

GALENA RIVER WINE & CHEESE

REVISITED
BY RICH BELMONT



Are you having a holiday party and trying to think of a way to make it happen quickly and easily? Here is a great idea: make it a wine, beer and cheese party!

One sure way to impress your guests is to serve them excellent quality domestic, imported and locally produced food and beverages that are unusual and entertaining. You will find everything you need at Galena River Wine & Cheese in Galena, IL.

This shop specializes in the area's largest and finest array of domestic and imported cheeses, wines and beers. You choose from over 170 wines, 130 premium beers and 120 different cheeses. Then you compliment these by selecting from a huge assortment of pâtés and salamis, gourmet coffees and teas, crackers, breads, mustards, pastas, preserves, cookies, nuts, chocolates and so much more.

Galena River Wine & Cheese was established in 1982 and is located at the south end of Main Street just inside the floodgates. It's in the building built in 1845 by Charles Peck. Originally it was a steamboat provisioning warehouse and subsequently housed wine and liquor wholesalers and three creameries.

Julie and Bryon Taylor purchased Galena River Wine & Cheese in November, 2014. Julie is from Kalona and Bryon grew up in Decorah, both small towns in Iowa. They met at the University of Iowa and after graduating they married and moved to Chicago. Julie taught grade school children and Bryon was a manager in a couple of brokerage houses and was Chief Financial Officer and Interim President of **TradeMONSTER.com** online stock and options traders.

Julie and Bryon visited Galena and became enamored of the city's beauty and old-world charm. Three years ago they purchased the Weber-Rockford Double Miner's Cottage as a summer home. Earlier this year they discovered the wine and cheese shop was up for sale. So they began contemplating new careers and a permanent move to Galena. At first it was a tough decision deciding if they should uproot their daughter, Addyson, and leave Edgewater, an upscale Lakeside community on the North side of Chicago near Loyola University where they had lived for 20 years. However, the decision came easily after there was a shooting right outside their residence!

Of course, the main attractions at a wine and cheese store must be wine and cheese, right? There are too many varieties to list them all so here is a sampling: French le Roule with garlic and herbs, California Humboldt Fog Chevre, French Explorateur Triple Crème, Monterey Jack with dill and garlic, Monterey Jack with basil and garlic, French Morbier, English Cotswald and Wisconsin Chocolate cheese with walnuts.

You can choose several different flavors for some varieties. For example there are 5, 7, 9, and 11 year cheddars. The more cheddar ages the sharper it tastes. There is a Wisconsin Hickory-Smoked Cheddar, Tilamook Sharp Cheddar, Chipotle Cheddar and Horseradish Cheddar.

Another example embodies all the different kinds of blue cheese. You will find the extraordinary creamy and intensely flavored Classic French Roquefort made from sheep's milk; the Spanish Cabrales Blue; the Salemville Amish Blue handcrafted from hand-milked dairy cows milk by Pennsylvania Amish; Wisconsin Buttermilk Blue from the Wisconsin cheese maker, Roth Käse; Maytag Blue handmade in Newton, IA since 1941; the Danish Triple Cream Blue Castello made with 75% butterfat for a mild spicy flavor; and the English Stilton Desert Blue cheese with blueberries, apricots, mango-ginger or lemon.

All these cheeses have interesting stories you can relate to your friends so they will think you are a cheese nerd. For example, the French Morbier has a small line of grape leaf ash separating the morning and afternoon cream layers. The French Raclette which means "to scrape" is a string cheese usually shaved off the block and melted onto potatoes or vegetables. The Belgium Chimay Cheese is made by Chimay Monks, the same order of monks at the New Melleray Abby near Dubuque. The Manchego, a Spanish cheese aged 12 months is made from 100% Manchega sheep milk and is the most popular cheese eaten in France. The cheese spread Wensleydale Gourmandise flavored with Kirsch, the clear brandy distilled from cherries. The Sartori Bella Vitano Raspberry is a Wisconsin cheese aged a minimum of 8 months with a texture of parmesan and a sweetness of creamy cheddar soaked in New Glarus Raspberry Tart Ale. It was voted Best New Cheese in 2008 and Best Cheese in 2009 and is one of the few cheeses exported from the U.S.

No cheese store would be complete without a Brie or Camembert and Galena River Wine & Cheese has a couple of the best. Both are bloomy-rinded aged, soft cheeses with reputations for being the kings of cheeses. Most people don't know they are made according to the same recipe and unless you are a cheese expert they will taste equally good to you. One is made in the Brie region of the Île-de-France and the other comes from the Village of Camembert in the Normandy region of France.

You need not worry about feeling overwhelmed from all these cheese choices. You can ask to sample them and the shop's entire staff is extremely knowledgeable and at your service.

Fred Ortiz, the store manager, has close to 30 years experience in retailing and has been at this store for over 8 years. Dan Thornton has been here for over 13 years and can educate you on all aspects of cheese and wine tasting. Sheila Haman and Jacque Hall are long-time employees and are eager to help you make your selections.

Cheese should be served at room temperature: the flavor is vastly improved if it is allowed to warm up. A small piece of cheese should be taken out of the refrigerator a half hour before serving and a large block of a pound or more needs about an hour on the counter. Most cheeses can be stored in the refrigerator for several weeks. The harder the cheese the longer it keeps. However a soft cheese like brie will only last a couple of days. You should always purchase at least a quarter pound of cheese and keep it in a block until ready to use. However, you can ask for it to be sliced when ordered. Thinly sliced cheese yields more flavor than thick slices. Freezing does not change the flavor but does affect the texture and should be avoided.

