

# Swiss Esquisse

Unexpected art, sybaritic artisans and a unique cultural history: impressions of a tour through Zurich, Lausanne and Neuchâtel. VICKI WILLIAMS reports

SWITZERLAND OFFERS A cornucopia of intriguing destinations, with year-round appeal, and individual stories to tell that go beyond guides (and watches). Stories that, in my case, began with recommendations from locals, and which led to discovering hidden sights, hearsay and history, gastronomic indulgences and fascinating characters. Starting with vibrant Zurich, where important art is on show in unlikely places; to breathtaking Lausanne, on the shores of Lake Geneva, with its sybaritic nature; and Neuchâtel, rich with unique cultural discoveries and rare wines.

## THE ART OF ZÜRICH

Zurich is home to more than 100 art galleries, including the imposing Kunsthaus Zurich, yet some of the city's most interesting art is to be found in situ. One hidden gem lies in the unlikely location of the city's police headquarters, a converted orphanage whose once-gloomy entrance hall features fresco-secco walls and vaulted ceilings painted in an exuberance of colour by the Swiss artist Augusto Giacometti. Known popularly as the hall of tiny flowers, the entrance hall's fiery murals were commissioned in 1923 in an attempt to brighten the dark, vault-like atmosphere.

A unique atmosphere pervades Kronenhalle, a restaurant and bar that combines fine dining with curated cocktails in a convivial gallery-like

setting. In the 1920s, Kronenhalle was the place for writers and artists to socialise, some of whom are said to have paid their bills with works of art. From the impressive bronze lamps on the bar by Diego Giacometti to originals by Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque, Joan Mirò and others adorning the walls, the elegant Kronenhalle is a work of art in itself.

Walk in the footsteps of some of these great artists at the Baur au Lac hotel. This Zurich grande dame has been attracting aristocrats, the famous and the discerning since 1844, and has a long history of

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supporting the arts. Today paintings and sculptures by numerous artistic heavyweights are, so to speak, part of the furniture in this refined hotel, which has also attracted an impressive list of prominent

artists as guests, from Mirò to Christo and Jeanne-Claude. One of its most famous artists-in-residence – and a repeat guest – was Marc Chagall, who created his breathtaking stained-glass panels for the nearby Fraumünster Church at the hotel. After each visit, the carpet in his

suite, splattered with paint, had to be replaced.

The hotel continues to support the arts and its private park is the location for the annual Art in the Park event. Held each summer, it highlights large modern sculptures by artistic luminaries and up-and-coming artists, with previous showings by the likes of Fernando Botero and Robert Indiana.

One modern artist to make the city his home is Conor McCreedy. McCreedy opened an atelier and gallery in September in a restored building dating back to the 14th century. Touted by Bloomberg as the next luxury brand, he had a sell-out show in Hong Kong in 2015, and is best known for creating the colour McCreedyblue, which defines his work. A private visit is possible, with the enthusiastic artist happy to discuss his work and inspirations. He revealed to *Prestige* that he is working on a McCreedyred series, which he believes will be embraced by Asian collectors, and he will therefore launch the series in Shanghai.



FROM LEFT: A ZÜRICH SCENE, INSIDE THE BAUR AU LAC HOTEL, A DISH FROM ZÜRICH'S RESTAURANT PAVILLON





EPICUREAN PLEASURES IN LAUSANNE Picturesque Lausanne and the surrounding area provide a plethora of epicurean pleasures. It is home to some of the best wineries in the country, and more than 300 restaurants, from typical auberges and century-old brasseries and terraces with views of Lake Geneva to fine-dining at its finest – all focused on bringing out the best of the abundant bounty of the region.

If time constraints only allow for dining in one restaurant in Lausanne, it has to be the two-Michelin star Anne-Sophie Pic. The restaurant is in Beau-Rivage Palace, a magnificent hotel dating back to 1861 with exquisite rooms by Pierre-Yves Rochon, on the shores of Lake Geneva. Everything about Anne-Sophie Pic is exceptional. The tasting menu is a measured culinary journey of seasonal produce (locally sourced where possible) expertly crafted

into outstanding and beautiful dishes such as crayfish from Lac Léman slowly roasted in shellfish butter with fir bud, rosat geranium and Bourbon pointu de la Réunion coffee-infused broth, and roasted venison marinated in Rampot pepper and cassia bark.

