

Notes From Europe: Back at Oma's Home

I'm writing today from the terrace overlooking my mother-in-law's well tended garden. It bursts with blossoms of every color and the stone path leads to vegetable beds that, with care and nurturing, have produced an abundance of goodness for over fifty-five years. At the moment, the tomatoes hang heavy on their vines and the salad all begs to be picked. Like many parts of the world, spring came earlier this year and now at the start of August, daytime temperatures soar well above the norm. Everything in the garden has reached its peak at the same time making for bountiful meals but leaving little left to enjoy for the rest of the month.

After ten summers of settling ourselves into Joachim's childhood home we have a well established pattern. Days are structured around a morning swim and an evening walk in the forest. The hours in between seem to be absorbed by meal planning, meal prep, meal enjoyment, and meal clean-up. Clearly there is a lot of eating, but rest assured all of our meals are plant based, seasonal, and mostly direct from the garden.

In past years I would say that this is when we embrace slow living, however, having had a month in the Pyrenees on top of a mountain, even this easy going schedule seems fast. No doubt in another day or two we will adjust and appreciate soaking up the rich time with family in the area and Marianne.

As I transition into family time, I will take a pause from these weekly posts returning the week of August 20th to share my experiences teaching in Cluj, Romania.

Keep up however with my daily happenings @LaurenHubele on Instagram.

Vegan Zucchini Fritters

This is a handy recipe to have around when there happens to be a few assorted vegetables but not enough of anything to make a full meal. These fritters have become a family favorite for sure and there is never a leftover in sight. That was even true today when we doubled the recipe in an attempt to use up more veggies from the garden!

Ingredients

4 cups shredded zucchini (about 4 medium-size zucchini) – sub out for any grated vegetable. I like summer squash but root vegetables are also good.

1 and 1/2 cups corn kernels (about 8 ounces) – fresh or frozen

3/4 cup finely chopped green onions (about 6 green onions)

1 finely chopped sweet pepper

1 and 1/4 cup chickpea flour

2 heaping teaspoons of your choice of italian seasoning, herbs provence, or garam masala

salt & pepper to taste

Directions

1. Grate zucchini, lightly salt and let sit in a colander to drain excess water while you prep the rest of the ingredients

2. Chop green onions and sweet pepper

3. Combine corn, green onions, chickpea flour, garlic, cumin,

oregano, thyme, salt & pepper in large mixing bowl.

4. Press zucchini into sieve to remove last bit of water and add to the veggie and flour mixture.

5. Stir together until well combined. Allow to sit for at least 5 minutes. This step is important because the flour will absorb the moisture from the zucchini and create a batter.

6. Add water a TBL at a time if needed.

7. Warm a large non-stick skillet over medium heat.

8. Add coconut oil or sunflower oil for cooking oil. When oil is hot drop large TBL of mixture into the pan. After 3-4 mins flip and cook the remaining side.

Seve these after a large green salad with your choice of this herbed cashew cream or possibly this tomato chutney (replacing the brown sugar with maple syrup to taste). Both are equally delicious!

The People You Might Meet

The retreat I led early on this month was held at La Maison du' Cedre owned by **Jean and Marie**. Over the course of my days on their property I came to appreciate the beautiful gardens of their place as well as the warmth and hospitality the couple exude. Seeing copies of their books I grew quite interested in the work they did as practitioners. When we ran into them days later at the Lavelanet market, they invited us to spend a morning with them. It was then we learned of their years of travel around the world teaching the ancient Hawaiian spirituality of Ho'oponopono. This practice of reconciliation and forgiveness has been passed down by indigenous Hawaiian

Healers throughout the South Pacific.

As passionate teachers, authors, and therapists, Jean and Marie are a fascinating couple. A year ago last spring, having the desire to create a space for their clients to spend some days of rest along with therapy, they bought La Maison. As with any endeavor of that magnitude they have put in a great deal of hard work to create a space that aligned with their vision. They are a remarkable example of how a couple can manifest a dream. However, they were quite open about the fact that the outcome has yet to meet their expectations. They shared that they have been warmly received as a couple by the community and claim to have met more people in their year in Lavelanet than in ten elsewhere. Yet professionally, the concept they created has not taken off. Open to how they are to share their gifts they contemplate other uses for La Maison as well as relocating to their home in Avila, Spain the hometown of Marie.

