2025

INSPIRATIONAL Cheese RETAILERS

SPONSORED BY

LE GRUYÈRE SWITZERLAND AOP



Cream of the crop

Meet the passionate retailers championing fine, artisan and specialist cheeses



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Welcome

Welcome to the fifth edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, brought to you by the teams behind *Speciality Food Magazine* and Le Gruyère AOP.

We adore putting together this guide, which showcases cheese retailing specialists from across the UK – each of them unique, but sharing common ground in their utter passion and dedication to offering the best quality, best experience, and best knowledge.

Crafting cheese is an edible artform – these cheesemongers being carefully curated galleries, where the nuance of every variety (from colour, to shape, provenance and, of course, flavour) can be discovered and embraced by customers through the experience they offer.

Join us across the following pages, as we applaud the fine work they do to keep the spirit of cheesemaking in the UK, Europe and beyond alive.

CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS | DIGITAL EDITOR
charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com

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Editor
Holly Shackleton, 01206 505110
holly.shackleton@artichokehq.com

Digital Editor
Charlotte Smith-Jarvis, 01206 505981
charlotte.smith-jarvis@artichokehq.com

Art Director
Lee Whiteford
lee.whiteford@artichokehq.com

Published by
Artichoke Media Ltd,
Global House, Global Park,
Moorside, Colchester
Essex, CO1 2TJ

COMMERCIAL

Senior Account Manager
Jessica Brett 01206 505901
jessica.brett@artichokehq.com

Senior Account Manager
Louise Barnes 01206 508629
louise.barnes@artichokehq.com

Accounts
artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

Publisher
Sam Reubin 01206 505936
sam.reubin@artichokehq.com

artichoke

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP



BROAD BEAN



THE CAMBRIDGE CHEESE COMPANY


THE CHEESE SHOP



CHEESES OF MUSWELL HILL

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





How We Put This Guide Together

Speciality Food is delighted to have joined forces with Le Gruyère AOP to present *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* for the fifth year.

Both teams are longtime champions of independent and specialist cheese retailing, working hard to support the passionate and dedicated professionals who are at the very heart of the fine food industry.

It gives us an immense sense of pride to once again present this publication in homage to the expertise of the UK's best cheesemongers.

Across the following pages you'll gain insight into how and why some of Britain's finest cheese retailers were founded, what excites them about the industry, what their customers love, and inside tips for success.

HELEN DAYSH
HEAD OF MARKETING UK AT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

It is a great honour to once again join forces with the team at Speciality Food to celebrate some of Britain's most remarkable cheese retailers.

At Le Gruyère AOP we never fail to be inspired by the sheer determination and passion demonstrated by the people behind these businesses, who work tirelessly to champion the best cheeses from across the world.

Every business highlighted is a worthy and deserving recipient of this accolade and we hope you'll join us in congratulating them all.

We all know how demanding running an independent business can be, yet these individuals stand out amongst the crowd, having made it their duty to put artisan cheeses on a pedestal.

They are not simply retailers. These independents are bastions of the artisan cheesemaking world, helping to preserve its rich history by acting as ambassadors, telling stories from the farms and cheesemaking rooms, and ensuring every single piece is stored, cut, sold and wrapped with the attention it deserves.

Thanks to their passion and adoring customer bases, it wasn't hard to uncover these businesses. We put the word out across the fine food industry and beyond via an online survey, offering cheese lovers the opportunity to put their favourite independent cheese purveyor in the spotlight.

The strength of nominations was, once again, phenomenal this year, and choosing just 15 to highlight was a difficult task. Each and every business featured brings something different to the cheese retailing landscape.

We also had the pleasure of revisiting some of the indie cheese retailers we featured in the 2024 edition of this publication, to see what they've been up to over the past 12 months. From lessons learned, to inspiring tips, these catch-ups are also well worth a read.

We hope you find this year's edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* insightful, informative and joyful.



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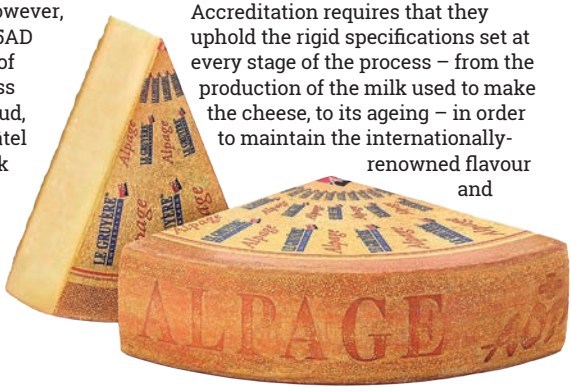
AS INTEREST IN ALPINE CHEESES CONTINUES TO SOAR, NO COUNTER SHOULD BE WITHOUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

For centuries, the cheesemakers behind Le Gruyère AOP have worked tirelessly and passionately to create one of Switzerland's best-loved exports. Produced in the Western cantons of the country to stringent AOP standards, the cheese has become an icon for cheese lovers across the world.

Le Gruyère AOP's history stretches far beyond the creation of protected food accreditations, however, all the way back to 1115AD when the inhabitants of five neighbouring Swiss regions – Fribourg, Vaud, Jura, Bern and Neuchâtel – transformed the milk from their cattle into cheese. In 1762 the cheese gained its now-famous name, yet without the quality standards which were set to be established across Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, the cheese was often imitated, which led to lesser-quality wheels.

Once its AOP (Protected Designation of Origin) credentials were established across Europe, the quality of Le Gruyère AOP never wavered.

The 160 dairies and 55 Alpage (mountain pasture) dairies which produce Le Gruyère AOP play a vital role in its enduring appeal. Accreditation requires that they uphold the rigid specifications set at every stage of the process – from the production of the milk used to make the cheese, to its ageing – in order to maintain the internationally-renowned flavour and



AN AWARD-WINNING CHEESE

Le Gruyère AOP is the winner of numerous awards, and no wonder – its consistently unique and perfectly balanced flavour, as well as its production by skilled cheesemaking experts who utilise knowledge and techniques passed down the generations, mean that this ancient cheese has become a modern-day icon of the cheese counter. Indeed, it is the only cheese that has won the title of Best Cheese in the World at the World Cheese Awards five times.

DID YOU KNOW

Le Gruyère AOP and the town and region of Gruyères are named after a crane (orgrue in French) which purportedly landed on the shoulder of the warlord who founded the civilization. You can see depictions of the crane on the statues, flags, and doorways of every village in the area, as well as on several wheels of the cheese



quality of Le Gruyère AOP. Distance and speed are also key; milk must be produced within 12.4 miles of the cheesemaking site, and must have been transported from the farm to the vat within 18 hours.

Due to the simplicity of Le Gruyère AOP – its only ingredients are milk, salt and animal rennet, not to mention time and expertise – the environment from which the milk comes is also of paramount importance.

Thankfully, the Swiss pastures on which the cows graze are full of natural herbs and flora, imbuing the cheese with a unique taste of the Alps. This attention to quality doesn't pause during the colder seasons; instead of silage, the cows are fed hay when temperatures are too low for grazing.





HOW TO CUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

To portion a wheel of Le Gruyère AOP, cut it in half using a cheesewire then into quarters using a double-handled knife. Halve these quarters into eighths, then cut the top half into three wedges and the bottom into six slices. Wrap the cut portions with clingfilm in order to avoid the cheese coming into contact with the air.



> CREATED IN THE WESTERN CANTONS OF THE COUNTRY TO STRINGENT AOP STANDARDS, LE GRUYÈRE AOP HAS BECOME AN ICON FOR CHEESE LOVERS ACROSS THE WORLD

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

Relish the Best of Switzerland

Thanks to its well-rounded flavour – think subtle sweetness perfectly balanced with complex savoury notes and a slight nutty note – Le Gruyère AOP has long been one of the world's most revered cheeses, making it a must-stock mainstay of any well-crafted cheese counter. Not only does it taste great, but Le Gruyère AOP is available in a number of different varieties (find out more on this page), meaning that every individual will find something to love about this ancient yet thoroughly contemporary cheese.

THANKS TO ITS UNIQUE FLAVOUR AND DELICIOUS VERSATILITY, LE GRUYÈRE AOP IS AN ICONIC PRODUCT OF THE ALPS

TASTING NOTES

Whether your customers are seeking a perfectly balanced milder cheese or a punch-packing burst of savoury flavour, Le Gruyère AOP has it covered

- Le Gruyère AOP Classic - aged six-nine months: nutty, floral and sweet, this option is ideal for those who prefer milder cheese
- Le Gruyère AOP Réserve - aged 10 months and above: aromatic and flavourful, this variation boasts a unique complexity and slight crystalline crunch
- Le Gruyère AOP Alpage is seasonally available

A CHEESE FOR EVERYONE

Award-winning Le Gruyère AOP is suitable for all cheese lovers to enjoy, thanks to being naturally gluten and lactose-free – so nobody, including lactose-intolerant or coeliac customers – need miss out on this one-of-a-kind cheese.

HOW TO SERVE

Thanks to its carefully balanced flavour and optimum texture, Le Gruyère AOP is a versatile addition to your customers' kitchens and events. It can play a starring role on a cheeseboard, of course, or you can be inspired by its Swiss heritage and create a fondue.



LE GRUYÈRE AOP IS A DELICIOUSLY VERSATILE INGREDIENT; VISIT GRUYERE.COM/EN/RECIPES FOR A HOST OF SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Introducing 2025's Inspirational Cheese Retailers

> "THESE RETAILERS STRENGTHEN THE BRITISH CHEESE SCENE"

It gives us the greatest pleasure to reveal this year's inspirational cheese retailers. The team really has been inspired by each and every one of them - their life-changing stories, determination, passion, creativity, and enduring love of all things cheese.

We hope you'll enjoy reading and discovering more about what motivates them, how they set the stage for success, and the cheeses their customers can't get enough of.

The cheese scene in Britain is certainly strengthened by their enthusiasm and dedication.

NORTH

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Crosby Cheese & Charcuterie

LOCATION: CROSBY **FOUNDED:** 2021
FOUNDER: LEE ZEVERONA



Crosby Cheese & Charcuterie founder, Lee Zeverona, has dreamt of cheese his whole life. While his friends made a beeline to supermarket sweetie aisles in the mid-80s and early 90s, instead he says he was drawn to the cheese selection. "I was always on the lookout for different, strange ones – something a bit different. I always wanted to try them," he smiles.

Lee's 20-year career carved out in financial consultancy couldn't be further from his childhood aspirations, but they were finally realised during the Covid period when the cheese lover decided he had to get moving to make his dreams a reality, once and for all.

A vision in cheese

"What I wanted to create had to be a small local shop, serving the local community," Lee says of his vision for the business. "I just felt like I had to provide cheeses for this community, who hadn't really had access to speciality cheeses before. I could get people here eating more cheese, discovering and learning about different cheeses and gaining more knowledge, rather than going to a supermarket to buy something more generic. It all comes from my love of cheese."

Between 80 and 90 varieties sit in the counter. "It can be a little overwhelming, seeing that many cheeses as soon as you come in, but if you're unsure, you can try before you buy," Lee says. "And we've always got a good stock of charcuterie items, condiments, crackers, wines and beers."

Supporting British factors highly here, with 60% of cheeses from the UK – the other 40% being continental 'must-haves'

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BEING A CHEESEMONGER

It's seeing repeat customers that gives Lee the most job satisfaction. "Having them come back is brilliant. Especially when they've bought a piece of cheese they've not tried before, really enjoyed it, told everyone else about it, and come back wanting more advice on what to buy next."

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> I JUST FELT LIKE I HAD TO PROVIDE CHEESES FOR THIS COMMUNITY, WHO HADN'T REALLY HAD ACCESS TO SPECIALITY CHEESES BEFORE

everyone expects to see when they walk into a cheesemongers.

Lee notes he's getting asked more and more for sheep's and goats' milk cheeses. "A lot more people are saying they're intolerant to cow's milk and they want an alternative, so I'm making sure we listen and stock more of those. And Alpine cheeses is an area I try to push as well – they're some of my favourites."

Being unique in his area, Lee says listening to customers, and reflecting what they like and what they need in the counter has stood the shop in good stead, particularly amongst Millennials, who are regular customers here. "We have lots of married couples with children living in the local area. They might not get out much, and they're looking for a nice cheeseboard and a nice bottle of wine. As opposed to going to a supermarket, they are coming into the shop. That's our biggest demographic."

Doing what it takes

To be a great indie cheesemonger, you simply have to know what you're talking about, says Lee. "It's about giving people the information about the cheeses. If that information isn't available, they're not going to try something new."

