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TRIPLE CRÈMES
OF FRANCE



The Triple Crèmes OF FRANCE

Indulgence made manifest in a piece of cheese

BY JAN FIALKOW

PHOTO COURTESY OF FROMAGERIE LINCET

French triple crème cheeses are gastronomical delights — buttery, indulgent, luxurious, rich, even decadent. If ever a cheese exemplified the concept that there can be “too much of a good thing,” it’s a triple crème.

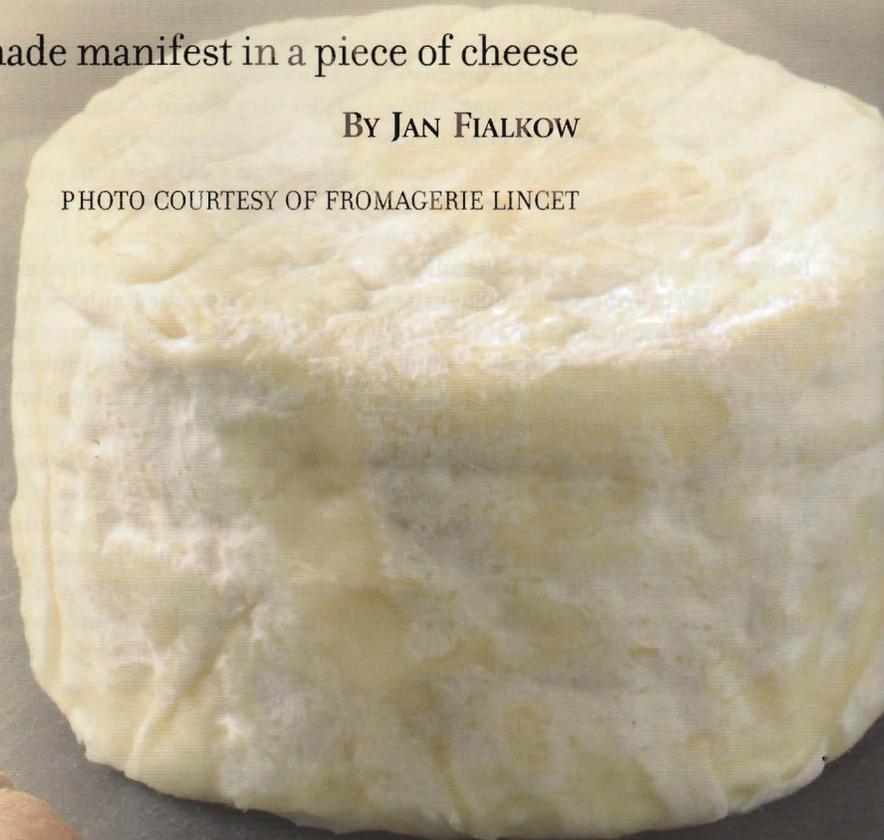
As the name suggests, these cheeses have a high fat content; by law, at least 75 percent butterfat so cheesemakers add extra cream to the fresh curd. All the triple crèmes available in the United States are made from pasteurized cow’s milk; they’re not aged long enough to conform to U.S. laws regarding raw milk cheeses.

The texture of triple crèmes varies from very soft to semi-firm, and the taste ranges from subtle creaminess to tangy aggressiveness. Unripened triple crèmes have a fresh, delicate tang; those ripened for about three weeks before coming to market develop a thin, bloomy crust.

Triple crèmes are traditionally eaten spread on crusty French bread and accompanied with seasonal fruits. Virtually any fresh fruit except citrus will pair well with a triple crème. They’re perfect before a meal, as a dessert or part of a cheese course, or as the main component of a light lunch or brunch. But be forewarned — these cheeses are exceedingly rich and a little goes a long way.

They need to breathe, so if you purchase a piece of triple crème wrapped in plastic, unwrap it as soon as possible and rewrap it in wax or butcher paper and store it in the refrigerator. Always bring it to room temperature before serving.

Triple crèmes are comparatively new cheeses, created in the 20th century; however, they make up in popularity what they lack in lineage. Developed in Île-de-France, Normandy and the Loire Valley, they match particularly well with wines from those regions although they can certainly be paired with New World wines and wines from other parts of Europe.



Boursault is one of the older triple crèmes. Invented in 1953 by Henri Boursault, it's an excellent example of a good factory-made cheese. It's one of the most popular triple crèmes, with an ultra creamy texture and rich flavor. Its slightly acidic citrus tang balances the richness of the cream, and its thin, edible, slightly pinkish rind has a pleasant smell of mushrooms and a nutty finish. Maturation takes about two months, and then it further matures in its packaging for up to a month. It comes in small paper-wrapped cylinders; avoid any with discolored paper.

A versatile cheese that can be used in any recipe calling for Brie or Camembert, Boursault is also an excellent dessert cheese. It pairs wonderfully with grapes, pears, strawberries, pecans and a fresh, crusty baguette. Bordeaux is the perfect red wine accompaniment. If you prefer white wine, you can't go wrong with Champagne, Vouvray or Riesling.

Brillat-Savarin was named for the 18th century gastronome, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, whose writings continue to be a must-read for any serious food enthusiast. One of the world's richest cheeses, this triple crème was created in the 1930s when Henry Androuët, father of French cheese expert Pierre Androuët, added hot cream to cow's milk to up the fat content of the cheese to 75 percent.

When Brillat-Savarin is fresh and rindless, it's soft and has a slightly sour taste with a creamy texture similar to whipped butter and a milky aroma with light lemony tones. After curing for about three weeks, it develops a thin, bloomy rind. This is a cheese that should be eaten young. If it matures too long, the rind darkens and the paste becomes oily.

