

# CHEESE + CURED MEAT



Indulgent and complex dry-cured meats are age-old partners to cheese

WRITTEN BY LAUREL MILLER



**A** slice of salami, a wedge of cheese. Be they ever so humble, these two foods share ancient history together—and they’re more similar than you may realize. Like wine, beer, and bread, cured meats have been enjoyed for as long as people have preserved foods, and are still prepared today via traditional methods of fermentation.

In the case of cured meats (often lumped under the umbrella Italian term *salumi* or the French *charcuterie*), the fermentation and dry-curing process is set in motion when salt and nitrites are added. Over the following weeks, as the meat hangs in a cool, controlled environment (historically, sometimes the very same cellar as aging cheeses), natural enzymes break down connective tissues and expel moisture, leading the meat to become denser, drier, and more richly flavored. As David Katz, owner of Napa Valley’s Sub Rosa Salumi, puts it, “something magic happens that can’t be explained by biochemistry alone.”

The basic rule for pairing cured meat and cheese is balance: Strike

the right match of fat, flavor intensity, seasonings, and texture between both parties, and you’re golden. It’s also OK (and, in fact, preferable for many people) to seek opposites.

“There’s plenty [of evidence] to recommend prosciutto di Parma and aged Parmigiano Reggiano” as a pairing, Katz says, “but I’d rather eat it with burrata di bufala [buffalo’s milk burrata], which contrasts more in terms of salt and mouthfeel.”

As for serving, one of the advantages of a meat-centric cheeseboard is that, by virtue of its rustic nature, entertaining is a snap. Says Charles Ventre, charcutier for Transatlantic Foods, which produces Aux Delices des Bois charcuterie,



"I like to stick to the basics: Serve at room temp, slice sausages double-thick, or thinly slice ham." And if you were wondering, *Ventre* adds, "No need to get fancy; finger licking is totally acceptable!" Pardon the pun, but we're on board with that.

## Classic Cured Meats

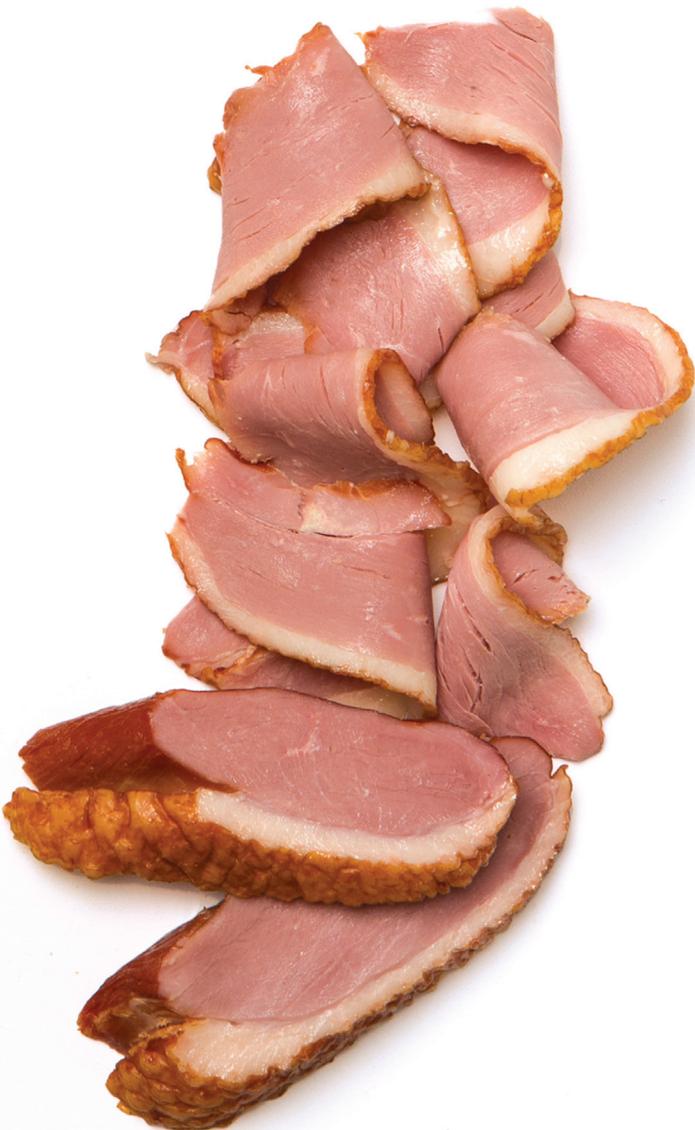
Pair classic staples (coppa, cured pork collar; and sopressata, dried salami) with cheeses by balancing characteristics. For example, *Aux Delices des Bois'* *Toscana Sausage* is studded with chunks of garlic and fat. A young, buttery cheese would coat the palate, obscuring the sausage; instead, try something drier, such as an aged pecorino.

