

[Brandywine Table]

Cheese and Charcuterie

Laura Muzzi Brennan

“THAT’S CHARCUTERIE? I’VE BEEN AVOIDING THAT ON MENUS FOR YEARS. THEY’RE KILLING THEMSELVES WITH THAT NAME!”

—Jay Pritchett, patriarch on the sitcom *Modern Family*.

MANY CULINARY BANDWAGONS HAVE PASSED ME BY. I never cottoned to foam, don’t much care for egg yolk oozing onto lettuce, and still order coffee in five words or less. But trends with staying power—sharing tapas-style plates, savoring small-batch artisanal products, learning the stories behind food—not only have me jumping for joy but taking a seat at the U-shaped chef’s counter at Cornerstone Cheese & Charcuterie in Wayne.

Christine and Nick Kondra opened this BYOB and artisanal market in fall 2015. Its cheese and charcuterie boards as well as its small plates quickly gained a loyal following.

Cornerstone carries over 60 cheeses: 40 percent are domestic, while 60 percent are imported with a focus on the Basque region straddling Spain and France and Italy’s Piedmont and Lombardy regions. The menu highlights 10 cheeses every day, but guests are always welcome to request any cheese in the store.

Cornerstone’s charcuterie—an umbrella term for various preparations of cured, smoked and cooked meats and fish—hails from around the world. Fresh sausages, pates, terrines and mousses are handcrafted in-house by Nick and Christine. On any given day, guests choose among 10 to 15 different charcuterie options. For diners who BYOB, Christine and Nick are happy to recommend cheese and charcuterie that complement the wine. Take-out boards are also available. (You’ll want to return the board so you can visit the shop again!)

The variety of offerings is impressive as is the fact that Cornerstone has exclusivity on a number of products, making it the only place in the region where diners can find certain small-batch cheeses and charcuterie, such as ‘Nduja and award-winning soppressata from Chicago’s West Loop Salumi.

But what’s really remarkable is the Kondras’ attention to every detail of the Cornerstone experience. Their commitment to what they call “thoughtful sourcing” means that not only do they seek top-notch triple crème and prosciutto, but they know and trust the people who craft these products.

Their connections to New England farmers and food artisans run especially deep. Although she’s originally from Berwyn, Christine founded Farm and the Fork CSA New England, and both Kondras worked as chefs in Boston and on Nantucket. Cornerstone’s Nantucket bluefish pate and cheese offerings from Vermont’s Jasper Hill and Blue Ledge Farms attest to the couple’s affection for their former home. They’re also devotees of local cheese including the Creamery Collection from Chester County’s Farm at Doe Run.

No matter where the product was made, the Kondras can tell its story. Bitto comes from cows milked in the Italian Alps, 1600 meters above sea level. A Casinca hails from the French island of Corsica, is nicknamed the “royal” cheese, and dates back to Napoleon’s era. The popular Tuscan pork salumi has been made by the same Tuscan family for four generations. Laughs Christine, “Guests always tell me that somehow it tastes better with a story behind it.”

Cornerstone’s signature accompaniments also enhance the already fantastic experience. There’s tomato confit to bring out the flavor in acidic cheeses like the Spanish Serrat del Triadó. There are pickled vegetables and a Nantucket IPA-infused mustard that pair well with heavy charcuterie. All are made in house as are the crostini and spiced nuts. (While the nut recipe is a well-kept secret, the Kondras graciously shared a few other accompaniment recipes, so read on.)

Christine says people go crazy for the fresh honeycomb from Georgia’s Savannah Bee Company. She recommends first sampling the cheese by itself and then with honey to see how it elevates the cheese, enhancing not only the flavor but the overall experience.

Done the Cornerstone way, cheese and charcuterie are much more than a food trend. They’re well on their way to becoming a bona fide movement! And one I’m happy I joined.



Nick and Christine Kondra



KEYS TO CORNERSTONE'S BOARDS

Cornerstone Cheese & Charcuterie put together six boards to entice all tastes. Each board's ingredients are listed left to right. Accompaniments on boards: harvest fruit compote, nuts, honeycomb, mustard.

LOCAL SELECTIONS



The Creamery Collection #11 (PA) • Buttercup Brie (NJ)
Smoked duck from Sugartown Smoked Specialties
That'll Do Ewe, (PA) • Hummingbird (PA)
Notes: Great price points for local cheese

PRESERVED LEMONS

Sometimes called lemon pickles, preserved lemons are important to North African cuisine. Sliced thinly, they pair wonderfully with charcuterie and add a salty tartness to pasta, salads and seafood dishes. Recipe courtesy of Christine Kondra, Cornerstone.

