses. The small, low-set windows are arranged to let in as much light as possible while minimizing heat loss. Engadine houses are typically built in conjunction with the surrounding houses.

The individual houses face each other and are arranged around village squares with fountains in the center. This was the hub of social life: livestock were watered, water was fetched, laundry was washed, and, above all, people exchanged information.

A distinctive feature of the Engadine houses in Sils is their stone roofs made of Fex slate. The lightweight slate from the Val Fex is not only beautiful but also frost-resistant. However, most roofs in the Engadine were covered with larch shingles, especially in the „Plaiv“ region from Madulain downwards and in the Lower Engadine.

Fadrina Hofmann