



## 50th Anniversary of the Comté AOC!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Comté AOC (Controlled Appellation of Origin)! On July 17, 1958, Comté became one of the very first cheeses to obtain a Controlled Appellation of Origin designation, which protects and preserves not only Comté's area of production and time-honored methods of fabrication, but also the economic organization of the region. To commemorate this momentous occasion, the Comité Interprofessionnel du Comté (CIGC) launched a series of events celebrating Comté's long heritage... and its future ahead.

Comté has been made for over a thousand years. Its production dates back to the Middle Ages, when the large wheels were fabricated to nourish families during the long, harsh winters of the Jura region. Because the wheels require so much

To honor Comté's system of solidarity and community, the CIGC hosted *La Grande Coulée* on July 17th—50 years exactly from the original date of AOC designation. Representatives from all of the cheese dairies in the appellation converged in Champagnole, France for the event, bringing with them an important asset—a few liters of their milk. The milk—representing some 112,000 cows from 3,500 farms—was combined to create the most diversified Comté ever produced. Claude Vermot-Desroches, President of the CIGC stated in his opening, "Apart from its inimitable taste, Comté is an artisanal product and an interdependent organization with many actors spread throughout the Jura region... This milk from all the *fruitsières* will mix to symbolize this solidarity, which is not only a source of prosperity but also a modern system where the women and men all have a significant importance in the history of Comté."

Other CIGC events celebrating the AOC's anniversary included: *Une Journée à la Fruitière* (Spend a Day at the Cheese Dairy) on June 14th in Simandre-sur-Suran, Ain; and *Instants Gourmands pour le Comté* (Instants Gourmands for Comté) on September 4-7 in Besançon.

Comté represents a link between a people and their land. Its production has to follow certain procedures and traditions shared by an entire region, and yet each wheel carries the mark of the local farms and cheese dairies, the microclimate, the season, the particular skill of the cheese maker and the *affineur*. Thanks to the AOC regulations, which were reinforced in 2007 (see Comté News Fall/Winter 2007), and the EU Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) regulations, Comté is not only a product with a long history, but also a long future.

milk—500 liters on average—a system of cooperative production developed. Farmers would bring their milk to their village cheesemaker, who would then make the sizable wheels of cheese.

Today, the ancient form of village organization and cooperation survives. Farmers provide the milk for Comté, which is delivered daily to local *fruitsières*, or cheesemakers, who transform the milk into cheese within 24 hours. About 3 weeks later the wheels are brought to *affineurs*, or cellar masters, who age the cheese in special cellars for at least 4 months, but often as long as 12 to 18, or even 24 months.



### Comté ("con - TAY") cheese ID

#### General information:

**Origin:** Jura Mountains  
(Massif du Jura), France

**Milk Type:** Raw cow's milk

**Cheese Style:** Artisanal, pressed, cooked, with natural brushed rind.

**French AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) since 1958 and European Union Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Certification.**

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1500-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 112,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and free of fermented products and GMOs.
- Each *fruitsière* must collect milk from dairy farms within a 17-mile diameter maximum.
- Milk must be made into cheese within 24 hours maximum of the earliest milking.
- Only natural starters must be used to transform the milk into curds.
- Wheels must be aged on spruce boards. Minimum aging is 4 months, generally 6-18 months and sometimes even longer.



**Comté Cheese Association**  
 at the next Winter Fancy Food Show  
 in San Francisco, January 18-20, 2009

Booth #3317

# Comté Tasting Class

Like wine, each wheel of Comté has unique aromas and flavors which are influenced by the pastures of origin, the season of production, the time spent aging, and the unique style of the *affineur*, or cellar master. Whether hosting a cheese tasting party, training store staff, cooking with Comté, conducting store demos, or simply enjoying it at home, these tasting tips will help you to best discover—and enjoy—the innumerable characteristics of Comté.

Remember to let Comté sit out at room temperature for 1 hour before tasting.



## LOOK

### Rind

First, observe the rind, which tells the story of the wheel's fabrication. Its grainy surface is evidence of the Comté mold that was used to shape the cheese, and the color—ranging from beige to light brown—depends on the atmosphere of the cellar where it was aged.

