

Herve Mons

FOOD

FROM THE COVER

JANET FLETCHER *The Cheese Course*

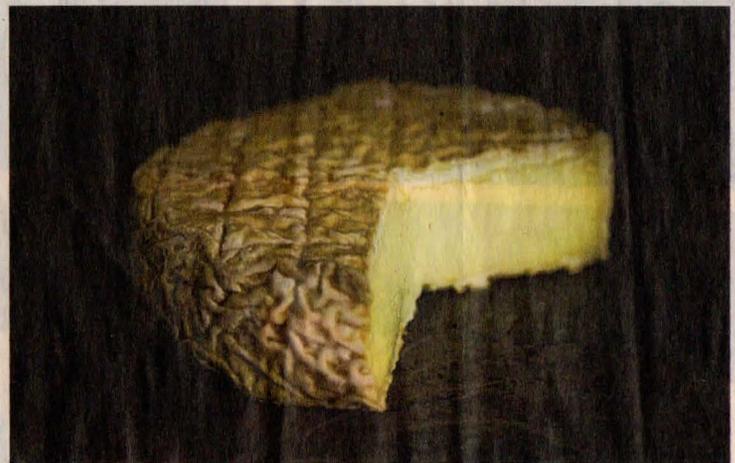
# St. Soleil: For those who revere the robust

If you enjoy Epoisses, the pungent washed-rind cheese from Burgundy, try its near-twin, St. Soleil.

I have never understood how Burgundians can enjoy their delicate, aromatic Pinot Noirs with Epoisses, a robust cow's milk cheese, but they do. In my opinion, the pair should be kept at arm's length, although they come from the same region. So much for that pairing principle.

St. Soleil is, essentially, an Epoisses made on an artisan scale and given the attentions of the expert affineur (cheese ager) Hervé Mons.

The small Burgundian creamery that makes the cheese uses a slow-acting culture and minimal rennet, so it takes several hours for the milk to acidify and coagulate. The slow fermentation produc-



Paige Hermreck / Special to The Chronicle

**Pungent St. Soleil's moist rind, washed in a grape-pomace brandy, cloaks a semisoft ivory interior.**

es more flavor and higher acidity; being stingy with rennet yields a more supple, spreadable texture.

The cheese is about 10 days

old when it arrives at Mons for maturation. Over the next few weeks, the Mons crew washes it twice with a dilute solution of marc de Bourgogne (grape-

pomace brandy) to encourage the moist, tacky rind.

The half-pound cheeses are nestled in individual wooden crates with a cellophane window — costly packaging designed to preserve humidity — then sent by air to the U.S.

These little beauties arrive at Bay Area cheese counters with a beefy aroma that you can smell through the packaging.

The thin, flesh-colored rind is damp and wrinkled, the work of beneficial bacteria, cloaking a semisoft ivory interior. The fragrance blooms as the cheese warms. I find it yeasty and garlicky, with the scent of roasted peanuts or peanut butter in the riper specimens I have tried. My husband thinks it smells like a beef bouillon cube.

Even for a salt fiend like me, St. Soleil can test the limits. If

possible, taste before you buy.

Look for St. Soleil at Bay Area Whole Foods stores.

The Mons team suggests a Pinot Noir or Chardonnay with it, but I can't go there. For me, an earthy Syrah or a rich Alsatian Gewurztraminer or Pinot Gris would better match these mouth-filling flavors. A sour ale, like Russian River Brewing's Consecration, is another possibility.

**Next up:** Bodensee Butterkäse, a cow's milk cheese from Switzerland.

*Janet Fletcher teaches cheese-appreciation classes and is the author of "Cheese & Beer," "Cheese & Wine" and "The Cheese Course." Go to [www.janetfletcher.com](http://www.janetfletcher.com) for a class schedule, or contact her at [fletcher@foodwriter.com](mailto:fletcher@foodwriter.com).*