

Doug Clark: Four bucks for a slice of toast?

America has officially run out of fads.

That thought dawned on me last Saturday after I joined a throng of young San Francisco hipsters who stood in line to pay \$4 for a slice of toast.

You heard me, toast.

The Mill bakery and restaurant, 736 Divisadero, is known for making toast out of long heavy loaves of bread that are baked on the premises.

It's like America has burned through every dumb idea from disco to fanny packs to plastic mounted wall fish that sing until the only thing left is, um, toast.

Only this is no mere toast. Oh, no. This is the latest "artisanal food craze" that has young urban professionals in a swoon.

I learned about this from my daughter, Emily, and son-in-law, Shane, who are moving back to Spokane and not a moment too soon.

My lovely wife, Sherry, and I flew to San Francisco over the weekend to help with the move, though after hearing about this toast thing I'm considering our role to be more like a rescue effort.

They need to get away, I believe, from people like Layton, who wrote the following Internet review:

"How could toast be so good? It's better than toast should be. It's \$4, sure, but it's somehow worth every penny."

I probably will never meet Layton. But somebody needs to shake him and yell, "Layton, it's toast. GET A GRIP!!!"

But it's probably too late.

This toast virus, I'm told, is growing and has already spread to Seattle where a Ballard eatery is purportedly selling carbonized bread at a bargain \$3 per slice.

Getting back to The Mill, however ...

As I approached the counter, I began to feel disproportionately excited about my choices.

Do I order the dark mountain rye with cream cheese or the whole wheat sesame poppy with butter and jam?

Or do I throw caution to the wind and go for the butter-and-honey slathered raisin coriander, which, by the way, was billed as The Mill's bread of the week?

In the end I decided to play it safe. I opted for country bread with cinnamon sugar because, well, it sounded like something I'd fix at home only for a whole lot less than four bucks.

After placing my order, I wandered over to a spot by the counter where I could watch my designated toastmaster. He was a young man with a mustache and a lock of brown hair that dangled uncomfortably all the way down onto his nose.

I watched as he ...

Inserted bread into silver toaster.

Waited for toast to come out of toaster.

Examined toast.

Inserted toast into different toaster.

Finally determined that bread was sufficiently toasted enough to serve.

Becoming a toastmaster doesn't require lengthy training at Le Cordon Bleu, I'm guessing.

Watching the toasting process gave me time to notice something else. Many of The Mill customers were eating their toast with a knife and a fork.

For a moment I wondered if I had stumbled into a strange Toast Cult.

Was the knife and fork a necessary part of the Communion?

Then the guy with the hair dangle called my name.

I picked up my toast, which was now covered with a thick layer of butter and cinnamon sugar.

I also grabbed a knife and fork.

When in Rome, as they say.

I wish I could tell you that the toast rocked my world.

Unfortunately, the bread was heavy enough to use as foundation material for the north Spokane freeway.

Plus it was extra-sour sourdough.

Some people are really into sourdough. I've never been a huge fan.

"Should've gone coriander," I muttered.

But chewing the thick toast gave me time to think.

Once my kids get settled here in Spokane, I plan to turn my attention to what could be the next hot new minimalist food trend.

Broth Boutique, I'd call it.

Broth will be so much easier than toast.

No dough. No baking. No toasters.

After placing an order for chicken, beef or seaweed vegan, the Broth Boutiquer will receive a corresponding bouillon cube, a cup of hot water and a spoon for stirring.

It can't miss.

All I'll need is a storefront and a wad of startup cash.

Oh, yeah. And that idiot Layton to write some reviews.

Doug Clark is a columnist for The Spokesman-Review. He can be reached at (509) 459-5432 or by email at dougc@spokesman.com.