



COMTÉ NEWS



Spring/Summer 2008

Opening a Cheese Store

The artisanal cheese market is growing faster than ever in the U.S., spurred in part by a growing number of dedicated retailers. Whereas decades ago, specialty cheese stores were few and far between, today they can be found in cities and towns across the nation, offering customers quality ingredients and first-rate service. But opening a cheese store is no easy feat. Here are a few tips from friends in the business:

Location, location, location

"Location is the most important criteria; it will come with the right audience," says Ihsan Gurdal, owner of Formaggio Kitchen in Cambridge, MA. Formaggio Kitchen opened in 1978, in response to a community demand for a store with a European style of service and quality products. Gurdal has expanded the store's vision over the years to meet changing trends, as well as to accommodate his own passions for artisanal cheeses and products that support sustainable agriculture. Cross-merchandising—offering complementary items such as cheese accompaniments (chutneys, crackers, honey, etc.), kitchenware (serving boards, knives, etc.), and/or wine (if possible in your area)—can also lure customers and boost sales. Choosing the right location—and the right merchandise—is the first step to ensuring long-term success.

Passion

"Of course, location is key, but ultimately one needs to do what one loves to be successful," notes Kent Torrey, owner of the Cheese Shop of Carmel and the recently opened Cheese Shop of Santa Barbara. "Buy products you like—why would you want to sell something you don't feel good about?" New retailers can expect to work long, hard hours, but with dedication and passion, the work will eventually pay off. As Torrey states, "You may not make a ton of money, but you can certainly eat and drink like you do!"

Quality and content over size

Less is sometimes more when it comes to opening a new cheese store. While a huge selection is

never necessary, maintaining high quality control is imperative for retaining a loyal customer base and for attracting new customers. Jason Hinds of Neal's Yard Dairy in London offers these tips for maximizing quality:

- Buy just what you can sell within 2-4 weeks and sell out.
- Store cheeses in waxed or butcher paper at 45°F-55°F. If stored in a walk-in, keep the cheese in the box and store away from fans.
- Don't leave displayed cheese in direct sunlight or under vents.
- For highest quality control, sell cheeses cut-to-order. Taste the cheese before offering it to a customer.
- For pre-cut and wrapped cheese, cut little and often. Cut pieces should be 2-3 days old maximum when they're sold. Same day is ideal. Don't pre-cut small or thin pieces, otherwise the cheese may dry out and/or taste of plastic.
- If you are concerned about the quality of the cheese, contact your supplier immediately.

Enthusiastic and informed staff

Personalized service and an in-depth knowledge of products sets apart many specialty cheese stores and creates a loyal following. It's an "old fashioned way of doing business," notes Torrey, which benefits both customer and retailer. However, retaining a quality staff is "one of the biggest challenges one will face in the U.S.," as states Gurdal. But this is "very slowly changing," as the specialty cheese profession has grown and attracted higher numbers of skilled and motivated employees. It's important to treat staff well, and, in return, to require a strong work ethic and a high level of professionalism.

In all, while opening a cheese store has its challenges, owners assert that it also comes with unforeseen rewards. We couldn't be more thankful to those ardent retailers who have helped to pave the way for the growth of the artisanal cheese market in the US, and who have developed Comté's presence nationwide along the way.

Comté ("con - TAY") cheese ID

General information:

Origin: Jura Mountains (Massif du Jura), France

Milk Type: Raw cow's milk

Cheese Style: Artisanal, pressed, cooked, with natural brushed rind.

French AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) since 1958 and European Union Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Certification.

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1500-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 112,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and free of fermented products and GMOs.
- Each *fruitsière* must collect milk from dairy farms within a 17-mile diameter maximum.
- Milk must be made into cheese within 24 hours maximum of the earliest milking.
- Only natural starters must be used to transform the milk into curds.
- Wheels must be aged on spruce boards. Minimum aging is 4 months, generally 6-18 months and sometimes even longer.



Comté Cheese Association

at the next Summer Fancy Food Show
in New York, June 29-July 1, 2008

Booth #1954

New Website and Brochure!

www.comte-usa.com



The Comté Cheese Association has developed a new website specifically for our U.S. trade partners! Log-in at www.comte-usa.com to download POS materials; request supplies; learn the latest Comté news; and download images and videos. You'll also find recipes, useful links, events, and more.

