

Hidden flavours of Paris

Our food experts lead you to the French capital's best steaks, freshest baguettes, its most welcoming bars and secret street markets

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THE SECRET PATISSERIE Gérard Mulot



Jeremy Lee, head chef of London's Blueprint Café and a regular visitor to Paris, tells us where to find the city's most perfect croissants. Jeremy appears on BBC Two's *Great British Menu*, weekdays at 6.30pm until early June.

Gérard Mulot is a splendid patisserie and traiteur in St-Germain. You can't miss it – just look for the white awnings and the imposing tower of macarons in the window – but you'll smell it before you see it. The scent of melted butter wafts down the block. Inside, the first thing that hits you is colour: jewel-bright strawberries on fruit tarts and patisserie boxes in pistachio, lemon and Gérard Mulot's signature pink.

This place does so many things so well that it's hard to single out one. There's an awfully good spinach tart and moreish little quiches, plus *I have*

to pick up a big bag of croissants every time I visit – they're outstanding. I also love the chestnut bows covered in chocolate and the religieuse: two buns of puff pastry filled with crème pâtissière and smothered in coffee icing. Finally, you can gauge a patisserie by its baguette, and Gérard Mulot's is a knockout. I can never wait to eat it, and start tearing off chunks from the street – getting strange looks from the chic clientele in the process.

St-Germain is a very fashionable district, so expect to see Russian princesses and off-duty models. But Gérard Mulot is also a family business that's been here for decades, remaining true to its origins.

Gérard Mulot isn't far from the Jardin du Luxembourg, so you can pick up all you need for a picnic. A sunny day in St-Germain with treats from Gérard Mulot – life doesn't get any better.

FIND OUT MORE

- 76 Rue de Seine, 75006 Paris; gerard-mulot.com
- Spinach tart £20 per kilo; religieuse £3; box of six macarons £8 ►

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE
You'll be greeted by a riot of colour at Gérard Mulot, from the pretty pastel shades of macarons to the rich green of a spinach tart. And don't miss the crisp baguettes – essential ingredients of a Parisian picnic





THE SECRET BAR La Cagnotte de Belleville



Trish Deseine is a food writer and cook (her shows are regularly repeated on the Good Food Channel). Originally from Ireland, she has lived in Paris for 20 years and fell in love with this bar in the city's bohemian heart.

La Cagnotte de Belleville is extremely scruffy but perfectly Parisian. It's just around the corner from my old apartment, so I discovered it when I moved in. In those days the smoking made staying inside unbearable, so I'd sit outside – it has a wonderful terrace, on a corner of Rue de Belleville.

Open from 7am to 2am, La Cagnotte is a true neighbourhood bar. You get workmen grabbing a lightning-quick espresso and mums with prams in the mornings, and artists and musicians with all the time in the world eking out their café au lait, pastis or panaché (shandy) in the day. Then the suits come in and down 'un double' coffee. Later, the crowd gets very hip as people chatter, dream, smoke and drink to loud music – a lot of rock, and The Stones, The Smiths and The Velvet Underground.

Over it all can be heard Charlie's laughter; a huge bark that starts as quickly as it ends. Charlie's the owner, a massive, black-haired, gorgeous man with an impeccable taste in music who knows when to chat and when to simply serve, and remembers how you like your coffee and your wine. I go for the coffee very early and the petit

quincy wine, très frais (very fresh), very late.

My favourite table at night is 'la banquette' by the door (très romantique). By day, I choose a table at the back of the terrace. When I'm up at 7am before a food shoot, I like standing silently at the bar with my noisette (espresso with a dash of cream) and its spoonful of milk mousse that Charlie adds. No food is served, apart from croissants in the morning – but Charlie turns a blind eye if you bring in a sandwich. La Cagnotte is a friendly, almost protective place that's lively right up to, and often after, closing time.