Muhammad and I actually met last summer when my family ventured out to the Mirepoix market. Needless to say I was overjoyed to see him again this year in Lavelanet. He and his engaging teenage daughters run a bustling market booth with the most exquisite vegan Syrian food. Yes, I will admit, it was my stomach that served as my first guide. It was nearly lunchtime the day we first met and would be several hours before I could prepare my fresh finds from the market. We chatted politely as I tested their freshly made falafels and walked away munching on a small bag full. With four hungry munchers in my group the bag was empty in moments which was a very good thing. I was then prompted to turn back and learn more about Muhammad and his family. Of course last summer the migration of Syrian refugees to Europe was at its and their story was of particular interest.

Muhammad shared with me their journey that had actually begun in 2016 leading them first to Germany and finally to the Ariège region of France. He and his wife Mona traveled with

five children in order to protect them from the peril that fell on so many Syrians. They fled like thousands of others with aching hearts, not only to leave their homeland but also the heart wrenching unknown fate of their oldest son. It is now five years since they have any word from him. With tears in his eyes Muhammad reminded me he is not alone in his pain. And for him, while it does not lessen the impact, he has others that share his experience. He is happy to have found safety for 6 of 7 of his family members and has built a business to sustain them and formed a community of support in Foix. Muhammad is not living his dream but he is finding his way given the circumstances of his life. He finds joy in his daily life through time with wife and children and when he is not preparing the most delicious Syrian food, he is a potter, his trade in Syria.

Twenty years ago **Michel** set out to create a setting to fuel his passion for herbal studies. Restoring an ancient farmhouse and creating gardens of medicinal herbs was just the start. To make use of his knowledge and the harvest of plants he soon created his own drying system and distillery. Then, to allow others to experience and learn from him, an eclectic set of accommodations were added one by one. I wish I could say my favorite, but each has a unique charm and mystique. There is a gorgeous Mongolian yurt, truly authentic as Michel had it shipped home after one of his excursions, a gypsy caravan so kitted out I think my rustic phobic daughter might even consider a night there, a large stone gite with dormitory style bedrooms and get this – a perfect replica of a Russian log constructed sauna. The energy required to bring this purposeful vision to life permeates the land and it is impossible not to be inspired by his creative ingenuity. A recognized expert in his field, Michel established the way in which he wants to live and then found the means to support himself through his teachings and boutique quality products. Michel and his wife along with their assistant prepare a remarkable selection of creams, balms, tinctures, and extracts

from local plants and those he collects from his annual excursions abroad. They have also extended their work and life to Morocco where they have a second home in the Atlas mountains. Michel spends each April living in the Berber region teaching herbalism and continuing his own studies of desert plants and their properties.

Francois and her boyfriend Bruno bought land and a small house in La Coume just over a year ago. They set out to be self sustaining by raising sheep and learning the art of permaculture. I met Francois when she delivered a sample harvest of herbs and vegetables from their 1 acre test garden. Seeing my interest, she offered an open invitation to come pick what we could use in the weeks ahead. When I arrived the next evening looking for more of that picture perfect lettuce she had shared, Francois and her boyfriend offered to give me a tour. This being only their second growing season they explained they were still in the learning stage and had planted a menagerie of all they knew was possible to grow in the region. Like all organic gardeners, they shared that there are still many lessons ahead particularly when it comes to protecting their plants from pests. They saw this as a period of trial and error and sometimes felt they had more error than success. What I witnessed certainly looked like success to me as I looked up and down the bountiful and well cared for rows. There before me were flourishing rows of fava beans, green beans, celery, potatoes, multiple varieties of lettuce, basil, parsley, nasturtiums, and more zucchini than I had ever seen and a greenhouse bursting with towering tomato plants. I could not help but marvel at their ingenuity and determination to live the life they desired and to find a means to make it sustainable.