We have also created an illustrated **16-page brochure** that explores Comté from the pastures to the table. It is packed with information about the region and the making, aging and tasting of Comté, as well as with ideas for serving, tips for buying and storing, and statistics about Comté's nutritional make-up. The brochure conveniently fits in a standard business envelope for easy transport and mailing, and will be helpful to both cheese professionals and consumers.

Cheese Slices Book and DVD Series



While visiting Neal's Yard Dairy in London recently, we discovered Australian Master of Cheese Will Studd's beautifully illustrated book, *Cheese Slices* (Hardie Grant Books, 2007), which is rich with information about the history, traditions and production of artisan and farmhouse cheeses like Comté. Studd also hosts a stunning TV series (available on DVD) where he travels the world, exploring how artisan cheeses are made. The book and DVD series are available in the U.S. at www.cheeseslices.com.

In the Cellar with Comté



A transformation silently takes place in the shadowy stillness of the maturing cellars, where Comté undergoes its final stage of production. It is here that the large wheels, lined side by side on spruce boards stretching from floor to ceiling, will reach their maximum potential. But they need an expert hand to guide them there.

Delivered weeks earlier from the fruitière, or cheesemaking house, young Comté wheels arrive to the cellars with a grainy, elastic texture and mild flavor. It is the role of the affineur, or cellar master, to nurture the diverse aromas and rich flavors that are distinctive of Comté. Affinage (the maturing technique) is a craft that takes years to learn and refine. The affineur must pay attention to dozens of details to ensure that each wheel is properly treated for

optimal flavor. Wheels are salted, turned regularly, and rubbed with a brine solution called morge, which contains ferments from the rinds of older Comté wheels. Tasted often, the wheels are transferred to a succession of humid cellars with different temperatures to encourage their fullest aromatic expression ("cold" cellars are held at 39°F to 48°F, "temperate" cellars are held at 53°F to 59°F, and "warm" cellars are held at 59°F to 66°F). Since every Comté wheel is unique, each follows a slightly different maturing path determined by the affineur. Each wheel has its own qualities and destiny!

It takes time for Comté to mature. By AOC law (Appellation d'Origine Controlée), Comté must be aged for at least 4 months but is often aged for as long as 12 to 18, or even 24 months, depending on the particular wheel, the conditions in the cellar, and the aim of the affineur. After aging, Comté's texture will have become smooth and supple with rich and refined flavors. Only then will it be ready for the market.



There are about 20 Comté maturing houses (maisons d'affinage) in the Jura Mountain region, each with unique techniques according to its cellar conditions, to the cheeses it receives, and to the particular style of the affineur. The maturing houses are responsible for the marketing and selling of Comté to distributors and exporters. It is therefore the responsibility of the affineur to complete the Comté cycle, using careful observation and centuries of tradition to coax each wheel to its highest level of quality, given its aromatic and aging potential.

On the Menu Comté has been featured on restaurant menus across the country this spring. Our friends at Asiate, Marseille and Zingerman's share with us their fantastic recipes.



Chef Toni Robertson,

Asiate at the Mandarin Oriental, New York City
Chef Robertson's Asian-inspired cuisine is artistic, modern and elegant, as reflected in this beautiful dish featured on her spring menu.

Kabocha Squash Risotto, Pumpkin Seed Crusted Scallops, Shiso, Aged Comté Cheese

By Chef Toni Robertson, Asiate
 Serves: 8 appetizer portions

- 8 large sea scallops, cleaned and patted dry
- 1 egg white, lightly whisked
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds, roasted
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup white onion, finely diced
- 1 cup Carnaroli rice
- 3 cups vegetable stock, hot
- 1 cup kabocha squash puree
- 1 cup Comté cheese, grated
- 1 tablespoon shiso leaves, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup radicchio leaf, shredded

1. Dip each scallop in egg white on one side, then in the pumpkin seeds to create a crust.
2. In a large pot, heat the olive oil and 1 tablespoon of the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until translucent. Increase the heat to medium-high; add the rice. Stir with wooden spoon, making sure that the grains are well coated with butter and olive oil.
3. Stir the hot stock into the pan a half-cup at a time, and let simmer after each addition. Stir continuously with a wooden spoon. Wait until the liquid is almost absorbed before adding more stock. When all the liquid has been added and the rice is al dente, stir in the remaining butter, kabocha squash puree, and Comté cheese. Remove the pot from the heat and season with salt and pepper.
4. Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, cook the scallops on the pumpkin seed side until golden brown. Turn and continue to cook for 2 more minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to paper towel to drain.
5. Divide the risotto into 8 small dishes. Place a scallop on top, garnish with shiso leaves and radicchio. Serve immediately.



