



Ken Skovron, owner of Darien Cheese & Fine Foods at an in-store Comté & Beer Tasting

Comté & Beer: A Surprising Marriage

Wine and cheese seem like a natural pairing, but have you ever thought about pairing beer with cheese? Beer makes for a surprisingly delicious complement to the rich flavors and texture of Comté.



Comté Pairings:

Brown ales, German-style malt beers (such as Altbiers), Märzen/Oktobfest style beers, Bocks, Saisons (farmhouse ales), Lambics

Beer and cheese share a long history (they both originated as traditional farmhouse products) as well as a natural affinity for one another. Beer's brisk flavors and palate-cleansing carbonation balance the rich, tongue-coating characteristics of cheese. "Cheese is rich and fatty and has a tendency to coat your palate; beer literally scrubs your tongue of the fat, allowing for more intermingling of flavors," explains Lydia Burns, "Cheese Maven" of Marion Street Cheese Market. She finds beer to be more approachable than wine when doing cheese pairings. The flavors in beer—from roasted nuts, to caramel, to citrus fruits—harmonize with similar flavors in cheese, and there's less chance of the beer or the cheese overpowering one another. "With beer and cheese there's more middle ground, and you're more likely to have success."

As with wine, however, not all types of beer pair equally well with different cheeses. Some things to consider when picking a beer to pair with cheese include its sweetness/bitterness, level of carbonation and flavorings. Young, fresh cheeses tend to pair better with more delicate beers such as wheat beers, whereas aged, nutty cheeses often pair better with malt-driven beers such as brown ales and dark lagers. Likewise, richer cheeses can benefit from beers with vigorous, small bubbles (like Belgian beers). But even though there are certain guidelines, there are no hard and fast rules when pairing beer with cheese. "What people forget is that pairing is subjective," emphasizes Burns. "There are no right or wrong answers!"

For Comté, the options are endless. In general, malty beers tend to pair better with Comté, highlighting the cheese's roasted, buttery flavors, while the citrus and pine-like flavors in hoppy beers can overpower the cheese. Brown ales, German-style malt beers (such as Altbiers), Märzen/Oktobfest style beers and Bocks can make for great pairings. Young Comtés work better with more delicately flavored beers while older Comtés, which are more nutty and assertive, can stand up to stronger flavorings.

St. Feuillien Brune Abbey Ale is one of Burns's favorite pairings with Comté. "The vigorous carbonation, nice acid structure and sweet, roasty, raisiny notes elevate the cheese." She also recommends Dogfish Head Indian Brown (Continued on page 2)

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.

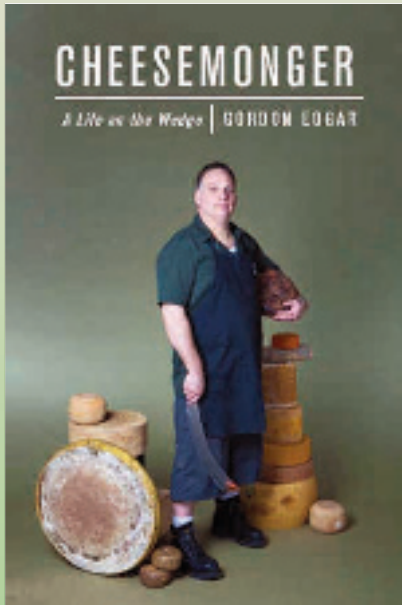
- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1500-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 112,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and 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

will be at the next

Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco,
 January 16-18, 2011 Booth #3120



New Book for Cheese Lovers

Gordon Edgar, cheesemonger at Rainbow Grocery Cooperative in San Francisco offers a hilarious and insightful look into cheese in his new book, *Cheesemonger: A Life on the Wedge* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010). Edgar candidly discusses his journey in becoming a cheesemonger and explores the characteristics and production methods of different cheeses. With humor as the backbone, Edgar also shares a deeper message about how something as elemental as cheese can be a mechanism for social activism. We recently asked Gordon a few questions about Comté:

How long has Rainbow Grocery Cooperative been carrying Comté?

We brought it in soon after we moved to our current, bigger location, sometime in 1996 or so. We actually carry two different Comtés right now: one aged about 6 months and one aged over a year.

Do you have any tips for merchandising Comté?