Speaking of new, rotating the counter regularly factors in as well. "We get asked for new cheeses all the time and we're always swapping them out. But we can tell customers all about the new cheeses, how and where they're made. We can't stock all the cheeses in the world, but if people come in wanting something specific, we'll do our best to get it in for them."

Lee says his knowledge since opening has grown tenfold. "As well as educating our customers, I'm still learning all the time. It's my priority to know as much as I can about all our cheeses to offer the best possible service."



BEST-SELLING CHEESES



DELICE DE BOURGOGNE
A moussy, velvety, bloomy-rinded cheese, crafted with added crème fraîche.
fromagerie-lincet.net



MONTAGNOLO AFFINE
An award-winning, soft triple cream blue cheese, with a rich, luscious texture.
champignon.de



KALTBACH CREAMY
A wonderful cave-aged semi-soft cheese, with added cream for richness.
emmi-kaltbach.com



PICOS BLUE VALDEON
A striking, powerful blue Spanish cheese with a spicy, piquant flavour profile.
quesospicosdeeuropa.com

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THE EDUCATOR

Cheese and Bees

LOCATION: WALPOLE ST ANDREW
FOUNDED: 2022 **FOUNDER:** PETER DAVIS



Nature surrounds Cheese and Bees – perched within farmland on the cusp of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Originally opened by beekeeper Peter Davis, today it's in the hands of a new family – with another Peter (Pooley) at the helm.

Peter fell into shopkeeping quite by accident, he jokes, having previously worked in the motor industry. "I've always enjoyed good food, and socialising around food," he says, "and when I heard Peter was struggling to keep the shop going and might have to close it, I told him it was such a shame, and gave him lots of ideas. They needed a website. Their social media presence was low. There was so much he could do. He said, 'I think I've found the man to take the shop over!'"

At the time, Peter knew very little about the cheese world or what it would mean to work in retail, but he took the change of pace in his stride, and says he is loving being part of what is such an inclusive, friendly industry. "I find it all so fascinating too. There's such a culture around cheese throughout history, and then there's the science – minor changes can make a dramatic difference. All these things resonated with me from the start. I was hooked!"

Sharing knowledge

Being rural, but with good links to the three surrounding counties, Cheese and Bees has become a destination shop – for its immense range (around 130 changing cheeses at any time), and for the knowledge and sheer enthusiasm Peter imparts from behind the counter.

"What was very apparent from the start," he says, "is people don't know what goes into some of the products they buy. I wanted to have a huge stock list so we could be a destination to try lots of cheeses, to draw customers in, so I can share what real, artisan cheese is with them. We can open their eyes without being too preachy about it." Regular tastings and talks allow Peter to connect further with customers.

"We can make recommendations from personal experience. People like the fact I can tell them not only where a cheese is made, but the name of the head cheesemaker, and exactly how it's made. It's that personal connection."

In a bid to push his education mission further, Peter set up *A Cheesemonger's Guide* on YouTube. The series follows him on his travels across the UK, meeting cheesemakers and giving the inside scoop on where and how their products are made – putting a face to many of the varieties his customers will see week-in, week-out.

"The idea is to keep it nice and down to earth, to try and get some engagement

PLANS FOR 2025

Peter continues on his travels for *A Cheesemonger's Guide*, and along the way is collecting content and creating recipes for a cheese cookbook he plans to publish. "So, we might visit Cheddar Gorge, write about their cheeses, and show how to use them. We're currently in discussions with a couple of people to put that together and our plan is to have it out in 2026."

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with everybody of every age and demographic, and to put British cheeses on the map."

Sparking joy

Alongside video, Cheese and Bees now has a website, and regularly posts on social media, in a bid, Peter says, to reach a younger audience, enticing them to try, and to ultimately love, speciality cheeses.

This approach appears to be working, with the shop's fan base of curious



under 30s growing. "We had a young couple come in who said they didn't know a lot about cheese and didn't know where to start. It was a bit of an unusual experience for them to be able to come somewhere and ask questions – they'd always bought from a supermarket. We went through some options with them, and let them taste a few things, and they've become regular customers of ours. Every time we get a new cheese in they come to try it."

Keeping on top of 'the new' is a key strategy for Peter, who is always being asked about what's trending, what's rare or limited edition, or made in small batches. "People want to try cheeses from very small artisan producers," he continues. "They don't want something they can find in the supermarket, and they're getting more adventurous. Because we have such a good selection, we can deliver that experience for them."

He adds that, in a way, what's available in the shop isn't just led by the seasons and cheesemakers, but by the customers, who can put in suggestions and ideas – most of which he'll follow up. This allows him to curate a counter that truly has something for everyone, from the expected to the unusual. That's the fun and great joy of being a cheesemonger, he smiles.

> "PEOPLE LIKE THE FACT I CAN TELL THEM NOT ONLY WHERE A CHEESE IS MADE, BUT THE NAME OF THE HEAD CHEESEMAKER, AND EXACTLY HOW IT'S MADE"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



NORFOLK WHITE LADY
A creamy Brie-style cheese made in small batches using the farm's own sheep's milk.
wiltonfarmnorfolk.co.uk



MONKLAND
A hard cheese with a light, crumbly texture and gentle acidity.
monklandcheesedairy.co.uk



RED FOX
A deeply flavoured, complex, savoury Red Leicester with a distinctive crunch.
beltonfarm.co.uk.



SCOOPING GORGONZOLA
An utterly indulgent, rich cheese to be spooned onto crusty bread.
casarrigoni.it

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PASSONATE NEWCOMER

Victoria's Cheeses

LOCATION: ELY
FOUNDED: 2024 **FOUNDER:** VICTORIA DUNTHORNE





Victoria Dunthorne still feels like she has to pinch herself when she arrives each day at her eponymous cheese shop, nestled into an ancient, historic crypted building in Ely.

"This was never my grand plan," she explains. "It's chance, and life circumstances that brought me here."

Victoria has loved cheese all her life, and spent a few years working behind the counter for other cheesemongers before taking the leap (encouraged by friends and family) to set up her own cheese box delivery service last March.

Trundling around Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, delivering fine cheeses to eager customers, really sparked something within her. "I could just see how many people were becoming appreciative of good food, and knowing where it comes from. When you sell them a piece of cheese, and tell them the name of the person who made it and the story behind it, ultimately they tell those stories to the people they are giving the cheese to or sharing it with. I love that," she says, adding that a bricks and mortar location was never on the horizon - until a friend happened upon "this darling little shop".

A fresh start

Victoria and her husband crunched the numbers and ploughed their savings into the premises – and she hasn't looked back. "You know when people say, 'do something you love and you'll never work a day in your life?', I never used to believe that, but now I get it. I absolutely get it!"

Being a Grade I listed building of special interest, there were limits as to what could be achieved when conjuring the idea for Victoria's Cheese, but customers are loving the look, which she describes as "ecclesiastical meets 70s caravan". Ambient goods are neatly arranged in antique cabinets, while pops of colour shine through in soft furnishings. It's a look that, Victoria says, stops customers in their tracks, before they queue up at the 3m-long cheese counter.

The ambience is, she adds, cosy and intimate – it's not big by any means – but this helps foster conversations. Often visitors sitting down at one of the two dine-in tables overhear Victoria discussing a type of cheese at the counter, and end up asking her for a wedge to-go before they leave.

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Victoria's stringent attention to detail meant that, having gained a five-star hygiene rating following an EHO visit, her shop was selected as part of a scheme carrying out further hygiene testing. "I wondered what I was letting myself in for, but all my samples came back perfect. It was just that assurance I'm doing everything right, which is a worry, especially when you're dealing with raw milk." Victoria's top tip for keeping the products in her counter perfect, is to store a couple of blocks of lard in amongst them, using these for probing, rather than going directly into the cheese. "It's a no-brainer," she says.

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Something for everyone

There are some cheeses Victoria simply won't put in her counter (including blended), and she had intended to stick to lesser-known, small artisan makers, but concedes there are certain types her customers demand, which has dictated what she sells. Snowdonia Cheese Co's Rock Star is one, and Belton Farm's Vintage Red Fox is another. "Other than these, and a few continentals like scooping Gorgonzola, Alp Blossom and a gorgeous two-year aged Spanish goats' cheese, I stick to selling British. At the moment people are loving Yoredale, Yoredale Blue and Appleby's Cheshire," she says. Victoria describes her selling style as open and encouraging. "I always want people to try the cheese and discuss it with me. If I send them home with a piece they haven't tried, they might not like it, and probably won't come back. But if they try a sample and enjoy it at home, they'll more likely come back, buy more, and try something else."

They may be only two in number, but the tasting tables at Victoria's Cheeses have proved an important part of the selling experience. "We change the cheeses every day or every two days, and the pickles might change two or three times a day," Victoria explains. "We like to include some unusual things people woudn't normally thinkoff, like strawberry crisps with a really nice soft cheese."

These pairings, and having an opportunity to explore cheeses beyond a small sample at the counter, further help customers in their buying decisions. And when Victoria introduced a cheese tasting evening, it sold out within two hours, with the further two events she then planned, also selling out within a couple of days. There's a huge appetite, Victoria thinks, for foodie experiences, and cheese tastings fit the bill perfectly, being informal, fun and affordable.

Indies matter

Independent cheese retailers' invaluable advice and knowledge sets them apart. Customers trust them. This is something Victoria takes seriously. "Customers who are pregnant look to me to find out which cheeses they can eat.

"And I did a special order box this year of Spanish cheese for a lady who couldn't get to her friend's wedding in Spain because she was going through chemo. These are those touches you won't find in supermarkets. And people want that service. It matters to them," Victoria adds.

> "YOU KNOW WHEN PEOPLE SAY, 'DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE AND YOU'LL NEVER WORK A DAY IN YOUR LIFE?', I NEVER USED TO BELIEVE THAT, BUT NOW I GET IT. I ABSOLUTELY GET IT!"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



GORWYDD CAERPHILLY
A champion British territorial with creamy, buttery notes.
trethowanbrothers.com



YOREDALE
Small batch traditionally made Wensleydale, crafted with raw milk.
curlewdairy.square.site



GORGONZOLA DOLCE
A must if you want to bring a touch of theatre to the counter.
tosigorgonzola.com



ALP BLOSSOM
A beautiful hard-pressed Alpine cheese coated with edible flowers and herbs.
hofkaeserei-kraus.de

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THE EXPERIMENTERS

The Cheese Shop

LOCATION: NANTWICH **FOUNDED:** 2020
FOUNDERS: NICK BIRCHALL AND CHRIS HOGAN



"People love cheese in this area – cheese runs through their veins more than blood," Nick Birchall, co-founder of The Cheese Shop in Nantwich chuckles.

With cheesemaking stretching back centuries in Cheshire, everyone knows someone, or has someone within their family, who's worked in the county's dairy industry – it's a topic locals take very seriously indeed.

Nick himself has fostered a love of cheese from a young age (coming from generations of cheesemakers) and he wears this affection proudly on his sleeve at the business he founded with his partner Chris Hogan early in 2020. Those visiting The Cheese Shop are guaranteed two things; one, an awe-inspiring display both in the counter and through the impressive glass wall; and two, that they will be met with warmth, friendliness and exuberance by both Nick and Chris, who adore chatting cheese, and providing what they call "good old fashioned service".

An education

As well as attracting self-professed foodies, Nick says he and Chris are delighted to help educate locals and visitors on the topic of cheese. Often those conversations are first sparked when people experience a glance through the glass wall to their cheese storage room for the first time. "We get so many 'wows' and people asking us what's in there," Nick smiles. "They can see all the big Stiltons and Cheddars on display. It's a great feature of the shop. We have a lot of school parties come in to see the cheese too. We're just around the corner from Nantwich Museum, so little ones will learn about local history there, then come into The Cheese Room for a taster of Cheshire cheese afterwards, finding out what 'real cheese' is." It's a mutually beneficial agreement. "Often it gets the mummies and daddies coming in later on!"

Nick says they're proud to have a shop right in the heart of traditional British cheesemaking. "We're always shouting about British cheeses."

A tasting journey

That's not to say European varieties, or even cheeses from further flung locations are off the board.

During lockdown The Cheese Shop got through an enormous amount of Raclette, Nick recalls. "People couldn't get out on their skiing holidays, so they were buying half or whole wheels. I was going through so many wheels a week. People were saying 'what the hell are you doing with it all'?"

"Since lockdown people have been travelling a lot more. They try cheeses, then come in and ask, 'can you get in this?'. We always try our best, and we're constantly looking for new cheeses. For the last two years we've brought cheese back from America, which people love and want more of. When I tell them it's American they say, 'oh really?', then they try it and can't believe how good it is!"

