



845SCENE

Side Dish: Blessed are the cheesemakers

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By **Robin A. Rothman**, Times Herald-Record

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Not constrained by its name, The Cheese Plate — a quaint shop in the Water Street Market in New Paltz — offers a wall of jams, a case of treats like homemade peanut brittle and tons of fun accessories such as cutting boards, picnic baskets and backpacks. But the real meat of this shop lies within two glass counters, inside which sit rows and rows of (obviously) cheese. Above the counter hangs a chalkboard advertising three three-cheese combo options: Domestic, Imported and Anything You Want.

I decide on the Domestic platter, and owner Kat Alexander starts to tell me about the cheeses I'll be getting. It's like hearing a foreign language, and nowhere in it are dirty words like "Kraft singles" or "Velveeta." I mention I'd like something spicy and ask if she has a pepperjack I can sub for another cheese. She doesn't, but she says she can give me an Asiago Pepato instead of a plain Asiago. Again, foreign, but she's got a trustworthy look about her, so I nod in approval.

She tells me the baguettes arrived just before I did, as she cuts a chunk into slices. She pulls out a paper plate and starts cutting my cheeses, sprinkling nuts and dried fruit around them and then covering the whole lot with plastic wrap. It's not five-star, but the quality of the cheese doesn't require a fancy delivery, she says. And her claim holds up.

I rip off a chunk of the Asiago Pepato and couple it with bread, taking a bite of both. This pale cheese, rife with green peppercorns, comes from Vella Farm in Sonoma, Calif. It's not as spicy as I'd hoped and is somewhat dry, but it definitely has kick.

The Gouda, produced by Taylor Farm in Vermont, comes in several varieties. I've chosen a Maple Smoked Gouda. As the name implies, this cheese is smoked over maple wood chips and has a strong flavor that releases a nose-tickling fragrance with every bite.

My final selection is Toussaint, a sharp cheese from nearby Sprout Creek Farm in Poughkeepsie. Its flavor has a tangy, lingering quality.

Sure, sure, Velveeta may have been created in Monroe, but the big cheese is definitely in New Paltz now. Put that in your pan and grill it.

If you Go! ...

What: The Cheese Plate

Where: Water Street Market, 10 Main St., Suite 302, New Paltz

When: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. daily

Cost: Domestic \$7, Imported \$9, Anything You Want \$11.75

Call: 255-2444

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