



Galena River Wine & Cheese

by Rich Belmont

Now that the holidays are fast approaching you might be thinking of hosting parties and get-togethers for family and friends. One sure way to impress them is to serve imported, domestic and locally produced food and beverages that are unusual, yes, but also out of this world!



You don't have to go far away to stock up on an assortment of gustatory delights. Might I suggest you visit Galena River Wine & Cheese right here in Galena, IL?

This shop specializes in offering the area's finest collection of domestic and imported wines, cheeses, premium beers, vinegars, olive oils and everything else you need to throw a first-class party.



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

Ken and Sandy Winge, who are originally from the Chicago suburbs, visited Galena and quickly succumbed to Galena's old-world charm. They visited friends often and eventually purchased a week-end retreat. Soon after, Ken and Sandy decided to become full time residents and open a business in downtown Galena. Since they both enjoyed hosting wine and cheese parties and shared a passion for artisan cheese and fine wine and premium beers, opening a wine and cheese shop just seemed the natural thing to do.



They purchased the Peck Building in 1982 and immediately went to work restoring it while at the same time lining up suppliers of domestic and imported cheeses, premium beers, select wines, sausages and pate's, gourmet coffees and teas and other specialty foods.



For 30 years, now, Ken and Sandy have been searching the world to fulfill their mission to provide their customers with a knowledge and sophistication of fine food and drinks. Right now there are over 150 cheeses, 140 premium craft beers and a huge assortment of fine wines in stock.

Of course, cheese is the focal point of this cheese shop. Many of them are stored in large blocks or wheels to prevent them from drying out. There is

a window in the cooler so you can see them waiting for their chance to be on display. There are too many varieties to list them all so here is a sampling: Wisconsin Hickory-Smoked Cheddar, French le Roule with Garlic and Herbs, California Humboldt Fog Chevre, French Camembert, French Explorateur Triple Crème, Tillamook Sharp Cheddar and even a Wisconsin Chocolate Cheese with Walnuts.

Ken and Sandy have carefully chosen several varieties from some of their cheese makers. For example from Country Connection there is Cheddar with Tomato and Basil, a Hot Chipotle Cheddar, Monterey Jack with Dill and Garlic and Monterey Jack with Basil and Garlic.

Galena River Wine & Cheese
420 South Main Street, Galena, IL 61036
815-777-9430 | www.galenawinecheese.com

HOURS: Sunday – Friday 10 a.m –5 p.m.,
Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

PAY OPTIONS: Cash, Check, Debit, All Credit Cards (No Amex)

ACCESSIBILITY: Front Door

PARKING: Free parking on Water Street behind building. Free parking on Main Street and Municipal Lot across street

There are also several choices for some types of cheese. You might think you intensely dislike blue cheese. However, you may change your opinion when you try sampling a few of these: the Classic French Roquefort made from sheep's milk that only comes from France, the Spanish Cabrales Blue, Salemville Amish Blue handcrafted from hand-milked dairy cows by Pennsylvania Amish, Wisconsin Buttermilk Blue from the Wisconsin cheese maker Roth Käse, Maytag Blue handmade in Newton, IA since 1941 or the Danish Triple-Cream Blue Castello made with 75% butterfat for a mild spicy flavor. Or how about a traditional English Stilton dessert blue cheese with blueberries, apricots, mango-ginger, or lemon?

Every one of these cheeses has a story. 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 strong cheese that is usually shaved off the block and melted on potatoes. Then there is the Belgium Chimay Classic made by Chimay monks, the same order of monks at the New Melleray Abbey near Dubuque. There is also Sandy's favorite cheese Manchego, a Spanish cheese aged 12 months and made from 100% Manchega sheep's milk. And my new favorite, Sartori Bella Vitano Raspberry, 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.



You need not worry about feeling overwhelmed from all these choices. First of all you can ask for a taste of any and all the cheeses you are interested in and secondly the entire staff is extremely knowledgeable and at your service. Three of the staff members, Fred Ortiz, the store manager, Chris Ludescher and Dan Thornton have a combined 35 years experience with all of the merchandise in the store.