When having a party you should allow at least one eighth to one quarter pound of cheese per person. Vary the cheese assortment by including a soft, ripened cheese, a hard cheese, cheeses of different colors, a couple of popular cheese like cheddar or gouda, an unusual or aged one and cheese with something added like olives, mustard seed, garlic or jalapeños.

When putting cheese away its best to toss the original wrapping and rewrap in fresh parchment or waxed paper or special cheese paper. Wrap in one of these papers first and then loosely enclose it in plastic wrap or place it in a baggie without sealing it to prevent the cheese from drying out.



Any of the staff will help you pair your cheese selections with wine or beer. All the wines are of the highest quality and are great buys. Some examples include the Farina Amarone Della Valpolicella 2010. It is an excellent choice but if it is too pricey then you can

select the Valpolicella Ripasso 2010. Ripasso wines are for those who love strong reds but can't always afford Amarone.

Other excellent wines include Casaloste 2009 Fattoria Rodano Chianti Classico; Sangiovese 2012 Di Majo Norante; Citra Montepulciano D'Abruzzo 2012; Baci Dolci Sweet Kiss; Stefano Farina Mosato d' Asti and the Stefano Christiani 2012 Pinot Grigio. There are also dessert wines and cordials. Like the ChocoVine: a combination of Dutch chocolate with French cabernet or the exotic Sômrus meaning "Nectar of the Gods" in Hindi made from a recipe dating back to 2600 BC. This Indian Cream Liqueur is made in the US by artfully blending pure cream, Caribbean rum, cardamom, saffron, almonds, pistachios and rose. I served this at a recent family gathering and I had to promise I would send a bottle to each of my sons!

The German beer selection is outstanding. There are beers from Franziskaner, Hacker-Pschorr, Einbecker, Erdinger and Spaten-Bräu. There are numerous brews from domestic brewers as well, like Founders Brewing Co., Curmudgeon, Devil Dancer, and Red's Rye.

Galena River Wine & Cheese is also a depot for small batch and artisan extra virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegars from all over the world. Each cold pressed, unfiltered oil is stored in an Italian stainless steel tank called a Fusti. The tank is designed to protect its contents from heat, light and air. There are 14 olive oils including Greek Organic, Spanish Arbequina, Basil, Roasted Chili Pepper, Garlic, Lemon, White Truffel and Tuscan Herb. This last one is a blend of oregano, basil, rosemary and garlic and is one of the best sellers. I myself like to dip pieces of a French baguette into it as an appetizer. The neat thing about purchasing these oils is you can taste each one before you buy. They are sold in protective colored bottles and when you return them for refills you get a \$1.50 price reduction.

The same is true with the Balsamic Vinegars. There are 12 of these including Blueberry, Fig, Pomegranate, Raspberry, Strawberry, White Peach, Cherry, 12 Year White, Traditional 20 Year and Black Currant. And for the record Balsamic Vinegar is not wine vinegar. It's made from grape pressings that have not been allowed to ferment into wine. The pressings are aged causing moisture to evaporate thickening the vinegar and concentrating the flavor: the older the vinegar the higher the price.

Plan on taking your time looking around the store. Check out some of the other unusual items like Stonewall Kitchen products from York, Maine. Their award winning product line includes Salsas like lime or raspberry; Pestos including basil artichoke, roasted garlic bread spread, maple pumpkin, caramel apple; Butters with flavors like fig and walnut; plus jams, mustards, and crackers.

There is a fascinating collection of Rossi Pastas and Cucina Viva Crostinis including black olive, black pepper, spicy bloody Mary and rosemary.

Then there are several salamis including Piller Mustard Seed, Bavarian, Hungarian, Genoa, and Hard salami. The prosciutto from La Quercia in Norwalk, IA is excellent; and the Serrano Ham is imported from Spain and is the cornerstone of Spanish gastronomy.

Julie and Bryon are continuously looking for more locally produced products. So you will find many products from Illinois including Gramps Gourmet Pickles, Scales Mound; Honey from Apple Creek Apiaries, Apple River; Maple Syrup from Hogback Haven Maple Farm, Orangeville; Mean Bean Roasters Coffee from right up the street in Galena; and beer from nearby breweries Potosi Brewing Company and Galena Brewing Company.

By the way if you are still looking for some last minute Christmas presents all of these unusual and wonderful products can be incorporated into beautiful gift baskets.

Once you enter Galena River Wine and Cheese it is almost impossible to leave empty handed. Not to worry, though, your purchases can be held for you while you tour Main Street. When you are leaving town just pull your car into the loading area right in front of the store!



↑ Julie & Bryon Taylor



↑ Fred Ortiz and Jacque Hall



↑ Dan Thornton and Sheila Haman

GALENA RIVER WINE & CHEESE

420 South Main St., Galena, IL 61036

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Hours: Sun-Fri: 10 AM-5 PM • Sat: 10 AM-6 PM

Pay Options: Cash, check, debit, all credit cards except AMEX

Accessibility: Front door

Parking: Free parking on Water St. behind building, Main St., and in municipal lot across the street