FIND OUT MORE

- 13 Rue Jean-Baptiste Dumay, 75020 Paris
- Café au lait, £2.20 at the bar, £2.60 at a table; petit quincy £3.50

ABOVE Join locals at La Cagnotte de Belleville for a snapshot of life in the Belleville quarter, whether for a quick coffee outside or a lingering beer in the welcoming interior

THE SECRET CHEESE SHOP Fromagerie Trotté



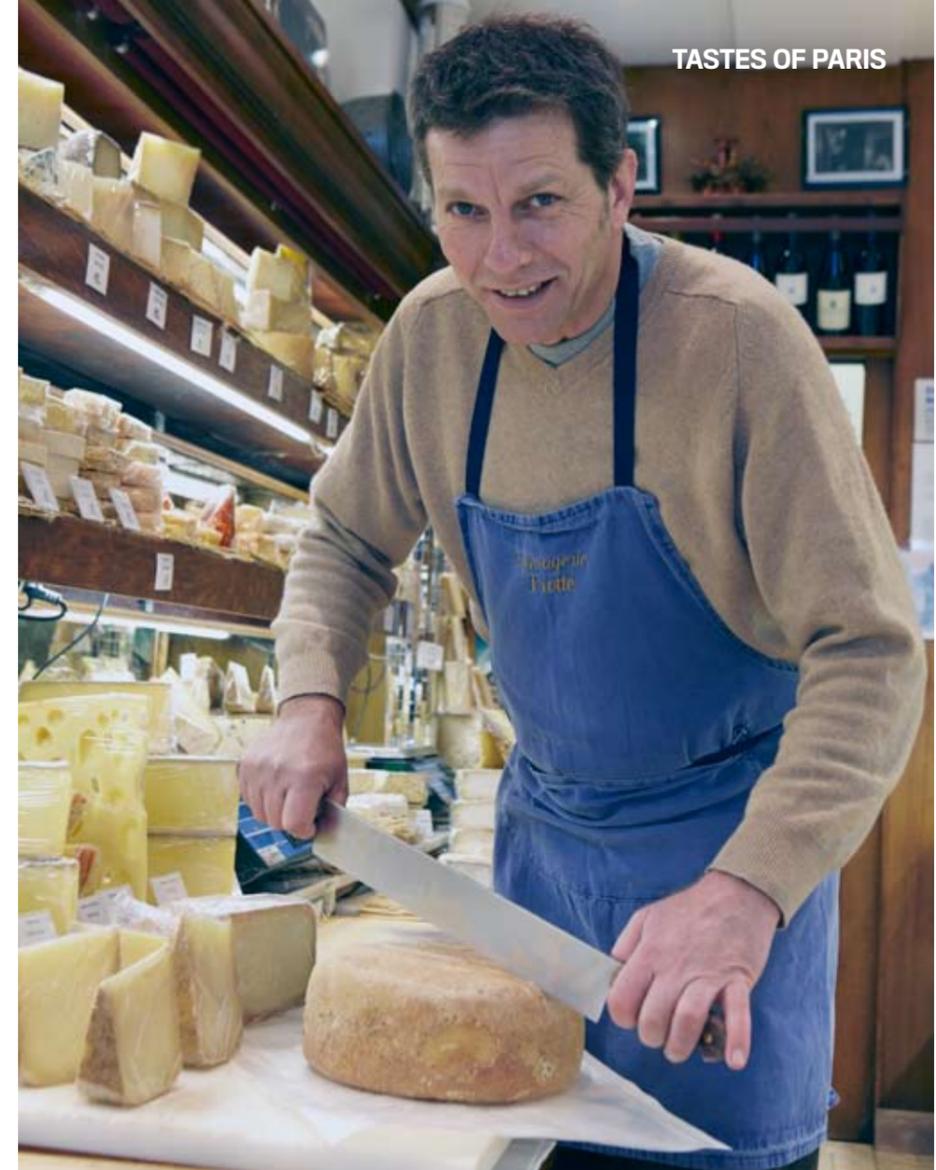
Sheila Dillon, presenter of BBC Radio 4's *The Food Programme* (Sundays at 12.30pm, and repeated on Mondays at 4pm), shares her fondness for this small Paris shop that's big on cheese.

Fromagerie Trotté is a tiny little shop in the Marais. Two people can barely stand side by side in there, but that's part of its quirky charm. The owner, Pascal Trotté, sells a very personal selection of artisan cheeses, stacked on shelves lining both sides of the narrow space. He specialises in goat's cheese – the scent hits you the moment you open the door – and sells varieties I've never seen before. My favourite is the figuette, a small cheese that's white and ridged and looks like a fig. A figuette, a crusty baguette and a ripe peach make for a pretty perfect picnic.

You get lots of locals popping in for a small piece of cheese for lunch, as well as people from much further afield who come because they know about cheese. The shop may be tiny, but there's a cellar on site: Trotté is an expert affineur (a specialist in maturing and ripening). The two men behind the counter can be rather grumpy, but they warm up if you speak a little French, and give excellent advice.

