

# Handcrafted American Artisanal Cheese

By Bob Skolnick Photography by Russell Bamert

The evolution of food and drink in the United States has been nothing short of phenomenal over the past thirty years. In the '60s, chefs in fine restaurants were predominantly European, wine came from France and Germany and quality cheeses were associated with Europe. We are all now aware that this country has bloomed into a major - if not dominant - producer of fine wines from many growing regions in the country. We are also finding that the same entrepreneurial spirit of the small vintner is now developing in the handcrafted American Artisanal Cheese market. Small farm cheese pro-

ducers in this country have developed "world quality cheeses", and more importantly, a strong market of cheese lovers who enjoy their creations. Specialty food shops across the country have recognized their quality cheeses and typically carry a significant selection.

Artisan cheeses are handmade in small batches using the purest milk from dairy cows, sheep or goats, often from the farms own herd of animals. Recipes are traditional and proprietary with ageing methods that vary from farm to farm. The product can be seasonal, as sheep and goats have dry



Wheel of Tom's Hudson Valley Camembert with Mutton Buttons and fresh pear

Tom's Hudson Valley Camembert has a beautiful white edible rind which highlights this soft cheese. The interior is a lovely cream color. This soft-ripened cheese is made by combining their own sheep's milk with their neighbor's BGH-free cow's milk. It was awarded "Best of Class" in the U.S. Cheese Contest. Old Chatham Shepherding Company is located in New York's Hudson River Valley and is a producer of several different types of handcrafted sheep's milk cheeses. Its herds are fed on organically managed pastures.

OLD CHATHAM SHEPHERDING COMPANY  
155 Shaker Museum Road  
Old Chatham, New York 12136  
1 - 888 - SHEEP - 60  
www.blacksheepcheese.com



Cypress Grove Chevre with date and walnut wedge

Their Humboldt Fog Chevre, a mold-ripened cheese with a central layer and outer cover of ash is made with the finest goat's milk from Northern California farms. Owners Mary Keehn and Malorie McCurdy state their award winning cheese starts with one ingredient, "exceptional milk".

CYPRESS GROVE CHEESE COMPANY  
4600 Dows Prairie Road  
McKinleyville, CA 95519  
707 - 839 - 3168  
www.cypressgrovechevre.com

periods. Much like wine, the precise flavor and aroma of the artisanal cheese depends on the soil and climate of where it is made, which explains why a Cheddar made in California tastes different from one made in Vermont.

The best way to get acquainted with these artisanal cheeses is to organize a tasting party. Select at least three cheeses of various types (made of cow, sheep and goat's milk), textures (fresh, soft-ripened and hard) and flavor intensities (from mild to pungent). To enjoy the texture and flavor of cheeses, it is best to eat them at room temperature. While tasting, always progress from mild flavors to intense flavors. To keep the flavors distinct, use a different knife for each cheese you are sampling.

We have selected three of our favorite artisanal cheese producers for suggested enjoyment in this article. Our selections include one special offering from each category; cows, sheep and goats. In future editions of *iSabroso!*, look for recommendations on new artisanal cheese products and new artisanal cheese producers.

To learn more about American Artisanal Cheeses, visit [www.cheesesociety.org](http://www.cheesesociety.org), or you can purchase books on cheese by renowned food writer Laura Werlin. Her first book, *The New American Cheese*, contains profiles of over 50 American cheesemakers. The book references the evolution of cheesemaking in America, how to

make cheese and how to taste cheese. Her thoughts on pairing cheese are particularly valuable. Laura's second book, *The All American Cheese and Wine Book*, offers profiles of both cheesemakers and winemakers and great tips on pairings. Another suggested book is

*The Cheese Palate* by Max McCalman, one of the world's

foremost experts on cheese and the maitre fromager at the Artisanal Cheese Center in New York City 212 - 239 - 1200 or visit online [www.artisanalcheese.com](http://www.artisanalcheese.com)



The perfect accompaniment to cheese are Marcona almonds from Spain

**You can purchase all of the suggested cheeses in this article at Greenery Market located in Sunland Park Mall in El Paso**



Bingham Hill Rustic Blue wheel with Bingham Hill Poudre Puff, fresh figs and Marcona almonds from Spain

Kristi and Tom Johnson made their first batch of Bingham Hill Rustic Blue in December 1999. Their Rustic Blue is an award winning raw-milk blue cheese with a crumbly texture. The taste has both a nutty and slightly chocolate flavor.

**BINGHAM HILL CHEESE COMPANY**  
1716 Heath Parkway  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80524  
970 - 472 - 0702  
[www.binghamhill.com](http://www.binghamhill.com)

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