

## Little Rove des Garrigues makes big mark

Janet Fletcher

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My friend Barbara brought Le Rove des Garrigues to my house for dinner recently, and this little cheese made a big impression.

I'm quite sure I had never tried it, although the distributor tells me the cheese has been available in the Bay Area for several years. How could this pretty thing have escaped my attention?

"Every chef I've sold it to reveres it," says Jesse Schwartzburg, a sales representative for Cheese Works West, the local distributor. Schwartzburg is a salesman, but I don't think he was exaggerating much when he said that many of his customers experience "an epiphany about goat cheese" when they taste Le Rove des Garrigues.

Rove is the name of the goat breed responsible for this delicate fresh French cheese. Garrigues is French for the aromatic scrubland of Provence, a brushy coastal landscape scented with wild thyme, lavender, rosemary and juniper. Goats browse among these pungent, low-growing shrubs, and, presumably, their milk retains some of those aromatic oils.

The petite Rove des Garrigues weighs a little less than 3 ounces and resembles a fresh snowball. These rindless goat cheeses, from pasteurized milk, leave the dairy at about 1 week old, packaged sous vide - with no exposure to air - which keeps them in a nearly stable state en route to retail counters, a voyage that can take a couple of weeks.

Each cheese rests in a paper doily, like a treat from the pastry shop. It does not have a large aroma, but the texture makes the sale. It is smooth, creamy and as light as a lemon soufflé. The citrus note is pronounced; you could be forgiven for thinking that the cheese recipe includes grated lemon rind, but it doesn't.

The dairy that produces Le Rove des Garrigues is no longer the small enterprise it was in the 1940s, when it premiered. Nevertheless, the cheese retains the flavor, texture and appearance of something handmade.

Enjoy Le Rove des Garrigues on a summer cheese board with fresh figs, or serve it for lunch with sliced tomatoes or a green salad. A dry rosé is the wine to pour with it.

Look for Le Rove des Garrigues at Say Cheese in San Francisco, the Cheese Board in Berkeley, the Pasta Shop in Berkeley and Oakland, and at Dean & DeLuca in St. Helena.



**Next up:** Ascutney Mountain, an aged cow's milk cheese from Vermont.

Janet Fletcher is the author of "Cheese & Wine: A Guide to Selecting, Pairing, and Enjoying" and "The Cheese Course," both from Chronicle Books.

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