

# food

TOP CHEFS, TASTY RECIPES, TASTE-BUD BLISS

## Say Cheese

New York's expert fromagers select their favorite rounds for summer.

As the weather warms, it's hard not to feel the pull of the picnic basket stocked with simple pleasures—great cheese and a nice bottle of wine or beer to go with it. Here, five of the city's cheese connoisseurs share their seasonal choices and tell you exactly what to pack along with it. Now go hit Central Park.

### The Cheesemongers



**1 Anne Saxelby**  
Owner, *Saxelby Cheesemongers*  
Essex Street Market  
120 Essex St. (between

Rivington and Delancey Sts.)  
212-228-8204; saxelbycheese.com



**2 Jonathan White**  
Owner and cheesemaker,  
*Bobolink Dairy*

Greenmarket at Lincoln Center (Thursday and Saturday), and at Union Square (Friday); cowsoutside.com



**3 Zahidul "Hakim" Hakim**  
Head cheesemonger,  
*Balducci's*

81 Eighth Ave. (at 14th St.)  
212-741-3700; balduccis.com



**4 Rob Kaufelt**  
Proprietor, *Murray's Cheese Shop*

254 Bleecker St. (between Sixth and Seventh Aves.)  
212-243-3289; murrayscheese.com



**5 Max McCalman**  
Dean of Curriculum,  
*Artisanal Premium Cheese*

2 Park Ave. (at 32nd St.)  
312-725-8585; artisanalcheese.com

### 1 Pearl

**Anne's choice:** "This small round, made with cow and goat's milk, is soft, light and fluffy, with a musky, buttery flavor. Since goats don't produce milk all year long, this is the first cheese you're going to get after they have their kids in February or March, and it tastes like spring. The cow's milk makes it more buttery and creamy, so it's great for people who think they don't like goat cheese."

**Serve with:** "Something simple and light with a sweet flavor, like Anne's Mirabelle plum preserves (\$11.95; Confitures de l'Ardèche, formaggiokitchen.com)."

**Pair with:** François Pinon Vouvray (\$18.99; astorwines.com). "Pearl cheese is very tangy, with just a bit of musky flavor. Vouvray is light and crisp, with lots of fruit flavors that cut right through the creaminess."

### 2 Wild Garlic Baudolino

**Jonathan's choice:** "Early spring milk is magnificent stuff. It makes the richest cheese we have all year. After a whole winter of brown hay flavor, we finally have grass flavor in the milk. The best is when the cows are grazing on garlic. They come into the barn smelling like a World Cup soccer team and the milk has an animal rankness that is almost skunked. But by the time the cheese is ready to eat, amazingly, that scent has turned into white truffle flavor."

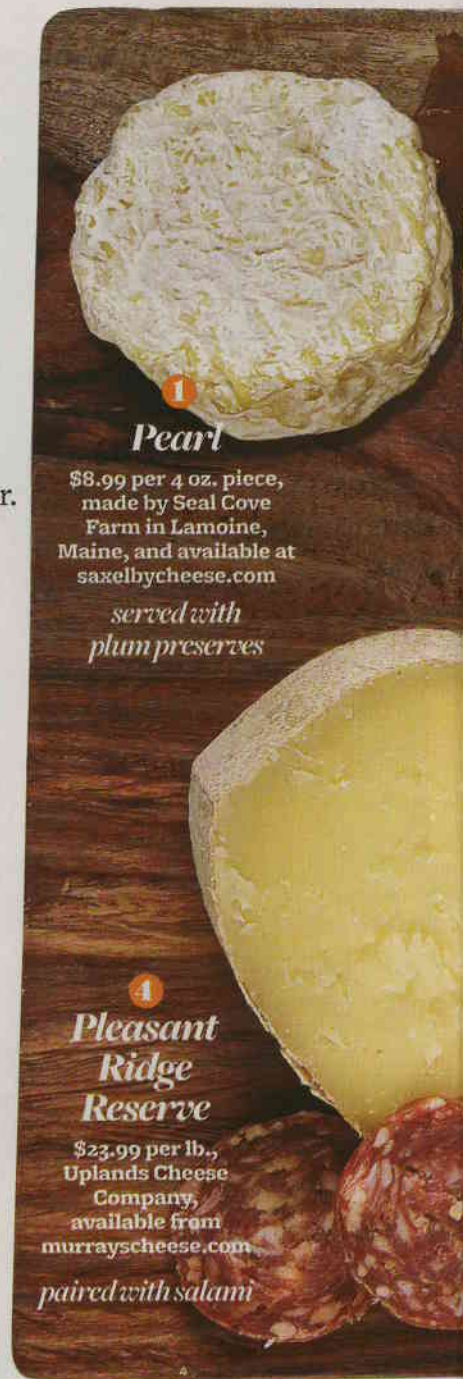
**Serve with:** Bobolink's cranberry-walnut breadsticks (\$4 each; Bobolink Dairy at Lincoln Center Greenmarket). "Cranberries and walnuts are sweet, sour and tannic, and that triad, like wine, brings out the flavors in the cheese."

