

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

December 22, 1999

So Long 1900s

Forget the Millennium, the big milestone is that this month we close out 13 years of *Gemütlichkeit*, this is the 156th issue. So how, I have been asking myself, should we mark this solemn event?

Conventional newsletter/magazine wisdom says readers like lists; top 10 nude beaches for senior citizens, 15 budget garbage skow cruises, 101 reasons why smart animals won't eat airline food, and so on.

Thus, over the past 12 years we have sifted through past issues and each December regurgitated for you the various "bests" of the past — best hotels, best meals, best values, best beer, most *gemütlich* places, etc.

You're still going to get some of that this month — we couldn't wrap up a whole Millennium (or even 999 years) without noting a few of the highlights — but in an

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria, Switzerland & the New Europe

SAVIGNYPLATZ

One of Berlin's most walkable, livable neighborhoods is this approximately 30 square block area just off Kurfürstendamm. In it are some of Berlin's best shops, restaurants and cafes.

Perhaps no European city has had a more eventful first 99 years of the century than Berlin. In the 20s it was the most exciting metropolis on the continent, full of the best musicians, scientists, actors, movie-makers, architects, brains — and villains: Albert Einstein, Marlene Dietrich, Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill, Lotte Lenya, Fritz Lang, Peter Lorre, Paul Klee, Sol Hurok, Walter Gropius, the Vladimirs Nabokov and Horowitz, Otto Klemperer and, of course, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. It was, in all senses of the word, liberal. And it rocked — around the clock. The playwright/poet Brecht, wrote "....everywhere there is toil

and trouble, but here we'll have fun...gin and whiskey, girls and boys...and the big typhoons don't come as far as here."

Brecht's weather report was wrong. World War II brought almost total destruction, followed by decades in which the city was ideologically and physically divided. The western portion was a free-world island in an unfriendly, totalitarian sea. The cutoff eastern half withered under communism.

But there was still more high drama. Ten years ago, the dividing walls were literally pushed down and the city and the country were again united, setting off a massive

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Best of the Century

Ok., so this is not the end of the Millennium and not the end of the 20th century. There's still a year to go. But we're swept along like everybody else. So here's our "Hotel of the Century," our "Affordable Hotel of the Century" and our "Castle Hotel of the Century."

For "Hotel of the Century" we imagined the following scenario: we are offered a one-week stay at any hotel of our choosing in Germany, Austria or Switzerland. We would want our choice to be easily accessible to a wide range of sightseeing options and activities and to have good restaurants — and/or be near good restaurants .

In the end it came down to a choice from among three hotels; the

Ritz-Carlton Schloss Hotel Berlin, the **Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel** in Interlaken, and the **Beau-Rivage Palace Hotel** in Lausanne.

In terms of rooms, amenities, staff and service, it's difficult to choose from among the three. The Victoria-Jungfrau has the best spa facility; the Beau-Rivage the most impressive grounds, and the Schloss Hotel a special aura of exclusivity.

In the end, however, we chose the Beau-Rivage. Its edge over the other two was its location. From it one can walk to Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) and catch a boat to several cities on the lake, including some in France. Or ride the train up and down the lake, stopping at towns like Geneva, Morges, Montreux,

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abbreviated way.

Aside from that, however, it's business as usual, starting in this space with some thoughts about next year and a rundown on our trip earlier this month.

Year 2000 Planning

I recall a few months ago, in a moment of overheated fervor, calling 1999 a "golden age" of travel to Europe. If so, 2000 will be a "platinum age," because things are better than ever.

Airfares: Except in the highest season, transatlantic airlines have too many seats to sell. Meaning prices should stay low. There have been some astonishingly low air fares this winter. At press time, for example, **Swissair** was offering deals that would get two persons to and from Zürich for as little as \$336. That's right, \$168 each. (This is one of the reasons you need to stay in touch with our website at www.gemut.com.) Though transatlantic carriers seem willing to lower fares to whatever level is needed to fill all seats, planes in late November and early December were still flying half empty.

Prices should remain soft into the late spring and summer fares will likely be about the same as last summer.

Car rental rates: Have been

climbing since late summer, particularly in Germany. Upgrades are gone and we know not when or even if they will return. In the past 18 months airport and rail station pickup fees have risen from 17 DM (\$9) to 12% of the total rental. Do the math: on a \$400 rental they'll nail you for \$48 if you get the car at an airport or rail station. At the moment, some companies are holding at 6% and some cap the so-called "premium station" charge at 100 DM (\$52), but long-term renters ought to give thought to picking up at an in-city location. And remember, you can still drop the car at an airport or rail station for no extra charge.

