

Say Cheese...

Posted by **David Eley** on 22-08-2008



Cheese is a wonderful and endlessly fascinating subject for those who love food: in many ways it offers a striking similarity to fine wine. The tremendous array of nuanced flavours and tastes, slowly evolving with time or exposure to air; the removal of the cheese rind and elevation of ambient temperature permit flavours to evolve, providing many points for comparison with wine appreciation. In addition, there are many distinct and carefully defined local appellations for cheese, with each region proudly defending the honour of its own cheesy identity. This standard and narrowly defined typicity is seldom diluted and with particular cheeses, is upheld and protected by individual A.O.C. denominations in a very rigorous fashion - the list of revered regional cheeses is endless; Roquefort, Stilton, Parmesan, Brebis, Comté, Cantal, Manchego, Queijo da Serra etc...

The finesse and subtle eloquence of a great cheese can contribute handsomely to dining and drinking pleasure, indeed, for many gastronomes it is undoubtedly the highlight of a meal. For a man whose entire life was dedicated to fine wine, this is precisely what drew the Michelin class French sommelier Frédéric Minvielle into this pungent and odiferous world. After several years practising his vinous profession in France's finest restaurants, Frédéric decided to pursue his great passion for cheese by establishing a fine cheese company in Anglet, [Fromage & Compagnie](#) at the heart of the French Basque Country, between Biarritz and Bayonne.

Frédéric Minvielle is not only a purveyor of fine cheese but a highly skilled *affineur*, aging and maturing cheese under controlled conditions, before offering them to clients when

perfectly ready to consume. Most professional fromagers do not come from a wine oriented background and it might well be that Frédéric is unique. Certainly, his approach to cheese is founded upon the subtle understanding of flavour necessitated by his previous vinous profession. He runs a business which not only stores and ages fine cheeses from all over France, but also helps local cheese-makers to adjust and refine their artisanal products to suit the requirements of leading chefs.. Frédéric's skills are so appreciated by restaurateurs, his finely cured cheeses find there way to distant places. One of his most loyal customers is the acclaimed Paris based 2 star Michelin chef [Hélène Darroze](#), recently appointed to preside over the restaurant kitchens of the newly refurbished (at a cost of over 70 million pounds) [Connaught Hotel](#) in London's Mayfair, so it seems that Frédéric's wonderful cheeses will now be available in London.

Knowing about cheese, food and wine pairing and understanding the complexities of the flavours required by culinary stars, are Frédéric's key to gaining their confidence. One particular star chef is Ducasse protégé Cédric Béchade at [l'Auberge Basque](#) , the stylish food-centric boutique hotel near St Jean de Luz. Cédric works alongside the world-class sommelier Samuel Ingelaere and they both have immense respect for Frédéric. At Cedric's request, Frédéric worked with a local sheep farmer and cheesemaker in the village of Itxassou - to develop a revolutionary haute-couture Brebis cheese with a much softer interior than the norm, it has proved a great success in the restaurant and provides the perfect example of why this dynamic fromager is making a distinct impression within the world of gastronomy.

Frédéric's fabulous cheeses will shortly be contributing to an occasional series of cheese 'postcards' at A Good Nose.Com - each photographic cheese portrait will carry with it a brief description from the specific cheesemonger. In addition, we will be featuring cheese-makers within the online journal on Cédric Béchade to be launched soon. In order to receive details of this and many other fascinating food and wine topics, subscribe to our electronic Newsletter '[Picture Post](#) '.