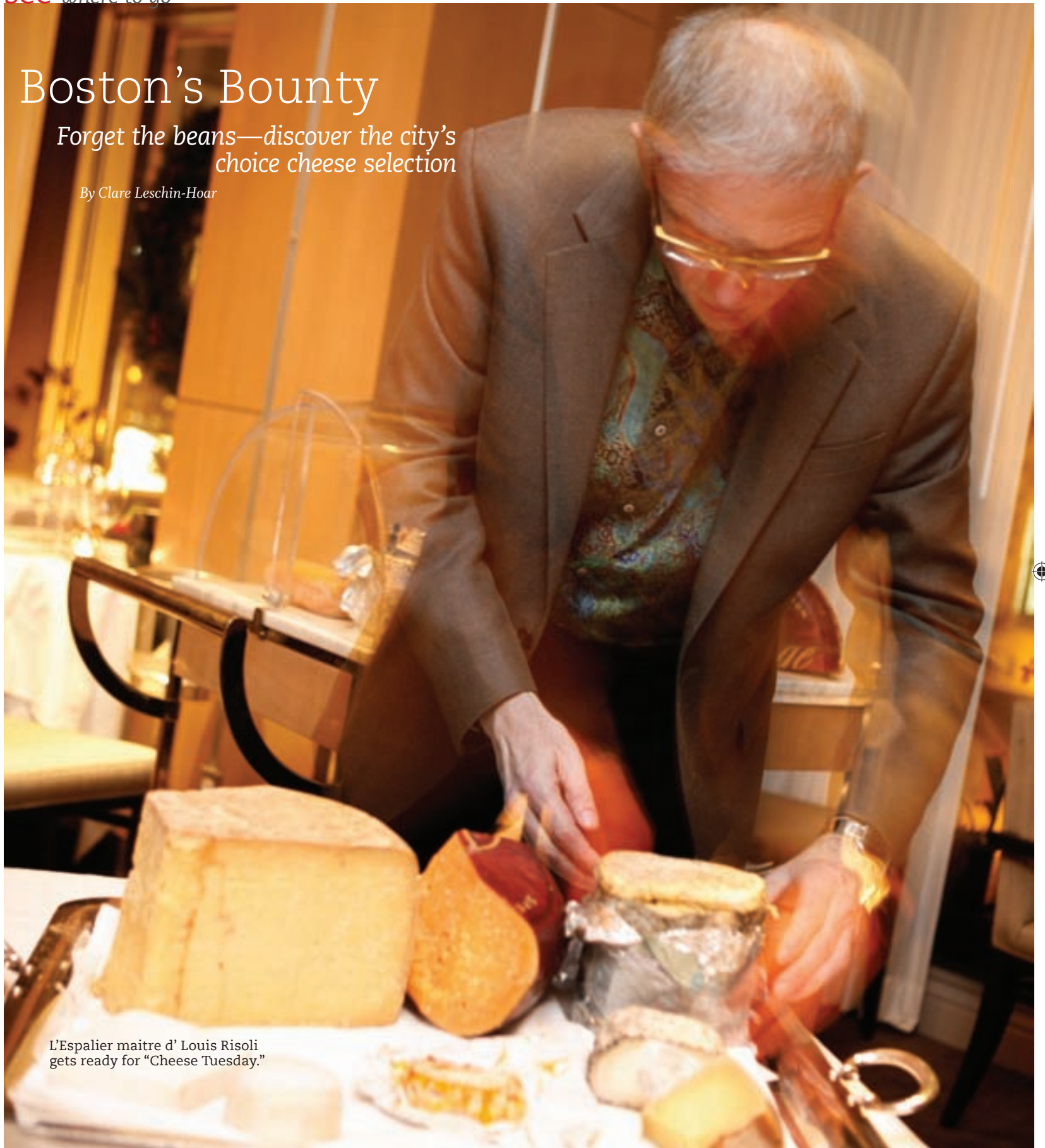


see where to go

Boston's Bounty

*Forget the beans—discover the city's
choice cheese selection*

By Clare Leschin-Hoar



L'Espalier maitre d' Louis Risoli gets ready for "Cheese Tuesday."

