

a small cheese in Provence

cooking with goat cheese



Jean Gill

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Jean Gill's previous publications

Novels

One Sixth of a Gill (*The 13th Sign*) 2014
Bladesong (*lulu*) 2012
Song at Dawn (*lulu*) 2011
Someone to Look Up To (*lulu*) 2011
San Fairy Anne (*lulu*) 2010
Crystal Balls (*lulu*) 2010
On the Other Hand (*Dinas*) 2005
Snake on Saturdays (*Gomer*) 2001

Non-fiction

How Blue is My Valley (*lulu*) 2010
A Small Cheese in Provence (*lulu*) 2009
Faithful through Hard Times (*lulu*) 2008
4.5 Years - war memoir - David Taylor (*lulu*) 2008

Poetry

From Bed-time On (*National Poetry Foundation*) 1996
With Double Blade (*National Poetry Foundation*) 1988

Translation (from French)

The Last Love of Edith Piaf - Christie Laume (*Archipel*) 2014
A Pup in Your Life - Michel Hasbrouck 2008
Gentle Dog Training - Michel Hasbrouck (*Souvenir Press*) 2007

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Recettes Gourmandes des Boulangers d'Alsace

Gostar la Cuisine Traditionnelle de la Drôme et Trièves

and not forgetting my partner in cuisine, who accepted that food had to be photographed before being eaten and who spent many a happy hour discovering that text-boxes have a life of their own.



For my sisters, who also escaped meat and two veg.
Ruth, the Queen of Pastry and Puddings,
and Anne, Juicer Extraordinaire.





*As for rosemary, I let it run all over my
garden walls, not only because my bees
love it, but because it is the herb sacred
to remembrance and to friendship,
whence a sprig of it has a dumb
language.*

Sir Thomas More

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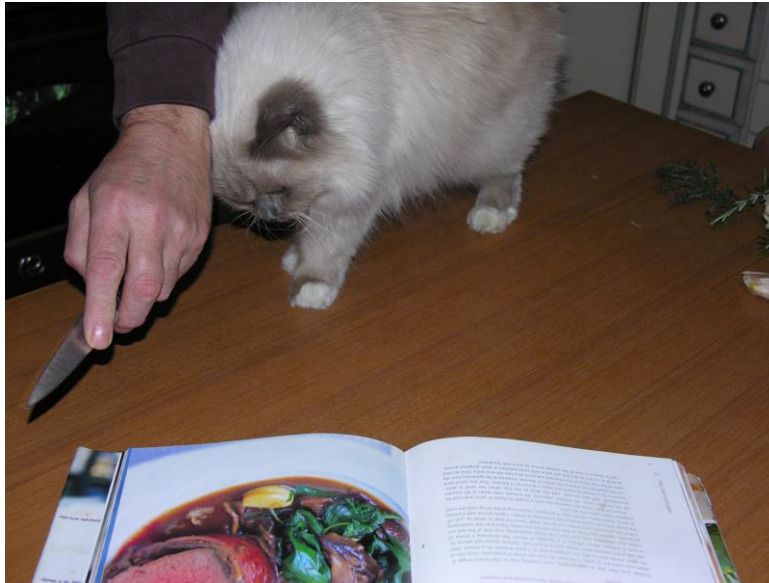
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Lou chao a empourta lou picaoudou, cha, cha
Lou mangara touou, cha, cha

Oh the cat has got the Picodon, la la...
He'll eat it all in one la la...



The clever cat eats cheese and breathes down rat holes with baited breath.

W. C. Fields

Introduction

Meet 'les chèvres d'ici', the goat cheeses round here (and they are round, here)

FALSE 'chèvre' is a popular French goat cheese
(misinformation in at least one bestselling English cookery book)

TRUE 'chèvre' is French for 'goat' but is also used as a general term for all the cheeses, usually small and round, that are made from goat milk. 'La chèvre' (feminine) is a goat; le chèvre (masculine) is the cheese but 'les chèvres' (plural) could be either.

In Provence, there are many different 'chèvres', some produced entirely by the goat farmers and sold directly at markets and some started on the farms and developed by the 'affineurs', the cheesemakers, from 2/3 day old cheeses. Others are produced by large companies which collect the goat milk and carry out the whole cheese-making process.

Reading the labels

fermier means that the cheese was made or started by the farmer, using only his or her animals.

laitier means 'milk producer' and shows which farmer provided the milk to the cheese producer.

Lait cru - good bacteria

The cheese mite has its unexpected fans:

Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death.

Wilfred Owen

lait cru unpasteurised milk, considered by cheese lovers to taste better and used by the farmers themselves, so is always a sign of traditional, small-scale cheese-making. Worries about health risks (especially to pregnant women) seem to be contradicted by other studies showing the health benefits of 'good bacteria'

Riddle

*Qu'est-ce que ça peut bien être ? Une bête moins grosse qu'une lente devant le roi se faire entendre?
Comment voyage-t-elle? C'est l'artisan qui utilise le Picodon et même le roi connaît sa renommée.*

What could it be? A creature smaller than a nit gets a hearing with the king. How does it travel?

