

Romancing the Foam No. 128



Today I am having a beer or two to salute Patrick, the former cheese guy at my neighborhood Lunds super market. My mother introduced our family to the world of cheese with weekly Kraft dinner and grilled Velveeta cheese sandwiches and the less frequent, dreaded vegetable au gratin made with a can of Campbells cheddar cheese soup poured over the vegetable of the day and cooked beyond recognition. My dad would have the occasional Swiss cheese or even Limburger with a Strohs, but that, along with his Pall Mall

cigarettes, was his sole domain.

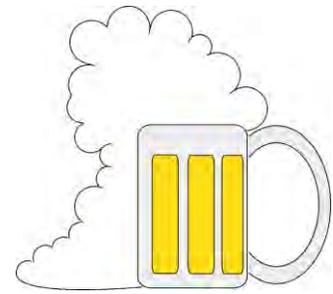
The Monty Python Cheeseshop skit opened the door a little wider on the dizzyingly array of cheeses, but Patrick the cheese guy threw the door open. In 1997 he opened a specialty cheese counter at the Uptown Lunds, a mile and a half from my house, and became the first cheese monger in a Twin Cities' grocery story. A friend of mine's wife who worked at Lunds hated working with him and said he was a pretentious jerk, but I loved him. I could stop by the counter, mention that I had a Westmalle Triple or a Chimay Blue and ask him what cheese I should buy, and he would discuss all the possibilities. Patrick was the first cheesmonger I knew and the rare one who took beer seriously. He opened the door to Trappist cheeses from Belgium, British Cheddars, the world of blues, and gave me a beachhead to the world of French cheese and for each, worked with me to find an appropriate beer. Patrick lasted only a few years at Lunds – probably a bit too curmudgeonly for the staff and some of the patrons.

While everyone thinks wine and cheese automatically go together, beer stakes its claim for a place at the table as soon as the ploughman's lunch or cheese and charcuterie plate appears.

Think about it. The animals that produce the raw material for cheese -



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cows, sheep, goats, water buffalo, and other milk producers - eat grains and grasses and may also eat a variety of herbs depending on where they are pastured. Beer is made from grains and grasses and spiced with herbs – usually hops. Both beer and cheese production can produce toasty, grassy, caramel, and nutty flavors. Besides providing a broader range of complementary flavors, beer often pairs better with cheeses that cause problems for wines. The tannins in red wines dull the taste buds. Beer’s bitterness and carbonation cleanse the palate better than wine and work better with heavier cheeses. The acidity in a wine like champagne makes pairing difficult. Blue cheeses have high levels of *alkan-2-ones*, a potent odor that overpowers most dry wines, while IPAs, Barley Wines, Gueuze, Pale Ales, Pilsners, Rauchbiers, Tripels and Weissbiers all hold their own. Beer also costs less.

Over the past few months I have reviewed about 50 pairings with cheese – most of them with beer and cheese on <https://www.romancingthefoam.com>. These are some of my favorite.

Drinking Surly Electric Sombrero of Death with Beecher's 4-Year Aged Flagship is one of the smartest things I've done in a long time. Beecher's 4-Year Aged Flagship is a semi-hard cheddar made from pasteurized cow's milk. It is the same cheese as Beecher's Flagship except that it has been aged for 4 years and it is 4 years well spent. The aroma is bigger and richer than its younger counterpart, with more funk, nuts, tang and a hint of nursing babies breath. The cheese has no rind and a semi-hard ivory paste that is crumbly but melts in your mouth. The extra age gives it a delicious, sought after, crystalline crunch. It is salty, buttery, and nutty with a hint of fruit and a slight tang. The Surly Electric Sombrero of Death's carbonation shaves a little of the cheese creaminess off the palate but not too much. The cheese brings out the beer's rich malt flavors. The cheese is big and dominates but the beer has enough going on to not be overwhelmed. This is the cheese you want to eat with this beer. The cheese rates 95 and the beer and the pairing rate 90.





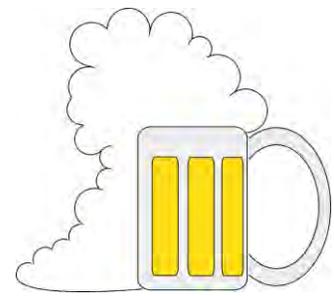
Bleu D'Auvergne is named after its region of origin - the south-central French region of Auvergne. It is a semi-soft blue cheese made from either pasteurized or unpasteurized cow's milk. This cheese is luscious with an ivory paste and blue green veins and holes about the size of a kernel of corn and a bloomy rind. It has a mild, funky, salty smell. Bleu d'Auvergne is creamier and more buttery than Roquefort. It is as intense, but the butter and cream soften it. It is soft and creamy and melts in your mouth. It is mildly salty with a meaty mushroom flavor seasoned by some grass and herbal notes. There is a light bitter note and a light tang on the finish. The cheese is luscious and downright decadent. I am eating it with a Brewing Projekt Simcoe and Mosaic hazy Pale Ale and the hops accentuate the cheese's herbal and gassy notes and the beer's fruit notes complement the

cheese and its creaminess. The cheese's creaminess softens the beer's bitter notes but at the same time the cheese's bitterness joins with the beer's bitterness in the finish to produce some new flavors. The beer has enough malt presence to do away with the need for bread or crackers to eat with the cheese. I give the cheese and the pairing a 90 and will have the cheese again soon.