PHOTO: JESS SCRANTON

SEE where to go

NEW ENGLAND IS IN THE MIDST of an artisan cheese renaissance, and no city is better poised to take advantage of all that hand-crafted goodness than Boston. Farmstead cheeses produced from western Massachusetts to rural Vermont are elegant and exciting, including gems like raw-milk blue cheeses from Jasper Hill Farm in Greensboro, Vermont, or Great Hill Dairy in Marion, Massachusetts; thimble-sized Hannabells from Shy Brothers Farm in Westport, Massachusetts; or award-winning Carlisle goat cheeses made less than thirty miles from downtown Boston. But the city's sophisticated dining scene means there's an audience clamoring for European favorites from France, Italy, and Spain as well. Here's where you can find the very best of both continents.

Restaurants

Special-Occasion Dining

Beacon Hill Bistro

Local cheesemakers from New England earn a big presence at this Beacon Hill Hotel spot. You'll find cheese from producers like Twig Farm, Shy Brothers Farm, and Boggy Meadow Farm regularly on the plate. Executive chef Jason Bond says he also has a soft spot for European cheeses, especially those from France, "because they define the tradition." A plate of three cheeses is \$12, and accompaniments include toasted cranberry-walnut bread, Calimyrna figs stewed with port and cinnamon, and house-made jellies.

25 Charles St., Boston, 617.723.1133,
www.beaconhillhotel.com

Craigie on Main

Chef-proprietor Tony Maws handpicks the ever-changing cheese menu himself, looking for cheese that has been made with summer or early autumn milk, and including a mix of aged and fresh cheeses. The \$16 cheese course will net you one goat-, one sheep- and one cow's-milk cheese, paired with accompaniments like green tomato chutney, honeycomb, and dates.

853 Main St., Cambridge, 617.497.5511,
www.craigieonmain.com

No. 9 Park

The staff here is well versed in the twenty-plus cheeses that fill the restaurant's cheese cart and are served tableside. Order à la carte or select one of the two cheese flights: one highlighting a specific region (say, Lombardy, Italy) features four hard-to-find cheeses from that area; the *formaggier* flight explores different versions of one style of cheese (cheddar, for example). Each runs about \$6 per piece and include accompaniments such as fig, pear, or cherry compote, toasted hazelnuts, sliced grapes, a honey-of-the-week, and toasted brioche with apricots.

9 Park St., Boston, 617.742.9991,
www.no9park.com

L'Espalier

Adjacent to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel on fashionable Boylston Street, the four-star L'Espalier epitomizes resplendent modern dining. Its cheese program is no less dazzling. Curated by maitre d' and fromager Louis Risoli, the selection has been recognized nationally for its breadth and quality. Cheeses from around the globe are available as an à la carte course, or as the Grand Fromage portion of chef Frank McClelland's seven-course *degustation* menu (\$104). Seeking out handcrafted products, Risoli top-notch cheeses include the soft-ripening Tuma dla Paja and the rustic Sora from Italy's Piedmont region; Fleur du Maquis from Corsica; and Mrs. Bourne's handmade Cheshire from England. Selections are available to take home. Special note to ardent cheese fans: don't miss L'Espalier's Cheese Tuesdays—a twice-monthly "musical" celebration of cheese (see "Tuned In" p.28).

774 Boylston St., Boston, 617.262.3023
www.lespalier.com





No. 9 Park

Lumière

One perfect cheese plus accompaniments to match is what you'll find here. Chef-owner Michael Leviton's penchant is for local artisanal cheeses, like Carlisle Farmstead Cheese produced just outside of Boston, which is regularly served with an apple-pear compote, mustard oil, and parsley salad for \$12.

1293 Washington St., West Newton,
617.244.9199,
www.lumiererestaurant.com

Troquet

Set with a view onto Boston Common, this upscale French restaurant features a tableside cart loaded with more than a dozen mostly European cheeses. Whether presented with a Le Chevrot or Vacherin Mont d'Or, customers choose based on what looks most appetizing. Three pieces cost \$13; six for \$23.

140 Boylston St., Boston, 617.695.9463
www.troquetboston.com

Excellent Dining, Just Not Fancy The Butcher Shop

Created by chef Barbara Lynch, the same culinary genius who gave Boston the elegant No.9 restaurant, this urban dining option is decidedly dress down, but offers the same attention to eating well. A long bar at the front offers a variety of wines by the glass from small growers around the globe, which Lynch pairs with classic bistro dishes like marrow with toast, sea salt, and haricots verts; pork rillettes; a *torchon* of duck foie gras; or a selection of house-cured meats. Charcuterie is the main attraction, but the changing selection of nine cheeses (\$5 per ounce), chosen by Berkshire cheesemonger (and **culture** contributor) Matthew Rubiner, highlights artisanal domestic tastes, including obscure and seasonal American cheeses.