Even with the increases, Germany rentals are still the lowest in Europe and, for two or more traveling together, the cheapest way to get around. There are other positives: most cars from the compact category on up are now routinely air-conditioned, and premium rates to take cars to Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic are largely a thing of the past.

Recently we drove an Opel Vectra for four days. A sweet car. It had 32,000 km (20,000 miles) on the odometer but was still comfortable, tight and responsive. On the Autobahn we were relaxed at 140 to 160 kmh (88 to 100 mph) and there was double the trunk room needed for our two suitcases and hefty fold-over hanging bag plus odds and

ends. The steering wheel was adjustable and a liquid crystal display showed the time, outside temperature, the radio station playing, etc. Very handy.

I almost preferred it to the Mercedes C220 diesel that we drove for five days later in the trip. At double the price, it had a smaller trunk, but more gadgets, and might have been a little more solid at high speeds. If the price is the same I'll take the MBZ, but at half the price the Vectra is a no-brainer.

By the way, the new San Francisco Airport auto rental procedure will make you appreciate the Zürich (and Munich and Frankfurt) airports. Haul your bags onto a jam-packed shuttle and ride 10-minutes through a maze of freeways, overpasses and industrial streets. Get off at the rental building and again drag the bags to the rental counter of choice. Paperwork and car keys in hand, schlepp those bags one more time to an elevator and up into the huge parking garage where you'll

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Notes for Readers

- Foreign currency prices are converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of publication.
- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria		Value Rating	Scale
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

Off the Beaten Path in Berlin: Rogacki

Here's a place you'll not read about in any guidebook. Rogacki has been around since 1928. These days it is an indoor marketplace in a lower middle-class neighborhood, with dozens of stalls selling all manner of produce, meat, fowl, fish, cheeses and baked goods. A kind of blue-collar Ka De Wa*.

Along one wall is an inexpensive cafeteria-style restaurant. But the place to eat in Rogacki is at the four-sided, stand-up bar in the middle of the room — **Rogacki's Schlemmerecke**. Two chefs/waiters work from its center, serving customers on all sides. Each side can accommodate five or six customers. And those come in all categories. I stood next to a tall, steel-gray haired bank president type in an immaculate \$2000-plus suit. Beyond him was a blue-overalled laborer whose ample red face was a billboard for the Berliner Kindl he drank with his lunch. Across the way, an ancient woman in a thrift store coat and babushka bellied up to the bar.

Our host, a Berliner, ordered for us. With a word from him, a plump but handsome, vivacious woman in a starched apron behind the counter set three large, stemmed goblets in front of us and turned a magnum of white wine upside down over each. No effete pre-taste, no presentation of the bottle. The wine gurgled out with such a splashing rush I was certain it would overflow, but at just the last moment she flipped the bottle upright without a drop spilled. It was French, but from where precisely I can't say. The menu said *franz. Weisswein, Cachet*

Vin de table, Blanc do Blanchés. Whatever, it was the "house" wine and delicious. It reposed on the counter with bottles of beer and champagne in a big bucket of ice.

Another nod from our host and the starched lady tossed a couple of handfuls of chopped vegetables on the griddle. Over them she poured some sort of broth that made the pile sizzle and steam. Cooking away in one corner of the griddle was a big mound of half-dollar size slices of potato.

In the meantime did we like oysters? Yes. Shortly, we were each sizing up three *Austern* so fresh they could only have arrived within the hour by Lear jet from the Normandy coast. Perfect.

But back to the griddle. Alongside the vegetables, our chef/waitress laid out about a dozen shrimp. Our wine was refreshed.

By this time every inch of all four sides of the bar was occupied with hungry customers. But our server and her male colleague handled it all without a ruffle; the pouring, the grilling, the serving, the cashing out. Even when the pace got frantic, she never lost her not-a-hair-out-of-place fresh look and kept up a banter with the regulars, including our host.

After a few minutes, using a large spatula, she transferred the shrimp, the vegetables and some of the *Bratkartoffeln* onto two plates. To this she added some green salad and then over all of it was ladled a magical white sauce. This was an order for one person which our host wisely


knew would be enough for both Liz and me. What was in that sauce I can't even guess. I can only tell you it was a marvellous plate of food. Our host had great looking seafood stew and the banker on my right carefully ate every morsel of a gigantic, golden-crustied filet of white fish along with his share of the glorious fried potatoes from the griddle. That, I thought to myself, is what I'm ordering next time (and there will be a next time, oh yes).

When the idea was first proposed to us, I was not so keen on standing while eating. But the whole experience was so fascinating, and the food and wine so absolutely delicious, I could have stayed all afternoon.

