



By Rail to Switzerland

10 - 17 March 2025

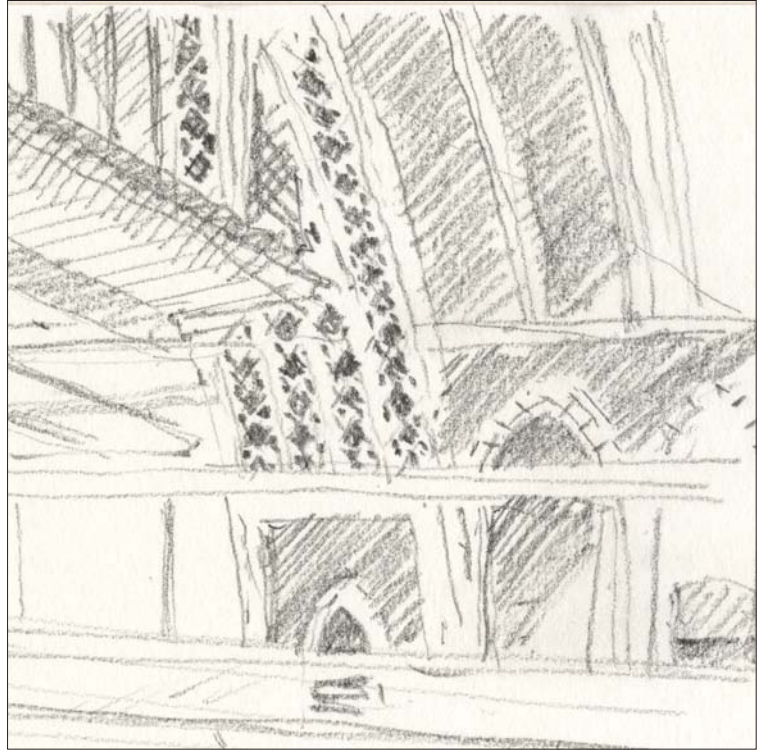
Greta & Mike Fitchett



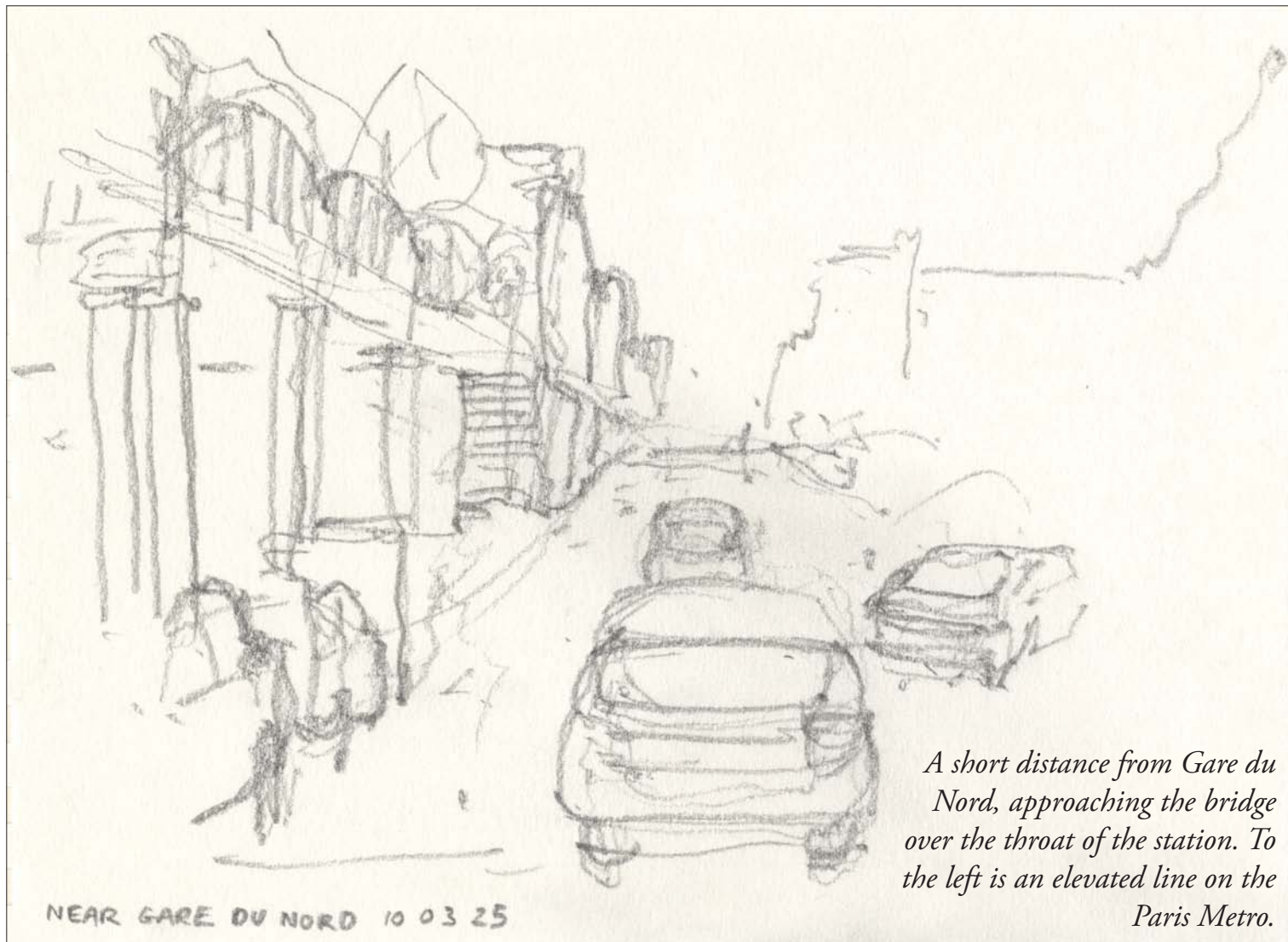
Day 1: Monday 10 March 2025: London to Montreux

This album is mostly Mike's sketchbook. Many of the drawings are quick "snapshots", as are some of the photographs. Sketching, like photography, is mostly opportunism when on the move. Many of those opportunities are brief moments such as station stops, which maybe allow less than a minute to compose something. The result is nevertheless an exercise in observation, and an attempt to heighten the memory of what is seen.

Sketch – right: 10 minutes to departure – no time at all to capture the intricacy of Barlow's magnificent train shed at London St. Pancras. But it's a start.



Into France: an impression of the endless flat landscape as we speed towards Paris. At 275 km/h this drawing is an amalgamation of various observations. Carbon pencil.



A short distance from Gare du Nord, approaching the bridge over the throat of the station. To the left is an elevated line on the Paris Metro.

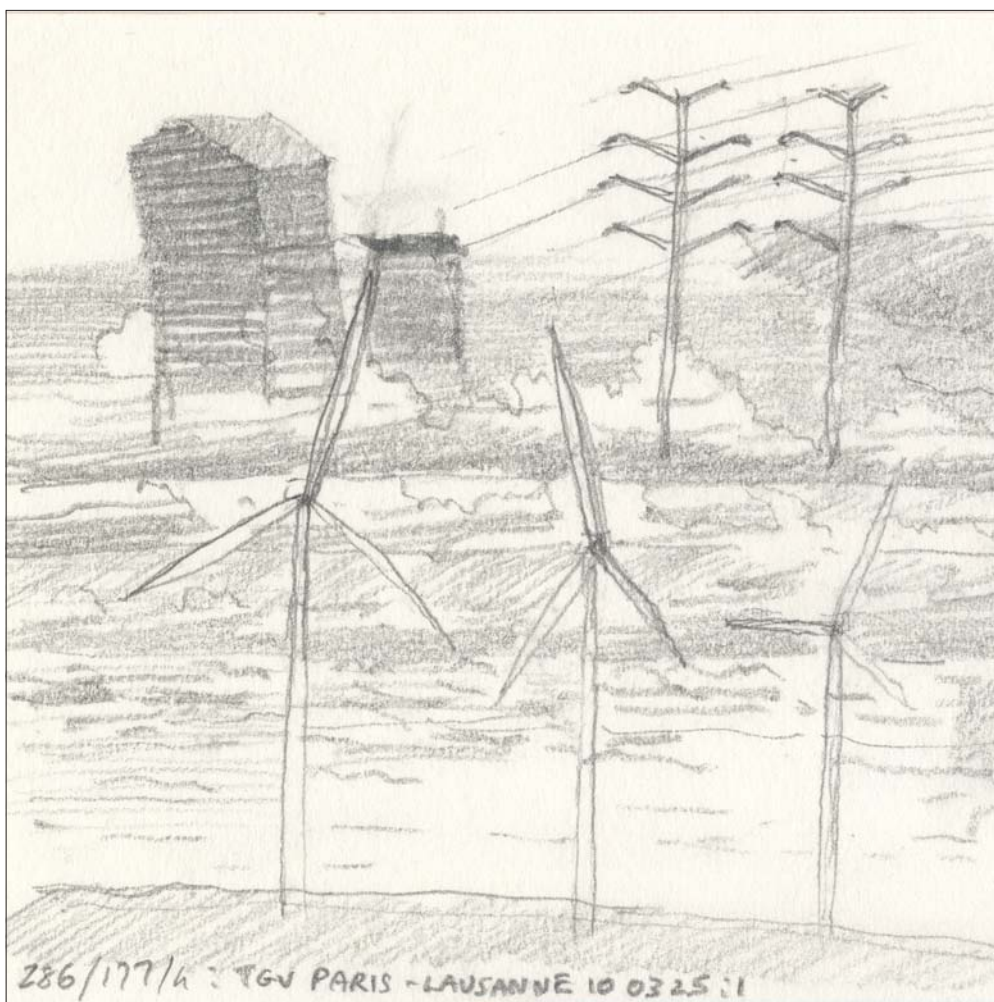
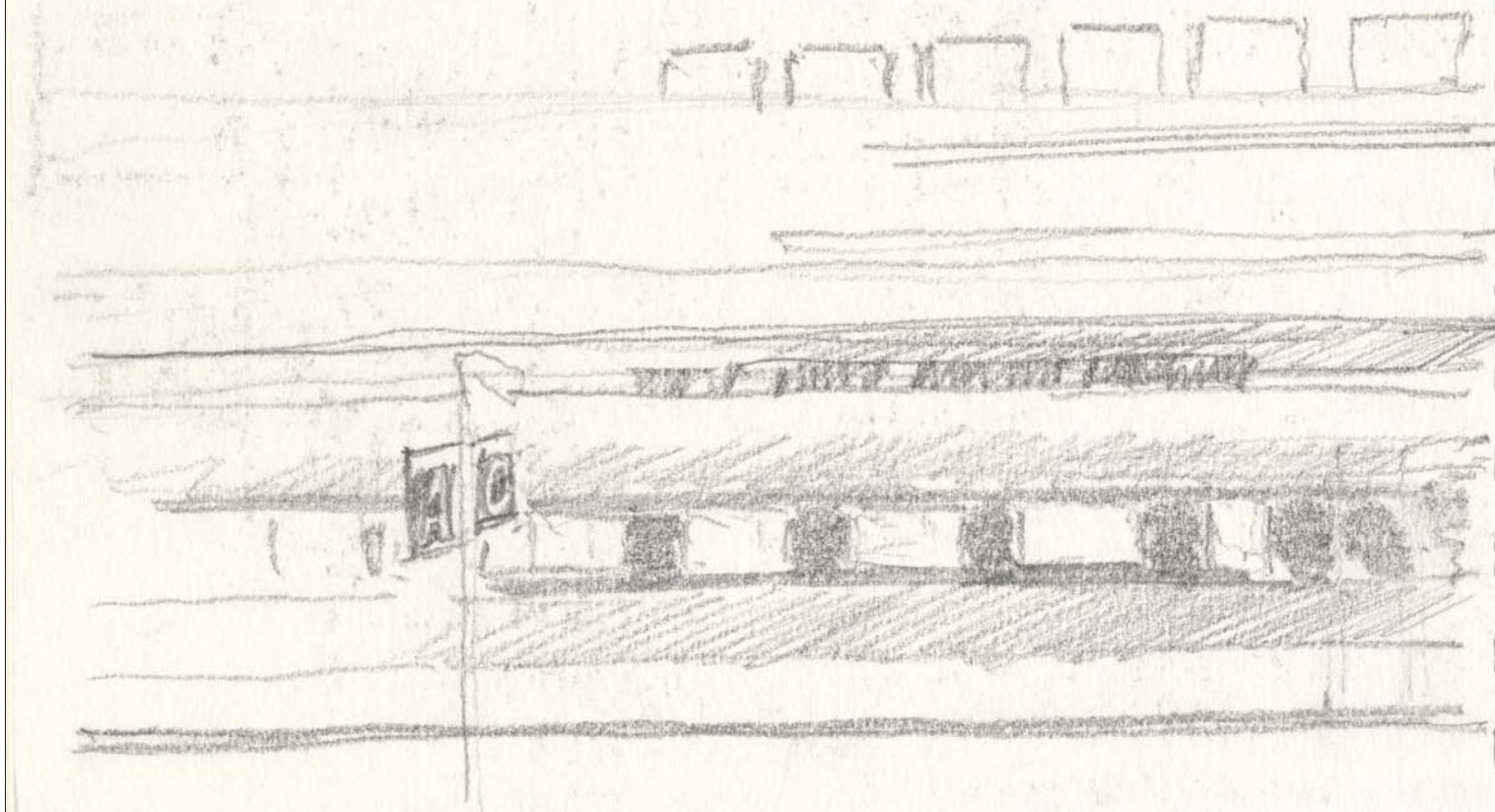
Our group has a bus provided for the journey between stations in Paris. Grabbing the vacant seat behind the driver gives an opportunity for a couple of quick sketches.

