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Soon after I moved to Switzerland, I lucked out and fell in with a great group of friends. Both men and women, we were mostly ex-patriots. We were young, single and our lives were pretty simple. As time passed there were a couple of weddings, a few babies and jobs became more demanding. In other words, our simple, carefree lives became a lot more complex.



And me? I worked for a computer company and landed a great promotion. I was constantly on the road, jumping on and off airplanes in Athens, Moscow, Johannesburg and everywhere in between. Leading a new sales team in a new territory was more than interesting. It was an exciting time and I loved every minute of it.

However, in those days the computer industry was a man's world. Maybe it still is. With a few rare exceptions, my colleagues and customers were men. Most days, make that every day, I was surrounded by

technology and testosterone. So on the rare evening when I found myself at home, I invited my girlfriends over for a glass of wine, dinner and a chat. When you travel more than 100,000 miles every year, a *Night In* with friends is a wonderful luxury, especially if you love to cook.

Girls' Night is all about friendship. It is for long chats, a little venting and lots of laughter. My kitchen in Arare was the perfect setting for a Girls' Night In. Only minutes from downtown Geneva and the airport, the tiny village of Arare was an oasis of fields and farmhouses. My skinny, little apartment was the three-storied corner of an ancient barn. My octogenarian landlord and his wife lived at the other end of the driveway. Although a bit rundown, their home was more chateau than rustic farmhouse. Monsieur still ran the farm, breeding hybrid roses. Throughout the summer, we were surrounded by fragrant fields of flowers.

Along with my apartment, the barn was home to two horses, an antique coach and miscellaneous farm equipment. The barn's old stone walls were at least a foot thick. The cozy step-down living room was a remodeled root cellar. The bedrooms were transformed haylofts. The wonderful eat-in kitchen had been a stable. I loved that kitchen. It was spacious and full of charm with white plaster walls and ancient wooden beams. For months I schlepped through antique shows and scoured flea markets to find the perfect farmhouse table and chairs. The room was warm and welcoming, the perfect gathering place for a relaxed evening.

On Girls' Night we said good-bye to care and worry. Phone calls and e-mail were put on hold for another day. Cell phones were turned off. Children were left in their dads' care. The meals were simple. I stuck to recipes and non-recipes that came together quickly with a little chopping, a little tossing, sautéing and simmering. We spent hours around my rustic table sharing our latest news, horror stories and triumphs. And more than a few giggles.

I left Geneva several years ago and no longer travel 100,000 and more miles a year. However, whether it's a Night In or Out, I still enjoy an evening with my girlfriends. March is Women's History Month. Before the month comes to a close, why not join your best buds and make a little history of your own? Fill your kitchen with good food, great conversation and lots of laughter.



Raise your glasses to friendship and bon appétit!

Linguine with Shrimp, Artichokes Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Olives

This dish is one of my favorite non-recipe, last minute dinners. From start to finish it comes together quickly, especially if you let your friends share the chopping and stirring. Enjoy!



Serve 6

12 ounces linguine pasta
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 Olive oil
 1 small shallot, finely chopped
 Pinch of pepper flakes
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 6-8 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes halves, well drained and cut in slivers
 6-8 oil-packed artichoke hearts, well drained and sliced
 1/2 cup dry white wine

1 – 1 1/2 pounds large shrimp, shelled and deveined
 Zest and juice of 1/2 lemon
 8 black oil-cured olives or kalamata, pitted and cut in slivers
 2 tablespoons fresh basil leaves, chopped
 2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley leaves, chopped

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the linguine according to package directions, less 1 minute. Drain the pasta, reserving a little pasta water.

Prepare the sauce while the water heats and pasta cooks: heat a little olive oil in a large heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shallot and pepper flakes to the skillet, season with salt and pepper and sauté until the shallots are translucent, 2-3 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute more.

Add the artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes and wine to the skillet. Simmer for 1-2 minutes. Add the shrimp and cook, stirring, for 1 minute.

Add the pasta, olives, lemon juice and zest to the shrimp-vegetable mixture and toss to combine. If the sauce seems dry add a little pasta water. Cover, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 1-2 minutes to let the shrimp finish cooking and the pasta absorb some of the sauce. Sprinkle with basil and parsley, toss and serve immediately.

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Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com