

The perfect match

Not sure what to have with that exquisite Dutch cheese? How about a coffee?



Pictures from top: L'Amuse cheese shop exterior; proprietor, Betty Koster; an assortment of cheeses; Betty's husband, Martin

Some might say it's her huge smile and the twinkle in her eye. Others might guess it's the company she keeps, but I fell in love with Betty Koster once she started talking about what the French would call *un mariage parfait*: pairing an artisan Dutch cheese with coffee. It didn't matter that her husband, Martin, was standing nearby minding their cheese shop, L'Amuse, a short train ride from Amsterdam. From then on, I was putty in her hands for a Dutch cheese tour.

Good thing.

"They all look the same," she says, motioning up at a wall full of large cheese wheels behind the counter. "And," she adds, "all of the sub-par ones get shipped abroad. We always kept the best to ourselves."

Which means I was glad she was leading the way. Armed with only a cheese slicer exactly like the one my mum used to use, Betty walks me through her country's best offerings, introducing me to each by taking a slice from a larger wedge and placing it in my hand.

Tasting the first one, I knew I was in the right place. She sells the Netherlands' best, often being the only cheese shop in the country to carry a certain producer's limited production. In a sort of beautiful, self-fulfilling prophecy, her producers make sure she gets the *crème de la crème*.

"If we make them a star, they'll be faithful to us," she says, giving me a sliver of a seven-month old Wilde Weide Kaas (wild meadow cheese), which is a Gouda that has an almost sweet flavour and a beautiful, late-arriving herb taste.

"This guy has a waiting list to become a client," she says, passing a sliver of 18-month old Olde Remeker. "This is the best cheese we have in Holland."

"Really?" I ask, thinking of all the other cheeses the country has to offer.

There's no pause: "Absolutely!" she says, and my tasting notes simply read, "Wow!" The Olde Remeker has all the flavour of an aged cheese with the creamy texture of a younger one.

I ask Betty what kind of drink she'd pair with it, thinking of the large quantities of wine the Netherlands imports.

"That's the biggest challenge," she says, before lifting the corner of her mouth with a look like she could finally trust me with an inside tip, "but it's beautiful with coffee. The caramel and buttery notes of the cheese make a wonderful combination with an espresso. It's like coffee and cream."

Joe Ray

PHOTOS JOE RAY

L'AMUSE, Hoofdstraat 185, 2071 EG
Santpoort-Noord
www.lamuse.nl