We find ourselves stuck at the front of a jam caused by a carelessly parked van where there is a road works. To our left, Metro trains run past on an incline which takes the line from elevated section to tunnel.



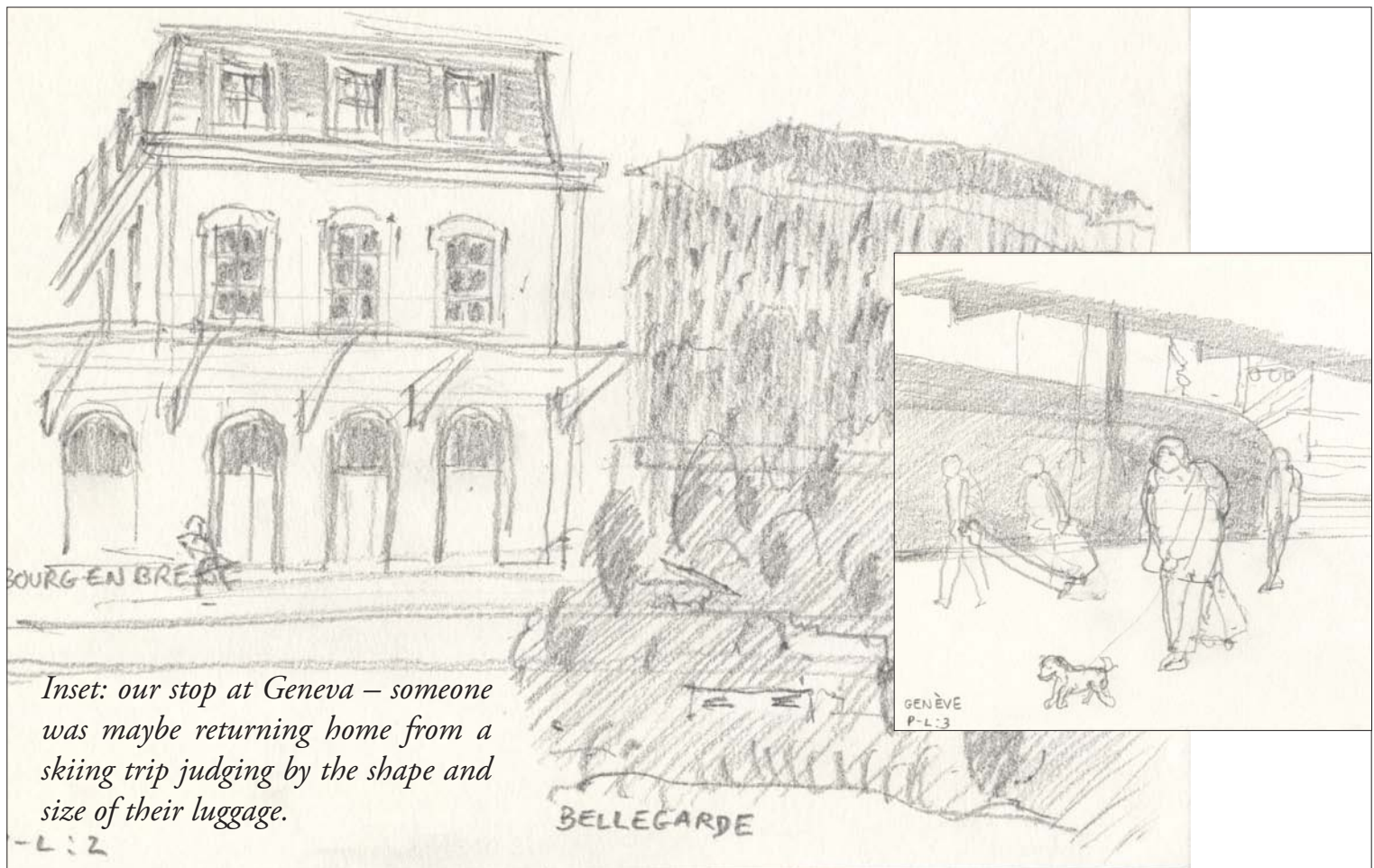
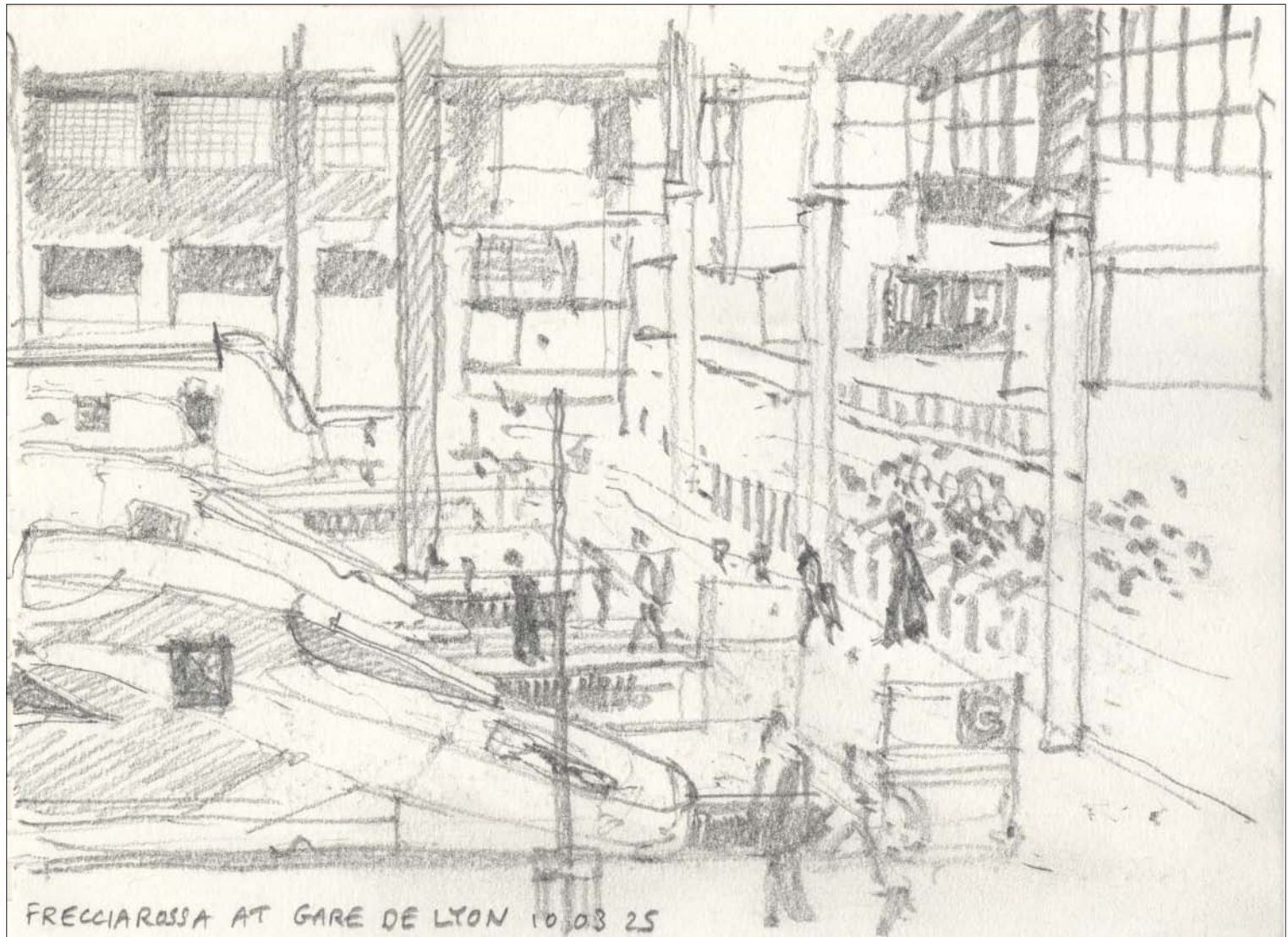
At a traffic light stop I manage to capture something of the domestic architecture.

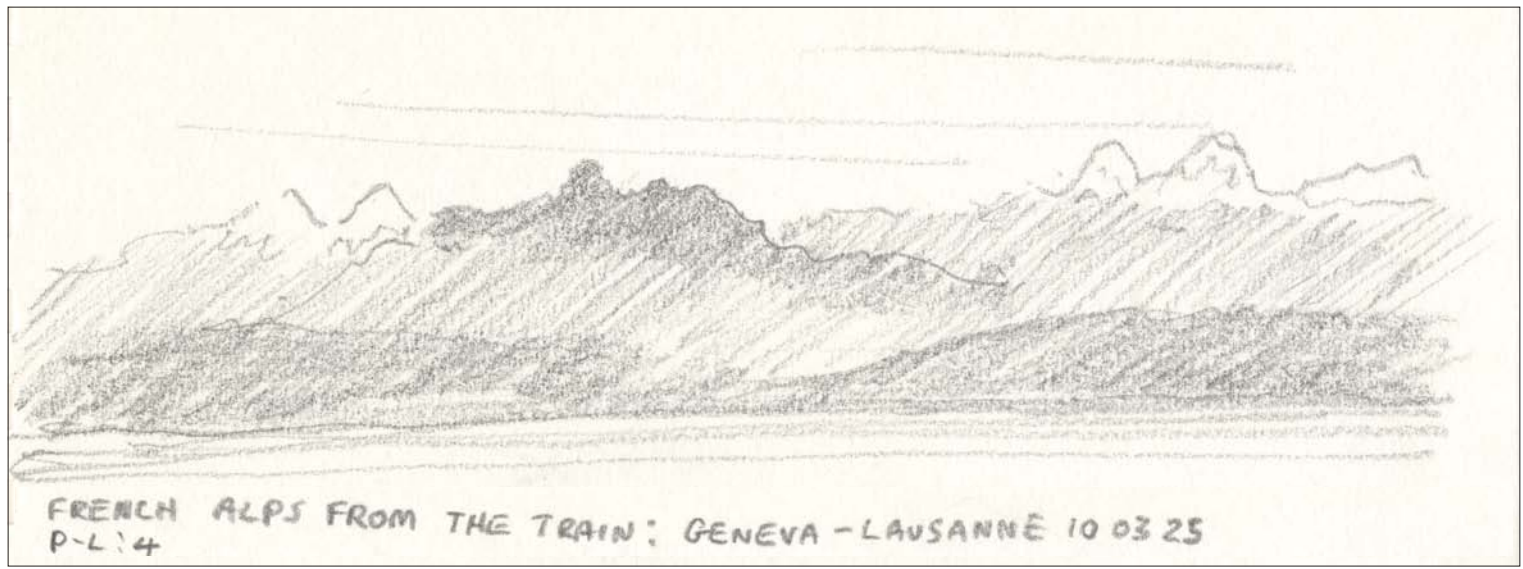
At Gare de Lyon. Brian, our guide, advises our group not to besiege the first class waiting room en-masse, as a large party entering together tends to “spook them”. So we do the right thing and all crowd in together. We are greeted by staff who with a friendly “bonjour” usher us up the escalator to a lounge where there is a glorious view of the concourse – and with a vacant window seat! Would that our UK stations be so well disposed to passengers, and people like me who enjoy watching trains...



On the TGV to Lausanne via Geneva, and as we left Paris, a fellow traveller pointed out a large building that had a distinct imbalance. After a moment it was hidden from view. Presently the city yielded to the swathe of rural France, with few hedges but plenty of power lines and wind farms.

Branching off the high speed route at Mâcon, we headed east along a single track, winding through a mountainous limestone landscape. We emerged from one tunnel directly onto a high viaduct over a river valley – not quite matching what Switzerland can offer but a grander version of the now closed railway through the Derbyshire Peak District. By now our train was calling at local stations.





The weather forecast was not good, but for now the skies were clearing and we were treated to a superb distant view of the French Alps as we sped along the north-western shore of Lake Geneva. Our train terminated at Lausanne. With ample connection time we gathered at the western end of the platform. There was a dramatic sunset, not spoiled, at least for me, by being behind a maze of electrification infrastructure. As dusk settled I dug out my camera and managed a few shots in the twilight.