>What does the rind look like? Light or dark? Smooth or rough? Thin or Thick?

### Cheese Body, or Paste

Next, observe the cheese body, or paste. Made without colorants or additives, Comté's color reflects the season in which it was made. The body of "summer" Comté, made from the milk of cows grazing on fresh plants rich in carotene, will have a yellow tint. A "winter" Comté, on the other hand, made from milk of cows fed on dried hay, will be paler ivory in color. The body can also reflect the age; an older Comté may have the appearance of tiny crystals, resulting from the build-up of the amino acid tyrosine during aging (contrary to widespread belief, these little crystals aren't salt!). The body might also have openings, or small holes ("eyes") that form during maturation from moderate propionic fermentation, which releases carbon dioxide. The amount of carbon dioxide released varies according to the temperatures of the maturing cellars. A wheel with no eyes is said to be "massif" (solid).

>What is the color of the cheese body? Are there any small crystals visible? Does the cheese have openings, or is it solid?

## SMELL

To perceive the most volatile aromas, break a piece of Comté between your fingers and sniff it immediately. Comté aromas are classified into 6 groups: Lactic (milk and milk products), Fruity (fresh or dry fruit, fresh nuts, honey), Roasted (toasted bread, roasted nuts, coffee), Vegetable (green plants, vegetables, mushrooms), Animal (meat stock, leather, egg) and Spicy (vanilla, nutmeg, pepper, mint). The Comté Wheel of Aromas identifies 83 common terms that are used to describe the different aromas in tasting.

>Is the smell weak or intense? How would you describe the smell? What are 3 different specific aromas that you detect?

\*The Comté Wheel of Aromas can be downloaded at [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com)

## TASTE

### Texture

Put the piece of Comté in your mouth and chew slowly. Concentrate on the texture of the cheese. Comté's texture can be broken down into the following characteristics:

- Elasticity: the ability to return to its original shape, assessed by lightly pressing on the cheese (elastic → no elasticity)
- Firmness: resistance to deformation (firm → has body → soft)
- Unctuousness: feeling of creaminess (dry → unctuous/creamy)
- Microstructure: size and number of particles perceived after chewing; as the cheese matures its texture becomes less grainy and increasingly smooth (grainy → floury → fine → smooth)

>What consistency does the cheese have? Is it elastic, firm, unctuous? How does it develop? Does it become grainy or does it produce very fine particles?

### Flavors

Now concentrate on the flavors of the cheese:

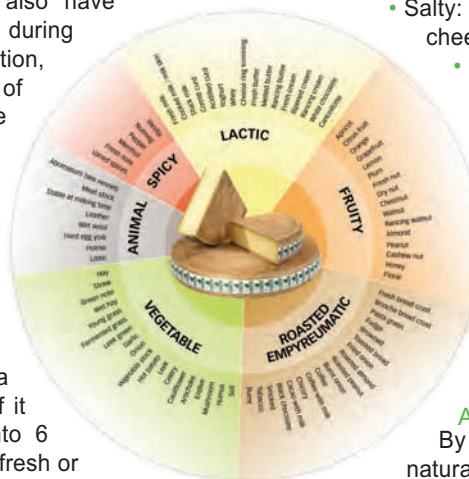
- Salty: created mainly by the salt that was rubbed on the cheese to produce the rind.
- Sugary: can be quite marked in certain cheeses due to propionic fermentation and proteolysis, or the breakdown of proteins.
- Acidic: not very intense; younger Comté tends to have more acidity than older Comté.
- Bitter: sometimes detected in the aftertaste; unpleasant if too marked, but positive if balanced.

>What flavors (salty, sugary, acidic, bitter) do you perceive?

### Aromas

By breathing as you taste, Comté's aromas rise naturally to your nose. Let the air held in your mouth out slowly through your nose and concentrate on the cheese's aromas. Intense aromas aren't necessarily the ideal; rather, the aromas should be diverse and in harmony. This diversity can articulate itself through time, as aromas don't express themselves simultaneously. Persistence refers to the aromas that linger after swallowing. Certain cheeses have more persistence than others.

>Are the aromas discreet or powerful? Do you recognize the dominant groups and some specific aromas in particular? Are the aromas persistent: do you continue to perceive them after swallowing?



