

# COMTÉ News



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Spring/Summer  
2022



Comté Cheese  
Association

(Photo Credit: Tom Hopkins)

## A Q&A with renowned Chef, prolific Author, Culinary Educator, Television Personality and Artist - Jacques Pépin!

**Q. You were born in Bourg-en-Bresse, near the area of production of Comté. Your family had a restaurant there. What kind of restaurant was it? Was cheese offered?**

**A.** They had a restaurant that offered bistro cooking like the kind you get in Lyon, Bourg or anywhere in the country. It's probably a mistake for most

Americans to look at French cooking in context of the [Michelin] star restaurant [system] because there is only probably 600 of those and 20 something with three stars. And there is what, like 138,000 restaurants in France? So, when I take groups from Boston University to France they tend to think these restaurants are Italian!!!

**Q. Was it common to have cheese in a restaurant like that?**

A. Yes, absolutely. But not before dinner. Only had that when I came to America, when I learned people start with a plate of cheese before dinner. Wow. Usually, we have cheese with the salad or whatever after the main course. My mother used to serve an apple tart with a caramel custard or cheese in her restaurant in Lyon. That was part of the tradition.

Actually, I have to say that during the war, I was just a little kid and my father left to go fight with the Résistance. We were picked up by the Red Cross and were taken to a farm in Savoie. And they made cheese there and we had cheese before meals there. That was a first for me. Before we started eating we had a piece of cheese. So that was quite different than it would be in my family.

**Q. What is your first experience of Comté? Have you visited the region over the years?**

A. Well, certainly my aunt always made a fondue with Comté. Half of the cheese she had to grate and the other half had to be sliced very thin. Which made no difference since it was melting but that was the way it was.

**Q. When you were at [the original] Le Pavillon was cheese offered to guests?**

A. Yes, when I first came to America, I started a Le Pavillon in 1959, then at the White House with the Kennedy's in 1960. After that, I decided to go to Howard Johnson's. I worked there for 10 years. Then I left to open a restaurant and do other things.

**Q. Have you been to the new Le Pavillon by Daniel Boulud?**

A. Yes, I was just there the other night. Daniel Boulud's a good friend and from Lyon, like me. He invited me there last year before it opened. He wanted to introduce me to all of his staff. I'm probably the only one alive who worked at the original Le Pavillon so!

The new restaurant is quite different but quite good. Excellent. It's very French and we had Comté for dessert. Because he had a big tray of cheese with Comté on it. It's a great space.

**Q. Aside from cooking with Comté, what is your take on cheese plates? Which wine would you serve with Comté?**

A. I know people now often say cheese with white wine. I am still with red wine in the old style. The other night we had a *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* from the Rhône -- that was a good mix for me!

**Q. You've filmed more than 250 instructional cooking videos and written more than 30 books. What are you working on now?**

A. Yes, I have a book coming out this summer and I have another book coming out next year. I've done 30- 31 books so far -- so that is many books. I wrote a book called *The Apprentice* (2003) which is the story of my life.

I also have been painting for the last half a century. I had a big show at a museum in Stamford, CT, a couple of months ago. Years ago, when I was first married, we decided that when people came to our house for dinner, I would write the menu of what we would serve them. Years later, I realized we had 12 large books of those menus with a lot of illustrations on them. A lot of illustrations of chickens, so at that point I wanted to do a book of chickens. Normal for someone from the Bresse region ! I have about 170 paintings & illustrations of chicken -- that book is coming out this summer.

In addition, to that we have been filming [cooking] videos for Facebook -- so far we have about 275. This has been quite successful. At the beginning, probably a couple years ago, our Facebook page had about 300,000 followers. Now, it's like 1.75 million, so it's quite a large following. It is run by my daughter, Claudine.

**Q. You have been a presence on TV and at festival. In recent years you have paired with daughter Claudine. Claudine?**

A. She works on Facebook for us. She also created with Rollie, my son-in-law, The Jacques Pépin Foundation (JPF) (<https://jp.foundation/>). We've done very, very well. A month ago, we held our big foundation dinner in New York. We raised \$700K. At the foundation we mostly raise money for community kitchens, to help people who have been disenfranchised in life; people formerly incarcerated, addicts and veterans.