Paulette, 72, still lives in the family home where she was born in La Coume. She is a voracious gardener tending her collection of potatoes, herbs and flowers rain or shine. Paulette still carefully washes her clothing in the water

source just outside her door and hangs it dry like a still life painting from former times. The laundry display however was replaced each day that France played in the world cup, and in its place was a gigantic French flag hung with pride. Paulette loves her country and Ariège as much as she loves her gardening. She confirmed she must see local sights yet shared that her personal favorite is the view right out her own window that opens to the mountains. She tells me that in her youth the mountains we see were not the dense forests of today. Instead, they were covered in grassy meadows that she had to cut herself with a sickle in her youth at the end of each summer. The grasses were then dried in the sun and rolled up to feed the sheep over the long winter. The fact that Paulette consciously sets aside time each evening to open wide her shutters, observe the setting sun and give gratitude for another day tells me so much about this woman. She exudes a positive spirit and finds joy in her simple daily chores and natural surroundings.

This is just a glimpse at those that have enriched our month here in the Ariège region of the Pyrenees. The people and the accessibility to nature in its purest state will have us returning again and again. This month has served as a successful experiment for Joachim and I. We set out to test whether we could keep up with our professional commitments and at the same time consciously slow our daily pace and simplify our life. The time change allowed for us to flip our work days providing a natural space each morning breakfast on the terrace and venture off for a hike in the forest, a trip to the nearby waterfalls, or on Fridays a trip to the Lavelant Market. This ability to create spaciousness at the start of our day fed our work hours that began after lunch and continued until 9 PM. We feel so fortunate to be at a place in our lives to give this a try and at the same time have taken conscious steps to make it a possibility. While these final days are a bit bittersweet, we will depart with such gratitude for each daily experience.

Our son Sebastian is headed our way now to join us and at the end of the week we pack up and head out for three weeks of family time in Ohringen Germany. Join me next week and I will share a bit about our life in Ohringen.

Keep up on my daily experiences by following **@LaurenHubele** on Instagram. You'll also find all of my photos at **#Notesfromeurope2018**.

Creamy Lemon Zucchini Soup

It happens to be every gardener's dilemma this time of year – what to do with all the zucchini? It's impossible to have too many recipes for zucchini. Apparently it is an international problem as well because our neighbors down the road gifted us with a basket full last Sunday morning. Moments later, a summer storm rolled across our mountain top and rain and soup just happen to be a favorite combination of mine. With a little improv from spices I had on hand those humble zucchini turned into a beautiful warming lunch in no time. Now you can try it for yourself.

Ingredients

- 3 large organic zucchini or summer squash, cut into small pieces
- 3-4 Yukon gold potatoes large potato, cut into small pieces
- 2 medium sized carrots, cut in small pieces
- 1 yellow sweet pepper, diced
- 4-5 shallot,s peeled and diced

- 2 TBL olive or coconut oil
- 2 cubes of organic vegetable bouillon
- 1-2 TBL of fines herb mix (parsley, chives, chervil and tarragon)
- 1-2 TBL Ras el hanout spice mix
- A pinch or so of red pepper flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 cup of nut milk- I used coconut but cashew or almond would work well
- Juice of one lemon
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Heat oil in bottom of heavy stock pot over medium heat. Add shallots and reduce to low, saute slowly being careful not to burn. Add pepper flakes and sweet pepper and herb and spice mixes. When sweet pepper has softened add all of the vegetables. Stir and coat well with oil and seasonings.

Add bouillon cubes and enough water to cover all ingredients. Simmer until vegetables are quite tender. Add nut milks and blend with immersion blender to desired consistency, adding more water or milk as needed and lemon juice. Adjust seasonings and serve!

My Version of France

When I share with fellow Americans that I am spending a month

in France I can only imagine what must come to mind. Images of bustling outdoor cafes, rich meals, baguettes, pastries, exquisite cheeses, shopping and yes some of the best wines in the world. While there is nothing wrong with this part of French culture, if you know me at all, you can guess that this would not be my French experience, □ There was a time, twenty five years ago, when that list served as my guide. I sought out all of the above in addition to the best café au lait and of course meringues! However, since I am now living a different chapter of my life, I have different priorities.