FIND OUT MORE

- 97 Rue St Antoine, 75004 Paris
- Fiquette £2; Poulligny St Pierre £7 ▶



Goat's cheese is the speciality at bijou Fromagerie Trotté, owned by Pascal Trotté (above) – try Banon, a goat's milk cheese wrapped in chestnut leaves, from the Luberon region (far left) and Baratte de chèvre, a goat's milk cheese from the Tarn region (left)



THE SECRET RESTAURANT Benoit



Michel Roux Jr, chef-patron of London restaurant Le Gavroche, trained and worked in Paris. He co-presents BBC Two's *MasterChef: The Professionals* – the new series begins later this year. Here he reveals a century-old Paris brasserie that both he and his father treasure.

I've been eating at Benoit for 25 years. It's an old brasserie in Les Halles, open for nearly a century. My father (Albert Roux) took me there for the first time when I was doing military service in France, and I still remember everything we ate with absolute clarity.

To start I had the most exquisite snails in garlic butter, served in their shell. My father had a pig's head in brawn – the head was just plonked on the table for him to help himself to. The portions and the quality were, and still are, phenomenal. They always slap big hunks of pâté down on the table with the bread. I followed those snails with a huge earthenware pot of cassoulet, while my father had pigeon. The puddings at Benoit are classics (that day we had oeufs à la neige – meringues floating in vanilla custard – and crème brûlée): traditional, yes, but when they're done properly, as they are at Benoit, they're very hard to beat.

In those days the head chef had a massive

moustache that curled up at the ends – the kind you put wax on. In the middle of the evening he'd pop up from the kitchen, pour himself a quick drink then stand behind the bar twirling his moustache while surveying the crowd, seeing how everything was going. It went a little downhill when he left, but it was never anywhere near 'bad', and since it's been taken over by the chef Alain Ducasse's group, Benoit is definitely back to its former glory.

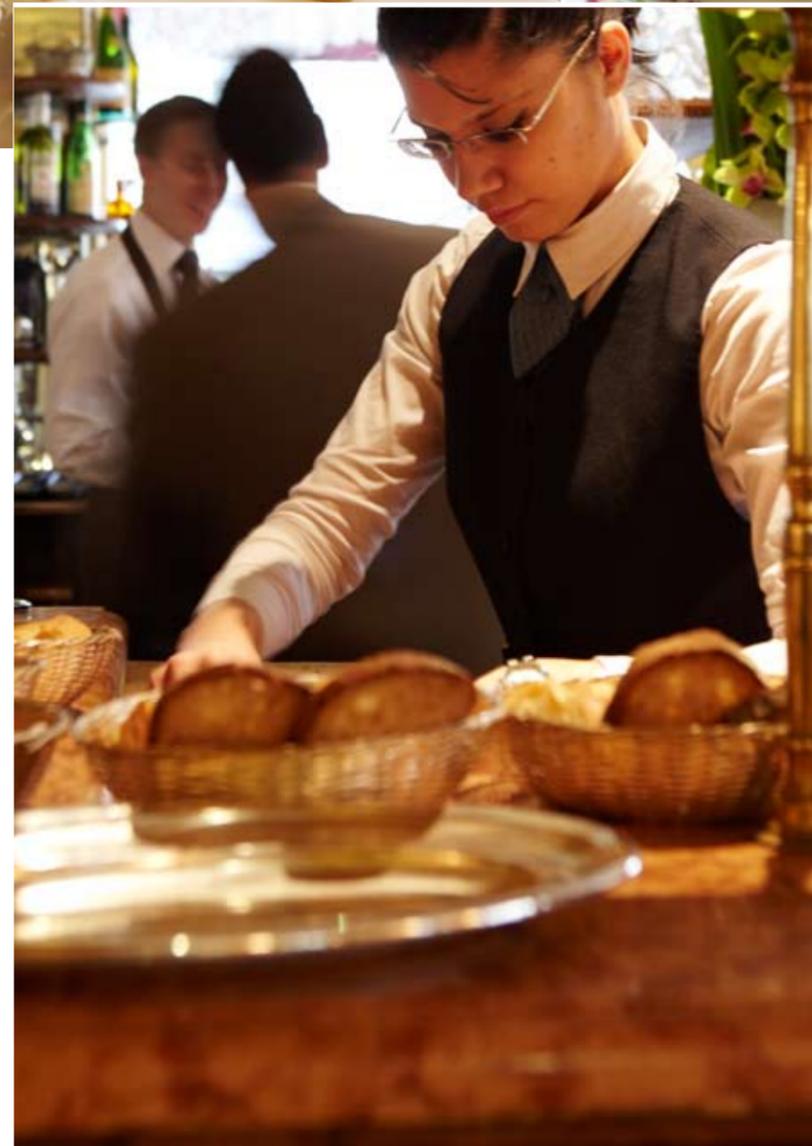
It's a beautiful room – I love the intricate mosaic floor and the brass rails. The best table is in the centre of the restaurant. The place isn't huge and the tables are all pretty close together, but at this table you're in the middle of everything – the chatter, the glasses clinking, the buzz. I never ask for that table, but maybe they register where we sit because they always take me there now. It's a very mixed crowd; lots of people go dressed up and are there for the full three-course experience, but many local residents also pop in for a little plate of something and a glass of wine.

