



# Say Cheese

Self-styled “cheese impresario” Barrie Lynn offers advice on pairing cheese with a classic beverage other than wine. **BY BARRIE LYNN**

**PAIRING ARTISANAL CHEESE WITH YOUR FAVORITE** libation is like a truly fabulous romance. When it works, one-plus-one equals much more than two — they dance together in a supercharged, visceral experience. But I’m here to turn you on to the delicious pleasure of pairing artisanal cheeses with a spirit rather than a wine.

Cheese and wine pairings are still delightful, but this trip on the “cheese highway” will awaken new flavors in your mouth. I was recently the cheese-pairing expert at the San Francisco Bay Ministry of Rum Festival, introducing those attending to this luscious combination. Person after person told me they’d never thought to try this pairing, and that it was astoundingly wonderful.

**SERVING CHEESES** (with accompaniments and artisan breads) and drinks can be an easy and very high-payoff entertaining strategy. I usually serve three cheeses before a meal — offering about one ounce of cheese per person per cheese. The cheeses should be tailored to the drinks being served — I happen to love dark

sipping rums before dinner. Serve the rum neat (no ice) in a glass and the cheeses at room temperature with dried fruit like California figs and a selection of unsalted nuts. This will deliver a beautiful visual and a great taste.

So, what cheese with what rum? Goudas work wonderfully. I love Marieke’s Raw Milk Aged Gouda and Wisconsin cheesemakers Julie and Tony Hook’s 10-Year Vintage Aged Cheddar. These are big-flavored cheeses with nuttiness, sweetness and big, rich cow’s milk tastes. Because the cheeses and the rum are both aged, this is a “like/like” combination. Pair with a dark sipping rum — like the super-rich English Harbour 5-Year Rum — you’ll be in heaven and so will your guests.

You can also make beautiful-but-easy rum cocktails that pair beautifully with the same cheeses. Try a rum Manhattan with a special Sweet Vermouth like Antica Formula from Italy. Add in a mixologists’ favorite Luxardo Maraschino Cherry to this, and it will leave you and your guests discussing the delicious, send-you-to-the-moon flavor. ■

## THE CHEESE HIGHWAY

EUROPEANS GET THE MOST OUT OF pairing cheese and libations by putting the cheese in their mouths, chewing briefly and then taking a gulp of their drink while their mouth is still full. Then, they chew it all up before they swallow — and get a great pairing! Not so in the U.S., where chewing a mouthful of cheese-and-beverage slush might be seen as violating table manners. So how can you get this taste sensation while still keeping to our Emily Post politeness?

Enter the “Cheese Highway.” (Teach your friends this procedure, and they’ll be thanking you for years.) Take a piece of cheese. Admire it just like you would your wine — note the color, the rind, the texture. Take a little bit of your cheese and rub it between your fingers to get it warmed up. Now smell it. Think of what flavors come to mind — mushrooms? Fresh cream? Nutty, earthy or sweet?

Now give the same attention to your drink (without the rubbing-it-with-your-fingers part). Look at the color. Get your nose way in the glass and smell; swirl the glass and smell again. Remember, 80 percent of taste is smell; your nose is an important tasting (and pairing) tool.

Now, here’s the best part. Eat your piece of cheese and allow the “Cheese Highway” to form on your tongue (it will mostly happen naturally as you chew the cheese). Now, make sure that your drink is ready and take a good-sized sip, allowing the beverage to run down your tongue. Note how your cheese and drink come together in your mouth for a turbo-charged experience. This is the way cheese and drink are supposed to taste together. You will get the maximum benefit from both with this maneuver.

I was recently on *E! Entertainment News* demonstrating the Cheese Highway to Julie Benz from the cast of *Dexter*. She loved this pairing methodology; so will you and your friends when you experience this fun and amazing way to get the most out of pairing beautiful cheeses with equally beautiful wines or spirits.