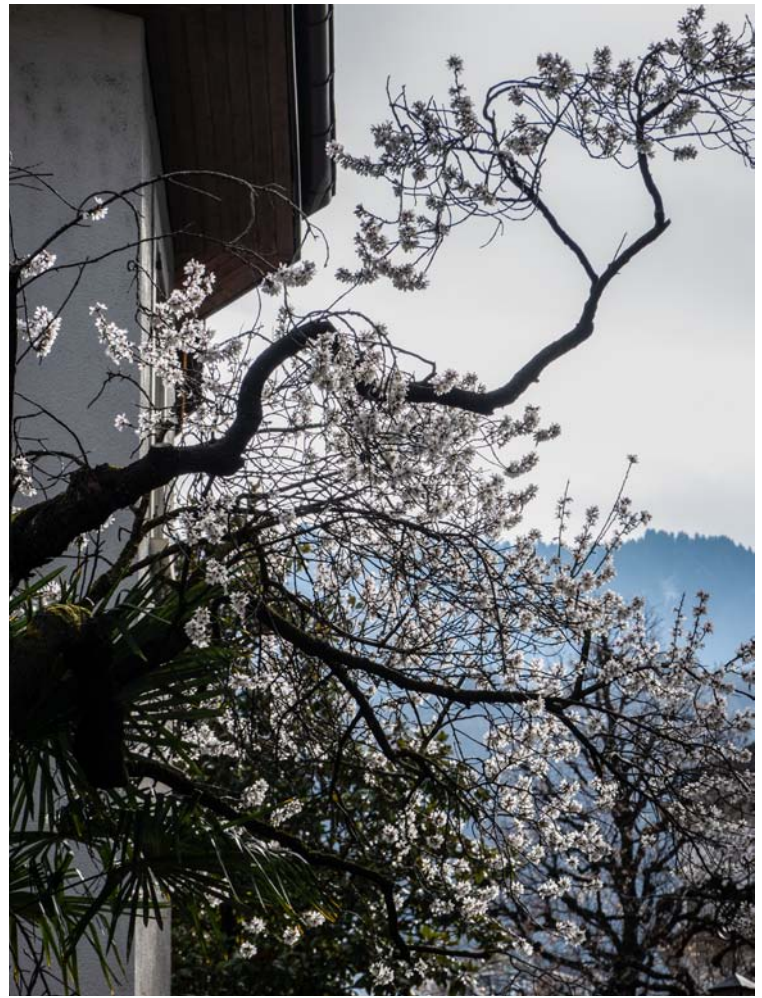
Day 2: Tuesday 11 March 2025: Montreux

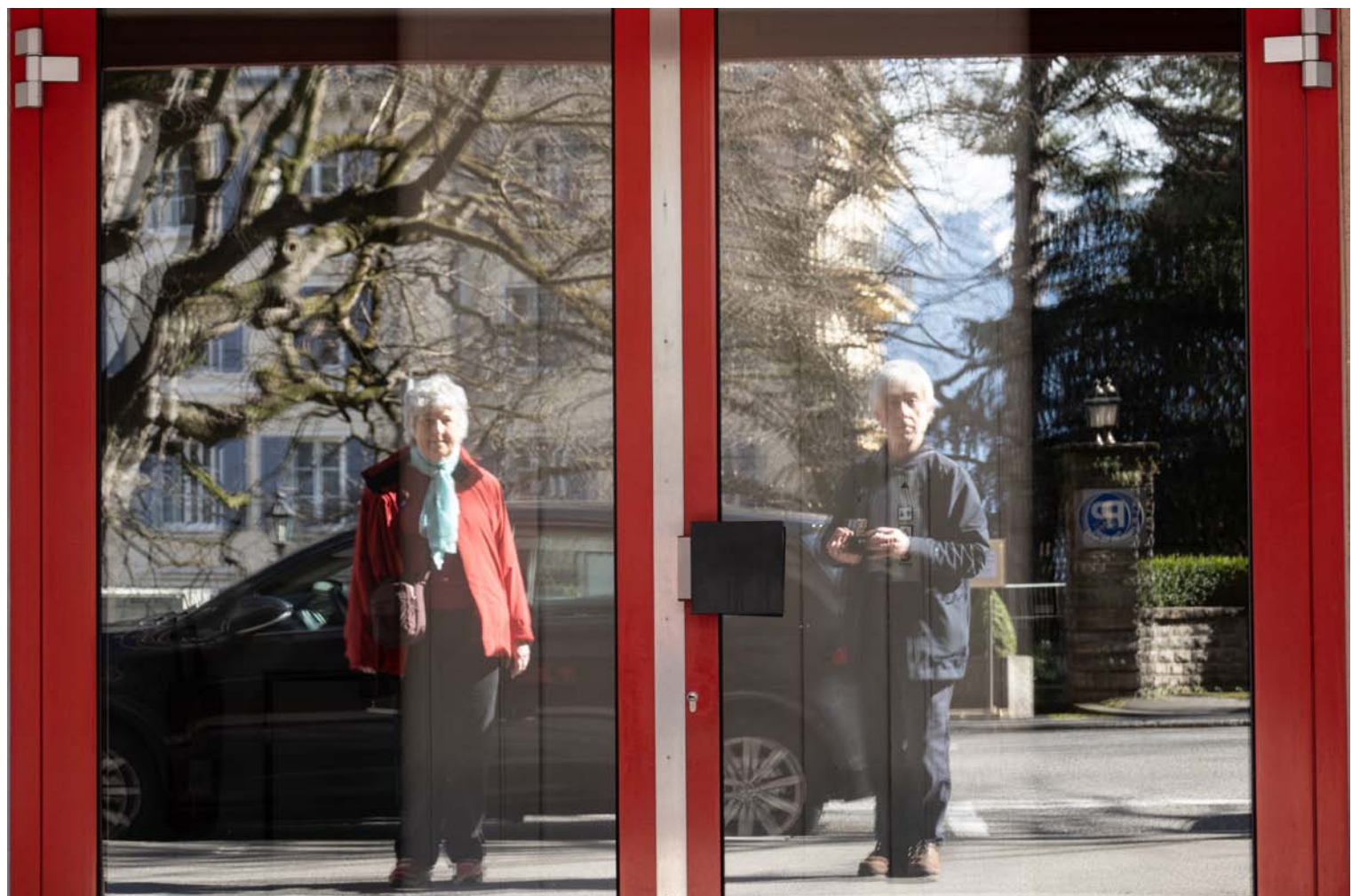
Spring sunshine and broken cloud gave us a superb view of the mountains surrounding Mt. Blanc.

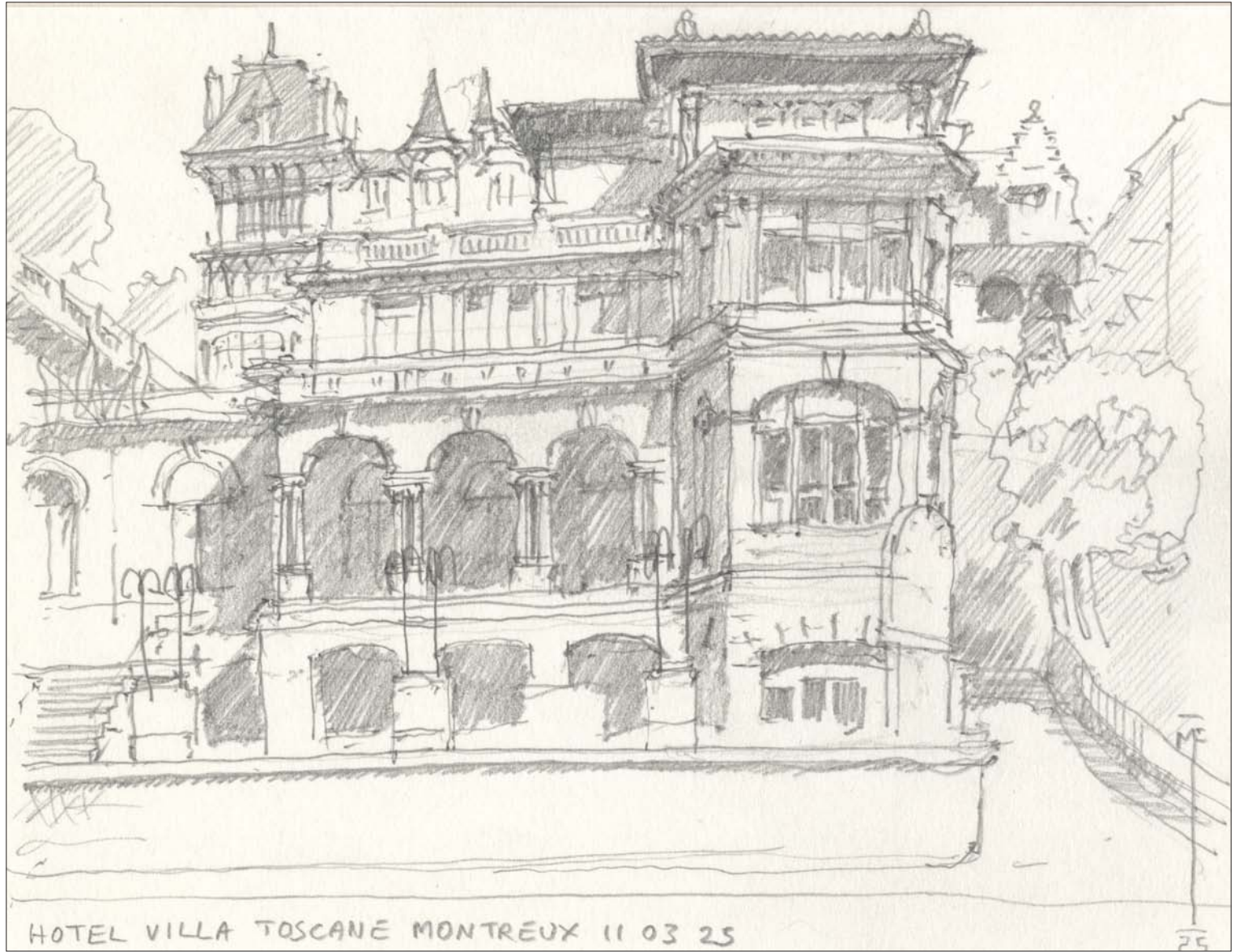
We discovered the historic Fontaine in what would have been a central part of the old town. It is still in use today as a water supply. In the afternoon we had a guided tour of the nearby Chillon Castle.

An office entrance on Avenue des Alpes gave us a selfie opportunity. Are those hinges and red door surrounds designed to mimic the Swiss flag?

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were a golden age of tourism for Switzerland, evident in the architecture of the period. Opposite our modern hotel stood a hotel, possibly a former private house, designed in the Belle Epoch style. The building beyond and above, whilst hinting at the Swiss vernacular, bears more resemblance to a style found throughout Britain and Europe, and probably dates from the same period.

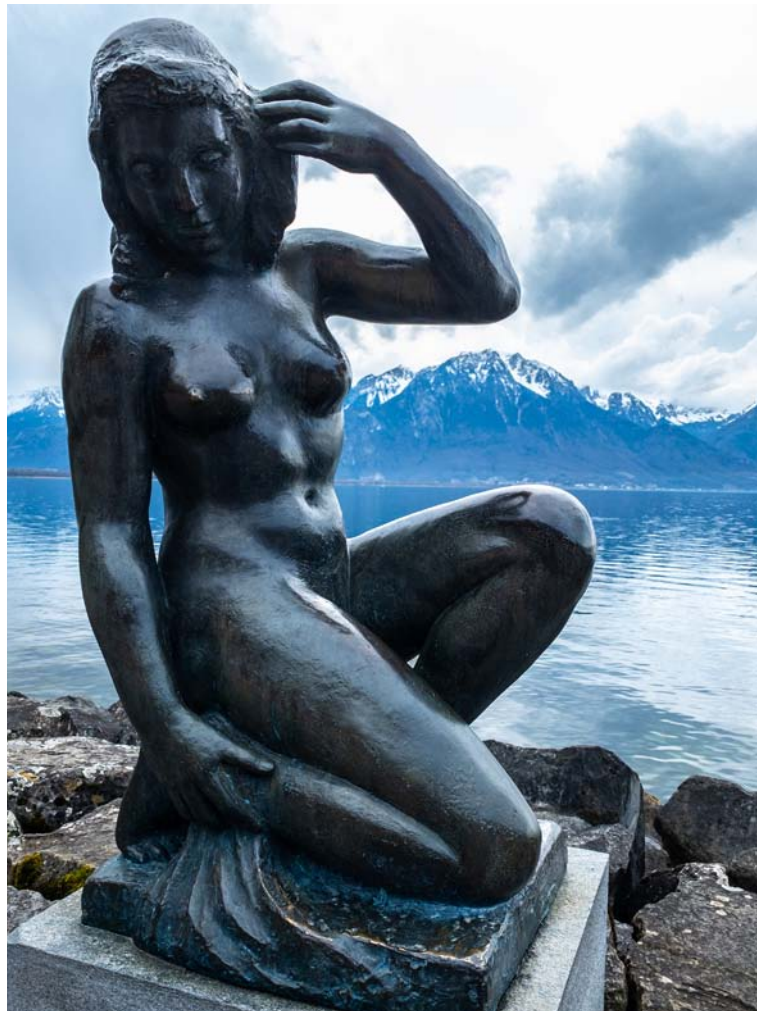






*Bathing Woman (Baigneuse), sculpture by Arthur
Schlageter (1883 - 1963).*

*Below: Restaurant artwork, Quai de Vernex. Below:
artwork on a restaurant, Quai de Vernex*

