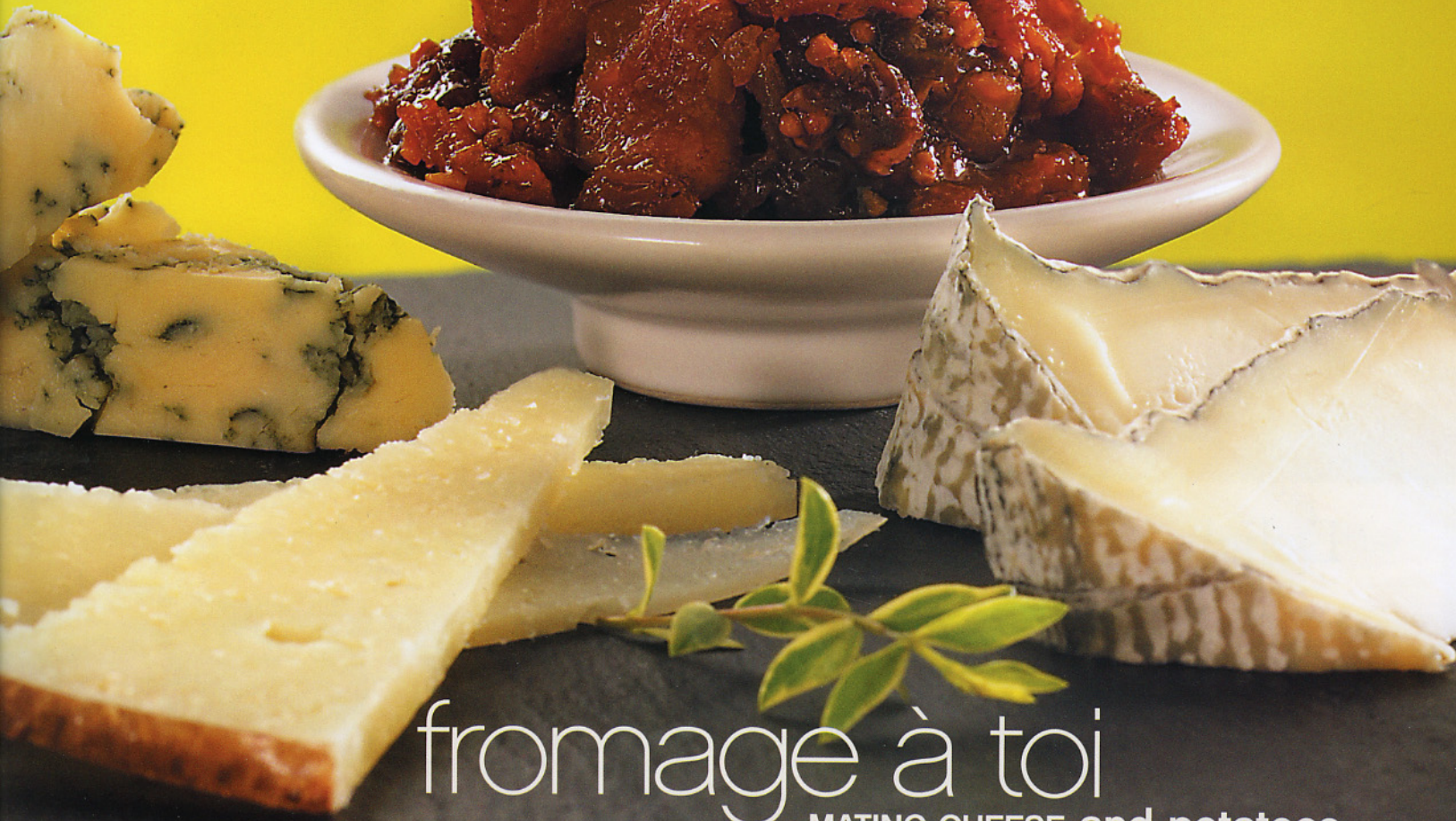


March • April 2006

# plate

Creative chefs. Better menus. Real solutions.



## fromage à toi

MATING CHEESE and potatoes  
cheese schmears SPREAD THE LOVE  
ROMANCING regional pizzas  
quiche AND TELL

# happy accidents

TIME HAS TURNED A FERMENTED FOIBLE INTO ONE OF LIFE'S MOST UNFORGETTABLE FOODS

There are a handful of foods that defy comparison. Bread, beer, wine, salami and cheese are each truly in a class of their own, though they all belong to the general category of fermented foods—foods that, usually by some unusual natural accident, have become integral parts of almost every culture's gastronomic legacy.

We can only guess at the exact origins of these first fermented accidents, but refinement over the ages has resulted in some of the most distinguished and sublime culinary products known. Who, for example, has not marveled at the perfect simplicity of a sourdough boule or at the sensory drama of a great Burgundy?

Of this group of fermented foods, cheeses distinguish themselves further. It is amazing to think that an Italian Reggiano, a French Explorateur and a Spanish Cabrales are all made of essentially the identical ingredient. The sheer variety of cheese, all derived from goat, sheep or cow's milk, is staggering. DeGaulle himself famously noted this diversity when he commented on the difficulty of unifying a nation that is home to several hundred name-controlled cheeses.

For us at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, cheese is an integral part of our menu and our food philosophy. Whether as a component of a dish or as a dish on its own, cheese provides us with a palette unlike any other—a flavor and textural spectrum impossible to duplicate with even the most sophisticated cooking techniques.

There is, however, more to cheese than simply something great to eat. We love cheese because great cheeses remind us of the land, and that link, after all, is why we do what we do. Cheese allows us to taste

the earth, the grass, the wildflowers and herbs. It is a telling window, a direct link to the seasons that shape our food and our eating

habits. Cheeses taste like the seasons because great cheeses *have* seasons and should be eaten that way. Europeans have known and practiced this for millennia.

And now for the first time (lucky us), American fromagiers are ably playing catch-up to centuries of European cheesemaking traditions, producing soft goat, rustic sheep and complex blues that can hold their own on any worldly cheese board. Writing in 1972 in his "American Cookery," James Beard mused that "it is heartwarming to think that in the next 25 years we might develop a new cheese of our own."

We did. And at our restaurant, we are fortunate to have access to outstanding locally produced artisanal cheeses, which we oftentimes pair alongside their European inspirations. And all the while, as we and our clients savor these cheeses—be they American or European—it is humbling to remember that the controlled spoilage of milk can produce such sublimely diverse flavors and textures. It is truly a testament to the confluence of primordial natural processes and basic human tinkering—a triumph of both nature and nurture. ♦



Dan Barber, left, and Adam Kaye

**Dan Barber**, executive chef-owner, and  
**Adam Kaye**, sous chef  
Blue Hill at Stone Barns, Pocantico Hills, N.Y.