

I 've Got the Holiday Blues



By Heather Schubert

Blue is a cheese that works well no matter the time of year, but it has a special preeminence in the month of December. All of the major cheese-producing countries have a signature blue. France has Roquefort, Italy has Gorgonzola, Denmark has Castello, Australia has Roaring 40's, and England has Stilton. Even the United States has Point Reyes Original Blue made in California & Maytag Blue from Iowa. Some blue cheeses have longer histories than others, but any will do when winter encroaches on the most festive of months.

A long, tasteful history...

Even though taste varies from one blue cheese to another, there is one common denominator that all blue cheeses share...mold. Roquefort and Gorgonzola are among the oldest of the blues, each tracing their origins back to 100 A.D., give or take a few years. This is probably the reason that Penicillium

roqueforti and its cousin Penicillium glaucum (also referred to as Penicillium gorgonzola) are the two most used molds in the production of blue cheese, roquefort being the most popular.

Moldy Deliciousness

During the production, it is common for the blue mold to be added to the curds just before the shaping and pressing of the wheels. The mold will grow throughout the entire wheel, but it will grow most vigorously wherever there is more air. To ensure sufficient access to air, many cheesemakers puncture the newly formed wheels with long, thin, stainless steel spikes, resulting in the appearance of distinctive striations of blue mold growth when the cheese is cut. In blue cheeses with a denser paste, the blue molding doesn't appear the instant the wheel is cut, but give it a few minutes and the mold will emerge, and darken the longer it is exposed to oxygen.

Distinct complexity

The distinctive appearance of blue cheese is matched only by its complex flavor that ranges from mild to spicy; but is always rich, meaty, peppery and full of salt. It is this rich quality of flavors that make blue cheese an exceptional complement to the flavors of the holidays - the roast meats and vegetables, cream sauces, and casseroles all are natural pairings for blue cheese. Enjoy blue cheese all year round, but embrace it in December; stuff it into dates, add it to your favorite mac n' cheese recipe, or pair it with your favorite Port. Whatever you choose to do with it, there's no better time of the year for the flavors of blue. ☺

