

OnLocation/Adventure

Out of this world

Rural Switzerland is not where you'd expect to find a space-age bar designed by the visual effects genius behind *Alien*. Welcome to the Giger Bar...

There you are, driving along in Switzerland, heading for some of the most famous locations in the Alps, the big boys of the Graubunden region - Davos, Klosters, St Moritz, Flims, Laax, Arosa.

In the blink of an eye you'll have ticked off Chur (pronounced Koor), on the ring road to all of these wildly sophisticated destinations. After all, it's just another town you have to drive alongside to get to somewhere better.

But take a five-minute detour off the autobahn, rather than stopping in an overpriced service station, and you'd be in for a surprise to rival that of Sigourney Weaver when she was about to suggest a Rennie might cure John Hurt's bout of indigestion in *Alien*. For there, on an uninspiring industrial estate sandwiched between the Erotik Market and an orthopaedic bed shop, rests one of the world's most discreet movie bars — the Giger Bar.

The name Giger may not mean much to you unless you're a film buff or a fan of surrealist art. But HR Giger is the Swiss painter, sculptor, designer and architect who won an Oscar back in 1980 for best visual effects for Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Born in Chur in 1940, Giger has also been responsible for, among other things, the visual effects on *Alien III*, *Poltergeist II* and *Species*, as well as the famous album cover for Debbie Harry's *Kookoo* (the one with the arrows through her cheeks). His airbrushed paintings sell for thousands.

The bar itself is the very essence of the marooned alien space ship — Planet Hollywood this is not. Essentially everything is black, chrome and as detailed as a film set, radiating from a nine-sided bar with revolving skeletal bucket seats. The walls have an opulent almost liquid texture in jet velvet, while the metal floor appears to pulsate with a matrix of computer wires, chips and circuit boards (or are they living ligaments?). Large picture

windows open out on to the mundanity of the shopping mall beyond but allow the sun to filter through folios of skulls and alien beings, like celluloid strips from the cult classic itself, so piles of croissants encased in glass-domed cake stands are cast in an eerily spooky glow.

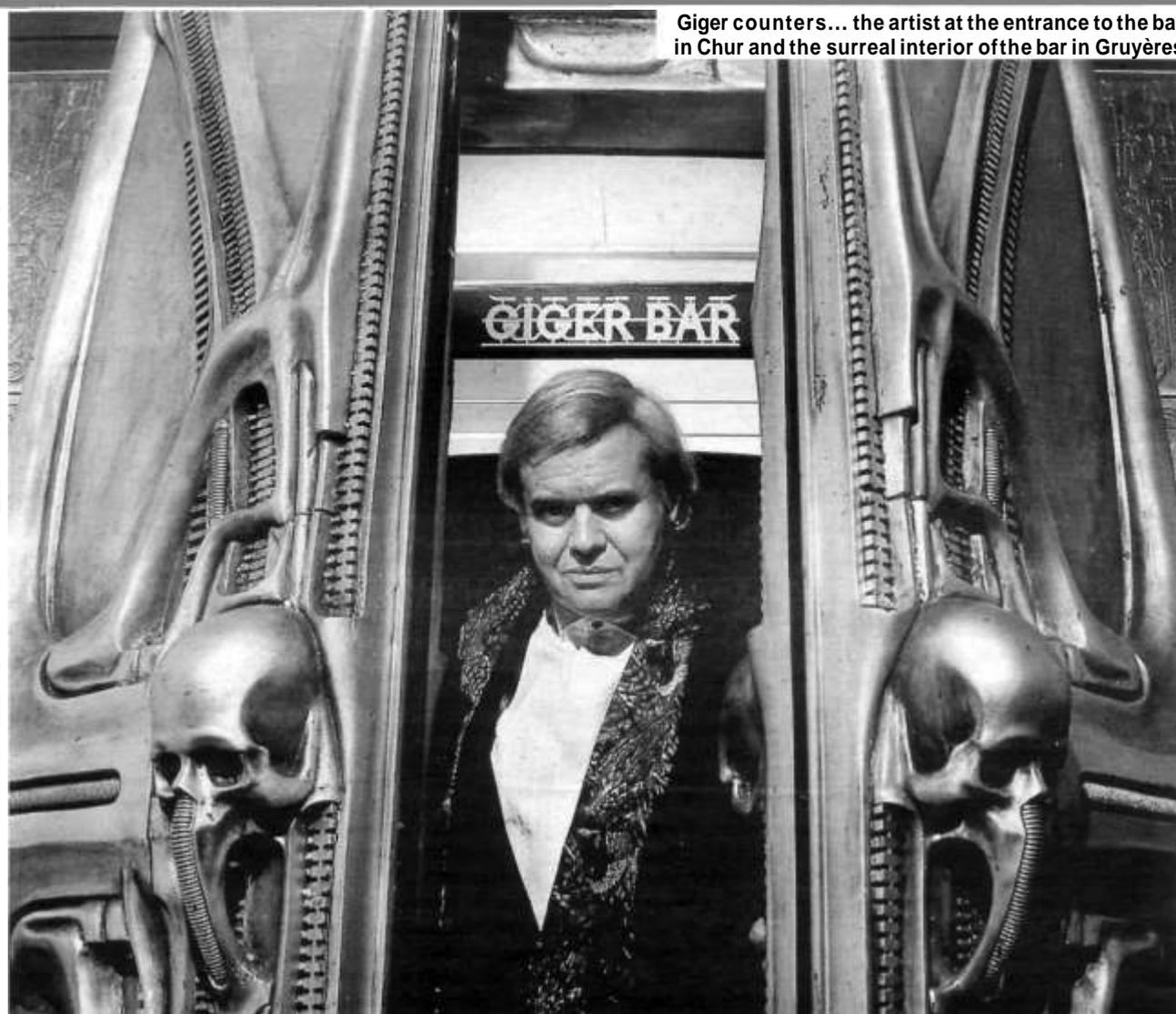
Everything has been designed by Giger himself, from the enormous whalebone-shaped mirrors to the lights which reach from the inky darkness of the walls like cloven hoofs ready to snatch and claw at unsuspecting passersby. The only splash of colour (other than the sculpture of a limbless, writhing female torso swathed in green strobe light) are the nine white-marble faces that stare from horizontal eye slits set into each cove of the bar. The faces, manager Fayzeh Sharabati explains, are nothing sinister despite their alabaster hue, but the replicas of craftsmen who helped Giger build the bar. Look closely and you'll also see two self-sculptures of the man himself.

