

Ten years ago, I traveled to Paris for the first time, as a young twenty something looking to see the world. Like so many, I was drawn to France, with its rich history and unique sense of feeling like a small part of it belongs to you. On that trip, I stepped into a small fromagerie on the market street of Rue Cler, steps from the Eiffel Tower. Fumbling over my French (if one could call what I was speaking that), I asked the busy fromager behind the counter about the enormous wheel of yellow cheese, with its green bells and cave-aged rind. Having never heard of any French cheese, or even really seeing one with my own eyes, I was in awe of its natural beauty. Stunning from its distinct rind, to the smooth paste, I had never felt that way about cheese before. With a warm baguette, saucisson sec and a healthy hunk of Comté on the lawn of the Champ du Mars, I was transported, and life has never been the same since.

Five years later, I sat in my small apartment, in tears on my couch as I contemplated my next steps in life. In between careers and dealing with unexplained health challenges, my path forward seemed daunting and unclear. In a small moment of clarity, I took a step back to examine what seemed most important to me, and how I felt I could best make a difference with a career and in the world. I knew I loved the intricacy of process, of learning about tradition, heritage and the care that goes into making something beautiful. As a lifelong creative, I was drawn to the art of formation

At that moment, I reached for my coffee table book “du jour:” *Fromages* by Dominique Bouchait. A love story of French cheeses, I leaned heavily on its pages when I needed an escape to my beloved France. Flipping open the pages, I landed on that cheese once more, with its distinct moon crater rind. The tears stopped as I sat there flabbergasted— here this cheese was again, a revelation of something bigger, something better, showing me the way forward. In speaking about Comté, Bouchait shares the story of the heritage of the fruitières, the nuances of summer and winter milk, the sheer amount of milk needed from French Simmental and Montbeliarde cows to create the massive wheels, and the joy of dipping Comté into a soft boiled egg or savoring an aged slice like fine chocolate on the palate. Reading the intricacies of its tradition, heritage and creation process, I fell in love all over again and life pivoted.

Cheese became my focus of formation, a way to savor and live the French joie de vivre, by appreciating every step of the cheesemaking process and sharing it with the world.

My story is unique to me but I do not believe it is singular. Of the vast amounts of delicious French cheeses (and all cheeses, for that matter!), Comté has an uncanny ability to hypnotize with its complex flavor notes— from fruity and lactic to caramelized and brothy, there is no end to its subtleties and diversity. It draws you in to learn more, and as you do your appreciation for it continues to grow. To eat Comté is to eat a piece of history, with its ancient origins and dedication to preserving its heritage. Comté is the direct result of a unified commitment to something greater than just delicious cheese. Its production combines the work of the Jura region, soil, animals, farmers, cheesemakers and affineurs that create an end product designed to change lives and how we view the world. Each bite you take is a love letter to the many hands (and hooves) that create it, and invites you to savor the craftsmanship of an ancient tradition being preserved today.