



ACS 2012 WINNING CHEESE PLATE

Matt Caputo

[ACS Certified Cheese Professional™](#)

[Tony Caputo's Market & Deli](#)

Salt Lake City, UT

- ★ [Hand Dipped Ricotta](#), Liuzzi Angeloni Cheese
- ★ [TeaHive](#), Beehive Cheese Company
- ★ [California Crottin](#), Redwood Hill Farm
- ★ [Rupert](#), Consider Bardwell
- ★ [Le Clandestin](#), Fromagerie Le Détour

★ HAND DIPPED RICOTTA, LIUZZI ANGELONI CHEESE (CT)

When done correctly, ricotta is the perfect way to start a cheese plate because its rich, milky flavors and smooth yet airy texture leave a hungry palate excited, but not overpowered.

WARNING! Did you notice above where I said “when done correctly?” Unfortunately, most mass-production ricotta found in the U.S. is so poorly made that the gritty texture is often enough to make you wonder if sand is an ingredient. Yuck! Liuzzi Angeloni Cheese lovingly creates a proper hand dipped ricotta from cow's milk whey. It is enough to conjure memories of my first trip to Rome when we demolished dangerous amounts of ricotta and salami.

Pairing: My top choice to accompany this wonderful cheese is *Creminelli Casalingo salami*. Okay, I may be a little biased. Before their fame and glory, Creminelli was launched out of our basement at Tony Caputo's Market & Deli in Salt Lake City, Utah, and a lot of my own blood, sweat and tears went into trying to sell expensive artisan salami at a time when salami was relegated to a mere cold cut in this country. However, biased or not, the Casalingo's special fermentation gives it a bit of extra tang that almost reminds me of cheese itself. Take some ricotta, spread on crusty bread, add chunks of Casalingo, devour, and think of Italy.

★ TEAHIVE, BEEHIVE CHEESE COMPANY (UT)

How many flavored cheddars can one company make? I think the friendly folks at Beehive are out to break a record. Nonetheless, it's hard to argue with success. Maybe I am biased here again. As fellow cheese geeks living in the great State of Utah, we often get to collaborate with Beehive on projects in Caputo's cheese cave.

Pairing: One combination of flavors that can't be denied is a slab of Teahive with a drizzle of *Slide Ridge Honey Wine Vinegar*. Yes, I said slab. You will want more than a piece so cut it in slabs! Okay, I guess you can cut it however you want, but mark my words, you *will* want more. You may also be asking yourself at this point, 'did he just say wine vinegar on cheese?' Think of it more like a thick balsamic with a nice bead to it. However, it's not made with grapes. Master beekeeper Martin James uses his legendary multi-flower honey from Cache Valley, Utah, to brew mead which he then acetifies into this thick sweet vinegar.

Teahive is essentially the same as Beehive's Promontory Cheddar, but rubbed and aged with black tea and bergamot oil. The floral citrusy bergamot becomes truly intoxicating as it melds with the musky tree pollen aroma of the honey. The richness of the cheese is accentuated with the sweet and mild acid of the vinegar. Oh yeah, don't forget the sweet juicy apples in the vinegar! Apples and cheddar? Yes, please. God, I love Utah.



★ CALIFORNIA CROTTIN, REDWOOD HILL FARM (CA)

From its trailblazing cheese making program to its animal husbandry and breeding, Redwood Hill Farm has established itself as one of America's agricultural treasures. A fact excellently demonstrated in one tiny little 3 oz goat cheese button, California Crottin. A slight dusting of *Geotrichum candidum* (white mold) lends the tangy paste a nice hint of yeast and mushroom-like aromas.

The first time I ate California Crottin, it evoked in me the kind of memories I didn't know I had. The aromas reminded me of childhood summers at the swimming pool. I am lying on the hot cement to dry off, and the scent of wet cement, nearby freshly mown grass, and chlorine calmingly intermingle. When I recount this story at the cheese counter, novices are often put off by the reference to bleach aroma in cheese, but I don't mean the caustic chemical. Just the faint hint of something profoundly clean, like the milk, as only Redwood Hill Farm can do.

