

Cheese CONNOISSEUR



SUMMER 10 \$5.95

Into The Soul Of France

*Paris may be the heart of France,
but the countryside is its soul*

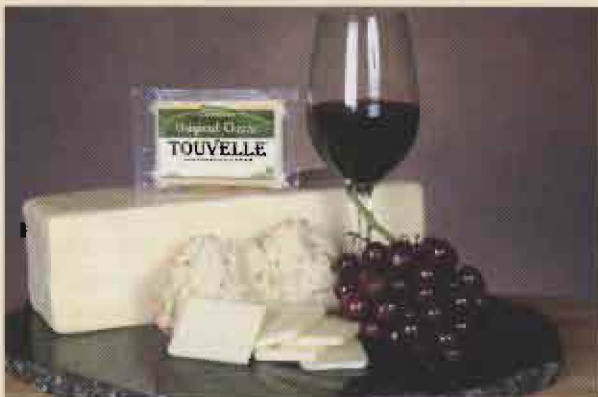
**The Quintessential
Cheese Plate**

HEIRLOOM TOMATOES

Plank Up The Grill

**TOKAJI — THE
HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY**





TouVelle



Saveur du Marquis

FROM MY TABLE TO YOURS

Casual summer meals can still include indulgent cheeses

BY LEE SMITH



Covered Bridge



Le Rove des Garrigues

Cheese is often the centerpiece of my summer table — it's easy to digest and suits the season's casual meals. My favorites for this summer have been influenced by my recent travels and the laid-back seasonal vibe.

This past spring, I had the pleasure of traveling to France to attend the Salon du Fromage in Paris and traversing the countryside to visit cheesemakers. Shortly before that trip, I attended the Oregon Cheese Festival, visited cheesemakers and tasted many local cheeses that aren't easy to come by outside of the Northwest. My advice to you is find them. These fantastic cheeses represent the maverick side of American cheesemaking and are worth the extra effort.

I'm often asked what cheese will satisfy both gourmands and kids, and I've found the answer — TouVelle from the world-class Rogue Creamery in Oregon. Rogue is most often associated with blue cheese; its Rogue River Blue has gained an international reputation as one of the world's greatest blues.

TouVelle is an interesting foray for the Rogue crew. Named for a beautiful state park on the banks of the Rogue River, it was developed as an everyday cheese, sophisticated enough for a fine palate but friendly enough for the kids. My own experience is that friends who run in the opposite direction when I bring out fine cheeses fall in love and quickly call it their favorite cheese.

Made from pasteurized cow's milk, this American Original resembles a cross between Cheddar and Gouda. It's gentle with an underlying strength, distinguished but familiar. Made using the cheddaring process but with a different recipe, it was inspired by Scandinavian cheeses, especially Danish cheeses. It's soft and creamy with a brown butter and herbal nose. Give it little time on the tongue and you'll pick up notes of chocolate and roasted nuts. A beautiful melting cheese and perfectly predictable, it works well in any recipe. It's also very food and beverage friendly, enjoying the company of iced tea, lemonade, beer, and wine. Great for a cheese plate, it's fantastic on burgers.

Just as friendly — but incredibly decadent — is the cow's milk, triple crème dessert cheese Brillat Savarin. Very popular and easy to find, this cheese is rich and creamy; when it comes to room temperature, it has the consistency of ice cream. A great cooking cheese, it's usually eaten as is with bread or crackers. While visiting a local cheese shop, I happened upon Brillat Savarin with myrtille — or bilberries, which are European blueberries. While I love fruit and cheese, I'm not generally a fan of cheesemakers who combine the two, because I often find the cheeses pandering to the lowest common denominator. In this case, I was pleasantly surprised. The bilberries were surprising fresh tasting and full of flavor. Don't look for nuances — just enjoy the pure decadence. Think cheesecake but better.

I often wonder where besides dessert to go with sweet cheeses — this is a sweet cheese — but I found the perfect place. With its fresh, lemony, blueberry and cream profile,

Brillat Savarin with myrtille is delightful for breakfast. Served with toast and fresh fruit, it's a consummate way to begin a lazy summer day. And it's absolutely superb with pancakes.

A much more sophisticated but versatile cheese from France is Le Rove des Garrigues, one of my favorite fresh goat cheeses. Introduced to me by a friend who found it in a little cheese shop in Paris, it's now available in the United States.

This little gem weighs less than 3 ounces, is about the size of a golf ball and has aromas of lemon and thyme. It goes beautifully with honey and preserves but is equally at home in a savory application. It's also a quintessential breakfast cheese. Its smooth, creamy texture is perfect on fruit, breads, croissants or bagels. An ounce has about 77 calories, less than butter or cream cheese but much more satisfying.

It's also excellent for a light lunch, accompanying a fresh green salad or fresh fruit. For an outstanding summer supper, sprinkle it with some fresh chives or parsley, maybe a little lemon zest, and serve it with grilled chicken or fish.

While fresh goat cheeses dominate the market, cheese lovers are starting to develop a taste for the increased complexity and character of aged goat cheeses. When I was in Oregon, I visited Pholia Farm. Nestled in the woods, this is a small artisanal goat dairy that's turning out beautiful and unique raw-milk goat cheeses.

One of my favorites is Covered Bridge, a raw-milk, washed-curd cheese aged for three months. During the make cycle, Wild River Nut Brown ale is added,

giving the cheese a unique, nutty flavor. All of Pholia Farm's cheeses are made exclusively from the milk of their own Nigerian Dwarf goats. Nigerian Dwarfs are an unusual breed for dairy goats because their small size means lower milk output. But they are unbelievably cute! Their milk has the highest butterfat of any breed, giving the cheeses a richness rarely found in goat cheese. By the way, this is a good beer cheese.

Pholia Farm's cheeses may be hard to find if you live outside of Oregon, but owners Vern and Gianclis Caldwell do ship their cheeses nationwide. Visit their website, www.pholiafarm.com, to contact them directly. My advice is to order the cheese they recommend. Not every cheese is available all the time; in the tradition of a true artisan, that's way it's supposed to be.

My final summer pick is French — Saveur du Marquis from the island of Corsica. This sheep's milk cheese is one of the most beautiful and unusual cheeses you'll ever see. Covered in rosemary, thyme, juniper berries, and aromatic herbs found on the rocky, brambly island, the cheese develops a beautiful light blue mold that is as striking as it is delicious.

The paste is semi-firm, creamy and snow white. Made from pasteurized milk, it has a surprisingly mild flavor that's full of character. At about six inches in diameter, it's worthy of being a table centerpiece, the pièce de résistance. If you're entertaining enough people, buy the entire wheel and display it with pride. CC



Brillat Savarin with myrtille