

Singing the Blues

BY SAM GUGINO

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ROQUEFORT, STILTON AND GORGONZOLA OFTEN come up when people talk about high quality blue cheese, especially if they are looking for a classic pairing such as Roquefort with Sauternes, or Stilton with Port. But there are many excellent blues beyond the big three, as we discovered last year when 16 blue cheeses wound up in *Wine Spectator's* list of 100 great cheeses ("The

We were st category of c meaty aroma Valdéon, fro of fruit and texture. We e a remarkabl within the c Roquefort, Gorgonzola t

That blue so varied shc been so sta that they ar by several f is the milk. cheeses, suc and Gorgonz from cow's i can be rich but which rather neutr Sheep's milk nutty and gar in Roquefort Basques), an cheeses feat earthiness (F bourne Blue) such as Ca Spain, are r combination

As with w a factor. The influenced b eat in the m tions in flav pasture, as t Farm's Bayle

Vermont's Jasper Hill and Oregon's Rogue Creamery, which had three blues on our list of 100 great cheeses, are two of the many innovative blue cheese makers in the United States. "The biggest change in blue cheese has come from American cheeses," says Robert Kaufelt, owner of Murray's Cheese in New York. He adds that the reason is other countries are constricted by traditions and regulations that don't apply to U.S. producers. For example, in France, Roquefort must be made near the village of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon, where blue cheese was believed to have been conceived more than a thousand years ago.

later to discover that an unsightly mold had covered the cheese—and that it tasted delicious. Today, Roquefort is still made in caves. Loaves of local rye bread are allowed to decay until the *Penicillium roqueforti* mold emerges, then the dried and ground mold is added during the cheesemaking process. Once formed, the cheese is pierced with needles to let oxygen in and allow the bacteria to grow, forming blue striations

ROQUEFORT Sheep's milk, France. Creamy, with salt, sweet milk and piquant blue character. Match with Sauternes.

ROGUE CREAMERY BLUE Cow's milk, Oregon. Distinctly fruity and rustic. Try with German auslese Riesling.



STILTON Cow's milk, England. Earthy aromas and buttery texture, with complex flavors. A classic with Vintage Port.

VALDÉON Cow's and goat's milk, Spain. Buttery texture, pronounced saltiness and meaty flavors. Pair with Madeira.

thing I verified with a German Riesling auslese and an even drier California Viognier. Don't forget sparkling wine (dry with pungent blues; softer and sweeter with creamier cheeses), Pedro Ximénez Sherry (with Cabrales) and Tokaji, which goes with most blues.

Given the assortment of blue cheeses and the variety of wines that go with them, it may be a blue moon before you run out of pairing possibilities.

Sam Gugino has been writing for *Wine Spectator* since 1994, becoming a regular columnist in 1996.