



Horizons

AAA SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

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eating out

The tasteful artistry of the cheese board

By Christine E. McDermott

To me, the cheese board is one of life's greatest luxuries. It can also cause me to revert back to childlike behavior in which each piece must be cut perfectly in half and shared equally. And no hogging the nuts, chutneys and breads ...

In honor of National Cheese Lover's Day, Jan. 20, here are some Rhode Island restaurants where you can find fabulous plates of fromage.

BACARO ♥♥♥
262 South Water St.,
Providence

When you're seated, you'll be handed a checklist on which you can select an assortment of cheeses and cured meats. Downstairs in the salumeria, they'll assemble your choices on a wood cutting board, along with marmalade, spiced nuts and fig jam. The extensive menu includes olives, Italian tapas, pizza, seafood and pasta, plus a tempting array of homemade desserts and ice cream.

HOW TO PREPARE A CHEESE PLATE

Matthew Jennings, chef and owner of Farmstead, shares his tips on how to build the perfect cheese plate:

1. Follow "The Rule of Five." I always include five varieties on a cheese plate: one cheese with cow's milk, one with sheep's milk, one with goat's milk, one blue and one with a washed rind. That way you get a little bit of every variety, age and style.

2. Quantity. Visually, odd numbers are best. Five cheeses make the most visually appealing plate, followed by seven.

3. Storage. The most important thing is to store them properly. Basically, you can't go wrong with anything but plastic wrap; plastic prevents the cheese from breathing. When you pick up the cheese from your local cheese monger, ask for a few extra pieces of cheese paper. Otherwise, even tin foil is a better alternative to plastic. Store your cheese in the crisper drawer of your fridge and take it out an hour before serving to bring the plate to room temperature.

4. Accompaniments. Keep the accompaniments simple. We always go with a pile of Farmstead's candied nut mix, which is available for purchase on our website. If you've never had honey with blue cheese, you're missing out. It's essential to a good cheese plate and if you ask me, it's one of the world's greatest combinations. Jams and chutneys are also a good way to add a little sweetness. At Farmstead, we like to serve cheese with rustic breads, but nothing with too much flavor or too many seeds, as that takes away from the cheese. Anything from ciabatta to a crusty wheat will work.



Farmstead Inc.

5. Dealing with leftovers. Depending on the type of cheese, you only have a certain amount of time to eat the leftovers before they go bad. That said, it's good to know that harder cheeses are still salvageable for a while after use. If a hard cheese has a little bit of mold, scrape it off and then grind the cheese to use in pasta or on top of a salad. Soft cheeses, on the other hand, can't survive for long periods of time and should be discarded if they grow mold.

THE CHEESE PLATE ♥♥♥

54 State St., Warren

This casual eatery with an in-house shop puts an international spin on its arrange-

ments, with French, Italian and Spanish themes among the options paired with honey, nuts and jams. Charcuterie and pate can be added to the order. If you're still hungry, indulge in a grilled cheese sandwich with brie, granny smith apple and caramelized onion chutney.

FARMSTEAD

186 Wayland Ave., Providence

Adjacent to its namesake gourmet shop, Farmstead changes its cheese board offerings weekly. Domestic and imported delicacies are served with house-made jam, local honey and Matt's candied nuts

(Matt being owner Matt Jennings, a two-time finalist for the James Beard Foundation's "Best Chef of the Northeast" award). Not to be missed are wife Kate Jennings' melt-in-your-mouth cheesy-chive rustic biscuits.

NEW RIVERS ♥♥♥

7-9 Steeple St., Providence

At this romantic bistro set in a renovated 1793 building, guests can choose from a list of artisan cheeses or defer to the chef's preferences. Adorning the tray will be sweet and sour grapes, fruit chutney, bread and nuts. Also featured is an impressive menu of charcuterie

that uses animals that were naturally raised - i.e., free of hormones and antibiotics.

SIENA ♥♥♥

5600 Post Road,
East Greenwich

This upscale Northern Italian restaurant, which also has locations in Providence and Smithfield, invites diners to mix and match their favorite meats, cheeses and olives to create their own antipasti platter. Or, you can order one of three signature tasting boards named after cities in Tuscany. Accompaniments include ciabatta crostini, candied nuts and fruits.