

# FIFTY



Twig  
Farm's  
Fuzzy  
Wheel



# CHEESES

*From Adelegger to Zimbro,  
the current cheesescape defined.*

BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND  
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*Photographs by Bobby Doherty*



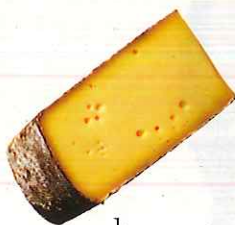
## FIFTY CHEESES

**W**ITH SO MANY wheels, wedges, tommes, and pyramids out there, in so many styles (from clothbound to washed-rind) and textures (from chalky to runny), exhibiting flavors and aromas that seemingly couldn't derive from mere milk, there's never been a better time to eat cheese. The biggest news has been the tremendous growth of American farmstead cheeses, a realm that no one could have predicted three decades ago. Like bread, wine, and coffee, cheese has captured the imagination of not only consumers but also passionate producers and retailers, who fill

their cases with the varieties that most excite them, be they microbatch experiments from upstate or even a new artisanal Limburger. We polled many of these mongers, plus importers and plain old curd nerds, to learn about their latest obsessions. Then we tasted a whole lot of cheese and categorized the eclectic results. The following 50 picks represent that diversity, without attempting the impossible task of naming the world's (or this city's) best cheeses. You won't find a rote recitation of classics, but instead the stinky, earthy, oozy, cave-aged, mixed-milk, and even process cheeses of the moment—and where to buy them.

### CATEGORY I AMERICAN ORIGINAL CHEESES

*Whether by accident or design—or a little of both—these domestics are very much their own thing.*



1.  
**Appalachian**  
Meadow Creek Dairy  
(Virginia)

Compared with its sister cheese, the washed-rind Grayson, Appalachian is brighter and less beefy and has evolved from its Monterey Jack-style roots to a pressed-curd tomme that defies categorization. Its only ambition: showcasing the nuanced flavors of the pastured herd's prized milk. *\$23 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.*



2.  
**Dunbarton Blue**  
Roelli Cheese  
(Wisconsin)

Essentially a classic English-style Cheddar but one whose raw cow's milk has been spiked with a little *Penicillium roqueforti*, the substance that gives Roquefort its green-blue veins. The three-month-aged end product is rich and earthy with just a hint of delicious blue mold. *\$30 a pound at Murray's Cheese.*



3.  
**Fuzzy Wheel**  
Twig Farm  
(Vermont)

As the name suggests, Michael Lee, the bike messenger turned cheesemaker, is proud of the bloomy rind on this goat-and-cow's-milk cheese. And rightly so. That fluffy mold French affineurs call *poil du chat* (cat's fur) is to thank for all those layers of flavor and the firm but supple texture. *\$29 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.*



7.  
**Winnimere**  
Jasper Hill Farm  
(Vermont)

The 2013 American Cheese Society Best of Show winner spotlights high-fat, high-protein winter milk, and in the style of Försterkäse and Vacherin Mont D'or, its oozy contents are barely contained by a spruce-bark girdle. A beer wash contributes to the irresistibly woody, bacon-y, creamy flavor. *\$27 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.*



8.  
**Cagliata**  
Caputo Brothers Creamery  
(Pennsylvania)

Rynn and David Caputo make cagliata, or curd, from milk that's been cultured, and the eight-hour fermentation allows the home cook (not to mention chefs at Carbone and Del Posto) to stretch *fior di latte* with much more flavor than you'll find in your typical Caprese salad. *\$17 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.*



4.  
**Beecher's Flagship**  
Beecher's Handmade Cheese  
(Washington)

A mixed-milk riff on the creamery's signature all-cow Flagship. It's made like a traditional Cheddar, but with two-thirds cow's milk and one-third sheep's. The harmonious result is rich and chewy, with a touch of sheepy sweetness and little of aged Cheddar's characteristic tang. *\$32 a pound at Beecher's Handmade Cheese.*



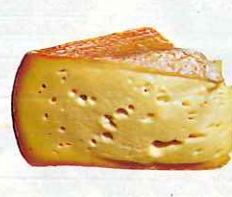
5.  
**Estero Gold Reserve**  
Valley Ford Cheese Company  
(California)

