



CHEESE please

IS YOUR CHEESE PLATE – AND PALETTE – STUCK IN A BRIE AND CHEDDAR RUT? ALICE AND ALLISON SPURRELL, THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER OWNERS OF **LES AMIS DU FROMAGE** (1752 W. 2ND AVE., WWW.BUYCHEESE.COM) OFFER FIVE PICKS TO EASE YOUR TASTE BUDS INTO DOING A LITTLE TRAVELLING.

Cashel Blue – This Irish blue is a great introduction to blue cheese. Rich and creamy, with the characteristic “grassy hay smell,” of blue cheese, but without the off-putting aroma of stronger varieties. The small production quality is evident at first bite, and why people venture beyond supermarket varieties.

Cantal – Mountain-fed cows are the difference in this buttery, cheddar-like cheese from Auvergne, France. Made with raw cow’s milk (unpasteurized and cooked at lower temperatures), it’s the presence of “good” bacteria that gives it a nice, nutty flavour.

Pecorino Toscano Stagionato – Just as all goat’s milk cheese made in France is classified as chevres,

Italian cheese made from sheep’s milk is called Pecorino. This sharp yet not overpowering Tuscan variety is good for first-timers, and perfect paired with a glass of red wine.

Farmhouse Camembert – Husband-and-wife dairy farmers in Agassi, B.C., make this runnier, full-flavoured Camembert in the European fashion without “dumbing it down” to suit less sophisticated taste buds.

L’Edel de Cleron - Wrapped in a strip of spruce bark for support and flavour, this soft brie-like cheese is sometimes called a faux Vacherin, in that it’s made in the same region of Eastern France as the acclaimed yet not widely available Vacherin Mont d’Or.

Cheese 101

Cheese is sometimes categorized by milk (cow, sheep, goat or the less-known buffalo). And other times by area. But while, like wine, “cheeses of a region tend to have some similarities,” the easiest way to identify them is by texture or type, says Spurrell.

FRESH

Typically not aged or ripened, with a short shelf life: Mascarpone, Cottage Cheese, Ricotta.

SOFT RIPENED

A soft buttery interior encased in a bloomy rind of usually white mould: Brie, Camembert or triple cream.

WASHED RIND

The stinkiest of cheeses. Strong-smelling, semi-soft cheese with a sticky, moist, orange rind that forms from bathing it in brine: Munster, Epoisses, Reblochon.

HARD

Can range from semi-soft to semi-hard to hard versions that are grated. Usually less aromatic than softer cheese due to less moisture: Cheddar, Guyere, Gouda, Parmesan.

GOAT/SHEEP

Can run the gamut from soft to hard. Sheep’s milk is milder, fruitier, with less of a “barnyard” taste. Since the protein amount in both goat’s and sheep’s milk is smaller than in cow’s milk, they’re easier to digest for those with lactose intolerances.

BLUE

Named for the blue veins of mould that run through it, its strong aroma and flavour can be an acquired taste. The Danish varieties are particularly pungent: Gorgonzola, Roquefort, Stilton.



STORING, SERVING AND EATING ...

■ Always store cheese in the fridge. Rewrap with new plastic wrap after each use. To further protect it from absorbing other food smells keep it in a Tupperware container.

■ Like wine, cheese has suggestions for serving but it’s really up to the individual, says Spurrell, who prefers, “soft cheese at room temperature and hard cheese, cold right out of the fridge.”

■ While they’re not to everyone’s taste, the rind or crust of the majority of cheeses are completely edible.

■ It’s true; if a hard cheese gets a little mould it’s perfectly okay to cut it off and keep eating.

- CARLY KRUG

Have we only whetted your appetite to learn more?

Les Amis du Fromage offers crash courses in cheese. Testings are sold out for spring, but fall dates will be announced soon.

EXPLORING CHEESE AND WINE/\$55:

Cheese basics including milk types and textures, and which go best with wine. Sample some of their favourite pairings and discover some of your own.

VIVE LA FRANCE/\$65:

Explore cheeses from some of the many regions of France including classic cheese pairings with wines from the Alsace, Loire Valley and Bordeaux.