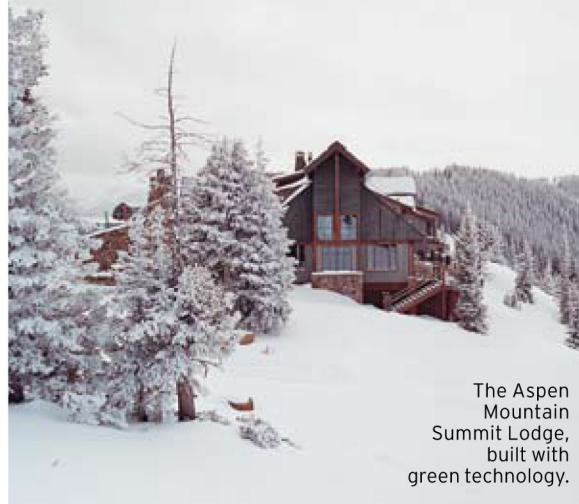


flies); and turning mountains into labs to experiment with the kinds of green innovations bigger industries could adopt.

“My mandate to Auden was to become an activist,” O’Donnell says. “We have to get involved at the state and national level. Otherwise, we’ll be sitting around with a squeaky-clean record, and we’ll say, ‘We did everything.’ And we’ll be bankrupt, because of climate change.”

**“Historically, the ski industry was perceived as environmentally benign,”** says Schendler, who previously worked as an analyst at the Rocky Mountain Institute, an environmentalist think tank. Still, by the 1990’s, skiing and snowboarding had become big business. Resorts cleared forest for expansions and drew more power from the grid every year. When O’Donnell came to Aspen from Patagonia in 1994, he figured the company had an obligation to its natural surroundings. And if the bigger resorts around the Rockies continued their sprawling development, Aspen might flourish as a boutique, back-to-nature alternative.

Aspen’s green experiment started small, in 1997, with a beefed-up recycling program and an employee-run charitable foundation to fund environmental projects. That probably would have been enough to give Aspen’s brand a progressive sheen. But the company soon turned its attention to trickier, costlier issues, like power and water conservation. Aspen tried little things, like building half-pipes in the summer, out of dirt, instead of in the winter, out of a small mountain of man-made snow, saving both power and water. “More and more resorts are adopting that technique,” Schendler says. Other projects were more ex-



The Aspen Mountain Summit Lodge, built with green technology.

otic—for instance, installing a micro power station that captures runoff water and converts it into clean electricity. Since lifts and snowmaking machinery are tough to run more efficiently, short of buying all-new equipment, Aspen has focused on reducing the environmental footprint of its buildings and vehicles, which account for roughly one-third of the resort’s energy use. Today, the mountain spends about \$300,000 annually on a range of green initiatives. (Aspen earns back about \$60,000 a year in energy savings, but other financial benefits—significant ones, anyway—are awfully hard to quantify.)

For all of Aspen’s progress, no change has been easy. (Lisa Isaacs, Schendler’s counterpart at Mammoth Mountain, and one of the top environment directors in the industry, actually developed an ulcer during her first year on the job.) Take the decision to convert much of Aspen’s heavy machinery from gas to cleaner-burning biodiesel, which, as far as Schendler knew, had never seen much use in the »

## SNAPSHOT SLOPES IN PERIL

When it comes to the viability of ski resorts, it’s all a matter of degrees. According to a 2001 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the most recent estimate available at press time, temperatures will rise approximately 2.5 to 10.4 degrees by 2100. The impact of these hotter temperatures on ski destinations will be a one-two punch of fewer snow days and low-lying melt. Here, a look at the slopes already feeling the hit around the globe. —Jennifer Welbel

**BRITISH COLUMBIA** Over the past 60 years, Canada’s average temperature has increased 1.98 degrees, with six of the warmest years occurring in the last decade, according to a study from the University of Waterloo. This trend has been particularly evident along the coastline and

at Whistler Blackcomb ski resort. Arthur DeJong, the mountain’s planning and environmental resource manager, reports that glaciers surrounding the resort have lost half their mass. The Horstman Glacier—a premier destination because of its groomed and mogul runs—has decreased in size from 428 acres in 1890 to just 86 acres in 2006.

### THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

It takes at least 100 wintry days for resorts in the Rockies to break even. Warmer temperatures shorten the ski season, putting profits at risk. The State of the Rockies Report Card, issued by Colorado College, predicts that springtime snowpack will have decreased by at least 37 percent by 2085 at all altitudes of the Rockies, from Montana to Colorado. Specifically,

Telluride, Beaver Creek, and Sun Valley ski resorts are each facing losses of over 54 percent of their winter powder.

**NEW ENGLAND** Between 1970 and 2002, temperatures increased 4.5 degrees throughout the Northeast—the equivalent of a New York winter turning into that of Washington, D.C., Cameron Wake, of the University of New Hampshire Climate Change Research Center, says. In 2001, the region experienced 16 fewer snowy days than it did in 1970, forcing many independently owned ski resorts to close their slopes forever.

**ALPINE REGION** This winter, the Alps had one of the warmest Novembers on record, according to the February 2007 report from the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development. The group’s environmental director, Shardul Agrawala, predicts that if temperatures continue to increase at the current rate, the Alps will lose 40 percent of their runs by 2056. The three resort areas most at risk are the Alpes Maritimes, Steiermark-Styria, and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, because of their low altitudes and proximity to the Mediterranean.

### AUSTRALIAN SKI RESORTS

A recent study by Australia’s Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization predicts that, at best, the region will warm by only 0.36 degrees over the next 13 years. At worst, temperatures will rise by 4.68 degrees and none of Australia’s ski resorts will be economically viable by 2070.