



WINE & SPIRITS

Perfect Pairings

WONDERING WHAT TO DRINK WITH GOAT CHEESE? THINK BUBBLES

Every New Year's Eve I make the same resolution: to drink more bubbly all year long. At a recent event at the red-hot Nomad Hotel, I found the perfect match for plenty of everyday sipping. Guests were clustered around a long table stocked with a gorgeous display of French goat cheeses—aged logs and young creamy *boutons*—paired with sparkling wines.

Jason Donnelly, *fromage* expert from Murray's cheese shop, offered valuable insights into the *chèvres* on display. "Goat cheese is much more than the crumbly log you sprinkle on salads," he said. "There's so much variety—cheeses with nuance and great natural acidity. And best of all goat's milk is much leaner than cow or sheep."

As we sipped Crémants from Alsace and Burgundy, Donnelly explained how to create a great board of *chèvres*. "Start with a fresh soft cheese like Sainte-Maure from the Loire," he said. "Then add

an aged version—after a few weeks in our cave, it becomes sharp and earthy with great nutty notes."

He explained the many shapes and flavor profiles that go into making a well-rounded board. The mild brie-style *Chèvre d'Argental* is a hexagonal beauty with a silky

texture and aromas of white almonds and mushrooms. The dense *Pyramide*, dusted in a gray coat of vegetable ash, is usually aged a few weeks to bring out its funky character. The cylindrical *Tomme de Chèvre* is extra nutty with a sweet finish and toasty, smoky caramel

notes. It's so firm, it seems more like a sheep cheese from the Pyrenées.

Another excellent addition to any goat cheese display is the super funky *chèvre bleu*. "This rare blue," said Donnelly, "has complex barnyard notes picked up from ambient molds. It's one of the most intriguing of all cheeses, and a great tool for making anyone an instant *chèvre convert*."

—Baroness Sberi de Borchgrave



MURRAY'S BOARD

For a mixed cheese board with cow, sheep and buffalo selections, Jason Donnelly of Murray's suggests arranging cheeses in a progression from mild on the left to sharp on the right. Serve with crusty baguettes or fruit and nut breads (avoid flavored crackers). Garnish with fresh grape clusters or sliced fresh pears and gourmet accompaniments such as artisanal honey (pairs with Brie and Roquefort) and Membrillo quince paste from Spain (classic with sharp cheeses).

Chèvre d'Argental

From the Rhône, mild with aromas of white almonds and mushroom and a silky texture.

Roncal

A sheep's milk Manchego-style cheese from Navarra in Spain's Basque country with a buttery texture and a sharp finish.

Cabot Clothbound Cheddar

From Vermont, dense and earthy in the English Farmhouse style with sweet undertones of caramel.

Washed-rind Quadrello Di Bufala

A square, semi-soft cheese with gamey meaty flavors. Made from buffalo milk, it has a rich slightly sweet finish.

Challerhocker

A Swiss mountain Guyère-style cheese with smoky notes and nuances of caramelized onion, herbs and baked bread.

Roquefort

A sheep's milk blue cheese aged in caves in the South of France, a metallic, sharp cheese with a creamy and rich texture.

SPARKLERS & CHÈVRE

Here are a few of my favorite sparkling wines and the goat cheeses that make the best match. Create a platter of several for a mix-and-match tasting party.

- > **BAILLY LAPIERRE CRÉMANT DE BOURGOGNE ROSÉ (\$20)** Aged in a limestone cave in Burgundy's crémant AOC, this light-textured rosé exhibits graceful notes of red fruit. *Best match: Chèvre d'Argental.*
- > **CHANDON BRUT CLASSIC (\$22)** This Napa sparkling has lovely, bright and balanced flavors of pear, pastry and citrus and a lively effervescence. *Best match: young and slightly aged Sainte-Maure.*

- > **DOMAINE CARNEROS BY TAITTINGER BRUT 2008 (\$27)** This *methode champenoise* sparkling from the Taittinger Champagne family has citrus and berry fruit flavors and a lively mousse. *Best match: the stronger flavored Pyramide.*
- > **JAILLANCE CLAIRETTE DE DIE (\$16)** Made from Muscat grown in the Rhône Valley, this sweet wine exhibits floral nuances of rose and elderflower and has nice minerality. *Best match: blue.*
- > **PAUL CHENEAU RESERVA BRUT BLANC DE BLANCS (\$18)** An elegant Spanish cava is from the Penedès region and has notes of honey, almonds and dried herbs. *Best match: fresh chèvre.*
- > **SCHRAMBERG BLANC DE NOIRS 2008 (\$39)** This blanc de noirs, made primarily from Pinot Noir, displays aromas of persimmon, vanilla spice and candied almond. *Best match: Tomme de Chèvre.*

