



COMTÉ NEWS



Spring/Summer 2010

The Comté Experience:

Discover the World of Comté with New Online Videos and DVD



staff members, educating customers (or yourself!), or featuring a promotion, the videos are a fantastic way to delve into the world of Comté.

The *Comté Experience* videos can be viewed directly at www.comte-usa.com. DVD's are also available by request to members of the trade and press at trade@comte-usa.com.

The Comté Experience

- **The Production of Comté Milk:** Step into the Comté fields and meet the dairy farmers and cows who provide the milk for Comté. Learn about the region's terroir and why it's so important to the flavor of the cheese.
- **Making Comté:** From the delivery of the milk to the local dairies, or *fruitières*, to heating the milk in large copper vats, checking the curds and forming the molds, see how the Comté wheels are made.
- **Aging Comté:** Comté is aged in special aging cellars for at least 4 months, and often 12-18 months or even longer. Meet a cellar master, or *affineur*, and learn how the aging process influences the flavor, texture, appearance and aromas of Comté.
- **Cutting & Storing Comté:** Learn more about the role of the cheesemonger, and discover how to properly cut, wrap and store Comté.
- **Tasting Comté:** Like wine, each wheel of Comté has unique aromas and flavors. Discover how to use all of your senses in this guided tasting of Comté, and learn how to best experience - and enjoy - the cheese's innumerable characteristics.
- **Wine Pairing & Comté:** Wondering what wines to pair with Comté? Learn several outstanding wine matches for Comté, and discover how versatile Comté can be.
- **Cooking with Comté – Fondue of Comté at La Petite Echelle:** Travel to the heart of the Jura Mountains and experience a traditional meal of Comté Fondue at La Petite Echelle, a restaurant and inn that's been cooking with Comté for centuries (be sure to check out La Petite Echelle's fondue recipe inside!).

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 *fruitière* 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

will be at the next

Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City, June 27-29, 2010 Booth #1459

The *Comté Experience* was produced in collaboration with Grape Radio (www.graperadio.com), and this was producer Jay Selman's first time visiting the Jura Mountain region. Since returning home, Jay notes, "I've been preoccupied with trying to recapture my experiences by using Comté in some of my favorite dishes. Grilled cheese sandwiches, sliders, and a killer French onion soup have, for the time being, satisfied my cravings for Comté!" You too can experience a bit of the Jura by cooking with Comté—look inside for more cooking ideas! →

Behind the Scene: Proteolysis and Propionic Fermentation

Have you ever noticed crunchy little crystals in your Comté? While many people mistakenly think these are salt crystals, they're actually the result of the maturation process. Comté wheels are aged for at least four months, and often as long as eighteen to twenty-four months or even longer in special maturation cellars located throughout the Jura. As the wheels slowly mature, two biochemical reactions of special significance are quietly taking place within the cheese: *propionic fermentation* and *proteolysis*. These reactions will impact the flavors, color and the texture of each wheel of Comté.

Propionic fermentation and proteolysis are influenced by the unique atmospheres of the aging cellars. Warmer cellars encourage faster propionic fermentation and proteolysis, while "cold" cellars (below 57°F) result in a slower evolution. Every wheel is treated differently depending on its specific characteristics and the ultimate objectives of the affineurs.

Affineurs (cellar masters who care for the cheese during its maturation) mature Comté wheels using three types of caves with different temperatures:

- 1- pre-maturation cellars at about 53-57°F for the formation and care of the crust. The crust hosts micro-organisms which form an ecosystem. The wheels will spend 0-20 days in these cellars depending on the pre-maturation they've undergone at the *fruitière* where they were made. The crust, which is porous, will develop a grainy and brown aspect.
- 2- maturation cellars, either mild at 59-65°F for a 3-4 week maturation, or cold at 48-52°F for a slower 3-12 month maturation.
- 3- final aging cellars at 41-47°F, or storage cellars at 39°F.