## What kind of taster are you?

If you prefer flavors of fresh hazelnut, dry apricot, soft caramel, boiled milk and hints of vanilla, you will probably appreciate a young Comté. If you like a more unctuous texture with rich, persistent flavors of roasted nuts, melted butter, spices and hints of matured cream or citrus, you will probably appreciate an older Comté.



# Cheese Talk with Will Studd

Will Studd is the Executive Producer and Host of *Cheese Slices*, the world's only television series focused on international artisan and traditional handmade cheeses (the *Cheese Slices* DVD series is available at [www.cheeseslices.com](http://www.cheeseslices.com), along with his book by the same name). Studd has been in the cheese industry for over three decades and is recognized as a *Maître Fromager* (Master of Cheese) from the French *Guilde des Fromagers*.

## How and when did your passion for cheese begin?

My Interest in dairy foods began after discovering the flavors of unpasteurised milk and yoghurt as child on holiday on the rugged coast of West Coast Ireland. However, my interest in cheese began after tasting authentic Swiss Gruyère cut fresh from the wheel whilst working at a shop in London as a student. It tasted sensational compared to supermarket vacuum-packed block gruyère. After that I became very enthusiastic about sharing my newfound experience, and went on to discover Comté. Comté has [now] been a favorite cheese for three decades.

## You are devoted to artisanal, farmstead and raw milk cheeses. Why?

Artisanal and farmstead cheeses are far more interesting than their industrial counterparts because they are handmade and vary from day to day, reflecting the quality of the milk, skill of the cheese maker, and patience of the *affineur*. They are unpredictable and generally taste much better than their industrial counterparts. Encouraging an appreciation for these wonderful cheeses so that they are around for future generations to enjoy has become my mission.



## You explore cheeses all over the world in your Cheese Slices series. Have you noticed any trends in the global cheese industry over the past several years?

Over the past five years I have spent more than 8 months filming *Cheese Slices* around the world. Despite the seemingly unstoppable growth in mass-produced factory cheese, it's been very encouraging to see more and more consumers becoming aware of traditional artisan cheese. Europe has finally recognized the importance of defending these traditions. In other countries where traditional [production] was almost lost (such as the USA), there are now a growing number of new producers adopting artisanal methods to produce an exciting range of handmade cheese. There has been a revolution in specialty cheeses driven by an increasing number of consumers fed up with innocuous bland industrial cheese.

## What are some of your favorite ways to enjoy Comté?

My favorite way to enjoy Comté is simply just as it comes. Cut fresh from a mature wheel with some crusty bread and a glass of dry Riesling. When enjoying a well-matured chunk of Comté, it's easy to close my eyes and link its delicious lingering flavor with the sound of cowbells echoing across the thin mountain air in early summer.

## New on the web!

Our US trade website, [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com) now has Shelf Talkers and Comté Recipe Sheets that can be conveniently downloaded and printed! Perfect for the cheese case or demo table, Comté Shelf Talkers (available in two different formats) offer a concise overview of Comté's characteristics and production, along with food and wine pairings. The Recipe Sheets provide delectable Comté recipes—including Chicken with Comté Cheese and Olives, Monte Comté Club Sandwich and Comté Cheese Frittata (featured to



the right)—which are perfect for demos and promotions. Finally, be sure to check out the new "In the Press" page, which features news and stories about Comté and the Jura region!

The US trade website, [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com),

features a variety of POS, educational and training materials, including brochures, handling and storage tips, staff training information, news, events and more.

## Comté Cheese Frittata Serves: 4



1 medium onion, sliced  
Olive oil  
8 eggs  
1 cup milk  
6 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and chopped  
Salt, cayenne and nutmeg to taste  
6 ounces Comté cheese, grated (1 1/2 cups packed)  
6 ounces quality ham, cubed  
8 asparagus spears, steamed until tender

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Sauté the sliced onion in olive oil until soft. Reserve.
3. Using a fork, beat the eggs with the milk. Add the sun-dried tomatoes, reserved onions, salt, cayenne and nutmeg to taste. Stir in the grated Comté and cubed ham and mix well.
4. In a medium oven-proof skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the egg mixture and cook for a few minutes, until the bottom starts to set. Arrange the asparagus on top. Place the skillet in the oven and cook until puffed and golden, 10-20 minutes.

