

CULTURE

You Think You Know Chevre, But You Have No Idea

The full spread on French goat cheeses

BY LAYLA KHOURY-HANOLD AUGUST 5TH, 2015



I have something to admit. I discovered cheese in France, lived there for three years as a child and 2 more as a university student, yet I didn't learn about the full range of French goat cheeses until about a month ago.

Most of us know about chèvre – you know, those [creamy, tangy logs](#) you can find at just about any grocery store. But it turns out there are many different flavors and textures beyond this fresh style of goat cheese. Since I suspect I'm not alone in this, I sought out [Tia Keenan](#), ambassador to [Goat Cheeses of France](#) and all-around cheese rock star to help me better understand the full spectrum. Then I enlisted my French friends to help me taste all of the different samples that were graciously delivered to my doorstep. Turns out that French goat cheeses still have a few surprises, even for native Frenchies.

The Low Down

There are French goat cheeses made in every style: fresh, soft-ripened, pressed, washed, blue, you name it. I think the most unique and plentiful category is the soft-ripened and surface-ripened cheeses. To name a few: Selles-sur-Cher, Valençay, Crottin, Chabichou du Poitou and Sainte Maure de Touraine. The Valençay for example, is a distinct pyramid shaped surface-ripened ashed goat cheese with a flat top. It has notes of honey, chalk and oyster shell.

Playing Favorites

Tia tends towards the soft-ripened cheeses, particularly the small-format cheeses. "I think they capture the essence of goat cheese and the unique notes of goat's milk: citrus, grass, honey and hay." For example, she describes Chabichou du Poitou as "a fudgy, dense, rich soft-ripened goat cheese with notes of hay and damp wood."

What I Tasted

Cornilly



This was the tangiest, freshest goat cheese I've tasted. With its fluffy texture, I think it'd be perfect folded into softly scrambled eggs scattered with fresh herbs. I wouldn't necessarily have it on its own or put it on a cheese board.

Florette



Think of this beauty as Brie's country cousin. She is buttery and a little sweet with an exceptionally creamy interior. The corrugated rind is even delectable, and I made the most of the last of it melting it over sunny side up eggs on toast (are you noticing a theme here?).

Crottin



This is the goat cheese that I remember from my youth. When we lived in Paris, my mom loved to order *salade chevre chaud*, a salad of mixed greens with baked rounds of goat cheese. My French friends confirmed that this is indeed the perfect cheese for baking and topping salad or toast. It's a soft-aged cheese, so when it's on the younger side it tends toward a creamy texture, and crumbly when it's a bit older. The one we sampled leaned towards creamy with a salty bite, and was absolutely dreamy when drizzled with wild honey.

Valençay



This was my favorite of the bunch and the one everyone kept reaching for on the cheese board. The real deal Valençay PDO hails from the Centre region of France and can only be made with raw milk. Alas, the version we get here in the U.S. is a variation on the style made with pasteurized goat's milk. Nonetheless, its signature creamy texture and balanced woody-tangy taste is a real crowd pleaser. It also pairs amazingly well with honey – I ate a generous slab of it atop a baguette slice for breakfast the next morning.

Bucheron



This was one that my French friends were already familiar with. They knew of its unique dual texture and flavors – a creamy, tangy creamline and fudgy, citrusy center. What was surprising to me was that it also had a taste of something meaty that I couldn't put my finger on. When I consulted the tasting notes it seemed obvious: mushroom.

Tomme de Chèvre Bethmale



This was the most surprising goat cheese of the bunch for everyone. None of us knew that you could make a tomme – traditionally a French cheese made with cow's milk – with goat's milk. It is an aged, washed rind cheese that had a very earthy aroma and an almost meaty flavor – very different from any goat cheese I've ever had.