Since propionic fermentation and proteolysis happen over a long time, their effects are more apparent in older Comtés, which are aged longer in the cellars. Older Comtés therefore have nuttier, spicier and more complex notes, often with the presence of amino acid crystals. In contrast, younger Comtés have more buttery, fruity, brioche and lactic aromas without the presence of crystals. Neither old nor young is better or worse—it just depends on personal preference and the moment of consumption!

Propionic (acid) fermentation of lactose is the transformation of calcium lactates into propionic and acetic acids. It is activated by the propionibacteria in Comté. Propionic fermentation takes place at the beginning of Comté's maturation, when the wheels are still supple and stored in mild temperature cellars (57-66°F). This reaction, which lasts



for about 4-5 weeks, releases gas and may create "eyes", or holes or cracks in the cheese. It stops if the temperature drops under 39-40°F.

Until about 15 years ago, propionic fermentation usually happened more intensely than today. As a result, the pressure from the gas released in the cheese was stronger, and Comté wheels would often display many "eyes". Nowadays, *affineurs* have a more gentle approach, resulting in Comté with a creamier and thus more porous paste that doesn't retain as much of the gas from the fermentation.

Whether it is evidenced by the presence of eyes or not, Comté generally undergoes propionic fermentation and displays its resulting mild empyreumatic and nut aromas – brioche, light toast, crust of freshly baked bread, fudge, caramelized onion, *café au lait*, roasted peanuts, hazelnut, walnut, etc.

Proteolysis is the process in which long chains of casein molecules are broken down into peptides and then amino acids (AA). The broad diversity of the natural microflora in raw milk induces a very wide variety of these AA's. This wealth of AA's has a positive effect on the diet and leads to the development of the aromas of Comté and their diversity. Among these AA's, tyrosin crystallizes in the cheese due to its limited solubility. Under the teeth, the tyrosin crystals have a soft crunch, much like that of shortbread or *fleur de sel*. They have a slightly sweet taste. Proteolysis takes place during the entire duration of the "affinage", and over time it generates more intense empyreumatic aromas: dark chocolate, roasted almonds, burnt toast, smoke, etc.

A third biochemical process should also be mentioned here regarding the development of aromas in Comté. It is the slow transformation of a small part of the fatty matters in the cheese. Along with propionic fermentation and proteolysis, this phenomenon also produces compounds that will ultimately give rise to fruity aromas after a long aging.

Old vs Young Comté

Older Comté	Younger Comté
- The cheese paste will often have the presence of tyrosin crystals	- The cheese paste is smooth without crystals
- Intense empyreumatic aromas - Nutty flavors - Complex flavors	- Mild empyreumatic aromas - Floral and fruity - More lactic, buttery, and sweet aromas
- Drier, firm, more crumbly texture	- Moister, more supple texture
- Great for shaving on salads, pastas and crostinis - Magical alone or with roasted nuts, dried fruits, fresh bread, and a glass of white wine.	- Great for melting and adding to dishes such as macaroni and cheese, grilled cheese, gratins and even pizza - Delicious at breakfast time or as a snack.



Fondue at La Petite Echelle

Eating fondue at La Petite Echelle, a chalet and inn located in the Jura Mountains of France, is a unique experience linking food to history, tradition and terroir. At least three centuries old, the building was at one point a hospital run by nuns, then later a chalet where cattle were raised, cheese was produced (Comté in the summer and Mont d'Or in the winter) and food was served. Today, heifers are still raised on the property for the production of milk for Comté cheese, and the inn continues to serve traditional local dishes made from local terroir produce. Both activities are conducted by proprietor Norbert Bournez. Fondue is the highlight of the restaurant's menu, combining Comté with local Jura wine, foraged mushrooms and mountain herbs. The result is a mouthwatering dish that is shared among diners, reflecting a convivial culture that has been passed down through the centuries.