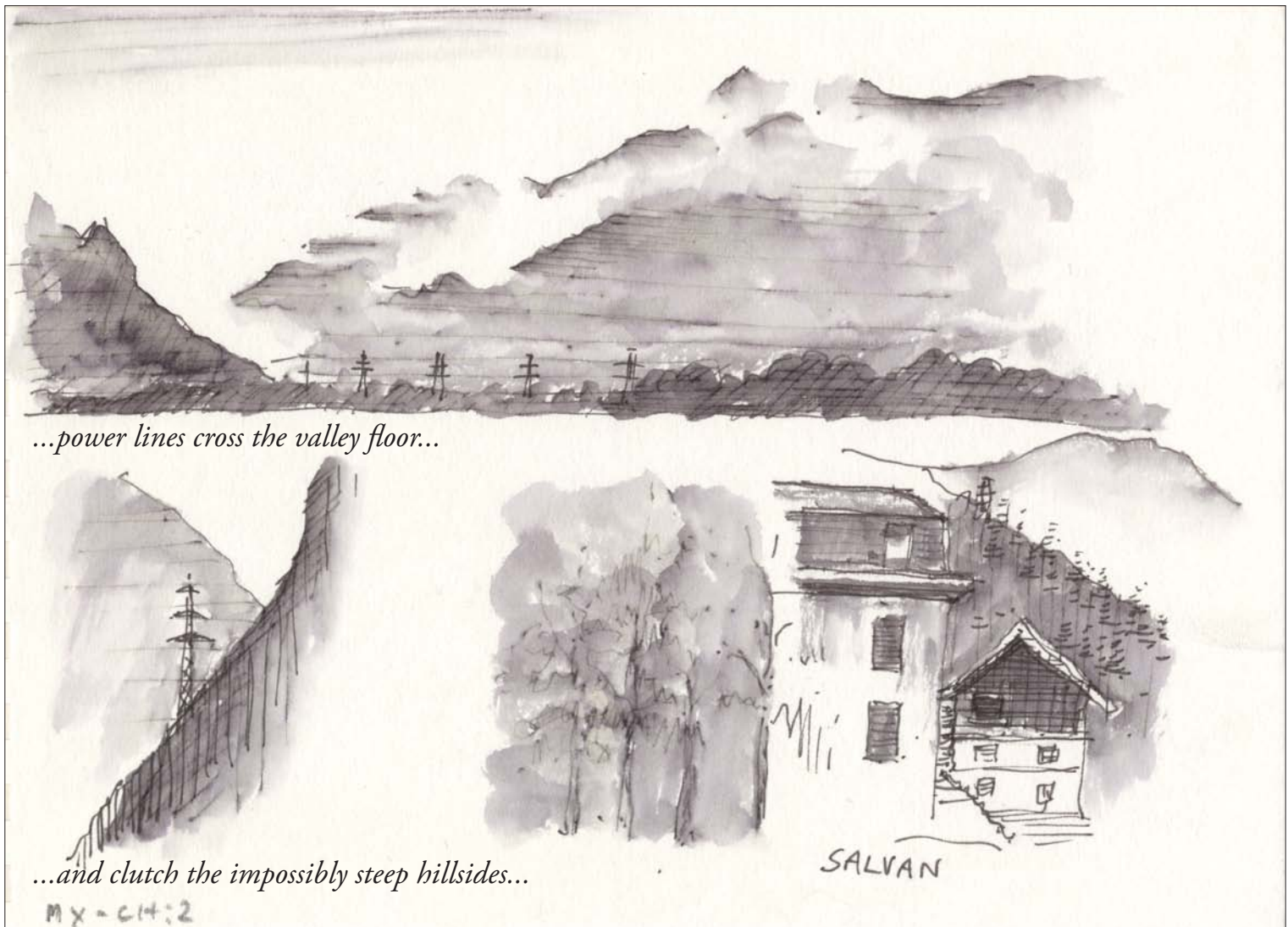
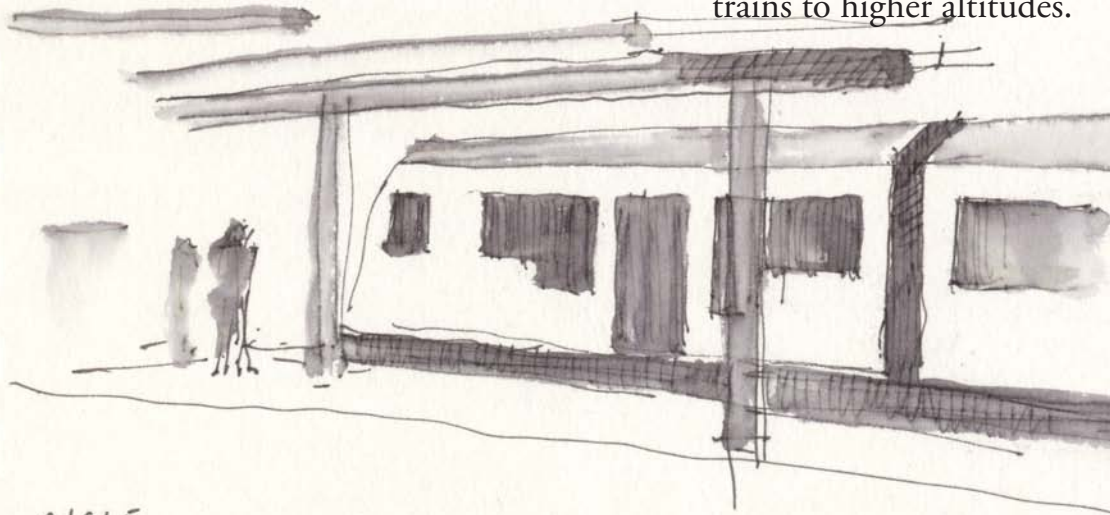


Day 3: Wednesday 12 March 2025: Chamonix

Train to Martigny, change for Vallorcine, then change for Chamonix. An excellent ride, and for the last leg of the outbound journey I got a seat with a view forward.

Cloud was hanging around, and Chamonix proved cold and cloudy enough to discourage us from taking trains to higher altitudes.

En-route sketch: water soluble pen and water. Distant mountain view with clouds, and a quickly grabbed scene at a station stop. And a "demonstration" piece, as I was showing a fellow traveller how I blended to tones with the water brush.

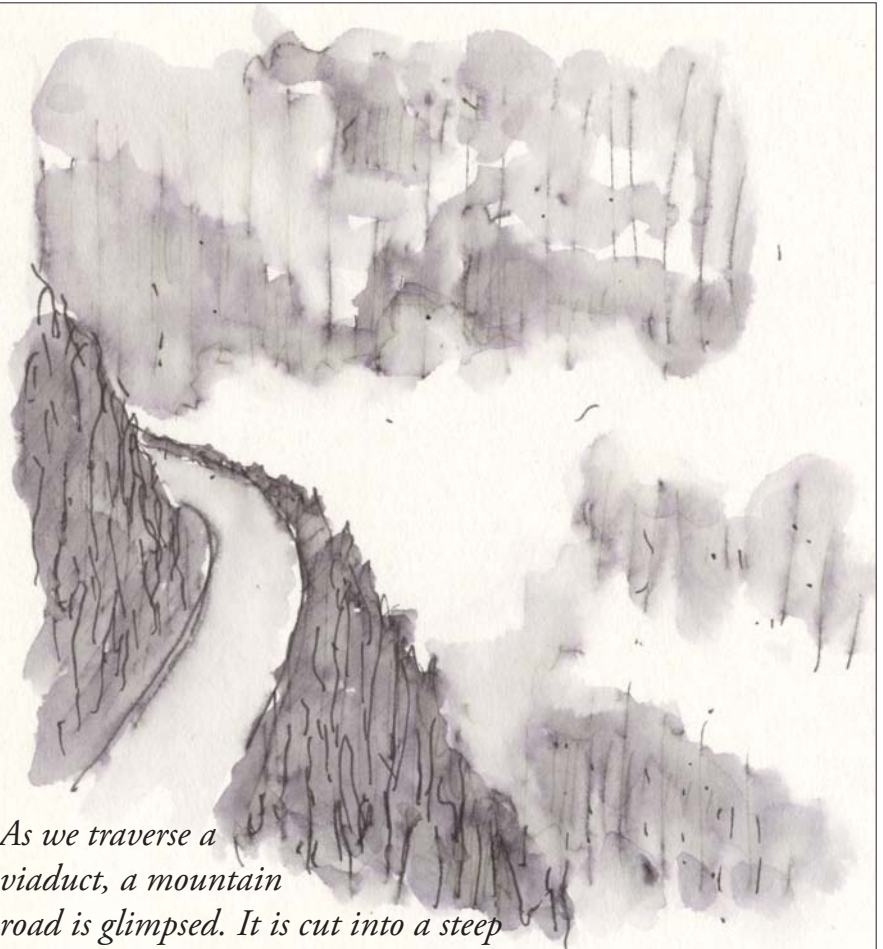


*Chimney on
a chalet....*

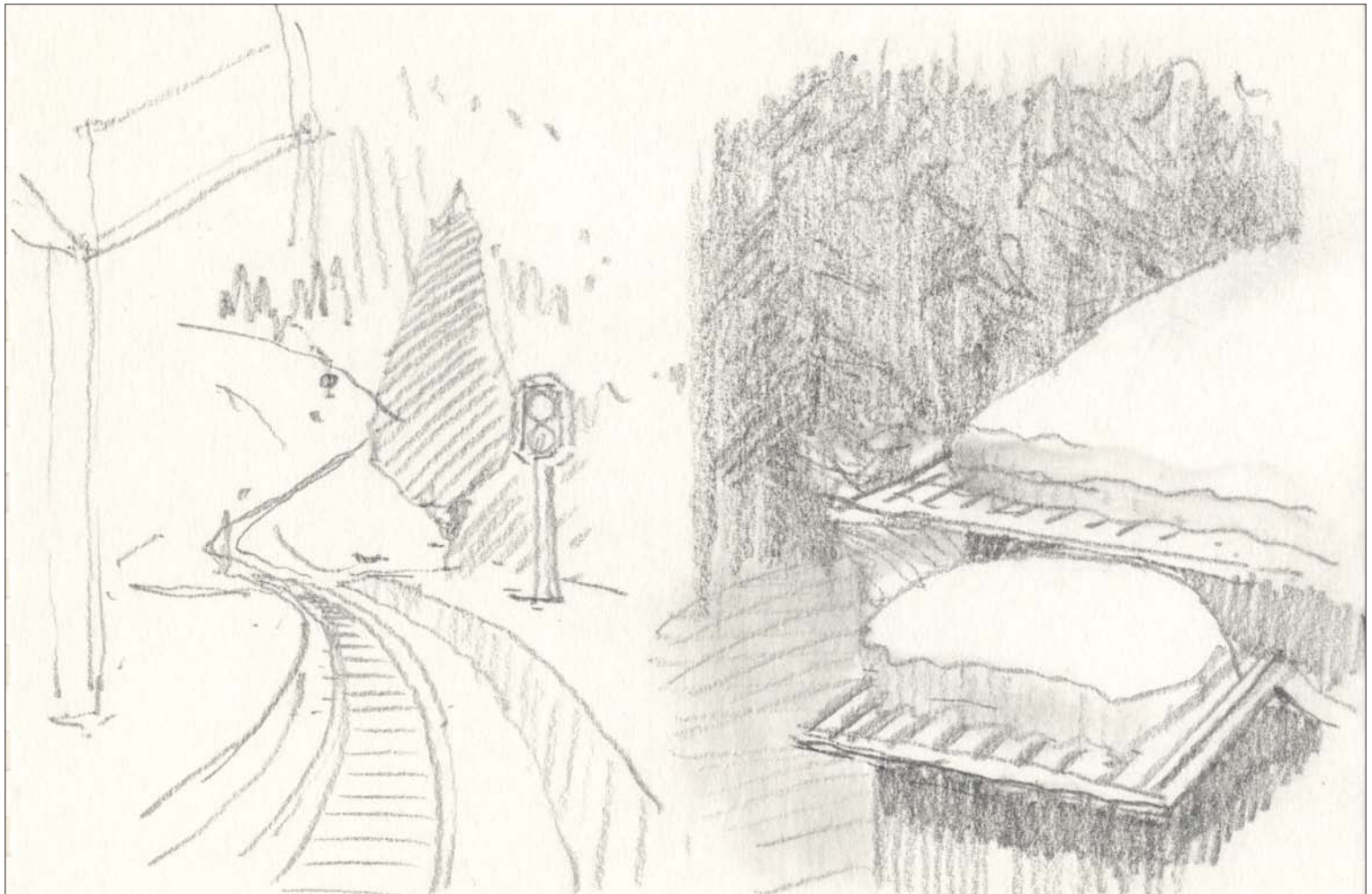


FINHAUT

*...avalanche
shelter...*



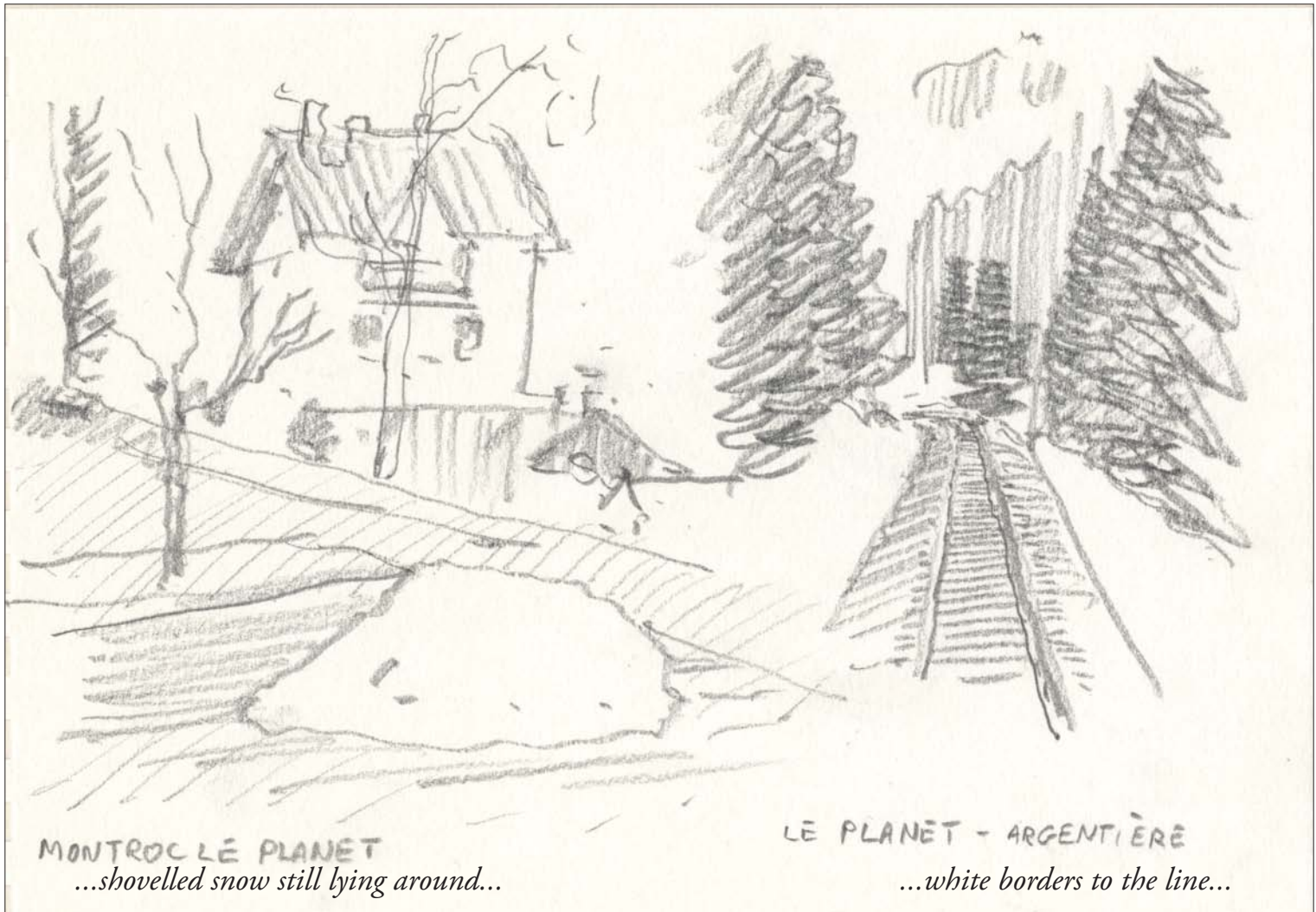
*As we traverse a
viaduct, a mountain
road is glimpsed. It is cut into a steep
mountainside, and beyond in the valley, cloud lingers.*



VALLORCINE
MX-CH: 4

LE BUËT

...retreating snow caps on chalet roof...

