The spirit of Zurich and Geneva
Zurich's Sächsliüte is a day-long festival in April where winter, called the Böögg, is burned in effigy. It has its roots in medieval times, as does Geneva's Decembr, when the city celebrates a 1602 victory over the Savoyards, with die Hardbürlike before they head for wine bars and a clutch of new restaurants around Langstrasse's east side. The newly gentrified area borders streets that are still seedy enough, with a few hookers, alcoholics and drug users, to remind you that this was once a well-known red light district.

Ten years from now we'll probably be comparing Zurich-West to Geneva's PAV (Praile-Accas-Vernet), a project in the planning to transform 250 hectares of industrial zone into alternative restaurants, housing, shops, a pedestrian and cycling park. Right now, dinner in a renovated garage on Gasometerstrasse feels very much like dining in Geneva's Carouge – although the arty quarter was a charming artisans' village on the city outskirts when Zurich-West's factories belched smoke. Langstrasse connected the factories in district 5, via a tunnel under the railroad tracks, to worker's quarters in district 4, where Zurich's political Left found a foothold.

Defying the forebears, it has taken Zurich and Geneva 500 years to fall in love with a nightlife sprinkled with clubs, gay bars, and in Zurich's case, a new casino in 2012. Both cities were home in the 16th century to some of the most powerful figures in a Protestant world not noted for celebrating fun. The process of dislodging the conserva- tive legacies of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and Jean Calvin in Geneva has speeded up in the past decade. Zwingli's stern figure towers over Bastions park. Expect the pedestrians to be passed by a tunnel under the railroad tracks, to via a tunnel under the railroad tracks, to

SPOTTED IN ZURICH

Niederdorf/City
Wirtschaft Neumarkt, Niederdorf. Focus on local foods and Swiss classes, meals, wine tastings, with lake perch and light French-style cuisine. Geneva's new landmark buildings, notably the lotus-shaped Maison de la Paix and WIPO's glass offices, are part of the United Nations sprawl; both cities are using architecture to underscore their new profiles as young, energetic, sophisticated and urban. Late afternoon shoppers in Zurich browse in trendy little boutiques under the arches along the Viadukstrasse, off Hardbrücke before they head for wine bars and a clutch of new restaurants around Langstrasse's east side. The newly gentrified area borders streets that are still seedy enough, with a few hookers, alcoholics and drug users, to remind you that this was until recently a well-known red light district.

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Zwingli Statue
Reformation Wall
Sprüngli, Paradeplatz
Auer Chocolate, Rue de Rive

Flower Clock, Bürkliplatz
Flower Clock, Jardin Anglais
Lettenschänflistrasse
Rhone, Quai du Seujet

Ellen Wallace
is an international writer, journalist and editor in St-Prex.
Lakes and rivers, a physical resemblance

I found myself in front of Zurich’s Opera this summer, at the bustling new Sechseläutenplatz near Bellevue. The sun was streaming across the plaza, morning coffee cups were clattering and buskers were warming up. Straight across the lake was a jet d’eau I’d never noticed. It’s smaller than Geneva’s, apparently out of deference to the lake was a jet d’eau I’d never noticed. It’s smaller than Geneva’s, apparently out of deference to its summer, at the bustling new Sechseläutenplatz

Geneva’s fine old park is across the lake from the fountain, at the foot of the World Trade Organization. Nearby grand parks were created by the cities’ fathers, the private gardens they built for their splendid mansions. Geneva’s discreet Parc La Grange, whose first resident was a rich Roman 2000 years ago, overlooks the lake, as does the romantic and larger Ripsteinpark in Zurich. Guest Richard Wagner wrote “Tristan und Isolde” in a Wesendonck family villa here, with Mathilde Wesendonck as his muse. He fled when their affair came out in the open.

The power of the Rhone when it arrives in Geneva, and its locks and dams, make swimming dangerous along most of the riverfront in Geneva. Zurich’s gentler river, named the Limmat once it leaves the lake, caters to swimmers, near the main station. In Geneva, you have to head to the Bains des Pâquis for the same kind of protected dip, with waterfront cafés.

A hot time

Pâquis is known as a quarter chaud in Geneva for its prostitution, drugs and noisy nightlife. It’s a relatively small area and while the crime rate is higher here, so is policing, just as with Zurich’s hot spots. This is a popular area for restaurants, from cheap to smart. And just as with Zurich’s Langstrasse, divided by the railroad tracks, Pâquis is separated by train lines from Les Grottes, very much working class, with a high percentage of foreigners.

Geneva’s international crowd loves its nightlife, especially the newly arrived commodity traders – 40 percent of the world’s commodities are traded here. Cross the river from Les Grottes to the financial district and you find bars, coffee shops and restaurants catering to the new young professionals who party until the wee hours. Zurich, too, has shifted some financial centre expertise from classic banking. It is home to SIX, the Swiss stock exchange, the world’s first exchange with a fully automated trading, clearing and settlement system in 1998.

It’s a major international futures and derivatives trading centre. After work you’ll find traders in the area stretching from Europe Alliance’s shops and trendy bars, that you reach by following track 1 at the Zürcher Hauptbahnhof, to the area around Stauffacher.

Eateries with character

Back in Bellevue to change trains it strikes me that the new Sechseläutenplatz is a blend of Geneva’s Place Molard with its bustling sidewalk cafés, and the markets and open spaces of Plainpalais. All three have a steady stream of people because they are public transport hubs with several tram and bus lines. Bellevue, like Molard, is near the lake. It divides two shopping and nightlife areas. Seefeldstrasse is funky and light-hearted at the Opera house end. Face the other way and you have the Limmat quarter, the right bank side of Zurich’s Old Town with its medieval alleyways, micro-brewery bars and coffee roasting houses.

Molard, too, looks one way towards glitzy watch and jewelry shops on the Rue du Rhône and the other way towards more affordable clothing shops and the Eaux Vives eateries and bars. It’s an area that is on the upswing, with a new Franco-Swiss regional train station being built just steps away. A few metres from Place Molard you climb narrow cobblestoned paths to Geneva’s Old Town.

Wine bars

Wine bars are growing in popularity in both cities, wherever the young international crowd goes. They’ve a new twist on an old theme. Zurich’s Old Town has boasted a famous wine bar since 1801, the tiny Oepfelchammer, while Geneva’s Café Papon opened in 1820. Since 1968 the Uni Mail campus has drawn people to Plainpalais nooks.

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