

Pastry haute cuisine on the Haut Plateau of Switzerland

Culinary and oenological high points from a magical trip to Switzerland and Italy

By Suzanne Hoffman
Behind the Scenes

Editor's note: This is the first installment in a two-part series. Check back next week to read part two.

In June, I embarked on a three-week trip to Switzerland and Italy. Since food and wine dominated most waking moments of our trip – and our nighttime dreams – I came home with a cornucopia of stories to share. Over the last two weeks, I told you about my adventures in Valliera, a resurrected hamlet in the mountains of western Piemonte. Now it's time to go back to the start, and share some of the culinary and oenological high points of this magical trip.

Our first stop was Crans-Montana, Switzerland, on the Haut Plateau above the Rhone River valley. Two towns – Crans and Montana – comprise the popular south-facing ski station. It was my home for over two decades and still tugs on my heartstrings. Truly, I am blessed to call the Rockies home, but I still feel a strong connection with Valais, particularly when it comes to friends and my daily routines involving food.

One of those daily routines was a trip to Boulangerie Taillens on Avenue de la Gare in Montana, usually to buy bread, often to buy pastries and chocolates. These artisans delight in their "pleasure of making pleasure" driven by a "passion for taste." Each time I return to Valais, my trip begins with a visit to Taillens.



SUZANNE HOFFMAN | SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Bowls of housemade chocolate truffles make for an irresistible display.

SWEET LANDMARK

Oscar and Berthe Taillens created the boulangerie (bakery) bearing their family name in 1943. Through the following decades, the family business evolved into an emporium of bread, pastry, chocolate, ice cream and delicious beverages, hot and cold. In 1987, eleven years after their expansion to Crans, Berthe and sons Reto and Guido opened the family's first tea room, the result of a major renovation of the boulangerie. Today, award winning Taillens is a treasured landmark on the Haut Plateau.

I fell in love with Taillens' delicious treats 1986. Truth be known, the Montana shop is my favorite. Perhaps it's because it's where I most often find Reto Taillens who proclaims a jolly "bonjour" to his patrons. Who cannot have a good day when a passionate artisan gives such sincere expression of gratitude for your patronage? It's one safe harbor where time stands still while the world outside changes, not always for the better.

Stepping through the sliding doors of the Montana shop is no less a sensory overload for me now than it was decades

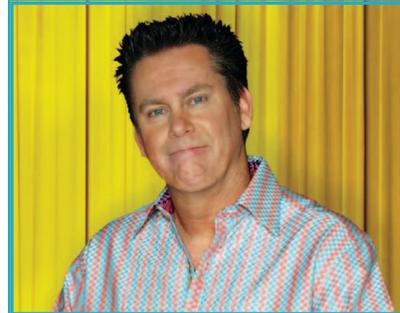
ago. All of their homemade products engage the five senses. It's immediately evident that attention to detail and an abundant range of choices for clients dominate the family's philosophy.

On the right are three-tiered glass cases filled with an array of pastries and savories. The displays containing a colorful array of cakes, pies and tarts are closest to the door, acting as a magnet to draw in unsuspecting pastry buffs. On the left, refrigerated cases of the award winning confectionery's homemade cocoa creations call out for attention. Once you're in, you're hooked. There is no escaping the sights and smells that greet you.

The choice of painstakingly hand-crafted pastries is mind blowing. In early June, the sweet, juicy Valais strawberries that grow in the flat, fertile valley below elevate their usually delicious strawberry tart to a new level. Later in summer, famous Valais apricots from the central valley's south side that resemble small nectarines make for delicious tartes aux abricots (apricot tarts).

BEHIND THE SCENES, B4

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