We make big piles of cheese and, really, it merchandises itself. I put up pictures after I visited a *fruitière*. People loved that, especially the pictures of thousands of wheels aging at Fort de Rousses and the strips of calf stomach lining for rennet.

How would you describe Comté to a new customer?

Nutty, grassy, earthy, a touch milky-sweet and amazing for melting. I also try and mention that it is the only name-controlled cheese that I know of that requires the use of cooperative milk and [that] specifies how large production can be. Our customers find those great selling points.

When you're not busy selling it, in what ways do you like to enjoy Comté at home?

It sounds like a cliché, but I always have some at home for spontaneous cooking. Recently I've been using it mostly in frittatas with caramelized onions and heirloom tomatoes—adding it at the end and browning it under the broiler. I've also been known to bite it right off the block.

(Continued from page 1)

Ale, a dark viscous beer with espresso notes, and Two Brothers Domaine DuPage, a French country style beer with a strong malt and fruit presence.

Ken Skovron, owner of Darien Cheese & Fine Foods, recently hosted a Comté and beer tasting at his store and found that Allagash Odyssey, which has sweet, vanilla notes, was a superb partner to the cheese, as was Duchessic Ale, a Saison/Lambic blend. Saisons, or farmhouse ales, were originally brewed in the winter to be consumed by workers in the summer. "Saisons share a similar heritage to Comté—they're both pastoral products with elemental, earthy roots," explains Andrew Hoenig, manager of The Ginger Man restaurants in CT, which are known for their exceptional beer selections. "It's no wonder that the two can make for an excellent match." Since ten different Saisons will each taste differently, pairing them with Comté can be a fun experiment, revealing new flavor combinations and unexpected harmonies. Similarly, Belgian Lambics, made through spontaneous fermentation from wild yeasts, can also make for fantastic pairings.

Other pairings can also bring surprises. Three Floyds Pride & Joy Mild Ale, a lighter hop-driven beer was an unexpected pairing for Burns, as was Schlenkerla, a smoked beer from Bavaria that created an appealing sweet and savory interplay. Similarly, based on the beer's aroma, Skovron wouldn't have thought to pair Corsendonk Abbey Pale Ale with Comté, but the beer ended up bringing out the rich caramel characteristics in the cheese.

Since each wheel of Comté has unique flavors and aromas according to where it was produced, the season in which it was made, and how long it was aged, two Comtés might pair differently with the same beer. But experimentation is half the fun! So instead of reaching for a glass of wine next time you're enjoying Comté, try a beer instead. You might just discover a spectacular new taste experience.



Comté DVD

Interested in a behind-the-scenes look at Comté? Check out *The Comté Experience*, a series of videos exploring the making of Comté from the Jura fields, to the region's aging cellars. Meet the people who craft Comté and learn about each stage of production. Discover how to cut and store Comté, as well as tips for cooking with Comté and pairing it with wine. *The Comté Experience DVD*—perfect for promotions, events and staff trainings—is available by request at trade@comte-usa.com, and the videos can be viewed directly at www.comte-usa.com or <http://www.facebook.com/ComteUSA>.

Portrait: Madame de Fromage

Colette Hatch, known as *Madame de Fromage*, is an internationally known food and wine authority who currently consults to specialty cheese retailers and restaurants in the California Bay Area. She grew up in the Jura region of France and has been a lover of Comté since childhood.

Growing up in the Jura where Comté is produced, how was the cheese part of your childhood experience?

Comté was the only cheese I knew, along with Morbier. My grandparents were farmers, and my parents carried on some of the farmer traditions. We had a very large garden and our main meal was at noontime. We would always have Comté with a piece of bread to finish the meal. At the time, we did not have a refrigerator. My mother would buy Comté in large pieces and keep it in the *garde manger* (pantry). She would reserve the best Comté for serving after the meal and would cook only with younger Comté.

What about when you moved to the US?

When I moved to the US thirty years ago, you could not find any good cheese anywhere. I was so sad! Every year I would go to France and bring back a big piece of Comté in my suitcase (6 pounds or so). In the last 10 years it finally became easier to find Comté.



And today?

I feel most comfortable when Comté is in my refrigerator at all times. I have a five-pound piece [in my fridge] as we speak.

How do you eat it?

