



Seasonality & Cheese

Here in Texas, we don't always get the pleasure of really experiencing four seasons. Instead it's just hot and then, well, maybe a cold day to slap you in the face, then warm again, and then winter - or some variation of that depending on where you live. Then as we come out of winter, it gets oddly warm quickly and confuses all our plants...only to freeze on us one last time and kill everything. Ah yes, Texas weather. Despite our lack of four true seasons, seasonality does affect cheese production and the resulting flavor. Are the dairy animals grazing on those early spring grasses which give way to amazing wildflowers? Or, later in the year as fall gives way to winter, there may not be enough pasture grass to sustain the animals and additional hay is supplemented to their diets. Depending on the time of the year, what the animals are eating, and where they are at in their milking cycle (among other variables), dairy milk composition differs. For instance, the milk may be plentiful but thin or more in short supply but rich and fatty. And each time that milk composition changes, adjustments have to be made in the cheesemaking room.

So where am I going with all this? Well, while some cheeses are made year-round and allow you to taste the distinctions from batches made in different seasons, other cheeses are only offered seasonally. Yes, it's that time of year when we get to showcase some stellar winter seasonal cheeses - from Oregon, to Wisconsin, to Vermont - all offering up a little taste of terroir that reflects the specific region and milk from this time of the year.

Winter Seasonal Cheeses

First up is **Rogue River Blue**. Not only has this cheese won numerous awards (including two Best in Show titles at the American Cheese Society and World's Best Blue Cheese at the World Cheese Awards), but only a handful of days ago it was named Best American Cheese at this year's World Cheese Awards in England. Made by Rogue Creamery in Oregon, this raw cow's milk blue cheese is regularly turned when it is younger and allowed to develop a natural rind as it ages in rooms created to resemble the French caves where Roquefort is aged. The cheese is then wrapped in Syrah grape leaves from nearby Carpenter Hill Vineyard that are macerated in Clear Creek Pear Brandy. The texture of this cheese is simultaneously creamy yet studded with bits of crunch and the flavor rocks our palates - hitting both sweet and salty notes, as well as offering a delicate umami or savory taste. Because this cheese is aged a minimum of 9 to 12 months, the wheels you get now were made last year. This description from Rogue Creamery's website couldn't be more picturesque: "Rogue River blue is made

during the autumnal equinox and before the winter solstice from Brown Swiss and Holstein cow's milk, certified sustainable by Food Alliance. The cows graze in 1250 foot elevation pastures bordering Rogue River, where they eat a variety of pasture and native grasses, hop clover, wild herbs, Himalayan blackberries and wild flowers, supplemented with grass hay, alfalfa and grain off the ranch." If made from their cows' milk at any other time of the year, then the cheese would taste noticeably different. And that folks, is why this is a special treat we wait for each year! (By the way, don't worry about that other milk. It's delicious and amazing in its own unique way and is used to make a handful of Rogue Creamery's other decadent cheeses.)

Speaking of award-winning, we also want to give a congratulatory shout out to Vermont's Jasper Hill Farm and the Cellars at Jasper Hill for their World Cheese Awards Super Gold wins for Harbison and Alpha Tolman. While Harbison often graces our case (and sells out just as quickly), right now we're highlighting their winter seasonal treat: **Winnimere**. Made from the rich, fatty, protein-laden raw milk of the farm's herd of Ayshire cows, this cheese develops such an unctuousness that it can't even hold it's own form, much like it's European muses Forsterkase and Vacherin Mont d'Or. Thus, it is wrapped in spruce bark from the area and then washed down in beer from neighboring Hill Farmstead Brewery. Yea, that's a mouthful. Basically, the Cellars at Jasper Hill are putting every little bit of their piece of Vermont paradise into this cheese, to make it uniquely it's own. All of these factors help describe and define what the French have long called terroir (a term you wine lovers surely know!). This cheese is hearty and comforting. Gather friends and drinks and gather around it as your centerpiece. Peel off the top rind, then spoon out the paste. (While your guests would prefer you ladle it on bread - or better yet, some cured meats, in our house, it goes straight from spoon to mouth. We know, we know. That's weird. But then again, we are cheese addicts.)