It's the cheese mite that travels by Picodon and even the king knows its fame.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| lait pasteurisé | pasteurised milk, a necessity for the big companies who collect from laitiers, and process the cheese in bigger batches |
| chèvres chauds | ‘hot goats’ are soft, fresh cheeses ideal for grilling |
| tomme | any cheese in a rounded shape |
| crottin | a popular type of goat cheese (see a.o.c.), but sometimes misused to mean ‘Chèvre’ or any small, round goat cheese. Crottins can be young and creamy or older, drier and stronger. |
| feuille | the ‘feuilles’, or leaves, are usually chestnut (as is the case for the a.o.c. Banon), in which some types of chèvre are wrapped to keep them moist |
| fruitière | a co-operative cheese dairy |
| a.o.c. | Appellation Contrôlée status has been awarded to the following 12 goat cheeses (so far), protecting the name, region and production method for Banon, Chabichou du Poitou, Chevrotin, Crottin de Chavignol, Pélardon, Picodon, Picodon méthode Dieulefit, Pouligny-Saint-Pierre, Rocamadour, Sainte-Maure de Touraine, Selles-sur-Cher, Valençay. |

The Banon is easily recognised by its casing of chestnut leaves but is only truly a Banon when produced in its a.o.c. region, the Vaucluse. Otherwise, however good, it is a copy, a ‘chèvre feuille’ (goat cheese in leaves). The Picodons are also protected by Appellation Contrôlée status, even stricter for the Prince of Picodons, Picodon méthode Dieulefit, still produced by the Cavet family, along with the rest of the chèvre family, in Dieulefit (‘the village God made’). The Dieulefit Picodon tradition can be traced back to 1367, although the Cavets themselves only lay claim to three generations of cheesemakers, so far





Adoun de toun sachou tirei 'no toumo frescho,
A toun crouchou de pan copei 'no lescho

Then you dig in your sack and pull out a fresh cheese,
cut a doorstep of bread and take lunch at ease.



Which goat cheese should you use?



All the recipes in this book have been created with cheeses produced by the Cavet affinerie, Dieulefit, but work with any goat cheese, using the following guidelines. Because Picodons are full-flavoured, I have suggested in the recipes that you replace 1 Picodon with the larger quantity of 100g of another goat cheese.

| Age | Les chèvres | Substitute |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Youngest | caillé or curds fromage frais | cottage cheese cream cheese very soft, melting cheese mild, creamy melting cheese mild, |
| Teenage | chèvre chauds | more solid cheese |
| Young adult | tomme or chèvre blanc | ripened, drier cheese 'with a sting' |
| Riper | chèvre crèmeux, feuille, | small cheese, big character shoeleather |
| Ripest | Picodon Picodon méthode Dieulefit | some old, some new, some blue, mixed in a jar with some eau-de-vie |
| Beyond | antique Picodons | and left to ferment for a month or two. |
| Surreal | foujou | |

In general, the youngest goat cheeses are easily sweetened as desserts, the middle-aged are for savouries and the ripest have earned their place on the cheeseboard for their own character. Both middle-aged and ripe chèvres melt in the oven but are often combined with grated gruyère or cheddar to give a traditional gratin appearance. The ancient are tough as old boots and appreciated by those seeking any new sensual experiences, not just good ones. Foujou is for the sort of people who, in the nineteenth century, would have used opium to heighten their creativity.

Foujou

quand las moèichas chèion dau plafon quand dubrètz lo baraston, lo fojon èi bòn per minjar.

When the flies fall off the ceiling if you open the jar, the foujou is ready.

‘Steal and Substitute’ are the twin pillars of British cuisine; how else would chutney have been invented? So never mind what you’re supposed to do, read a recipe, visit the market and have some fun. If the fun is loosely connected to the original recipe and tastes good, then this little book was worth the hours I’ve spent eating wonderful food in the sunshine – and talking about it.





The poets are mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.

G K Chesterton



Professional cheese tasters drink only water, but discussion as to how well the wine served complements each cheese – or not - is a far more sociable way of passing the cheese course.

If you want a Provençal ambience with a mild goat cheese, try a well-chilled rosé from that region. Otherwise, the usual choice is a dry white such as Muscadet, Gros Plant or a Haut Savoie de Deux Sèvres for a young goat cheese; Sauvignon, Sancerre or an Ardècheois Viognier for a ripened one.

But what better wine to accompany the robust flavour of a Picodon than its neighbourhood red wine, a Côtes du Rhône Villages from Seguret, Valrèas or Côtes du Ventoux?

Which wine goes with goat cheese?

And with a mixed cheeseboard?

The difficulty is the range of cheeses on the board so that reds such as Gigondas or a St-Emilion, which are superb with Comté, will annihilate Port-Salut.

