

*It can be soft, hard, sweet, sour
hot, cold, pungent or bland
It comes in various shapes and many colors
It can be inodorous or effluvious
It is known in every country
to every tongue
Whatever its shape, hue, scent or nationality
it is one of the most ancient
most honorable of foods
and it is called*

CHEESE

by JAMES BEARD

HARD CHEESE hathe this condicioun in his operacioun. Furst he wille a stomak kepe in the botom open, the helthe of every creature ys in his condicioun." So states one of the oldest English books on food, *The Boke of Nurture*, dated 1452. In a very different mood, the great French food authority, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, wrote with true Gallic fervor: "A meal without cheese is like a beautiful woman with one eye."

The average American displays a remarkably unsophisticated attitude toward cheese. He recognizes, at most, only cheddar, cream and perhaps limburger. On the other hand, the true cheese enthusiast is as knowledgeable and as earnest as a wine lover in pursuit of his favorite vintage claret. For cheese, like wine, varies greatly. Its flavor and texture can be affected by the kind of milk used, the method by which it is made, the aging, and the climate and soil of the region. Two cheeses of the same type may be entirely different or may differ so subtly that only the connoisseur can detect one from the other. Comparing fine cheeses is a gastronomical adventure, and a tray of several types with a good wine for clearing the palate can furnish cheese lovers with a subject for a whole evening's discussion. At the end of this article I will list my favorites among the American and imported products available in most fine food shops, but first a few words about general types of cheese, their care and how to serve them.

Cheese falls into four cate-

C H E E S E

gories: 1. **Natural cream** cheeses. Cottage and cream cheeses are examples. 2, **Fermented uncooked** cheeses, well aged. Some examples are Brie, Camembert, Pont-l'évêque and a cheese called breakfast cheese in California. 3. **Cooked** cheeses. Notable examples are Emmenthal, Gruyère and cheddar. 4. Finally, there are **processed** cheeses—recooked natural cheeses with additions that make them less flavorful and smoother, sometimes rubbery, in texture. These are cheese mixtures rather than cheeses and a poor substitute for the real thing.

If it is at all possible, cheese should be kept in a cool place *out* of the refrigerator. Extremely cold temperatures tend to kill the flavor and may ruin the texture of the more delicate cheeses such as Brie. Some restaurants have special storage areas where the temperature stays around 58–60 degrees. This enables cheese to ripen and age without being harmed. If you must keep cheese in the refrigerator, remove it several hours before eating to allow it to return to room temperature or even warmer.

Serve cheese uncut on a board, marble slab or platter with knives for hard cheese and scoops for soft or creamy cheese. I like to serve three or four different kinds of definite contrast in texture and flavor. I find this gives guests ample chance to experiment.

With cheese serve French bread and a variety of biscuits—for example, traditional English biscuits made especially to complement cheese. I'm particularly fond of Euphrates, a new biscuit, made in this country, that resembles toasted Armenian cracker bread topped with sesame seeds. Butter belongs with certain cheeses and the pepper grinder is a "must" for others, especially for goat's milk cheese—*fromage de chèvre*. Some people enjoy a dash of paprika on soft cheeses such as Camembert and Brie. Other people like hot mustard with sharp

CHEESE

cheeses. Soft cream cheese fanciers frequently like preserves. Of course the greatest complement to any fine cheese is a fine wine, and in "The Cellar" in this issue you will find Sam Aaron discussing some of the great vintages and their affinity for the great cheeses of the world.

Now let me suggest some unusual cheeses made in our own country and deserving of far wider acclaim.

Teleme, a semi-soft cheese from the Pacific coast, is described by one food expert as the most provocative of all cheeses. It can be ordered from Robert L. Balzer, 133 North Larchmont, Los Angeles, Calif., and costs \$6-\$7 for a four-pound cheese. **Langlois Blue cheese** is the most distinctive blue cheese in the country. Order direct from the Langlois Cheese Co., Langlois, Ore. The Star Valley Cheese Company of Thayne, Wyo., makes two fine Swiss cheeses: one well aged, called **Gruyère**, and one milder, called **Swiss Emmenthal**. Both cost around a dollar a pound. The Marin County Cheese Company, Petaluma, Calif., makes an excellent **Brie** and also a **Camembert**.

These two classics are also produced by Kolb's in Illinois. Two old American favorites should never be forgotten: **Vermont cheddar**, outstanding when sharp; and **Liederkrantz**, a fine cheese if thoroughly ripened.

The great classic European cheeses are imported and sold in most fine food shops across the country. If they are not available in your area, order from Mr. Balzer (listed above) or from Maison Glass, Bloomingdale's or Macy's in New York City. Here is a list of the most outstanding: **Roquefort**, probably the world's greatest blue cheese. **Emmenthal**, commonly called Swiss. If aged it is superb. This and **Gruyère**, a Swiss without holes and with a mellower flavor, are the best for fondue. **Bel Paese**, a great semi-soft cheese from Italy. **Gorgon-**

CHEESE

zola, an Italian blue cheese, rich, creamy and strong. **Stilton**, famous English cheese of the blue family; truly outstanding. **Cheshire**, a fine classic from England. **Wensleydale**, a hard cheese of great distinction from England. **Reblochon**, a noble French cheese. **Telaggio**, a delicious, rich Italian cheese with a mild flavor. **Triple Crème**, a rather new cheese from France, delicate and fluffy. **Bleu de Bresse**, a new French blue cheese as light as a soufflé.

In addition to these suggestions, try sampling special cheeses available in your locality. Some to watch for are Coon, Monterey Jack, creole cheese, pineapple, cream brick, Mysost, Poona (a wonderful cheese), sage, Chantelle and Limburger.

**GENTRY***Spring, 1957***p. 94**