

How to Host a Raclette Party

BY DAVID GIBBONS

There's something about subjecting a good melting cheese to direct, fiery heat that virtually guarantees scrumptious results. And what better way to achieve them than raclette?

From the French verb *racler*, meaning “to scrape,” raclette is based on the age-old practice of scraping the melted side of a half-wheel of cheese onto potatoes. Ranking right up there with fondue as a beloved tradition in the French and Swiss alps, it's simultaneously a dish, a cheese, a device and an occasion.

Modern times have seen the advent of two principal types of raclette devices: One a melter with a cheese-holding stand and infrared lamp, the other a tabletop contraption with a griddle on top, an electric heating element in the middle and trays underneath to melt individual portions. The melter stand is the more traditional and picturesque option, while the griddle oven is more convenient, versatile and participatory. Both augur a deliciously drawn-out, convivial gathering.

In 2007, Sonja Hoffmann gave stateside raclette fans reason for celebration when she launched Raclette Corner (raclettecorner.com), a one-stop shop for all things raclette. “There's no wrong way to do raclette,” Hoffmann says, adding simply, “Be creative.”

Hoffmann harbors fond memories of summers at her grandparents' home in the canton of Graubünden, Switzerland. Her website carries an authentic local cheese, Alp Maran, via the Adopt-an-Alp program started by another Swiss raclette-meister, Caroline Hostettler of the importer Quality Cheese. (Go to adopt-an-alp.com to learn more.)

On account of its washed rind, a raclette presents moderately funky aromas and creamy, grassy, slightly nutty flavors. The raw-milk Alp Maran is our top recommendation, as it will pack more flavor and complexity. The French raclette sampled for this feature was somewhat sweeter, softer and milder than its Swiss counterpart, which had more funk and more *gruyère*-like fermented notes.

Other good options are two raw-milk raclettes from Vermont—the mild and creamy Reading from Spring Brook Farm and the full-flavored Whitney from Jasper Hill Farm.

“You want a raclette that will melt without the fat separating and has some really good flavor,” says Hostettler, who hails from the Bern area of western Switzerland. When it comes to personal preference, she's a staunch purist: “To me, it's just melted cheese, potatoes, cornichons, pearl onions—that's it.”

She continues: “Nowadays, raclette's in a really good place.

For example, the melted cheese photos are some of the sexiest food shots on social media.” So go ahead, invite some friends and make an exciting evening over some raclette.

David Gibbons is co-author of Mastering Cheese.



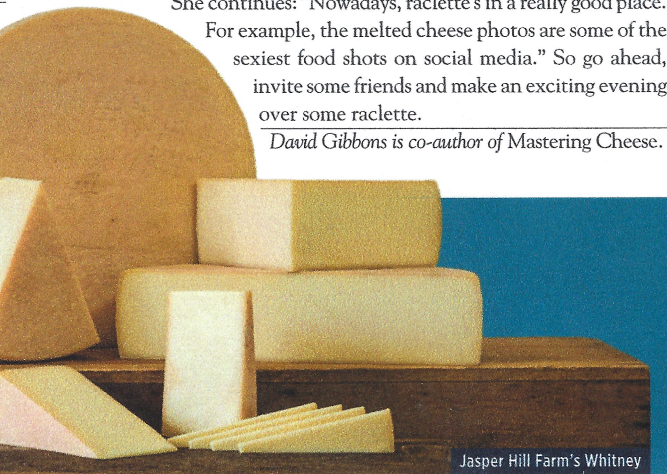
Goey raclette complements potatoes, meat, cornichons and beyond.

A DELUXE TABLETOP RACLETTE FOR 8

- About 1 pound Bündnerfleisch or bresaola (2 ounces per person), sliced very thin*
- 6 bell peppers, quartered and seeded
- 2 large zucchini or yellow squash, cut lengthwise into 4 slices
- 1 pound pork loin or chicken cutlet, thinly sliced
- One 12-ounce jar cornichons
- Two 5-ounce jars pickled pearl onions
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Paprika or raclette spice mix (optional)

1. Preheat tabletop griddle-style raclette oven for 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Boil potatoes in salted water until fork tender, 15 to 20 minutes.
3. If presenting vegetables raw, slice thinly; alternatively, drizzle with olive oil and lightly grill.
4. Arrange plates with equal portions of all ingredients, except raw meats and cheese, and place on table.
5. Slice cheese ½ to ¾ inches thick to fit in melting trays; leave rind on for flavor and crunch. Instruct diners to melt their cheese portions for 4 to 5 minutes, until they start to blister, brown and turn toasty/crunchy, then scrape them onto the potatoes. Repeat once; 5 to 7 ounces per diner is enough for 2 portions each.
6. Grill the sliced raw meat on the griddle for about 1 minute per side.
7. Add the cooked meat to the plates, season the raclette to taste with pepper and paprika or spice mix (if using). Enjoy.

TOP: BOB D'AMICO; COURTESY OF JASPER HILL FARM



Jasper Hill Farm's Whitney

WHERE TO BUY IT

ALP MARAN RACLETTE (raclettecorner.com; 5.5-pound half-wheel for \$138)

CITTERIO'S BRESAOLA (igourmet.com; 3 pounds for \$77)

SCHALLER & WEBER'S BÜNDNER-FLEISCH (raclettecorner.com; 1.75 pounds for \$90)

FRENCH RACLETTE LIVRADOUX (raclettecorner.com; 3.5-pound quarter-wheel for \$68)

SPRING BROOK FARM'S READING (sbfccheese.org; 1 pound for \$18)

SUISSE CLASSIQUE (igourmet.com; 15.5 ounces for \$25)

JASPER HILL FARM'S WHITNEY (jasperhillfarm.com; 1 pound for \$34)