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1 An armful of cheese. 2 A global array of fromage. 3 Murray's counter. 4 Olives and pickles. 5 Murray's salami.

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Murray's Cheese

LOCALE: 254 Bleeker St., Manhattan, murrayscheese.com

THE STORY: Greenwich Village is an eclectic neighborhood that has seen its fair share of changes. The Italians moved out and young, hip New Yorkers made up of artists, musicians and even business types moved in. Like the neighborhood, Murray's Cheese evolved from a tiny dairy shop in the '40s to an Italian bodega through the '90s to what it is today: a quality cheese shop with an impeccable reputation for customer service.

THE REPUTATION: Buying cheese can be as intimidating as shopping for wine. But Murray's goal is to create an environment that is approachable, educational and fun. The philosophy is "try it before you buy it." And they enforce it. The cheesemongers are knowledgeable and seem to lower the intimidation factor from the moment you enter the door. Murray's true distinction comes from its onsite cheese caves, where the cheese can age properly.

THE GOODS: Murray's strives to keep an interesting selection of 300 cheeses—from domestic to international, high-end to affordable. Though cheese is the main attraction, Murray's has also created quite a business with cured meats. In fact, it now has Murray's Real Salami (located on 43rd and Lexington next to its other cheese shop).

VIRTUAL CHEESE: Experiencing Murray's in person is best, but the website is a gem. Check out the glossary of terms, the virtual cheesemonger test, cheese and meat of the month clubs, and all the great cheeses for purchase.