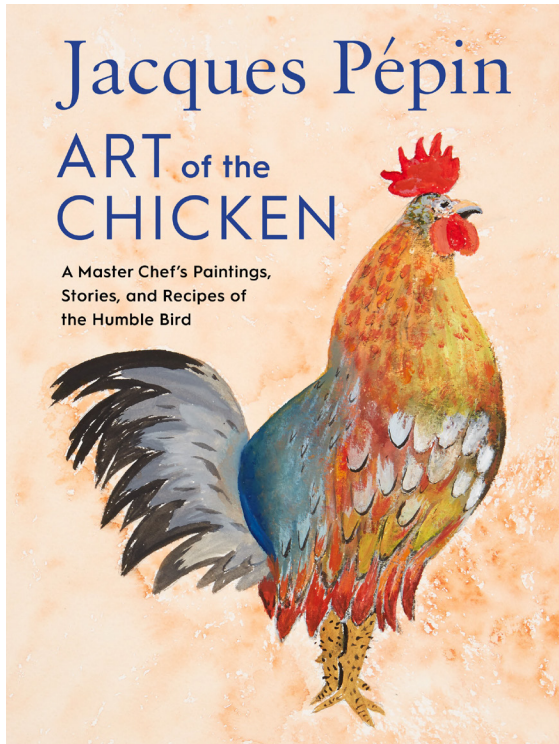
Over the last two years, Rollie asked chefs to do a [recipe/cooking] video because we could not raise money the same way during Covid. Initially, he asked chefs from José Andrés and Martha Stewart to Daniel Boulud. Now there are over 200 videos available. So now any chef you can think of in the food world is going to be involved. Rollie won a Webby Award for the foundation. The videos are available to members of the JPF such as young chefs for around \$30.

**Q. It's great to hear you enjoy Comté, are there any special memories you have of it?**

Yes, I remember when I was working for the president of France and we had a tray of cheese after each dinner. It was from a well-known cheese place in Paris, Androuet. Every time they would have Comté on it, and the names

of the cheeses would always be indicated on the tray. So, I worked with several presidents under the Fourth Republic between 1956-1958. I especially remember with Guy Mollet and then de Gaulle who introduced the 5th Republic in 1958.

And now I am going to have a glass of wine and possibly a piece of Comté with it!



**Jacques Pépin The Art of the Chicken:** *A Master Chef's Paintings, Stories, and Recipes of the Humble Bird* (published by Harvest Books), is available starting September 27<sup>th</sup> and can be found wherever books are sold.



**The number of places where one can buy Comté keeps on growing.** Not only is it available at specialty cheese shops and major grocery chains but now it is being carried by an increasing number of online retailers (a development spurred by Covid).

For more information about Comté, visit: [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com)

## Comté at David Boulud's Le Pavillon in NYC!

Le Pavillon was a restaurant that defined French dining from 1941- 1966. Daniel Boulud's took that legendary name for his latest venture, which opened last year in New York City. Since then, it's been generating rave reviews. Particularly, the Champignon Comté main dish! Comté also appears on their dessert cheese platter.

### TERRE

#### CHAMPIGNON | COMTE

girella pasta, hen of the woods mushroom, broccoli rabe, comté emulsion

#### CHOU FLEUR | SAFRAN

saffron roasted cauliflower, mojavé grapes, bloomsdale spinach, fresno pepper

#### PANAIS | ORANGE SANGUINE

chermoula roasted parsnip, anson mills' polenta, blood orange vinaigrette

#### POULET | CHAMPAGNE

roisserie chicken breast, spring vegetable vol-au-vent, asparagus, sauce champagne

#### AGNEAU | AIL NOUVEAU\*

duo of elysian fields farms lamb, sea island black eyed peas, spring garlic, escarole