The Italian-Swiss family behind this Sonoma County farmstead dairy aspired to make something akin to Montasio; the sweet, creamy, slightly crystalline result eats much more like Piave and shares that cow's-milk crowd-pleaser's resemblance to Parmigiano-Reggiano. *\$24 a pound at Lucy's Whey Chelsea Market.*



6.  
**Tomme Dolce**  
Andante Dairy  
(California)

Accomplished pianist Soyoung Scanlan refers to herself as "soloist" at her Sonoma County dairy and counts Thomas Keller among her loyal fans. This semi-firm goat tomme is washed with brandy and June Taylor plum conserves, then aged six months until creamy and salty-sweet. *\$34 a pound at Bedford Cheese Shop.*



9.  
**Ameribella**  
Jacobs & Brichford  
(Indiana)

This Hoosier-farmstead interpretation of Northern Italian semisoft, washed-rind stinkers like Taleggio is made with the raw milk of rotationally grazed cows—somewhat of a rarity in these parts. Square and squat, it's more bulgy than runny, with a full, savory flavor and lush, dense texture. *\$30 a pound at Lucy's Whey Chelsea Market.*



10.  
**Landaff**  
Landaff Creamery  
(New Hampshire)

This semi-firm raw-cow's-milk cheese has a natural gray rind that encases a paste the color of butter with a fragrance to match. It's moist and mild, faintly tangy, exquisite in its simplicity. The mom-and-pop cheesemakers, Deb and Doug Erb, modeled it after a traditional Welsh Caerphilly. *\$22 a pound at Eataly.*





11.

**Marieke Super-Aged Gouda**  
*Holland's Family Cheese (Wisconsin)*

An 18-month-aged Gouda, made from raw cow's milk, that you'd swear had been shipped over from the Netherlands. Like the best farmhouse Goudas, it possesses that umami-rich blend of sharp and sweet—like a Parmigiano-Reggiano that's been infused with caramel—and a texture accented by the crystalline clusters of amino acids called tyrosine that pop in your mouth like Rice Krispies and are a sign of a well-aged cheese. \$28 a pound at *Saxelby Cheesemongers*.



12.

**Pleasant Ridge Reserve Extra-Aged**  
*Uplands Cheese Co. (Wisconsin)*

Crafted in the Alpine style of French Beaufort, Pleasant Ridge is the most celebrated American cheese out there. It's super-nutty, deeply flavored, and made only from May to October, when the dairy's rotationally grazed cows are eating fresh pasture. \$30 a pound at *Murray's Cheese*.



13.

**Txiki**  
*Barinaga Ranch (California)*

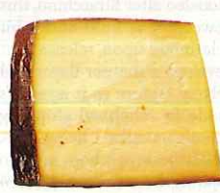
Marcia Barinaga's second cheese follows the same Basque raw-sheep's-milk-tomme recipe as her first, Basseri, but Txiki's size (the name means "little") hastens ripening. It's made after lambing season, and its flavor is reminiscent of European classics like Ossau-Iraty—sweet, nutty, and a bit fruity. \$44 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.



14.

**Bay Blue**  
*Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese (California)*

You know Point Reyes's punchy, pungent, razor-sharp Original Blue. This is something like its polar opposite. It's built along old-world Stilton lines, with a flavor that's soft and round as opposed to sharp and peppery, and a texture that is crumbly-buttery. \$25 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.



15.

**Alpha Tolman**  
*Jasper Hill Farm (Vermont)*

This Alpine-style wheel is a group effort: The milk comes from a nearby farm; the curds are cooked and pressed in a new food incubator in the town of Hardwick; and the brine-washed wheels age in Jasper Hill's cellars, where they evolve from smooth and fruity to crystalline and meaty. \$23 a pound at *Saxelby Cheesemongers*.



16.

