

Cheeseboard, But Make It Dinner

MORE WAYS TO ENJOY THE WONDERS OF SOME OF CHESTER COUNTY'S FINEST

Liz Tarditi



IN “THE WISE MAN’S FEAR,” PATRICK ROTHFUSS HAS his main character quip that it’s not the dark arts that scandalize people: it’s eating the cheese the wrong way. Yes, that’s a lighthearted lesson in manners, but it underscores a deeper truth: cheese is more than sustenance — it’s a cultural anchor.

If you don’t know your cheese history, it’s one of the foundational foods of human civilization. Cheese emerged as a “happy accident” some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, closely following the domestication of herd animals like sheep and goats in the Fertile Crescent. As ancient nomadic cultures traveled, they discovered that milk stored in animal stomach pouches would separate into curds and whey, transforming a perishable liquid into a durable, transportable, digestible food source.

That ancient history laid the groundwork, but modern cheese-making has refined the craft into an art form that mirrors the complexity of fine wine. For this month’s Brandywine Table, we checked

in with Sue Miller, owner and expert cheesemaker at **Birchrun Hills Farm**, a family-run dairy and creamery in Chester Springs, known for its award-winning, milk-first philosophy. Sue and her husband Ken manage every detail of production, starting with their herd of Holstein cows raised on high-forage diets and farm-grown feed.

“You take a simple ingredient like milk and translate that into flavor and texture and stories,” said Sue Miller. She noted that cheese shares the same concept of terroir with wine, but with a more immediate pulse. While a vineyard reflects a season, milk reflects a single day. Weather, hydration, even herd stress register instantly in fat and protein levels, shaping flavor, texture and melt.

At Birchrun Hills, gravity-fed milk flows to the creamery to preserve its natural character before cheeses are aged in an underground, cave-like facility. This dedication to daily terroir has earned the Millers honors as Chester County Farmers of the Year and a permanent place on the region’s finest cheese boards.

To bring that craftsmanship into the home kitchen, Sue shared four signature recipes that showcase the versatility of the Birchrun lineup, from fresh, crisp dishes like celery and fennel salad with Birchrun Blue and the tart acidity of skillet Chardy with roasted grapes and walnuts to richer, comforting favorites. A bright, herb-flecked Birchrun Hills Farms Ola with lemon and za’atar and the decadent Fat Cat fondue with wild mushrooms highlight the farm’s distinct profiles. We’ve also included an alpine-inspired tartiflette for a hearty, entrée-sized celebration of melted gold. And for a sweet finish, the Birchrun cheesecake proves once again that world-class cheese elevates every course.

These recipes are designed to spark conversation and delight, turning every seasonal gathering into a showcase of Chester County’s finest flavors.

Birchrun Farms Ola with Lemon & Za’atar

Sue Miller notes that Ola is a cow’s-milk interpretation of a classic French *bûcheron*. While the traditional version is made with goat’s milk, Ola’s silky, luscious cow’s milk base gives it a softer, creamier texture with bright freshness, gentle earthiness and clean dairy sweetness. Za’atar is a Middle Eastern spice blend — typically thyme, sesame seeds and sumac — that brings herbal warmth, nutty crunch and a gentle lemony tang to both savory and fresh dishes.

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 piece Ola cheese, room temperature
- 1–2 T. za’atar, to taste
- ½–1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest
- 2–3 T. high-quality olive oil
- Freshly cracked black pepper (optional)
- Flaky salt, if needed

To serve:

- Warm crusty bread or grilled sourdough
- Flatbread or seeded crackers
- Raw vegetables, such as radishes or cucumbers

Remove the Ola from the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving. Slice into thick coins or gently break into large pieces and arrange on a shallow serving plate.

Sprinkle evenly with the za’atar and lemon zest. Drizzle generously with olive oil, allowing a little to pool around the cheese.

Let rest for 10 to 15 minutes, so the flavors bloom and the cheese softens fully. Taste and finish with black pepper or flaky salt if needed. Serve at room temperature.



Ola with Lemon and Za’atar and Celery & Fennel Salad with Birchrun Blue

Celery & Fennel Salad with Birchrun Blue

This crisp, refreshing salad balances thinly sliced celery and fennel with toasted nuts and bright lemon. Farmhouse Birchrun Blue anchors the dish, its savory depth and gentle sweetness cutting cleanly through the crunch of the vegetables and tying everything together without overwhelming the freshness. It’s a sharp, bracing counterpoint to richer dishes on the table.

