

Bela Racsko

Bela Racsko was one of the many people who escaped war or political conflict in Europe in the middle of the twentieth century and eventually made their lives in the Snowy Mountains. He arrived in Thredbo in 1957, the resort's first year, and made an immediate mark as the designer and builder of lodges. In partnership with his fellow Hungarian, Steve Szeloczky, he formed the Sigma Building Company which pioneered the construction of commercial, club and private lodges in the village.

Racsko fled his homeland at great personal risk after the ill-fated popular uprising of 1956. Skilled in architectural design and building, his talents were in great demand in a difficult alpine environment little known to the local builders. He designed many lodges, obtained approvals for them and managed the construction effort often using European migrant labour. His projects were managed with skill, energy and invariably to the satisfaction of his clients, and accordingly he always had a full book of work. In his first decade in Thredbo his credits included the original Roslyn (now Hi Noon), Candlelight (for Kornel and Suzanne Deseö), Golden Eagle, Karoonda, the Black Bear (initially Sasha's and built for Karel and Sasha Nekvapil), the Silver Brumby (for John and Pam Hughes), Hing's (now Leatherbarrel), Koomerang, Schlupfwinkel, Kasees (for Cees and Ann Koeman), Winterhaus (for Beryl and Vic Clifford), Inala (for the family of Charles Hlavaty), Sitzmark, Munjarra and the original Lantern.

He also built Punchinello, which he lived in and operated with his wife Gabi. He was active in building Thredbo into the late 1980s.

Racsko's buildings were small and simple by today's standards, but they were renowned for an ambience summarised in the German word *gemütlich* (cosy). By the late 1960s, about half of the sixty or so buildings in Thredbo bore his stamp. As the years rolled by and the lodges were expanded and rebuilt the Racsko signature became less apparent, but elements of it remain nonetheless – for example in Schlupfwinkel, which remains in near-original form half a century after its construction. With its neighbour, the original Sequoia, Schlupfwinkel (formerly Ashtons) featured often in photographs taken by visitors: the two lodges became visual emblems of Thredbo.

Bela Racsko's last building was the second Roslyn, across from the first lodge to bear that name. Fittingly the corner where Diggings Terrace, Bobuck Lane and Banjo Drive meet is named after him. His contribution to Thredbo's physical fabric and the "look and feel" of the village was immense.