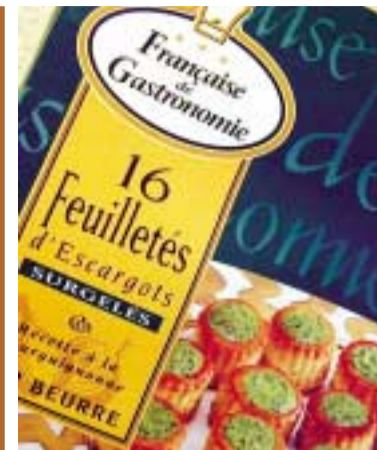




BUSYCOOK



Show off with these classy snails

ESCARGOTS in buttery **vol au vents** sounds sinful. But if they cost just \$5.95 for a box of 16 (picture above), I reckon it's an affordable sin. Ignore the fact that the English label says "snails in shells", they are deliciously more and each vol au vent is packed to the top with herby butter. This is great party food and an effortless way to impress the boss/the girlfriend/boyfriend or prospective in laws. All you need to do is to pop them out of their cartons and place them on a baking tray (see below). Bake at 200 deg C for 15 minutes. Found at Carrefour's frozen food aisle. Buy a few boxes.



Pear and chocolate

Caramelised pears on a buttery base makes a really good tart

ON our last trip to Paris, my mother and I stayed at a little boutique hotel right in the heart of Saint Germain, which has some of the most expensive real estate in the world.

The hotel was on a romantic cobble-stoned street lined with musty old bookshops, discreet furriers and a whole row of specialist delicatessens. We ate freshly baked buttery croissants every morning, washed down by potent cups of espresso.

Each evening, the little street came alive with stalls selling bread and baked meats, pastries and quiches all ready for the working crowd to take home a little supper.

We bought ours

here as well. My mother's favourite was a little confection called *Oeuf Norwegian*, or Norwegian Egg.

It was basically a scoop of tasty potato salad sitting on a boiled heart of artichoke, topped with a barely hard-boiled egg with a runny yolk and covered entirely with layers of smoked salmon. And it cost something like \$6. We feasted on that for two days.

And there was dessert. By using the simple communication tools of look, point and pay, I got to eat an amazing array of sweets.

My favourite, however, was a pear and chocolate tart made with caramelised Poire William.

You can imagine my absolute delight when I found a bottle of caramelised William Pear at home at Carrefour. I also found bars of dark

chocolate that had 72 per cent cocoa. I'm sharing the results of my own experiments with this delightful Paris-inspired tart with you this week.

It's a relatively no fuss recipe, and the main thing would be to use the right ingredients. I'm afraid I have to point you towards Carrefour again. I know nowhere else you can find the pear and the dark chocolate at such affordable prices.

I used little butter biscuits I found at the supermarket as well. All they need to form a delicious crust is a good crushing with a rolling pin and just a few spoons of melted butter to help them cling to the tart pan.

You must try this. It's not too sweet and served with good coffee or a pot of green tea, this tart will rake in compliments. The one I took to the office disappeared really quickly.



by Pauline D Loh

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Caramelised Pear and Dark Chocolate Tart

Ingredients:

- 1 bottle caramelised William Pears
- 2 100g bars of 72% dark chocolate
- 1 packet of Petits Beurre (butter biscuits)
- 3 tablespoons melted butter or corn or canola oil
- (It's about 3 cms off a 250g block of butter)

Method:

1. Prepare the tart pan by brushing it with melted butter or oil. Preheat oven to 180 deg C.
2. Crush the whole packet of butter biscuits. Easiest way is to put them into a large ziplock bag and break the biscuits into little pieces. Then, crush them with a rolling pin.
3. Stir the melted butter into the biscuit crumbs. Pour the mixture into the tart pan and press down with the back of a spoon, using your fingers to stop the crumbs from escaping over the

edge.

4. Break the dark chocolate into small pieces. Cut them into smaller blocks first, then chop up roughly with a sharp knife. Distribute the chocolate evenly over the biscuit base.
5. Drain the bottle of William pears. Reserve the liquid. Cut each pear half into small slices. Slide a palate knife over each cut half and place them on top of the chocolate pieces. Repeat till pear halves have all been used up.
6. Brush top of fruit with reserved liquid. Bake for 20 minutes. When the pears are lightly browned, it's time to remove the tart. Cool slightly and cut into pieces. Serve them solo or with a scoop of ice cream a la mode.

Notes:

If you want a professional touch, you can reduce the pear liquid in a saucepan to get a jelly glaze.

You can also add just a small teaspoon of cornflour, arrowroot or even a little gelatin to get a better set. Brushing this over the pear topping will give it a brilliant shine.

If you need to substitute the dark chocolate, go for the best baking chocolate you can get. Don't add any more sugar, the pear juices will melt the chocolate as the tart bakes.

If you want a bit of a kick, sprinkle some liqueur over the tart just as it finishes baking. Or serve it with well chilled whipped cream with a little Cointreau added.

Shopping List:

- 1 bottle caramelised William Pears (\$4.50)
 - 2 X 100g bars of 72% dark chocolate (\$1.50 each)
 - 1 packet of Petits Beurre (\$2.50 for a double pack of 24s)
- All items available at Carrefour.

