

CHARCUTERIE

Saves the Holidays ... And a Business



With the holiday season in full swing, you might find yourself needing options for a drop-in open house or a last-minute party. A quick and easy solution comes in the form of charcuterie boards, a spread of food typically presenting various cheeses, fruits, cured meats, olives and nuts. More than an appetizer of preserved foods rich in flavor, charcuterie boards helped to save a local business and can help you save a party.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JORDAN BUSH

The Savory Gourmet

Every time I walk through the door of The Savory Gourmet in Lititz, Bill McMahon cannot help but exuberantly share the shop's latest cheese additions. Bill and his wife, Missy, are usually on hand to assist customers with their purchases. The shop not only offers cheeses from all over the world, but it carries a substantial range of unique meats, including venison, elk, lamb and Kobe-certified beef from Japan, as well as exotic selections such as alligator, boar, python and rattlesnake meat.

The husband-and-wife duo purchased the 13-year-old business from John Peris in 2017. "Missy had the vision," says Bill. "I came home from work one night and she said, 'The Savory Gourmet is for sale. Let's buy it.' I said, 'What! Are you crazy? I already work!' She said, 'Let's think about it.' We went to bed that night, got up the next morning and she said, 'What do you think about it?' I replied, 'What do I think about what?' She said, 'The Savory Gourmet!' Then,

WHAT'S ON THE BOARD?

FIVE CHEESES

1. **Secret de Scy** (fruity, supple, mild, creamy flavor; from France)
2. **Mimolette** (Edam-like; from France)
3. **Red Dragon** (a wholegrain mustard seed cheddar from Wales)
4. **Grevenbroecker** (a superb and balanced new blue; from Belgium)
5. **Intergalactic** (a buttery-smooth cheese with hints of herbs, minerals and green olives; from Perrystead Dairy in Philadelphia)

OTHER SELECTIONS

- Salami Nuggets
- Dried Apricots
- Dried Cherries
- Honey (from Greece)
- Raincoast Crisps (from Canada)
- Grapes
- Cornichons
- Olives
- Mixed Nuts
- Candied Ginger
- Candied Lemon Peel
- Dried Orange Slices
- Dried Hibiscus Flowers
- Dried Fava Beans



Owners Bill and Missy McMahon outside their store, The Savory Gourmet, at 51 North Broad Street in Lititz. The McMahons traded spaces with next-door neighbor, Renewal Kombucha, in order to gain more retail and display space.

I made the mistake of saying, ‘Let’s go talk to John.’ It was the equivalent of taking your 6-year-old to go and see a puppy,” says Bill.

To see the McMahons in their element – their exuberance is as though someone forgot to tell them they’re at work – is a sight to behold. “It’s just fun,” says Missy. “The people are fun. Nobody comes in cranky. They’re coming into a cheese store; they know you’re going to feed them samples. If it’s a good day, we’re pouring them something to drink to go along with those samples.”

The world of cheese has also provided the McMahons with an education. “What surprises me is just how complex the cheese world is,” says Missy. “Nobody will ever live long enough to taste every cheese but I’m trying, I’m really trying! Not only do we love the international cheeses, but there is stuff to be found in this country that you would not believe. There’s cheese from Indiana that’s off the charts. We have so many talented farmers and cheesemakers in this country. Give it a chance, it’s gorgeous,” says Missy.

Saving the Gourmet

Bill and Missy recently swapped spaces with their next-door neighbor, Renewal Kombucha, in order to gain more retail space. Twenty-one months ago they would not have dreamed of needing more space. In March 2020, when COVID-19 arrived in the United States, The Savory Gourmet faced uncertainty. According to Missy, “We were shut down for about two or three weeks at the very beginning, and Bill was like, ‘We’ve got to find a way to make this work.’ The first week, we dropped cheese off at the police department, the hospital and with EMS workers,” Missy recalls. “We didn’t want it to spoil. After that, he came up with the cheese board idea. That was all him. That was the solution to staying alive during the pandemic.” Bill credits the idea to “desperation,” explaining, “Mission one was to get rid of it. Mission two was solving the question, where do we go from here? We needed some kind of take-out option.” Thus, the idea of the cheese board, whose popularity caught on instantly.

A common thread among businesses pivoting during the pandemic has been the repackaging of established goods and services in new ways. On paper, these changes might not look drastically different but a small shift can have brilliant results. With a tremendous selection of cheeses, meats and side items for pairings, all of the ingredients were already there for Bill and Missy to use. They found their answer at the intersection of everything they do in creating a charcuterie board. In that act of desperation, they formulated a new product offering, a service that provides new food experiences for their customers. “They’re here to stay,” Bill reports. “People order them

for graduations, birthdays, gatherings and for dinner.” According to Missy, survival also relied on pick-up and delivery options. “We did curbside, we did deliveries – we still do deliveries,” she notes.

