

## taste buds

**chef Larry Janes**

### 3 cheeses greatest of France

If one thing was certain this holiday season, the yuppie consumption of Brie, Camembert and Roquefort cheeses was definitely up. Way up.

With all the holiday brouhahas going on, just about every buffet table was heavily stocked with the likes of some form of Brie, melted into a mishmash and sprinkled with chopped pecans, some Camembert, if not just plopped onto a board and choked with Triscuits, then baked beyond recognition like the Brie, or worst yet, just a solid hunk of Roquefort, standing alone, looking forlorn and almost begging to be crumbled into a salad, pasta or sauce.

Brie and Camembert are soft-paste cheeses with a minimum of 44 percent butterfat. Even though they both contain only about 90 calories per ounce (28g), the problem lies in folks like myself who usually position themselves as close to the cheeses as possible. Limiting yourself to one ounce of anything is like going to a Baskin-Robbins and ordering a Diet Coke.

The secret in enjoying a great Brie or Camembert is finding one that is perfectly ripe, cutting into the rind and observing the cheese ooze out of its shell without running down the plate, off the cracker and onto your chin.

Most folks are a little timid when it comes to even sampling a Brie or Camembert, mainly because of the white rind that encircles the mass. Do you eat it or just scoop the gooey center? The choice to consume or not consume the white rind is totally upon the eater.

ALTHOUGH MOST aficionados would cringe at the thought, I have observed folks snatch up everything on the plate. The white shell is a surface mold that assists in ripening the cheese. A white liquid fungus called *Penicillium Candidum* is sprayed onto a disc-shaped block of cheese never more than 4 inches thick.

The block of cheese itself is made that way solely for the surface molds to find their way inside and do the curing. A too-thick block of cheese would never cure properly. If you were lucky enough to receive one of those "sampler baskets" with tiny, foil-wrapped cheese and sausage that never needs refrigeration, and notice a small sample of Brie or Camembert, allow it to sit at room temperature for at least two hours before sampling. This should aid in the softening and improve the flavor immensely.

When it comes to Roquefort, most folks think salad dressing. True Roquefort is made solely from ewe's milk and ripens in naturally air-conditioned caves of the Mountains of Cambalton in Roquefort-sur-Soulzon. As strange as it may seem, it is the inoculation of *Penicillium Roqueforti* into the ewe's milk and the subsequent ripening in the alternating air currents of the caves that make this truly Roquefort and not just "blue cheese."

INCIDENTALLY, the Roquefortians go to considerable trouble to protect their own. A restaurateur who offers real "Roquefort" had better be careful because there are paid professionals (the Roquefort C.I.A.'s) who visit establishments and have test kits that can discern the strain of *penicillium* right at the table. Imposters beware!

So whether it's baked, broiled, crumbled, tossed or sauced, these three cheeses stand out as the big granddaddys of all the great French cheeses. You might find Brie from the United States or Camembert from Scandinavia, maybe even a domestic "Roquefort," but if you are looking for the ultimate in true taste sensations, look for a Brie from Meaux or Coulommiers, a Camembert with a passport only from Normandy and the truest, bluest, blue cheese of them all, Roquefort from the caves of sur-Soulzon. Bon Appetit!

#### THE ULTIMATE ROQUEFORT SALAD DRESSING

1/2 cup Roquefort cheese, crumbled  
1 cup real sour cream  
1/4 cup mayonnaise  
3 Tbsp. heavy cream

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Cover and refrigerate at least 24 hours and allow to stand at least 1 hour at room temperature before serving.

#### CAMEMBERT EN PHYLLLO

6 oz. camembert  
1/4 lb. phyllo dough  
1/4 Tbsp. butter, melted



Mary Jemerlon (left) puts cookies on rack for oven, partners Wayne Sonkin and Cathy Stiteler look on, while Terri Harrison and Valerie Madison pull cookies out of press.

## Gourmet cookies Baker's Choice keeps them from crumbling

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

That's the way the cookie crumbles. A common enough refrain, but for Wayne Sonkin of Livonia the exact opposite is more to the point.

Sonkin, 28, founder and president of Baker's Choice in Livonia, is devoted to cookies that never crumble, some 30,000 cookies baked daily in his factory on Stark Road.