MAKING A SHOW OF IT

Alongside David Williams of Westry Roberts Cheese, and following a successful pilot last year, The Cheese Shop organised The Nantwich Cheese Awards at Nantwich Show this summer. It's the first time cheese has been judged in Nantwich since the long-feted cheese show moved to Staffordshire in 2021. "It's been so missed," Nick says. "The amount of people who came in and asked why the show left Nantwich is huge. It's the home of cheese! We're really proud of it, and hope it will do really well."

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The counter at The Cheese Room firstly champions products from the North and the rest of Britain, before foraying off to foreign climes, with 120 to 130 usually on display, until Christmas when that number almost doubles. "We ramp it up like nobody's business," Nick laughs. "When I'm ordering I'll say, 'how are we going to sell all this cheese?', and it's frightening but it does sell. People queue for an hour, and we'll have four people on the counter. It's crazy! I sold 15 whole Nantwich Blues last year!"

Serving with style

Nick is the first to admit he's a talker, but that's part of the appeal of a visit to The Cheese Shop, he thinks. "People like to come and talk, but we also like to listen, and to tell them about the cheeses. It's very personal service. A lot of people we've got to know through the shop, so we'll ask how they're getting on, or how their family are."

This attention, he points out, should never waver, even at busy, peak times. "We never rush anyone through. At Christmas my big thing to all the staff is telling them not to look up at the queue outside. You've got to concentrate on the person in front of you. They might only come in once a year, but if we make their experience pleasurable, they will keep on coming back."

It's an approach that works, with the shop attracting a wide demographic of regulars, including a teenager who pops in weekly to spend his pocket money on cheese.

"I think people are fed up with the large multiples holding sway," Nick thinks. "They've realised if they go into an indie, they're keeping their money in the area and getting better quality and service. "Yes, it will be slightly more expensive, but they're fed up of being pushed around in a supermarket. I think they also realise, if they don't use the high street, they'll lose it, and that's so important."

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



MRS BOURNE'S CHESHIRE CHEESE
A tangy, slightly crumbly, mature-tasting Cheshire cheese of distinction.
hsbourne.co.uk



NANTWICH BLUE
Soft, creamy and mild with a luxurious texture.
hartingtoncreamery.co.uk



EXTRA MATURE CHEDDAR
Traditionally made Somerset Cheddar with a delicious savoury taste.
quickes.co.uk



BARON BIGOD
Luscious and velvety with earthy notes of mushroom.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk

> AT CHRISTMAS MY BIG THING TO ALL THE STAFF IS TELLING THEM NOT TO LOOK UP AT THE QUEUE OUTSIDE. YOU'VE GOT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU. THEY MIGHT ONLY COME IN ONCE A YEAR, BUT IF WE MAKE THEIR EXPERIENCE PLEASURABLE, THEY WILL KEEP ON COMING BACK

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE AFFINEUR
Metz Cheesemonger

LOCATION: FARSLEY **FOUNDED:** 2024
FOUNDER: EMMANUELLE METZ



PERFECT PARTNERS

Emmanuelle won Best Cheese Display at the Great Yorkshire Show this year, as well as golds for Cheeseboard, Grazing Board and Celebration Cake. "I love creating them," she says. "I've been raised that you eat with your eyes. It's important to have quality, but also for things to look beautiful. I challenge myself all the time with shapes and colours – I'm non-stop creating.
"One of my favourite pairings is with Glaston Tile from White Lake Cheese. It's a really young, fresh goats' milk cheese that's brilliant with candied lemon and verbena. When you can take a cheese and do something gently to complement it, it's magical."

A Parisian native, Metz Cheesemonger founder Emmanuelle Metz says she has an ingrained, innate love for good food, and (more importantly) sharing good food.

This epicurious nature, and her fascination around the quality and provenance of ingredients, is what drove Emmanuelle last year to take the leap, opening her own shop, where she adores pushing boundaries, experimenting, and bringing immense joy to customers with cheeses they, quite simply, cannot find anywhere else.

It was a career running her own photography studio, specialising in food, that prompted the entrepreneur to delve further into the cheese world. And having spent time working for a large cheesemaker in France, and later (five years ago) for a cheesemonger in Leeds upon moving to the UK, she says she felt a sense of longing to run her own business again.

Emmanuelle adds she couldn't have found a better location than the buzzy Sunny Bank Mills complex in Farsley, just outside Leeds. "It's a village within a village," she explains. "It reminds me of the East side of Paris, with artisan breweries and artists. It's so vibrant." Renowned for being a part of the area's historic fabric industry, she adds, "It's like the stones have been soaking up the energy."

A local champion

You'd think, having Gallic roots, Emmanuelle would dedicate much of her counter to French cheeses. But supporting local and being in tune with the farmers and producers around her, gives her a sense of purpose and meaning. "There is so much to say about cheese in the North," she explains. "So



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my first point when I was setting up the shop was to keep it local. I want to support artisan cheese." French consumers, she adds, "have no idea about the range of cheeses made here".

Buying from makers who share her passion for 'slow food' gives Emmanuelle so much satisfaction. "I'm against having any type of cheese that is mass produced. Having a knowledge of what good food is is so important. I want to share with people that buying a block of Red Leicester from the supermarket won't make you happy. But buying a local, artisan variety will feed you more."

Cheese with a twist

A standout feature of Metz Cheesemonger is that several cheeses have been matured by Emmanuelle herself. Winning a prize in last year's Affineur of the Year awards has only fuelled her desire to pursue the art of affinage further. Creating 'signature' cheeses is part and parcel of cheesemongery in France, and it's something she felt very strongly should feature in the shop. She's been making cheeses injected with local gin, washing cheeses with Yorkshire whisky, and even partnered recently with a chocolatier to cap cheese thinly with dark chocolate. "It's such a nice thing for me – exploring, and pushing the limits," Emmanuelle says.

A shop of surprises

Experience comes first at Metz Cheesemongers. Whoever walks through the door is treated like family, and this sentiment has garnered Emmanuelle a league of fans, from older shoppers living alone who want to sample 50g of cheese and have a chat, to teenagers popping in for a snack.

Being approachable and "breaking the fear" of visiting an independent cheese shop, is crucial too. "There is something more human," about visiting a specialist retailer compared to a supermarket. "People care about the customers, and they can feel that."

As well as great service, Emmanuelle says the fact no two visits to the shop are the same intrigues customers, who pop in regularly to see what she's been up to. "I'm changing the range quite a lot. I want to surprise people. None of them can say, 'oh, I've tried all your cheeses', yet. We always have something new and that's important to me. I want to spark joy. That's the main thing in life. I want people to be happy and surprised. Life is hard, so it's nice to be able to bring a tiny bit of joy through food.

"We're like a huge family. I like having people around the table at home, enjoying food, and it's exactly the same when I sell cheese to customers."

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



SUMMERFIELDS ALPINE
Made in summer with organic milk from grass-fed Shorthorn cows. Warming, honied and moreish.
camphillvillagetrust.org.uk



GLASTON TILE
A versatile, fresh, creamy goats' cheese suitable for sweet and savoury dishes.
whitelake.co.uk



BRIE DE MEAUX DONGÉ
A renowned raw cow's milk cheese with a rich, tangy, earthy flavour.
intervalexport.com



BUFFALO BLUE
A well-balanced small-batch blue with a smooth texture and light flavour.
shepherdspurse.co.uk

> "I WANT TO SPARK JOY. THAT'S THE MAIN THING IN LIFE. I WANT PEOPLE TO BE HAPPY AND SURPRISED. LIFE IS HARD, SO IT'S NICE TO BE ABLE TO BRING A TINY BIT OF JOY THROUGH FOOD"

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THE FUN ONES

All in a Pickle

LOCATION: LONDON
FOUNDED: 2016 **FOUNDERS:** NICOLA AND DARREN KELLAR

"We like to have fun here," says Darren Kellar wryly. He and wife Nicola have become a must-visit double act in their small corner of Westmount Road, London, putting smiles on customers' faces for nearly a decade.

The couple (Darren formerly worked for the MOD and Nicola in HR and recruitment) joke that All in a Pickle is a lengthy extended honeymoon. They did, after all, open the shop nine months after tying the knot - their passion for cheese celebrated by guests who gifted them a 2kg wheel of Godminster.

"Coming up with a name for it was difficult," Darren says, revealing they didn't have branding for the business close to the opening day. "I called Nicola at work and said, 'we really need to decide on a name for the shop and quickly'. Her reply was, 'I can't talk now, I'm all in a pickle'." And it stuck.

The best of British

What makes All in a Pickle unique in its location, says Nicola, is a dedication to predominantly British cheeses, complemented by around a dozen firm European favourites. "We try to stock things you can't get in the supermarket," she adds. "If you came into the shop today, that's what you'd experience. You'd be able to find lots of cheeses you won't see elsewhere." Customers are encouraged to try everything by the closeknit team, which includes Nicola's sister and best friend from school. "It's like a little family," she beams.

"Customers like our banter," Darren adds. "Everyone has a laugh in here, and we've got lots of regulars who've become good friends."







WASTE NOT

In addition to cheese and other deli items, Nicola and Darren manage stock by using cheeses that might be getting close to their best before date in their range of homemade pies and pasties, from steak and Stichelton pie, to quiches filled with vegetables and Black Bomber. "It's great for customers to try our cheeses in products – it helps inspire them," Nicola says.

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Triumph over adversity

While Covid was, of course, a difficult time for everyone, Darren said it was the making of the shop. The few tables and chairs they'd had set up in a cafe arrangement were taken out for social distancing, and sales went up by around 300%. "We were so busy, we don't know how we kept up. Nicola was working her full-time day job, and the deli."

"I think the reason Covid impacted us was you couldn't get pasta or other essentials in the supermarkets," Nicola says. "We posted on Instagram saying, 'we've got pasta', and people came in and realised everything we did. They thought we were a cafe, but we could show we were a deli, and all the things we offered.



We introduced grazing platters and it was absolutely mental! I've got no idea how we did it."

The business continues to grow through word of mouth, and the couple's entrepreneurial spirit, such as supplying local pubs with cheese labelled with the All in a Pickle name, has further increased their local presence.

Befriend your wholesaler

Despite being small, Darren and Nicola say they punch above their size when it comes to sales, attracting a wide and loyal demographic, who appreciate the fact they can pop in for a chat and to buy just 50g of cheese if they like – there's no pressure.

"Rowcliffe is our main supplier, and our sales rep always talks about us whenever she's meeting her boss. When he came here, he couldn't believe how small we were because we buy so much cheese."

Rowcliffe was heavily involved in helping to set up their cheese counter, and it's a relationship that's continued to blossom, with the team teaching them how to keep cheese in peak condition, and how to wrap it properly. "We still argue about how to wrap cheese," Darren smiles.

"Working so closely with them has been key for us," Nicola adds.

> "WE TRY TO STOCK THINGS YOU CAN'T GET IN THE SUPERMARKET. IF YOU CAME INTO THE SHOP TODAY, THAT'S WHAT YOU'D EXPERIENCE"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



BARON BIGOD
Luscious and velvety with earthy notes of mushroom.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



BEAUVALE
A decadently creamy cheese, with defined blue veining and a delicate blue taste.
cropwellbishop creamery.co.uk



KALTBACH CREAMY
Aged in sandstone caves, this delicious cheese has added cream, for a melt-in-the-mouth texture.
emmi-kaltbach.com

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THE CONTINENTAL EXPERT

Relish Delicatessen

LOCATION: ST HELIER, JERSEY
FOUNDED: 1995 **FOUNDER:** FLORIAN DE PORAY (SINCE 2010)







BUYING THE BEST

Florian's mission to source fine cheeses and accompaniments stretches to his wine selection too. It's important, he explains, to be thoughtful about such things. After all, many customers are stopping by because they're hosting guests and want to impress. It's worth investing in interesting and exciting wines shoppers can pair with their cheeses. "We have a lovely selection of wines and Champagnes, generally from small vineyards and farms. They're very different from anything you can get elsewhere. People come in because of that," he says.

Wine, food and eating well have been a defining thread throughout most of Relish Delicatessen owner Florian de Poray's life. Having spent decades travelling around Europe, being exposed to the best ingredients, he says his first foray into retail (buying the business from its original founder in 2010) was always going to centre around absolute quality – including sourcing the very best cheeses he could lay his hands on.

"Cheese is one of those things I find quite extraordinary," he says of his love of fromage. "When I was younger, studying fine art in Florence, I was reading a Medieval manuscript, and found the people there got an awful lot of cheese from England. I thought it was strange. In the 80s, cheese in England wasn't considered very good. Why would they come over here to get it? It transpired it was really good!"

Relish was a small but reputable shop when Florian took the reins – mostly selling wines, with a few cheeses and accoutrements. "I felt this was something I could take on that wasn't too scary to begin with! The idea was to gently expand it, because my knowledge of the market wasn't very good. It had to be done in a slow way."