My last visit was in January this year. I still have the snails, and this time I followed them with a little ragoût of cockscombs, kidneys and veal sweetbreads: stunning.

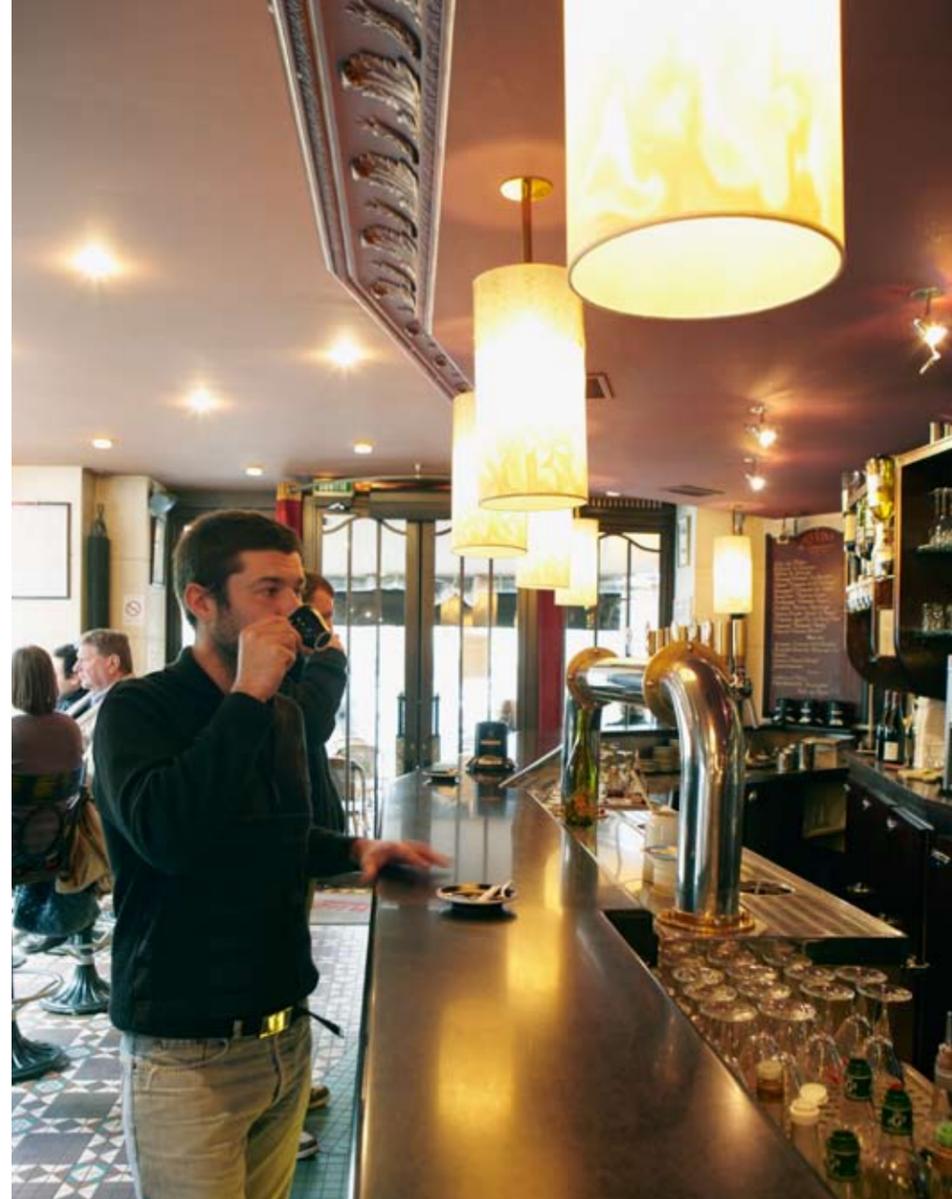
FIND OUT MORE

- 20 Rue Saint-Martin, 75004 Paris; benoit-paris.com
- Plate of nine snails £17; cassoulet £23; ragoût £34 ►