When the shop could welcome customers, parameters were put into place. “The hardest part was the six months [this year] we didn’t have sampling. Trying to describe what a cheese tasted like without being able to say, ‘Try this, it’s amazing,’ was frustrating,” says Bill.

“We want customers to taste [the food],” says Missy. “You can’t buy good cheese without trying it. Can you imagine if you spent money on good cheese and then you hated it? I want you to walk out of here with something you are excited about.”

Dessert Charcuterie Boards

A charcuterie board might seem best-suited as an appetizer but swap out savory foods like prosciutto and olives for sweets and you have a marvelous dessert course. If you’ve never tried it, give it a go. Yet again, it requires nominal preparation once everything is procured, allowing guests to graze on small bites that will allow them to experience a wide range of flavors at their leisure.

For the holidays, you could opt to assemble a board using an apropos color palette: bright pomegranates, dried cranberries, figs or dates, lingonberry jam, almonds, dark and milk chocolate morsels, chocolate-covered pretzels or nuts, wafers, caramel corn and a garnish of fresh or toasted rosemary. Sweet biscuits, notably biscotti, are a Savory Gourmet inclusion I find to be a brilliant option for a dessert board. They carry Enrico Biscotti Company’s biscuits. Based in Pittsburgh, the company’s owner delivers them personally to Lititz.

Some cheeses are inherently ready to serve as dessert, too. For example, Lemon Baked Ricotta from Italy, might as well be cheesecake! Pair honey with funky cheeses – like a strong blue cheese – and you have a savory-sweet revelation.

Enjoy a cheese course with a glass of wine, an espresso or my favorite, small pours of amaro (an after-dinner digestif), and the experience becomes richer.

Elevate Your Experience

To experience the fullest flavor, let the cheese warm to room temperature. Cold cheese is devoid of subtle nuances, making it an utter waste of expensive cheese. The Savory Gourmet recommends letting a charcuterie board sit out of refrigeration for at least 45 minutes, but even longer durations may be beneficial. For dessert purposes, pull



Bill and Missy’s 1950 Dodge half-ton pickup truck can often be seen parked in front of the shop and at events around town.



Assembling your own charcuterie board starts in the kitchen – who doesn’t have a board or oversized plate stashed away? Hint: Boards, such as those available at The Savory Gourmet, make great gifts.



The larger space has allowed Bill and Missy to expand their inventory of cheese-related products.



Tasting journals from 33 Books – including topics such as cheese, wine and hot sauce – elevate a shared tasting experience and make excellent gifts for food enthusiasts.

cheeses or an assembled charcuterie board from the refrigerator as dinner starts and you should be set for the last course.

I encourage writing the names of each cheese on a folded card or small piece of paper that can be displayed on or by a cheeseboard. For those who want to research cheese or make note of it for the future, labels make deciphering a name, country and milk of origin easier than fumbling with crumpled stickers on discarded plastic wrap. Especially among folks curious about food (such as yours truly), there are always questions about the origins of cheeses, honey, nuts or fig jam, so it's easy to lose track.

Cheese Tasting Journals

If you are looking for a fun stocking stuffer or dinner party gift with an experience attached, check out *33 Pieces of Cheese*. These tasting journals, which are produced by 33 Books in Portland, Oregon, are printed on recycled chipboard paper and cover such topics as wine, whiskey, cigars, hot sauce, beer and even donuts. A foodie friend turned me onto these with their coffee version a few years ago and I was thrilled to see them at The Savory Gourmet.

Charcuterie Order Information

When ordering a single cheese board, 24-48 hours' notice is requested. They come standard with a selection of five cheeses based on your preferences, starting at \$12 a person, with a minimum serving for four people (\$48). The Savory Gourmet is located at 51 N. Broad Street in Lititz. Visit savorygourmetlititz.com for details.



Bill McMahon, cheesemonger, offers samples to curious customers at the counter.

Below, internationally procured cheeses are available to sample and take home individually or as part of a charcuterie board.



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ZEST'S DATE NIGHT: Charcuterie Board Building

DECEMBER 3, 6-8 P.M.

Participating couples will be given a 20% discount at The Savory Gourmet to purchase three cheeses prior to this hands-on class. Zest will provide the other elements. Chef Hannah will provide instructions on building the ultimate charcuterie board, as well as for some fun and fancy fixings to make it a meal. BYOB.

For details, visit zestchef.com/cooking-classes.