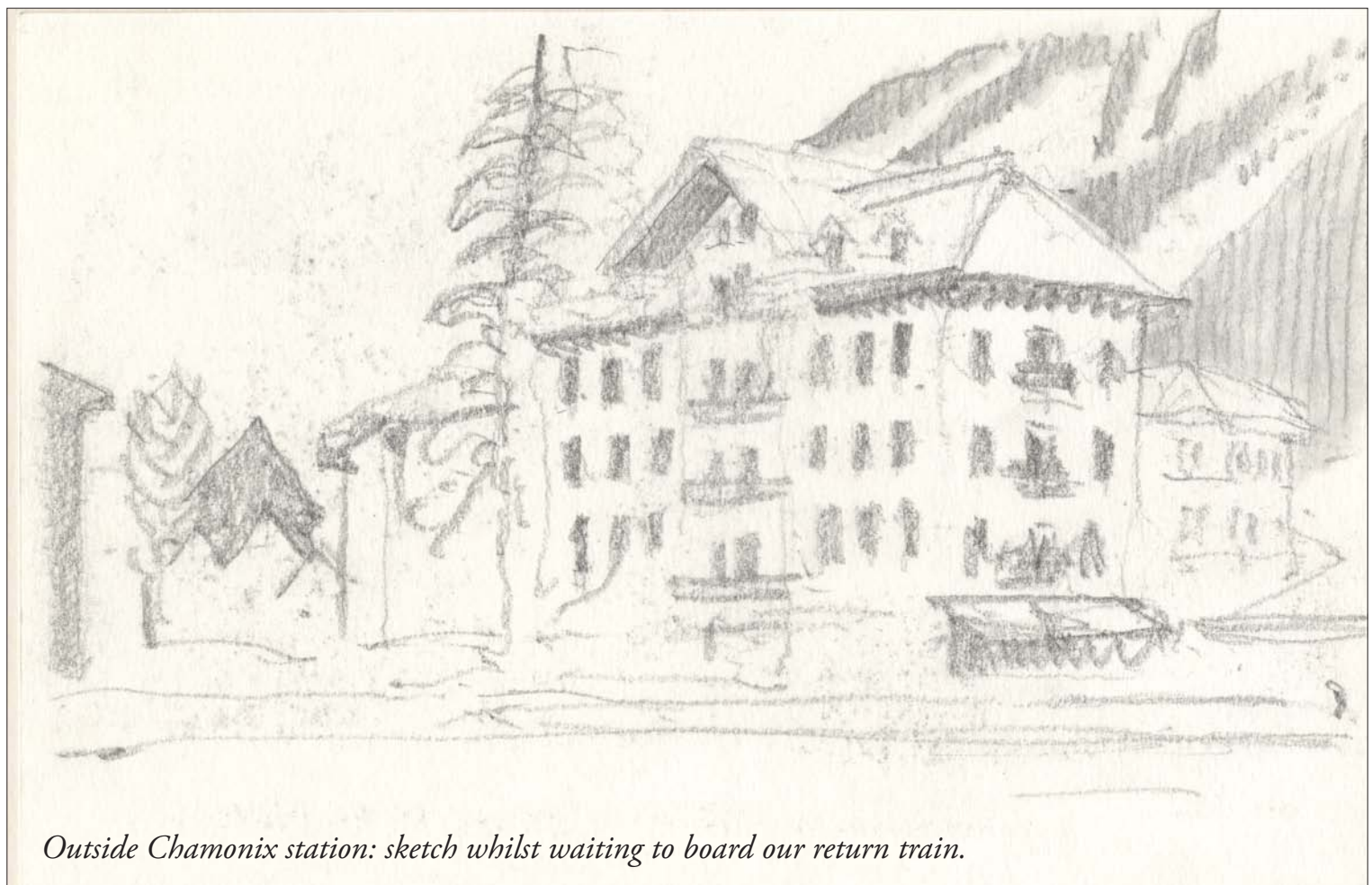


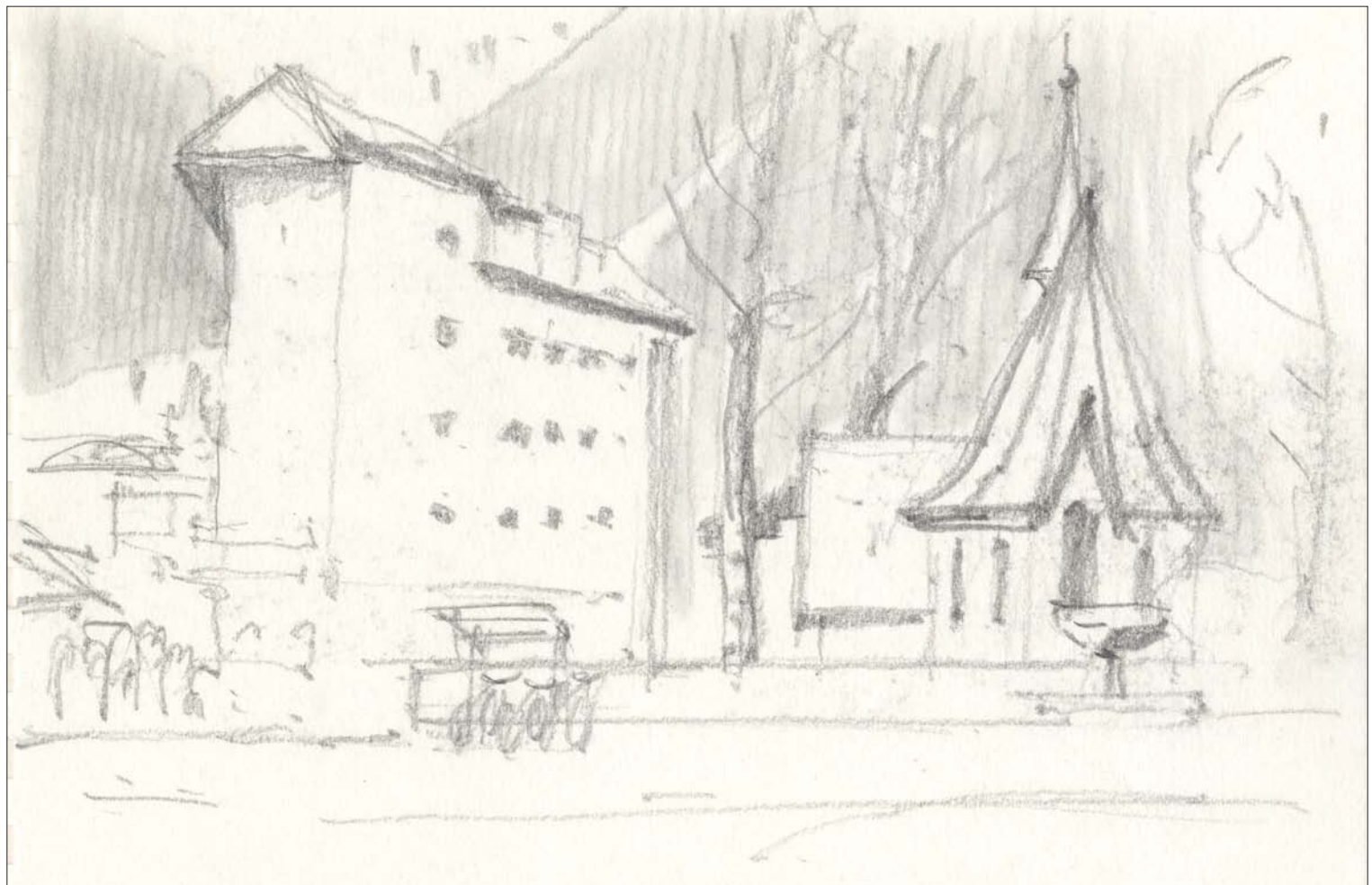


A vintage rack railway locomotive displayed in Chamonix illustrates the principle of the cog system.

Chamonix church: carbon pencil – sketched in the rain which has caused the black blobs.



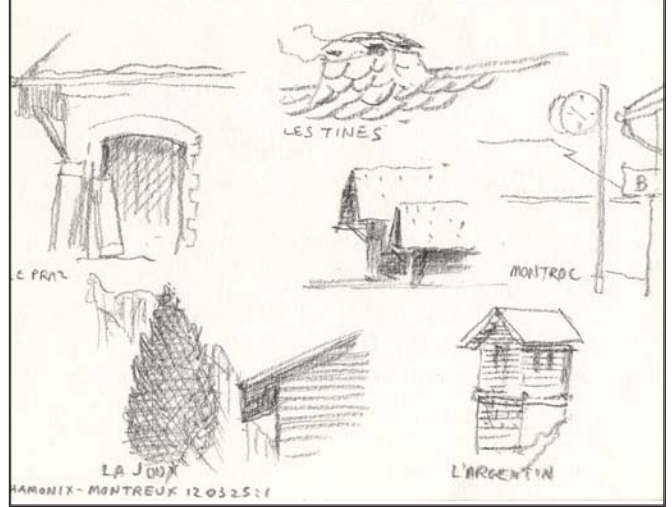






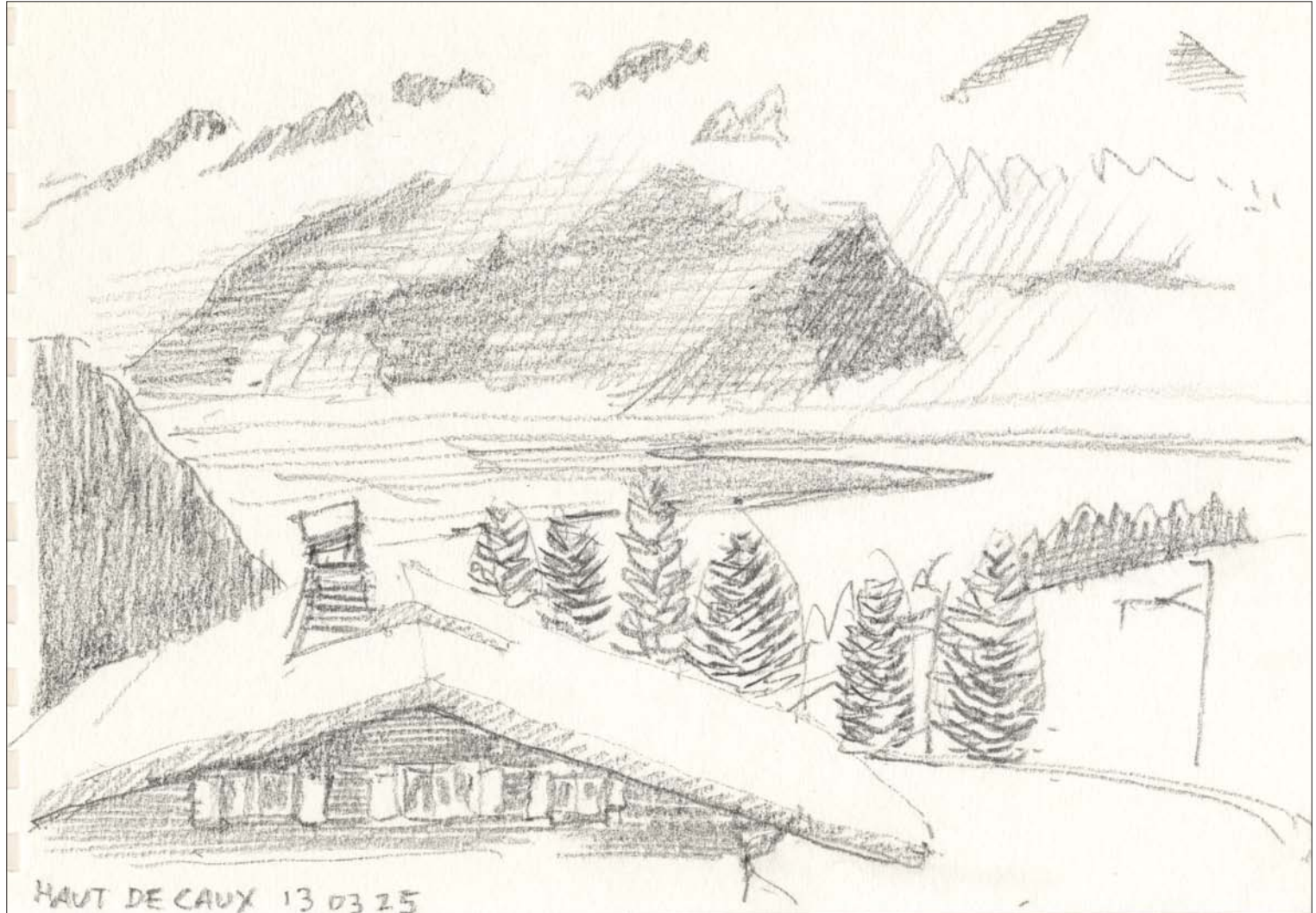
En-route sketches: returning to Montreux

