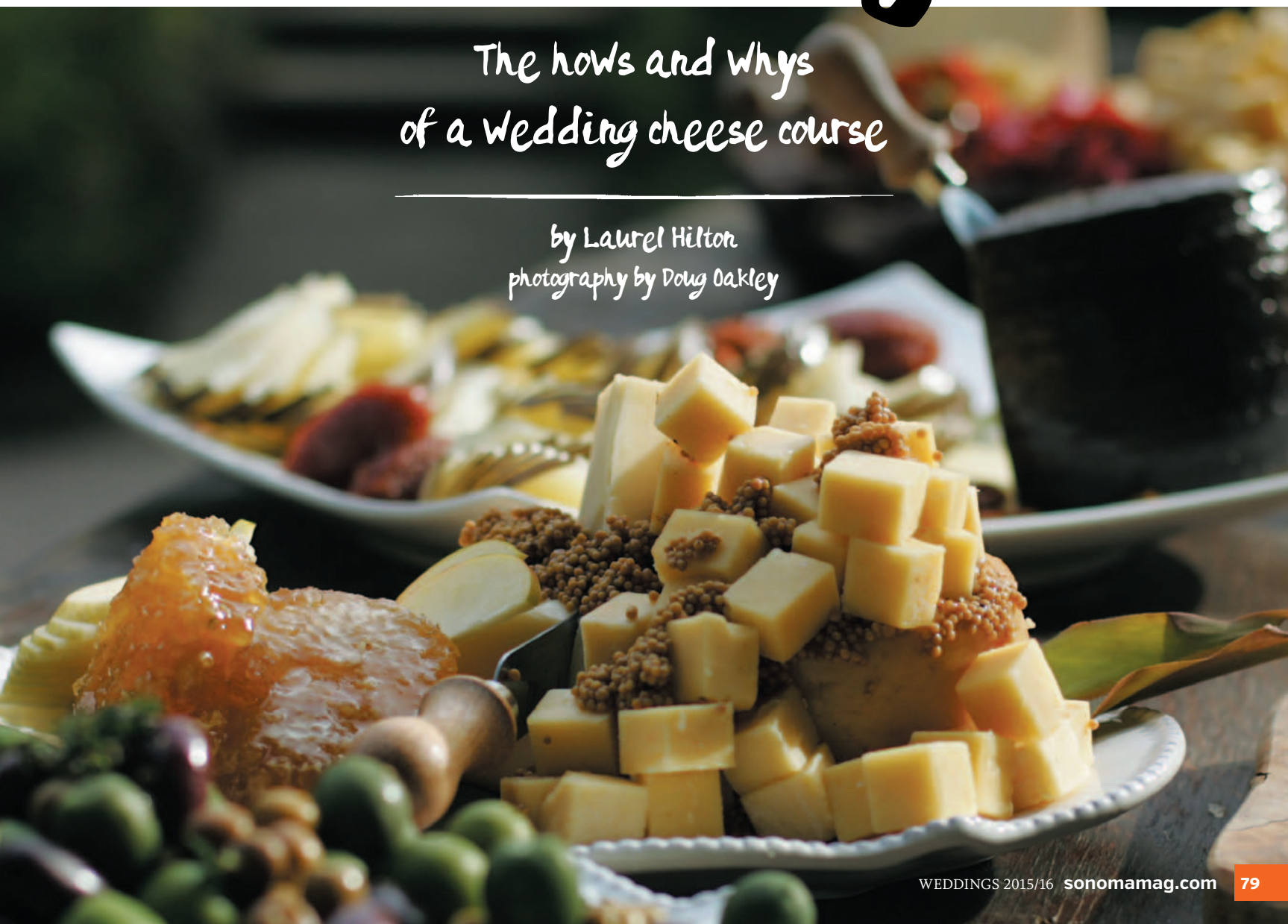


getting cheesy

The hows and whys
of a wedding cheese course

by Laurel Hilton
photography by Doug Oakley





A beer-washed cheddar was offered as part of a cheese station before dinner at a wedding in Monte Rio.

An old song lyric says love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. Another age-less pairing is wine and cheese. Chances are good that if you're planning your wedding in Sonoma, the wine will be flowing freely—and what better complement than a selection of local artisanal cheeses.

The North Bay region of San Francisco has attracted much attention in the last several years for its award-winning, handcrafted cheeses. The area is often referred to as the Normandy of Northern California, a nod to France's famous cheese-producing region. A cheese course is an excellent way to showcase local flavors and have fun with presentation.

You don't need to be an expert to include a cheese course in your celebration—but it helps

to take cues from one. Janet Fletcher, author, cheese educator, and publisher of the Planet Cheese e-newsletter (subscribe at janetfletcher.com) has some suggestions for planning your wedding-day cheese course.

First, get yourself a copy of the Sonoma Marin Cheese Trail map, available online (see "Resources"). According to Janet, the Cheese Trail map is "a great guide to start with, and it tells you who the producers are. It's a fun way to get to know the region."

After reviewing the trail map, start to think about the styles of cheese you like and the ones you don't. "If you are working with a caterer, let them know your preferences," says Janet. "But then give them some flexibility. Cheese comes and goes in the marketplace; some cheeses are quite seasonal, and your caterers

are going to know what they can get in great condition on the day of your wedding.”

Each year, there are more cheeses to choose from. Use your time wisely in conducting research and visiting cheese purveyors. It is a good idea to plan well in advance of your big day.

Once you have your cheese selections made, the next task is to decide on timing. Should the cheese course be part of your hors d'oeuvres presentation during the cocktail hour or during a formal seated meal? It's up to you, but if you opt to serve cheese during a sit-down dinner, Janet recommends offering the cheese after the main course, before des-

sert. Perhaps your guests would enjoy a simple baby greens or arugula salad complemented with a cheese board, or with a few selections of cheese on the greens. “It is a lovely interlude before dessert,” says Janet.

Finally, many couples who marry in Sonoma celebrate its scenic beauty by holding their wedding outdoors. If you're planning an outdoor wedding, keep in mind that cheese needs to be protected. “Cheese can be served at room temperature, but it really doesn't like to be hot any more than a cake would,” says Janet. In this case, narrow the window in which you serve cheese, whether during cocktail hour or your reception.



Perfect to Pair With Champagne

Cheese expert Janet Fletcher suggests the following cheese styles as an accompaniment to sparkling wine.

Aged goat's milk cheese (try Capricious by Achadinha Cheese Company)

Bloomy rind cheeses, such as brie and camembert (try Tomales Farmstead Creamery)

Mellow bleu cheese—buttery and smooth

Ricotta—served with berries, peaches, and local honey (try Bellwether Farms)

Sheep's milk cheese

Toma—smooth, light, and buttery

Triple cream cheeses, rich and buttery

Cheese Artisans and Guides

Sonoma and Marin counties are in the heart of Northern California's cheese country. Here are some of Janet's favorite Sonoma cheese purveyors and resources.

Achadinha Cheese Company
achadinha.com

Andante Dairy
andantedairy.com

Bellwether Farms
bellwetherfarms.com

Marin French Cheese Company
marinfrenchcheese.com

Tomales Farmstead Cheese
tolumafarms.com

Vella Cheese Company
vellacheese.com

Sonoma and Marin Cheese Trail
cheesetrail.org