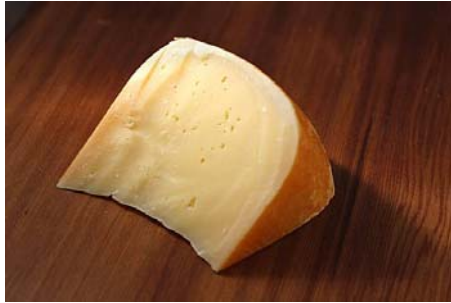


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Rimrocker a cow's milk surprise from goat farm

October 03, 2010 | By Janet Fletcher



Rimrocker is made from organic Jersey cow's milk.
Credit: Craig Lee / Special to The Chronicle; styling by Natalie Knight

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Rimrocker, a new creation from Oregon's Tumalo Farms, surprised me when I spotted it for the first time this summer.

This 5-year-old enterprise made its name with aged farmstead goat cheeses, "farmstead" indicating that the milk came from the farm's

own herd. But this wasn't a goat cheese and it wasn't farmstead.

Made with organic Jersey cow's milk that Tumalo Farms purchases, Rimrocker is one barometer of this company's strong premiere. Demand for its goat cheeses has been robust, but it takes time and a lot of capital to build a herd.

When I wrote about the creamery two years ago, the farm had 400 goats. Now it has 700, but it's still not enough. It takes 18 months between the birth of a female goat and its first usable milk, and Flavio DeCastilhos, the dairy's founder, says he can't grow his herd fast enough to meet demand and can't find local goat's milk to purchase.

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So he devised the cow's-milk Rimrocker, which will change to a mixed-milk wheel as his goat herd grows. He already has some mixed-milk Rimrockers in the aging room, so they should be in the marketplace within three months.

In the meantime, I am enjoying the cow's milk version. Weighing about 10 pounds, Rimrocker resembles a classic young Dutch Gouda, with rounded edges and a coated exterior. Instead of wax, which cloaks many mass-market Goudas, Tumalo Farms uses a breathable polymer that allows the wheel to continue to develop over time.

Internally, the cheese is pale gold with a dense texture that is silky when the cheese is shaved, more creamy or even fudgy when sliced. The fragrance converges around dairy aromas, like fresh cream, caramel and warm butter.

Rimrocker, matured for two to three months, doesn't have the crystalline texture of well-aged Goudas, but its grilled-cheese-sandwich aroma and sweet finish have a lot of appeal. I am curious to see what the addition of goat's milk does to it.

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Rimrocker is more compatible with beer than with dry wine. The creamy, malty Boont Amber Ale from Anderson Valley Brewing Co. is just about perfect with it.

Look for Rimrocker at Say Cheese and Cowgirl Creamery Ferry Plaza in San Francisco, the Pasta Shop in Oakland and Berkeley, and Oxbow Cheese Merchant in Napa.

Next up: Robiolina, a fresh mixed-milk cheese from Northern Italy.

Janet Fletcher is the author of "Cheese & Wine: A Guide to Selecting, Pairing, and Enjoying" and "The Cheese Course," both from Chronicle Books. Contact her at food@sfchronicle.com or at www.janetfletcher.com.

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