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE Benoit was opened by an enterprising butcher in 1912. Now owned by Alain Ducasse's group, with chef Wilfrid Hocquet (top right) at the helm, it serves dishes such as snails in garlic butter and herbs, and strawberries in their warm juices with cheese sorbet (both right)



RIGHT Situated on Place Cambronne, which commemorates a heroic general at the Battle of Waterloo, Café Cambronne is the epitome of a Paris café



THE SECRET CAFÉ Café Cambronne



Lee Bennett, head chef at Le Pont de la Tour in London, used to escape to Café Cambronne during the three years he spent in Paris. Lee appears on this year's *Great British Menu*, on BBC Two, weekdays at 6.30pm until early June.

I discovered Café Cambronne during my first few months living in Paris as a trainee chef. It's a 10-minute walk from the Eiffel Tower, in the Place Cambronne. I had come out of the gym feeling hungry and stopped to read the menu – it was well written and concise, which is a good sign.

Café Cambronne is a typical Parisian café. There are very few reservations – it's not that kind of place. It's mostly walk-ins and regulars. There are only ever two or three waiters serving the whole café, running around looking after everyone. I love the hectic feel, with clattering of pans and shouting emanating from the open kitchen. The smell of the steaks and the garlic butter for the snails hits you as soon as you walk in. It's quite a moody spot, with its dark green walls and burgundy leather seats. There's an imposing mural on one wall – a battle scene from the Napoleonic Wars (the Musée de l'Armée at Hôtel National des Invalides, where Napoleon is buried, isn't far away). A long bar runs down one side of the café, where old men with their hats pulled down sit, day in and day out, sipping beer.

I love the Toulouse sausages with lentils, the snails and the classic, well-dressed bistro salads. The steaks are outstanding, and a giant, well-aged rump steak with sauce au poivre is very good value. And you must try the tiramisu – it's just so light and airy, and comes served in a little glass. One of my guilty pleasures is the dessert fridge at the back: you simply point or nod to the tarte tatin or tarte au citron and the waiter cuts you a slice and asks if you want cream or double cream. Both, in my case.

In summer the terrace is a great spot to sit in the evening, when the Place Cambronne is lit up with fairy lights. When I arrived in Paris I fell in love with it right away, and watching the world go by outside Café Cambronne is one of my happiest memories.

FIND OUT MORE

- 5 Place Cambronne, 75015 Paris
- Toulouse sausages with lentils £11.50; rump steak au poivre £15; tiramisu £6