Drunken Goat Cheese, also known as "Murcia al vino" or "queso de cabra al vino" comes from the southeastern Spanish town of Jumilla in the region of Murcia. It is made from pasteurized Murcia goats' milk, the wheels are soaked for two days in Doble Pasta wine made from the Monastrell grape and then aged for two and a half months. The cheese smells a little goaty and earthy. The paste is white and the rind is purple from soaking in red wine, is edible and is usually mild tasting. The paste is semi-soft, elastic, creamy and slightly sticky. The flavor is rich, creamy, buttery, nutty, lightly tangy and acidic, with a touch bitterness on the end and a mild goat presence. There is a hint of fruit and wine in both the aroma and the flavor. I am having this with 56 Brewing's Wizard Mode and the cheese and beer are outrageously good together with each accenting the other's fine points. This is a case where $2 + 2 = 5$. Wizard Modes' hop flavors



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bring out the fruit flavors in the cheese and the tartness in the cheese accents the fruit notes in the beer's hops. There is a trace of bitter in the cheese which adds nuances to the beer's bitterness. The cheese coats the mouth and grabs onto some of the hop



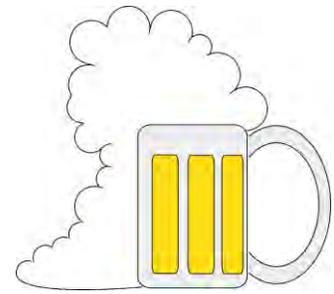
flavors to make a long, pleasant linger. If you are inspired add some chorizo, almonds and olives to snack on while you drink the beer and eat the cheese. I rate the cheese and the pairing 90. Try drunken goat with your favorite piment, Makana Meadery Cape White Fig Mead, Gurutzeta Sagardotegia Sagardoa Basque Cider, or a fruit beer like Funkwerks Rasperry Provincial.

I am pairing Roelli Red Rock Cheese with a HammerHeart Weltanwanderer and an Ommegang Three Philosophers aged in bourbon barrels. The Roelli family emigrated from Switzerland to Wisconsin in the early 1920's. Three generations of the Roelli family ran the cheese operation, building it into a commodity cheddar cheese producer. The economy shut the factory down in 1991. The founder's great grandson Chris Roelli reopened a small artisan cheese factory, the Roelli Cheese Haus Factory, in 2006 on the corner of highways 11 and 23 6 miles east of Shullsberg Wisconsin.

Roelli Red Rock Cheese is a bloomy rind cheddar with periodic blue cheese veins that look like a 10 penny nail pierced into the cheese. The cheese is firm and square with a funky, moldy, grayish brown bloomy rind with traces of green that looks like it was excavated from an archaeological site. The smell has some nutty cheddar notes joined by a light, funky blue cheese tang. The cheese starts fruity, nutty and tangy on the tongue and as it dissolves a bit of crystalline crunch and a trace of grit comes through. The blue cheese element is there but not overboard and not enough to drowned out the aged cheddar notes. There is a little bitter on the finish. I am having this with a HammerHeart Weltanwanderer, a Bamberg-style Rauchbier (5.5% alcohol by volume) that brings some smoky, bacon notes to the table and it marries beautifully with the cheese's cheddar, nutty and blue cheese



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notes. I also tried Roelli Red Rock Cheese with Ommegang Three Philosophers - a blend of Belgian quadruple and Belgian kriel (wild fermented cherry flavored beer) aged in bourbon barrels. This beer also has the stones to stand up to a strong cheese like Roelli Red Rock and brings flavors that add to the cheese such as bourbon, vanilla, cherry, dried fruit, and dark malt notes - all flavors you might put on a plate with the cheese. The Roelli Red Rock is a US Cheese Championship Winner and is a perfect companion for big bold beer. I rate it 85. The pairing with the HammerHeart Weltanwanderer is an 87 and the Ommegang Three Philosophers aged in bourbon barrels is a 90. The Ommegang gets a couple more points than the HammerHeart due to its richer malt flavors and marvelous bourbon notes.



