

Cheese won't get your goat when served with these wines

BY BILL DALEY
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Goat cheese is sold in dozens of varieties from tangy white rolls, often adorned with peppercorns or fresh herbs, to aged specimens almost as sturdy as Parmesan. Your choice of wine has to change depending on what you buy, but that choice can be intimidating to all but the cheese-savvy.

Enter Jan Henrichsen, wine buyer at Chicago's Pastoral shop, with very simple, sensible advice.

"The firmer the goat cheese, the bigger the wine," she said, noting that goat cheese loses moisture as it ages, developing a denser texture and a fatter, saltier taste profile. "Texture is the rule for figuring out what to pour."

For most people, the term "goat cheese" means those cute cylinders, pyramids and discs of fresh or lightly aged varieties.

"Although it is tangy and pungent, goat cheese is relatively delicate since it is lower in fat than cow's milk cheese," said Tracy Lewis Liang, wine and spirits director of Treasure Island Food stores. "Therefore you don't want a super big wine that will overwhelm the cheese. Think cool-climate wines: crisp white and light reds."

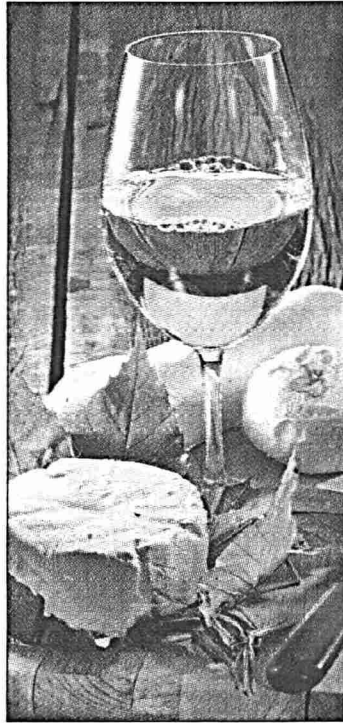
The adage what grows together goes together also can be used here.

"A great place to look is the age-old affinity of Loire Valley wine with Loire goat cheese," said Chris Speir, wine manager at the Binny's Beverage Depot store in Willowbrook, Ill. "The bright acidity in both meets and mellows each other out, creating a creamier impression from the cheese and a rounder, fruitier one from the wine."

The classic combo is chevre, fresh goat's milk cheese, and sauvignon blanc (especially Sancerre in the Loire), but you don't have to stop at France for

the wine. Look for crisp sauvignon blancs and other similar varieties around the world.

Efrain Madrigal, wine director of Sam's Wines & Spirits stores, likes a Spanish Rueda and said that a Greek moschofilero is great with a goat feta cheese. Liang likes a Spanish albarino from Galicia and sauvignon blanc from New Zealand. Henrichsen urges



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Fresh goat cheeses pair best with cool-climate wines, such as a crisp sauvignon Blanc.

consumers to try chenin blanc, pinot blanc and pinot gris.

Red wines are more problematic with goat cheese. Henrichsen advises steering clear of the big, tannic varieties that will either wipe out the cheese entirely or trigger some strange taste sensations.

Liang looks to the Loire for red wine inspiration.

"A Bourgeuil or an Anjou

rouge, both made from cabernet franc, have enough fruit to complement the cheese but are light enough so as not to clobber the flavor combination with tannins or alcohol," she said. An Austrian zweigelt or blaufrankisch might also work.

Henrichsen likes pinot noir with goat cheese. Style matters here; weighty, big pinots — what she calls "Sideways' pinots" from the movie — won't work. She thinks pinots from Oregon and Washington, especially the Willamette Valley, "absolutely go" with goat cheese.

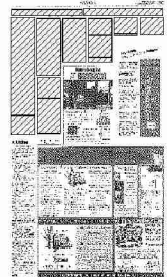
Standing up to chevre

We paired six white wines from around the world with a California chevre from the renowned cheesemaker Laurel Chenel.

The fresh goat cheese was tangy and assertive, with a mouth-coating creaminess. The lighter whites, so good on their own, seemed to falter when meeting the chevre. The bolder, more aromatic wines more than held their own. It will be interesting to see how an assortment of reds would work. Corkscrew ratings reflect how well each wine went with the cheese.

— **2006 Churton Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough:** The New Zealand sauvignon blanc has a vivid grassy aroma with floral notes and touches of tropical fruit. The flavor is clean and crisp with a big burst of grapefruit riding through to the finish. The wine and cheese each bring out the best qualities in the other. 4 corks. \$18

— **2005 Les Vignerons Reunis de Kientzheim-Kaysersberg Pinot Blanc, The Furst:** Redolent of pineapple and lilac, this Alsatian offered a mouth-filling flavor ripe with honey and almonds. The finish was complex and pleasantly oily. The high acidity checks the sweetness, but there's



still enough richness and complexity in the wine to tame the cheese's lemony tang. 3 corks. \$13.

— **2006 Sadie Family Sequillo:** A South African blend of chenin blanc, grenache blanc, roussanne and viognier, this wine is big and buttery with notes of citrus and melon. Some tasters thought the cheese flattened the wine's profile. 2 corks. \$29

— **2006 Zacharias White**

Squared: Sweetly tart and fragrant like honeysuckle, this Greek blend of assyrtiko and sklava grapes split the taste panel. Some thought the wine was neither helped nor hindered by the cheese while others believed both were dimmed in the pairing. 2 corks. \$16

— **2006 Domaine Vacheron Sancerre:** Fragrantly tart with lots of grapefruit flavors, this sauvi-

gnon blanc from France's Loire Valley paired nicely with the cheese but tasters thought there was no real spark. 2 corks. \$29

— **2006 Naia Rueda:** Strong minerality gives this Spanish verdejo a crisp, citrusy whack, which ultimately proved to be too much with the cheese. Both seemed to grow tarter when paired. 1 cork. \$12

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