If you are just learning about the pleasures of cheese the staff offers a few rules of thumb. 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. Freezing does not change the flavor but does affect the texture. Most cheeses can be stored in the refrigerator for several months. You should always purchase at least a quarter pound of cheese and keep it in a block until ready to use. However, you can have it sliced when you order it. Thinly sliced cheese yields more flavor.

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



The staff will help you to pair your cheese selections with wine or beer. For all intents and purposes, the wines are all part of Ken's personal collection. He seldom buys a wine he hasn't tasted. Ken and Sandy go to many Chicago wine tastings during the year. They look for ones that are exciting and really special and not very expensive. All wines are rated 85 points or higher by Wine Enthusiast, Wine Advocate, Robert Parker or the Wine Spectator. Just a couple of examples are the 2009 Protocolo Tempranillo, a Spanish wine ranked number 2 of the Top 100 Best Buys of 2011; the 2007 Brancaia Italia Sangiovese Cabernet/ Merlot blend; and the 2008 Maryhill Riesling perfect for sipping. There are also dessert wines to think about like the Cranberry Snow or one of the store's best sellers, Choco Vine, a combination of Dutch chocolate with a French Cabernet that tastes like a Mud Slide!

There is also a rather extensive collection of interesting craft brewed beers. Ken and Sandy and some of the staff always attend the Great Taste of the Midwest beer tasting convention. They are continually seeking new beer tasting sensations.



The German Beer selection is awesome. There are beers from Franziskaner, Hacker-Pschorr, Einbecker, Erdinger, and Spaten-Bräu. There are numerous brews from domestic brewers as well, like Fat Tire Ale, Mothership Wit Wheat Beer, Ranger Indian Pale Ale and 1554 Black Ale all from New Belgium Brewery in Fort Collins, CO. There is also Gonzo Imperial Porter, In Heat Wheat, Snake Dog India Pale Ale and Doggie Style Pale Ale from Flying Dog Brewery, Frederick MD.



Galena River Wine & Cheese is also a depot for Olive Oils and Balsamic Vinegars. Each cold pressed, unfiltered small batch Extra Virgin Olive 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. Currently there are 4 regular oils: Greek Organic, Spanish Arbequina, Italian Leccino and California Ascalana. There are also 9 flavored oils: Basil, Roasted Chili Pepper, Garlic, Lemon, Orange, Rosemary, White Truffle, Roasted Walnut and Tuscan Herb Olive Oil. This last one is a blend of oregano, basil, rosemary and garlic and is one of the biggest sellers. 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 receive a 10% discount.

The same is true with the Balsamic Vinegars. There are 9 of these: Blueberry, Fig, Pomegranate, Raspberry, Strawberry, White Peach, Cherry, 12 year White and 18 year Aged Traditional. By the way, did you know Balsamic Vinegar is widely believed to be wine vinegar but it's not at all. Balsamic is 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.



You should plan on taking your time looking around this store. Check out the other products. For example, Little Ragghi's Crackers from Ocean City, Maryland are artisan flatbread cheese crackers you can't stop eating. Then there are the Stonewall Kitchen products from York, Maine; Every item in their award winning product line is spectacular. They have salsas, several butters, jams including Black Raspberry, Sour Cherry and Strawberry Brandied Apricot. They also have several Pestos like Basil, Artichoke, Roasted Garlic Bread Spread and Tomato Herb Bruschetta.



There is a fascinating collection of flavored pastas including Leek and Onion, Wild Mushroom, Whole Wheat, and Spinach-Basil-Garlic from Rossi Pasta.

Then there are the many sausages, patés and salamis, Italian Prosciutto and Spanish Serrano Ham.

Recently, Ken and Sandy have noticed a burgeoning interest in locally produced products. So you will find Gramps Gourmet Pickles, Hogback Haven Maple Syrup, Honey from Apple Creek Apiaries and beers from nearby breweries Potosi Brewing Company and Galena Brewing Company.

Now I must warn you. Once you enter this store it is almost impossible to leave empty handed. Stock up on all your holiday food supplies. By all means don't be afraid to sample some of the cheeses you have never had before. You might even hear Ken exclaim his favorite quote: "Cheese – Milk's Leap towards Immortality!" – Clifton Paul Fadiman.