552 Tremont St., Boston, 617.423.4800
www.thebutchershopboston.com

Clink

Akin to a good a wine list, cheese *terrior* is the focus here. Take your time with the cheese menu, and you'll leave knowing each type of milk, whether it's been pasteurized, where it's from, and exactly the right accompaniment, according to chef Joseph Margate. Honeycomb is one of his favorites. Cheeses are \$5 apiece or \$27 for all six.

215 Charles St., Boston, 617.224.4004
www.libertyhotel.com/clink

Eastern Standard

The cheese course here has its roots in a strong brasserie approach. Three cheeses are served on a wooden board, paired with multiple garnishes and fruit for \$14. While the selection changes frequently, you'll almost always find one sheep-, one goat- and



Formaggio Kitchen's iconic wall of cheese

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CheeseCupid.com

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SEE where to go

one cow's-milk offering. House favorites include Lake's Edge goat cheese from Leicester, Vermont, and Saveur du Maquis and Brevis Ossau Black Label from France.

528 Commonwealth Ave., Boston,
617.532.9100
www.easternstandardboston.com

Henrietta's Table

At this famed farm-to-table restaurant, you'll find all New England cheeses all the time. Chef Peter Davis keeps ten cheeses on the menu—and changes them frequently. He's happy to chat with diners about farm pedigrees, so don't be shy. Select one, two, or all ten cheeses, which start at \$4. Accoutrements include spicy nuts, fruit crisp, Lady apples, and Concord grapes.

One Bennet St., Cambridge, 617.661.5005
www.henriettastable.com

Rendezvous Central Square

Only three carefully selected cheeses are served here at a time, and while owner Steve Johnson is crazy about goat cheese (he finds the flavors *fascinating*), the choices betray an affinity for French cheeses. Prices are \$8, \$10, or \$12 for one, two, or three cheese selections, respectively, and are accompanied by the restaurant's signature whole almonds fried in olive oil, dried fruits macerated in a spiced port syrup, fresh fruit, and sliced baguette.

502 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, 617.576.1900
www.rendezvouscentralsquare.com



Cheeseplate at Middlesex Lounge

Ten Tables

The single cheese course is a signature staple of the Tuesday-night wine dinners at this bustling neighborhood restaurant. The emphasis here is on European cheese, like the chef's favorite, Fourme d'Ambert, or Langres, which has a small dip in the top of the wheel to hold that splash of champagne conveniently. When ordered separately, the single cheese course is \$8.

597 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, 617.524.8810
www.tentables.net

Bars and Casual Spots

Green Street

While the menu sections range from snacks to desserts, the \$11 cheese course is always available, and features two hand-selected artisanal cheeses matched with tasty offerings like green apple-thyme jam, house-made almond butter, and toasted raisin bread. Staff will expertly pair your cheeses with beers like Hop Rod Rye from Bear Republic Brewing Company, or North Coast Brewing Company's Le Merle, a Belgian-style farmhouse ale.

