

Andrew's Cheese Shop (cont.)

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Gouda, and Andrew does what he can to care for them. He has a facility in the shop where he can dry-age or wet-age a cheese to get it in shape for sale, and he will not cut into a wheel before it is ready, even if a customer begs him. "Then I'm stuck with an open wheel of underaged cheese, and its pretty much ruined as far as I'm concerned. And the cheese won't be what it's supposed to be either. I had to have my cheese-handling facility to do business directly with Neal's Yard Dairy (the heart and soul of artisanal British Cheese purveying), and I'm one of the few shops in the country that can. My relationship with my customers and the cheesemakers I will buy from starts with a commitment to quality."

I asked Andrew if he had any advice for cheesemakers, and he said, "Stick to your guns. Get the best quality milk you can, and when you can't get it, don't make the cheese. If the animals change feed, and the milk changes, make a different cheese if you have to...don't pretend it's the same. The best young cheeses are often seasonal. That's as it should be. If you cave in on quality it will ruin your name, and there are no second chances in the quality food business. If a restaurant isn't good, you will not go back. Better for people to be unable to get a cheese they want than get an inferior version of it, because they'll never get it again, and neither will anyone they serve it to."

When I asked Andrew about buying trends he sees at the retail end, he thought for a while and said he has seen a steady uptick in goat cheese sales. It seems that doctors have been recommending it for people with digestive issues, and it's



easier on people who are lactose intolerant. And there are now so many varieties instead of the traditional feta, which not everyone likes. I also asked him a question of current concern to all American artisan cheesemakers, about the recent scares and government crackdown on real and perceived hygienic handling issues at some small cheesemakers' facilities. He said that other than a few casual questions, his customers seem unconcerned. But he is nevertheless very worried about the crackdown; not for the sake of his business...as he notes, "I could make as much money selling nothing but European cheeses, and American cheeses made by large cooperative facilities, like Cabot, as most cheese shops were doing 10 or 15 years ago. I just worry about losing this amazing abundance of superb artisan cheeses...of seeing a great industry come crashing down. It would be a real tragedy."

On a lighter note, Andrew's entrepreneurial spirit has also led him to offer a little academic course he calls Cheese 101, so that his customers can learn and speak of cheese themselves. He also does some catering and once a month has a beer-and-toasted-cheese dinner at a long table he sets up in the shop, wherein he pairs beers and cheese for about 20 people. These have been regularly selling out, and are another example of point-of-purchase marketing for cheesemakers and brewers alike.

So, after three years and a few bumps in the road, Andrews' Cheese Shop seems a community fixture in our seaside town. The man was worth waiting for. 🍷

Andrews' Cheese Shop
728 Montana Avenue
Santa Monica, CA 90403
www.andrewscheese.com

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Gianclis Caldwell
Pholia Farm Creamery, LLC
Rogue River, Oregon
541-582-8883
www.pholiafarm.com
541-582-8883