Traditionally, a selection of cheeses is accompanied by a fruity red, such as a Beaujolais-Villages, a Chinon or young Côtes du Rhône, but a dry white such as a Pouilly-fumé, Côtes du Tricastin, an Alsace Riesling or an Ardèche Chardonnay, make an interesting and increasingly popular alternative. Fortified wines, madeira or a tawny port, are another classic option.



*Dans les sentiers pierreux qui mènent à la mer,
Rassasié de thym et de cytise amer,
L'indocile troupeau des chèvres aux poils lisses
De son lait parfumé va remplir les éclisses ;*

Charles-Marie Leconte De Lisle (Thestylis)



Along the stony pathways that lead right to the sea
Gorged on thyme and bitter broom
The wayward herd of smooth-haired goats
Take their scented milk to fill the wooden trays

*Faute de reculer, leur chute fut commune ;
Toutes deux tombèrent dans l'eau.
Cet accident n'est pas nouveau
Dans le chemin de la Fortune.*

Jean de la Fontaine (Les Deux Chèvres)



The Two Goats

So neither gave way and both of them fell
The two of them into the stream
An old, old tale, and you know very well
You should make room for two in your dream.



Which cheeses for your cheeseboard?

Although not all cheese fits neatly into these categories, the table of cheese families is a helpful guide to choosing and storing cheese. When you are buying a selection of cheeses for a cheeseboard, the professional advice is to choose from different categories, with as many cheeses as there are people.

Storing cheese

Anyone who has ever kept a Camembert or Brie a week too long, knows only too well the ooze and smell of an over-ripe soft white cheese, so this is a category to buy carefully. The white rind looks less powdery, more yellow and sunken as the cheese ripens and softens (from the outside in), and the smell strengthens.

Although there are detailed tasting notes available, which score every named variety against its ideal, choosing cheese is still very personal. If you like your Camembert young and firm, don't wait until it is more conventionally ripe – enjoy it now. Soft white cheeses are the most sensitive to storage conditions so are best eaten within a week and kept wrapped in waxed paper in the vegetable drawer of a fridge – unless you are lucky enough to have a 'cave' or cellar.

Ideal storage conditions for cheese are humid, cool and covered, so terracotta containers, waxed paper, (or failing that, clingfilm, preferably only on cut edges, leaving the rind to breathe) and moistened teatowels can all be used to prevent any cheese developing past its best or even growing a mould to turn an Emmental into a Roquefort wanna-be. Big pieces of cheese keep better than small ones but a fortnight is long enough to keep any cheese that was sold ready for eating.

Big Franglais Breakfast

Serves 4

preparation time 10 mins plus 30 mins standing for galette batter

cooking time 15 mins

4 rounds or slices of bacon

4 eggs

8 mushrooms

4 tomatoes

½ Cavet Picodon/50 g goat cheese

Galettes

100g Breton black 'saracen' flour or wholemeal flour

45g plain flour/type 55

1 egg, beaten

25cl water

1tbspn clarified butter (see cook's tip)



Make the batter for the 'galettes' (Breton savoury crepes or pancakes) by sifting the flours with the salt into a mixing bowl. Make a well in the flour, add a little of the water and whisk the beaten egg into the mixture, gradually adding the rest of the water. It is really important to leave the batter to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes. If you have to leave it longer, cover it and chill it. If you are impatient, the galettes will break up like angry popadoms when you try to make pancakes.

Grill the bacon, sliced mushrooms and tomato halves while cooking the galettes. To cook the galettes, use a pancake or frying pan on moderate heat. Add a little clarified butter to the pan and when it sizzles, pour in about three tablespoons of batter or enough to coat the pan in a thick circle. Cook for a minute, or until the pancake is solid, then flip the pancake onto the other side just to seal it. Add more water to the batter if necessary and adjust the heat according to how well the first pancake turned out – the tradition of ‘one for the dog’ is well-established. Keep the galettes warm, stacked on a plate in the oven



In a separate pan, fry an egg and when it is nearly cooked, put a galette back in the pancake pan, lighter side down, crumble, grate or squidge the goat cheese (depending on its ripeness) onto the galette, and put the fried egg on the top. Fold the galette in two like an omelette and repeat the procedure with the other galettes. Serve with bacon, tomato halves and mushrooms.

conseil d'ami - cook's tip

To clarify butter, melt it in a saucepan over low heat until it separates. You're supposed to let it cool to tepid and pour it into a small bowl, leaving the milky sediments in the pan, but I never bother. For some chemical reason, it is the best pan-grease, better than sunflower oil, which in turn is much better than olive oil.

The traditional method is to cook the egg on top of the galette; replace a galette in the frying pan, uncooked side down, break the egg onto the galette and let it cook through the galette. This is fun but difficult!

Unless your timing is miraculous, it's useful to keep the various foods warm in a low oven until they are all ready. Galettes don't freeze well so if you want ready-made pancakes, but not bought ones, use a recipe with egg, plain flour and milk to make pancakes in advance (e.g. recipe p66), freeze them and reheat last minute in a microwave.

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