280 Green St., Cambridge, 617.876.1655
www.greenstreetgrill.com

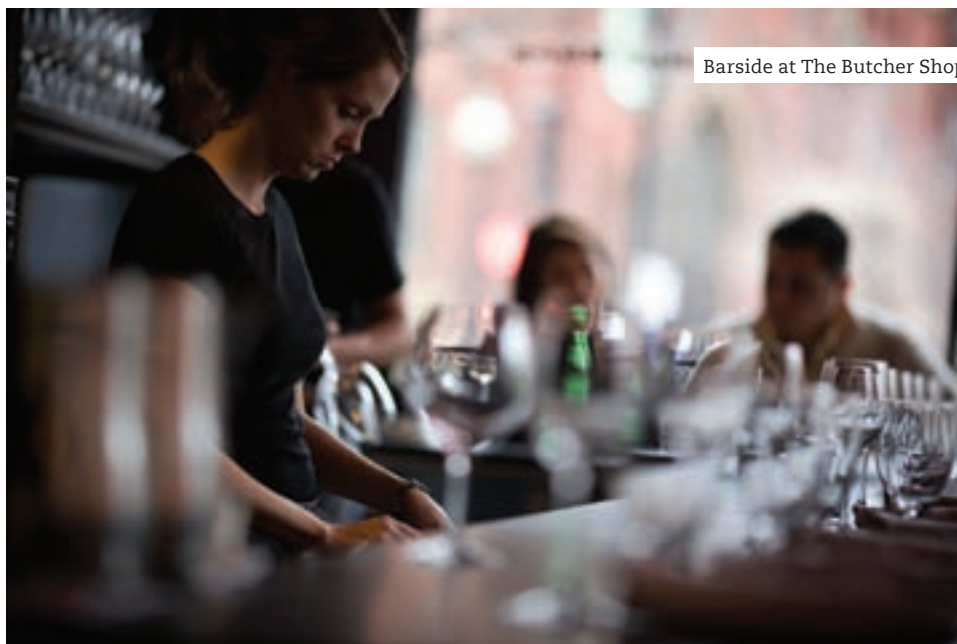
Matt Murphy's Pub

Rustic farmhouse cheeses go perfectly with a pint of Guinness in this small Irish pub known for its live music. Whether you choose a slab of Irish blue cheese or a hunk of farmhouse cheddar, expect generous portions paired with hearty slices of bread, mustard, nuts, and homemade pickled onions and eggs for \$10.

14 Harvard St., Brookline, 617.232.0188
www.mattmurphyspub.com

Middlesex Lounge

A hidden gem lies within this Cambridge-based music lounge: its stellar cheese course. Owner Matthew Curtis selects cheese with the same criteria a top chef would, and a plate of three cheeses (one cow-, one sheep-, one goat's-milk) for \$12 is meant for sharing. While the emphasis is usually on local cheeses, a flight of French-made cheese



Barside at The Butcher Shop

might show up too. Also of note is the Bueno Queso Social Club (www.buenoqueso.org), run by renowned cheese expert Robert Aguilera, meets here the third Sunday of every month to explore cheese and beverage pairings.

315 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge,
617.868.6739
www.middlesexlounge.us

Cheese Stores

Boston Cheese Cellar

Opened in December 2006 by Kathy Lacher, and her husband, John Pierce, the Boston Cheese Cellar fills a much needed niche in the Roslindale neighborhood. One hundred and fifty cheese offerings include plenty from France, Italy, and Switzerland (a favorite of Lacher's), but the shop



Formaggio Kitchen's cave



Ihsan Gurdal, owner of Formaggio Kitchen

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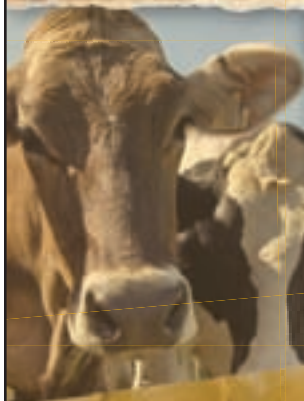
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SEE where to go

Tuned In

Want to croon about cheese with other devotees? If so, be sure to reserve your seat at L'Espalier for its Cheese Tuesday—a twice-monthly celebration based around a three-course dinner followed by a themed cheese plate (served with commentary), and finished off with a group sing-along of the evening's "Cheese Song." The tune is created by the instigator of the weeknight fête, maitre d' Louis Risoli, who writes his cheese-themed lyrics to fit a popular melody; every Cheese Tuesday has its own score. "The nights are really fun and relaxed," Risoli says, beaming, "as well as very tasty and informative."

Cheese Tuesdays cost \$68 per person, including wine with each course. See the monthly schedule at www.lespalier.com. In the meantime, here's a taste of Risoli's cheesy songwriting: "The Cheese from Meadow Creek"

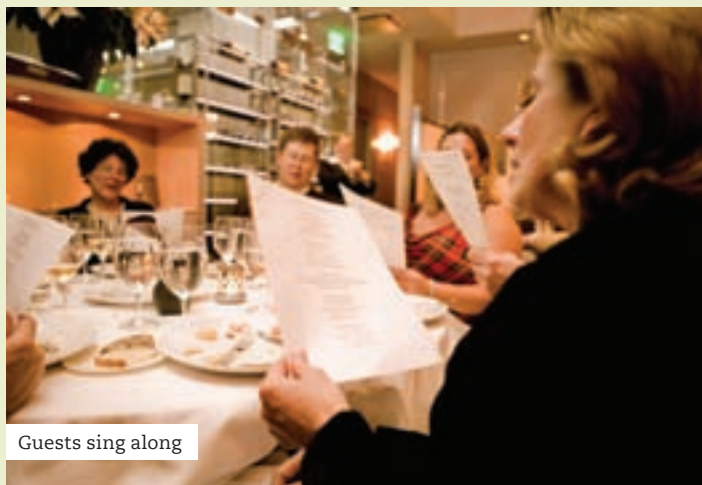
(Sung to the tune of "Girl From Ipanema")