Chef Andy D'Amico,

Marseille, New York City
Chef D'Amico has been charming New Yorkers for years as Executive Chef of Marseille restaurant, where his French bistro cuisine is both traditional and refined.

Lorraine Omelet

By Chef Andy D'Amico
 Serves: 2

- 1 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 3 thick slices bacon, cooked and cut into slivers
- 1/4 tsp. fresh picked thyme
- 4 eggs
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 3 ounces Comté cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Chopped chives or parsley for garnish

1. In an 8 – 10 inch nonstick omelet pan, melt 1/2 tablespoon of the butter over medium heat. Add the diced onions and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 20 minutes. Add the bacon and thyme and cook gently for 2 more minutes. Transfer to a bowl and wipe out the skillet.
2. Beat together eggs and milk and season with salt and pepper. In the same omelet pan, melt 1/2 tablespoon of the butter over medium-high heat, swirling the pan so the butter evenly coats it. When sizzling, pour in half the egg mixture and cook, stirring, until partially scrambled. Lower the heat and tilt the pan to spread the egg evenly. Spoon half the onion/bacon mixture on top, sprinkle with half the cheese and cook until the bottom is set and the surface appears thick, about 1 minute; season lightly with salt and pepper. Fold the omelet over and slide onto the plate. Garnish with chopped herbs. Repeat step 2 for the second omelet.



Zingerman's Delicatessen,

Ann Arbor, MI
Zingerman's celebrated their 26th Anniversary in March with a Comté Fondue Fest. Their delicious recipe is below.

Fondue Comtoise

Adapted from Zingerman's Guide to Good Eating
 Serves: 8-10

- 2 pounds aged Comté cheese, cut into small cubes
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 garlic clove, bruised
- 3 cups dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon kirsch
- Freshly ground Telicherry black pepper to taste
- Country bread for dipping

1. Toss the cheese with the flour in a medium bowl.
2. Rub the bruised garlic inside the fondue pot, then discard.
3. Pour the wine into the fondue pot, and bring to a simmer over medium heat.
4. Start adding the cubes of flour-tossed cheese about ten or twelve at a time, stirring continuously. When the cheese has melted into the wine, add a bit more, stirring softly, until all the cheese has been added and melted.
5. Add the kirsch and stir.
6. Remove from the burner when smooth, and top with a generous bit of freshly ground pepper. Serve the fondue at the table on its stand over a flame.

Cutting Comté Wheels

Weighing in at approximately 80 lbs and stretching 3 feet in diameter, cutting a full wheel of Comté takes a bit of know-how. But with a few simple steps and the right tools, it's easy to create manageable quarters and clean slices for selling. We met Daphne Zepos, owner of Essex Street Cheese Company, at the Bedford Cheese Shop in Brooklyn, where she demonstrated how to cut a Comté wheel. Remember to only cut what you need and to leave the remainder in large pieces, tightly wrapped; this will best preserve the flavor, texture and aromas of the cheese. Also, be sure to slice a taste for yourself!

Special thanks to the Bedford Cheese Shop and Daphne Zepos.

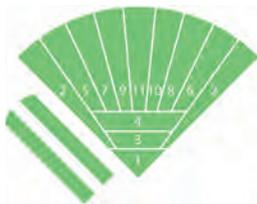
Unwrap the wheel and assess it for any flaws. "Ridge" the wheel. Using a clean box cutter or razor, cut a slit across the diameter of the wheel through the label (this will prevent pieces of label from sticking to the cheese when cutting through). Use a sharp knife to cut a ridge around the edges.



Cut the wheel in half along the ridge. Use a wire cutter or double handled knife to ensure a clean cut.



Ridge one of the halves across the center and around the edge. Cut the half into quarters along the ridge.



COMTE CUTTING DIAGRAM: Working with one quarter, follow the cutting diagram to the left. After cut #4, alternate sides so that the cheese doesn't dry out. For smaller pieces, cut thinner slices and divide them in half horizontally. Tightly wrap each piece soon after cutting.



Comté Cheese Association

provides you with everything you need for a successful selling program, including: recipe booklets, brochures, aprons, demo toothpicks, training tools, and more.

For free POP and in-store demonstration material, please contact:
contactusa@comte-usa.com
 212-216-9671

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