What does it cost? Well, it's a real rip-off. The stir-fry dish Liz and I shared — *Garnelengpresse* — was 17.45 DM (\$9) or \$4.50 each. Nothing on the menu cost more than that, except for lobster which is 28.5 DM (\$15). An order of mussels is 8.45 (\$4.50), shrimp cocktail and several soups are in the 6-7 DM (\$3-\$4) range. The total bill for the three of us, including at least six glasses of wine, was 65 DM (\$34).

This was one of the most satisfying meals I had anywhere during 1999. Rogacki is about as far off the beaten track as you get in Berlin. I doubt you'll see any other tourists there, other than fellow *Gemütlichkeit* readers. It's a great find.

(*Referring to the eye-popping food market in the Berlin department store.)

Rogacki, Wilmersdorfer Str. 145, near Bismarck Str. U-Bahn Station. —RHB 

SAVIGNYPLATZ

Continued from page 1

— and expensive — rebirth. Berlin is again Germany's capital. And, for the traveler with a bent for recent history, Europe's number one travel destination.

Thus it seems only proper that the final *Gemütlichkeit* of the 1900s be at least partly about Berlin. We

spent a few days there last summer and explored in some depth one of its most appealing neighborhoods, Savignyplatz. Just north of the Kurfürstendamm's many attractions, it is a quarter of diverse shops and dozens of restaurants representing a wide variety of cultures. Its tree-lined streets are sedate compared to the bustle and hurry of the Ku'damm and it offers that just-right

mix of residence and commerce that seems to mark the best urban neighborhoods.

We suggest headquartering in one of the area's hotels, perhaps devoting half of each day to Berlin's many sightseeing opportunities and the other half to cafe sitting and lazy browsing. At night, there are a couple of dozen dining choices — a

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SAVIGNYPLATZ

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few of which we've covered here — and after that there are two intimate and excellent music venues, **Ewige Lampe** and **A Trane Jazz Club** (see page 6).

Here is our look at the shops, hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs of Berlin's Savignyplatz.

Accommodations

Art Nouveau Hotel

Our first choice in the neighborhood is conveniently located on Leibnitzstrasse, just off the Ku'damm, easy walking distance to all the area's shops and restaurants.

Most of the high-ceilinged rooms are spacious and airy and each has its own decor. The best of them is Number 10, a corner double with hardwood floors and a love seat niche, or Number 8 which is also very large, though on the street side.

The owner, Christine Schlenzka, is most friendly and helpful.

Daily Rates: Singles 160 DM (\$82), doubles 190 DM (\$99), suite 210 DM (\$108). Prices are 20% to 25% higher during trade fairs and conventions.

Contact: Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, D-10629 Berlin, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Bleibtreu Hotel

An arty, elegant hotel between the Ku'damm and Savignyplatz. Imaginative design and appointments make the small guestrooms seem bigger than they actually are.

An interesting, charming city hotel but prices seem out of line. Nearby Art Nouveau has larger rooms at half the price.

Daily Rates: Singles 234 to 344 DM (\$121-\$177), doubles 274 to 384 DM (\$141-\$198). Breakfast is an additional 25 DM (\$13) per person.

Contact: Bleibtreu Hotel, Bleibtreustr. 31, 10707 Berlin, tel. +49/030/884740, fax 88474444

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 7/20

Hotel Carmer 16

In a residential area at the neighborhood's eastern edge, is Hotel Carmer 16, a quiet hideaway offering exceptional value.

The neo-baroque structure looks to be a war survivor and thus offers the high ceilings and spacious rooms of buildings from that era.

Guestrooms are straightforward, simply furnished though comfortable, and come equipped with the usual satellite TV, direct dial phones, and minibar.

Daily Rates: Singles 130 to 160 DM (\$67-\$82), doubles 160 to 200 DM (\$82-\$103)

Contact: Hotel Carmer 16, Carmerstrasse 16, D-10623 Berlin, tel. +49/030/311 00500, fax 311 00510

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 17/20

The Neighborhood

Mommenstrasse

Brera, 71 Mommenstr. Modern design home accessories, bedding and light fixtures.

L & P Classics, corner Mommenstr. and Knesebeckstr. Records and CDs.

Linum, 5 Mommenstr. New and antique country linens, pillows, nightgowns.

Briganti, 15 Weilandstr. Small wine and deli specializing in Italian and Spanish wines, some of which are available for tasting on the weekends.

Leibnizstrasse: between Mommenstrasse and Niebuhrstrasse

Tavolo Calada, Leibnizstr. 45. Small Italian restaurant with interesting art. Pastas range from 15 to 19 DM (\$8-\$10) See page 5.