CH - MX 2



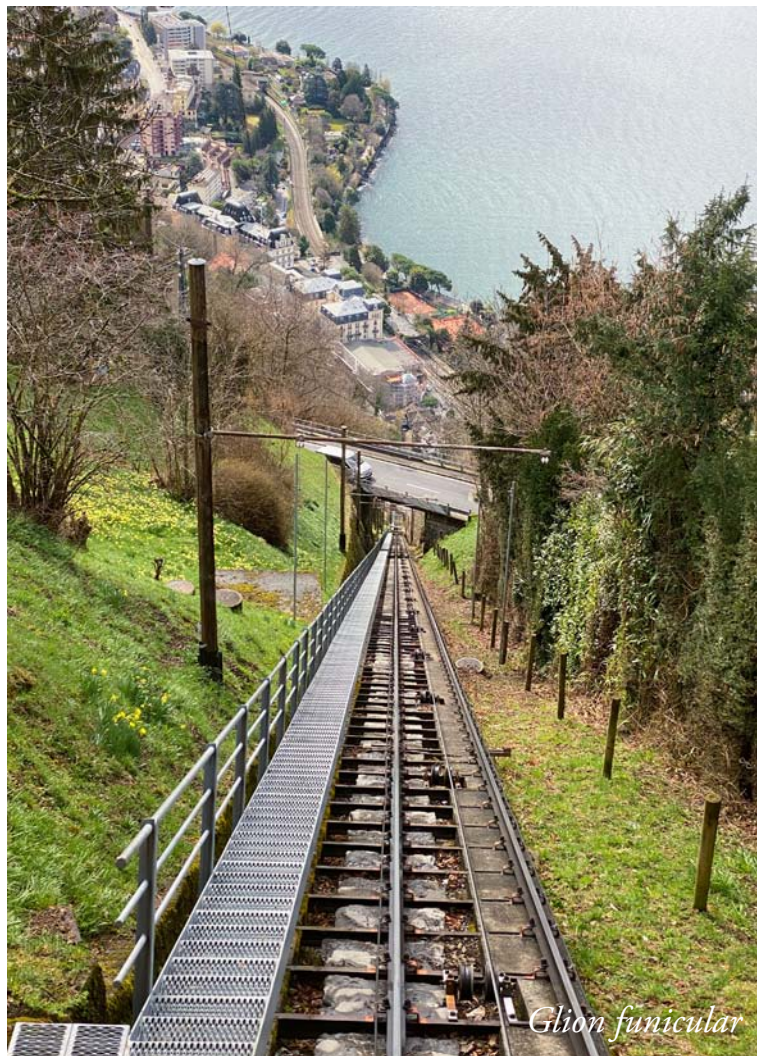
Day 4: Thursday 13 March 2025: Montreux to Interlaken

Sunshine, a sprinkling of snow and a tight connection. We head for the station and the 09.32 rack railway train to Haut-de-Caux. Repairs to the line beyond here make this the temporary terminus. Alighting into freshly fallen snow we head for a traditional Swiss guesthouse for coffee. It's the same train for our return and we change at Glion for the funicular, to find that the efficient Swiss connection doesn't account for the time it takes oldsters to hurry between platforms, and we miss it. It is a 15 minute wait, and we're short of time. We make it back to our hotel room just as our tour guide is missing us and texting me.

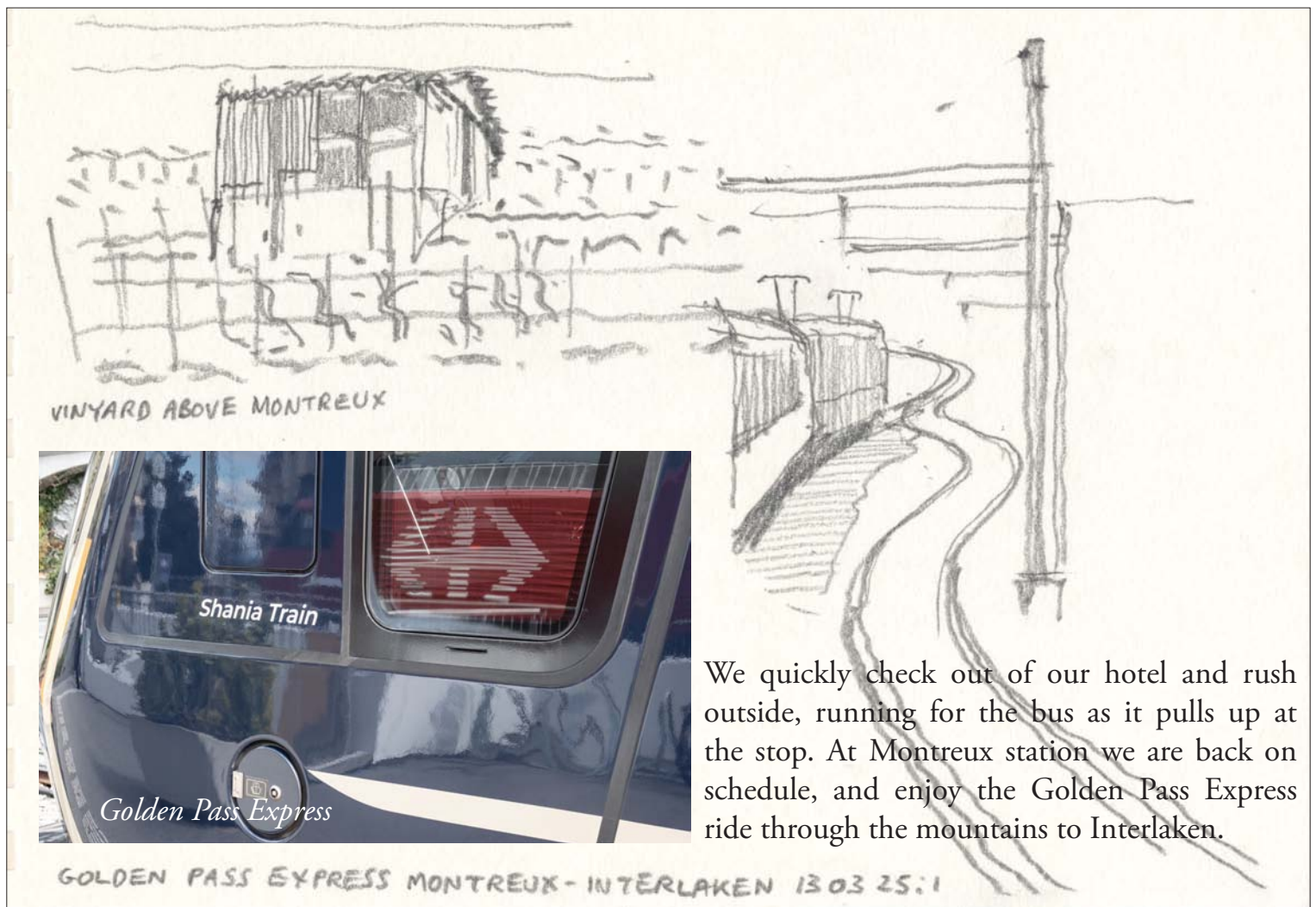




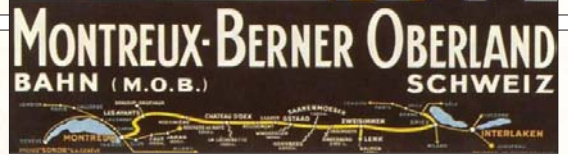
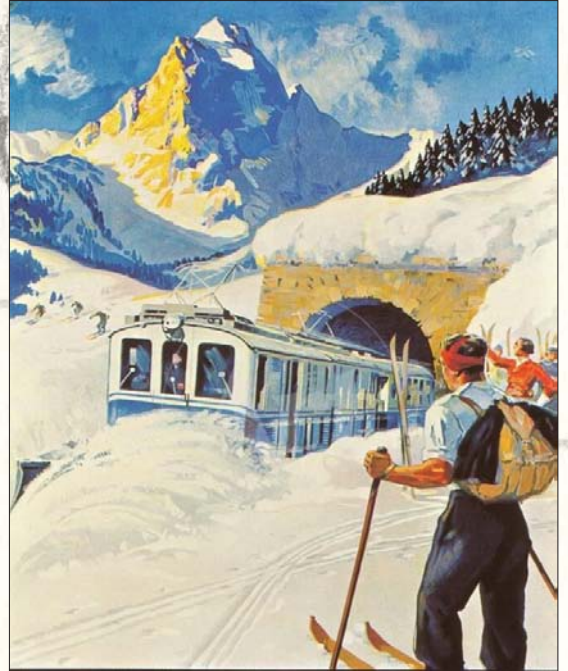
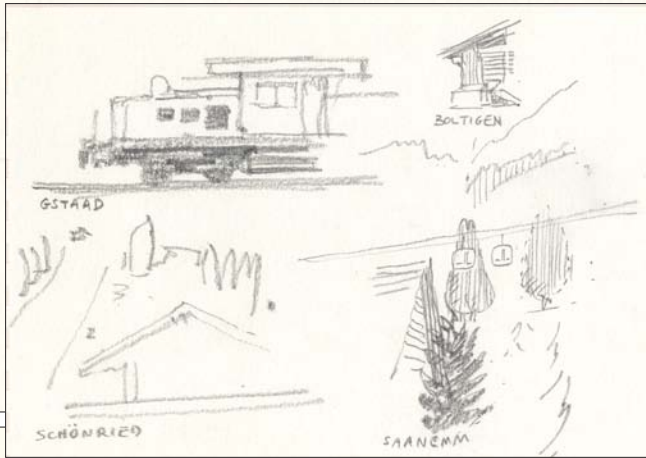
Fresh snow at Haut-de-Caux



Glion funicular



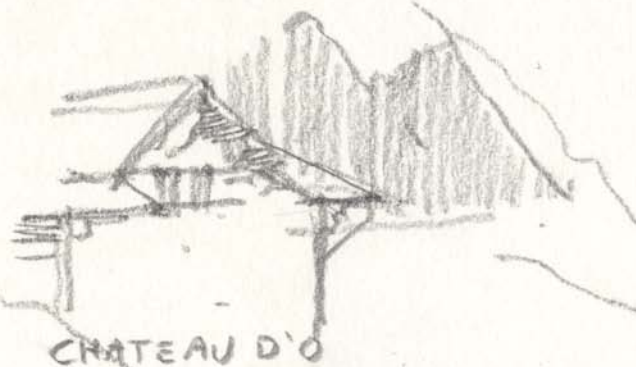
We quickly check out of our hotel and rush outside, running for the bus as it pulls up at the stop. At Montreux station we are back on schedule, and enjoy the Golden Pass Express ride through the mountains to Interlaken.



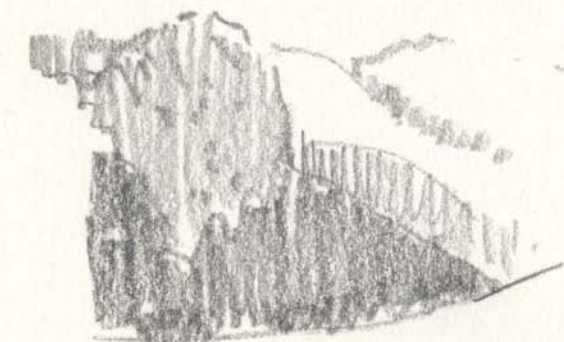
TREE SHADOWS



MONTBONN



CHATEAU D'O



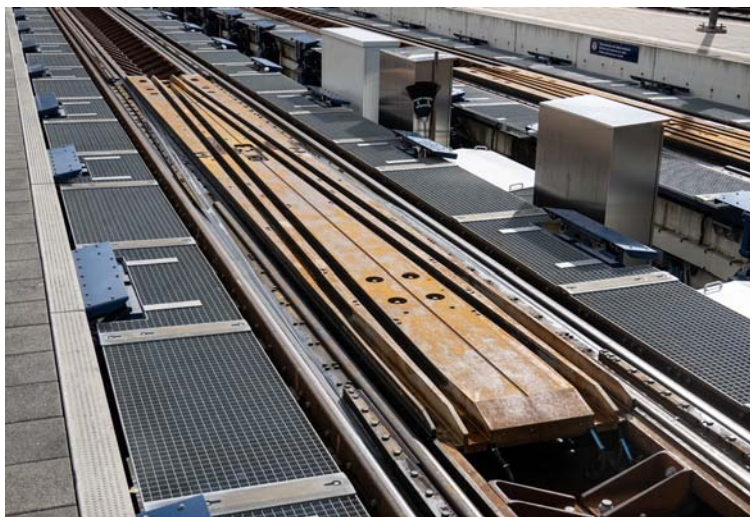
LIMESTONE FOREST SNOWFIELD PASTURE



Eglise St. Nicholas, Rougemont



There is a change of track gauge from narrow to standard at Zweisimmen. The Swiss railways have a process for making the process automatic but the locomotives have to be changed as their gauge can't be adjusted. We quickly lose the blue metre gauge electric from the front, in exchange for a green standard gauge which buffers up at the back, ready to propel us onwards.