Consider the aromatics as well. Cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, fennel, and other salumi seasonings each carry particular tastes and aromas. Look for complementary herbaceous cheeses, such as peppercorn-studded wedges, or alpine styles redolent of wildflowers.

**Parmigiano Reggiano** + *Aux Delices des Bois Coppa*

**Avalanche Cheese Co. Cabra-Blanca** + *Sub Rosa Salumi Sopressata*

**Black Sheep Creamery Queso de Oveja** + *Aux Delices des Bois Coppa Toscano*



## High-Octane Flavors

While cured meats are generally flavored with at least salt, pepper, and garlic, some varieties contain higher doses of aromatics, including dried or ground chilies, alcohol, or potent spices; they may also be smoked to enhance the flavor and preservation technique. These selections stand out for their distinctive flavor profiles, which elevate them a notch above standard cured meats. In pairing, the objective is to highlight those special attributes. The wild fennel pollen in *Sub Rosa's* fragrant Tuscan classic *Finocchiona*, for instance, shines against a young *Pecorino Toscano's* medium level of saltiness and creamy, not-too-sheepy profile. *Fra' Mani's* new *Salame Piemontese* is heady with

cardamom, ginger, and clove; it calls for a young cheese that won't fight for attention with spices.

**Pecorino Toscano Fresco** + *Sub Rosa Salumi Finocchiona*

**Mozzarella Co. Hoja Santa** + *Olympic Provisions Smoked Chorizo*

**Yarmuth Farms Whitehorse** + *Fra' Mani Salame Piemontese*

**Beppino Ocelli Testun al Barolo** + *Creminelli Fine Meats Salame al Barolo*

## Cured Hams

Cheese doesn't discriminate when it comes to ham. It's always a love match, as long as you take the flavor profiles into consideration. When it comes to cured ham, the characteristics vary: Silky, satiny, nutty, or sweet

## HOW TO TASTE

One of the bonuses of pairing these products with cheese? They're super-compatible. Simply slice salami or sausages into ¼- to ½-inch-thick slices (don't forget to remove the "skin" if there is one), and fan out alongside slices of semi-firm or hard cheese. With most cheeses (including soft), let the meat serve as the platform upon which the cheese sits (the exception to this rule is if you're serving paper-thin prosciutto; in that case, let the ham sit atop a slice of firmer cheese). Eat the entire pairing in the same bite to taste how the two interact.

are typical attributes of Italy's prosciutto or Spain's jamón ibérico; while speck (a smoked ham traditionally from Italy's Alto Adige region) is often rustic and earthy. A salty ham is well balanced by a tangy, earthy, or buttery cheese. A gamy meat, such as duck, will stand up to a washed-rind style.

**Vermont Creamery Bonne Bouche**  
+ *Tanara Prosciutto di Parma*

**Rockhill Creamery Dark Canyon Edam** + *Olli Salumeria Berkshire Prosciutto from Becker Lane Farm*

**Rogue Creamery Smokey Blue** + *La Quercia Speck*

**Fromagerie des Ardennes Le Wavreumont** + *Fabrique Délices Duck Magret*

### Assertive Cured Meats

Whether it's spicy 'nduja (en-doo-ya), a spreadable pork salami from Italy's Calabria region, or earthy cured game, these meats

pack a punch. Pair them accordingly, with a cheese that can stand up to their strong flavors and aromas. A sweet, lightly smoked domestic ricotta adds a cooling element to the aforementioned 'nduja by Underground Food Collective of Madison, Wis.; try pairing 'nduja on a plain, sturdy cracker or serving it in separate ramekins with sliced, country-style bread. Beefy Landaff complements the rich, dark meat and clove and juniper berry used to season Creminelli's field-harvested wild boar salami. A goat salami cut with a bit of pork for added fat plays well with a mellow, buttery aged goat cheese.

**Salvatore Bklyn Smoked Ricotta** + *Underground Food Collective 'Nduja*

**Landaff Creamery Landaff** + *Creminelli Fine Meats Wild Boar Salami*

**Tumalo Farms Classico Reserve**  
+ *Underground Food Collective Goat Salami*



## CHEF'S CHOICE

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