**Pair with:** "A Belgian ale like Saison Dupont (\$11.99, bierkraft.com), which has an earthiness that comes from wild yeast and complements the grassy, earthy flavor of the cheese."

### 3 Sottocenere with Truffles

**Hakim's choice:** "People get hot and sweaty in the summer and they don't want to eat something that's too flavorful or too soft. The Sottocenere is a smooth, silky, semifirm cow's milk cheese from Benito, Italy, that normally has a very strong flavor, but the light truffle flavor balances well. And the rind contains mysterious ingredients like cardamom, cumin and bay leaf!"

**Serve with:** A plain baguette (\$2.50;



**1 Pearl**

\$8.99 per 4 oz. piece, made by Seal Cove Farm in Lamoine, Maine, and available at saxelbycheese.com

served with plum preserves

**4 Pleasant Ridge Reserve**

\$23.99 per lb., Uplands Cheese Company, available from murrayscheese.com

paired with salami

balduccis.com). "You don't want anything that is going to interfere with the flavor of the cheese or force the flavor to get lost, like crackers, which are too dry and salty."

**Pair with:** Beringer White Merlot (\$7.99; americaswineshop.com). "White Merlot has less acidity compared with red Merlot, and it's not too flavorful or too bland. It's lighter and sweeter and blends very nicely with the delicate truffle flavor of this cheese."

### 4 Pleasant Ridge Reserve

**Rob's choice:** "It's a wonderful raw cow's milk cheese with a fruity flavor of dried plums and apricots, made by a farmer named Mike Gingrich in Wisconsin. He became enamored with Beaufort cheese, which comes from France, and



2

**Wild Garlic Baudolino**

\$20 per lb., cowsoutside.com

paired with cranberry walnut bread

3

**Sottocenere with Truffles**

About \$24.99 per lb., balduccis.com

served with a baguette

5

**Sbrinz**

\$33.50 per lb., artisanalcheese.com

served with raw honey

created Pleasant Ridge. It's typically aged a year or more, and as it ages it gets more butter-scotchy and has those crunchy amino acids we all love. It's only available in summer because the cows need to be able to graze on grass."

**Serve with:** "A French saucisson sec salami, since it's richly marbled with fat and provides a spicy and salty counterpoint to the cheese, which is not overly salty. I'm a purist." Trois Petits Cochons is a favorite (\$7.99 for 10 oz.; Murray's Cheese, 212-243-3289).

**Pair with:** Tablas Creek Vineyard Cotes de Tablas Blanc Paso Robles 2006 (\$22.99; columbuscirclewine.com). "A northern Rhône varietal, this white wine has a crisp juicy attack that blends fabulously with the rich complexity of the Pleasant Ridge Reserve. The nose is redolent of jasmine, honeysuckle and peaches,

which contrasts pleasingly with the brown butter and nutty aromatics of the cheese."

**5 Sbrinz**

**Max's choice:** "It's a concentrated, hard cheese from Switzerland that I call the great-great-grandfather of Parmigiano-Reggiano. Apparently, the Italians learned how to make Parm through Sbrinz. But Parm is made with skim milk, while Sbrinz is made with whole, so all the butterfat stays within the cheese and it tastes like a perfectly balanced butter. It's got a pretty good wallop of savory umami as well. All you need is a little bit to feel satisfied. Plus, it doesn't have that salty, hard edge that Parm can have and it's never excessively sour or bitter. I told NASA they should bring it into

space because it doesn't go bad over time—it gets better and offers more nutrition in a small package than any other food. We had a wheel at Artisanal that was aged for eight years, and once we cracked it open it was gone within a week, it was so good."

**Serve with:** Raw, unfiltered honey (\$9 for two pieces of honeycomb at the Union Square market). "The Sbrinz is more savory, so the sweet honey balances that. The honey and the Sbrinz provide near-complete nutrition."

**Pair with:** A 1995 Krug vintage champagne (\$235; morrellwine.com). "The smooth texture, light acid, good fruit and elegance brings out the buttery aspect of the cheese. But if you don't want to splurge, you can also try a Bouvet Brut (\$12.95; sherry-lehmann.com)." —Annemarie Conte

COURTESY ROSE KADOFF; STYLING: MICHELLE YOO