Pairing: You thought that because I was from Utah and my first two cheeses were sans alcohol that I was a teetotaler, didn't you? Wrong. Cheese without a tasty beverage is just sad. Everyone always says to pair small format goat cheeses of this nature with Sauvignon Blanc. I do have contrarian tendencies, but this pairing is classic for a reason. If you have not yet succumbed, you are totally missing the boat. Want fireworks in your mouth? I suggest *Honig Winery's Sauvignon Blanc* from Napa Valley to accompany this tidbit of coagulated goodness.

P.S. For a guaranteed laugh, look up the translation of Crottin. Oh, those French.

★ RUPERT, CONSIDER BARDWELL FARM (VT)

Recently, I have become obsessed with Alpine-style cheeses. At Caputo's we teach a two hour class on Alpine cheese history and how the confluence of very unique circumstances caused the evolution of a completely unique and cohesive style of cheese all across the disparate cultures of the Alps. Because of these specific topographic and climatic circumstances, these cheeses all start with curds that are high in sugar, low in acid and salt, and therefore have to be cut a specific way, and vigorously cooked in small copper vats before the wheels are formed.

This intense cooking was primarily done to expel enough whey to make cheeses dry enough to be stored for long periods of time or transported over long distances before refrigeration was invented. But, it also serves to caramelize some of the lactose (milk sugar). Some of the more aged versions I like to refer to as milk candy. My current favorite American-made Alpine-style cheese is Rupert from Consider Bardwell Farm. This raw cow's milk cheese from Vermont offers deep nutty flavors, hints of caramelized grass, and wildflowers. The paste is firm, yet, upon chewing, melts with a texture rich as peanut butter, interspersed with the occasional crunch of milk protein crystals.

Pairing: Something so sweet, nutty and rich I like to accompany with cured, smoky pork. *Caputo's Housemade Speck* is basically prosciutto made in the style of Italy's northernmost province. However, unlike more prevalent Italian styles of prosciutto, it is influenced by the farmhouses of the Alps and is made from belly instead of leg. Also demonstrative of its Alpine roots, we season it with spices then lightly smoke it with apple wood.

★ LE CLANDESTIN, FROMAGERIE LE DETOUR (QC)

Growing up, I had the pleasure of spending quite a bit of time in Europe, where I learned that stinky cheeses are best saved for the end of the meal. When the palate is full, the strength of these pungent delicacies is far less off putting and the finer nuances can be fully explored.

Le Clandestin from Fromagerie Le Détour in Québec, Canada, is a soft-ripened blend of sheep and cow's milk. The rind of this beauty is washed with a brine solution to promote the growth of a bacteria called *brevibacterium linens* (or b-linens) which gives the surface a lovely orange tint and a



big smell. Some say these washed rind cheeses smell of feet. I think they smell delicious when cared for correctly.

Pairing: There are many classic pairings in this world. Sauternes and Foie Gras, Stilton and Port, Cabernet with Ribeye, to name a few. These are all great, but I contend that the best food and wine pairing by a long shot is washed rind soft-ripened cheeses with a lightly oaked Burgundian Chardonnay. Sorry California, but in this case, the magic works best with the French stuff. When these two products combine, the lactic buttery flavors are instantly amplified far beyond normal human capability.

Warning! Don't try this at the beginning of the meal. On a hungry palate, it is akin to shooting your tongue with Novocain. You can forget about tasting much of anything in your food for the rest of the evening

Note: My absolute favorite artisan American cheese is basically the same cheese but made by Snowy Mountain Sheep Creamery in Eden, Utah. It is called Strawberry Peak. However, unlike Le Clandestin, it is highly seasonal and best from early April to mid June. Give it a try during this period.

About the American Cheese Society (ACS): ACS is the leading organization supporting the understanding, appreciation, and promotion of farmstead, artisan and specialty cheeses produced in the Americas. At 1,500 members strong, ACS provides advocacy, education, business development, and networking opportunities for cheesemakers, retailers, enthusiasts, and extended industry. ACS strives to continually raise the quality and availability of cheese in the Americas.

Since its founding in 1983, ACS proudly hosts the foremost annual educational conference and world-renowned annual cheese judging and competition. The 2013 ACS Conference & Competition will be held in Madison, WI from July 31-August 3, 2013. For more information, visit www.cheesesociety.org.