

*Let prudence fly away when l'Ami Louis's escargots arrive. Photo Steven Richter.*

My guy and I vowed we would avoid the Euro-zone this year. As a chronic penny pincher – regular readers will have noticed? – I'm undone by a wobbling dollar. Buenos Aires last July and Merida in the Yucatan in February made our arthritic currency seem absolutely muscular. But when the two of us were sent E-tickets to join the Franco-American host committee of "Gastronomy on the Seine," our Euro panic began to seem quite manageable, especially housed in a junior suite with terrace at the Powers Hotel in the stylish Eighth Arrondissement next door to Maison du Chocolate. I ate my favorite lunch of our two weeks in Paris on that little terrace, windows thrown open to a cornflower blue sky: Tuna and tomato on a marvelously chewy baguette, with lemon sorbet and chocolate ice cream in cups from a nearby branch of Paul Bakery (salami for Steven, sans mustard...Paul sandwiches can only be bought as is).

I am telling Parisian pals how much we love Paul's crusty, multi-grain baguette. "I know Paul is commercial, but it's so fabulous."

"Kayser is better," I am told.

Next day I buy a Monges baguette (like Paul's, these baguettes come in several flavors) and a chorizo bread from an Eric Kayser boulangerie steps from the tourist frenzy of the Rue du Buci. Okay, Kayser is good, and the chorizo-loaf lasts, perfect for toast with some Pont-l'Évêque cheese two days later. But Paul's baguettes are better. I can tell my Gallic pals about this comparison tasting, but they won't be impressed. My forty years as a restaurant critic is easily trumped by the mere fact they are French.