Pasticceria Italiana, Leibnizstr.. Next to Tavolo. Old fashioned pastry shop with wonderful looking cakes in the window. Old overstuffed furniture in eating area.

First Reiseburo, next to Pasticceria. Make train reservations here for 5 DM (\$2.60) per person.

Ristorante Mario, corner Leibnizstr. and Niebuhrstr. Smaller menu than Tavolo, but more expensive. Recommended by a subscriber (see page 6).

Niebuhrstrasse

The English Scent, 10 Niebuhrstr: Fragrances from England. Soaps, old time shaving gear, Mason Pearson hairbrushes.

Taverna Akropolis, corner of Niebuhrstr. and Wielandstr. As we passed by one evening, Greek dancers performed for the outdoor diners.

Kunsthandel Haus, 5 Niebuhrstr. Gallery with expensive art.

Bramigk & Breer, Emma & Co, 1 Niebuhrstr. Country-style interior design fabrics and accessories. Also in this space is Emma & Co., high-end children's clothing.

Bleibtreustrasse

Astoria Art Deco, 42 Bleibtreu. Light fixtures, jewelry and furniture from the Art Deco period

Lubitsch, near Astoria: Cafe and restaurant. Lunch specials range from 12.50 to 15.50 DM (\$6.50-\$8).

Alt Berlin, 48 Bleibtreustr. Antique store.

Art, Savignypassage Bogen 605. Antiques including posters, metal signs, metal boxes of all sizes, musical instruments and matchbook covers.

XXII Apostles, Savignypassage, across from Art. Attractive and popular restaurant open 24-hours. Pastas range from 15 to 17 DM (\$8 to \$9), fish and meat dishes 25-32 DM (\$13-\$16) and salads 8 to 18 DM (\$4-\$9).

Knesebeckstrasse

Berlin Zinnfiguren, Knesebeckstr. 88. Retailer of extraordinary tin and pewter soldiers and entire battles. Open since 1934. Wells Fargo stage and horses about 2,000 DM (\$1,030); Hussar on a horse about 1000 DM (\$502); Napoleon on horseback about 900 DM (\$464).

Grolmanstrasse

Cafe Tucci: salads from 11-17 DM (\$6-\$9); pastas 15 -18 DM (\$8-\$9).

There are dozens of women's clothing stores throughout the neighborhood.

Sustenance

Florian

Berlin has thousands of restaurants. Over the years we've eaten in perhaps 30 or 40 of them. With the demise of Fofi's a few years ago, Florian is now our top recommendation in the city and certainly the best we found in the Savignyplatz neighborhood. Mainly because it serves the best food. It's a little bit yuppie, a little bit smoky, and a little bit cramped. Service is accommodating but what comes on the plate is the real attraction. Dishes sound traditional but are done in the lighter style of the "new" German cuisine.

A meal's quality is often foretold by its salad and Florian's, with crisp rucola leaves coated with a wonderfully smoky dressing and topped with Parmesan shavings, promised great things to come.

We weren't disappointed. *Ochsenbrust* (27 DM/\$14) turned out to be a heap of the tenderest, most flavorful slices of boiled beef we've ever had. Of course, there was a rugged, homemade horseradish and an accompanying saute of vegetables had just the right touch of buttery sweetness.

A rich *Sauerbraten* (26 DM/\$13) was nearly the equal of the *Ochsenbrust*. The homemade *Spätzle* served with it was about as good as the dish gets and the breaded cauliflower was faultless.

The restaurant's interior is the same as it was on our last visit a few years ago; a series of fairly small rooms with plain white walls and hardwood floors. In summer, you can dine outside.

The clientele is an interesting mix of locals from the neighborhood, artists, actors and Berlin yuppies. Fine people watching. This is a popular place, so reserve ahead. On warm summer days you'll want a table outside.

Berlin Info

Population: 3.5 million

Altitude: 40 meters/ 131 feet

Distance From:

Dresden	192km/120 miles
Frankfurt	566 km/354 miles
Hamburg	289 km/181 miles
Munich	585 km/366 miles
Vienna	642km/401 miles
Zürich	852 km/533 miles

Tourist Information:

Berlin Tourism USA, 245 Fifth Ave., Suite 2204, New York NY 10016, tel. 212-896-3333, fax 212-896-3342

Berlin Tourist Office, Am Karlsbad 11, D-10785 Berlin, tel. +49/030/2647 4812, fax 2647 4899

Berlin Tourist Office 24-hour hotline for hotel bookings: +49/030/250025

Web site: www.berlin.de

Berlin WelcomeCard:

Costs 29 DM (\$15) and is good for three days unlimited travel on Berlin's extensive U-Bahn and S-Bahn lines. Also comes with coupon booklet good for discounts at many of the city's leading attractions.

