

Confectioner

Above the main entrance of the Hotel Margna in Sils Baselgia are the initials J. J. These refer to the founder of the hotel: Johann Josty. Born in Sils in 1773, this Engadine native is considered one of the most successful confectioners of his time. But who was this enterprising man? Josty came from humble beginnings. Legend has it that as a young man, he even tended goats. His father owned a small farm. As a teenager, Josty emigrated to Magdeburg, where he apprenticed as a confectioner. As early as 1796, at the age of only 23, he founded the company J. Josty & Companie in Berlin together with other Engadine emigrants. On May 1st of that same year, the first of his own confectioneries opened. Pastries, chocolate, and marzipan were his specialties.

Josty's confectionery was located directly opposite the royal palace at Stechbahn 1. It was frequented by a clientele from the upper echelons of the civil service, officers, and artists, including the writer Heinrich Heine. In the later-opened Café Josty, Joseph von Eichendorff, the Brothers Grimm, and Theodor Fontane, among others, were regulars. Café Josty became a place to read newspapers and engage in political debate. Josty continually expanded his empire. The company J. Josty & Companie soon operated cafés and patisseries in various German cities, for example, in Leipzig, Frankfurt an der Oder, and Hamburg. And so, Josty became a wealthy man. Josty did not forget his roots in distant Berlin. In 1817, he had the „Margna Patrician House“ built for his wife in Sils Baselgia. With the start of construction on this family residence, he provided the locals with work and income. This came after 1916, a „year without a summer“ with crop failures and famine. From then on, „Randulin“ was considered a generous „bap dals povers,“ a benefactor of the poor. Randulin is the Romansh word for swallow and refers to those Engadine residents who had left the valley but, like swallows, regularly returned. The Josty family's patrician house was the origin of today's „Parkhotel Margna.“ The „Restaurant Stüva“ was originally Josty's living room; above it is the Josty Room, popular with many guests – once the marital bedchamber.

Josty died in Sils on September 5, 1826. After Josty's death, Johannes Badrutt, founder of the Kulm Hotel in St. Moritz, bought the house. Café Josty continued to operate at the same address even after Johann Josty's death, until 1864. Then the company established new premises at Schlossfreiheit. In 1880, the business moved to Potsdamer Platz. It was destroyed in World War II. However, since 2001, there has been another Café Josty, located in the Sony Center, about 200 meters from the former location of the main branch.

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