It pairs beautifully with apples, pears and strawberries, which are native to Normandy where it was developed. Tropical fruits such as kiwi, mango and guava also work surprisingly well. The best wine to server with a Brillat-Savarin is Champagne, although Gewürztraminer is a good white option. St. Emilion is a good red French option. Since it's made with primarily merlot grapes, a good Merlot would also work well.

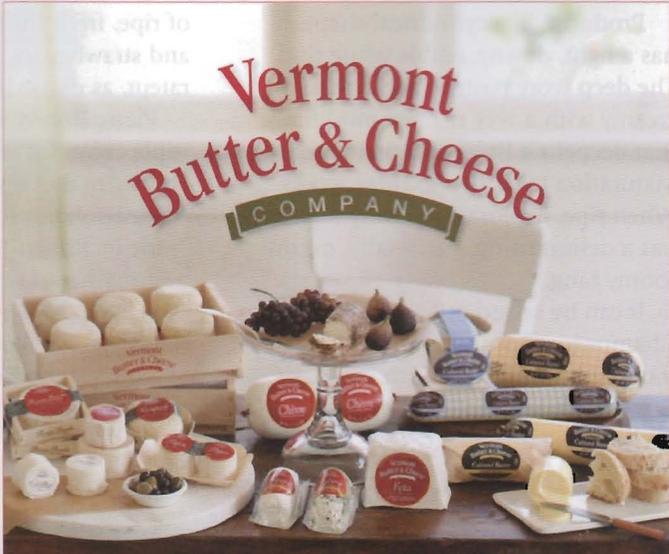
Délice de Bourgogne, another factory-produced triple crème, is incredibly complex with a voluptuous, melt-in-the-mouth texture and fresh cream taste. Made by Fromagerie Lincet, it combines fresh cream with whole cow's milk to produce a magnificent triple crème cheese.

Its rich paste has been likened to whipped cream cheese, and its pungent, moldy rind has straw and mushroom aromas that complement the sweet, creamy straw-colored interior. The cheese has a salty, earthy finish.

Délice de Bourgogne is a natural paired with Champagne, but it also goes well with white Burgundy, Riesling, Sauternes, or light-on-the-oak Chardonnay. It's perfect with dried figs, apples or grapes and delicious spread on toasted baguette slices for breakfast or on untoasted slices for an appetizer or snack.

Explorateur was created by Fromagerie du Petit-Morin in 1958 and named to honor Explorer 1, the U.S. response to the Soviet Sputnik. A picture of the rocket still appears on the wrapping.

Described as decadent and indulgent, Explorateur was one of the first cheeses to be created after the triple-crème classification was codified to indicate a cheese with a butterfat content of 75 percent or more.



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Produced in a cylindrical shape, it has a light, downy, edible white rind. The deep ivory paste is very soft and creamy with a very rich yet mild flavor that deepens a little with maturity. Maturation takes two to three weeks. When ripe, Explorateur's ivory interior has a delicate aroma and salty, mushroomy tang.

It can be served as an appetizer with Champagne, Bordeaux or Gewürztraminer and crusty French bread, or as a dessert accompanied by a medley

of ripe, fresh fruit and crackers. Papaya and strawberries work well with Explorateur, as do pecans or hazelnuts.

Pierre Robert is among the newest triple crèmes. The addition of Crème Fraîche makes it even richer and creamier than most triple crèmes. It's made by Robert Rouzaire, one of the best makers of ripened-cheese and affineurs (cheese maturing specialists) in France. The Rouzaire firm began in 1969, so Pierre Robert is considered a modern cheese. The story is that

Rouzaire and his friend Pierre tired of Brillat-Savarin cheese and decided to cave-age their triple crème to develop its flavors and texture. Many professionals rank it among France's best cheeses triple crèmes.

Made in a small wheel, it has a snow-white moldy rind and a soft paste with a mousse-like texture. It may have some light-tan splotches on the surface, but it should not smell ammoniated. When perfectly ripe, the ivory interior is fluffy and silky, with a Crème Fraîche aroma and a lactic finish. After ripening for three to six weeks, Pierre Robert has a tangy bite not often found in this style of cheese.

A quintessential breakfast or dessert cheese, Pierre Robert can be spread on a French baguette and drizzled with truffle honey. Or spread it on a bagel and add the best-quality berry jam you can find for an indulgent brunch. It's superb on walnut bread or any highly textured whole-grain bread.

It pairs beautifully with raspberries, blueberries, kiwi, mango or guava. Once you've tried Pierre Robert paired with toasted walnuts, you'll think the nuts were created for just that purpose. Pinot Gris and Chardonnay — if you avoid oaky wines — as well as Riesling and Gewürztraminer work, but this is a cheese that fairly cries out for Champagne. The bubbles and acidity cut through its richness. Avoid red wines — the tannins just don't make it here.

St. Andre is probably the easiest triple crème to find in the United States. Soft ripened, it has a bloomy white edible rind and rich, silky paste. Its flavor is intensely buttery; some people compare it to a combination of butter and sour cream. As dense as pure butter and with an incredibly rich flavors, it has salty tang imparted by the ocean air that blows through the pastures on the Normandy coast where it's made.

Serve St. Andre with crackers or baguette slices, pecans, walnuts or hazelnuts, tropical fruits such as mango and kiwi, or fruits typical of Normandy — apples, pears or strawberries. Once again, the wine of choice is Champagne, but you could also opt for a light, fruity Rosè. CC

