



CHEESE MATTERS

Cheese Architecture Part 2

BY KRIS LLOYD

Holland produces millions of kilograms of cheese per week. One of its most famous cheeses is quite familiar to us all. The cannon ball shaped Edam in its red wax rind would have to be one of the most easily identified cheeses largely because of its shape. The cheese is named after the Harbour of Edam where the cheese was originally traded. The name Edam is used worldwide as a general term for cheeses with similar characteristics.

Gouda is of similar shape, however, it is finished with a bright red wax rind and named after the city of Gouda in the Netherlands. The wax coating prevents the cheese from drying out, making lengthy sea transportation possible. The difference between Edam and Gouda is the fat and moisture content, Gouda being slightly higher in fat content. It is said the ball shape came about due to ease of storage on the sailing transport ships; the round shape was said to take up less space, minimise the damage that could occur to the cheese and allowed for an even maturation. Many reports claim that the cannon ball shaped cheese was occasionally used in the Caribbean as cannon balls. It was said that this made the cheese even more popular! Traditional Edam weighs around 1.7kg per ball.

In the 12th century, the monks who lived in the valley of Abondance in France understood the cheese they had been casually producing could be a source of fortune for their remote mountain valley. They cleared the lush, green alpine land to create grazing pastures for their herds of cows. The monks worked on perfecting this particularly wonderful cheese, which was said to have been presented to the papal conclave that met in Avignon in 1381 to elect the new Pope. It was at this time that Abondance cheese was identified as a classic and quality cheese. The shape of Abondance is quite unusual as its sides are concave. It is said the shape of the cheese was influenced by the need to get the cheeses down from the mountain for storage or selling to

market. The concave sides allowed two of these large cheeses to fit snugly each side of the donkeys belly without too much movement. Traditional Abondance is still made in this shape.

The King of English cheeses is undoubtedly Stilton. There has always been a degree of uncertainty around the first making of Stilton and oddly enough the cheese was not made in the town of Stilton, which it takes its name from. Some note 1720 however, there are varying theories. It requires 78 litres to make eight kilograms of Stilton. This classic blue cheese is rich and buttery, it has a deep mellow flavour that melts in the mouth and that is almost syrupy. Stilton must be made in only three counties in England, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire from local milk, which is pasteurised. It must be unpressed and allowed to form its own crust or rind. It must also have blue veins stretching from the centre of the cheese and only be made in a traditional cylindrical shape. It is said that the shape of the cheese prevents the corners of the cheese from being damaged during its three-day brining and round cylinders would maintain their shape, as any other shape would distort and break apart, as modern cheesemakers know. The shape and thickness was also the key to even salt uptake.

Aside from the history and some colourful stories the shape of cheese directly influence texture, ripening and flavour. Whether it is a log or a pyramid, cylinder or barrel, these different shapes and structures have a lot to do with how they will ultimately taste.

A cheese with less surface area is often also a dense cheese, and sometimes needs to be aged longer for the flavours embedded within the structure to fully develop. Consequently, small goat milk cheese with differences in surface area produce more than subtle variations in flavour. Shape is only one factor in the maturation process. White mould cheese with a higher ratio of surface area to total volume will ripen faster. The smaller the cheese the quicker it will ripen but also the quicker it will become dry, but not always. Alas, such is the



complexity in the wonderful world of cheese.

» **Kris Lloyd** is the Head Cheesemaker of **Woodside Cheese Wrights**.

[woodsidecheese.com.au](http://www.woodsidecheese.com.au)