Without beverages we paid 72 DM (\$37) for dinner for two.

Florian, Grolmanstr. 52, D-10623, Berlin, tel. +49/030/313 91 84

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

Astir's

Bistro-style restaurant with black and white tile floors and a music theme; jazz related art on the walls and good recorded music in the background.

The opening "gift of the house" course was baguette slices with a smoked salmon puree and a small slice of a very salty quiche. An appetizer plate of grilled, marinated and fresh vegetables, olives, and spreads was only fair.

Coq au vin (26 DM/\$13) came in a nice red wine sauce with chunks of good bacon but the chicken was dry and too salty.

Much better than the chicken was a decent rack of rosemary-seasoned lamb (31 DM/\$16) served with potatoes au gratin under a mantle of pungent cheese and a small side of fresh green beans.

We paid 75 DM (\$39) for the meal for two persons without beverages. A very ordinary wine from France's St. Emilion district in Bordeaux was overpriced at 62 DM (\$32).

This is a city with many good restaurants. Astir's is o.k., but there are many better.

Astir's, Grolmanstrasse 56, tel. +49/030/313 6320

Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 10/20

Schlüter

A new entry on the neighborhood cafe scene. In summer, the stark, almost cavernous, interior is accessed by folding doors that open the entire width of the restaurant. Inside, small, bare wood tables are packed close together in lines, with hardly enough room to move between them. There are no tablecloths or napkins.

Things began well, with a fine gazpacho and good green salad in a raspberry vinaigrette dressing.

O.k., so the salad doesn't always foretell. *Rinderfilet mit Pfifferlingen* (beef filet with wild mushrooms) was dry and tasteless. Calves liver with an onion/apple sauce was a little better but not much. The beef cost 34 DM (\$18) and the liver 27 DM (\$14). Without beverages, our dinner was 80 DM (\$41) for two.

This is a good place for a drink at one of the outside tables — perhaps a zesty rum and grapefruit juice concoction (10 DM/\$5) — but avoid the food until a new cook is hired. Schlüter, Schlüterstr. 52, tel. +49/030/8867 6926.

Rating: QUALITY 5/20, VALUE 8/20

A few other restaurants should be noted:

- **Tavola Calda.** Italian. We only had dessert here — excellent — but the plates of food we saw being served to tables around us looked awfully good. Service was pleasant in the small dining room which was still full at 11:30pm, always a good sign. It's handy, too, if you are staying at the Hotel Art Nouveau

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SAVIGNYPLATZ

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just up the street. Reserve ahead. Tavola Calda, Leibnizstr. 45, tel. +40/030/3241048.

- **Ristorante Mario.** Just across the street from the Art Nouveau and recommended by subscriber Charlotte Olstead: "excellent food and accommodating service."

Ristorante Mario, Leibnizstr. 45, tel. +40/030/3241048.

- **Spree Athen.** The idea here is to reprise the ambience of dining in the parlor of a prewar Berlin house with a little cabaret thrown in. A young woman, accompanied on the piano, sings the tunes of the Marlene Dietrich and Lotte Lenya era.

The fixed-price, six course dinners (about 80 DM/\$41) are very good — not great — but overall Spree Athen is a most enjoyable evening.

Located just around the corner from the Art Nouveau. Reserve ahead.

Spree Athen, Leibnizstrasse 60, tel. +49/030/324-1733.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Music

There are two excellent music venues in the Savignyplatz area.

Ewige Lampe

Hole-in-the-wall bar/jazz/blues club. A tiny bar opens to a larger showroom with a small stage and table seating for perhaps 50 to 75 persons. Top-flight blues and New Orleans-style jazz begins at 9pm and ends about 1am. There was no cover the nights we were there and a small beer was about \$3. Great place.

Ewige Lampe, Niebuhrstr. 11a, tel./fax +49/030/324 3918

A Trane Jazz-Club

Outstanding small club featuring modern jazz. We paid a small cover (5 DM/\$2.60) but often there is no entrance charge. Very popular but you can check out the schedule of performances and make advance reservations on the web at www.a-trane.de.

www.a-trane.de.

A-Trane, Bleibtreustr. 1, tel. +49/030/313 4629, www.a-trane.de



BEST OF THE CENTURY

Continued from page 1

Vevey and Martigny. Some of Switzerland's finest and most spectacularly sited vineyards are minutes from the hotel. One can be on the ski slopes or hiking in the Vaudois Alps in about an hour and interesting towns like Gruyères, Murten and Avenches are easy day trips.