To be clear, France has not changed. You can rest assured all of that and more is still readily available. What has changed however, is my discovery that there is so much beyond. There exists a completely different set of sensory pleasures that I could only appreciate as I began to change myself. Once I learned to embrace simplicity and become comfortable with quiet and solitude; noise, crowds, and stimulation were no longer appealing and my eyes were able to focus on what lie just beyond.

The Villages

In my humble opinion, the best flavors of France can be found when you depart from the cities and make your way to village life in the countryside. Here you will feel your heart rate slow and begin to take notice of your surroundings. You'll smell the scent of honeysuckle in full bloom that covers the iron gate to the cemetery; see the grandmother who still washes her clothing at the water source and hangs it out to dry; watch the child who has been sent for morning bread at the boulangerie; marvel at the unbelievably teeny delivery trucks designed to maneuver the narrow roads; hear the old men who have gathered at the cafe to discuss their view of the latest news and long to pick from the mirabellen trees heavy with fruit along the edge of the main road. All of that and the village cats who steal my heart as they sun themselves on

the rock walls. My list could go on and on, each addition enriching the layers of character that blend to create the village experience.

The Beauty

Then, there is the accessibility to natural beauty that one can experience without lines, crowds, or an entrance fee. A highly accessible network of walking paths wind through the countryside connecting villages and offering the opportunity to enjoy impeccably protected areas of pure natural beauty. There's nothing like sitting on moss covered stones and dipping your feet into a rushing mountain stream to remind you of what is real and important. This summer I've grown to treasure the morning mist that rolls over the peaks after sunrise as well as the steam that rises from the forest after a summer downpour.

While there is not a museum of masterpieces for miles, there is the everyday art of slow living which is accessible to all who care to witness and partake. Whether we speak of the flatland villages of Alsace, those along the rugged coast of Brittany, or high up in the Pyrenees mountains, it is the village concept and community that brings me back to France.

I am so grateful to have the privilege of this time in France and equally grateful that I am able to share it with you. Thank you. And now I'm already looking forward to sharing next week's note in which I introduce you to some of the lovely individuals who have enriched my time here this summer.

If you'd like to catch a glimpse of my everyday adventures be sure to follow me on Instagram @LaurenHubele.

Herbed Polenta

I love to work with recipes that are easily modified and polenta certainly fits in that category. This particular version can be eaten creamy almost porridge like or firm and cut into slices. Even the slices themselves can be served as is, pan roasted in a small amount of olive oil, grilled briefly on a bbq or under an oven broiler. As you can see, there are plenty of options to choose from and you will want to select a version that best fits the accompanying dish.

It's a bright sunny day in the Midi Pyrenees and after yesterday's trip to the market I have made my Aubergine dish once again. It has sat overnight in the fridge allowing the flavors to meld waiting for our midday meal. To compliment it I will make the polenta firm.

Once the polenta has cooked on the stove I will pour it into a well oiled loaf pan and let completely cool. Just before serving I will slice it, place the slices on a parchment lined baking sheet, brush with a bit of olive oil, and let it sit on the middle rack under the preheated broiler until crispy edges begin to form. You'll find below what you need to get started.

Ingredients

For a dense polenta that can be formed and sliced:

3 cup water

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plant based milk, I prefer cashew milk because it is the most creamy

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt OR 1 to $\frac{1}{2}$ cube of veggie bouillon to taste

2 cup coarse organic corn grits

For a soft porridge-like polenta:

3 cup water

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup non-dairy milk, I use a mixture of almond and cashew milk in this version

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt OR 1 to $\frac{1}{2}$ cube of veggie bouillon to taste
1 cup coarse organic corn grits

For both versions you want to use a good handful or two of chopped fresh herbs from the garden or a few tablespoons of the similar herbs dried. Consider any combination of the following: Basil, Chervil, Chives, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Thyme.

