



For the Cheese Lovers

Santa Ynez Valley Cheese Company

It was about time that a cheese shop opened in Santa Ynez. Cheese lovers have already discovered this charming shop, with its walls adorned with photos of the owner's sheep. It's a great spot for getting all your favorite regional and specialty cheeses cut to order and some day soon they hope to be offering their own locally produced artisan cheese.

Santa Ynez Valley Cheese Company is open Mon–Sat 10am–5pm and Sun 10am–4pm. They are located at 1095 Meadowvale Rd., Santa Ynez; 805 691-9448; SantaYnezValleyCheeseCompany.com

For the Wine Lovers

Cowboy Ike's Wine Jelly and Syrup

Here's another local product that belongs in your pantry and in a gift basket. The Original Cowboy Ike's Cabernet Sauvignon Wine Jelly got a firm start when it was entered into the Santa Barbara County Fair in Santa Maria in 2005 — where it won First Place and Best of Show. These days you can find it all over the Central Coast, and the product line includes jelly made from other varieties as well, such as Syrah, Grenache, Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon Wine Syrup. Try serving the jam with goat cheese and smoked fish on a cracker as an appetizer or drizzling a little of the syrup on a slice of flourless chocolate cake.

Cowboy Ike's is available at Isabella's Gourmet Foods, Whole Foods Market and other area markets. You can also order online at CowboyIkesWineJelly.com



vertical TASTING

Inspired by Nancy Oster's article in this issue, "Discovering the Taste of Fine Chocolate," we decided to do a vertical tasting of chocolates recommended by Maya Schoop-Rutten, owner of Chocolate Maya. The chocolate bars she suggests are not only made from the finest chocolate, but they are sourced from cacao farmers who are getting a fair price for their work.

Twenty-Four Blackbirds Chocolate

Beans from Madagascar

Percentage of chocolate: 75%
Bar produced in Santa Barbara, California
TwentyFourBlackbirds.com

You might think we're partial to our local bean-to-bar maker, but we swear that even blindfolded we would count this as one of our favorites. The texture is perfect—not too firm and not too soft. And it has a delicious hint of green apple. Try pairing with tea in the afternoon or wine in the evening.

Dick Taylor Craft Chocolate

Beans from Camino Verde, Balao, Ecuador

Percentage of chocolate: 76%
Bar produced in Arcata, California
DickTaylorChocolate.com

The beautiful design of the wrapper and elegant stamped texture of the bar provides a clue to its sophisticated flavor. We pick up notes of hazelnut. The flavor comes on quickly and then has a clean finish. This bar would be perfect after dinner with coffee or espresso.

Ritual Chocolate

Beans from Marañón River Valley, Peru

Percentage of chocolate: 75%
Bar produced in Denver, Colorado
RitualChocolate.com

This is chocolate produced from pure Nacional cacao beans (the famous "white" beans), and it doesn't disappoint in the least. It has a deep, earthy and complex flavor that lingers in the mouth with a tangy finish. Enjoy all by itself or pair with a fine port.

Patric Chocolate

Beans from Madagascar

Percentage of chocolate: 74%
Bar produced in Columbia, Maryland
Patric-Chocolate.com

This bar is called IN-NIB-ITABLE for its sprinkling of cacao nibs across the surface. But while nibs are usually bitter, this chocolate is not. Instead the flavor is nutty with a distinct fruitiness. This would be perfect as part of a dessert platter with dried fruit and aged gouda.