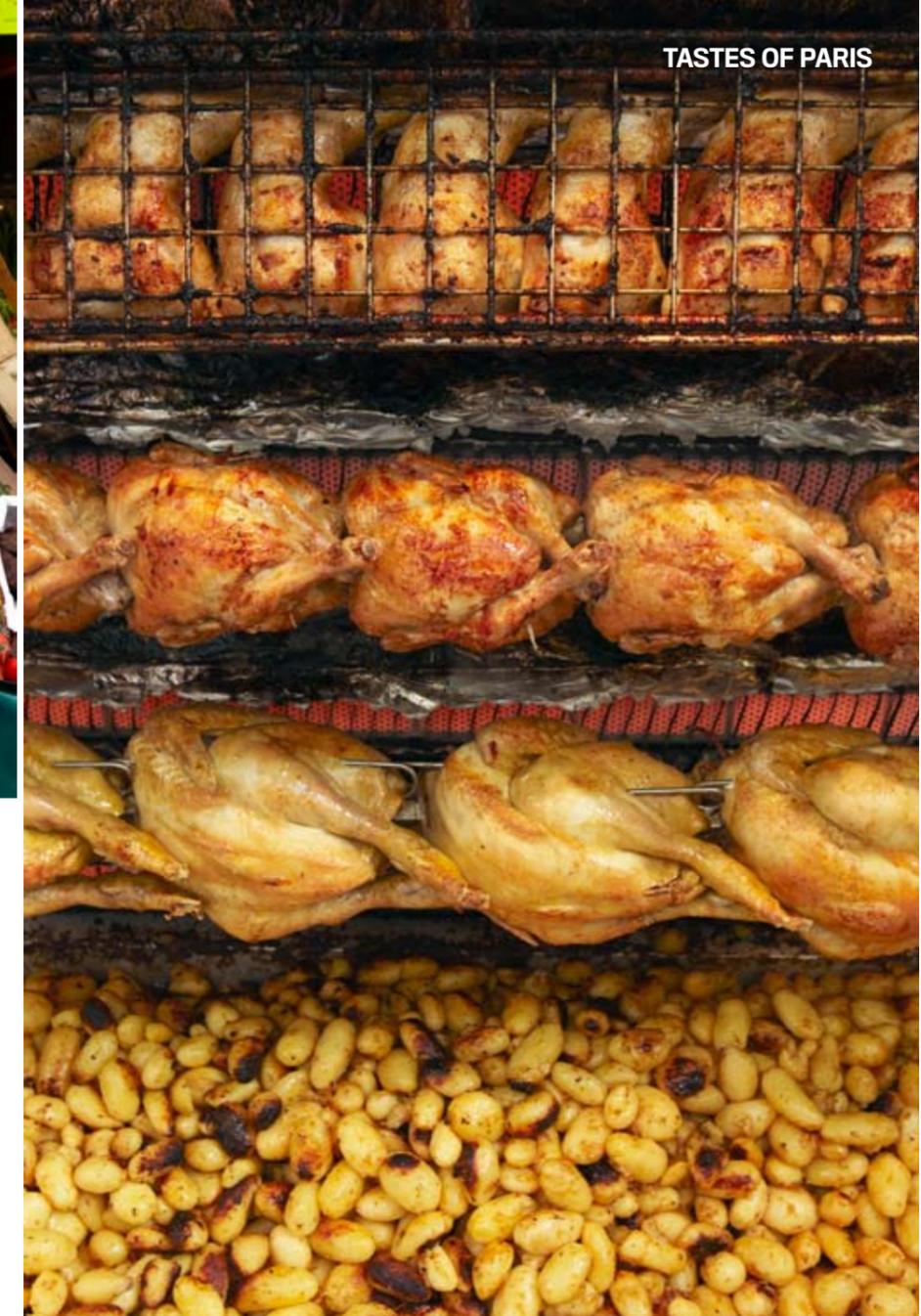
THE SECRET MARKET Rue Mouffetard



Anthony Demetre is the head chef and co-owner of Arbutus and Wild Honey in London, and has worked under Raymond Blanc. Anthony is also appearing on BBC Two's *Great British Menu*. Here he shares the sights, sounds and smells of his favourite Parisian street market.

Rue Mouffetard in the 5th arrondissement is home to the best street market in Paris. My wife, Frederique, is from Paris and she introduced me to the market about 10 years ago. If you're looking for 'old Paris' – that romantic ideal of cobbled streets and bustling markets – this is the place to go. You know you're on the right track when you start to smell roast chicken, as the scent filters through all the twisting little streets. When you get to the market, you realise why – the chicken guy has maybe 50 chickens roasting on his spits.

It's very working class, definitely not a destination market like le Rungis. You'll see housewives and chefs from the nearby restaurants shopping for the day's ingredients. I always stop by the fruit and veg stall run by a family of French Moroccans and pick up whatever is good and in season (you'll never find a strawberry in November here). It's also very regional – farmers come to the city from all over and sell their produce on different stalls. There's a cheese stall from the Auvergne, where you can pick up a wonderful fourme d'ambert blue cheese. Now we have children we always self-cater in Paris, and you can get everything you need on the Rue



TASTES OF PARIS

Mouffetard – there's a crémier for your milk and crème fraîche; a wonderful butcher, a wine stall and plenty of fromageries.

There's a little bar à vin on the street, called Le Verre à Pied, where you can stop for an apéritif and a piece of charcuterie. But I love the market best very early in the morning. With the mist still low over the city, you can walk to Rue Mouffetard, grab a coffee and load a baguette with butter and jam, then watch the stallholders assembling their stalls and the locals starting to pour in.

FIND OUT MORE

- Rue Mouffetard, 75005 Paris
- (Le Verre à Pied) small jug of merlot £3; veal with fennel and bleu d'auvergne £10; crème brûlée £3.50

ABOVE The aroma of chickens roasting on spits will lead you to the market on Rue Mouffetard, where you'll find the best in fresh, seasonal produce