

Wine Spectator

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COOKING WITH
CHEESE

A CODEX TO 10 ICONIC CHEESE TYPES, WITH CLASSIC AND MODERN RECIPES FROM TOP CHEFS, PLUS WINE MATCHES

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THE DOOR

AN IDEA HOUSE

SWISS

ALPINE RULES

To the casual observer it might come as a surprise that a small, landlocked nation roughly the size of Connecticut and Massachusetts put together runs a close second to the magnificent behemoth that is France in the world of fine cheeses. Such is the case with Switzerland, which operates as a federation of independent and, historically, at times disparate provinces, called cantons, that have consistently turned out an astounding breadth and variety of cheeses.

What's no surprise, given Switzerland's geography, is that it produces more of the finest mountain cheeses than any other nation. The large-format Swiss alpine types—starting with Emmentaler and Gruyère—head that list, and they are the models for many flattering imitators the world over.

Key to understanding Switzerland's outstanding mountain cheeses is comprehending the concept of an alpe: It is any place in the mountains where people go, usually in the summer, almost always accompanied by their domesticated animals. They may not settle there permanently, but they stay long enough to milk those animals and make cheese. The operative word is *place*, as in a particular patch of terrain or a specific microclimate. And the operative principle is transhumance, whereby, once the snows have melted, cows are ushered up to high pastures to feast on a rich diet of alpine fodder, ensuring that their milk is the best possible raw material for cheesemaking.



FOUR SWISS ICONS

- ▶ Gruyère 1655
- ▶ Chällerhocker
- ▶ Der Scharfe Maxx
- ▶ Nufenen

Down through the centuries, before the advent of modern transportation, alps and other small communities tended to remain isolated. They developed independent traditions and customs. Cheeses would be made according to similar, even identical recipes. Yet they remained distinct expressions of their *terroir* and were named for their places of origin—Appenzeller, Toggenburger, Hoch Ybrig and so forth.

For most of the 20th century, Switzerland's cheesemakers, ruled by the Swiss Cheese Union, were stodgy and predictable. The union was a financial boon but a creative bust; when it collapsed in 1999, the Swiss were once again free to invent, which they did in all categories.

Excellent new cheeses made with old-style methods wowed the cheese world: Among the traditional alpine types, Chällerhocker and Der Scharfe Maxx emerged as superstars. Both could be characterized as “breakaway Appenzellers,” and they knocked the Hoch Ybrig off more than a few shelves in fine cheese shops. This was quite remarkable, given the

Hoch Ybrig's many charms, but those two (relatively) new kids on the block were just that good.

If a genuine AOP Emmentaler is the baseline for all Swiss alpine types, a carefully selected, well-aged AOP Gruyère is the benchmark. The former is bright and fruity up front, offering notes of caramel and toasted bread. With a smooth consistency and satiny texture, it's a little springy on the palate but nonetheless toothsome and melting. The Gruyères add earthy, beefy and nutty notes to the classic alpine profile, along with delightfully crunchy crystals. Recommended labels include Rolf Beeler, Murray's and Gruyère 1655.

A couple of other highly recommended Swiss alpine types are L'Etivaz, a throwback Gruyère made as it was 100 years ago—an eye-opener with its salty, smoky and musty-citrus combo—and Nufenen, offering Gruyère-like earthiness and meatiness, not as powerful up front but building convincingly and leaning more toward the fruity end of the Swiss spectrum.

As recipe ingredients, all of these alpine cheeses, new and old, are great options. They're built to melt (after all, fondue is the national dish) and their flavors hold up wonderfully to the heat of cooking.

Cubano Sandwich

“A Cuban Sandwich is the one dish I crave the most. Each component is important; the smoked ham must be good-quality. The roast pork should be marinated in adobo and sour orange, which is the traditional Cuban method. You have to use Järlsberg Swiss cheese because it's great when melted and has the right kind of elasticity. The color and brininess of inexpensive dill pickle chips can't be beat. The pickles must be patted dry to ensure that they stick to the meat. Look for a bread made with lard—you can taste the difference. I prefer the mustard on the side, and it's best when it's that ‘ballpark yellow mustard’—never a Dijon.”

—DOUGLAS RODRIGUEZ

WINE MATCH |

Ontañón Ecológica Rioja 2013

“This is a strange dish for pairing. Acidity is key because of the mustard and pickle. The Ontañón has the sweet spice and acidity to stand up to the pork, and the medium body won't overpower the food. The acids cancel each other out.”

—CASEY LITTLEFIELD, BEVERAGE MANAGER

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES: Cune Rioja Crianza 2012 (\$1, \$13); Bodegas Federico Paternina Rioja Banda Azul Crianza 2013 (\$8, \$15)



RECIPE

1 loaf 24-inch-long Cuban bread made with lard (or French baguette or hoagie-style bread), split in half and cut into four 6-inch sections
1 pound thinly sliced Jarlsberg cheese
1 pound thinly sliced Black Forest smoked ham
1 pound thinly sliced Roast Pork Butt (recipe follows)
Sliced dill pickles, patted dry
6 tablespoons salted butter, melted
Ballpark mustard

1. Arrange the bread slices cut side up. Evenly arrange $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Jarlsberg on each slice of bread, then spread 4 to 5 pickle slices evenly on 1 side of each sandwich. Evenly lay $\frac{1}{4}$ of the ham followed by $\frac{1}{4}$ of the pork on 1 side. Carefully combine the 2 sides of each sandwich and brush with melted butter.

2. Heat a sandwich press or a saucepan to medium (275° F). Grill each sandwich for 3 to 4 minutes, pressing firmly. If using a saucepan, first brush with butter, then press the

sandwich with a spatula, or place a second pan, inset with a heavy can, on top of the sandwich to weight it down, Cuban old-style.

3. Once cooked, cut each sandwich in half and serve with ballpark mustard. *Makes 4.*

TO MAKE THE ROAST PORK BUTT

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped white onion
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup distilled white vinegar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
1 tablespoon dried oregano
8 cloves garlic, peeled
3 bay leaves
1 tablespoon cumin seeds
2 tablespoons salt
Zest of 2 oranges
1 tablespoon pepper
5 pounds boneless pork butt trimmed of excess fat

1. Place all ingredients except pork in a food processor or blender. With the motor running (if using a food processor), gradually add 4 cups water to create a puree.

2. Place the pork in a large ovenproof dish or nonreactive pan and pour the marinade over. Cover and refrigerate for 12 hours or overnight, turning occasionally.

3. Preheat oven to 300° F. Uncover the pork, then re-cover it, along with the marinade, using aluminum foil. Transfer to the oven and cook until the pork is very tender and almost falling apart, about 3 hours. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly.

4. Place slightly cooled pork in the refrigerator and let cool completely, at least 4 hours. Slice thinly.



Douglas Rodriguez

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