Preparation

1. Place a heavy pot over a high heat and pour in all the water and the milk. Add in the salt or bouillon cube, stirring to dissolve.

2. Once the liquid reaches the boiling point, pour the corn grits into the liquid in a steady stream, whisking to prevent it from clumping.

3. As soon as the polenta thickens a bit, stop whisking, lower the heat to the absolute minimum and cover the pan with the lid.

4. Leave the polenta to cook over the lowest heat for 5-10 minutes.

5. Once the time has elapsed, remove the lid and stir the polenta vigorously with whisk or wooden spoon making sure to scrape the entire surface of the pan. Then, place the lid back on and cook for another 5-10 minutes.

6. You want to repeat this process 3-4 times, for a total cooking time of 30-40 minutes.

7. Now remove the lid and add the fresh or dried herbs stirring well to integrate.

Adapted from The Vegan Corner.

Enjoy!!!

A Gemmotherapy Immersion Retreat in the Pyrenees

As I entered the gated entrance to La Maison du Cedre, I sensed an unfamiliar apprehension. While I normally embrace new teaching experiences, this would be my first time teaching in France. Questions swirled within me of what and who might lie ahead. Before these seeds of doubt could take their grip I came across a small gathering of women. I soon realized that these were some of the very women who would be forming our retreat community for the next 6 days. The warmth and kindness generated by the open hearts I encountered touched me deeply. At that moment, any anticipatory anxiety about the days ahead melted away, leaving no room left for fear.

Entering the hallway of the wooden shuttered building, I was greeted individually by each woman. However, it didn't take long to spot the one brave male participant who failed at appearing inconspicuous in this all female crowd. Inviting them into our meeting room they each found a place in seats that had been carefully arranged into an intimate circle.

As I gazed into the expectant faces I knew I was exactly where I belonged at that moment in time. It was clear to me that the learning to take place would expand well beyond any lessons I had prepared. While each had signed up for a professional growth opportunity we together would take a journey leading us to deepen both spiritually and emotionally.

It was a year ago last July that Stephane Boistard and I cautiously approached an idea of collaboration. We sat on my sundrenched terrace in Ilhat, just 10 minutes up the road from our current location. The idea was a bold one as we had only just met in person and our approach was vastly different. Yet,

there was something there that we both spotted, an opportunity to blend our styles to deliver a unique experience.

As lives will do, each of ours took interesting turns in the months that followed. It was February before we could make a final commitment for a summer retreat. But here we were and the reality of it all set in as introductions began. I soon discovered just who those generous warm souls who greeted me belonged to. To save all of us in this dual language setting was my translator for the week, a Japanese acupuncturist and herbalist from Brittany, joining her was a naturopath from Toulouse, a dietician and herbalist from Belgium, a singer and choral conductor from central France, a psychologist from the Basque region, an energy healer and bud harvester from the southwest coast, a professor of chemical engineering and bud harvester from Lille, a midwife from Brittany and another naturopath and a student of naturopathy from central France. Each of these courageous beings said yes to a deeper dive into the study of Gemmotherapy and to discover a holistic approach to restoring immunity.

I was sure to present materials that would bump up against their belief systems as well as ideas that resonated deeply with their own truth. Their feedback and sharing would do the same for me, giving us all exactly the blend of experiences that would push us to grow.

Each and every day held important lessons for me. I find it so humbling to witness the boundaries of what I believed to be my own limitations crumble. Each and every retreat I lead is just another reminder to step out of the way of Divine order. I may hold the responsibility for setting the agenda, but the way it plays out is precisely what was meant to be. At no time have I seen this so well defined as this week.

When we began to find we were too much in our heads, Stephane was readily available, creating opportunities for us to connect with nature. Whether we spent short breaks with the

trees in the garden of La Maison du Cedre, searched for the ancient stone meditation huts in Roquefixade, or waded in the crystal clear pools above the cascades at Montseguer it was always exactly what was needed. The blending of his unschooled approach, my experiential offerings, and wholesome plant based meals together in the garden produced a harmony we could not have planned.

