

Quesos Españoles

1. Monte Enebro

Made by a single producer, Rafael Baez, of Avila in Castilla y Leon, this bizarre and exuberant goat cheese is shaped like a log but is said to resemble the leg of a mule. The rind composed of ash and mold means insistent flavor, more like a blue cheese than anything else. The damp, cakey, acidic paste near the rind is fierce, with unmistakable overtones of black walnut. Inside, the core remains salty, lactic, and soothing. A relatively new cheese on the scene, Monte Enebro won top goat cheese in Spain in 2003. That insistent flavor is pacified by sweeter wines made from the charming Muscat grape.

2. Garrotxa La Bauma

Pronounced ga-RUCH-ah, this moist and cakey Catalonian import is fast becoming Spain's most famous goat. The La Bauma brand is crafted by Tony Cueva in the foothills of the Pyrenees. The northern proximity explains its similarity to French sheep cheeses like Pyrenees Brebis. They share a semi-firm texture and sweetness but Garrotxa offers a white pepper piquancy and looks like a river-stone. A velvety grey mold coating lends a woody aroma, but is not so ideal for eating. Pair with Cava; the clean lactic qualities strike harmony with Spain's sparkling white.

3. Amarelo de Beira Baixa

It may look like those soft, slurry sheep cheeses from southern Spain, but it's not! Named for the interior region of Portugal where it's produced, a mixture of raw sheep and goat milk yields this semi-soft, slightly unctuous round with a buttercup-yellow rind. The clean, slightly acidic flavor is rich and fatty. After some time, if you are silly enough not to finish it, the cheese will get all oozy on you, and the cloth in which it's bound for support may get lost in the paste. Eat the cheese, not the cloth!

4. Roncal

An ancient raw sheep milk cheese from Novara in the Basque territory near the border of France. Pressed, aged paste develops a fuller, more gamy flavor than Manchego, to which it is often (mistakenly) likened. Its wheel size and aging conditions share greater similarity with unsmoked Idiazabal (rarely seen in the U.S.). The aroma is musty and distinctly lanoliny.

5. Queso de Valdeon

Often passed off as another famous Spanish blue, Cabrales, we proudly display our Valdeon for what it is: a bold and spicy blue made from seasonally blended milk of goats and cows that graze the Picos de Europa Mountains in Castilla y Leon. We prefer it for its dense veining and balance of salt and spice, compared to the often inconsistent and over-the-top rusticity of Cabrales. Valdeon makes a pretty package with its powdery white rind peeking out behind a protective layer of sycamore or oak leaves. It's a hearty blue that loves fresh fruit and strong red wine or sherry.