Two of Switzerland's great restaurants, **Girardet** in the Lausanne suburb of Crissier, and **Hôtel-Restaurant de L'Ermitage** in Vufflens-le-Château, about 30 minutes down the road toward Geneva, are nearby. And the hotel itself has two very fine restaurants plus a chic little winebar.

To us, the Beau-Rivage defines the term European "grand hotel."

Affordable Hotel

Our requirements for the other two categories were similar except we placed more emphasis on charm and hospitality. The very top hotels, all five-star and corporately owned, seem to have those qualities in about equal measure.

For the "Affordable Hotel of the Century" we looked only at hotels where a double room with breakfast can be obtained for \$125 or less.

Two of the main contenders were the **Gutshotel** in Neumagen-Dhron on the Mosel river, and the **Auberge de Chernex** in the hills above Montreux.

Our pick, however, is the **Hotel Anker** in Marktheidenfeld between Frankfurt and Nürnberg. From a facilities standpoint it outshines all the other contenders and the welcome and care lavished on guests by the Deppisch family is unsurpassed. Another point in its favor is its easy proximity to the outstanding restaurant, **Weinhaus Anker**, just across the street from the hotel.

In our first review of the Anker,

in 1990, we wrote, "This is a Mercedes Benz of a hotel; solid, not flashy, but everything works and is built to last. In two days there we never encountered a single employee, from the owners to the person mopping the floors who, at every contact, did not favor us with a *Guten Tag* and a smile."

Castle Hotel

While we agonized over the first two categories, "Castle Hotel of the Century" was easy. The **Schloss Haunsperg**, near Salzburg, combines authenticity, great charm and perhaps the warmest welcome in all Christendom.

Eike and Georg von Gernerth have a special talent for making guests feel welcome. Arrive at Haunsperg and, after you've been escorted to your room by one of the owners (not just handed a key and pointed toward the stairs), you'll be invited to join them for a glass of wine before dinner, which is best eaten in the village at **Landgasthaus Hammerwirt**.

Charm? Haunsperg sets the standard. It has eight rooms/suites in a variety of shapes, sizes and furnishing. Some are quite large but all have great character. High ceilings, ancient three-foot thick walls, squeaky wood floors, antique furnishings, and glorious objet d'art, most of which have been in the von Gernerth family for centuries, will do that for a hotel room. You might like the one with the Bösendorfer grand piano and the crystal chandelier.

And the von Gernerths are delighted to show guests their home and share its history. There seems to be an interesting story behind every apartment, every picture, every rug, every piece of porcelain and China, and every antique.

Amazingly, this hotel is not prohibitively expensive. The best double room is 1900 AS (\$138).

More Top Picks

Those are our Hotel of the Century picks. We could go on with other categories, the possibilities are

limitless.

Here might be a few other choices.

The bargain hotel of the century would probably be a toss-up between the **Pension Heim** in Seeg, near Füssen, or the **Gasthof-Pension Waldrast** in Reutte, Austria, just south of Füssen.

The leading alpine hotel would come from **Les Sources des Alpes** in Leukerbad, Switzerland; **Grüner Baum** in Badgastein, Austria; the **Rote Wand** in Lech, Austria; the **Waldhotel Doldenhorn** in Kandersteg, Switzerland, or the **Hostellerie Bon Accueil**, Château-d' Oex, Switzerland.

The top restaurant would be an easy choice, the **Hôtel-Restaurant de L'Ermitage** in Vufflens-le-Château, near Morges on Lac Léman (Lake Geneva), where we had the finest dining experience of our lives. With wine, figure on \$200 per person. The restaurant also has a few beautifully appointed guestrooms.

More affordable restaurants could include **Kronenhalle** in Zürich, the previously-mentioned **Weinhaus Anker** in Marktheidenfeld, **Florian** in Berlin, **Le Gitan** in Zermatt, and **Lorenzini** in Bern, Switzerland.

Best inexpensive restaurants might be the **Bahnhof Hotel** in Saanen, Switzerland or the brewery restaurant at **Budejovicky Budvar**, in Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic.

The hotel and restaurant where you will have the most fun is the **Gasthof Fraundorfer** in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Next time you're there, raise a glass for your friends at *Gemütlichkeit*.

