



SAY CHEESE

Stichelton, a cheeky cheese from Nottinghamshire, is ripe and ready for Christmas

A ripe round of blue-veined British cheese is as festive as a plump plum pudding or trussed up turkey with all the trimmings. Christmas just wouldn't be the same without a wedge of it wheeled out at every given opportunity. Stichelton will take pride of place on the *Food and Travel* cheese board this year. Made in Nottinghamshire on Collingthwaite Farm, within the Welbeck Estate, by cheesemaker Joe Schneider and Randolph Hodgson of Neal's Yard Dairy, this creamy cheese is rich, robust and perfect for winter grazing. It's not without a whiff of controversy, however. Made to an ancient recipe for Stilton, named after the old Saxon name for the town, and produced in the same part of the country (Stilton has to be made in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire or Leicestershire), this stiltonesque cheese has irked the Stilton Cheesemakers' Association. EU laws ban the owners from making any reference to its Stilton roots because it does not meet certain stipulations, namely it is made using raw milk, rather than pasteurised – the last raw milk Stilton was made in 1989. Surprisingly, it was an American who revived the traditional method. Joe, who previously made cheese at Daylesford Organic, began making Stichelton three years' ago on a mission to resurrect a historic British cheese

to its former glory. Joe believes pasteurised milk cannot give the same 'complexity of flavour and length of finish'. Another point of difference is the dairy only uses milk from its own herd of Friesian-Holstein cows, which is pumped through to the dairy every morning. Joe makes the comparison between his cheese and single malt whisky – there being no blending of different milks whatsoever. The cheese's appearance and taste varies throughout the year, but the batch that's ready in time for Christmas will be 'juicy, creamy and buttery' after the cows have spent the summer grazing on lush grass. The hand-made process means production is tiny so get your order in early to try out this rule-breaking cheese. At once soft and creamy, tangy and salty, it has bite but with none of the astringent harshness of some blue cheeses. How to eat it? 'However you like,' says Joe, but he has been known to sip sauternes or sweet gewürztraminer with his. Joe also likes to crumble it on top of juicy roasted field mushrooms with crushed walnuts. 'Don't tell anyone', he says, 'but I really like a slice on my hamburger... I am an American after all.' □

For more details, visit stichelton.co.uk. Available by mail order from Neal's Yard Dairy (020 7500 7520; nealsyarddairy.co.uk).

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Words by Rachel Truman