Leben & Kultur

Clinic founder Jan Gerber: "It is my mission to foster understanding of the psychological suffering experienced by wealthy people." Photo: Boris Müller

Chris Winteler

In his private clinic, film stars and powerful figures seek treatment at CHF 600,000 per stay

Luxury psychiatry: "Too much money makes people ill," says Jan Gerber at Paracelsus Recovery, the clinic he founded in a prime location in Zurich. He offers an insight into the unhealthy world of the super-rich.

Just moments ago, a prince from the Middle East suffering from multiple dependencies was sitting on the dark green velvet sofa. Before him, a millionaire heiress from the United States, struggling with severe depression.

Here, on the third floor of an unassuming commercial building on the shores of Lake Zurich, resides Paracelsus Recovery – the psychiatric clinic of a global elite that, at least from the outside, appears to live on the sunny side of life.

Clinic founder Jan Gerber (44) welcomes visitors into his strikingly spacious office: a subtle scent in the air, lavish floral arrangements, a generous seating area for guests and a piano – all overlooking Lake Zurich. Thirteen years ago, he founded what is likely the most exclusive and most expensive private clinic in the world.

This "refuge for the super-rich" is aimed at people suffering from mental health conditions and dependencies and who can afford to invest a great deal of money in their mental well-being. A stay costs CHF 15,000 per day. The average client remains for six weeks, paying around CHF 600,000 in total.

The son of a nurse, who grew up in Schaffhausen, initially planned to pursue a different career path. After studying economics in London, he worked as a management consultant, built companies of his own, invested in property and accumulated significant wealth.

The founding of the luxury psychiatric clinic was driven by entrepreneurial calculation, and Gerber makes no secret of this. But he also says: "It is my mission to create understanding for the psychological suffering of wealthy people. Pain is pain, regardless of how much money someone has in their bank account."

2025 was one of the clinic's most successful years. The reason, according to Gerber: "Psychological problems are increasing overall. And there are more and more super-rich individuals in the world." Globally, more than 500,000 people have a net worth of at least 30 million US dollars, the threshold internationally used to define someone as "super-rich".

A glimpse inside one of the luxury clinic's three private penthouse residences. Photo: PD

A treatment room at Paracelsus Recovery. Photo: Boris Müller

Clinic of the super-rich

Gerber says: "Too much money makes people ill.

These individuals are not to be envied."
Very little ever emerges from this discreet world. Princess Charlene of Monaco is said to have sought help here at the end of 2021 due to psychological exhaustion. Gerber neither confirms nor denies such reports.

Unless clients choose to make their stay public themselves, as Sarah "Fergie" Ferguson did this summer. The former wife of Prince Andrew shared her experiences of psychological trauma in the British newspaper The Telegraph.

According to Gerber, his specialists treat a small number of members of royal families from the Middle East every year. Occasionally, they also treat a Hollywood star or a powerful foreign politician. Above all, however, they care for billionaire company founders and heirs, as well as CEOs of major corporations. These are influential individuals whom one would not recognise on the street, most of them from North America. "Whether these people are psychologically well or not can influence entire ecosystems, and in some cases even whole countries," Gerber says.

Swiss clients are comparatively rare. Based on Gerber's experience, the reason is simple: "Even the super-rich Swiss are accustomed to not paying for a clinic stay out of their own pocket." Health insurance does not cover any costs at his clinic.

Only 25 to 40 people are admitted each year

Patients, whom Gerber refers to as clients, are often admitted under pressure from those around them. This was the case with a recent client, a 15-year-old from a Middle Eastern royal dynasty. The diagnosis was severe ADHD. As an incentive to endure the three-week stay, his parents promised him a Bentley of his own.

"We do not judge," says Gerber. So far, he has never turned anyone away. Only once did they come close, he admits. Several years ago, following a major Hollywood scandal that dominated the media for months. The individual ultimately chose another clinic.
Paracelsus Recovery usually treats only one or two clients at a time, three at the very most. As a result, only 25 to 40 people are admitted each year. Each client is supported by a team of at least 15 specialists, including psychiatrists, physicians, therapists, yoga instructors and nutritionists.

Discretion is taken for granted, and clients do not encounter one another. The price includes a penthouse residence with lake views, where around 90 per cent of the treatment takes place. The all-inclusive service also includes a private chef, a personal fitness trainer and, despite the emphasis on discretion, a chauffeur-driven limousine.

"Accommodation and service reflect, at least to some extent, the reality of our clients' lives," says Gerber. Distracting stress factors, such as an unmade bed, are deliberately avoided so that clients can focus fully on their therapy.

Clients are never left alone and remain under constant professional supervision. A so-called live-in therapist stays in the guest room.