Little by little he's put his stamp on the business, including closing (due to Covid restrictions) the restaurant and original location, and moving to new premises.

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A different kind of customer

Indie shoppers in Jersey have quite different expectations to those on the mainland, Florian explains. Being so close to France, "people are much more interested in French cheeses than English, as much as I try to push them". The ratio, he says, is 20-30% British to 70-80% continental.

Increasing the number of cheeses at Relish was a no-brainer for him. "The very obvious thing was that cheese was the direction for the shop. It's a small island, with only 100,000 people, there's not much competition." Around 100 varieties fill the counter at any time, with goat and sheep cheeses continually rising in popularity, he says, adding that a number of customers have asked for these due to their intolerance to cow's milk. "They've become really important."

He continues, "The way people are shopping has changed considerably since I've been here. I realised early on you have got to give people a reason to come in. You have to be able to offer them something that's different from any other type of operation."

Florian's art background has come in handy. "I've tried to ensure it [the shop] is as artistic as possible. It's beautifully laid out, with beautiful music. The whole thing is a beautiful experience. And that's the way you have to go with marketing shops these days. You always have to be different to everyone else."

Most items (especially cheese) at Relish aren't available elsewhere on the island. "You also have to make sure the quality is absolutely top notch. Everything has to be the best!"

Controversially (for some) this ethos means Florian will sometimes eschew local produce. He doesn't want to sell just any old cheese, crackers or chutneys – they have to be remarkable in taste and presentation.

Building trust

Florian's approach to selling cheese is to create a relationship of trust with customers. "When they come in, they trust you have good taste and, generally, if they have a good time, haven't been pressurised, and got everything they wanted, they will come back. If they wanted a hard cheese, we'd get them to try three to four different ones to see what they like."

The team spend a lot of time talking about the cheeses, where they're from, and how they are different from one another – and it's something customers (be they locals or tourists) appreciate. "Giving tastings is essential. It includes customers in the buying experience. They have to be involved in it," he says.

What he loves most is sharing his enthusiasm with everyone. "To see what they like and don't like, and to guide them. It's a lovely thing."

> "I REALISED EARLY ON YOU HAVE GOT TO GIVE PEOPLE A REASON TO COME IN. YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO OFFER THEM SOMETHING THAT'S DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER TYPE OF OPERATION"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



DELICE DE BOURGOGNE
A moussy, velvety, bloomy-rinded cheese, crafted with added crème fraîche.
fromagerie-lincet.net



GORGONZOLA DOLCE
Yielding and soft with a sweet, mild but tangy flavour and gentle blue veining.
latteriadicameri.it



STILTON
Multi award-winning hand-crafted cheese made using milk sourced within 1.5 miles of the dairy.
colstonbassettdairy.co.uk

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THE ENTHUSIASTIC BEGINNER

The Cheese Shop

LOCATION: MORPETH
FOUNDED: 1990 **FOUNDER:** DANIELLE CAMERON (2025)



You cannot fail to miss The Cheese Shop in Morpeth. The store's dandelion yellow frontage is a beacon, attracting both locals and tourists alike – many of whom are inevitably drawn in by the irresistible smell of cheese.

Founded 35 years ago, the business has been a familiar fixture in the town for a couple of generations now, gaining many regular, loyal customers. And as of this summer it's in the hands of Danielle Cameron, who took over the reins from John and Sheila Holyoak as they retired after just over a decade at the helm.

A new start

Food lover Danielle bought the shop after coming into some inheritance money. Running her own business, she thought, would give her the flexibility to work around her family and childcare commitments – and what's more fun than working with cheese?

"It's just up the road from me, it was doing well, and I thought I just had to give it a go," she smiles.

"It's a well-loved shop too. When regular customers found out it was being sold, they panicked, thinking it would turn into something else. When they realised it was still going to be a cheese shop it was such a relief for them – it's a very busy place."

Absolutely key to getting the new version of The Cheese Shop off the ground, says Danielle, has been working alongside the existing staff, who have remained with her. "Most of them have been here for a few years now and if they weren't here to teach me, I'd be lost. It was also nice that the old owners stayed on for two weeks to help us transition. I've already learnt so much," she adds.

Plans for the future

In addition to handing out samples of cheese (something that hadn't happened in the shop for quite some time), Danielle says she's ringing the changes within the business by ensuring the staple cheeses (ones that sell regularly like Montagnolo



WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHEESEMONGER?

"I'm still learning the ropes – so I would say learning and educating yourself all the time," says Danielle. "But also, you do need to offer samples. The previous owners didn't do that and it's what sells the cheese and helps customers to make their decisions."

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and Black Bomber) are supported by regularly changing new stock, so the variety of 80 to 100 types always has something different for customers to try.

"The stock has been the same for quite a while, so it's nice to have new things," Danielle says. "Customers are liking sampling flavours of Snowdonia Cheese they haven't been able to buy here before, like Amber Mist, Rock Star and Bouncing Berry."

Danielle has also taken the shop into the 21st Century by reviving its social media accounts and introducing it to TikTok. "TikTok is such a big platform, and I'm building the Facebook back up too. I'm already starting to see more and more people interested in us. An example is we just started to sell Doddington ice cream. I put that on TikTok and sales picked up."

Adding local wines, spirits, ales and ciders to The Cheese Shop, to complement the cheeses, is also on the cards.

The local connection

Speaking of local, while many of the folk who pass through The Cheese Shop's doors are from the area, Morpeth is firmly on Northumberland's tourism map and, as we all know, tourists love taking a slice of their holiday home with them.

The shop's cheese counter is split between European and British (from Le Gruyère to Stilton), but there is also a skew towards local makes to target this market. "The main ones we have are from Northumberland Cheese Company. That's only 15 minutes up the road from us. And we have lots of cheeses from Yorkshire, including Harrogate Blue and Yorkshire Blue too."

Enhancing the local offering further are butter and eggs sourced nearby, Northern honey, and regionally sourced chutneys, as well as plum bread from Whitby.

Sourcing and making discoveries has become a real pleasure for Danielle, who says she loves everything about being a fledgling cheesemonger. "From speaking to the customers, to learning with the customers. It's all great fun."

Her next step (after conquering TikTok that is) is to take The Cheese Shop exprience out to markets and events, with plans for a giant cheese cart underway. Watch this space!



> "WHEN REGULAR CUSTOMERS FOUND OUT IT WAS BEING SOLD, THEY PANICKED, THINKING IT WOULD TURN INTO SOMETHING ELSE. WHEN THEY REALISED IT WAS STILL GOING TO BE A CHEESE SHOP IT WAS SUCH A RELIEF FOR THEM"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



BLACK BOMBER
A creamy extra mature Cheddar with seriously intense and deeply savoury notes.
snowdoniacheese.co.uk



NETTLE
Made to an original Northumberland recipe using Northumberland milk, the nettles act as a natural rennet in this delicious cheese.
northumberland cheese.co.uk



HARROGATE BLUE
An internationally renowned, golden-bodied blue cheese, matured for a minimum of 10 weeks to deliver lots of depth and layered complexity.
shepherdspurse.co.uk

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND

THE KNOWLEDGE SHARERS

The Cambridge Cheese Company

LOCATION: CAMBRIDGE
FOUNDED: 1994 **FOUNDER:** JACKY AND PAUL SUTTON-ADAM







WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHEESEMONGER?

Understanding cheeses is crucial, says Jacky. "We're in a Grade II listed building and downstairs is perfect for ageing hard cheeses, while the chiller area is more high humidity for soft cheeses. We keep a keen eye on all of them and understand what they are capable of, how they might change with the weather or seasons, and how to get them to be their best. It's a bit like being a nurse, saying 'how are you feeling? Are you a bit dry today?'. We react to those signals early enough to ensure our cheeses are sold at their peak of perfection."

Jacky and Paul Sutton-Adam know more than a thing or two about cheese. After all, they've had three decades to learn the tricks of the trade since opening the doors to The Cambridge Cheese Company in 1994. For them, it truly is a passion. But founding the business was done rather on a whim.

Having both been made redundant from their careers in the wine industry ("the best fun ever"), while considering their next step they made a visit to a cheese shop in Norwich - and it sparked something in them both.

"Paul said, 'I think we could do a cheese shop'," says Jacky. "And I said, 'yes, let's do that'."

It took a year to find the right premises (and their feet). "I thought we could just buy a shop, set it up, job done," Jacky recalls. "Paul had more foresight. He did a cheese diploma so he could have 'cheese dip' after his name ... but he's never actually done that," she laughs.

A landscape of change

The idea for the shop, explains Jacky, was to "do cheese, and do it well", in the style of a European food seller. "In France you buy meat from the boucherie, bread from the boulangerie, cheese from the fromagerie. That vision of just being able to focus on one thing appealed to us".

At the time of opening, the cheese industry was newly invigorating itself after the milk quota disaster, she continues. "Milk over and above would not get any subsidy. A lot of British farmers producing milk were looking

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP



around for granny's old cheese recipes and trying their hand at them."

The Cambridge Cheese Shop really has seen the world of cheese change over the last 30 years – watching old makers disappear into obscurity, while new ones take their place.

It's something Jacky says she's been reflecting on recently. One of the most notable things that's changed is the lack of availability of raw milk cheeses. "Covid was very cataclysmic in terms of British cheesemaking too. Hospitality had to shut overnight, and it was responsible for a third of UK cheese production. All of a sudden, all this cheese was available with nowhere to sell it." Campaigning by public figures opened people's eyes to British cheeses and stimulated the market for homegrown varieties, Jacky adds.

Today the shop stocks more than 200 cheeses in rotation, with a ratio of 40% British to 60% continental. "People still come in and say, 'have you got anything new I haven't tried before?'. It's a never-ending piece of work to keep up with that!"

A matter of taste

Everybody who sets foot in The Cambridge Cheese Shop is greeted, regardless of whether they're browsing, or actively approaching the counter, says Jacky. "Normally they come in with lots of questions – they could be looking for a cheeseboard for 30 people, or have a friend who is vegetarian and want all vegetarian cheeses.

"What they want is incredibly varied, and our job is always to help them find the perfect cheese."

Samples have a starring role to play. "We use tasting samples a lot – probably more than most. If there was a time and motion study done, they would say, 'you're spending too much time tasting with customers'," she jokes.

The same level of care is lavished upon the 700 or so other products in store. All are trialled by the staff, so they can give informed advice to customers. Staff are also trained in how to pair cheese with other cheeses, and the art of creating a cheeseboard.

Diverse demographics

Cheese shops might once have been the epicurean playgrounds of gourmands, but today that's changed dramatically, says Jacky, who is seeing lots of younger shoppers in store – likely inspired by social media, and the trend towards grazing boards and dinner parties.

Her team (mostly in their 20s and 30s), have a part to play in inspiring their peers too. "They are mad keen and passionate about cheese, and up to speed on what the current tastes are. Back in the day, people couldn't get enough of strong, punchy, sock you between the eyes flavours. But increasingly the trend amongst younger clients is towards things that are milder, more creamy, and luxurious."

That's what draws these customers in. And this presents an opportunity, Jacky says, to show them how multidimensional cheese can be. It's more than soft, hard, strong or mild. "Our tool of the trade is our expertise, introducing them to other flavours and cheeses they might not have thought about before." This approach and building of trust ensures many newcomers to the shop remain regulars, and hopefully will continue to visit and draw upon the team's knowledge for years to come.

> "OUR TOOL OF THE TRADE IS OUR EXPERTISE, INTRODUCING THEM TO OTHER FLAVOURS AND CHEESES THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT BEFORE"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



BARON BIGOD
An unctuous, yielding, sumptuous Brie-style cheese with earthy notes.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



ISLE OF MULL TRADITIONAL FARMHOUSE CHEESE
This moreish Cheddar-style cheese is savoury, rich and almost boozy with a hint of fruit.
isleofmullcheese.co.uk



TRUFFLE MANCHEGO
A small batch, artisan made sheep's milk cheese with a generous ripple of black truffle.
vegasotuelamos.com

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THE JOY BRINGER

Must Be Crackers

LOCATION: DUNFERMLINE **FOUNDED:** 2023
FOUNDER: AILEEN WRIGHT

WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT BEING A CHEESEMONGER

"My customers are amazing," says Aileen. "We meet some of the most resilient people, the kindest people. If they usually come in twice a week, they'll tell us when they're going on holiday so we don't wonder where they are. There's one chap, who's visually impaired, who'll call up and say, 'I'll be in on Thursday, can I have a little cheese box? Here's what I like and don't like'. That trust and rapport we have is so special. I love it."

Must Be Crackers founder, Aileen Wright, fizzes with excitement as she talks about her absolute adoration of cheese, retail, and her "wonderful customers".