**Brabander Goat Gouda**  
*(Netherlands)*

Monger Betty Koster sources these wheels and ages them just long enough to achieve the cheese's characteristic creamy texture and buttery-sweet, slightly caramelized flavor. Connoisseurs consider it a less mainstream Midnight Moon. \$28 a pound at *Bklyn Larder*.



17.

**Försterkäse**  
*(Switzerland)*

This profoundly stinky cheese is held together by a strip of spruce bark. It's not new, per se, but cheesemaker Thomas Stadelmann has tweaked the recipe, expanding the cheese-to-bark ratio to tone down the woody taste. \$27 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.



18.

**Stichelton**  
*(England)*

Unlike Stilton, all of which is now made with pasteurized milk, Stichelton is crafted with the raw variety. It's rich and mellow with a long finish, and it's not too much to say that Stichelton picks up where Stilton left off. \$34 a pound at *Bklyn Larder*.



19.

**Cabricharme**  
*(Belgium)*

The cheese cognoscenti are increasingly excited about the cheeses coming over from Belgium, like this fairly pungent Trappist-style washed-rind variety, atypically made with raw goat's milk instead of cow's. \$26 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.



20.

**Jersey Blue**  
*(Switzerland)*

Willi Schmid has achieved cult status in the New Swiss Cheese movement for his intuitive, innovative mastery of the flavor nuances of local milk. His blue is buttery, floral, and a two-time winner of the World Jersey Cheese Awards. \$38 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.



21.

**Ticklemore**  
*(England)*

Ticklemore has a subtly sweet flavor redolent of herbs and grass, and a moist yet slightly crumbly texture. It's made from the milk of goats who graze on not only pasture but also some nutritious hedgerows bordering Dartmoor National Park. \$32 a pound at *Gastronomie 491*.



22.

**Challerhocker**  
*(Switzerland)*

By tweaking the tightly regulated Swiss recipe for Appenzeller, second-generation producer Walter Rass invented a brand-new Alpine mountain cheese. Creamy and dense, the paste tastes of allium and butterscotch in equal measure. \$30 a pound at *Whole Foods*.



23.

**1605 Manchego**  
*(Spain)*

An artisanal farmstead Manchego in a sea of mass production, 1605 is made from the raw milk of grass-fed La Mancha ewes, and further distinguishes itself with a natural, unwaxed rind. It's sweetly sheepy, with a bouquet of serrano ham. \$29 a pound at *Bklyn Larder*.



24.

**Zimbro**  
*(Portugal)*

In the tradition of Portugal's sheep's-milk stars, Serra da Estrela and Azeitão, Zimbro is coagulated with thistle rennet, which gives the finished cheese a notably tart taste. When young and supersoft, it's spooned from the wheel like pudding. \$25 a pound at *Bedford Cheese Shop*.

CATEGORY III  
**EUROPEAN NEW WAVE CHEESES**

*By virtue of their rejection of tradition or their return to it, these imports have cheeseheads talking.*



## FIFTY CHEESES

### CATEGORY IV

#### CHEESES FROM THE ALLGÄU

*Germany's hot new microregion.*



25.

**Adelegger**  
(Germany)

This Alpine beauty is the masterwork of a small cooperative of dairy farmers and cheesemaker Evelyn Wild, who brine-washes the 15-pound wheels and ages them for 17 months—long enough to develop the dense and fudgy paste and sweet, nutty flavor one associates with world-class Gruyère. \$36 a pound at Bklyn Larder.



26.

**Chiriboga Blue**  
(Germany)

An unusual young blue named for its maker, Arturo Chiriboga, Ecuadoran by birth and Bavarian by marriage. He transforms organic cow's milk from a local cooperative into a cheese so mild and mellow it's fondly known among fans as "blue butter," with the texture of a triple crème and only the faintest whisper of funk. \$32 a pound at Bklyn Larder.



27.

**Anton's Limburger**  
(Germany)

Originally a Belgian cheese made by Trappist monks, Limburger became a punch line in America owing to its cartoonishly powerful aroma. Today, most Limburger is produced in Germany. This one is handcrafted from locally sourced, organic milk by the innovative cheesemaker Anton Holzinger. The orange-beige washed rind is unabashedly stinky, but the creamy pale paste is relatively mild and more nuanced than you'd think. \$14 for a 7-ounce block at Bedford Cheese Shop.

