

Front & Back of the House

It's a Cheese Thing!



Gael Hees
Sep 7, 2020

Cheese. How many of us can say we love cheese? All hands in the room raised? But when planning for my interview with Diana Brier, I realized I didn't really "know" about cheese. Does it have terroir? What should I expect from a good brie? Do happy cows really make better milk for cheese?

The Person

Diana Brier's life with cheese has been a series of right-time, right-place experiences. She is a cheesemaker, affineur and monger and has worked at the creamery of her dreams, Rogue Creamery near Portland, Oregon. She is a certified Cheese Sensory Evaluator by the American Cheese Society and is now owner and cheese director of Valley Cheese and Wine.

Born in Tomball, Texas, northwest of Houston, after seven years of college spent jumping between the arts and sciences and amassing more credits than any college senior, Diana joined the workforce. While working in financial analytics related to identity theft monitoring, she had emergency open-heart surgery and ended up flatlining in the ICU recovery room.

"After that experience, I discovered I didn't want to do anything I didn't love to do ever again," Diana said.

The beginning?

Diana applied at Whole Foods while she was recovering, and the interviewer said, "What do you think of cheese?" She admitted that she loved cheese to the point that her first password on her computer was "cheese." Nothing prophetic here. Even her last name is brie with an extra "r."

"It was always something I just loved," said Diana, "but it never occurred to me that it was a career."

She was hired and enrolled in a Cheese 101 class. It was here that Diana began to understand that she could marry her two interests—science and art. Plus, it was food and making people happy and made her happy!



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Hot Off the Grill!

On August 3 the food & beverage community lost one of our own, as Justin Cooper lost his battle...

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What's Cooking

Photo Credit: Fresco Italiano Fresco Italiano at Westgate Las Vegas Serving Fresh Authentic Italian Cuisine Fresco Italiano at Westgate Las Vegas...

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UNLV Epicurean Society

Photo credit: Nicholas Bilt It has been a tough couple of months. In March, right before spring break, everything was...

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Wine Talk with Alice Swift

Another magazine issue, and still another month of social distancing and restricted hospitality and tourism. As part of the...

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Heavenly Pies Brings an Angelic Touch to the Las Vegas Culinary Scene

Photo credit: Elaine and Scott Harris When it comes to great food, James Beard award-winning chef Luciano Pellegrini appears to...

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What's Brewing

Speedee Mart Offering Expansive Craft Beer Selection Those in the know already are aware, but it's worth mentioning a chain...

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Her employment as assistant cheesemaker at Deer Valley Resort in Park City, Utah, was another twist of fate. She called on a whim about the possibility of a job during ski season and happened to reach the assistant cheesemaker who had just given her notice. She set up an interview for Diana with the Belgian cheesemaker who hired her on the spot and a week later she was making cheese!

Soon after she started, she was completing the entire make and following up with the affinage and as she says almost shyly and with an evident bit of wonder, “I became this cheesemaker!”

Her dream job at Rogue Creamery? The president liked to ski at Deer Valley and Diana met him, built him a cheeseboard and worked an event in Oregon with his team. Soon after she had a job as the first female to supervise all cheesemaking at Rogue Creamery!

The Cheese

My cheese tasting with Diana was simply amazing—I learned so much. For example, I never thought that any variety of cheese could be made with milk from a goat, sheep or cow. Cheese underneath the rind is always called a “paste,” and when the rind isn’t touching the paste, that’s called a “slipcoat,” which is due to improper moisture levels.

I experienced a richness of tastes new to my experience with cheeses. She told me to take the cheese into my mouth and push it up against the roof of my mouth and at the back of my teeth. She told me to breathe in through my mouth just slightly, letting the air add new heights to the taste sensations.

The first cheese we tasted was a sheep milk Brebrousse D’Argental from France—so rich and buttery! Diana directed me to have a swallow of the J.P. Chenet Sparkling Rose she had poured and pointed out what I should be experiencing: floral on the front of the palate and savory, slightly animal on the back. It was stunning.

The second cheese was called Midnight Moon from Holland. This gouda-like goat cheese was completely

The Bottom Line

Photo credit: John Kelly Marketing is one of the toughest hurdles for a restaurant owner. Too often seen as a...

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Best of the Best

Photo Credit: Area 15 and Lost Spirits AREA15, the highly anticipated entertainment venue on the west side of the I-15...

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The Raiders Kick Off Inaugural Season in Las Vegas

Photos Courtesy Michael Clemens, Las Vegas Raiders
Marc Badain - President of the Las Vegas Raiders
After years of anticipation the...

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Brett's Vegas View

Bright Future Signs An illuminated arch welcome sign for visitors entering Downtown Las Vegas is under construction. The \$6.5 million,...

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USBG Las Vegas

Photo credit: Todd Smith Todd Smith is “that guy” that everyone should know. Smart, funny and a student of the...

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different in taste, texture and appearance but equally delicious. The third cheese was a stunning Guryere. A valuable sensory and informational experience.

Cheese tastings and wine and cheese pairings are two of the many offerings at Valley Cheese and Wine, and Diana has special support. Solenne Peyronnin, former owner of the store, has stayed on as the director of wine. This is a place where one can go to explore new tastes—in both wine and cheese.

But what can Diana do for a restaurant?

Diana’s knowledge is so broad and deep, she can direct a chef to hundreds of different cheeses as ingredients or for cheeseboards.

“For example, if a chef is thinking of using a light cheddar in a recipe, after spending time studying the entire menu, I might recommend several different cheeses that would bring a unique flavor to the dish and better complement what the chef is trying to achieve over all,” said Diana. “I can also provide training for waitstaff members on the individual cheeses in the cheeseboards so they can discuss them knowledgeably with customers.”

Diana has changed my life in relation to cheeses. I’m always going to love a basic cheddar, but I can tell you I’m going to experiment and ask more questions at the cheese counter.

Diana Brier, Wine Director

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Photo credit: Valley Cheese & Wine Cheese. How many of us can say we love cheese? All hands in the...

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Twinkle Toast

Photo credit: Erin Cooper Photography Issa Khoury is no stranger to the wine business and his local retail shop, Khoury’s...

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The Restaurant Expert

No matter what happens in the next weeks and months, the lesson I hope you take away from this...

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Human Resources Insights

It seems like these days most of us find that our work or business endeavors require us do more...

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Product Review

ReadyWise Long-term Food This Salt Lake City, UT-based company started off as one of the leaders of the emergency food...

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Chef Talk

I hope everyone is doing well through this crisis. I’m writing this month’s article in August during the record-breaking...

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Gael Hees is a Las Vegas freelancer, and founder of the blog, The Steamy Side of Vegas, Living the Spa Life. She writes for national publications and has won numerous awards for printed materials and videos. Follow her at steamysideofvegas.com or email, gael.hees@icloud.com with questions, suggestions or comments.



SoCal Foodie Biz

Photo Credit: Dog Haus Worldwide As restaurants continue to struggle through the COVID-19 pandemic, some are nevertheless finding ways to...

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SoCal Craft

Photo Credit: David Mulvihill First published in 2008, He Said Beer, She Said Wine was inspired by dinner pairing competitions...

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