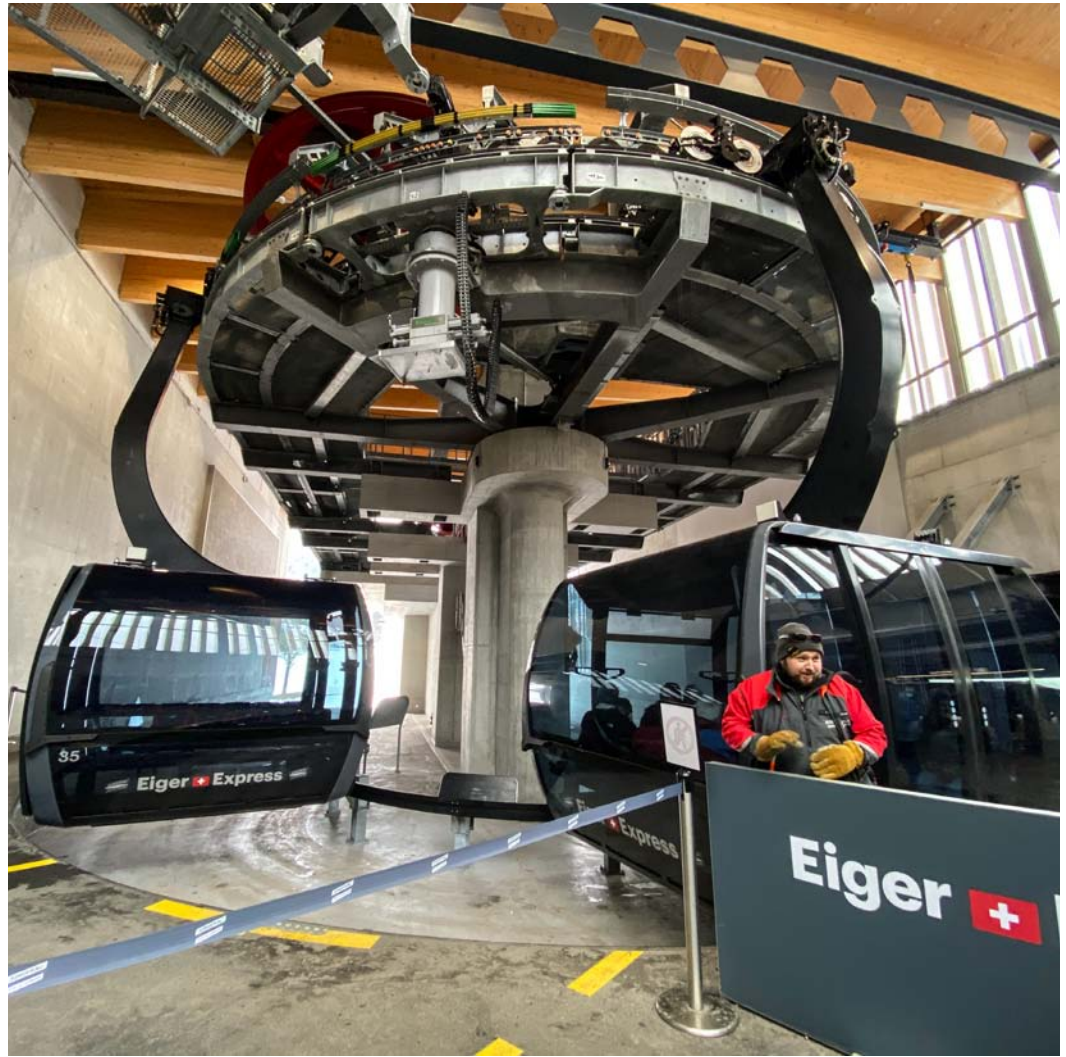


Day 5: Friday 14 March 2025: Jungfraujoch

Switzerland cannot make one thing reliable: the view – the principal reason visitors come.. Today it was a disappointment for those in our party who had not ventured here before.

The Eiger Express cable car was new to us though, and despite the low visibility proved an interesting ride. It whisked us aloft, taking just 15 minutes for the 6.4 km distance between 2 new stations. We were just 1,800 metres from the fabled north face of the Eiger, but could not see it for cloud.

The sub-zero temperature and falling snow on the terrace of the “Sphinx” was also what we had anticipated – which we enjoyed together with the ice sculptures carved from the inside of the glacier.





*Accumulated snowdrift
against the glass
at Eismeer station
observation point.*



*Pianist Lang Lang's visit
re-imagined in ice*



*Sketching in minus 11
degrees – alpine choughs
keeping watch...*



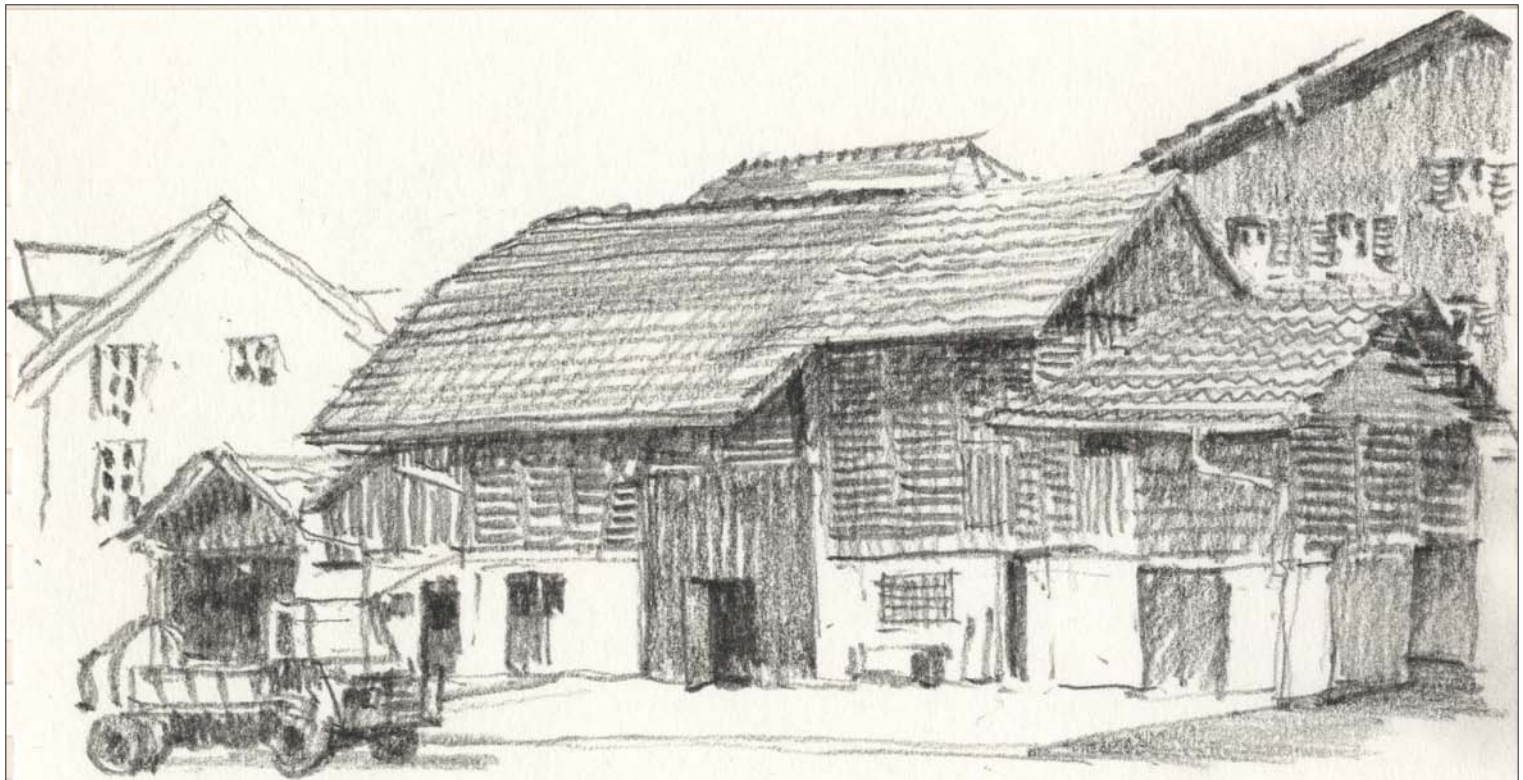
Day 6: Saturday 15 March 2025: Interlaken

A farm building in Unterseen, the old town, still appears to be used as such today. The store or cow byre, (behind the vehicle on my sketch) contained an array of cowbells. The tower of the reform church, built 1471 overlooks what would originally have been a market square. Above the doorway of the nearby Schloss Unterseen is a shield with the bear motif for Bernese region.

Traditional Swiss chalet style and the later Beau Epoch period architecture is found throughout the town.



The bear of Berne



AUF DEM GRABEN, INTERLAKEN UNTERSEEN 150325



Cow bells in a building that now serves as a garage



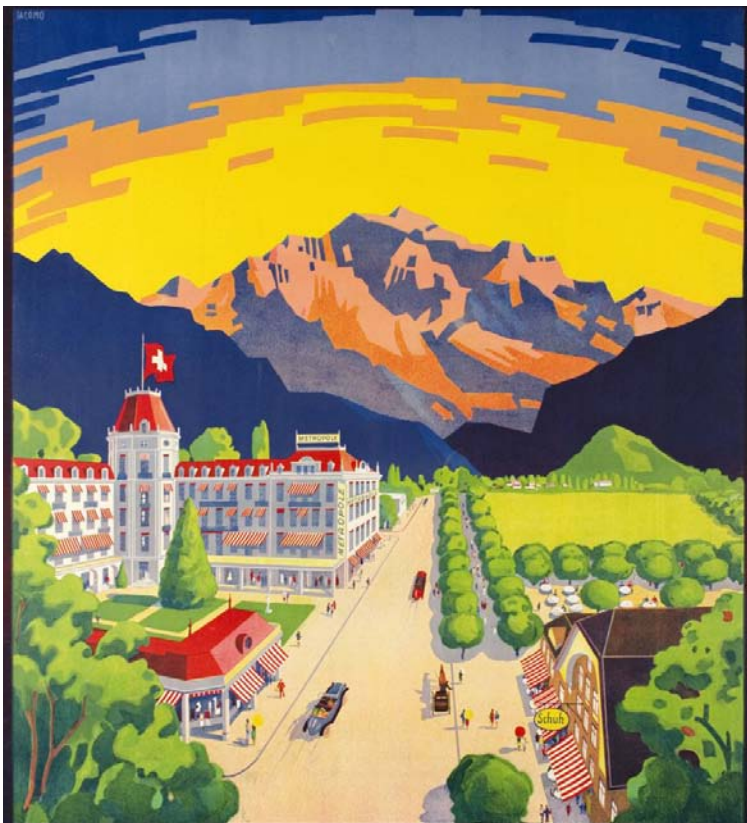


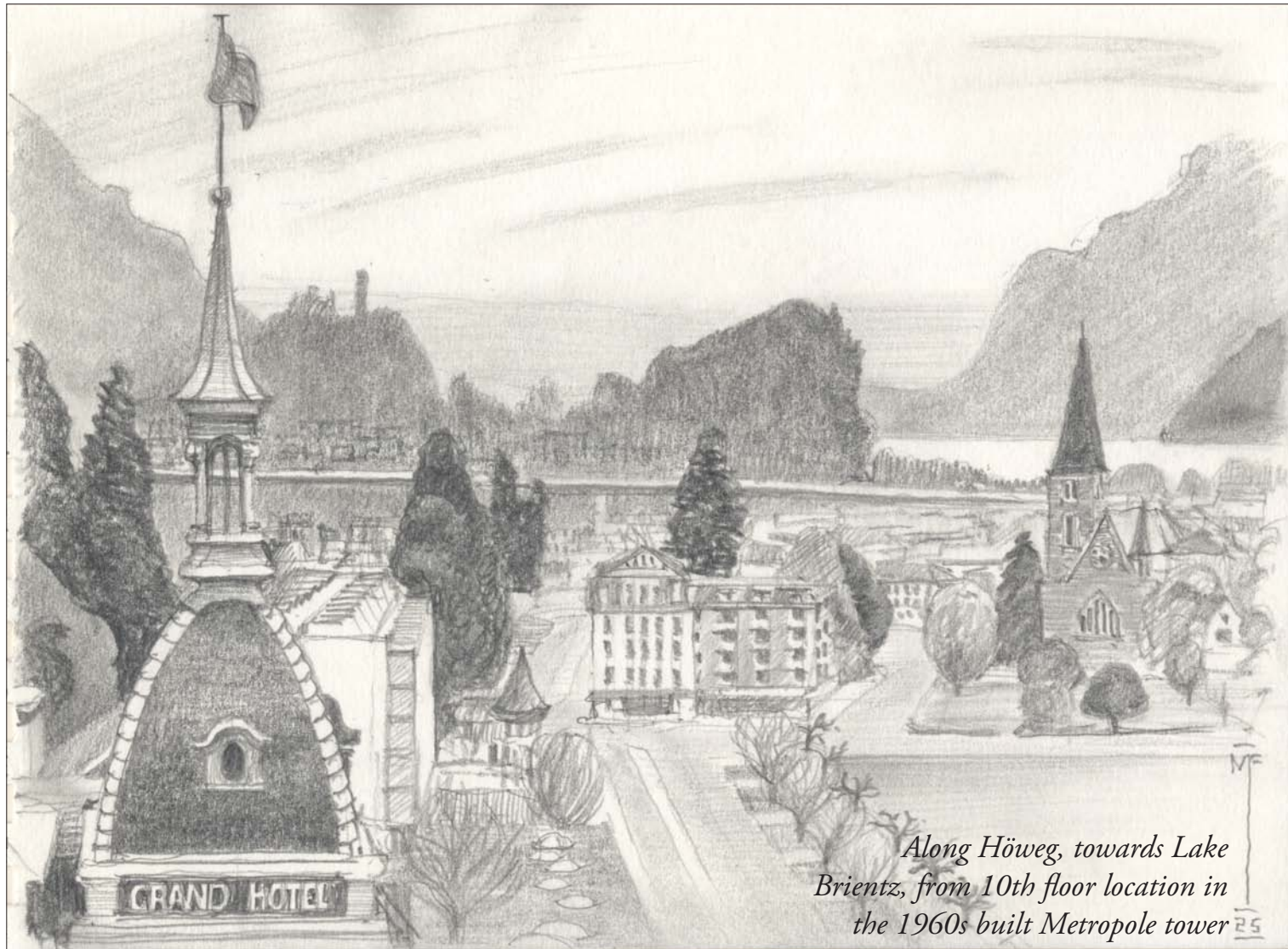
Pilgrims, silk road merchants, travellers on the grand tour, wealthy visitors in the 19th century, mountaineers, adventurers, winter sports enthusiasts – the Tourist Museum in Interlaken tells the story of this crossroads of travel and trade. Though connected to the rest of the world, reaching Interlaken meant an arduous journey.