In only two years, the cheesemonger has amassed leagues of adoring fans, drawn to the shop for its constantly changing, interesting selection, and for the truly, truly, genuinely warm welcome and 'unstuffy' environment Aileen and her team have created.

Coming from a large Irish family (spending a lot of time buying lovely things with her dad in a nearby old-fashioned deli) Aileen understands what it means to nourish and nurture people – to make them feel at home in her presence. And it's this that is central to the success of the business.

From a career in sales and retail, Aileen opened a haberdashery shop in Dunfermline 10 years ago. When it moved to bigger premises, a little spark ignited within her. Could she turn the smaller, original haberdashers into the ultimate food shop? The answer is yes.

"If you live here and you wanted nice cheese, you had to get in the car and drive 30 minutes to a farm shop or into Edinburgh," she says. "I thought, if I want my own food life here to be better, surely the rest of Dunfermline wants it as well?"

A place for everyone

Aileen wanted Must Be Crackers to offer an elevated shopping experience, but at the heart of her plans was that the shop must be accessible to everybody. "It couldn't be so fancy that it was intimidating," she says. "Or put off people because they can't pronounce the names of the cheeses. It can be a scary experience to visit a cheesemonger! Equally, Dunfermline has a wide range of mixed means people. Sometimes



LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





they'll just want to come in and buy a slice of cheese because they live on their own. I didn't want people to be afraid, if we've cut a piece of cheese that's £10 and they've only got £3 in their pocket, to ask for a third of it instead."

It's Aileen's ultimate goal, she says, to share the wonderful world of cheese with as many people as possible. "I do like to say I sell joy for a living."

A tide of change

What sets Must Be Crackers apart, Aileen continues, is the sheer turnaround of cheeses, and the variety. "You won't find stacks and stacks of Cheddars," she explains. "We have around 40 to 50 cheeses at any time, and because there's nothing like us around here and the choice beyond us is a supermarket, we have to offer variety."

She starts by sourcing from Scotland, then the rest of Britain, Ireland and beyond. "The cheeses from Britain and Ireland never cease to amaze me," Aileen says. "But I also have to keep things like Gruyère and Dutch Goudas, which are always popular."

Over the last two years the shop has rotated around 200 cheeses. "And for Dunfermline to have had access to that many types is amazing. People love the choice, and we always have customers coming in asking what's new. They rely on us to not stand still and I'm constantly on the hunt for something different and interesting. I go down lots of rabbit holes to find new things."

Cherishing customers

The vibrant, fun atmosphere at Must Be Crackers is as inspiring for the staff as it is customers, says Aileen. They take pride in being part of people's buying decisions. "I love entertaining, and when a customer comes in and says to us, 'I've got 10 people coming for dinner, help me out', it's fantastic to have those discussions about what they're cooking, what they like, and what they don't like, so we can help them get it right. It's like shopping, but you're not spending your own money," she laughs.

To be a good cheesemonger, she thinks, "you have to bring the customer into your world and allow yourself to be a part of their world".

She continues, "You have to have your door open in every sense of the word." As well as chatting and being welcoming, that extends to your displays too. "We try to have really good information for people here. We colour code our labels. So, there's a red dot on raw milk cheeses and a green dot on everything pasteurised. It means straight away, someone coming in who can only have pasteurised cheeses knows what they can buy. It's a lot less intimidating and helpful."

This thoughtful touch is just one of many ways Aileen and the rest of the team at Must Be Crackers put customers at ease. "It's so simple, but it makes the world of difference," she says.

> "YOU HAVE TO BRING THE CUSTOMER INTO YOUR WORLD AND ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE A PART OF THEIR WORLD"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



ST ANDREW'S FARMHOUSE CHEDDAR
A rich, rounded, punchy, Cheddar-style cheese made with the farm's own raw milk.
standrewscheese.co.uk



ALP BLOSSOM
This is a real customer favourite. A supple Alpine cheese, covered in attractive dried flowers.
hofkaeserei-kraus.de



THE TRIPLE ROSE
A multi award-winning triple cream cheese from Northern Ireland, made using milk from a single herd.
ballyliskcheese.com



CASHEL BLUE
Melt-in-the-mouth, rich and savoury. This Irish blue is outstanding and much loved.
cashelblue.com

LE GRUYÈRE SWITZERLAND AOP

THE BRITISH CHEERLEADERS

Green & Lovely

LOCATION: EAST MOLESEY
FOUNDED: 2022 **FOUNDER:** PAUL AND LUCY DONOUGHUE



When Paul Donoughue returned to the UK, having spent two hard years opening a restaurant and cocktail bar in the Seychelles (no mean feat, he says) following a career in hotels, catering and commercial property, he wasn't sure what would come next.

"After that experience I didn't want to go into another restaurant or cocktail bar for a while," he jokes. "I was definitely looking for a change, so I went to see a career consultant, who asked, 'if you could do anything you wanted, what would it be?'"

His top three were an airline pilot, rock star or deli owner. "She looked at me and said, 'well, two of those are unrealistic'. I came home to my wife with this piece of paper and she said, 'well, there we are then'."

That was back in 2020, and it took the couple a while to find the perfect premises for Green & Lovely, while planning, and deciding on exactly what the shop would be.

"My vision," says Paul, "was that I wanted to get good food where we live in East Molesey. I thought, 'why do I have to get in the car and drive to find it?'. We're surrounded by gorgeous places – Hampton Court Palace, lots of lovely restaurants and bars - but we didn't have a decent deli-style shop. I wanted to build the kind of place I'd go to. Not just for the food, but for all the elements of it."

Paul says he was drawn to the idea of supporting the British farming and dairy industry and small producers. "I know how hard they struggle and thought it would be brilliant to help these guys out. Great food, from great people – those are the pillars we started from."

Learning on the job

Paul and Lucy weren't the first people to open a food shop without retail experience, but it didn't make it any less unnerving. When they welcomed their first customers in 2022, with a modest range of 25 cheeses, Paul says he was terrified. "I'd never done this before. I didn't know what would sell and what wouldn't," he reveals. "But as I was serving people cheeses, giving them little tasters, I saw this magic in their eyes – like they were tasting a little piece of heaven. I thought, 'this works'."

Through tasting and experimenting,



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BEING A CHEESEMONGER

"For me, what I love most about being a cheesemonger is realising how happy good cheese makes people. It's just a joyful thing, and I have such fun with the customers because of the atmosphere in the shop. We talk to them like human beings, and have a laugh with them. We enjoy the experience as much as they do," says Paul.

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





the couple have learned what customers appreciate, and increased their offering over and over again.

A welcoming experience

The first thing that hits you, undeniably, as you enter Green & Lovely is the smell of cheese, Paul says. "It's not a big shop, around 300sq ft. The counter is right in front of you, and the other fridges are filled with lots of lovely things. Everyone gets a warm welcome, and we instinctively know if they want to wander around for a nosy, or if they're after something in particular."

Paul says their approach to sales is genuine, honest and friendly. "We are keen and enthusiastic and want to make the experience with us as good as possible. When we sell cheese, we give a lot of information, for example, so if you're having a dinner party, you might remember a few snippets of what we said, so you can tell your guests and impress them."

It's a method that clearly works, with 80% of customers being return visitors. "It makes me feel warm and fuzzy we're doing the right thing," Paul smiles.

The best of British

Green & Lovely's counter is weighted heavily towards British cheeses. It's crucial, Paul thinks, to support the nation's makers. "It's one of the most important heritages of this country, and it's pure passion. Nobody goes into cheese for the money. We do what we can to explain to customers how important the industry is. We should never lose it, in the same way we should never lose festival culture, art culture or band culture."

All the classic continental cheeses are, of course, in stock, he adds. "You've got to have your Gruyère, scooping Gorgonzola and Munster. We don't have European Brie, though. Instead we have Welsh Brie and two English Bries. You have to stock Baron Bigod these days!"

Paul spends a lot of time thinking about the counter, ensuring all countries in Britain are represented – with a particular fondness for Welsh cheese, which he thinks is "absolutely brilliant".

"When people come in and say, 'oh, boring Cheddar', I say, 'get your mouth around this'. Keen's isn't boring. Westcombe isn't boring. These are incredible cheeses. I love sharing that knowledge and spreading happiness through cheese because, my God, what incredible varieties we have!"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



DELICE DE BOURGOGNE
An absolutely decadent, mousse-textured, light, fluffy, triple cream cheese.
fromagerie-lincet.net



BLUE CLOUDS
Creamy and mild, this blue is made in small batches from a single herd. Similar to a young Gorgonzola.
chris@balcombedairy.co.uk



RACHEL
A multi-layered, complex, flaky hard goats' milk cheese with bags of flavour.
whitelake.co.uk

> WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO EXPLAIN TO CUSTOMERS HOW IMPORTANT THE INDUSTRY IS. WE SHOULD NEVER LOSE IT, IN THE SAME WAY WE SHOULD NEVER LOSE FESTIVAL CULTURE, ART CULTURE OR BAND CULTURE

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE TRADITIONALIST

The Cheese Shop

LOCATION: BRADFORD UPON AVON
FOUNDED: 2015 **FOUNDER:** CHRISTOPHE BONNEAU



Enjoying and sharing food is part and parcel of life when you grow up in France, says Christophe Bonneau, who today indulges his enthusiasm and passion for fine food and drink at The Cheese Shop in Bradford Upon Avon – celebrating a decade in business this year.

From a career in hotels and catering, working in Michelin restaurants, he bought his first shop in 2006, before selling it on and investing in his new retail home.

What attracted Christophe to Bradford Upon Avon was the fact there wasn't anything similar to what he wanted to create in the area. "I thought there was the opportunity to be a little bit more specialist here. Instead of being a deli first, I wanted to be a cheese shop first. To make a point of it." The concept's been very well received by locals and tourists alike. "We are small, but we offer very good quality," he says. Cheese comes first, of course, complemented by the best products to go alongside it, from chutneys to biscuits and wine.

Keeping it traditional

The Cheese Shop's offering is wide-ranging, Christophe says, focusing primarily on British cheeses, before diving into the continental classics through the seasons, from wheels of Gruyère, to wedges of Emmental, and Brie de Meaux. "These, we have to stock, but the main structure of the counter is British," he explains. "And I always try to bring in local cheeses because we're quite a tourist town. People like to take something back with them if they are on holiday here. For us, a main one is the Bath Soft Cheese Company, and also the various Cheddars from around here."

British cheeses, he says, have come on a long way in the last 20 years. "I've seen them slowly getting better and taking off. They're definitely becoming more and more popular."

The experience of visiting The Cheese Shop is incredibly individual, he continues. "I'm a one-man-band.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHEESEMONGER?

"It's the quirkiness and the decor for me", says Paul. "And having an impressive counter. We probably have 80 to 90 cheeses on the counter on a regular basis. They are all of good quality. And customers always come here from word of mouth. It means we must be doing something right."

> "PEOPLE DON'T FEEL TOO INTIMIDATED COMING HERE. IT'S WELCOMING AND IT'S MORE OF AN EXPERIENCE THAN A SUPERMARKET. I THINK IT'S THE RIGHT PRICE, FOR THE RIGHT PLACE"

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP







When people come in, they just see me. I can only serve one person at a time, so others have to usually browse and wait their turn, but they don't seem to mind that at all. Running this on my own, it's very personal service."

A friendly face

Being at the helm of the shop every day means Christophe has come to know his regular customers well, building a strong rapport with them. While the key demographic is retirees, he says he enjoys seeing a younger audience of cheese buyers towards the end of the week too. "We have a lot of families come in then. Everyone has busy lives now. People find it difficult to shop during the week, so we tend to see younger people at the weekends and also for lunch. I do a takeaway lunch every day, baking quiches, making a few salads, I've got bread all the time so I can make them a cheese and chutney baguette."

Giving customers an additional reason to visit (ie feeding them on the spot) is a great way, Christophe thinks, to expose them to the cheeses he sells. While they might not buy at the time, the introduction to artisan cheeses while they're buying a salad or sandwich plants a seed in their mind, so they know exactly where to go should the desire to conjure up a cheeseboard or seek out a really good cheese for after dinner strike them.

What the cheesemonger loves best about his job is it's something he's created himself. "I enjoy what I do, really." It's not a pretentious shop, he adds. "And I think it's well priced compared to some places. There's something for everyone, from eggs to a little baguette. It doesn't break the bank. That's why, I think, I'm busy. People don't feel too intimidated coming here. It's welcoming and it's more of an experience than a supermarket. I think it's the right price, for the right place."