#### BOEUF | RAIFORT\*

dry aged black angus

duo of braised paleron and strip loin for one

grilled cote de boeuf for two' supplement 36. per person

rutabaga, caramelized chestnuts, horseradish cream, sauce bordelaise



#### CANNEBERGE | ORANGE

cranberry paulova, "creamsicle" ice cream, candied kumquat

#### MASCARPONE | FRAISE

speculoos sable, mascarpone mousse, harry's berries strawberries

#### ANANAS | LAURIER

caramelized pineapple, vanilla cremeux, bay leaf ice cream

#### PAVOT NOIR | VANILLE

gianduja ganache, milk chocolate bavarois, poppy seed shortbread

#### CHOCOLAT | EARL GREY

chocolate moelleux, vanilla caramel, earl grey chantilly

#### NOISETTE | CHOCOLAT

milk chocolate mousse, praline croustillant hazelnut nougatine

#### FROMAGE | ABRICOT

Couple | goat, bloomy rind, Vermont

Oma | cow, washed rind, Vermont

Comté | cow, alpine, France

Fourme d'Ambert | cow, blue, France

IPA glazed apricots, walnut-raisin baguette



## '22 Winter Fancy Food Show in Vegas!



The Winter Fancy Food Show returned with a new location – Las Vegas! The show which ran February 6-8th at the Las Vegas Convention Center was well attended. One estimate stated that between 4,000 and 5,000 people attended the show, not including the exhibitors. Which was a solid post-Covid showing!

Despite the ever-increasing presence of plant-based/sustainable foods, (as well as Keto diet, mushroom products such as jerky, chips, puffs, etc.) cheese was well-represented at the show. Although there were less distributors and importers with booths compared to previous years, most of the key Comté importers and distributors were present. According to some sources, Las Vegas may be the home of the Winter show for next year too!

The summer FFS recently took place June 12-14<sup>th</sup> at Javits center in NYC.

## Your Chance to Win a Free Trip to SIAL 2022 (Salon International L'Agroalimentaire) Paris, France!

The Cheese Importers Association of America (CIAA) is proud to once again offer retailers of imported cheese and food service specialty cheese buyers a chance to win a trip to SIAL, October 13-19, 2022. Fifteen people will be chosen in a random drawing for the all-expense paid educational trip. This prize includes round-trip airfare, transportation, a two-night stay in Switzerland, five-night stay in Paris, magnificent dinners/events, educational tours and networking/learning opportunities. SIAL is the largest food exhibition in the world. Go to [www.theciaa.org](http://www.theciaa.org) to apply today. The deadline is July 30, 2022.



## CHEESEMAKER'S TOOLBOX: The Production Book

Did you know, all Comté cheesemakers keep a diary in which they record the smallest details of production on a daily basis? This includes everything from quality of milk, setting time of curds, cooking time, etc. Each cheesemaker records what they see fit to include, in addition to the traceability obligations: Who did what? Was there a particular event that day? A short outage? An open window? Weather conditions? This information allows the cheesemaker to keep track of all that happens each day of production. In particular, it will be useful months later, when the cheesemaker goes to see his cheeses in the maturing cellars of the affineur... If a batch has a small defect, or is exceptional, the cheesemaker will consult his precious notebook to see what may have influenced the production that day.

It is considered a very effective secret weapon for the continuous improvement of cheesemaking in the Comté PDO.

### The artisanal gestures of the Comté cheesemaker: Explained!

Among dozens of gestures, there are three that are essential to the production of Comté. These are:



1. **The pocket test:** After renneting the milk, the cheesemaker monitors the setting time and then assesses the firmness of the curd. In order to define the right time to start cutting the curd, he will carry out the “pocket test”: he plunges a plastic shovel into the tank and observes the sharpness of the break to assess the consistency of the curd. It's all a matter of feelings... At the precise time the cheesemaker starts cutting the curd which separates the dry matter from the whey.



2. **The dough test:** The cheesemaker performs the “dough test” to check the quality of the grains of curd. He takes a little curd and agglomerates it in the palm of his hand, to assess the elasticity and the cohesion of the dough. Here too, experience and feelings do their work! If everything is to his liking, he starts the draining of the curds: the contents of the vat are sucked up to be placed in perforated molds letting out the whey.



3. **The green plate:** During molding, two small casein markers are slid onto the side of the “white cheese.” The green plate is the identity card of the cheese: it indicates the month, the year and the place of manufacture; the second plate, which is white, indicates the day of manufacture. Sometimes a number is added which indicates the vat from which the curds came from. The next day, the cheese is unmoulded. Then the wheels are placed into the pre-affinage cellars in the Fruitière.