

QUESO **DIEGO**
THE SAN DIEGO CHEESE CLUB

Queso de la Aldea

Village Cheeses of Spain or
Becoming a Quesos de Espana Turophile

Presented by
Jeffree Itrich

The Essence of Spanish Cheese: Goats and Sheep and Cows, Oh My!



One Whiff and You Sense It Immediately.



The Heady Aroma

- The palate pleasing textures and flavors
- The unmistakable characteristics of their origins: type of milk, grazing lands, climate, production, and the microbiology of the region.
- What's the secret? Cheese making is taken **VERY** seriously in Spain

What Makes Spanish Cheese Unique?

- Spanish cheese is made in a wide variety of styles from hard and dark-skinned (ie Manchego) to very soft such as capricho de cabra, a goat's milk cheese similar to chevre.
- Varying regional climates + terrains + local ingredients = the type of cheese made in each area.

Cheese Regions of Spain



COWS....

Cows prefer the rich, green pastures of the north: the northern coast of Spain, along the Cantabrian coast from Galicia to the Basque country, the Cantabrian Range, the Aragon and Catalan Pyrenees.



Sheep.....

Cheese made from sheep's milk is common in the rocky, dry interior of Spain where cows cannot thrive. Generally found from Cantabria and the Basque country in the north to the flat lands of Castile, Leon, La Mancha, Aragon and Extremadura.



Goats.....

Goat's milk cheese is made throughout the country due to goats' ability to roam on any terrain. And they're inexpensive to keep.



But I Digress, First a Little History

- While it is believed that the Romans refined cheese making and brought it to colonized regions like Spain as early as 200 B.C., historians believe that cheese was most likely made in the Iberian Peninsula many centuries before the Romans.
- Archeologists have found a cheese similar to Manchego being produced in Spain before the Romans colonized. The first tangible evidence of cheese making on the Iberian peninsula was found in cheese vessels and colanders dating back to the 4th millennium B.C.

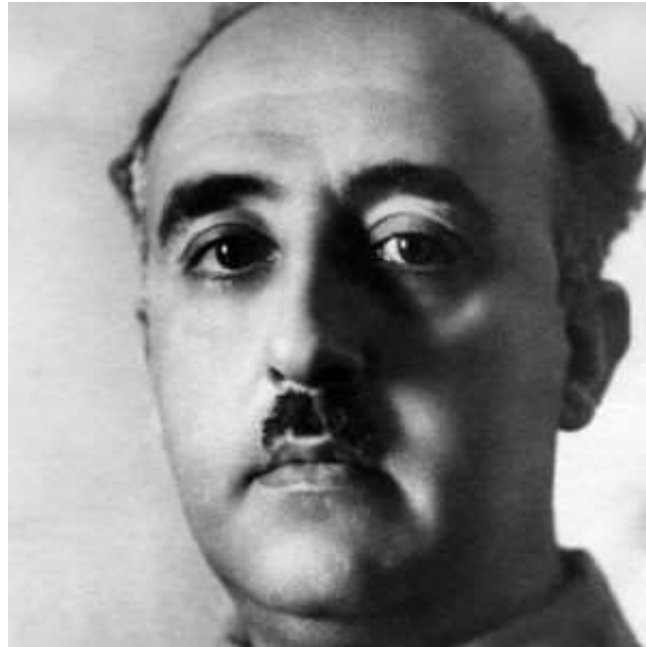
The Middle Ages

- Documented evidence of cheese being produced in the 10th cent in the Picos de Europa, a mountainous area in northern Spain that extends through present day Asturias, Cantabria and Castile-Leon. The Picos is still famous for its cheeses, particularly its blues, which are made by leaving them in damp mountain caves where they acquire the Penicillium mold.
- Historians found the first documented references for making sheep's milk cheese in 10th century manuscripts.

Why Isn't Spanish Cheese as Well Known as Those of France and Italy?

- You can thank Franco's dictatorship following the Spanish civil war (1939-1975) for that injustice.
- Under his rule, artisan cheese production was outlawed due to efforts to modernize cheese production in Spain.
- Like all good things that refuse suppression (think moonshine and beer brewing in this country during Prohibition) cheese making went underground and artisans continued to refine their techniques.

The Arch Enemy of Spanish Cheese.....



Post Franco....

- After the dictator died in 1975 artisan cheese production resumed and Spanish cheese making returned, but
- They were way behind the eight ball and had a lot of catching up to do.
- And caught up they have. Today there are over 20 Denomination of Origin (DO) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) cheese varieties in Spain and more than 100 different varieties of cheese being made.