The days are filled with conversations and treatments. At weekends, recovery is on the agenda, says Gerber. That is when they head into the mountains in the Bentley, for hiking or skiing. The therapist is always present, and sometimes the personal trainer comes along as well.

After a stay at the clinic, not all problems are resolved, Gerber says. The return to everyday life, when "all the triggers are back", is a particularly critical phase. Ideally, the client is accompanied in daily life for some time by their personal therapist. To ensure that psychological issues remain confidential, this person is often introduced as a career coach or fitness trainer. Occasionally, they may even be presented as a ghostwriter for an autobiography. "Depending on the client, a cover story can always be found if needed."

The illnesses of the super-rich

Depression, burnout, anxiety disorders and dependencies are among the most common conditions affecting the super-rich. Among successful entrepreneurs who have built their own fortunes, a self-destructive work ethic is frequently observed. Family, friends and even their own health are often neglected.

Such individuals, whom Gerber refers to as "over-achievers", often suffer from deep-seated low self-esteem and feel a constant need to prove themselves. "Only if I am successful will I be loved and respected." Gerber says that as a young man he too believed that large sums of money and beautiful cars would make his emotional insecurities disappear. "Of course, that was not the case," he says.

He also knows from personal experience what wealth can do to a person. Having no financial worries is, at first, liberating. But envy and resentment, even requests for a "loan", have put some of his friendships to the test.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the clinic founder himself became a patient. Gerber speaks of an acute stress-related depression. Many things came together at once: intense pressure, worries about the lack of clients, symptoms of burnout. His marriage broke down. He experienced a midlife crisis. He says he felt exhausted and empty.

"Psychological problems can affect anyone"

He spent several weeks receiving treatment in a clinic. He says he still experiences highs and lows. "Today you see me as articulate," Gerber says, "but on some days I am still not quite myself."

Today, he derives a genuine sense of happiness from relationships, nature and creative work. That said, the CEO has not entirely turned away from luxury. He is a member of organisations reserved exclusively for the ultra-wealthy, including the Campden Club, which requires a minimum fortune of 100 million Swiss francs. From time to time, he takes holidays on a private yacht and appreciates the comforts of five-star hotels.

Gerber is married for the second time, is the father of a teenager, and has a fondness for British car brands. He currently owns five cars, more than he did in the past. One day, he jokes, he will drive a sensible Toyota Yaris Hybrid. "Life would be simpler." But people find it difficult to scale back, regardless of their social background.

Gerber says that speaking openly about his own mental health is part of a credible approach. "There should be no shame in psychological problems," he says. "They can affect anyone."

Those born into wealth, the "rich kids" as he calls them, are exposed to particularly high risks. They are under immense pressure to meet their parents' expectations, or "the money tap is turned off". Rich kids often lack emotional closeness. "They are looked after by nannies and sent away to boarding school." This can lead to attachment issues or low self-esteem, which in turn can encourage a wide range of dependencies, including alcohol, cocaine and prescription drugs, or sex addiction.

Unlike people on average incomes, this group has greater means to indulge such behaviours. Gerber mentions the businessman who travels the world and orders an escort in every luxury hotel. Or the billionaire who maintains several mistresses in separate residences. In most cases, the dependency continues until it has consequences, until a wife threatens divorce.

Addicted to handbags or Lamborghinis

New forms of dependency have also emerged in recent years, most notably crypto addiction. Compulsive and high-risk trading in cryptocurrencies has increased sharply. "In essence, it is nothing more than gambling," says Gerber. It is particularly dangerous, however, because it feels like familiar financial activity. People tell themselves: I am investing, I understand the market.

"An addiction is primarily a tool for coping with underlying causes such as pain or inner emptiness," Gerber says. Some of his female clients attempt to fill this emptiness through consumption. Compulsive buying, known clinically as oniomania, or opulomania, the addiction to luxury, wealth and excess, is widespread among the financially privileged.

Gerber's clientele indulges heavily in status symbols. "The men buy watches and cars excessively, the women handbags." He says that heirs in particular, but also investment bankers who gain access to large sums of money at a very young age, are a high-risk group. "Extreme luxury experiences produce short-lived feelings of happiness." The craving for ever higher doses of dopamine can then lead to a classic cycle of dependency.

Gerber recounts the case of a client who obsessively kept buying new Lamborghinis. Or a female client who shopped several times a week in London's luxury boutiques, spending tens of thousands of francs each time. "The unopened shopping bags piled up in the basement." In this case too, it was the client's close circle that ultimately ensured she received help.

"These are problems I would like to have." Gerber is familiar with the remark. He is aware that sympathy is limited when it comes to men and women who collect Lamborghinis or designer handbags, whose problems arise from unhealthy excess. Nevertheless, he wishes for compassion and understanding for all people in psychological distress, including the super-rich. "Money does not make you happy. Quite the opposite," he says. At least his clients prove as much.