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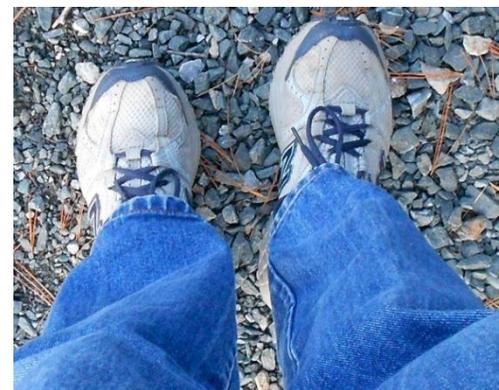
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After graduate school I moved to Switzerland. My original plan was to work a year abroad and then return to real life. Figuring I had twelve months (and not seventeen years) I was determined to see as much of Europe as possible. During my first year abroad I traveled at least every-other weekend. My friend Marie-Claude was a willing travel mate.

Paris was just a few short hours away on the TGV, the fast train, so off we went for a long weekend. We visited museums, went to the theater, snooped around the market at Les Halles and walked and walked and walked some more. Until, standing in front of The Ritz, Marie-Claude let out a gasp, informed me that she needed a break and headed into the hotel. Taking me in tow, she made a bee-line to the bar. That's when an officious-looking man with a name badge hurried over to us.

Of course, Marie-Claude was casually but respectably dressed. With her kakis, pink cashmere sweater and silk scarf she was preppy chic. Not me. I was dressed like a tourist in blue jeans, running shoes and a backpack. Monsieur Name Badge wanted to know what we were doing in his hotel. Marie-Claude stood tall and announced that we were going to the bar for a coffee. He looked me up and down with disdain and replied, "*pas avec les baskets.*" Loose translation – "not with your scruffy friend." In France, all sneakers, tennis shoes, running shoes and anything resembling an athletic shoe or sneaker are called *baskets*, short for basketball shoe. And at least in those days you did not wear *les baskets* in a 5-star hotel, not in the lobby and definitely not in the bar.



I thought that being thrown out of The Ritz was pretty funny. It was a first for me. Should it ever happen again, I could raise my fist and defiantly shout, "I've been thrown out of a far better place than this." Disappointed, Marie-Claude did not find it so funny. Not only was she tired but she really wanted to sip a coffee in a grand hotel.

To be honest, her disappointment was a bit of a mystery to me. Didn't she know that The Ritz Bar was not for coffee? You went to The Ritz Bar for a martini. Or in Paris, maybe a flute of champagne. Like most MBAs my lessons had not been limited to break-even points and strategic planning. In between classes and study groups, I'd happily discovered both The Ritz Bar on Boston Garden and martinis. Not only did I like their taste, drinking martinis gave me the illusion (or maybe delusion) of being grown up and sophisticated. All the more so when sipping one at The Ritz Bar.

Holding our heads high, we left the hotel to have coffee at a small café. I was charmed. And Marie-Claude? Well, not so much, so I apologized profusely.

A month or two later, Marie-Claude and I went on another long weekend adventure, this time to London. Again we went to museums, the theater and of course we visited Harrods. Maybe she noticed, maybe not but Saturday morning I donned a tweed blazer instead of my normal scruffy tourist garb. By late afternoon our energy began to flag. That's when I surprised my friend by coming to a full stop in the middle of the sidewalk and changing my shoes. After stashing *les baskets* in my backpack, I casually draped my raincoat over the handy but offensive carry-all.

I was making amends. It was time for tea at The Ritz London. With my friend in tow, I made a bee-line for the Palm Court. I stood tall and declared we had a reservation for Nye for two for tea. Thank goodness, I passed muster and we spent an elegant hour nibbling little cakes and sipping tea in a grand hotel.

Bon appétit!

Cappuccino Brownies

Perfect for afternoon tea or dessert, these brownies are very rich so cut them into one or two bite squares. Enjoy!

Makes 40 tiny squares



Brownie Layer

8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped
 3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) butter, cut into small pieces
 1 cup all-purpose flour
 2 tablespoons instant espresso powder
 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 1/2 cups sugar
 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 4 large eggs

Put a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Butter and flour a 13x9 inch baking pan.

Melt the chocolate and butter in a heavy saucepan over low heat and whisk until smooth. Remove from the heat and cool for 10 minutes.

Whisk the flour, espresso powder, cinnamon and salt together in a medium bowl and set aside.

Whisk the sugar and vanilla into the chocolate. Add the eggs one at a time and whisk until the batter is smooth. Add the flour mixture and stir until just combined.

Evenly spread the batter in the baking pan. Bake for about 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with a few crumbs adhering to it. Cool completely in the pan.

Cream Cheese Layer

8 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter, at room temperature
 1 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Put the cream cheese and butter in a large bowl and beat until fluffy with an electric mixer on medium speed. Add the vanilla and beat until well combined. Sift in the confectioners' sugar and cinnamon and beat until well combined.

Spread cream cheese frosting on the brownie layer. Refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour.



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Another recipe from Susan Nye: Spring 2012/Volume 294

Glaze

6 ounces bittersweet chocolate or a mix of bittersweet and milk chocolate, chopped
2 tablespoons butter
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon instant express powder

Combine all the ingredients in a heavy pan and melt the chocolate and butter over low heat. Stir until smooth. Remove from the heat and cool for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Carefully spread or drizzle the glaze on top of the cream cheese layer.

Cover and refrigerate until very cold, at least 8 hours. Cut into tiny squares and remove from the pan while still cold. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

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