28.

**Sternschnuppe**  
(Germany)



Another winner from Evelyn Wild, the woman behind Adelegger, this Alpine-style cheese is washed with red wine and herbs. It has a rustic rind, a moister-than-usual, semi-firm paste flecked with small eyes, and a beefy, slightly funky flavor. \$27 a pound at Murray's Cheese.

### CATEGORY V

#### HYPERLOCAL CHEESES

*For the lacto-locavore, cheeses from near and nearer.*



29.

**Kunik**  
Nettle Meadow Farm  
(New York)

A mold-ripened mixed-milk wheel that combines goat milk's tang with the tongue-coating richness of Jersey-cow cream, Kunik is a triple crème just this side of cheese-cake. As it ages, its firm texture loosens and its flavor grows goatier, but never overwhelmingly so. \$30 a pound at Murray's Cheese.



30.

**Lorenzo**  
Meadowood Farms  
(New York)

Like a young Fontina, but made from sheep's milk, this farmstead cheese has a delicately funky flavor and a supple, pale-yellow paste that makes it a good melter. It's handcrafted by Veronica Pedraza, a former Saxelby monger, who washes each wheel with hard cider. \$32 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.



31.

**Miranda**  
Vulto Creamery  
(New York)

Jos Vulto began making cheese in Brooklyn six years ago, but has since built a creamery in the Catskills, where he sources grass-fed milk from a local dairy. Miranda is a pleasingly pungent button washed with Meadow of Love absinthe from Delaware Phoenix Distillery. \$16 each at Lucy's Whey Chelsea Market.



32.

**Mozzarella**  
Di Palo's  
(New York)

Di Palo's fresh, fragrant mozzarella is soft and tender but not too, with just the right amount of pull. When you cut into a ball, it fairly oozes with its own sweet whey. Lou Di Palo kneads and stretches several batches daily, the same way his great-grandfather Savino did 100 years ago. \$7.89 a pound at Di Palo's.



33.

**Melville**  
Mystic Cheese Company  
(Connecticut)

Modeled after Stracchino, this newcomer is mild and a bit gelatinous upon release, but develops a sharper flavor and velvety texture as it ages. It's made in rehabbed shipping containers called Cheese Pods, which the owners hope to sell to aspiring cheesemakers. \$11 each at Saxelby Cheesemongers.



34.

**Ricotta**  
Salvatore Bklyn  
(New York)

Unlike traditional ricotta, invented to repurpose whey once the curds have drained, this stuff uses full-fat Hudson Valley milk, acidified and strained in a cheesecloth until its texture resembles a lemony cross between cream cheese and whipped cream. \$18 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.

