

July 1, 2011 10:09 pm

# Bubble-wrapped for safety

By Tyler Brûlé

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## Freedoms once enjoyed by cautious people are being removed to ensure that a minority don't injure themselves

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**D**eep blue skies, dancing meadows of alpine wild flowers, warm days, cool nights, fresh breezes and endless hours to lie back and observe, read, nap and watch the world go by. The past 10 days in the Engadine have been all that, along with daily trips to the physio for post-knee operation maintenance, occasional visits to my trainer Vivi and excellent dinners at Chasellas in St Moritz. Thanks to a good physiotherapist (and surgeon) I've been cycling and walking around the lake and using my enforced convalescence to visit some favourite establishments and try out a couple of new venues.

On Sunday I decided to spend the afternoon on the lawn of a local hotel with a stack of magazines and newspapers, tanning cream, notebook and a sharp pen. All was going well (cloudless sky and few guests) until one of the waiters approached in a new, more "relaxed" uniform (gone was the mandarin collar jacket and in its place a too baggy piqué polo shirt and shiny black trousers) and handed over the regular menu and also a sushi menu. It was a steep, bumpy descent from that moment forward. A quick scan of the menu revealed some missing classics. A request for a glass of rosé was met with a choice of three types of white wine. And a follow-up request for a real glass instead of the plastic picnic cup was met with a look of panic. "I'll speak to my manager." A few minutes later a kindly Italian gentleman came striding across the lawn to explain that glasses were no longer allowed near the pool. "But we're nowhere near the pool. I can't even see it," I responded. "It's because of the children," said the manager.

"What children? I don't see any children. What do children have to do with my enjoyment of a glass of wine?" I asked politely. "If a glass broke and a child stepped on it, well it would be a disaster," explained the manager.

"Honestly?!" I said. "You used to have glasses and a pool close by but now you've moved the pool 70 metres away to the far side of the building. I could throw a glass on this lawn and it wouldn't break." At this point the manager threw up his hands and shrugged in that wonderful way that only Italians can manage. "Mahhhh, I know, but these are the rules."

I tried to enjoy my lunch but I was thoroughly unsettled. Had "litigationosis" finally come to Switzerland? Was it really the case that glasses were now forbidden from lush lawns near open bodies of water by the local council or was the hotel scared of being sued by some hysterical parents? Was this another battle won by meddling health and safety bureaucrats or hotel management having a crisis of common sense? Just as train windows that open are now under threat on some of Switzerland's railway routes, it seems other freedoms that were once enjoyed by people who had a bit of caution and control in their genes are being closed down, boarded up and abandoned to ensure that a dopey minority don't injure themselves.

While this is all terribly depressing it does open up a business opportunity for people in the protective-gear business. Imagine how well you'd be doing today if you moved into the helmet-making business 15 years ago. In many cities it's now illegal to even pedal down a quiet side-street to the corner shop without a helmet. A decade ago helmets were seldom seen on slopes but today they're the norm. It's only a matter of time before we'll need protective gear for the simplest tasks and herein resides a huge opportunity to create a global protective-clothing business.

With my slightly unstable leg I almost slipped on the bathroom floor and there's no doubt it could have ended in catastrophe. What I really needed was a shower helmet that would have allowed for shampooing and rinsing but also would have protected my skull from smashing into the washbasin in the event I skidded across the tiles. In fact, it would have been useful to have a special sleeping helmet as well because there was the odd morning I was a bit wobbly on my feet and I could have easily hurtled headfirst through a nearby window and fallen several storeys.

Some years ago I met a clever Swiss gentleman who ran a company that specialised in packing solutions. Part of his business was focused on making machines for packing plastic that's used for bundling newspapers and securing pallets. The other part was involved in creating plastic bubble wrap and I want to propose a joint venture to him. I think it's time to deliver maximum protection to adults and children who are worried about glass in the grass, tumbling down stairs, falling off bicycles or slipping in bathrooms and offer full body bubble wrap suits at hotels, restaurants and all other dangerous public spaces. This would give the dim and litigious a cushion of protection and allow everyone else to get on with life – being mindful of the daily risks that come with getting out of bed.

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