Now we have bid our farewells, yet the chords we have formed run deep. I am forever grateful for this opportunity and sense that this is not the end but the beginning of something beautiful to come.

Nut and Seed Bread

I've shared this simple and satisfying gluten free bread recipe in a previous blog post. However, it absolutely deserves a place of honor on it's own. What I love so much about this recipe is how easily it can be modified, mixed together in a flash, and is so delish! All the nuts and seeds are interchangeable and the oats can be subbed out for Buckwheat flour, Quinoa or Millet Flakes.

Now that my retreat has come to a close I look forward to experimenting with the wide variety of gluten free and grain free flours available locally in Lavelanet. You'll want to follow me @laurenhubele on Instagram where I will share my results. With our flipped work schedule here in France due to the 7+/- hour time difference we have taken to eating a cold evening meal. A slice or two of this bread with a large salad perfectly fits our needs.

Recipe

To begin the bread making, you will need a kitchen scale set for metric measurement, a container marked for liquid metric measurement, a large bowl for mixing, and a 10" x 5" bread pan. Alternatively you can shape the dough into a round loaf by hand.

Dry Ingredients

Combine all in large bowl:

300g gluten free organic oats

270g mixed raw, unsalted sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and sesame seeds (all organic)

180g ground organic flax

130g ground nuts (hazel, walnuts, or almonds)

4 Tbl chia seeds

8 Tbl psyllium husks

3 Tbl sea salt

Liquid Ingredients

Combine and then pour over dry mixture:

2 Tbl maple syrup or honey

6 Tbl melted coconut oil

700 ml filtered water

Instructions:

1. Blend with hands until all dry ingredients are moist.
2. Press all the dough into a 10 x 5 inch bread pan which it will fill completely, cover with a cloth, and let stand on counter for minimum of 6 hours or overnight.
3. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bake for 45 mins.
4. Very gently remove the loaf from the pan and place on preheated baking stone or cookie sheet. (Consider leaving loaf on it's side to prevent it from breaking.)
5. Continue to bake for another 45 mins.

This loaf must cool completely to slice! I find it helpful to turn off the oven, leaving the loaf inside to cool by itself. It can store in the fridge for up to one week or frozen into single slices. You won't want to miss the experience of toasting a few slices and topping it with ripe avocado and a slice or two of ripe tomatoes.

Enjoy!

Aubergine, Tomatoes, and Mushrooms

This is my go to summer dish when eggplant is at it's peak, everyone is hungry, and dinner needs to appear with the wave of my magic wand. From start to finish this can be on the table in 40 minutes or left to simmer longer if you desire.

Ingredients

2 medium sized eggplant (select only those with shiny skins that are firm to touch), cut into cubes, salt and put in a wire sieve over a bowl to drain away excess liquid. Blot cubes dry with paper toweling just prior to cooking.

3-4 large garden fresh tomatoes cut into large chunks or two baskets of cherry tomatoes, leave whole or quartered.

1lb of mushrooms sliced

4 shallots, peeled and diced fine

Optional: Finely chopped spinach leaves, fresh or frozen

Olive Oil

Tomato paste, 1-2 tbl

Salt

Pepper

Herbes de Provence, 1-2 tbl

Instructions

Heat a large heavy skillet, add oil, when it has warmed reduce heat to low and saute shallots.

Once shallots are soft and aromatic salt lightly, add mushrooms. Increase heat to medium, saute in open skillet for the first 5 minutes then cover and let mushrooms soften.

Remove mushrooms from heat and set aside in a bowl.

Add more oil to skillet, when it has warmed add cubed eggplant. Saute eggplant in open skillet for 10 minutes. Add chopped tomatoes, Herbs de Provence, reduce heat and cover,

simmering until eggplant is tender.

Return mushrooms to the skillet, add tomato paste and spinach if you choose to do so, and simmer until flavors meld. Season with salt and pepper to taste. I have served this dish over pan roasted gnocchi, gluten free pasta, polenta, quinoa and rice- all were delicious.