Parked near a bakery, their delivery van showed a fine example of Swiss graphic design. Though reduced to basic outlines, the shapes are instantly recognisable.

The view I sketched from our room has been used before – virtually – in a circa 1928 travel poster. The artist has taken an imaginary viewpoint from above the street, and appears to have re-positioned the Jungfrau from almost south to almost north east. It has never been visible along Höeweg. Nor any mountain today due to cloud.

As a final celebration of our trip we dined in the Stadthaus (old Town Hall) and choose from a menu of Alpine classics. Now a hotel, hospitality was first enjoyed here by visitors in the 18th century, and was visited by Felix Mendelssohn. It was rebuilt to its current form in 1818. Image courtesy of a purloined beer mat.





*Along Höweg, towards Lake
Brientz, from 10th floor location in
the 1960s built Metropole tower* 25



Stadthaus, cheers...



Day 7: Sunday 15 March 2025: Thun

An early start for the 08.32 train along the shore of lake Thun to the eponymous town. Famed for its landmark Schloss (castle) we had no trouble spotting it high on its defensive hill. We had much less bother scaling the heights as ancient invaders would have had – the Swiss have obligingly installed a lift! Less so entering the keep itself, as we early birds were there before visitor opening time. Rather than lay siege to it, and having a boat connection coming up, we contented ourselves with skirting the courtyard and churchyard on foot, then descended via a covered staircase.







From Kirchtrappe

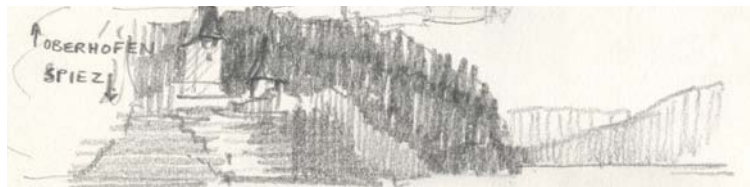


Müleschieuse, Thun



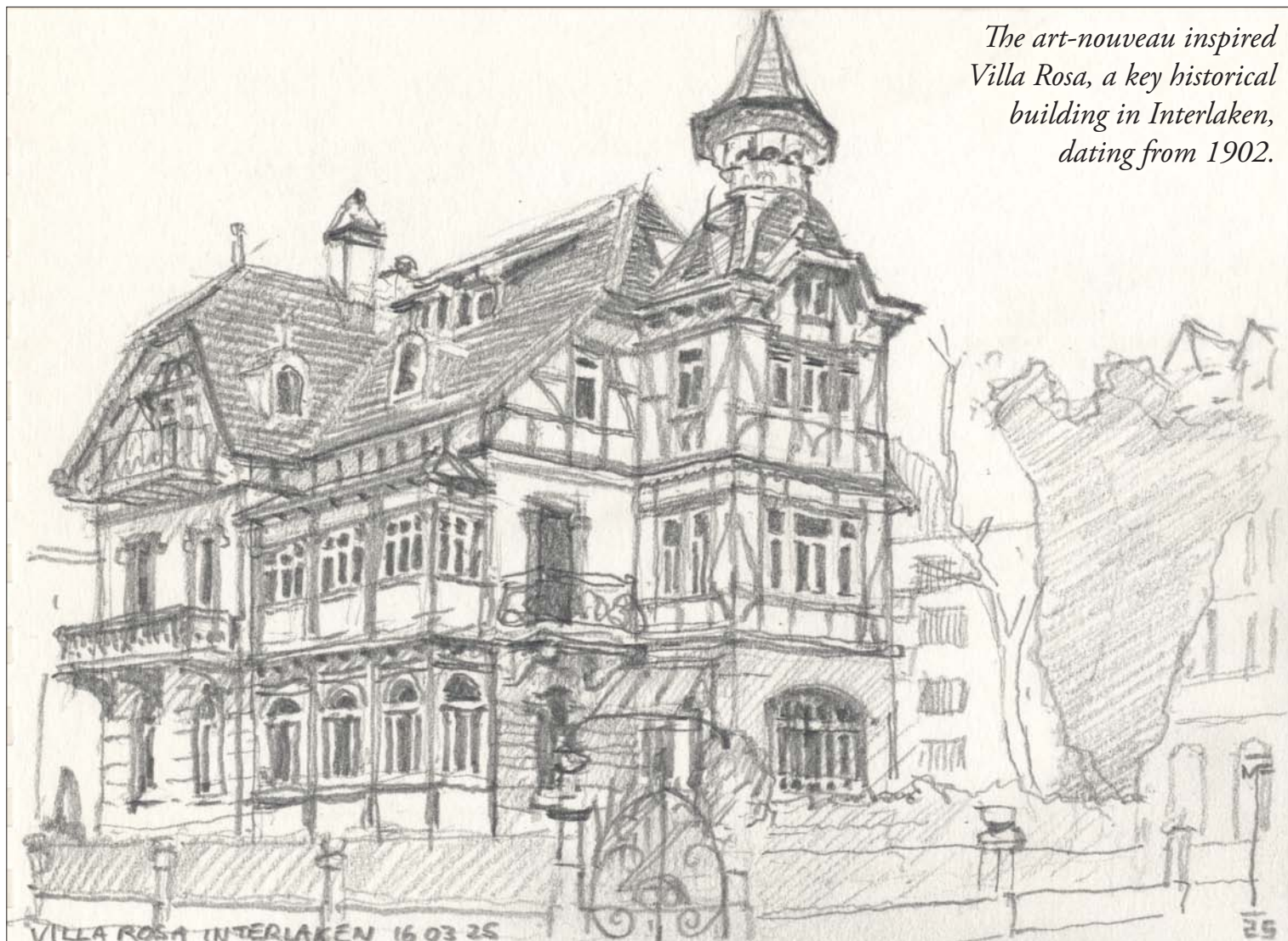


Kirchtreppen, Thun



We headed for the quay in time for our cruise back to Interlaken. Once on the boat, confusion took hold as the only seats inside turned out to be at restaurant tables. The staff insisted we move, but they had reckoned without the negotiating powers of Brian, our tour leader, who soon scotched any pretensions they might have had about us all not being entitled to a comfortable trip. Re-taking our seats, I discovered a full lunch menu on the table but no bar or snacks tariff. So having breakfasted well, we sailed without further sustenance, only to notice when we landed that snacks were on display, and presumably for sale.

The views were charming, and would have been more so if the cloud had lifted. Castles, spires, old towns and exclusive resorts and comfortable chalets as well as signs of industry and mineral workings lined both shores. We put alongside at several jetties, and arrived back in Interlaken some 2 hours later.



The art-nouveau inspired Villa Rosa, a key historical building in Interlaken, dating from 1902.

Day 7: Monday 16 March 2025: Interlaken to London

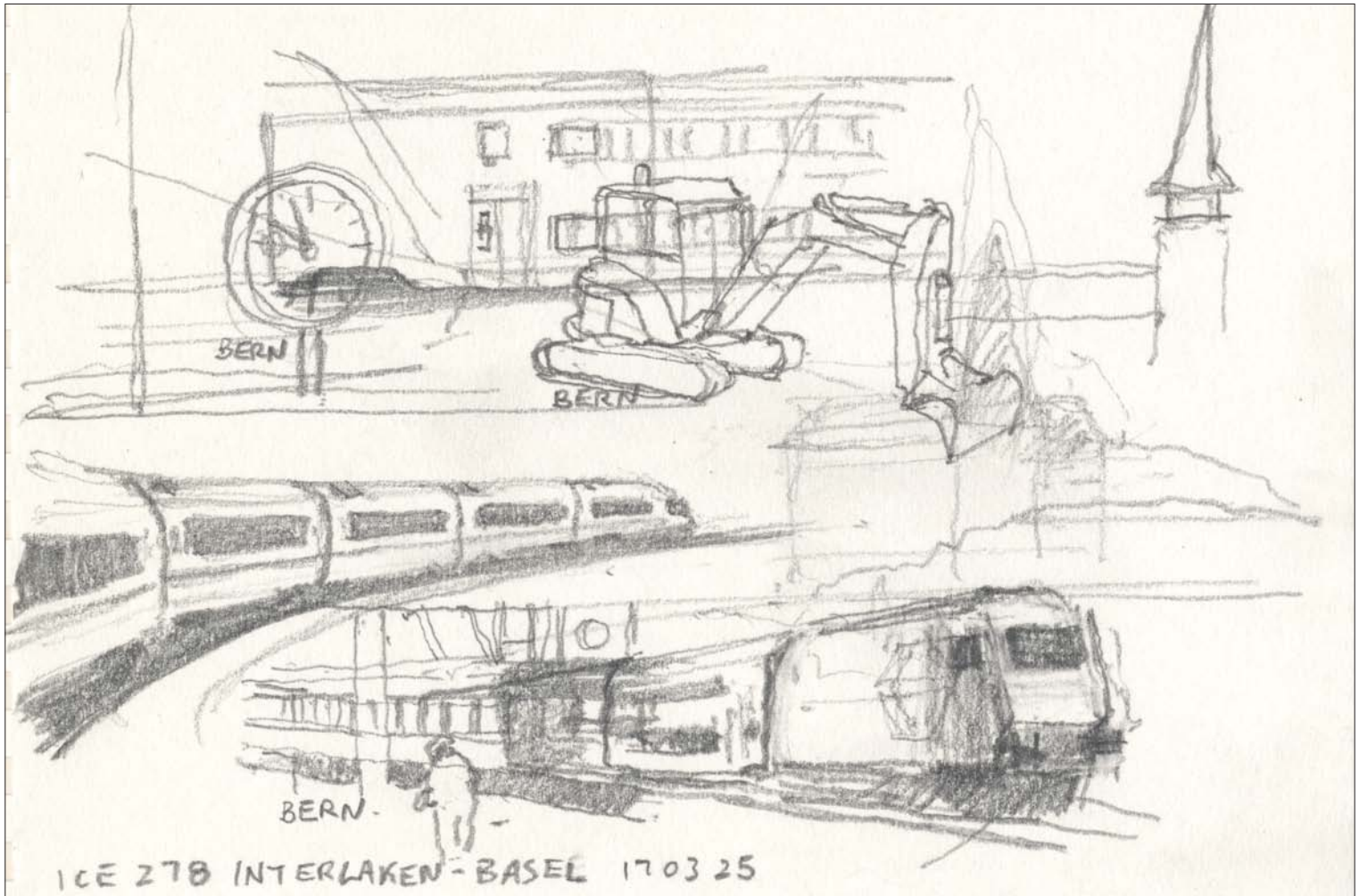
We board the 10.04 ICE (German InterCity Express) at Interlaken West, changing at Basel, Strasbourg and Paris. We ease past Lake Thun, glimpse the galleon of the castle at Thun, then the landscape seems to exhale and the mountains diminish to hills.

At Bern we stop alongside contractors rebuilding a platform, and have a surgical-reminiscent scaffolded view of the innards of an escalator installation. At Basel we seek the watery sunshine to abate the chill of the wind as we await our SNCF connection to Strasbourg. We're in first class, and our 1980s vintage carriage has seats soft as feather mattresses, velvet trimmed and at the end of the vestibule, separate male and female toilets.

At Strasbourg we snatch a moment to witness the feeling of being inside the enormous glazed



"It's the one after this": awaiting the ICE at Interlaken





“bubble” that envelops the entire façade of the station building. Then it is all speed and flatness as we zip to Paris, arriving at Gare de l’Est.

As the day has progressed, so has the quality of the weather and we are now in glorious afternoon sunshine as we dodge traffic on the short walk to Gare du Nord. The only hiccup of the journey occurs here when caught by the baffling, arcane, user-unfriendly and counter-intuitive process of going through the automatic passport gates. Our own journey continues to Derby, and with our goodbye’s said, we’re almost home.

To Switzerland – March 2025