- 6 medium lemons
- 1/4 C. kosher salt
- 2 C. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 bay leaf
- Special equipment: 1 qt. Mason jar

Quarter each lemon lengthwise, but be sure it stays attached by about 1/2" at the stem end. Place lemons in a bowl and stuff with salt. Transfer lemons to a Mason jar and add lemon juice, peppercorns and bay leaf. Seal with a tight-fitting lid.

Set jar aside in a dark place, shaking jar every other day or two, until the lemons are soft (about 1 month).

Refrigerate after opening, and use within 2 to 3 weeks.

Makes 1 quart.

TOMATO CONFIT

Roasting tomatoes for a long time at a low temperature concentrates their flavor. Says Christine Kondra: "The acidity from the tomatoes and garlic brings out the flavor in the cheeses—specifically the Creamery Collection #11 and Spanish-style cheeses such as Serrat del Triadó and Manchego.

- 4 heirloom or vine-ripened tomatoes
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled, cut in half lengthwise
- 1/2-1 C. extra virgin olive oil (amount depends on the size of the tomatoes.)
- 1 bunch fresh basil, chopped

Preheat oven to 275°.

Cut tomatoes in half and toss with salt and pepper. Add a half clove of garlic to each tomato half.

Place on sheet pan and sprinkle olive oil over tomatoes. Then put basil over top.

Place in oven for 1 hour and 45 minutes. Let cool and place in a mason jar or other container. The confit will last for 1 month.

Makes 1 pint.

Here are five tips to keep in mind when purchasing, serving and storing cheese.

1. Buy a mix of flavors and textures. Be adventurous! Try highlighting cheeses from one region or country or one milk source—cow, goat or sheep.
2. Allow cheese to sit at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes before serving.
3. Offer a different knife for each cheese.

4. Taste first. Seasonal changes affect an animal's diet, habits and its milk. Artisanal cheese you enjoyed in the spring may taste quite different in the fall.

5. Wrap cheese in cheese paper and store in the produce drawer, designated cheese drawer or other medium-cold, relatively humid part of your refrigerator. Avoid the fridge door. Every time you open the door, the temperature fluctuates, affecting the cheese's taste and shelf life.

GOAT CHEESE TASTING FROM AROUND THE GLOBE



Domitilla (Italy-Lombardy)
Crottin (Vermont)
Chabichou du Poitou (France)
A Casinca (France-Island of Corsica)
Notes: Great to add wine pairings to this one.

BASQUE COUNTRY SELECTIONS



Templais Fleuron (France) • Albala Tierno (Spain)
Serrat del Triado (Spain) • La Retorta (Spain)
Gamenedo (Spain)

Notes: Gamenedo, says Christine, is "a life-changing cheese."

CROSTINI TWO WAYS

At Cornerstone, the Kondras use unsalted crostini to serve with cheese because the salted version would make an over-salty experience and could negatively affect the cheese's flavor. Enjoy the salted, herbed version by itself or spread with a little tomato confit. Note: Maldon sea salt is an all-natural salt harvested on England's south coast. It comes in the form of flakes and has a clean taste. You can find it at Whole Foods or gourmet shops. Recipe courtesy of Christine Kondra, Cornerstone.

1 baguette
Olive oil
Optional: Maldon sea salt; dried herbs

Preheat oven to 375°. Slice baguettes thinly, about 1/4" and place on sheet pans. Sprinkle olive oil over slices (and salt and herbs, if using). Bake for 12 minutes. No need to flip the crostini over.

Remove from pans and let cool for 20 minutes. Stored in a tightly sealed container, crostini will last for 2 to 4 weeks.

Makes 6-8 servings.

CHICKPEA "NUTS"

Once you start eating these little bites, you can't stop. Truth be told, I like them best with just olive oil and salt, but if you want more spice, add lemon zest and either paprika or rosemary. Adapted from *The Kitchen*.

2, 15-oz. cans chickpeas
2 Tb. extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp. kosher salt or to taste
Optional: zest of 1 lemon, sweet paprika, dried rosemary (or cook's choice)

Preheat oven to 400°. Rinse chickpeas well. Spread on a paper towel to get them as dry as possible.

Toss chickpeas with olive oil and salt and place on a rimmed sheet pan. Bake for 10 minutes. Shake the pan. Bake for 10-15 more minutes, until golden. Some will even pop! While still hot, toss with lemon zest and spices or dried herbs. Serve warm. Once they cool, they become chewier ... still delicious!

Makes about 1 C.



DOMESTIC SELECTIONS

St. Stephen (NY) • Cloud Cap (WA)
Tuscan Pork Salumi (VA and Italy)
Cabot Clothbound (VT) • Point Reyes (CA)
Notes: A very approachable selection—crowd pleaser; even people who don't like blue cheese, like Point Reyes.