Serves 6

- 1 large celery bunch, including tender inner stalks and leaves, thinly sliced
- 1 medium fennel bulb, trimmed and very thinly sliced
- 1 small shallot, very thinly sliced
- Kosher salt
- 2–3 T. fresh lemon juice
- ¼ C. extra-virgin olive oil
- ¾ C. toasted walnuts or almonds
- 3–5 oz. Birchrun Blue, broken into large crumbles
- Freshly cracked black pepper

In a large bowl, combine the celery, fennel and shallot. Season lightly with salt and toss, allowing the vegetables to soften just slightly to create the salad base.

Add the lemon juice and olive oil and toss until evenly coated and glossy. Fold in the toasted nuts.

Scatter the blue cheese over the salad, keeping the crumbles chunky so there are pockets of cheese throughout. Finish with freshly cracked black pepper, taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Serve immediately.

Skillet Chardy with Roasted Grapes & Walnuts

This warm, skillet-baked, camembert-style Little Chardy cheese from Birchrun Farms is designed for easy sharing and minimal prep. Roasted grapes bring sweetness and acidity to balance the cheese’s richness, while toasted walnuts add texture and depth. Serve it straight from the oven with crusty bread and alongside a simple salad of bitter spring greens.

Serves 4 to 6



- ½ lb. seedless grapes
- 1 T. honey
- ¼ C. red wine
- Pinch of black pepper
- 1 Little Chardy cheese
- ¼ C. walnuts

Outlawed: Why You Can't Buy Reblochon in the U.S.

Blame the government. No, really! Reblochon, the raw-milk cheese traditionally used for tartiflette, is aged fewer than 60 days and as a result can't legally be imported into the United States under FDA regulations.

Fortunately, several washed-rind cheeses offer similar richness, aroma and melt, making them good stand-ins for home cooks and professional chefs alike. Taleggio, from Lombardy on the Italian side of the Alps, is one of the most reliable substitutes, with a supple texture and savory depth that performs beautifully when baked. Or capture that French flavor with raclette or brie. For those ready for a French-level noseful of truly stinky cheese, there is Époisses, which tastes far more subtle and sweet than its barnyard scent suggests. And it melts wonderfully.

The goal is not to replicate reblochon exactly, but to capture its spirit — creamy, aromatic and indulgent enough to stand up to potatoes and bacon without overwhelming the dish.

Preheat the oven to 400°. In a small cast-iron skillet or oven-safe ramekin, combine the grapes, honey, red wine and black pepper.

Bake for about 30 minutes, until the grapes blister and the wine reduces slightly. Lower the oven temperature to 350°. Nestle the cheese on top of the grapes and return the skillet to the oven.

Bake for about another 15 minutes, until the cheese is soft and begins to ooze.

Meanwhile, toast the walnuts until fragrant and chop coarsely.

Remove from the oven, scatter the walnuts over the top, and serve immediately.

Tartiflette (Potato, Bacon & Cheese Gratin)

This potato gratin from the French Alps layers tender waxy potatoes with sauteed onions, smoky bacon and melted cheese for a dish that's deeply comforting and unapologetically rich. Traditionally made with reblochon, this version uses cheeses that are readily available in the U.S. while preserving the spirit of the original.

Serves 6 (as entree)

8 medium Yukon Gold or red potatoes (waxy potatoes hold their shape better for baking)

Kosher salt

1 lb. thick-cut bacon, cut into lardons

1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced

1 clove garlic, minced

½ C. dry white wine, such as Jacquère

Freshly cracked black pepper

12 oz. taleggio or raclette cheese, rind removed and sliced (if using a more assertive washed-rind cheese such as Époisses, reduce the amount to 6–8 oz. to keep the dish balanced.)



Place the potatoes, unpeeled, in a large pot and cover with very well-salted cold water. (Taste the water. Salty like the sea is correct for this recipe.) Bring to a gentle boil and cook until just tender when pierced with a knife, about 20 to 25 minutes depending on size.

Drain thoroughly and let the potatoes steam-dry for several minutes. When cool enough to handle, peel and slice into ¼-inch rounds.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large skillet over medium heat until rendered and lightly crisp. Transfer to a plate, leaving the fat in the pan.