This dish is incredibly adaptable to what produce is available. Eggplant can be easily swapped out with zucchini or any summer squash. A variety of mushrooms can be used adding further flavor and texture.

Notes From Europe

Although I had viewed countless times the address of our home for the month of July on Google maps, nothing quite prepared me for the narrow ascending gravel road that lay before us. Yes, I knew that the farmhouse was located just outside the local village on a dead-end road, but this incline was something I clearly missed. Grateful Joachim was at the wheel, I found myself holding my breath as he shifted gears and the tires struggled to maintain traction. In all the details I had investigated, here was one I had somehow ignored. I am the big picture planner in our partnership; he usually attends to the details and this was one we both had missed. The house was of course set at the very top of the hill on a level plain that overlooked the dense forests below. While the view was remarkable, I was immediately thankful to have groceries for the upcoming days, I would be avoiding trips down until I recovered from this shock. So, it seemed, living in the mountains might require me to develop some new skills and overcome a fear or two. Hmmm, another detail.

Having survived that experience and happy to be out of the car after two days of travel we quickly set about the task of settling in. There is something grounding about the blending of our energy with that of the house itself. My next hour or so was filled with my making friends with the kitchen. As important to me as the breathtaking views would be the meals I planned to prepare each day with local produce. I busied myself with unpacking our fresh produce from market shopping on our two day road trip along with the organic staples I bought in Ohringen. Joachim investigated the cookware and appliances at our disposal, rating each on its functionality. With the kitchen well stocked and the tools tested it was not long before I had a simple classic of aubergine, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions and Herbes de Provence simmering on the sleek gas range in the smartly remodeled farmhouse kitchen.

Joachim then took on the task of setting up what would serve as our dining room in the garden for the next four weeks while I pan roasted a packet of ready-made gluten free gnocchi and put together a simple salad of local melons to start. We were both surprised by our ferocious appetites, so it was no surprise there wasn't a bite left. After a quick cleanup an evening walk directly from the house into the forest was all I needed before falling into the deepest most restful sleep we had in months.

I awoke to full on daylight at 7 am on day one of this much anticipated experiment. The question being put to test was whether I can create a life that allows for a balance between the rich busy-ness of family and urban living in Texas and the remote simplicity of time in the Pyrenees Mountains in France? I expect to gain considerable insight these next four weeks with the feasibility of it all revealed. It certainly helps to have a willing partner and one who shares a similar longing to live at a slower pace. I am also fortunate to have children who, if not completely agreeable, certainly cheer us on and humor our endeavor. Because our ideas of rustic simple living

do vary, my daughter Kate was particularly relieved today to learn we had a house with running water.

Today, the primary goal was to allow ourselves the opportunity to come down from the two month long emotional roller coaster of selling our Austin home of ten years and packing it all away in storage until a new house can be built for us in San Marcos. It's amazing how much easier this is accomplished given our setting. Knowing our first work day was just ahead we spent the afternoon creating comfortable workspaces for ourselves. With just a bit of furniture rearranging and out of the box thinking we were able to put together a standing desk for me with a beautiful view of the mountains as well as an outdoor option on the stone terrace that overlooks the garden. I could certainly get used to these options. Joachim claimed the dining room table which we don't expect to be using given our preference to dine outdoors and taking full advantage of the fact that we can.

And not to be forgotten was the fact that I set out to overcome my fear of the crazy steep road that leads to our house. Two times down and one up and I think I've got it. I was even able to breath the last time!

As I look at the days that lay ahead, the word rhythm comes to mind. I see this time as an opportunity to establish one that allows me to live the life I aspire to live. Finding rhythm to our days is quite different than setting a routine. Rhythm allows for the highs and lows, the demands of the day, and the rich moments that feed our soul. What thoughts come to your mind when you think of your daily rhythm? I'll certainly be thinking more in the days ahead about establishing a rhythm that allows for spaciousness and yet productivity. Looking forward to sharing further thoughts and experiences with you next week.

Follow me on Instagram, @Laurenhubele, to keep up with my daily excursions in the Pyrenees.