"We're not the first to make cookies, but the way we do it is unique. There may be other companies comparable to us but, if so, I'm not aware of them," Sonkin said.

Sonkin is referring to his product, individually wrapped, gourmet-style cookies chock full of chocolate chunks, nuts or raisins just like Mother makes.

That, of course, is the point — mass-produced cookies that look, smell and taste like the home-baked variety.

"We took a gourmet-type cookie of very high quality, figured out how to mass produce and market it, and brought it into the work place," Sonkin said.

ALL BAKER'S CHOICE products are manufactured in this manner, four variations of cookies including chocolate chip, peanut butter and oatmeal raisin, and fudge bars. Daily, some 40 employees mix three tons of dough which is then measured into exact 3.57-ounce rounds and baked on the premises.

Until 1985, each cookie was hand-wrapped in cellophane. Today, machines that Sonkin specially designed for the job have taken over the wrapping duties. Quality control workers monitor the results.

Finally, squads of distributors deliver batches of cookies and brownies to schools in Livonia, Southfield and Bloomfield Hills and to hospitals, factories, convenience stores and

vending machines throughout Michigan and Ohio.

A new product called Oscar Brown, a peanut butter and chocolate brownie, will be introduced later this month and by early spring Baker's Choice products will appear for sale in Illinois.

In addition, the company produces items under private labels for other clients "who want products similar to ours at the high-end quality of the market," Sonkin said, adding the firm grossed \$3 million last year.

BAKER'S CHOICE products contain no preservatives or stabilizers. "There is no way to simulate a freshly baked cookie if preservatives are used," Sonkin explained.

Items have a shelf life of nine days. While they do not spoil after that period of time, "a soft cookie becomes a hard cookie. Nine days is the optimal time." Products unsold after that time are donated to area food centers for distribution to the poor.

Sonkin uses recipes he has been trying and testing since 1980 when he dropped out of college at Michigan State University in Lansing because "I wanted to start my own business. I got impatient."

When he launched Baker's Choice in 1982 he was initially met with skepticism. Once products began selling, "We spread like wildfire. The market was wide open at that time."

He says he has never spent a dime on advertising. The price of his cookies has increased once in five years, to 85 cents each.

The recipes, as well as ideas for new products, are "confidential." It takes approximately three months to ready new products for market and until something is ready to go, like the new Oscar Brown brownie, "I keep it a secret."

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— Wayne Sonkin  
Baker's Choice

SONKIN SAID he frequently receives telephone calls from distraught home bakers who are seeking advice for failed baking ventures.

"The curse of most home bakers is not following the recipe to the letter. Unlike cooking which is an art, baking is a science. You are counting on the reaction of every ingredient. For optimal results, you cannot experiment or substitute."

Sonkin offers the following tips:

- Follow recipe directions carefully.
- Use high-quality ingredients and high-grade baking pans.
- Use an oven thermometer.
- Outdoor temperatures affect final results. Warm weather means softer dough and thinner, crispier cookies.
- "The Joy of Cooking" cookbook offers "phenomenal" baking recipes.

## Monster distributes samples of cookies from Aunt Clara's

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

The cookie monster is alive and well in Plymouth. He can be seen during most community events like the recently staged ice sculpture show downtown, handing out yummy samples of chocolate chip, peanut butter and sugar cookies to awed small fry who often-times reach out and touch the friendly, furry green fellow.

On Halloween night alone, the cookie monster handed out 1,800 individually wrapped tasty morsels to youngsters enjoying an evening of trick or treating.

The monster is none other than Pete Gade, 32, who, with his fiancée Cindy Burgess, 30, launched Aunt Clara's Cookies last spring in a small shop off Main Street next door to the community's Chamber of Commerce.

"We wanted to do something together and on our own. I had the idea and Pete had the financing," explained Burgess. "We didn't want to get into a franchise."

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Aunt Clara's Cookies

AUNT CLARA'S reflects the couple's personal touch. Laura Ashley print wallpaper, hung by Burgess, matches aprons she sewed for herself and five employees who bake and sell cookies daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Display cases, designed and built by Gade, hold wicker baskets decorated in matching Ashley ruffles brimming with cookies.



Peter Gade and his fiancée Cindy Burgess display their cookies that have a personal touch.