# Quality Control in Retail

Quality control at the retail level is no easy feat in the specialty cheese industry—artisan cheeses can have widely different shelf lives, stages of maturity and optimal storage conditions, making it tricky to regulate turnover and manage staff training. The American Cheese Society Conference in Chicago this year (July 23-26) tackled this topic with an inspiring and educational seminar titled, “Keeping it Fresh: Harm Reduction for Cheese at Retail.” We spoke with the three panelists—Helder dos Santos, Sales Manager at C.E. Zuercher & Co, Juliana Uruburu, Cheese Program Director of The Pasta Shop, and Carlos Souffront, Cheese Manager at Zingerman’s—about the steps they take to manage the quality of their cheeses from arrival to sale.

## Get it In, Get it Out

“Get it in, get it out,” is the motto of Helder dos Santos of C.E. Zuercher & Co., who sells to distributors, retailers and restaurants. He continuously examines his cheeses to make sure they arrive in good condition, and ships them to retailers as quickly as possible. He recommends that retailers buy only what they need each week, that they open and inspect each shipment when it comes in, and that they store the cheese in its shipping box in the refrigerator or walk-in away from fans. Juliana Uruburu of The Pasta Shop in California unwraps all orders upon arrival and calls her distributor immediately if there are any issues. The cheese then gets rewrapped in paper and crated, and the crates get bound in plastic wrap before going into the refrigerator. Both Juliana and Carlos Souffront of Zingerman’s prefer to order

imperative. His staff keeps track of tasks such as cleaning shelves, sweeping and mopping, airing out the room and turning the cheese. Juliana runs her store on a detailed weekly schedule to maintain quality and cleanliness. On Monday all of the cheeses get unwrapped, cleaned and rewrapped; on Tuesday the entire department gets thoroughly cleaned and all new orders are placed; on Wednesday all orders are received and examined; on Thursday the staff preps for the weekend; and on Saturday and Sunday, “sell, sell, sell.” Every night the cheese case is also emptied and cleaned, then set up again in the morning. Her motto is, “Buy it. Sell it. Listen to it. Get it into the customer’s hands as the cheesemaker intended.”

## Staff Training

Getting the cheese into the customer’s hands as the cheesemaker intended is something that Juliana strongly enforces in her staff. She has developed a 3-day training process that involves lectures and tastings about cheese classifications and types, lessons about entertaining with and pairing cheeses, and instructions in cutting, wrapping, receiving and handling. She keeps a procedural book at the cheese counter for new employees, and pairs them with a veteran staff member to learn the intricacies of quality control. She believes it is also important to “empower [the staff] with knowledge,” and invites cheesemakers and experts to conduct trainings and tastings. Carlos also continuously trains and educates his staff. To facilitate quality control, he has developed a chart with the names of all the cheeses on the Y-axis and the methods of care on the X-axis so that any staff member can look to any given cheese and find out exactly what procedures need to be done from its point of reception until it’s sold to maximize its life and potential.

Although it takes a level of dedication and passion to preserve and nurture the quality of their cheeses, all of the panelists agree that the payoff is worth it. They find that with consistent high quality it is easier to develop a loyal customer base and reduce waste, and they can charge more for outstanding product. It’s a “win, win, win situation” for the retailer, customer and cheesemaker.



whole wheels of Comté and to sell it cut-to-order. They agree that if pre-cutting, it’s important to only cut what can be sold that day. “Never cut more than you can sell,” advises Juliana.

## Attention to Detail

“I think of cheeses as babies. They need constant attention and they can’t talk,” states Carlos, who believes that store staff should be tasting constantly to make sure that each cheese is being sold in its peak condition. Having the right tools, such as a cheese iron for tasting, cardboard and wooden boxes for storing, paper for wrapping, and proper knives for cutting are key. Cleanliness is also



### The Comté Cheese Association

provides you with everything you need for a successful selling program, including: recipe booklets, brochures, aprons, demo toothpicks, training tools and more. Visit [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com) for POS materials and free downloads.

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