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



VACHERIN MONT D'OR
A yielding, melty, luxurious seasonal cheese. Something very special for the cooler months.
fromageriedumontdor.com



WESTCOMBE CHEDDAR
One of only three classified Artisan Somerset Cheddars. Nutty with hints of citrus and caramel.
westcombedairy.com



MONTAGNOLO AFFINE
An award-winning, soft triple cream blue cheese, with a rich, luscious texture.
champignon.de



SAINTE-MAURE-DE-TOURAINE
Fresh and full-flavoured, this delicate French goats' cheese has a thin, ash-coated rind.
rodolphelemeunier.fr

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND

THE FLAVOUR SEEKER

Cheeses of Muswell Hill

LOCATION: LONDON
FOUNDED: 2009 **FOUNDER:** MORGAN MCGLYNN CARR



BEST-SELLING CHEESES



MONTGOMERY CHEDDAR
A traditional, earthy, savoury, delicious West Country Farmhouse Cheddar, revered for its depth of flavour.
montgomerycheese.co.uk



ROSEMARY MANCHEGO
A contemporary twist on a much-loved classic Spanish cheese. Fabulous with a glass of wine.
vegasotuelamos.com



BRIE DE MEAUX DONGÉ
Irresistible. Regarded as one of the finest French cheeses, with notes of mushroom.
intervalexport.com

You might recognise Cheeses of Muswell Hill owner Morgan McGlynn Carr. The bubbly cheese aficionado is a regular on C4's Sunday Brunch, where she shares her resolute passion for pairings with hosts Tim and Simon, and millions of viewers.

When she's not in front of the camera or working on a cheese-themed book (her last, *The Complete Cheese Pairing Cookbook*, was a massive hit), Morgan is in her happy place – her tiny (but mighty) shop in London's Muswell Hill.

It is so much more than a business to Morgan, who cut her teeth working at the cheesemongers as a teenager, having dreamt of being a shopkeeper since she was a little girl.

Taking on the premises at the tender age of 19, becoming a business owner only made her fall more head over heels for the industry. "When I started to meet the cheesemakers and producers, learning the heritage, and their stories, I knew my big focus would be to never have cheese in the shop from people I hadn't had interaction or long conversation with, and that's still true today," she says.



A star is born

Being one of the youngest cheesemongers in the UK, Morgan immediately sparked interest when she took on the shop, and within two years found herself and Cheeses of Muswell Hill featuring in an hour-long TV special with Nigel Slater. "That was the start of me really being able to bring somewhat of an old traditional shop into the 21st Century, getting people more interested in artisan cheese."

It was an awards ceremony that clinched her (so far) decade-long relationship with C4. "We were up for Best Shop in Muswell Hill. Me and the girls had gone along very very excited. We were there with our favourite shops - real institutions - and went and won it. We dined out on that free Champagne, running around with our award in the toilets.

"Then someone came in and said, 'come out girls', and the Mayor of London announced the Best Shop in London. We won it –and the first thing I did was drop the award! We had an interview on TV, and by this point I was very tipsy. The next day they (C4) were like, 'come on Sunday Brunch'." And the rest is history. "They're very much like family now. I just love them."

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





A unique experience

A visit to Cheeses of Muswell Hill is made all the more special thanks to the stunning property that houses all the goodies within. "It's a really rare shop," Morgan explains. "It's an Edwardian building, and the curved glass is probably worth more than my house!"

At a mere 7m by 2m, it can be described as bijoux, and this, naturally, lends itself to super personal service. "You'd be lucky to get three people in at once," Morgan laughs.

"When you walk in, because of the size, you're overtaken by cheese in the best possible way. I sometimes say 'just open the doors'. We don't need advertising, people follow their nose to us."

Around 220 to 250 cheeses find their way into a counter, with Morgan's cheese obsession and quest for newness meaning the fridge changes all the time, bursting with seasonal and speciality varieties, products she's personally in love with, and even exclusive cheeses made for the shop. "It's only the best. I say 'the nicest of the nice'."

The split is 50% British and 50% 'rest of the world', because Morgan really does scour the cheese universe, feeding her own desire to procure flavours and formats rarely seen in other cheesemongers. There are, of course, the classics from France, Spain and Italy, but on any given day customers might also see cheeses from Norway, Germany and America.

"We have a great rapport with our clients, which means if there is a cheese I love that I think it could be changed or added to, they will make it for me," she adds. "Things like our pistachio Brie, which is insane. We can say 'this will work really well', and a couple of weeks later it's in the shop."

Building communities

Being viral on TikTok (with videos getting up to 5 million views) Morgan has managed to, of course, build her customer base. After sharing a clip of her pistachio Brie recently, for example, she says a 17-year-old got in touch, wanting to know the shop's opening times. "I've achieved what I wanted," she says, "to appeal to so many more people than you'd usually find in a traditional cheese shop".

That's not to say regulars (who are, like her suppliers, akin to family) are left behind. "We have the doctor who delivered me, the doctor that delivered my baby, old teachers. We've got this amazing, melting pot of customers and it's so exciting. I love it.

"Sunday Brunch has given me this ridiculously large platform to share my love of cheese with people all over the country and of all different ages, which I'm so grateful for."

> "WE'VE GOT THIS AMAZING, MELTING POT OF CUSTOMERS AND IT'S SO EXCITING"

WHY I LOVE BEING A CHEESEMONGER

"I just love my shop," says Morgan. "It's such a big part of my life. It's my baby, and I'm really proud of it. It's just so special. I love the customers, my girls, and being able to share my passion with everyone else. People here have known me for such a long time. I can't imagine my life without this, and without the community."

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE PROBLEM SOLVERS

Gershon & Sons

LOCATION: OLD AMERSHAM
FOUNDED: 2022 **FOUNDER:** KATHERINE GERSHON



WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BEING A CHEESEMONGER

Besides the cheese, it's the people who make being a cheesemonger so enjoyable, says Katherine. "People often turn up tired, or busy, or stressed with a problem, and I love that they always leave happy, and confident what they've bought will taste great and look great. Helping people to entertain, and making entertaining easy and fun – that's what food should be about."

Some of Gerson & Sons founder, Katherine Gershon's, earliest memories revolve around cheese. On the beach in Cornwall, eating a slice of Red Leicester with Branston Pickle as a child. Or family holidays in France as a teen, where she and her sister (both learning French at school) were dispatched to buy croissants, exploring boulangeries and fromageries along the way.

Katherine's passion for travel and food ultimately led her to a career in the travel industry, but when the Covid lockdowns hit "it was like groundhog day".

With spare time on her hands, Katherine says, she decided to learn more about her other love – cheese - taking on the Academy of Cheese Level 1 course, and doing occasional work for other local cheesemongers. "Opening my own shop was going to be 'kill or cure'," she recalls. "Then I saw Dame Deborah James, the Bowelbabe, doing her final interview on the BBC, saying you only get one life, life is precious. I watched that on the Friday, and by Monday I'd put an offer on this shop. The rest is history!"

A beautiful experience

Katherine says she's very lucky that, not only is she positioned amongst several other brilliant independents, but she's also endowed with such a visually appealing shop. "Because it's an old apothecary we have beautiful cupboards, several hundreds of years old, around the shop with Latin written across them."

All that rich heritage has been preserved, while giving the premises a contemporary twist – from a bold navy colour scheme, to the striking Italian glass counter. "You get that real contrast between feeling like you're walking into an old shop, and a modern-day approach," Katherine explains.

She's worked long and hard to source the cheese selection, and is proud that customers are returning over and over again not only for the cheese, but for the service.

"Everyone who works for me is brilliant," Katherine says. "Someone might come in and say, 'help, I've got a dinner party for 12 and I don't know



LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





how much cheese to buy', or, 'my daughter's got a French boyfriend, what should I serve them?', or they might be gluten free. We pride ourselves on being able to help solve their problems."

A world of cheese

The counter split between British and continental cheeses at Gershon & Sons is about 60/40 - erring on the side of European varieties. "I'm a huge champion of British, and I really believe in supporting small producers and farms, but if you miss out continental cheeses, you're losing out on sales," Katherine says. "If people come to you and you don't sell Gruyère, Comté and Taleggio, they'll walk out and go to the supermarket!"

She works as closely as possible with specialist suppliers, or direct with makers if she can. "When we opened, Ballylisk was winning awards. I called up Mark Wright, who makes the cheeses, and said, 'I really like them, who can I buy from?', and he said, 'me'. Customers can't get enough of it. It's nice having something different you can't buy in most British cheesemongers, let alone supermarkets."

Working with the seasons

Consumers don't often realise some cheeses are seasonal. This is something the team like to educate shoppers about at Gershon & Sons. And it's always wonderful to know there are certain varieties to look forward to at particular times of year. "In winter we might have more Beaufort and Raclette. In summer more Alp Blossom. Jumi have a cheese called Mountain Meadows with grasses and tiny blue Alpine flowers on the outside – that looks very pretty." There's something lovely about championing seasonal cheeses, Katherine adds. "It makes them more special."

Though there are some concessions to her method - one being scooping Gorgonzola. "Two years ago I decided to stop selling it in October. I was like, 'it's a summer cheese'. But there was practically a riot in the shop!"

That's the other thing she finds interesting about being a cheesemonger. You really do have to listen to your regulars. "So, I'm on the fence about chilli cheese, but when you've got 10 customers asking for it, you need to stop saying 'no' and sending them back to the supermarket!"

> "IF PEOPLE COME TO YOU AND YOU DON'T SELL GRUYÈRE, COMTÉ AND TALEGGIO, THEY'LL WALK OUT AND GO TO THE SUPERMARKET"

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



THE TRIPLE ROSE
A multi award-winning triple cream cheese from Northern Ireland, made using milk from a single herd.
ballyliskcheese.com



BRIE DE MEAUX DONGÉ
A renowned raw cow's milk cheese with a rich, tangy, earthy flavour.
intervalexport.com



STILTON
Multi award-winning hand-crafted cheese made using milk sourced within 1.5 miles of the dairy.
colstonbassettdairy.co.uk

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

THE OLD SCHOOLERS

Broad Bean

LOCATION: LUDLOW
FOUNDED: 1977 (TAKEN OVER 2016) **OWNER:** IAN EVANS





If you were given a map and asked to plot out destinations renowned for their food and drink, Ludlow would certainly make the cut.

It's the perfect location for Broad Bean deli, and this is something owner Ian Evans doesn't take for granted.

Ian, who originally set his sights on fishmongery before switching to butchery, landing a position as a butcher to the Royals at Sandringham, made the move to Ludlow to be closer to family in Wales.

"The drive was five or six hours. It was ridiculous! I was trying to find a shop of my own, and my wife was a teacher. She was happy to work in a shop, but didn't want a butchers, so we compromised on a deli. We saw this one in Ludlow. It needed quite a bit of work, but there was a lot of potential. I thought, 'we can do something with that'."

Keeping it old school

"I always saw this as being an old school deli, and that stands us out from the crowd," Ian explains. "We're not a cafe or a sandwich bar selling a few deli bits. Most of the products people come in for are ingredients they, as cooks or chefs, will use at home. My ambition was to be as good as Wally's in Cardiff. I thought if we could be half as good as them we'd be OK!"

Nine years in, and the deli continues to grow exponentially. "Which means we must be doing something right. We're not the same business as we were this time last year. There's always something new coming in. Standing still is a dangerous place to be in retail nowadays."

Unashamedly a deli

Being a deli, and not offering food-to-go, is important to Ian. "It means we've got space to showcase some fantastic products. It's only a small shop, but we've got 15 different types of pasta, and many things are cheaper than the supermarket. We keep costs down, but also give people a choice of something different."

The experience of visiting Broad Bean can be an "assault on the senses" he adds. "We've got so much in here. And because the counter is at the back of the shop, you do have to do a journey to get to it!"

More than 40 types of cheese grace the chiller, and while there are always a few key offerings you'll find on the regular, like Cheddars and Baron Bigod, Ian says he continues to refresh

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHEESEMONGER?

In one word, Ian says it's passion that makes a cheesemonger stand out. "Passion for provenance. Passion for the product. Passion for the affinage and the display. For me, after a stressful day, it's therapeutic to stay after work and restock the counter. Being in the zone, enjoying the smells, textures and colours. Creating a display is important as well. You've got to remember you're not curating a 'cheese museum' - people should be excited by how your cheese looks."

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP



what's available. "I feel like that keeps customers engaged. They won't find the same cheese in the same spot every week. We try to keep it seasonal, so we're heavily stocked with goats' cheese at the moment."

A new customer base

From a display point of view, Broad Bean is a little different. Instead of a serve over counter, Ian chose a patisserie display. "It's like a large TV screen – 5ft by 3ft. The cheeses look great, and it creates a lot of engagement and conversations. We've always got tasters on the block, so we'll sample those out while people are looking. Once people try something, they tend to buy it," he says.