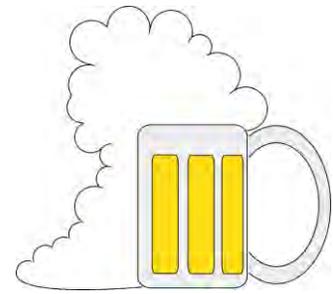
I picked Deer Creek The Blue Jay for my last cheese because it is the cheese I have bought most often in the last few months and I have found it goes well – but in different ways with a wide variety of beverages. Deer Creek The Blue Jay is a juniper berry infused quintuple crème blue cheese. At first blush, quintuple cheese reminds me of the scene in the movie This is Spinal Tap where Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest) points out that on his amps "...the

numbers all go to 11..." and are therefore 1 louder than normal amps. There is some basis, in reality for at least double-crème and triple-crème. By French law, double-crème cheeses must have at 60 to 75% butterfat by dry weight material. The cheeses in this category are typically semi-soft, creamy cheeses such as Camembert with a moisture content of 50% so if the dry material (non-moisture) of a double-crème cheese contains 75% butterfat by weight, the total cheese will contain about 39% butterfat. Triple-crème cheese, by French law, must contain over 75% butterfat in the dry matter and any cheese with more than 75% is a triple-crème cheese so quintuple-crème cheese is a little like having an amp that goes all the way up to 11 - but it is damn good cheese. The cheese has cream added to it so it probably has lactose.

The Blue Jay is wrapped in cranberry red foil and has no rind. The Blue Jay brings the blue cheese tang and a bit of the funk to the table - pungent whiffs of old socks - tempered by butter, mushroom and juniper berry. It has a sticky, slightly mottled, semi-soft cream to pale yellow paste with blue green veins and spots of juniper berries. The cheese is tangy, creamy rich and dissolves in your mouth with a brief graininess and the tang and juniper are evenly matched. It is buttery, mushroomy, and decadent and the first bite, as it melts in your mouth convinces you that this is a good idea. I have paired it with Duluth Brewhouse Big Boat Oatmeal Stout, Cornish Orchards Duloe-Cornwall Heritage Cider, and Insight Brewing A Visit to My Crazy Aunt and have also had it with Urban Forage Semisweet Sparkling Cider,

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Mountain Dragon Mazery West Virginia Wildflower Honey Mead and Nanbu Bijin
Tokebetsu Southern Beauty Sake.



The Cornish Orchards Cider starts mildly sweet with rich apple aromas and flavors, some traces of over ripe fruit with a moderate dose of tannins and some tartness coming in on the finish to dry things out. The cider does not get in the way of or mask any of the cheese flavors but the two together bring out each other's fruit notes. On its own the cider is magnificent and classy and the cheese makes it more so. The cider is the more elegant pairing with the carbonation softening the butter flavors while the butter softens some of the cider's tannins. The cider and cheese are something you might enjoy sitting in the garden while watching the bees pollinate your flowers.

The Big Boat Oatmeal Stout has oat, dark roast, light chocolate flavors and a very creamy texture and is a yummy pairing with the cheese. The Stout's chocolate and roast work very well with the cheese and the beer and cheese bring out new fruit flavors in each. The Stout's roast masks some of the cheese's tang and pungency while the cheese's butter notes mellow the roast. This is a decadent pairing that will appeal to lovers of dark bitter chocolate. The oatmeal stout covers some of the Cheese's more subtle notes but chocolate and butter with the juniper suggests an elegant chocolate truffle. The stout and cheese are an after-dinner dessert pairing.

The Insight Crazy Aunt has a mild gin and tonic smell and flavor with light biscuit, citrus and juniper. The cheese and the Crazy aunt go off in the same general direction together and both evoke a gin and tonic sandwich of sorts. They both tone each other down a little while at the same time enhancing the pairing. The Crazy Aunt is the more whimsical pairing of the three and the least challenging. The cheese and beer are something you might enjoy in the late afternoon instead of a gin and tonic.

So, here is a toast to Patrick. All of the beer cheese pairings worked. Of the pairings, The Surly Electric Sombrero of Death with Beecher's 4-Year Aged Flagship and the Roelli Red Rock with the Ommegang Three Philosophers aged in bourbon really stand out. I was worried that the IPA and the Pale Ales hoppiness might interfere with the cheese but the IPA - 56 Brewing's Wizard Mode with Drunken Goat Cheese and the Pale Ale - Brewing Projekt Simcoe and Mosaic hazy Pale Ale and Bleu d'Auvergne – work very well and are worth repeating.

Beer and cheese are a no-brainer pairing. You eat cheese on crackers or bread and the malt in beer can play that role in interesting ways. Cheese brings fat to the table and fat can coat the mouth and dissolve, absorb and concentrate flavors and distribute salt and other seasonings throughout the mouth. The carbon dioxide in the beer is an acid and can change our perception of sugars. It can dissolve and wash away some flavors while leaving others behind. Alcohol bonds with both fat and water molecules allowing it to carry aromas and flavors. Eating cheese with beer influences the initial flavors and changes the aftertaste of both, usually in pleasant and interesting ways. Look for subtle changes in the hop flavors, bitterness, and malt flavors in the beer, while looking for how the beer influences subtle notes in the cheese such as grassiness, nuttiness, or fruitiness.