

Kunik - Cheese Course

by Max Shrem, Posted Dec 29th 2009 @ 5:00PM

Photo: Nettle Meadow.

This New Year's Eve, as on many others before it, the bubbly will surely flow, but that doesn't mean you can't get more from the experience than a nice buzz. When it comes to pairing Champagne with cheese, nothing will tantalize the taste buds more than a sip of sweet and luscious sparkling wine and a bite of a thick, rich and creamy *triple-crème* cheese, like Kunik from Nettle Meadow Farm in Warrensburg, NY. This intoxicating combination will make New Year's Eve an extraordinary feast of the senses.

Similar to many creamy-cheese-beer pairings (think Camembert and Belgian blond ale), Champagne not only complements the richness of a *triple-crème* cheese, but it also cuts the hedonistic levels of butterfat (the fatty part of milk that is usually used to measure the amount of creaminess in all kinds of dairy products from cheese to ice cream). Like a spoonful of extra-heavy liquid cream, *triple-crème* cheeses contain more than 75% butterfat. Compare this to the 49-percent butterfat found in a typical Gruyère cheese, and you can see just how creamy a *triple-crème* cheese can be.

Besides the creaminess, Kunik has an extra level of tanginess that differs from famed French *triple crèmes* like Brillat-Savarin and Explorateur, because Kunik is made with a blend of cow's and goat's milk rather than solely with cow's milk. On its very own, Kunik represents a mix of different flavors: a slightly grassy tang, a buttery sweet flavor and an herbal mushroom-like aroma. "The goat milk adds another layer of complexity to the flavor," says Sheila Flanagan, co-owner of Nettle Meadow Farm (along with Lorraine Lambiase). "It gives this *triple-crème* a little bit of a goat cheese kick while maintaining a soft subtle *triple-crème* finish."



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But back to the creaminess. Kunik's creators also attribute its thick and creamy consistency to the detailed and painstaking technique involved in hand-cutting the curds during the cheesemaking process. "The curds are hand cut into a medium-size chunks and then, after leaving to set for more time, they're gently hand-ladled into molds that are then periodically flipped, also by hand, to remove excess liquid," explains Flanagan. "We think that the consistency of Kunik is reached first by not cutting the curds too small, and second, by carefully handling the curd to keep its velvety texture."

The amount of care involved in making Kunik attests to its superior quality and makes clear why it's worthy of being paired with a century-old sparkling French beverage. Like Champagne, Kunik has much to do with its terroir — the soil of the land can be reflected in the milk thanks to the varied natural diet of the cow and goats. In fact,

it's named after the first goat that Flanagan had on the farm.

After being aged for 14 days in Flanagan's caves, Kunik is sent to the market where it can be purchased at restaurants, like Alain Ducasse's restaurant Adour in NY, Blantyre Hotel in Lenox, MA, and Bern's Steak House in Tampa, FL, and stores coast to coast. For a full list of retailers and restaurants, check out Nettle Farm's Web site. Kunik can be purchased in one of two sizes: 5.5 to 9 ounces or 10 to 16 ounces. And if for some reason you can't find Kunik in your area, then your New Year's guests (or hosts) will be more than satisfied with the more readily available Brillat-Savarin, Explorateur and Pierre Robert and Saint André.