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Romainmôtier

A haven for artists in the Swiss Jura

IN the year AD 460, two monks – one called Romain – spread the gospel around the Jura and built a wooden oratory in a secluded spot in the Valley of the Nozon River in the Canton of Vaud, surrounded by hills and forests.

A succession of churches was erected on the same site, all clearly outlined in the paving of the present abbey.

Each new church simply encased the space of an earlier one, growing more and more imposing.

The Abbaye de Romainmôtier was the first church built in Switzerland by the Benedictines of Cluny about 1,000 years ago. It replaced the various previous sanctuaries.

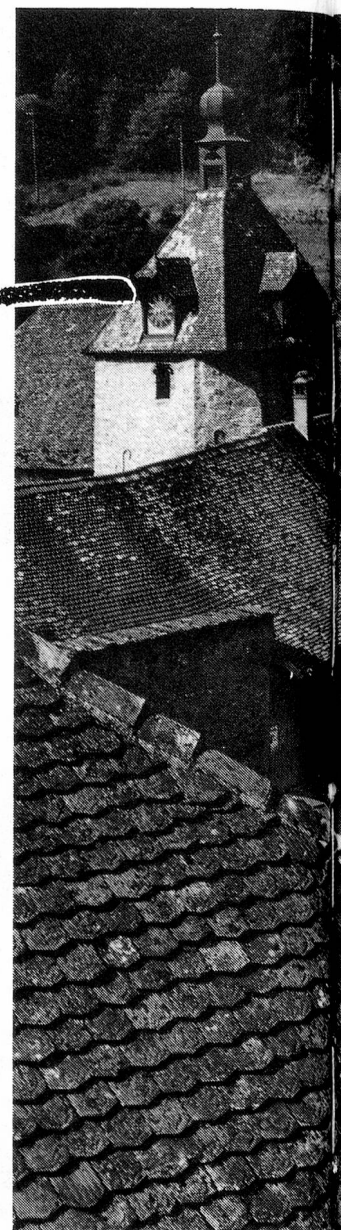
Later, in its heyday, crowds overflowed into the porch and narthex as popes, kings and royal weddings filed through the wooden portals into the vaulted nave with its massive pillars in pink sandstone.

In medieval times it was at the crossroads of a Roman road which ran from Geneva to Basle and another one that crossed over to France towards Besançon.

When Vaud was overrun by the Bernese during the Reformation, the convent church was turned into an austere Protestant parish church. The frescoes dating from the 12th century were whitewashed and the stone images were beheaded. The upper story of the entire narthex was used as a granary.

The church was restored to its former appearance early this century, and the restoration of the crumbling buildings of the Priory is due to the owner, the author Katharina von Arx.

Craftsmen have settled in the medieval village and visitors come from far and wide. Services



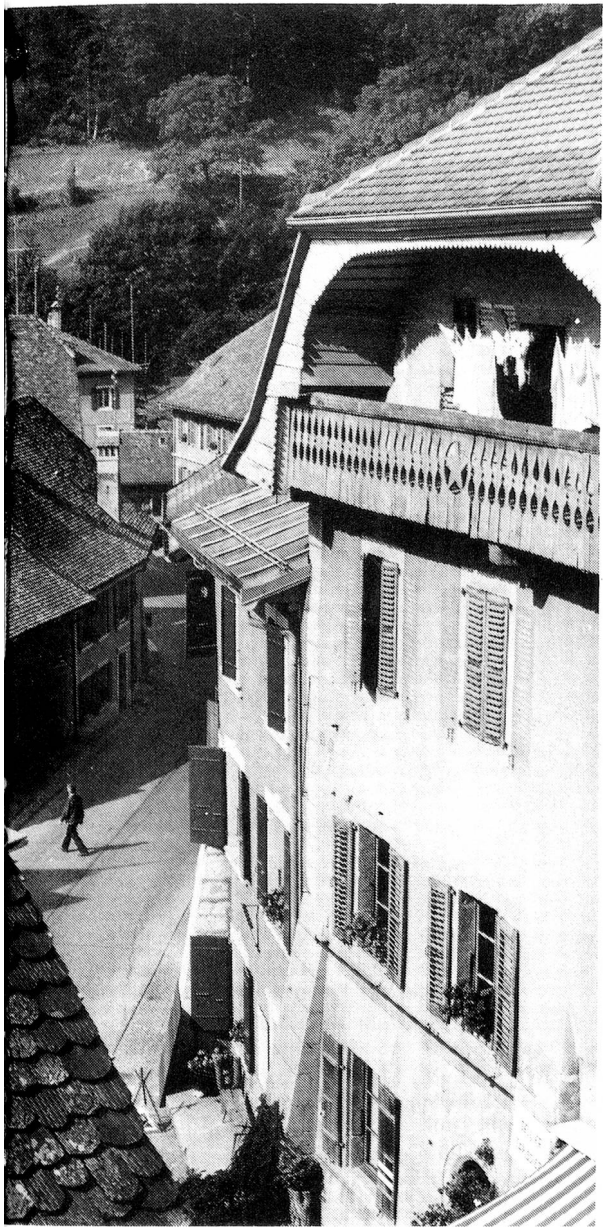
are held three times a day for an ecumenical community of Protestant and Catholic nuns who act as guides.

During the summer, concerts of sacred music are held every Sunday. The Chapter Hall of the Priory may be rented for banquets, concerts and other festivities.

The charming little town is the starting point for various excursions into the Joux Valley, up to the Dent-de-Vaulion and the springs of the Orbe river.

With its Romanesque monastery it is one of the little known jewels of Switzerland and is well worth a visit.

Mariann Meier



Left: Paradise for the artist.

Below: The clock tower above the main gateway.



*Below left: Beautiful setting for festivities at the Priory.
Below right: Chapter Hall, the Priory.*