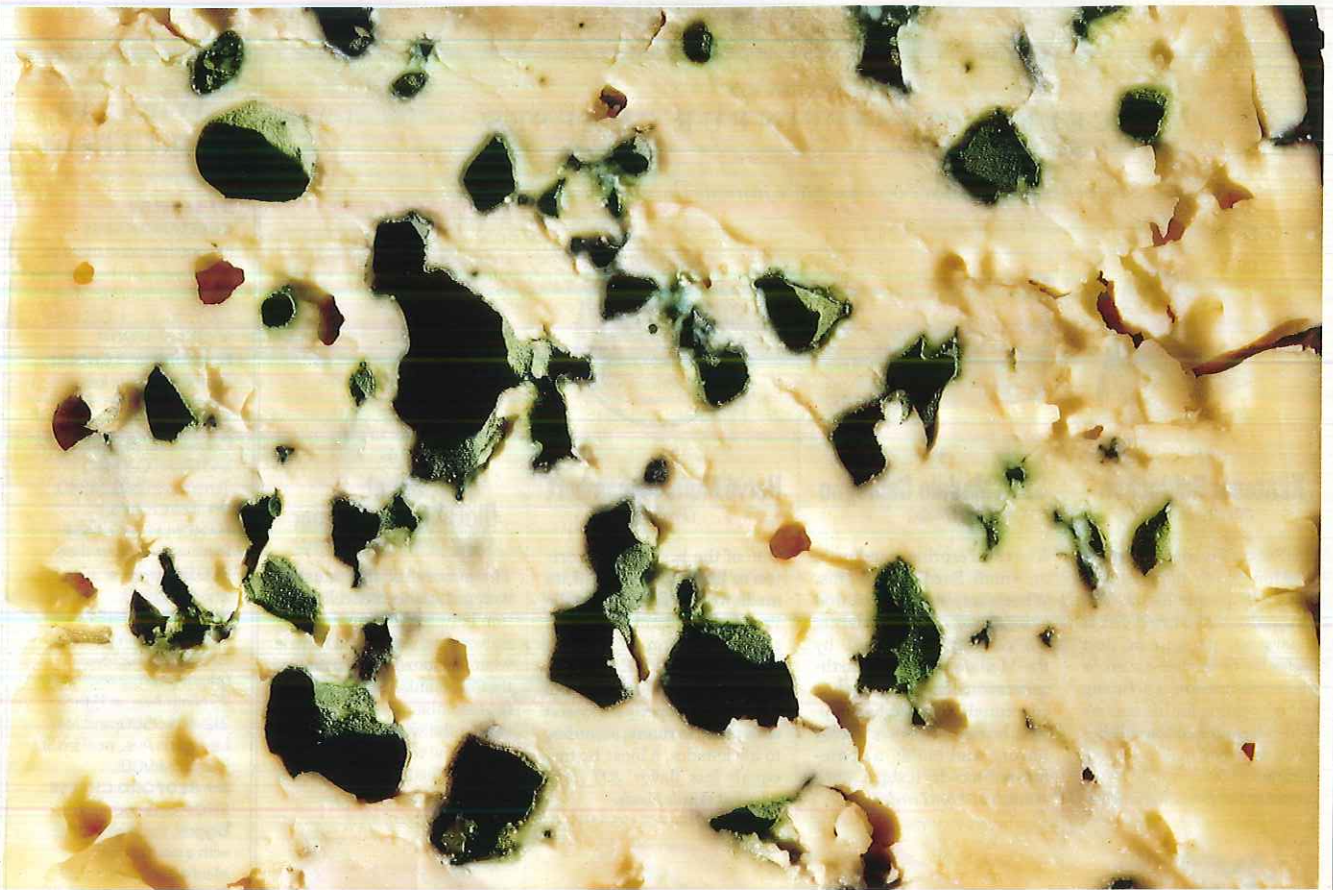
35.

**Hooligan**  
Cato Corner Farm  
(Connecticut)



Mark Gillman brine-washes these one-and-a-half-pound raw-cow's-milk wheels, ages them for two months, and trucks them over to the Greenmarket on Saturdays. The rind is orange and strong-smelling, the paste sweet and meaty. \$26 a pound at Greenmarket.

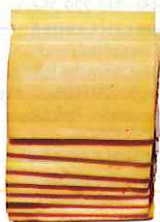




*Le Meunier Roquefort.*

# CATEGORY VI TRASHY CHEESES

*It's not only about the artisanal stuff.*



36.

## American Process Cheese

Blame an infatuation with burger-joint burgers for a new appreciation of preservative-riddled American process cheese. The reason: No other type melts nearly as well without exuding fat and separating. Wylie Dufresne, for one, is a fan, and Nathan Myhrvold gives a recipe in his *Modernist Cuisine at Home* starring the key ingredient, sodium citrate. At supermarkets everywhere.



37.

## Beer Cheese

The highest compliment one can pay Kentucky's contribution to the cheese-spread canon is that it is "snappy." Proportions vary, but the building blocks are sharp Cheddar, beer, garlic, and secret spices; Brooklyn brand Floyd Beer Cheese, born in a bar and now stocked on shelves from Ann Arbor to Fort Worth, comes in Original, Spicy Jalapeño, and Smokey Bacon. \$9 for a 7-ounce tub at Gourmet Garage.



38.

