



THE BIG CHEESE

Jim Boyce's gold-medal brie brings California cheese to the global arena

French vintners have learned not to underestimate California winemakers—and now European cheesemakers have some stiff competition in Northern California as well. At this year's prestigious World Cheese Awards in London, a nutty triple cream brie made by Petaluma's Marin French Cheese Company captured the gold medal, besting even the French bries. It was the first time an American company had won the category in international competition.

Local fans of the company's distinctive, soft-ripened cheeses were hardly surprised. Like many of its European counterparts, the Marin French Cheese Company has honed its cheese-making process over time to create several flavorful varieties, many of them award winners. "When you taste our cheeses, you're eating a piece of living history because we use methods that have been passed down from journeyman to apprentice and perfected for over a century," says Jim Boyce, the company's owner.

In fact, the Marin French Cheese Company got its start selling 3-ounce cheeses to longshoremen in the town of Yerba Buena (later renamed San Francisco) 140 years ago. Today, it offers 40 handcrafted cheeses—from camemberts to chèvres to schlosses—all crafted in the European tradition. Flavor cultures flown in from Europe are stirred into the milk early in the process, rather than sprayed on the outside of the cheese later. This causes the cheese to age from the inside, imbuing it with a wonderful flavor and texture. As Boyce says, "When our customers enjoy our cheeses, we want them to experience happiness." — KO