Add the onion to the skillet and cook slowly until soft and lightly golden, seasoning lightly with salt. Add the garlic and cook just until fragrant. Deglaze with the wine and simmer briefly until reduced by about half.

Preheat the oven to 375°. Butter a shallow baking dish. Arrange half the potatoes in the dish and season lightly with pepper. Top with half the onion mixture, bacon and cheese. Repeat the layers, finishing with cheese on top.

Bake until bubbling and deeply golden, about 35 minutes. Let rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Birchrun Farms Fat Cat Fondue with Wild Mushrooms

This baked fondue pairs sauteed mushrooms with a washed-rind cheese that melts into a rich, savory pool without losing structure. Earthy mushrooms and thyme deepen the flavor, making this an ideal dish for cool evenings when you want something warm, communal and unfussy. Serve straight from the oven with crusty bread for dipping.

Serves 4 to 6

Olive oil or butter, for sauteing

1 small onion, thinly sliced

1 shallot, thinly sliced

Pinch of salt

1–1½ C. mixed mushrooms, such as shiitake, oyster or wild varieties, sliced

¼ C. dry white wine



1–2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves

6–8 oz. Fat Cat cheese, sliced

Crusty baguette, for serving

Preheat the oven to 375°.

In a skillet over medium heat, warm a little olive oil or butter. Add the onion and shallot with a pinch of salt and cook until softened and lightly golden. Add the mushrooms and cook until they release their moisture and begin to brown.

Deglaze with the wine and let it reduce slightly. Stir in the thyme and remove from the heat.

Transfer the mushroom mixture to a small ovenproof dish and layer the sliced cheese evenly over the top.

Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until the cheese is fully melted and bubbling. Serve immediately.

Birchrun Cheesecake

This cheesecake leans on cultured dairy for structure and balance rather than heaviness. Fromage blanc keeps the texture light and clean, while crème fraîche adds gentle richness and tang. The result is a smooth, softly-set cheesecake that finishes fresh rather than cloying. Credit where it's due to Sue Miller — using farm-fresh ingredients instead of supermarket stand-ins is what pushes this dessert into next-level territory.

Serves 6



For the crust:

1½ C. graham cracker crumbs

3 T. sugar

6 T. cultured butter, melted

Pairing Without Rules

When building a cheese-board-style dinner, stop thinking in pairings and start thinking in balance. Nearly every successful plate hits the same four notes: fat, acid, salt and crunch.

Cheese brings fat and richness, whether it's molten, baked or served at room temperature. Acid keeps that richness in check — lemon juice, vinegar, wine used in cooking, pickled vegetables or a spoonful of fruit compote. Salt might come from the cheese itself, cured meats, olives or anchovies, while crunch adds contrast through toasted bread, nuts, raw vegetables or crisp salad greens.

If those four elements are present and in balance, the meal works! No rigid rules, formal pairings or special knowledge required.

For the cheesecake filling:

2½ lb. fromage blanc

2½ C. sugar

12 oz. crème fraîche

5 large eggs

2 tsp. vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 325°.

First prepare the crust. Stir together the graham cracker crumbs and sugar. Add the melted butter and mix until evenly moistened. Press firmly into the bottom of a 9- or 10-inch springform pan. Bake for about 15 minutes, then set aside to cool slightly.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the fromage blanc, sugar and crème fraîche. Mix on medium speed until smooth and fully combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed.

In a separate bowl, lightly whisk together the eggs and vanilla. Slowly add the egg mixture to the cheese mixture, mixing gently just until smooth.

Pour the filling into the prepared crust. Bake for 25 minutes, then rotate the pan and continue baking for another 25 minutes. The cheesecake should be lightly set around the edges and still slightly jiggly in the center.

Remove from the oven and refrigerate overnight before cutting. ♦

Liz Tarditi is a chef and wine specialist with more than 30 years of experience in food, wine and event planning. She holds degrees from Villanova University and from a Seattle culinary arts program founded by a Certified French Master Chef, where she trained in a classic brigade-style kitchen. Liz later ran her own catering company and has worked as a wine specialist in Pennsylvania. She brings her training and lifelong passion for seasonal, approachable cooking to Brandywine Table.



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