## Bel Paese

Yes, the little foil-wrapped medallions you see in upscale sandwich shops like Soho's Alidoro are the Italian equivalent of Laughing Cow. But that's the point: The soft, bland, spreadable cheese adds just the right faintly tangy note to a hero without getting in the way of the cured meats. 45 cents a piece at Raf fetto's (144 W. Houston St., nr. Macdougall St.; 212-777-1261).



39.

## Cheese Curds

These squeaky nuggets of cheese potential form as the whey is drawn off acidified, coagulating milk, and their all-American appeal has grown from a cult fan base in Wisconsin. That's due, no doubt, to their often being consumed battered and deep-fried, or sprawled over a heap of French fries smothered with gravy in French-Canadian poutine. \$7 for about a half-pound at Beecher's Handmade Cheese.



40.

## Pimento Cheese

Consider pimento cheese's popularity a corollary of the fried-chickenification of New York. It can be found at southern-food restaurants, Smorgasburg, and even in a highfalutin gourmet stall at Essex Street Market, where it's made with extra-sharp Cheddar, cream cheese, mayonnaise, pimentos, red pepper flakes, and Sriracha. \$6 for a 2.7-ounce jar at Formaggio Essex (120 Essex St., at Delancey St.; 212-982-8200).



## FIFTY CHEESES

CATEGORY VII

### CELEBRITY-AFFINEUR CHEESES

*Some cheese agers have become more famous than the cheesemakers.*



41.

#### Küntener Reblochon (Switzerland)

This Swiss riff on Reblochon can be astoundingly pungent, but that's why people like it. The barnyard-y washed-rind disk is a personal passion of Rolf Beeler, the Swiss cheese avenger whose life mission is sourcing and advocating for his nation's hidden treasures, often collaborating with their makers on production and flavor profile. \$40 a pound at Bedford Cheese Shop.



42.

#### Casa Madaio Calcagno (Italy)

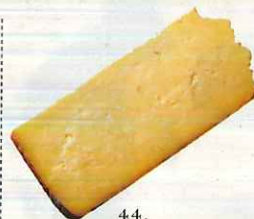
A terrific Pecorino, handmade on small Sardinian farms. Wheels are shipped to natural aging caves outside Salerno, where they're ripened by the Madaio family, a fourth-generation affineur. Long aging concentrates the cheese's sharpness, brings out its sweet, herby flavors, and builds a dense-but-not-too-dry texture. \$29 a pound at Bklyn Larder.



43.

#### Hervé Mons Camembert (France)

One of the best Camemberts you're likely to find—and it's made from pasteurized milk. Produced in Normandy under the supervision of affineur Hervé Mons, it's full of earthy, truffle, sweet buttery flavor, and the paste is properly sticky-soft as opposed to runny; according to aficionados, a loose texture equals less flavor. \$11 for a wheel at Whole Foods.



44.

#### Cabot Clothbound Cheddar Cabot Creamery (Vermont)

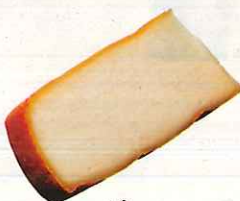
The success of this muslin-wrapped, lard-coated collaboration between the supermarket stalwart and Jasper Hill Farm is what facilitated construction of the Cellars at Jasper Hill. After 12 to 14 months in the underground vaults, the wheels acquire the crystalline texture of a proper English Cheddar. \$22 a pound at Saxelby Cheesemongers.



45.

#### Le Meunier Roquefort (France)

The Roquefort that French affineur Rodolphe Le Meunier ships to the United States is intensely salty and sweet, but in such perfect balance that the overall flavor seems almost delicate. The texture is wet and cool, like some molecular-gastronomist ice cream that won't melt at room temperature. \$32 a pound at Gastronomie 491.



46.

#### Tome d'Aquitaine (France)

The goat-cheese wheels are produced by a Loire Valley dairy cooperative, then transported to master affineur Jean d'Alos's facilities in Bordeaux, where they're washed in brines of Jurançon and Sauternes. After four months, they turn semi-firm, silky, and almost milky-sweet. \$26 a pound at Gastronomie 491.



47.