*Square and flat, full-fat and lovely
The cheese from Meadow Creek sits ripening
And as it ripens, each one who passes goes - pew*

*As it waits it gets all moldy
So full of flavor and soft and gooey
And as it ripens, each one who passes goes - pew*

*Ooh but I so want to eat it
How can I sit and resist it
Yes it so tempts me to wonder
But until it's been aged sixty days
It's kept locked away in a cave*

*Square and flat, full-fat and lovely
The cheese from Meadow Creek sits ripening
It gets so stinky, I swoon, but it's not yet for me
How sad I will be, it's not yet ready ...*



Guests sing along



L'Espalier maitre d' Louis Risoli



Lyrics and cheeseplate with wine

carries a number of small-batch New England artisan cheeses as well. Those who like washed rinds: consult the Stink-O-Meter on the wall.

18 Birch St., Roslindale, 617.325.2500
www.bostoncheesecellar.com

Concord Cheese Shop

In its 41st year of business, this cheese lover's destination carries as many as two hundred different kinds of cheeses, with "nothing pre-cut," boasts owner and veteran cheesemonger Peter Lovis. "Everything is cut to order." The shop also has a deli on premise and sells a wide selection of wine. In addition, Lovis leads an overnight cheese tour through New England two to three times a year.

29 Walden Street, Concord, 978.369.5778,
www.concordcheeseshop.com

Formaggio Kitchen

This bustling shop is arguably the epicenter of Boston's thriving cheese culture. Ihsan Gurdal launched the store with his wife, Valerie, nearly thirty years ago, and he's revered for his prolific cheese knowledge. (In fact, the French government knighted Gurdal recently for his passion for French gastronomy.) His mouthwatering display of cheese is affectionately known as the "Wall of Cheese" and is sorted by region: British, American, Swiss, France (given the most space), Corsica, Spain, and Italy. A refrigerated section underneath holds washed rinds, brie and triple



Bread rings and blocks of feta at Sevan Bakery



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creams, and softer blues. Gouda has its own spot on a smaller countertop, and charcuterie hangs alluringly from the ceiling.

244 Huron Ave., Cambridge,
617.354.4750, (a second location is
at 268 Shawmut Avenue in Boston's
South End, 617.350.6996)
www.formaggiokitchen.com

Russo's

This produce market has a remarkably strong cheese counter; the sheer volume moved here means that cheese manager Mark Trumble is able to keep prices low on classics like Parmigiano-Reggiano, Robiola due Latte, and Brie de Meaux. And unlike most chain grocery stores, Russo's knows how to handle cheese properly. Be ready to bump elbows, though, because weekends are packed with customers.

560 Pleasant St., Watertown,
617.923.1500
www.russos.com

Sevan Bakery

This small but jammed shop in Watertown's Little Armenia carries gorgeous nuts, olives, and Middle Eastern staples like *lahmejune* (Armenian pizza). But it also presents a wide variety of pasteurized feta cheeses: Bulgarian, French, Cypress, Turkish, Israeli and more. Each distinct flavor profile varies in sharpness, creaminess, and how it crumbles; regulars come in once a week and buy it by the block.

599 Mount Auburn St., Watertown,
617.924.9843
www.sevanboston.com

Wasik's Cheese Shop

Step into this jam-packed specialty shop in Wellesley and you'll find a Wasik behind the counter, always. The family-run cheese store carries up to four hundred cheeses at a given time, and every piece is smelled, squeezed, and tasted before it's put out for sale. Gift baskets from the shop have been sent to Bruce Springsteen, Steven Tyler, and Rachel Ray, and celebrity chef Ming Tsai is a customer as well.

61 Central St., Wellesley, 781.237.0916
www.wasiks.com

The Wine & Cheese Cask

If you need to pair your cheese with your wine perfectly, the Wine & Cheese Cask is the place to do it. A ten-minute walk from Harvard Square, this bustling store sells all the accoutrements to go with triple crème, Stilton, five-year old Gouda, and more.

407 Washington St., Somerville,
617.623.8656
www.thewineandcheesecask.com