His customer base is largely locals, but also tourists who've flocked to Ludlow to investigate its restaurant scene. "And over the last 18 months the age range has expanded. We still get a lot of older, more affluent people in, but younger professionals are finding us – our cheese sales reflect that."

> "I ALWAYS SAW THIS AS BEING AN OLD SCHOOL DELI, AND THAT STANDS US OUT FROM THE CROWD"

Bucking the trend as being stuck in their ways with Cheddar and Stilton, Ian says it's the more mature customers who are being adventurous in their cheese buying decisions, while younger shoppers are happier to be guided. "The older people are more likely to have tried something on their travels or with friends and they'll come and ask if we've got a cheese or if we can get it in, which is great. I love it. We've got a couple of grandparents as well who set their grandchildren little food tasks, like trying 12 types of olives in a year – creating the next generation of customers. It's fantastic."

BEST-SELLING CHEESES



WOOKEY HOLE CAVE AGED CHEDDAR
Made using fresh Dorset milk, and carried by hand 200ft underground to mature and develop in Wookey Hole's caves.
fordfarm.com



BEAUVALE
A delicately textured, soft, creamy blue, with gentle veining. A great alternative to Gorgonzola Dolce.
cropwellbishop creamery.co.uk



SMOKED PERL WEN
This Welsh cheese is smoked over beech, which enhances its mushroomy, truffley notes.
cawscenarth.co.uk



SHROPSHIRE BLUE
A striking addition to any cheeseboard thanks to its bright orange colour and deep blue veining.
clawsonfarms.co.uk

LE GRUYÈRE SWITZERLAND AOP



Inspirational Cheese Retailers 2024: Revisited

> AT SPECIALITY FOOD, THE ENTIRE TEAM SHARES A PASSION FOR CHEESE, SO PUTTING TOGETHER THIS GUIDE IS ALWAYS INCREDIBLY ENJOYABLE

As well as relishing the chance to discover more about new retailers, a highlight of our calendar is checking in on previous winners to see how their businesses have been shaped by the past year.

We've found, despite tricky trading times for retailers in general - as prices for staff, energy and more increased - they have remained positive, buoyant and as determined as ever to share their love of cheese with as many people as possible.

What's keeping them on their toes in 2025? For starters, experiential cheesemongering has become a 'thing'. Consumers love cheese and wine (and coffee, and chocolate, and Port - the list goes on) events, and several of our featured retailers have upped the ante in this respect, giving shoppers more ways than ever before to discover what they have to offer.

Also clear is that a new kind of customer is emerging. As the UK experiences a boom in dinner parties and 'picky teas', so the audience for artisan cheese is becoming younger, with Millennials and Gen Z tentatively stepping into independent retail, perhaps for the first time ever. It's important, our retailers say, to embrace them, educate them, and secure them as new regulars.

Read on to find out what our Inspirational Cheese Retailers of 2024 have been up to.

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP

Birkdale Cheese Co



It's no mean feat adopting a business with an already strong and loyal following. But for John Clarke and Mark Moss, who took on what was Birkdale Cheese Centre in Southport (which had nearly 50 decades under its belt), the shop's long history served as a solid, reliable foundation for growth.

Since being handed the reins in 2021, the duo have continually driven the business forwards, each change strengthening their existing customer base, and bringing in new faces.

An increased deli offering, from rillettes to charcuterie and fine wine, has tapped into the growing trend for grazing and charcuterie boards; the business's name, logo and branding have changed under their ownership; and an increased focus on social media has breathed new life into the shop – with Mark saying social platforms have become a "strong tool" for them to reach younger shoppers, especially.

The last 12 months, he adds, have been, "really positive, with a steady increase in sales. We have attracted lots of new customers, introducing them to the world of specialist cheeses". And that world is vast indeed - the shop set aside from its competitors thanks to a bulging counter of nearly 150 varieties, with the most recent favourite being 8 Blumen (an Alpine cheese wrapped in eight different flowers).

All new additions are tried, tested and approved by the whole team, who are fully focused on customer experience, Mark says proudly. "So many people are intrigued by cheese but are frightened to branch out and try something new. Customers are free to try any cheese from the counter, and the 'try before you buy' concept builds trust and allows us to build relationships with our customers."

The team are able to build further on those relationships thanks to a series of new monthly events held at Birkdale Cheese Co, working in partnership with other local businesses, and including cheese and wine, and cheese and beer tastings, which Mark says are selling out far in advance.

These calendar highlights are a chance to help customers old and new learn more about the cheeses that are a mainstay in their baskets, thrilling new discoveries the team are dying to share, and also the shop's own four varieties – Birkdale Cheddar, Birkdale Cheddar Smoked, Birkdale Cheddar infused with Chilli and Lime, and cave-aged Birkdale Blue.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GREAT CHEESE RETAILER?

The ability to change with the market and to constantly add new lines, say John and Mark.

> "WE HAVE ATTRACTED LOTS OF NEW CUSTOMERS, INTRODUCING THEM TO THE WORLD OF SPECIALIST CHEESES"



Hamish Johnston

The Hamish Johnston name has long been considered a 'big cheese' in fine food retail. Founded by Will Johnston in Battersea in the late 90s, a wholesale arm (based in Suffolk) was added in 2001, with Will joined by business partner Mark Newman. Today, they supply more than 350 businesses, from pubs and bars, to restaurants, cafes, farm shops and even other delis, with the cream of the crop from Britain and Europe's dairies.

That's all while continuing to run their own shop, now on London's Northcote Road.

"It's been a good 12 months despite being buffeted by supplier price rises," says retail and technical manager, Jamie Collins, who adds that, in line with their long-term plans, they've continued to bolster their offering by upping the ante when it comes to in-house cheese and wine tastings. "And we've been deploying resident cheese guru, Prentice, to lead tastings at wholesale customer events."

For Jamie, what makes a good cheese retailer great is "range, quality, knowledgeable staff, and the friendly service you get in an indie".

All things that, with 30 years in the business, Hamish Johnston can offer in spades. The shop, like its wholesale operation, has a large and loyal following of customers who covet the endless expertise the team share. Shoppers know they are the go-to people for anything cheese-related, from finding something new to put on the table, to caring for their purchases, and pairing suggestions.



> "IT'S BEEN A GOOD 12 MONTHS DESPITE BEING BUFFETED BY SUPPLIER PRICE RISES"

The fact that several members of staff live near the shop very much gives it a community feel, built on by swathes of locals who visit regularly – many of them French expats who appreciate the attention to detail and care the Hamish Johnston team lavish upon their collection of fromages.

They also appreciate the ways the team think outside of the box, such as offering free loan of a Raclette machine with every purchase of a quarter of the cheese.

It's these thoughtful touches that truly matter, Jamie thinks.

OUR FAVOURITE CHEESE

The current favourite, says Jamie, is Smoked Montgomery Cheddar. "We get this classic farmhouse Cheddar lightly smoked by our friends at London Smoke & Cure. It is ruddy delicious!"





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The Cheese Hole

Suffolk's foodie capital, Bury St Edmunds, was missing an essential piece of its edible puzzle until Francisco and Sabina Perello opened the doors to The Cheese Hole in 2022.

The shop cuts a fine figure in an area renowned for independent retailing, sitting in a triangle with a quirky wine store and an award-winning bakery – giving shoppers a trio of reasons to visit.

The Cheese Hole has, in a very short space of time, become renowned for excellent customer service, driven by Francisco and Sabina's endless enthusiasm for artisan makers, and exuberant approach to sales - they have the ability to draw customers in with their immersive, thoughtful, educational tastings.

Notwithstanding the challenging economic times of the last year, they say the business continues to move in a positive direction. Their range of cheeses and accompaniments has grown. "And our customers, both regulars and new, appreciate the diversity on offer. It's also been a year with many new producers and cheeses coming out, which is a delight for all."

Francisco says they've consolidated their offering in the past 12 months and are pleased to have been in demand for wedding and special occasion cheese towers and large cheese selections for both corporate and family events – something he thinks is "very exciting".





> "WE WANT OUR CUSTOMERS TO HAVE A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE AS THEY SAVOUR CHEESES AT THEIR PEAK"

Staffing challenges have, he concedes, limited their ability to run events, but they're hoping to bring these into the fold as time progresses.

Something, Sabina thinks, that resonates with customers (apart from service) is the care and attention she and Francisco put into sourcing, which includes ensuring the shop always has products for those who are lactose, cow's milk, or gluten intolerant. This is especially true of their ambient goods, with Francisco revealing they stock one of the biggest collections of gluten-free products in the town.

It's a sign they've listened to their fanbase, leaning into what they want and need. 'Real food' without any unnecessary additives, is important to both them and their visitors too. "Customers want to be informed about what they are eating these days, and we very much enjoy helping them to feel connected to the cheese and its origins," Francisco says. "We want our customers to have a delightful experience as they savour cheeses at their peak."

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHEESEMONGER?

"Listening to your customers! Everybody knows what they want, even if they don't know what they want. Asking the right questions and listening carefully will always let you zoom in on the cheeses that they may not even know they like just from understanding their preferences on textures, strength and milk sources. It's also a question of having a selection of cheese that cuts across these factors, even more so than just their geographical origin or types."



OUR FAVOURITE CHEESE OF THE YEAR

The team's collective best-loved cheese of the last year, says Mel, is goat Gouda with fenugreek. "An unusual goats' cheese that tastes beautifully fresh, light and creamy. The addition of fenugreek seeds gives it a nutty, savoury flavour and a crunchy texture."

Secretts

There's nothing secret at all about Secretts in Milford, Surrey. The farm shop (which grows much of its own produce) has been a mainstay in the area for nearly 50 years, beloved by locals, visitors, and even Michelin-starred chefs alike.

"It's an inspiring one-stop-shop," says buyer Mel Whythe proudly, adding, "We know the customers really well, and meet new-to-farm-shop visitors all the time."

Secretts' cheese counter is undoubtedly one of the best-stocked not only in Surrey, but in the South of England, with hundreds of varieties to buy at any time – the majority of them available as pre-cut pieces (a popular hangover from Covid-era restrictions).

The past year, Mel admits, has been tricky, but trade overall has been good, with cheese remaining a 'pull' to the business. "We often have people travelling from further afield in search of something special. Usually a specific variety of cheese, or an artisan product they have sourced at Secretts," she reveals.

> "WE ARE LUCKY IN THAT OUR COUNTER IS LARGE, AND THEREFORE ABLE TO HOUSE A HUGE VARIETY OF CHEESE"

Mel thinks the hallmark of a good cheese retailer is being able to understand what the customer wants. But so too, she adds, is diversifying. The team need to trust their own educated taste buds and instincts when sampling and deciding what will next take pride of place in their selection. There should always been something new and interesting within the counter, she says, going on to add that while they always have the likes of locally made Sussex Charmer and Blue Monday in stock, they do like to throw in a few curveballs.

Recent buys they're enjoying include Balcombe Dairy's Blue Clouds, and farmhouse Cheddar, Olde Sussex – both of which Mel says are brilliant for a summer cheeseboard, leading her to add that seasonality is a huge consideration in cheesemongery.

"Brie and creamier/herby cheeses invariably always sell better in the summer, whilst blue comes into its own in winter. We are lucky in that our counter is large, and therefore able to house a huge variety of cheese."





PICS: HANNAH MCGREGOR

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Jarrolds

Jarrolds is more than a department store – it's an institution in its home county of Norfolk. Boasting a 250-year history, Jarrolds' flagship property in the heart of Norwich is a go-to destination for those who enjoy the finer things in life – including food and drink.

The basement-level Food Hall (reimagined in 2022 to include two wine bars, a coffee bar, and a 40-seater restaurant) is a mecca for local produce and speciality ingredients, with customers inevitably drawn to the central hub – a gleaming deli counter, complete with its own glass-walled cheese room.

The space is an homage to artisan cheese, and makes cheese shopping a true experience here, demonstrating that despite being a traditional heritage business at heart, Jarrolds is constantly looking forwards, innovating, and thinking of ways to enhance what the team can offer its customers.

The last 12 months have been fantastic for the business, says head buyer Jim Stevenson, who reveals the group has recently expanded to take on a farm shop in North Norfolk (formerly Back to the Garden and now Jarrolds Letheringsett), has won Independent Department Store of the Year in the Draper's Awards, and was named amongst the best food halls in Britain by *Speciality Food Magazine*.

"This recognition puts us up there alongside the likes of Harrods, Fortnum & Mason's and Selfridges, and for the article to say, 'outside of London, this could win the award for most beautiful food hall in Britain', is real testament to what we've created here," he says, adding that the food hall had a record-breaking Christmas, with cheese being a major factor in that success.