Auberge De Chernex, CH-1822, Chernex, tel. +41/021/964 41 91, fax 964 68 57

Bahnhof Hotel, Bahnhofstrasse, CH-3777, Saanenmöser, tel. +41/033/ 744 15 06, fax 744 72 88

Beau-Rivage Palace, CH-1000, Lausanne, tel. +41/021/613 33 33, fax 613 33 34

Florian, Grolmanstr. 52, D-10623, Berlin, tel. +49/030/313 91 84

Gasthof Fraundorfer, Ludwigstrasse 24, D-82467, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, tel. +49/0882/2176, fax 71073

Gasthof-Pension Waldrast, Reutte-Ehenbichel A-6600, tel. +43/05672/62443, fax 62443

Girardet, 1 r.d'Yverdon, CH-1023, Crissier, tel. +41/021/634 05 05, fax 634 24 64

Grüner Baum, A-5640, Badgastein, tel. +43/06434/25 16 0, fax 25 16 25

Gutshotel, Balduinstrasse 1, D-54347, Neumagen-Dhron, tel. +49/06507/20-35, fax 5644

Hostellerie Bon Accueil, Château-d' Oex, CH-1837, tel. +41/026/924 63 20, fax 924 51 26. 21

Hotel Anker, Obertorstr. 6. D-97828 Marktheidenfeld, tel. +49/09391/6004-0, fax 6004-77

Hôtel-Restaurant de L'Ermitage, CH-1134, Vufflens-le-Château, tel. +41/021/802 2191, fax 802 2240

Kronenhalle, Rämistr. 4, CH-8001, Zürich, tel. +41/01/251 66 69, fax 251 66 81

Landgasthaus Hammerwirt, A-5411 Oberalm, tel. +49/06245/83664

Le Gitan, Hotel Darioli, Marie-Therese Darioli, CH-3920, Zermatt, tel. +41/027/968 19 40

Les Sources des Alpes, Tuftstr. 17, CH-3954, Leukerbad, tel., +41/027/470 51 51, fax 470 35 33

Lorenzini, Theaterplatz 5, CH-3011, Bern, tel. +41/031/311 78 50, fax 312 30 38

Pension Heim, Aufmberg 8, D-87637, Seeg, tel. +49/08364/642, fax 10 51

Ritz Carlton Schloss Hotel Berlin, Brahmstrasse 10, D-14193 Berlin, tel. +49/030/89584-0, fax 89584-800

Rote Wand, A-6764, Lech-Zug am Arlberg, tel. +43/05583/34 35 0, fax 34 35 40

Schloss Haunspert, Hammerstrasse 32, A-5411 Oberalm, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680

Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel, CH-3800, Interlaken, tel. +41/036/271111, fax 273737

Waldhotel Doldenhorn, Hauptstrasses, CH-3718, Kandersteg, tel. 033/675 81 81, fax 675 81 85

Weinhaus Anker, Obertorstrasse 13, D-97828, Marktheidenfeld, tel. +49/09391/17 36, fax 1742

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find your car in the dim light (the better to hide the dents you get charged for when you bring it back). Return the car — pray you don't miss any of the "rental return" signs approaching the airport on the freeway — and do the whole thing in reverse.

Rail: Here's a novel idea, Eurail and Europass rail passes will not increase in price for the year 2000. Let's hear it for Rail Europe.

The Dollar: Stronger than at any time since the mid-80s. With the deutschemark over 1.9, the Swiss franc near 1.6 and almost 14 shillings to the dollar, Germanic Europe is palpably cheaper.

December in Germanic Europe

Earlier this month we spent a couple of weeks in Germany, Austria

and Switzerland. In the months ahead you'll be reading about Neu-châtel, the medieval town of Murten and its great **Hotel Vieux Manoir au Lac**, Eichstätt just north of Inglostadt in Germany, the Austrian winemaking province of Burgenland, and a little taste of Munich.

Here are a few impressions.

- **Switzerland** is now a country of roundabouts. You know, those circular drives that replace intersections? It seems to me thousands have blossomed over the past couple of years and most Americans aren't used to them. Actually, they're a great idea. The secret to not getting T-boned in one of them is to yield the right-of-way to cars already in the roundabout.

- **We are not advance** reservations advocates for most situations but it's a strategy that sometimes didn't work so well. December weekends in Christmas market towns like Salzburg, Vienna and Munich attract thousands of out of towners and the hotels and restaurants fill up. We had big trouble finding hotels and restaurants in all three cities. In fact, even hotels in small towns near Salzburg laid that unwelcome "fully booked" phrase on us.

- **In Munich**, we lucked out when we remembered the **Asam Hotel** (see September, '99) was new and perhaps not yet well known. We liked the hotel very much; nice people, super location a block from a pedestrian-only street that leads to the center, great restaurants in the neighborhood, excellent beds and bedding, tight but well-equipped bathrooms, quiet, good breakfast in an attractive room. We had room Number 32 for two nights and paid 310 DM (\$161), which I think is a bit pricey, especially considering breakfast is an additional 22 DM (\$12) per person. Still, this is an ideal Munich headquarters.