No meal is complete without cheese, and the cheese trolley here is excellent, with around 50 varieties. Working with top affineurs, the offerings are impressive – from Jacques Duttweiler's Gruyère Caramel (32 months) to the Rhône-Alps' Boujon, Tomme de Savoie, Comté, Bleu du Vercors Sassenage and Maréchal Brossé aux herbes are just some of the other superb choices.

To accompany it all are some of the finest wines in the world, more than 3,000 of which – and 75,000 bottles – being stored and aged in the cellar of the Beau-Rivage Palace. This affords an opportunity to try outstanding Swiss wines expertly recommended and paired by the sommelier, and for those keen to know more the hotel is hosting tastings this month in the cave with the sommelier. Hotel guests can also arrange private tastings or winery tours. Another way to try unique wines (and produce) is at the



*To go mad  
from absinthe,  
one would need  
to consume 42  
glasses*

Christmas markets held in various locations around Lausanne, such as the Place de l'Europe in the trendy Flon district.

Other epicurean pleasures are to be found at the street markets, where locals shop for bread, fruits, vegetables, cheese, smoked and cured meats, sausages, honey and more. One of the best options for cheese at the market in the La Cité district is from the stall of Christian Willen, which offers a cornucopia of varieties, including Gruyère Caramel. It's easy to find – just look for the queue. Most stallholders are happy to vacuum pack any purchases.

SWISS-IMAGE.CH / MARKUS BUEHLER-BUSCH



#### HIDDEN GEMS IN NEUCHÂTEL

Intriguing Neuchâtel, with its medieval old town on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, is largely undiscovered by travellers from Asia. One of its many cultural treasures is the fine-wine cave of J-Ph Bauermeister, who for over 40 years has been operating from a 15th-century building in the old town. It is estimated that he has more than 30,000 bottles (around 10 percent in the cave and the rest in storage), with some of the wines dating back to the 19th century. The location, off a main street, beside nondescript shops, with no street signage, gives it a touch of the Aladdin's Cave, complete with unexpected and exciting finds for wine aficionados. This includes the big names in French wine through to hard-to-find vintages from around the world; just ask Monsieur Bauermeister. It is (almost) opposite Brasserie Le Cardinal, a favoured lunch spot since the 1900s, and worth a stop for the fondue and the stunning decorative interior.

Bauermeister is also a composer, and gives impromptu mini concerts on his 100-year-old grand piano, complete with candelabra and

dripping candles, either of his own compositions or perhaps Chopin or Liszt. From time to time he stages wine and concert nights that sell out rapidly.

Neuchâtel is also the home of the green fairy: absinthe. The quaint and informative Maison de l'Absinthe (Absinthe House) is just a short drive away in the village of Môtiers. After learning about prohibition, claims of hallucinations and madness, clandestine production, secret code-words and intriguing ingredients, take a seat at the bar, which offers possibly the world's most extensive range of quality Absinthe, much made nearby by boutique producers. Absinthe, absinthe-serving paraphernalia and absinthe products such as sausages can also be purchased.

Alternatively, dine at the Michelin-recommended restaurant at Neuchâtel's 18th-century Hôtel DuPeyrou. This former mansion played its own role in absinthe's notorious past as the location of the serving of the infamous Mitterrand soufflé. The soufflé contained the spirit, which had been banned for more than a century, and was served to the then French president during a state visit to Switzerland in 1983. It resulted in a mini political storm, a two-year trial and, eventually, the legalising of the forbidden liquor in 2005.

And in case you were wondering, we were advised by an authoritative source that in order to go mad from an absinthe-drinking session, one would need to consume 42 glasses! **L**



FROM LEFT: A DISH AT ANNE-SOPHIE PIC; INSIDE ANNE-SOPHIE PIC (ABOVE); LOCAL CHEESES (BELOW); NEUCHÂTEL; A BOTTLE OF ABSINTHE