Our final seasonal cheese for discussion this week hasn't even arrived yet, but we just couldn't keep it a secret any longer. Tis the season for **Rush Creek Reserve** (in photo above)! Many of you love Pleasant Ridge Reserve, an outstanding firm Alpine-style cheese with a nutty flavor made by Uplands Cheese Company in Wisconsin. As a quick reminder, it's the cheese that has won the American Cheese Society's prestigious "Best in Show" honor three times. The point is that Uplands Cheese Company doesn't mess around. For over ten years, Pleasant Ridge Reserve was the only cheese Uplands Cheese Company produced. Choosing to focus equally on the lands, cows, and cheesemaking process, they encourage diverse luscious grasses for their mixed-breed herd to graze on rotationally, and only the spring and summer seasonal milk from the pasture-fed cows is used to make Pleasant Ridge Reserve. So when the owners hired cheesemaker Andy Hatch a few years ago, he inherited a well-respected cheesemaking environment and reputation ... as well as a herd with fall/winter milk to contribute to a new creation! Rush Creek Reserve is also akin to Vacherin Mont d'Or. Also wrapped in spruce bark and washed in a brine, the Rush Creek Reserve is aged exactly 60 days before being shipped off. That's because Uplands wanted to continue to use raw, unpasteurized milk to emphasize their milk and their grasses. (Raw milk cheese sold in the United States must be aged a minimum of 60 days.) Just like with the Winnimere, the best way to eat Rush Creek Reserve is to cut the top rind off and then scoop out the decadent, silky cream. We'll be receiving over twenty discs in the next couple of weeks. Although we're not taking reservations or preorders for Rush Creek Reserve right now, make sure to keep in touch with us (facebook, twitter, these emails!) so that you'll be one of the first to know when it arrives, because when these puppies come in, we can hardly keep our hands on them (or our mouths off them!).

Upcoming Events & Cheese-y News

It's time to nominate and vote for your favorite "local heroes" for Edible Austin. Be proud of your city and reward those folks (a chef/restaurant, a farm/farmer, a food/beverage artisan, a food shop, and a non-profit organization) who work to create the food environment you want and who encourage food ethics you can get behind. Voting ends December 14!

We're ecstatic to announce that MSN recently included us in their article on "**America's Finest Cheese Stores.**" We're among amazing company and it's truly honor. Thanks for your continued support; we promise to keep trying to impress you by simply offering amazing cheeses (thanks cheesemakers!) in a fun environment.

Saturday, Dec 8 (11am): Calling all women who like cheese and beer? We've got an event just for you. Girls' Pint Out, a national craft beer organization for women, is hosting its inaugural Austin event at the **Draught House Pub with a Cheese and St. Arnold's Beer Pairing** - yum. This five pairing event will be at The Draught House Pub and pre-sale tickets are \$25. Proceeds will benefit Austin-based breast cancer charity, The Smile Never Fades.

Thursday, Dec 13 (6:30-9:30pm): December is just around the corner, meaning it's that time of year again for our **Slow Food Austin's Third Annual Cheese & Beer Pairing with (512) Brewing**. This event often sells out quickly, so count your friends and purchase the \$40-\$45 tickets now. You'll get a pairing of five beers and six cheeses (yes, we had to pair two with one beer), other food pairings and snacks, a good time, and explanations from Brewmaster Kevin Brand and Cheesemonger John Antonelli - all set in the cozy, inviting environment of (512) Brewing.

Stay Cheese-y!

John & Kendall
Kelly, Brad, Courtney, Paul, Victoria, Dan, Traci, & Kara



ring us 512 531 9610

visit us Tues-Sat 11-7 | Sun 12-5 | Closed Mon

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