#### Torus Vermont Creamery (Vermont)

A special strain of mold called *Geotrichum candidum* gives this doughnut-shaped goat's-milk cheese its powdery appearance and sweet, mineral flavor. A collaboration between Murray's and Vermont Creamery, it's aged in Murray's caves, 15 feet below Bleecker Street. \$11 each at Murray's Cheese.



48.

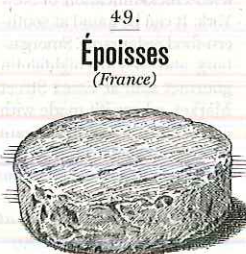
#### L'Amuse Gouda (Netherlands)

Dutch-cheese renegade Betty Koster buys Gouda young and ages it herself, at higher temperatures and humidity levels than usual, and sells it under the name of her cheese shop. After two years, the so-called cheese candy is hard but creamy, dotted with crunchy protein crystals, and as sweet as salted caramel. \$28 a pound at Bklyn Larder.

CATEGORY VIII

### CONTRABAND CHEESES

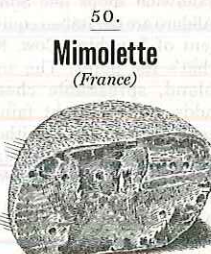
*Hard to find, easy to love, illegal cheese will always be the fromage fiend's holy grail.*



49.

#### Époisses (France)

Of all the soft cheeses traditionally made from unpasteurized or "raw" milk and aged less than 60 days, and therefore banned from import, this is the one connoisseurs seek out most fervently. While you can increasingly find good pasteurized versions of cheeses like Vacherin Mont d'Or and Camembert, their Époisses equivalents are usually lacking.



50.

#### Mimolette (France)

Ever since the FDA detained shipments of this spherical orange cheese last spring, its future as a French import has been in jeopardy. If you do happen to spot it on shelves, it will likely be very young and lacking its characteristic gray, craggy rind—a traditional hiding place for the microscopic mites that are said to contribute to its flavor.

## Where to Find Them

#### ➔ SAXELBY CHEESEMONGERS

No one has done more to give American cheeses their due. Essex Street Market, 120 Essex St., nr. Delancey St.; 212-228-8204.

➔ MURRAY'S CHEESE Terrific selection, lots of classes, and aging caves. 254 Bleecker St., nr. Cornelia St.; 212-243-3289; and Grand Central Terminal; 212-922-1540.

➔ BEECHER'S HANDMADE CHEESE Part creamery, part shop. 900 Broadway, at 20th St.; 212-466-3340.

➔ LUCY'S WHEY All-American in Chelsea; international uptown (plus a wine bar and café). 75 Ninth Ave., at 15th St.; 212-463-9500; and 1417 Lexington Ave., nr. 93rd St.; 212-289-8900.

➔ BEDFORD CHEESE SHOP One of the city's biggest, ripest selections with a swanky new Manhattan branch. 229 Bedford Ave., at N. 4th St., Williamsburg; 718-599-7588; and 67 Irving Pl., nr. 19th St.; 718-599-7588.

➔ FAIRWAY Without this pioneering cheese counter founded by Steven Jenkins, New York gourmets might still be eating third-rate Brie. Multiple locations.

➔ EATALY An undersung cheese counter not restricted to parm and mutz. 200 Fifth Ave., at 23rd St.; 212-229-2560.

➔ BKLYN LARDER The best of Italy and beyond, from the folks at Franny's. 228 Flatbush Ave., nr. Bergen St., Park Slope; 718-783-1250.

➔ WHOLE FOODS Home to the Hervé Mons Camembert. Multiple locations.

➔ GASTRONOMIE 491 Erudite cheesemonger Martin Johnson holds forth at the counter. 491 Columbus Ave., nr. 84th St.; 212-974-7871.

➔ DI PALO'S A New York landmark. Grab a ticket. 200 Grand St., at Mott St.; 212-226-1033.

➔ CAMPBELL CHEESE AND GROCERY A quaint provisions shop with a strong dairy bent. 502 Lorimer St., at Powers St., Williamsburg; 718-387-2267.