



The Big Cheese

Andrew's Cheese Shop Stinks and He's Proud of It

Written by Joshua Lurie

Santa Monica's Montana Avenue features a mile-long stretch of chic boutiques, galleries and cafés. Since August, the foot-friendly community also houses Andrew's Cheese Shop, the creation of cheese master Andrew Steiner.

Steiner worked as a waiter at Patina's original Melrose location when Joachim Splichal decided to install a French-style cheese cart. To help guide customers, Steiner religiously studied cheese books. Splichal appreciated his efforts and promoted Steiner to full-time maître fromager after the restaurant moved to Walt Disney Hall. Steiner managed The Foundry on Melrose for chef and friend Eric Greenspan before leaving to open Andrew's Cheese Shop.

Steiner stocks approximately 200 cheeses, rotating his selection based on seasonality,

customer requests and his never-ending pursuit of new tastes. He's cultivated a widespread cheese network that allows him to source cheeses that Angelenos can't find anywhere else, including Timanoix, a cow's milk cheese that French monks wash with walnut liqueur. Andrew's Cheese Shop might also be the only shop in the country to carry Coolea, a farmhouse cheddar from County Cork, Ireland.

Steiner's knowledge base and selection are stellar, but it's his democratic approach that truly separates Andrew's Cheese Shop. He gladly shaves free samples of each cheese, and with every purchase, Steiner includes an informational

souvenir card that reflects his personal taste. The card hosts the flag of the cheese's country of origin, an illustration of a cow, sheep or goat, detailed tasting notes and suggested wine pairings.

Steiner currently suggests Alpine cheeses made from summer milk. Examples that are near the peak of their ripeness include Krummenswiler, a firm Swiss cow's milk cheese from the eastern Alps. On a cool night, he recommends pairing the firm cheese with hard cider or "big Burgundies."

Petit sapin is a French cow's milk cheese from Comte, France. Steiner suggests tossing the already-oozing cheese into the oven to bake with sliced potatoes, then uncorking a bottle of oaky white wine.

Every Wednesday at 10 a.m., Steiner makes fresh mozzarella, using fresh curds from Caseificio Gioia in El Monte. He provides free samples with basil and heirloom tomatoes from the nearby Santa Monica Farmers Market.

In order to dispel cheese myths and to educate customers about the different styles of cheese, Steiner hosts regular "Cheese 101" classes. One Sunday per month, he hosts a grilled cheese class. Steiner also plans to offer classes on cheese and wine pairing, fondue and macaroni and cheese.

Every day, Andrew's Cheese Shop sells sandwiches that incorporate his cheeses. For example, the prosciutto sandwich incorporates a pear slice, honey mustard, shaved asparagus and St. Agur blue cheese on a baguette.

For those looking for something other than cheese, floor-to-ceiling wood shelves hold premium olive oils, infused salts and cans of Squirrel Brand almonds flavored with shaved Italian black truffle or crème brûlée.

Andrew's Cheese Shop may stink, but in this case, that's a good sign.

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ANDREW'S CHEESE SHOP WANTS TO LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT ITS CHEESE OF THE MONTH CLUB. MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES THREE HALF-POUNDS PER MONTH FOR \$40, WITH PERSONAL SELECTIONS FROM STEINER AND COMPLIMENTARY ESSAYS WITH DETAILS AND PHOTOS. THERE IS A \$5 CHARGE FOR DELIVERY TO THE WESTSIDE, \$15 TO METRO LA AND \$25 FOR OVERNIGHT SHIPPING.