

The sexy side of cheese

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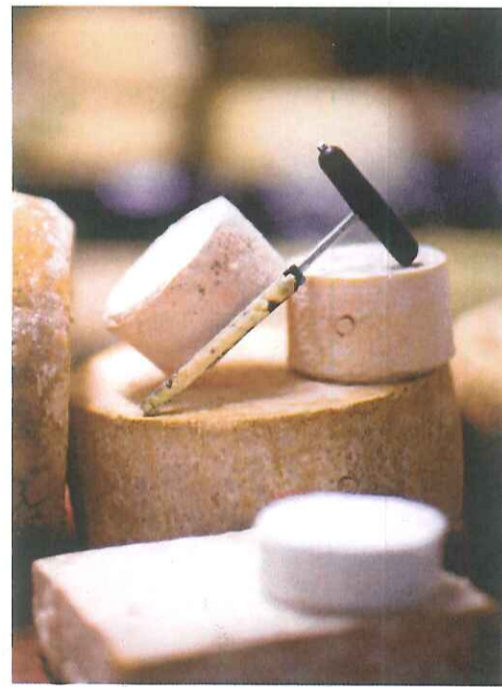
► Story: MARETA MARRAPODI Photos: NAT ROGERS

Creamy, soft, desirable, addictive, aromatic, luscious, airy, moist, hard, supple, bold, tasty, orgasmic – what do all these sexy adjectives have in common? Why CHEESE of course!

And when it comes to the highly skilled and impressive art of cheese making, no one does it better than the Italians – just ask Gina Graham, cheese maker extraordinaire who has recently returned from a whirlwind trip to Italy where she spent many a day enhancing her cheese making skills.

When I first met Gina, I was impressed by her extensive cheese making knowledge. Born and raised in an Italian household, cheese was very much part of my family's staple.

"I fondly remember that our home never lacked some of the most delicious Italian style formaggi (cheeses), Provolone, Grana Padano, Pecorino, Ricotta, Bocconcini and Mozzarella were daily indulgences eaten with pleasure and gusto!" Gina said.



"Somehow I don't think that I'm alone in my love of cheese, let's face it some of the most popular foods in the world have cheese as their main ingredient.

"What would a pizza be without the mozzarella? What would lasagna be without the melted cheese? Without cheese there would be no cheesecake, no ricotta and pistachio cannoli and no fondue," Gina said.

A lecturer at TAFESA Adelaide, North Regency Campus, food technologist Gina teaches a variety of subjects but her main area of expertise is Cheese Making.

"I enjoy teaching but I really love getting in the cheese production area and making cheese," she said.

Gina's classes encompass Dairy and Practical Food Production and include ice-cream, yoghurt and cheese making. In addition to the practical components her lectures also feature milk and cheese chemistry, sensory analysis, and the legal requirements according to the Food Standards Code.

Gina also runs short courses for industrial cheese producers and general interest courses which are steadily increasing in popularity.

So what does it take to be a good cheese maker? According to Gina, passion is a key element.

"I believe that you need passion to be a cheese maker as it is fundamentally hard work and quite involved. In Europe skills are often handed down from generation to generation, if cheese making is not a family tradition then a science or food technology course is an advantage.

"I have known people to start a cheese business and then learn along the way, if you are passionate and willing to work hard anything is possible."

World famous for its diversity and tradition, Italy is one of Europe's oldest cheese making countries and is home to some 400 types of cheese, 32 of which come with the DOP seal, signifying protected designation of origin.



Strict controls guarantee that this cheese is produced in a defined region according to a defined method using exclusively, milk from that region.

"I travelled all over Italy tasting a number of varieties specific to each region. In the North I ate cheese ranging from Gorgonzola, Taleggio, Bitto, Casera and many mountain cheeses.

In the South the cheese style changed dramatically to a large variety of pasta filata and ricotta forte. My objective was not to just visit factories to see how the cheese was made but to see how it is eaten, served and displayed."

Although Gina's trip to Italy was largely work related she was fortunate enough to visit a vast number of cities, including Caravaggio, Milano, Campobasso, Bari, Orvieto, and Arona, just to name a few.

"Every city has special cheese memories from Arrigoni Caseificio where I saw Gorgonzola and Taleggio being made to Campobasso where I spent



time visiting educational institutions, factories and highly sophisticated research centres.

"I even frequented the phenomenal Obika' Mozzarella Bar in Milan and several high quality eateries. It was an unforgettable experience.

"I must thank Pier Giorgio Olivetti, Director of Cittaslow international, Lidia Moretti, Project Coordinator, SA Food Centre and Nicola Sasanelli, Special Envoy for Higher Education and Trade (Europe) for the SA Government, without their assistance my visits would not have been possible," Gina said.

Returning to Australia armed with an abundance of additional knowledge, Gina intends on sharing new found technical processes and manufacturing techniques with local cheese producers and students who may benefit greatly from her Italian hands-on experience in the fine art of cheese making.

"Australia is very young in the world of cheese, and keep in mind when cheese was first produced many years ago the Australian palate was not in tune with European flavours.

"Certainly there are cheeses made in Italy that just cannot be reproduced here such as some of the mountain cheese, this mainly being due to the milk and what the cows graze on.

"This does not mean that Australians cannot make good cheese, just not the same. What is made in Australia is made well; some cheese such as fresh mozzarella cannot be made quite as milky and delicate if they intend to sell to the supermarkets which demand shelf life." Gina said.

Since her return to Australia Gina has been busy running her normal classes and designing special short cheese courses.

"With the new found knowledge I have brought back with me I am going to try and make some of the cheese I experienced in Italy that is not currently made in Australia.

"I have worked on Gorgonzola and this is coming along nicely. Even before my trip I had attempted several batches of Asiago, it's not the same but pretty good, I intend to call it Vicenza in honour of my father."

Oh and what of the sexy side of cheese? Yes Cheese is sexy! Embraced in Italian culture as a natural aphrodisiac, cheese contains ten times as much PEA, phenylethylamine (a chemical compound responsible for feelings of pleasure) than chocolate and is related to the release of endorphins.

Just another great reason to include a wonderful cheese platter at that next special night in or out!