- **Munich Musings.** December 3. The Marienplatz and its pedestrian-only feeder streets swarm with

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shoppers. The main attraction is the Christmas Market, a series of booths selling Christmas decorations, handcrafts, the traditional *Glühwein*, food, and a lot of junk, much of which I'll wager is made not in any European craftsman's workshop but someplace in Asia. Nonetheless, it's a great atmosphere.

From the street window at **Donisl**, Weinstrasse 1 on the Marienplatz, we fortified ourselves with delicious hot dogs on round, crunchy rolls for 3 DM (\$1.50) and meandered along Odeonsplatz, where a French horn quartet played Mozart. Then to Max-Joseph-Platz where stands the south facade of the **Residenz** and the **National Theater**, home of the **Bavarian State Opera**. In the arcaded buildings that line Maximilianstrasse, and in nearby streets, are some of Munich's finest shops and galleries. Ready to drop 100Gs on a piece of art or a couple of thousand on some handmade riding boots? You can do it here. But American tourists with more modest credit card limits might want to look in at **Wallach**

(Residenzstrasse 3) for German handcrafts; shop the high brow ski wear store of yesteryear Olympic star, **Willy Bogner**; choose from what is reputed to be the world's largest stock of Loden wear at **Loden-Frey**, Maffeistrasse 7-9, and of course there is the mouthwatering food and wine store, **Alois Dallmayr** at Dienerstrasse 14.

We stopped in the late afternoon for a beer at **Spatenhaus**, Residenzstrasse 12, the most elegant of all

Munich's beer restaurants. The clientele here lays to rest the fat, red-faced Bavarian stereotype. Spatenhaus is a lot more Rodeo Drive than Fritz's Beer Garden.

Later, we wandered across Max-Joseph-Platz to pay 3 DM (\$.150) to see the **Altes Theatre** in the Residenz. Worth the money and spectacular but Michelin has it right when they assign it one star (interesting). The **Church at Wies**, the breathtaking Zimmerman rococo masterpiece in the countryside between Füssen and Garmisch-Partenkirchen, is

where the per person cost of a reservation is about \$3 instead of the \$11 you'll pay Rail Europe in the U.S. We were traveling on the Europass.

• **Gasoline these days** is about \$3.15 per gallon. Diesel fuel is under \$3 a gallon. —RHB

Europe Travel Briefs

■ Here's a way to obtain tickets for the Oberammergau Passion

Play without committing to a tour. You must, however, agree to a three-night hotel stay and pay more than face value for the tickets.

The **Hotel Schloss Berg**, 30 kilometers southwest of Munich on the Starnbergersee, is offering tickets at 280 or 330 DM (\$146-\$171) with the three-night stay. (Tickets only — if you can get them — range from 115 DM for second class seats and 165 DM for first class seats.) Transportation via motor coach is provided to and from Oberammergau and *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers get a 10% discount off the hotel's published room rates, which are \$115 single and \$150 double. In

May of 1997, *Gemütlichkeit* rated Schloss Berg 14 for quality and 16 for value. The dates with ticket prices are as follows: May 27, July 22, August 5, October 8 — 330 DM (\$171); June 9, August 6, September 3 and October 2 — 280 DM (\$145).

For more information contact at the hotel's U.S. booking agency at 561-833-1251, toll free fax 800-729-8119, www.germancorner.com/schlossberg/

Swissair Reduced Fare Program for Gemütlichkeit Subscribers Extended

Gemütlichkeit and Swissair have agreed to continue the reduced transatlantic fare program for *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers through March 31, 2001. The schedule of fare reductions is as follows:

Swissair ticket price	Subscriber reduction
Under \$451	\$0
\$451-\$600	\$25
\$601-\$999	\$50
Over \$999	\$150
Business Class	\$400
First Class	\$600

To be ticketed at the appropriate reduced price, phone a special Swissair toll-free number, 800-238-0399.

You must book and purchase tickets directly with Swissair. Prior to issuing tickets, Swissair will verify subscriber status with the *Gemütlichkeit* office. Family and friends traveling with a subscriber for at least one leg of the transatlantic roundtrip are also eligible for the lower fares. Other restrictions may apply.

To obtain the reduced fare you must contact Swissair directly. However, if you have questions about the program or difficulty booking at the reduced rates, phone *Gemütlichkeit* at 800-521-6722.

properly rated two Michelin stars (worth a detour).

• **Advance reservations** are advised on ICE and EC trains between major cities, especially in Germany. An EC from Basel to Mannheim was about half full and 95% of the first class seats were occupied on a weekday afternoon ICE Mannheim to Munich run. Wait until you get to Europe to reserve,