DRIED CHERRY-CURRY TAPENADE

This tapenade has many layers of flavor. It goes well with strong cheese—a super sharp cheddar or tangy goat cheese. Or slather it on crackers and enjoy. Adapted from *Pestos, Tapenades and Spreads* by Stacey Prince.

4 Tb. olive oil, divided
1/4 C. chopped shallots
1 C. dried cherries
4 Tb. red wine or sherry vinegar or a combination, divided
3 tsp. brown sugar
1 tsp. sweet curry powder
1 tsp. lemon juice plus more to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Heat 1/2 Tb. olive oil over medium heat and add shallots. Cook until they start to soften and begin to turn brown, 2 to 3 minutes.

Add cherries and 3 Tb. vinegar. Cook 2 to 3 minutes, until cherries start to soften. Add brown sugar and curry and stir until sugar dissolves.

Put the mixture in the food processor. Add the remaining olive oil and vinegar and lemon juice and pulse until the mixture is a thick paste. Taste and season with additional lemon juice, salt and pepper to taste. If it's too thick to spread, add water 1 tsp. at a time until you reach desired consistency.

Serve warm or at room temperature.

Makes 3/4 C.

CHARCUTERIE DEMYSTIFIED

Charcuterie: "Charcuterie is everywhere around us ... bacon, sausages, hams, pates and terrines are all part of this great culinary specialty ... all of which have some sort of cure and preservation at their core."—from *Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking and Curing* by Michael Ruhlman & Brian Polcyn, forward by Thomas Keller.

Salumi: "With a couple of exceptions (mortadella, the soppressata of Tuscany, which is the Italian version of French fromage de tête), salumi refers to salted, dried meats [such as salami and prosciutto] that are, when done well, with well-fed, well-raised pigs, some of the best foods on the planet."—Michael Ruhlman on his website. Ruhlman & Brian Polcyn co-authored *Salumi: The Craft of Italian Dry-Curing*.

Pâtés & Terrines: "They are both French variations on the American meatloaf. The distinction has so blurred with time that they both mean the same thing—a winy spiced-up ground meat mixture that is baked and served cold. Terrine originally meant a comfortable earthenware baking dish, usually loaf shaped, in which pâté was baked and served. A pâté en croûte is the same mixture baked in a handsome highly decorated pastry crust."—Julia Child, *The Way to Cook*.

Rillettes: "Rillettes are usually made with long-cooked salted pork, rabbit, or goose, which is then shredded, then mashed with fat to produce a rich, rustic paste for spreading on bread. But a good one, the best rillettes you find, are nearly buttery-smooth and rich with the taste of fork-tender meat. Yet rillettes can also be made with fish."—David Lebovitz on his website. He is the author of many books including *My Paris Kitchen*.

Confit: "Usually the word confit refers to duck confit, a dish from France's Southwest in which duck legs are salted and then cooked in their own fat, a way to both preserve and flavor them ... Now chefs are likely to confit fish as well as fowl."—Dorie Greenspan, *Around My French Table*.



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NEW ENGLAND SELECTIONS



Square (Northern VT) • Conundrum (VT, Northern Kingdom)
 Prosciutto di Parma (Italy)
 Pyramid Scheme (VT, Lake Champlain area)
 Middlebury Blue (VT, Lake Champlain area)
 Notes: An extremely limited number of Conundrum is made; no two are ever the same. Cornerstone had some of the last Conundrum in the country.

SHRIMP RILLETTES

If you want to highlight the shrimp's taste, use a milder feta. You can also substitute butter or cream cheese. Adapted from a recipe by Chef Linton Hopkins on James Beard Fdn. website.

- 2 Tb. butter at room temperature, divided
- ½ lb. shrimp, peeled, deveined, no tails
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ C. whole milk feta crumbles
- 2 Tb. lemon juice, plus more to taste
- 1 Tb. minced scallions
- 1 Tb. chopped fresh dill

Melt 1 Tb. butter in a large pan over

medium heat. Toss shrimp with salt and pepper and add to skillet. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes until shrimp turns pink and is just cooked through. During the last 30 seconds, add feta and lemon juice and cook until feta starts to become gooey.

Transfer mixture to a food processor and add remaining 1 Tb. butter. Process until you reach desired consistency. Taste and add additional lemon juice, salt and pepper. Fold in scallions and dill. Put in a ramekin or small bowl. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least one hour.

Serve with crackers or baguette slices.

ITALIAN SELECTIONS

- Fontina Valle d'Aosta (from northern Italy, Valle d'Aosta region) • Blu Imperiale (Lombardy)
- Bitto (Lombardy) • Finocchiona, pork (Tuscany)
- Nababbo (Lombardy) • Salted Pork Loin (Tuscany)
- Pecorino Gessato (Tuscany)

Notes: An incredible experience to sit down with this board.

