



CHEESE MATTERS

Winter Cheese Table

BY KRIS LLOYD 

I love South Australia's clearly defined seasons. There is no mistaking the crisp winter mornings and often drizzly and misty evenings we are experiencing at the moment. I recently played around with a few new and old combinations of what I consider winter cheeses. I'll be sharing these with you, along with some stunning accompaniments, which are seasonal and lend themselves to warming you and leaving you feeling content.

This combination would have to be one of my all time winter favourites: a creamy blue cheese, perfectly ripe and extensively marbled with blue mould, served with a fabulous locally-made fig jam infused with ginger and star anise. The spice combination in the jam adds a glorious complexity, and when combined with the salty and pungent blue, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Pair this with a Champagne or Gewurztraminer, both of which are rich, satisfying and offer just the right contrast to

bring out the best in the cheese.

Raclette is both a type of cheese and a dish. The cheese is a style of washed rind, it is semi-hard, sweet, nutty and melts like a dream. Popular in Switzerland near the Alps, the dish is derived from the French verb *racler*, meaning 'to scrape'. It is a hearty offering and, as its name suggests, is served tableside by scraping the melted cheese from large wheels onto boiled or roasted potatoes. Crispy cornichons or dill style gherkins are added, along with pickled onions, charcuterie and some good heavy bread like pumpnickel – I did say hearty! I imagine that after a good day of skiing on those Alps this would be a dream come true – not unlike fish and chips wrapped in newspaper after a long day at the beach. If you haven't tried raclette it is well worth it, a

great cheese made even greater when melted. A more simple approach, if you want to create raclette at home, would be to melt the cheese in a small pan until it almost browns. Then drizzle the melted goodness over some crispy toasted bread, top it off with a pickle and serve with beer, cider, wine or tea. The melted cheese is truly flavoursome and seriously addictive.

Corella pears are in season; you can pick up some beauties in the Adelaide Hills; they are an exceptional accompaniment with any cheese. While I do prefer them fresh and crisp, as the temperature has fallen, I've been lightly

poaching them in Earl Grey tea, cooling them slightly, before serving them alongside a sharp-aged cloth-wrapped Cheddar and a glass of port. Quite a traditional combination that is tried and trusted and most certainly has its place on the winter table.

If you can, try and get hold of a very ripe soft cheese such as Brie, Camembert or, even better, washed rind (anything with a robust flavour works best). Choose from cow, goat or sheep's milk, depending on availability and your preference. I tend to look for cheeses that are nearing their best-before date for this cheese dish. Once you have found the right cheese, place it in an ovenproof dish that keeps it snug. Make a small well in the centre of the cheese and fill it with your favourite wine (I prefer white but any will do!), bake until it is hot through. Serve straight from the oven while it is super hot, with baby potatoes and roasted winter veggies. I am pairing Sangiovese or Rose with this great sharing dish, not dissimilar to fondue. It is easy to make this a meal by serving with a fresh salad, warm olives, thinly sliced prosciutto and good crusty bread.

Winter fruit compote is an easy but rewarding food in winter. We tend to think of it as the perfect accompaniment to our porridge



or breakfast cereal but it takes on a whole new meaning when it is served with cheese. Compote is easy to make: simply poach dried fruits of your choice – I like figs, cumquats, prunes or dates – with a little sugar and cognac until the fruit is plump. Add the zest of one lemon plus a large star anise. Then, if you can let it steep for a couple of days, it is worth that wait to get a truly rich flavour! Serve it with hard cheeses such as Pecorino, Parmigiano Reggiano or harder blue cheeses. Some cristini or oatmeal crackers and dessert wine make this a perfect finish to a winter evening.

Cheese is so portable, serve it on large boards or small individual plates, it can be as simple or as complicated as you like, the blessed cheesemaker has done all the hard work for you. You simply need to settle in, whether it is in front of the fire or anywhere else you feel is cosy and warm this winter, to share and enjoy some winter cheese.

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