- The DO label is part of Spain's regulatory classification system for wines and foods such as cheese.
- It regulates quality and geographical origins of certain Spanish cheeses such as Manchego, Mahon, Murcia al Vino and Tetilla.
- The PDO label was established by the European Union and regulates production regions as well as ingredients and manufacturing methods for PDO cheeses, such as Ibores and Idiazabal.

Okay, Enough History

- Since there are too many PDOs to list, here are a few predominant ones you can find locally. We will taste those in **RED**.

Balearic Islands: **Mahon** a cow's milk cheese ripened in underground caves for 60+ days. Soft and spicy. Marries well with almonds & fruity red wine.

Basque Country (Navarre): **Idiazabel** from sheep's milk. Hardwood smoked, buttery with a nutty finish. Named for its namesake village on the Spanish-French border. Originally smoked as a result of being stored in stone chimneys of shepherders mountain huts. Try with olives and fruity red wine.

More PDOs

- Castile-La Mancha: **Manchego**, the King of Spanish cheeses, the one most well known in the U.S. You can buy it anywhere.
- Castile and Leon: **Valdeon, Zamorano** (more on these later)
- Catalonia: **Gorrotxa** a hard, flavorful, rustic goat's milk cheese from Eastern Spain. Moist and smooth. Pairs nicely with olives, & dry wines as well as fruit-driven whites & soft rounded reds.
- Extremadura: **Ibores** an earthy, semi-hard goat's milk cheese from western Spain. Covered in paprika or oil giving it a reddish hue. Pair with white Reisling, Spanish red wine and lighter beers.

And more.....

- Galicia: **San Simon** tangy cow's milk cheese from the far NW corner of Spain. Matured for 3 weeks, smoked over birch wood. Shaped like a pear (or a Hershey's kiss). Creamy & buttery. Nice with fresh fruit and sweeter wines.
- Murcia: **Cabra del Vino** (drunken goat). Sweet & smooth, made of pasteurized Murcian goat's milk in southeastern Spain, a place of rough terrain & hot, dry summers. Aged for approx 75 days, then soaked in red wine for up to 72 hours giving it a burgundy colored rind. Pairs quite nicely with dried apricots and red wine.

Z Cheese

- **Zamorano:** From Castile-Leon on the border with Portugal. A traditional farmhouse cheese made from the milk of the Churra sheep, which yields the highest grade milk of any sheep in Spain. Matured in high humidity to encourage natural rind formation, Z is typically aged 6 months. Subtle hints of caramel & grass burst through its buttery nature. Ideal for serving with ham, fruit, crusty bread and medium body red wines. BTW, the Navajo raise Churra for use in their weavings and other handicrafts.



A Cheese to Take Away the Blues.....

- **Valdeon**: a tangy blue cheese produced in the Valdeon Valley in the northwest area of the Castile-Leon. Made year round from cow or goat milk or a combo. Wrapped in the leaves of the sycamore tree. High fat content, strong flavor. Pair with a dry white or red wine.



Recipes for Making Spanish Cheese

- Manchego: <http://thelatinkitchen.com/how/ingredients/a/how-make-manchego-cheese>
- Ibores: <http://www.cheesemaking.com/Ibores.html>
- Zamorano <http://cheeseforum.org/forum/index.php?topic=2207.0>
- Roncal:
<http://cheeseforum.org/forum/index.php?topic=2201.0> D.O.: An ancient raw sheep milk cheese from Navarra in the Basque territory near the border of France. Pressed, aged paste develops a fuller, more gamy flavor than Manchego, to which it is often (mistakenly) likened. Its wheel size and aging conditions share greater similarity with unsmoked Idiazabal (rarely seen in the U.S.).

My Fave Spanish Appetizer Recipe

- 2 oranges, sliced crosswise, seeds removed
- 1/4 lb Manchego, scraped very very thin in whole pieces
- 10-15 raw almonds
- Several sprigs of fresh thyme
- 3-4 tablespoons of the best extra virgin olive oil you can afford

On a large platter layer ingredients in order listed, finishing off with olive oil. Let sit at room temperature for an hour or more to allow flavors to blend.

Serves 4-5 people.

Where to Buy Spanish Cheeses Locally

- Venissimo – ck around, each location carries different cheeses
- The Cheese Store on Kettner
- Bristol Farms in UTC
- Whole Foods
- Brothers Provisions in Rancho Bernardo
- Online: igourmet.com – fantastic selection of cheeses we can't get locally.

Got a Question?

Contact me: jeffreewyn@gmail.com