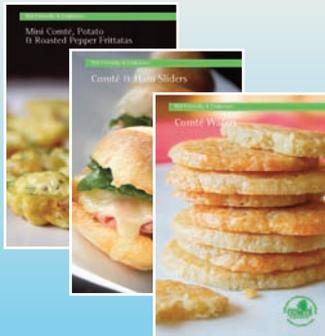
You can watch fondue being made by proprietor Norbert Bournez at La Petite Echelle in our new video series, "The Comté Experience." Log-in to www.comte-usa.com; click on Comté Videos; then select "Cooking with Comté – Fondue of Comté at La Petite Echelle." Then try recreating the recipe at home. It's great for parties, potlucks or as a fun meal with friends!

Comté Fondue

Adapted from La Petite Echelle, Jura Mountains, France

1 pound mature Comté, grated
1 ¼ cup dry white wine
1 clove garlic, peeled
1 tablespoon cornstarch
2 teaspoons Kirsch
A few slices of wild mushrooms, such as Cèpes (optional)
A few leaves of Asperula Odorata or other herbs such as tarragon or rosemary (optional)
Freshly ground black pepper and/or ground cumin (optional)

1. Combine the grated Comté, wine and garlic in a fondue pot and cook over low heat, stirring often, until the cheese melts.
2. In a small bowl, mix together the cornstarch and Kirsch.
3. Once the cheese is melted, add the mushrooms for flavor (if using), along with a few leaves of fresh Asperula Odorata or herbs (if using). Stir in most of the cornstarch mixture and bring to a simmer. The fondue should be thick enough to richly coat the back of a spoon. If it's too thin, add more of the cornstarch mixture until you reach the desired consistency. Season the fondue with freshly ground black pepper and/or a pinch of ground cumin, if desired.
4. Serve the hot fondue with cubes of French bread for dipping.



New Recipe Cards: *Kid Friendly & Delicious*

New recipe cards are now available! Sharing the theme, "Kid Friendly and Delicious," the Comté & Ham Sliders, Comté Wafers, and Mini Comté, Potato & Roasted Red Pepper Frittatas, are not only great for kids, but also perfect for entertaining. Download the recipes at www.comte-usa.com, or email us at trade@comte-usa.com to request copies of the 4x6-inch cards. Recipe Card Holders are also available for retailers upon request.

Comté Wafers

These mouthwatering wafers are a cinch to pull together and make for a scrumptious snack or garnish for soups and salads. Best of all, they can be made ahead of time and frozen—perfect anytime you need a nibble!

Makes about 30 wafers

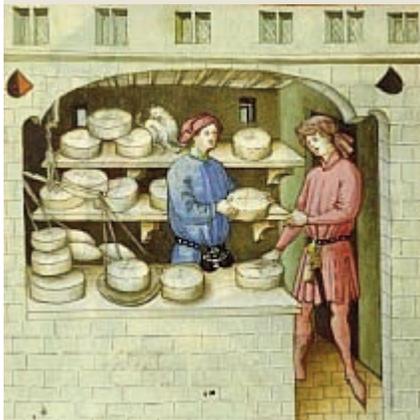
1 stick unsalted butter, softened
1/2 pound Comté, shredded (about 3 heaping cups shredded)
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
Pinch cayenne pepper
1-2 teaspoons water

1. In a large bowl or in the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat together the softened butter and shredded Comté. In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, salt and cayenne. Stir the dry ingredients into the cheese mixture and mix until well combined. Add 1-2 teaspoons of water, just until the dough holds together when pressed in the palm of the hand.
2. Shape the dough into a large roll, about 9-10 inches long. Wrap with plastic wrap and refrigerate 1 hour and up to 48 hours.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
4. Slice the dough into ¼-inch thick wafers and line them on the prepared baking sheet. Bake on the middle rack for 15-17 minutes, or until light golden around the edges. Transfer to a rack to cool. Serve or freeze for up to 1 month (defrost at room temperature or in a toaster oven before serving).

Bon appétit!