I will eat it as a snack, before dinner with wine, after dinner on a cheese plate; I will even eat a young Comté with breakfast (growing up, we never would eat cheese at breakfast). One of my favorite recipes is my mother's Tarte au Comté (see below) as well as Gougères, which I can make with my eyes closed! I also like to sprinkle Comté on my vegetables, in my soup in the winter, and I like to melt it on a good piece of bread to go along with my soup or salad for lunch.

Besides Champagne, what other wines do you like to pair with Comté?

I live in the Wine Country and do cheese and wine pairing for wineries, classes and parties and find it interesting how many wines I can pair with Comté depending on its age and of course whether it is a winter or a summer Comté. I love the Jura wines with my Comté, and I find that Chardonnay goes well with it also. Younger, less expensive Chardonnays in the \$15-20 range pair well with younger Comtés, while older and pricier Chardonnays pair better with older Comtés. If the Comté is 18 to 24 months from summer production, pairing it with a good Pinot can also be such a treat.

Tarte au Comté de ma Maman (My Mother's Comté Tart)

Adapted from Colette Hatch

This Comté tart recipe comes from Colette's mom, Camille. Colette likes to serve it warm with a salad for a light supper or as an aperitif with friends.



One recipe pie dough (*pâte brisée*)
1 7.5-8-ounce container crème fraîche
1 large egg
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
Salt and pepper to taste
¾ cup shredded Comté (preferably an older Comté)

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Roll out the pie dough and transfer it to a 9-inch pie plate.
2. Beat together the crème fraîche, egg and a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Sprinkle the Comté on the bottom of the pie shell. Pour the crème fraîche mixture evenly over the top. Bake 40-45 minutes, or until the crust is nicely browned and the filling is puffed and golden. Let cool 15-20 minutes before slicing. Serve warm.

Bon appétit!



New Recipe Cards Now Available:

"Easy & Elegant Entertaining" Recipe Cards are Perfect for Holidays

Don't miss this new batch of Recipe Cards, featuring easy but elegant dishes that are perfect for fall and winter entertaining! The "Easy & Elegant Entertaining" recipe card series includes: Roasted Pear & Arugula Salad with Shaved Comté & Walnuts; Comté Stuffed Pork Tenderloin with Dijon Jus; and Butternut Squash Gratin with Comté, Roasted Garlic & Hazelnuts. Download the recipes at www.comte-usa.com, or email us at trade@comte-usa.com to request packs of the 4x6-inch cards for your holiday displays, classes and promotions. Recipe Card Holders are also available to retailers upon request.

Roasted Pear & Arugula Salad with Shaved Comté & Walnuts

This easy but elegant salad has the ultimate balance of flavors: sweet honey-roasted pears, peppery arugula and nutty Comté, all tossed in a lively vinaigrette. An older Comté works best here, providing a delicious contrast to the aromatic pears.

Serves: 6

6 5-inch rosemary sprigs
 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon honey, divided
 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
 3 firm but ripe Bartlett pears
 2 tablespoons Champagne vinegar
 1 teaspoon minced shallots
 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 Salt and pepper
 3 tablespoons good quality extra virgin olive oil
 6 ounces baby arugula (about 10 cups)
 3-4 ounces Comté (preferably 12-24 month),
 shaved with vegetable peeler
 1/2 cup lightly toasted walnut pieces

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line large baking sheet with parchment paper. Line rosemary sprigs on top of parchment.
2. In small bowl, whisk 1 tablespoon honey with lemon juice. Cut pears in half lengthwise. Using melon baller or paring knife, cut out and discard core of each pear half. Brush pears on both sides with honey mixture. Place each, cut side down, on top of a rosemary sprig on baking sheet. Bake 12-15 minutes, or until pears are tender. Let cool.
3. Meanwhile, make vinaigrette. Whisk together Champagne vinegar, 1 teaspoon honey, shallots, Dijon and pinch of salt and pepper. Slowly drizzle in extra virgin olive oil while whisking. Taste and season with additional salt and pepper if needed.
4. Cut 1/4-inch slits lengthwise in each pear half, keeping stem end intact. Press down lightly to form fan shape. In large bowl, toss arugula with just enough vinaigrette to coat (you may have extra). Season with salt and pepper. Place a large handful of arugula on each serving plate. Arrange a pear half on each bed of greens. Divide Comté shavings and walnut pieces over top.

The Comté Cheese Association

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