Customer favourites have included two drunken cheeses, sourced from Borough Market's L'Ubriaco - Blu '61 and Basajo – the first a soft blue with Raboso Passito IGT wine, topped with cranberries, and the latter a soft sheep's milk blue with Passito di Pantelleria, topped with Chilean Grapes. "There's a really pleasant contrast between the assertive flavour of the ewe's milk and the sugary aftertaste of the dessert wine. It's perfect as an appetiser."

Due to the food hall's enduring popularity, it has once again been expanded to offer more floor space dedicated to world foods, and additional seating for the cheese and charcuterie bar. "It was frequently at full capacity, so an expanded deli space means more people can now lose a few hours with us, sampling cheeses alongside cured meats, olives and a glass of something special from the extensive menu," adds Jim.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD INDIE CHEESE RETAILER?

"Great choice, which includes all the everyday aged-to-perfection core products, alongside locally produced cheeses, which we love and support, giving a constantly evolving variety. We also firmly believe in the ritual of carrying out tastings daily, tempting people to explore different cheeses and discover something new and surprising."

> "IT WAS FREQUENTLY AT CAPACITY, SO AN EXPANDED DELI SPACE MEANS MORE PEOPLE CAN NOW LOSE A FEW HOURS WITH US"

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St Giles Cheese

WHAT MAKES A GREAT INDIE?

For Caroline, there are a few things independent cheesemongers need to do to stay ahead of supermarkets. "Stick to your guns. Keep it interesting. And get to know your customers. We know the people who come in, and if we've got a new cheese they might like, we always ask if they want to try it. Knowing their tastes can help you find them a cheese they probably wouldn't usually go for."

We often talk about passion when describing the role of a cheesemonger. You can't sell cheese without a fundamental love for and appreciation of the product.

Many in the industry say they'd never worked in food and drink before - they were simply following their hearts. And Steve and Caroline Ward are a case in point. The couple (who celebrate 15 years of their shop, St Giles Cheese, in Northampton this year), were inspired to set up their own business following an enlightening trip to France, which led them on a 12-week adventure, opening the store on a shoestring budget, and learning on the job.

Clearly, with a decade-and-a-half under their belts, it was the right move, and the couple say they're proud to serve their community, where many of the regulars have become friends.

The last 12 months have been, as for many others, a bit tricky, says Caroline, who explains footfall in the town has been down, largely because of ongoing building work. But they remain positive, and are buoyed by the energy of customers, who return time and time again to see what's new in the counter – most recently Isle of Wight Blue, and Spanish Vega. "Their cheese with black garlic has been flying out," Caroline reveals, adding that her own favourite over the past year has been aged Mimolette. "It's hard, nutty and caramelly. The kind of cheese you love, forget about for a little while, then try again, thinking 'why haven't I been eating this more often?'"

Attention to detail, knowing their products, and learning what shoppers really want, has led to St Giles Cheese garnering a great reputation and solid fan base, from teens to octogenarians, and cheese 'newcomers' to aficionados. All are welcomed heartily, something that's intrinsic to the experience, says Steve. "It's surprising how many shops you can walk in and not get a simple 'hello'."

He adds that the purpose of an indie is to boost customer confidence ... to give them an experience.

Every time they receive a bit of praise, he says, "it's a great boost to a fragile ego, but also a confirmation that we're doing it right".



> "EVERY TIME SOMEONE WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR AND TELLS US HOW PLEASED THEY ARE THAT WE ARE HERE, OR THAT WE ARE STILL HERE, THAT'S A GREAT BOOST, BUT ALSO CONFIRMATION THAT WE'RE DOING IT RIGHT"

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Georgonzola

Losing his job at a local butchers was just the life change George Hammond needed to realise a long-held dream – opening his own shop.

With years of experience in the food and drink industry under his belt, bags of enthusiasm, and a healthy dose of ambition, he founded Georgonzola in Clitheroe, Lancashire, and hasn't looked back since, delighting customers with his sheer passion and love for cheese (and other good things to eat).

In a relatively short space of time, George has become known for championing British cheeses especially, and for conjuring up imaginative pairings for his favourites, from York's Bullion chocolate, to a touch of mango or pineapple pickle.

Business in the last 12 months has been, he says, "interesting", as he's watched people's spending habits evolve. "It definitely feels as though people are buying little and often, rather than big baskets less often," George explains. "So, a little bit of something really special, rather than a large quantity of lesser quality produce."

Having added tables and chairs to the shop, creating a nice environment for customers to sit and enjoy nibbles over a glass of wine or draught beer, George adds that the past year has seen events take off, with ambitions to host one tasting each month.

"We have now run about six cheese and wine events, with three more in the calendar. We have also run two cheese and honey events - one at the start of the season, and one at the end of it - showing the difference between spring honey and autumnal honey. This shows how what the bees are eating really affects the taste and texture."

It's these events which really allow George to flex his culinary and flavour knowledge, helping his customers to get the very best out of the cheeses they buy.

He prides himself on excellent, personable service, getting to know regulars, and learning what they need and want, to ensure his offering continues to satisfy their demands for the familiar, while exposing them to 'newness' on a regular basis. He adds that they trust his judgement. "I don't often offer them something to try that is a true wildcard!"

Variety and diversity are two of his key words. "We swap and change our selection around almost weekly, with some core cheeses always being present. We talk to our customers about what they want, and how we can make that happen. We don't quite understand having a counter with limited space, but filling it all with a similar style of cheese."

> "WE TALK TO OUR CUSTOMERS ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT, AND HOW WE CAN MAKE THAT HAPPEN"

A FIRM FAVOURITE

A winner with customers this year has been Feltham's Farm's cheese, Lucky Marcel, says George. "This little cheese can develop into a completely different but still beautiful cheese in the space of a week, going from a fresh, lactic cheese, into an oozing puddle of loud and bold flavour."





grate Newcastle



It's five years since cheese lover Moz Murphy opened grate Newcastle – and her passion for and dedication to artisan cheese has never wavered during this time.

Moz founded the business (bravely during the lockdown years) having noticed a gap in the market for a shop combining great cheese and great service, and says it's the store she's always dreamed of having.

Though she's been gently prodded by visitors to add to her range with charcuterie and other bits and bobs, Moz says championing British, Irish and Continental cheeses remains her priority.

MOZ'S FAVOURITE CHEESES THIS YEAR

In the last year, Moz has been loving Wakebridge from Wakebridge Manor Creamery. "I can't wait to get it back in stock later this year." She's a huge fan of sheep's cheese, and says she loved having King Stone Dairy's Hidcote in stock this spring. "I also rediscovered some cheeses that we'd not stocked for a while, including Perl Las and Monte Enebro."

> "WE'VE BUILT A GREAT LITTLE COMMUNITY FEEL IN OUR SHOP, AND IT'S LOVELY TO BE A PART OF"





Of course, grate stocks everything shoppers need to pull together a stunning cheeseboard (including locally made preserves, breads and crackers), but they are the shop's 'garnishes' or 'side dishes', not the main course. "Ultimately my background is in cheese," Moz explains, "and that's my passion."

The last 12 months have, she says, seen business slow a little – picking up, as expected, at Christmas - so there are plans on the horizon for more in-house events, wholesaling and collaborations to keep footfall up. And sales have been bolstered by grate Newcastle being named a runner-up in the Small Business Saturday People's Choice Awards last winter, something Moz says was huge for her.

What clinched the recognition, she thinks, was her being truly interested in what she's selling. This is something she says is vital for indie cheesemongers, calling it a 'given'. "But you've also got to be interested in what your customers are actually buying, not just your favourites." Keeping on top of the latest cheese news is a must as well, "especially when your customers are foodies who read the same publications as you!"

Moz has seen grate's fanbase and demographic grow across ages, and reveals the business is very family orientated. It's more than a shop – it's a community. And this is why she also dedicates time to giving back. Her charitable endeavours have included teaming up with a local restaurant to deliver free meals to hundreds of children in 2023 when the Government cut funding for lunch provisions during school holidays, and raising money for Maggie's centre at the Freeman Hospital, and the Rainbow Trust. "We've built a great little community feel in our shop, and it's lovely to be a part of."

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Rennet & Rind

The past year has been "huge" for the Rennet & Rind team, says the business's chief of cheese, Perry Wakeman, who was recently named Affineur of the Year for the third time.

The wholesaler opened a bricks and mortar shop in Stamford, Lincolnshire, in 2024, and Perry reveals it's going from strength to strength.

"We've expanded our chilled counter to introduce more fresh British products like Buffalo Mozzarella and proper British-made Ricotta," he explains. "We've also broadened our charcuterie offering, sticking firmly to home soil, with some brilliant small-scale producers joining the line-up".

Something "quite special" that customers have been loving is the shop's 'pairings on the pavement' initiative, where they can grab a streetside table, buy a wedge of cheese and a drink, and people-watch while they indulge.

Then, "on the educational front, we launched The Cheesemonger Experience," Perry adds, "running the Academy of Cheese Level 1 in-shop. Every time we announce a date, it books out within 24 hours, which is mad (in the best way). We're also planning some relaxed late-night openings for the summer. No hard sell. Just good cheese, good drinks and a welcoming space for curious eaters."

Perry feels honoured that the shop has stacked up nominations for locally judged awards this year. Awards that he says are, "just genuine recognition from people who care about proper food and independent businesses".

Rennet & Rind was also featured on a few national TV shows, giving the team a brilliant platform to showcase some of the makers they work with.

And Perry's third triumph at the Affineur of the Year awards is another string to the shop's bow, further putting it in the spotlight, with him in talks to make his winning cheese (Dillon, crafted using a Quicke's Cheddar truckle) commercially available.

For the retailer, there are three things that make shoppers' experience in indies a unique one, far removed from visiting their local supermarket. These include knowing the makers (and telling their stories honestly); maturing with intent ("so every cheese we cut is at its best, not just 'in stock'"); and creating a space that feels open. "There should be no cheese snobbery, no jargon. Just good conversation, encouragement to taste, and genuine passion behind the counter."

> "THERE SHOULD BE NO CHEESE SNOBBERY, NO JARGON. JUST GOOD CONVERSATION, ENCOURAGEMENT TO TASTE, AND GENUINE PASSION BEHIND THE COUNTER"

PERRY'S CHEESE OF THE YEAR

"It's a cruel question, like asking me to pick a favourite child, but if I had to highlight one, it would be Hidcote from King Stone Dairy. It's just been singing lately. Soft, natural rind. A paste like set custard. And flavour that hits cultured butter, hazelnut and that subtle earthiness you only get from a well-made raw milk cheese. It's the kind of cheese that makes you stop mid-sentence."

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Neerlyns Farm Shop

WHAT SETS INDEPENDENT CHEESE RETAILERS APART?

"Great cheese retailers need a passion and love for the product, dedication to looking after it, and knowledge to pass onto the customer."

This farm shop in the heart of Hampshire has been delighting shoppers for more than two decades – especially those seeking out carefully chosen and nurtured artisan cheeses.

The role cheese plays in the business was strengthened in 2018 by the addition of a dedicated, purpose-built cheese room, overseen by assistant store manager Jo Moody.

Jo, who loves a challenge (and food) doesn't have a cheese background, but was intent on setting up the space for success, diving into learning every aspect of cheesemongery. "When you start to learn about the world of cheese," she says, "you quickly become passionate about it, and I love passing this on to both the customers and staff."

The room was designed to hold cheeses at a temperature and humidity that allows them to be showcased unwrapped, and a ripening chamber ensures every single piece that leaves the premises is taken home by customers in peak condition. This level of attention to detail has made all the difference, Jo says. "We pride ourselves on the quality of our cheese and how we take care of it, and this has helped us gain a reputation for being 'the' place to get cheese in quite a wide area."

In addition to continental favourites, the shop's collection boasts an enviable array of cheeses made in the region, from Spenwood to Waterloo. Jo's current favourites to be found on the shelves are Blue Clouds from Sussex, Lyburn Old Winchester, and Corscombe, made by Hollis Mead Organic Dairy in Dorset.

The last 12 months, Jo continues, have been good - given the economic challenges businesses are facing – with sales and footfall up. Thursdays to Saturdays are busiest, but an increase in shoppers has been noted on Sundays too.

A mini cheese festival, held last autumn, proved a great way, she adds, to encourage customers to think about their Christmas cheeseboards. "We had suppliers and local cheesemakers manning stands and offering samples. The customers could also taste the difference between a selection of Stiltons and three different Cheddars." This made the Christmas selling season a lot easier. "When customers came to actually buy their Christmas selection, many remembered and asked for cheeses that had tasted. It was a great success!"



> "WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON THE QUALITY OF OUR CHEESE AND HOW WE TAKE CARE OF IT, AND THIS HAS HELPED US GAIN A REPUTATION FOR BEING 'THE' PLACE TO GET CHEESE IN QUITE A WIDE AREA"

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