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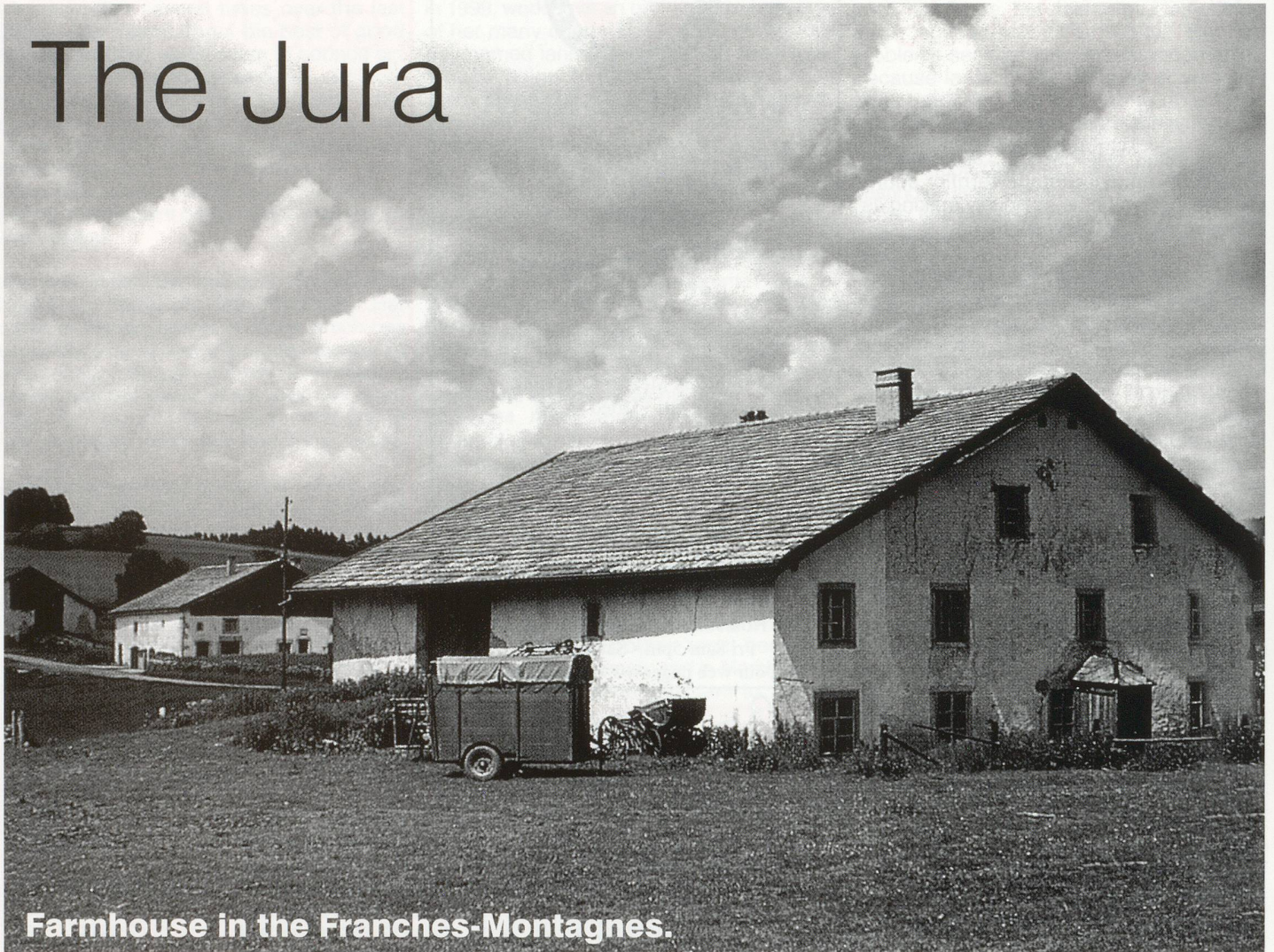
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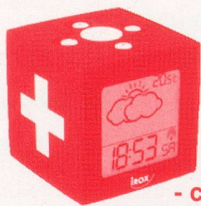


The Jura



Farmhouse in the Franches-Montagnes.

