

August 2019

Every good new cheesemonger asks the same question sooner or later – *how do I learn more about cheese? What books can I read?* And the answer usually comes back something like – “yeah, there’s this book, and this website, but really you just have to learn as you go by tasting/asking questions/visiting producers/etc.” I’ve always struggled with the fact that most books and resources end up focusing on people, history, or technical details – very few dive deep into what defines a given *style* of cheese. *What should* this cheese taste like? Often we hide behind batch variation and say “every batch is different” – but I think/hope there are still Truths about each style that are worth learning, and worth teaching.

Cheesemongers often latch on to personal stories as a primary means of selling cheese - and it works, generally. But I want to know how we can elevate flavor profiling education to a new level. I want to hone in the **power** of your first

holy shit!

moment as a cheesemonger, whatever the style or category of cheese – of course, you can relate the experience and sell the hell out of that batch, but how can you build on that? What’s next? Why did that cheese make you swear out loud? Should you even be swearing in the cheese shop, or in a DZTA application? Is there a way to preserve the memory of that cheese, at that time?

In 2017, I was awarded the DZTA scholarship to dig deep into English bandaged-wrapped cheddars – the source of many a *holy shit!* moment – and to share that information not only at the 2018 ACS conference but through a simple, focused website dedicated to the style:

bandagedcheddar.com

This pilot project was the first of its kind – a website promoting the ongoing and rigorous study of one particular style of cheese. The foundation was built on the classics – 6 established bandaged cheddars from the UK: Montgomery’s / Keen’s / Westcombe / Quicke’s / Hafod / Lincolnshire Poacher, with detailed, careful analysis of the farms/milk/process/rinds/aging techniques/flavor profiles and clearly presented information on the analytical and flavor composition of the cheese at different points in its life informed by two week-long visits to England, 6 months apart.

The development of a style-specific spider graph is one of the most unique things about this website. The flavor profile reference points were developed after thorough, comprehensive tastings with each producer, alongside the experienced selection team from Neal’s Yard Dairy. The reason for two visits was to see summer and winter profiles, younger and older, and to follow up on batches from the first tasting in the second round. This was a formative experience for me, as I had yet to visit the UK or Europe as part of my cheese career. While I had ongoing professional experience having tasted hundreds of batches of bandaged cheddars over my career, and I

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thought that I had developed an understanding of some of the nuances of the style...I quickly found that there is still so much more to learn, and I wanted to get a better grounding in the English standards to prop them up as vanguards of the style.

I remember when I first walked into the musty aging room at Jamie Montgomery's farm in January 2018. I thought – *holy shit!* - the smell of the aging room should be listed alongside rennet type and milk treatment! We tasted through a range of cheeses made in summer 2017. We talked about pH profiles and salt targets, and the flavors were rich and nuanced, emblematic of the cheese as we all know it. But as we were tasting, I got to thinking – what will Monty's taste like 10 years from now? Is the Monty's made in 2017 going to be the same as Monty's from 2027? Surely in 10 years something will have happened that will change the cheese, ever so slightly, to a different profile. But the style of bandaged cheddar will remain the same. Could this website be the first formal attempt to pin a cheese down to some sort of profile - almost like we think of wines in vintages but can describe the general profile of a given type of wine? On bandagedcheddar.com, you could imagine a catalog of past spider graphs for a given cheese – composites of a season, year-over-year comparisons – how fascinating would it be for new mongers to be able to look up how a cheese has evolved over time?

Maybe cheese is too complex for that. Or maybe thinking about cheese in terms of “vintages” is too reductive or naive. But maybe we just haven't previously had the framework to quantify and qualify differences between batches/seasons/years/cheesemakers/techniques in a consistent arena. Maybe this website could serve as one piece to preserve the legacy of a cheese that will one day completely change, or disappear.

After the presentation at the 2018 cheese conference – the first DZTA presentation with a tasting included, with a reference batch of each bandaged cheddar, and an interactive live spider graph session - this format of information-sharing has spurred a revitalization of sorts by several others in the industry – within a year, there have been similar websites developed for alpine cheeses and rinded blue cheeses, using the same model as bandagedcheddar.com. The ultimate goal of the website is to provide all the information that cheesemongers need to get up to speed on the story and profile of a cheese - using an established and consistent spider graph system to compare a batch to the style at large.

All in all, the lasting educational impact of bandagedcheddar.com is clear, but ever-evolving – it's a living education “document” that can be adapted to fit any type of cheese by someone with expertise in the style, and goes deeper than just marketing and story-telling. This project supports the palates, hearts, and minds of the internet-savvy young cheesemonger who cracked open a wheel of traditional bandaged cheddar and had their first *holy shit!* experience.

Take a breath, taste again, then document the profile.