

THE SAILORS RETURN

It was only Monday when Sharon and I disembarked in historic Portsmouth for the bus ride up England's M-3 to London's Heathrow Airport. We had wonderful experiences: gliding into Lisbon at dawn, ferrying ashore through the Galician mists by Zodiac at Finisterre, sliding into the locks at St Malo, France which were just barely longer than the National Geographic Endeavor, which at just under 300 feet is minuscule by cruise ship standards.

Back in Seattle the sun is out, the flowers are in bloom, and we are just in time for **The Seattle Pike Place Market Cheese Festival** this weekend (May 16-18). To help celebrate the event, George, our cheese specialist, has stocked up on his favorite cheeses with an emphasis on our Portuguese selection. Portuguese cheeses are the rarest, most difficult of imported cheeses to obtain and we have brought in some gooey and delicious gems. Throw in a bottle of wine, Amontillado or Madeira and some crackers and you have a picnic or tapa hour waiting to happen!

Azeit o:

A concentrated round of sheep's milk cheese made with cardoon thistle rennet, in a village in the foothills of the Portuguese Arribida mountains. Cut off the top and scoop this wonderful creamy cheese out onto crackers or fruit platters. You'll be amazed at its rich flavor! Wine: pair with **Blandy's 5 year Malmsey** (\$22.99) for a hedonistic experience!

Queijo Cabra Quinta:

A washed rind goat cheese from Portugal made with a milk thistle rennet. Semi-soft and creamy in texture, complemented by aromatic citrus zest and a slightly piquant flavor. Some white pepper notes even show up at times. Wine: The crisp, dry grapefruit flavors of **2007 Con Class Verdejo** (\$14.99) are perfect with this cheese.

Queijo Sao Jorge:

An Azorean staple, dating back to the 1400s. This pungent cow's milk cheese is piquant, intense and creamy, yet firm in texture. A wonderful, rustic addition to a fruit platter, it also pairs perfectly with Portuguese chorizo or Linguica. Wine: **2005 Juan Gil's Old Vine Monastrell** provides richness, spice and deep red fruit flavors to match up to the creamy goodness of this cheese. And best of all, it's now on sale for \$12.99!

Serra da Estrella:

In production since the 12th century and famous throughout the world for its unique character and intense flavor. Because it is handmade, only two or three wheels are made per day; each takes several hours to craft. Thistle is used as the rennet and its flavor is evident in the profile of the cheese. It is consumed two ways: when it's young, it's oozy,

buttery and rich with fresh herbal undertones; as it matures it takes on more cohesion with a sharper flavor, developing soft caramel notes. Serra de Estrella is the ultimate party cheese, perfect for large gatherings. Wine: **2003 Abad Dom Bueno from Bierzo** (\$15.99) completes this delightful flavor journey with its slightly herbal, ripe blackberry flavors and low tannins.

Ros:

A.K.A. *Cheese Candy*, is an absolutely delicious, though obscure, Catalan sheep's milk cheese hand molded in the mountains outside of Barcelona. If you like aged Manchego, you're going to go nuts over Ros! The cheese is extra aged, sporting a granular texture and a caramel, nutty flavor with notes of brown sugar and a citrus tang finish. You have to taste it to believe it! Wine: **Barrel fermented 2006 Montes Chardonnay** (\$9.99) from Chile has buttery vanilla and tropical fruit flavors that wrap around the flavors of this cheese very nicely.

Cabrales: Spain's most famous blue cheese, and rightly so – one bite and you'll become lost in its depth and complexity. Simultaneously pungent and creamy, sharp and tangy, this cheese is made from cow, sheep and goat's milks in Asturias. Our cheese specialist, George's favorite way to partake of Cabrales is to stuff it into fresh figs or dates. If you're unfamiliar with Cabrales, you're in for an unforgettable experience! This cheese demands a rich red wine such as **2005 Pagos de Quintana from Ribera del Duero** (\$16.99). This delicious wine is made for zinfandel lovers, with loads of ripe currant, blackberry, licorice and vanilla.

Mahon Artisanal

: A raw cow's milk cheese from the island of Menorca. A salty flavor comes through, lingering from native grasses the cows graze on. It is buttery and sharp with a light, nutty aroma. Piquant and perfect with olives, it is also an excellent melting cheese! The nuttiness of a dry **Amontillado sherry** is a great pairing with this cheese for tapas hour.

Veigadarte:

Produced in a small village in the province of Leon, is a goat's milk log with an oak ash rind covered by a thick, bloomy white rind. Great with any fruity white wine or **sparkling Cava**.

Abbaye de Belloc

(ah-BAY du Bell-OCK): A semi-hard, French-Basque cheese made from raw Manech sheep's milk and aged 4-10 months. Mild and nutty, this cheese has a unique "lanolin" toasted brown sugar characteristic. The texture is rich, smooth, buttery, luxurious, great with a wine such as the **2001 Vi a Salceda Reserva Rioja** (\$19.99) which has lots of blackberry, licorice leather, and acidity.

Myzithra:

A hard Greek sheep's milk cheese. Delicate & salty, this cheese is a great way to jazz up a pasta dish. This is one of my favorite grating cheeses and we have a selection of Greek wines to serve with it!

George has also stocked up on crackers and flat breads and we have a few cheese books sale priced for people who want to learn more about the world of cheese.

Early notice for wine collectors! We will be receiving limited quantities of the following wines within the next few days. Please call or e-mail seattlewine@spanishtable.com if you are interested in purchasing any of these wines. We can't guarantee at this point how much of each wine we will receive, so our apologies in advance if we aren't able to fill your order. We will fill orders on a first come, first served basis. The wines are:

Bodegas El Nido Clio 2005 95 points Robert Parker \$50.00

Bodegas El Nido El Nido 2005 98 points Robert Parker \$150.00

Muga Prada Enea Gran Reserva 2000 92 points Robert Parker \$65.00