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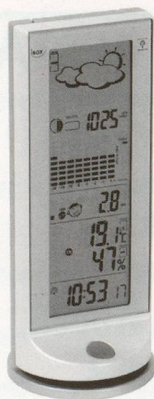
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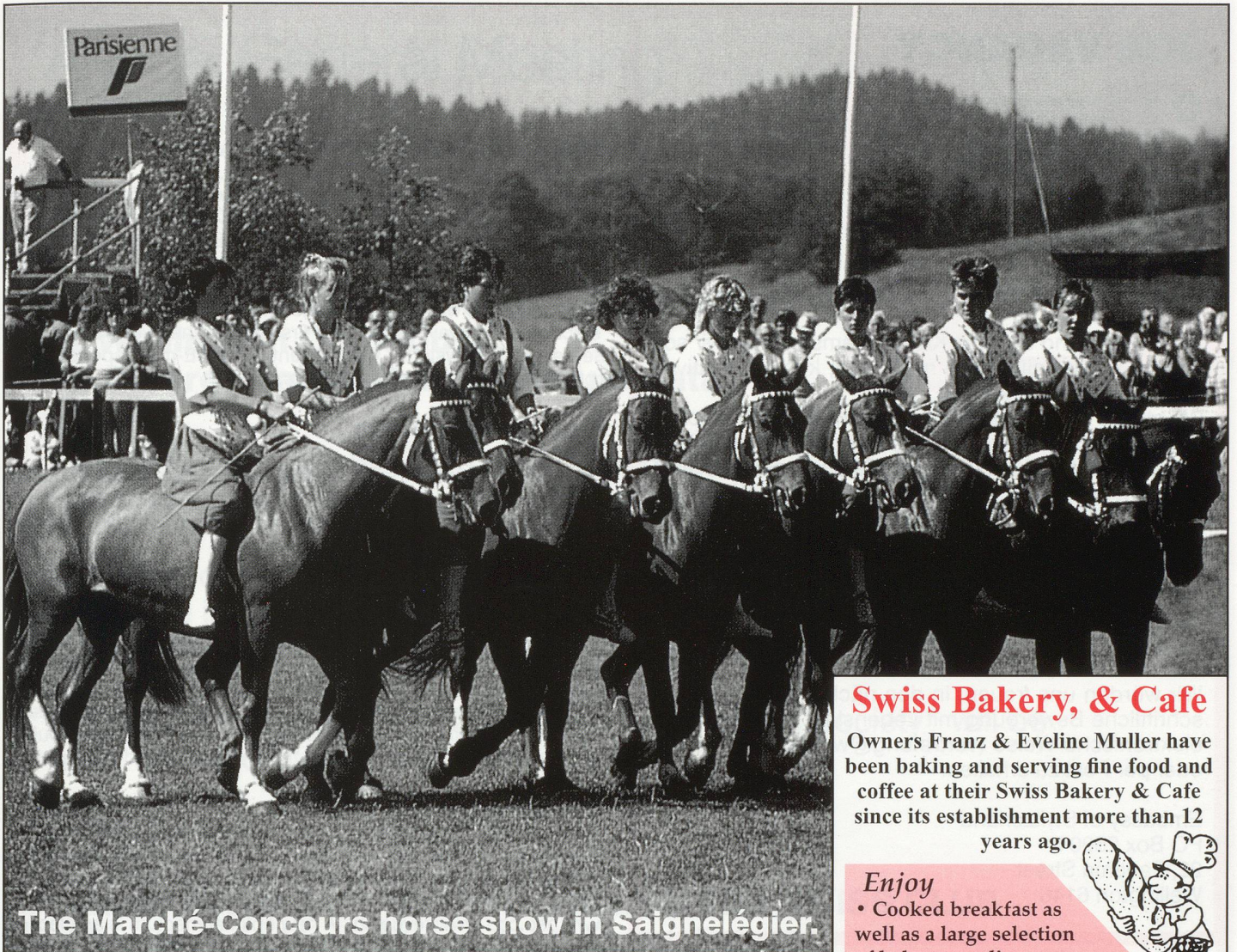
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This mountain range, forming a natural border with France, and comprising the Jura, Vaud and Neuchatel cantons, offers a rich mix of attractions, from Roman remains to vast, unspoilt forests.

According to geologists, the Jura mountains - a mighty system stretching some 780km long - are among the youngest on the planet. Some 150 million years ago the Jura, an unusually complex mountain range, rose like a reef from the endless sea, much like the neighbouring Alps. Ferns, conifers and ginkgo trees carpeted the slopes of the new land, and the first of the flying reptiles circled above its peaks; then came the first birds, small carnivores and other mammals; the seas teemed with giant dinosaurs, fish, snails, ammonites and innumerable tiny life-forms. Fossils, the petrified proof of these creatures' existence, can be seen today in their tens of thousands in the numerous village museum collection of local history.

In the eyes of the average Swiss citizen, the Jura represents nothing more than the Confederation's 26th and most recent member (born on 24 September 1978). Much has been written about the labour pains involved; this region in the northwest of Switzerland, which possesses three lakes, has always been - and most likely will continue to be - politically divided. The variations of the landscape are reflected in the diversity of the region's inhabitants.

Switzerland and France both have a share of the Jura mountain range. To the French, as for the Swiss, it is known simply as Le Jura; neither has made any effort to distinguish between the two parts by name. Anyone after a more accurate idea should not overlook the fact that these limestone mountains actually extend right across the canton of Schaffhausen and as far as the Franconian Jura in Germany, an area known as "Little Switzerland".



The Marché-Concours horse show in Saignelégier.

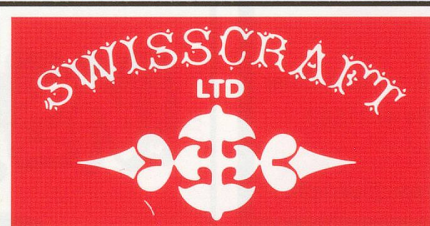
Of course, it is not only the language that makes the difference between here and adjoining areas so noticeable: the whole atmosphere has a definite "French-Swiss" flavour, which is shaped at least in part by the town of Delemont, the capital of the republic and canton of Jura. The Grand-Rue, without a doubt the finest street in Delemont, makes it obvious why the bishops of Basel elected to build a chateau here, around the year 1716, as their summer residence. The old town remains attractive, with two ancient city gates, a convent dating from 1699 and several interesting churches. The people of the Jura have always held their public gatherings in front of the Maison Bennot, which today houses the excellent Musee Jurassien (Jura Museum of Art and History).

A short distance south of Delemont the River Birse becomes fully Bernese - as it was in the Laufental - and remains so right up to its source, for there the river flows on through the Moutier region, one of the three regions that stayed under the jurisdiction of the "old canton", namely Bern, following the country-wide plebiscite that gave the Jura autonomy as the 26th federal state of Switzerland - the first change of cantonal boundaries in 163 years.

The people of the Jura love horses. Since horses particularly like to find footing on ground that is not too hard, the plateau of Franches-Montagnes, 1,000 metres above

sea level, is considered ideal horse country. The botanical wealth of mushrooms (including many edible varieties) to be found in the Franches-Montagnes countryside is much appreciated by connoisseurs of ceps.

Source : *Insight Guides Switzerland.*



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