The Role of the Cheesemonger in France

In France, the role of a cheesemonger has both cultural and historical significance. Cheese has long been an important part of French life and cuisine, and the French currently lead the world in cheese consumption (along with Greece). The cheesemonger's role is that of a liaison between the cheesemaker and the consumer, searching out the best quality cheeses and selling them to a discerning clientele.



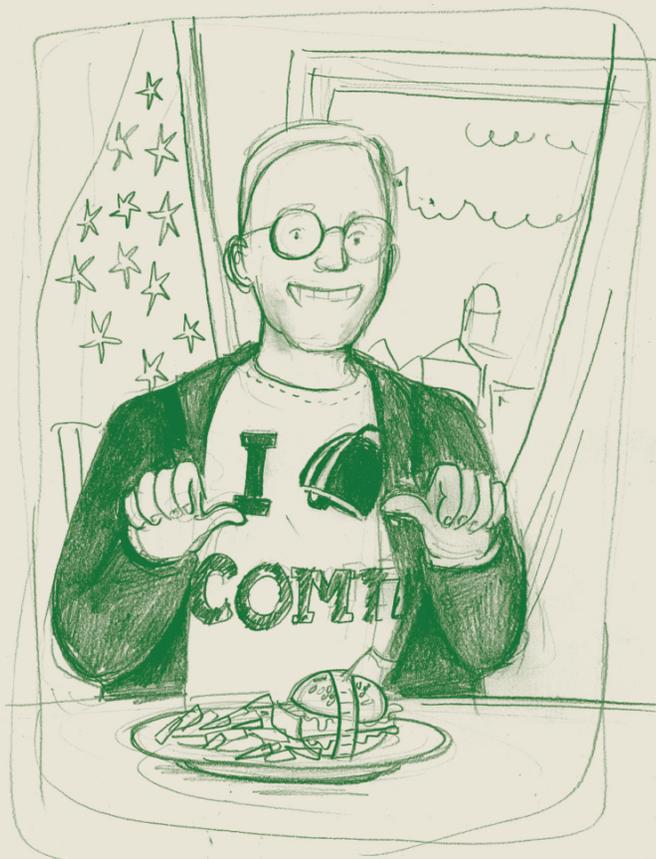
The first cheese stores appeared to have opened in France around the turn of the Twentieth Century, although most had their start much earlier as cheese stalls in local

markets or as door-to-door delivery services before becoming actual storefronts. Today, there are about 3,300 fromageries, or specialty cheese stores, in France. The cheesemongers at these stores work closely with the Comté *affineurs*, or cellar masters, to source Comté that is best suited to their customers' tastes. The flavors and aromas of Comté vary according to where the cheese was made, its season of production, the particular style of the cheesemaker, and the amount of time the cheese spent in the aging cellar. The cheesemonger must therefore develop a trusting relationship with the affineur—as well as visit cellars and taste wheels often—to decide which types of Comté to carry.

The cheesemonger not only selects which cheeses to sell but also must care for them from the time they arrive at the shop to when they're sold. Careful attention is paid to how the cheese is stored, as well as to how it's cut and wrapped for customers, to ensure that it's sold in the best possible condition. Comté is often sold cut-to-order, which preserves freshness and allows the cheesemonger to offer customers a taste of the cheese before purchasing.

The *métier*, or craft, of the cheesemonger is an honored one in France. In 1969, the *Guilde des Fromagers* (Cheesemonger's Guild) was established to support the importance of this role within French history and culture. The guild is made up of professional cheesemongers, cheesemakers and cheese specialists.

The role of the cheesemonger continues to gain in recognition and importance in the US as the specialty cheese industry grows. As in France, it's now possible to find specialty cheese stores and restaurants across the US where cheesemongers carefully source, care for and sell artisan cheeses. These establishments are worth seeking out for the impeccable quality and the passion behind their selection.



Visit of Governor Jim Douglas, VT, to the Jura
September 10, 2009

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 for POS materials and free downloads.

Comté Cheese Association USA

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