Although you can sit and sup an *Alien* cocktail (a heady mix of white and black vodka, Maracuj liqueur and ginger ale), the monochrome menus (covered with more surreal Giger artwork, they make a fine prize for visiting sci-fi buffs) hold no extra-terrestrial surprises inside - Ovomaltine and chicken nuggets next to lattes and tomato mozzarella salads. The toilets are a bit prosaic, too, clearly having surrendered to Swiss health and safety rules. The scariest thing that could happen in here is the *Andrex* running out.

Maybe that explains why the regular crowd is pretty tame. After the fans, it's mainly a hang-out for students from the three nearby colleges. The fact that it closes at 5pm hardly makes it a hardnut, but Sharabati is happy with that. "This isn't the first Giger Bar. The first was in Japan, but it had to close because it attracted gangland fighting."

You can, however, hire the place for parties and with the shutters down, blocking out the pedestrian mall, you could truly transport yourself not just out of Switzerland but out of this world.

As for Chur itself, well it's not a bad place to stretch your legs. Sitting in a deep valley carved by the Rhine, the town is the oldest continuously inhabited city north of the Alps, with archeological finds dating to 3000BC. The huge cathedral (1151) sits atop a



Giger counters... the artist at the entrance to the bar in Chur and the surreal interior of the bar in Gruyères

cobbled stepped hill, towering over artistically painted, beamed houses that feel like a film set in their own right. Little cafes spill on to the pedestrianised streets and on Saturday mornings a flea market takes over Arcas Square filling it with a cornucopia of bric-a-brac.

But it's the Giger Bar that remains the real — if a tad incongruous — star. And if that whets your appetite and you fancy another detour, HR Giger has a second, bigger one, in the quaint village of Gruyères - home of the cheese - which is adjoined to a museum dedicated to his art. It makes for a much more exciting pit stop than a Shell garage.

Samantha Warwick
• *The Giger Bar* (0041 81 253 7506, hrgiger.com), *Comercialstrasse 23, Chur, (highway exit Chur south)*. *Double rooms at the Comfort Hotel Post, Poststrasse 11, Chur (+81 252 6844, all-hotels.com) from around Sfr160. Giger Museum and Bar, Chateau St Germain, Gruyères. Visit hrgiger.com for details. myswitzerland.com.*

