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I've been feeling a bit peevish lately. Maybe it's the too-many rainy days but I find myself feeling a bit homesick for Geneva. It should come as no surprise that from time to time this nostalgia should creep in and darken my usually sunny mood. After all, I lived in and around Geneva for almost two decades.

Like New England, it is harvest time in Switzerland. Just minutes from downtown Geneva, farmers are piling up corn and turnips (or maybe they're rutabagas) for the cows. Cabbages and cauliflowers are being plucked. Foragers are scouring the forest in search of wild mushrooms. And the hills are perfumed with the slightly sweet, slightly sour smell of fermenting grapes.



It is all hands on deck for la vendange (*the grape harvest*). Crews move up and down the rows of grapes, cutting big bunches of ripe fruit and tossing them into baskets. As soon as they are filled to overflowing, the pickers empty their baskets into the carts which noisy tractors pull through the vineyards. The tractors rumble over country lanes to the local chateau where the grapes are crushed and made into wine. Along the way a few grapes fall to the ground and are trampled. They bake in the warm autumn sun and fill the air with their vinegary scent. Like the smell of burning leaves from my childhood, the prickly perfume of crushed grapes will stay with me forever. It is a special reminder of the changing seasons and a wonderful time in my life.

I'm far from expert but, real or imagined, I had my favorite wines. I looked over the border to France and Italy for reds but bought local white wines. Sure I loved to walk through the vineyards behind Geneva and hike in the hills east of Lausanne. However when it came time to pour a glass, I preferred the dry white wines made from the grapes grown between these two cities. I could make some noises about other wines which were too astringent or flat. I could yammer on about hints of vanilla, lemon or herbs. I could but I'd feel silly and pretentious and wouldn't know what I was talking about so I won't.



As far as I can figure most if not every village up and down the coast of Lake Geneva makes its own wine. I can't say for sure that all the wines are made in the charming old chateaux that dot the hills and lakeside but I like to think so. Each fall, at least some of these grand old chateaux open their doors to sell the previous year's bounty. In the smallest villages, demand pretty much outweighs supply. Whether it is the fine quality of the wine or a sense of local pride, there are never enough bottles to go around. I lived in one such town for awhile. Loyal villagers lined up every fall to restock their cellars. Within a day, maybe two, the most recent vintage was sold out.

My sentimental choice will always be Mont-sur-Rolle. My introduction to Swiss wine was on a flower-filled terrace in Mont-sur-Rolle on a beautiful summer evening. While often tempted, I never lived in the charming hillside town. Still I always kept a few bottles of her wine in my makeshift cellar. I think I may still have one or two. It may be time to open one up for a nostalgic toast to fond memories, the change of seasons and a bountiful harvest.

Bon appétit!

Susan

Croûtes au Fromage

Delicious but hardly a light lunch this Swiss specialty is great after a vigorous walk, long bike ride or morning on the ski slopes. Do not drive or operate heavy machinery after indulging. Instead, treat yourself to a snooze on the couch and dream about life en Suisse. Enjoy!

Serves 2

About 4 ounces gruyere or emmental cheese (or better yet a mix of both), grated

About 1/4 teaspoon minced garlic

3-4 tablespoons dry white wine (Swiss if you have it!)

Freshly ground pepper to taste

2 thick slices country bread

Butter

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Put the cheese, garlic and wine in a bowl, season with pepper and toss to combine. Let the cheese and wine sit for a few minutes.

Butter one side of each slice of bread and lay them in a small casserole dish, oven-proof skillet or individual casserole dishes. The bread should just fit the pan.

Spread the cheese mixture evenly over the bread. Drizzle any wine that has settled in the bottom of the bowl over the cheese and bread.

Bake at 425 degrees for about 15 minutes or until the cheese is golden brown and bubbly.



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