

## 'Blue-brain' cheese: is this the mouldiest cheese in Britain?

Some years ago, a family of cheesemakers in the hills outside Bern, in west-central Switzerland, were making a batch of cow's cheese. As per tradition, they had shaped the cheese into fist-size balls and left it to mature in a damp cave. They then forgot about it. Some weeks later, they found it, covered in a thin layer of green-blue mould. Most people would have thrown it away.

Like Play-Doh, penicillin or babies conceived while using the rhythm method, some of the best things in life are created by accident. Mark Twain claimed accident was "the greatest of all inventors" – proof that not everything good needs to have been thoroughly mapped out. And then there's this cheese ...

The cheerily named blue-brain cheese – so-called because of the cerebrum-like ridges and grooves the mould creates while festering in cool, damp conditions – is sold by artisan vendors [Jumi](#) at [Borough Market in London](#). Here, each cheese is kept in its own box within a glass-fronted dresser, chilled to 5C. The overall effect is rather striking: the stack of cheeses resemble small mammalian brains at various stages of decay. You can't keep the cheese in the fridge because it will go off, says Jumi manager Marcello Tomi. Looking at the cabinet, however, I can't help but wonder if that ship has sailed.

Jumi was founded by two friends, Jürg Wyss (Ju) and Mike Glauser (mi), and their cheese comes from a family of cheesemakers, five generations old, based in the Emmental valley. They use simmental cattle, a breed indigenous to the region. The blue-brain variety is one of the mouldiest cheeses you can buy in the UK.

I follow Tomi's suggestion for eating the cheese: on bread with a cold chardonnay (rather than, say, [fava beans and a nice chianti](#)). The youngest cheese is a couple of weeks old and has 1mm of blue-green mould. It tastes fruity and mellow, with a sharp, welcome twang. At a few months old, the mould has deepened and this fruitiness has veered surprisingly into a mellow, burning flavour – almost spicy. By six months, though, the mould is 1cm thick, as black as a doll's eye and the whole thing looks ready to walk. I'm not sure who wanted to eat who more.

This is a cheese aimed at macho eaters and enthusiasts, able to cater to a lads' night out and Frasier Crane. It might seem to be verging on gross-out gimmickry – and it certainly ties into [a trend for "ugly food"](#) – but it is also rooted in family, history and flavour. So, a thumbs up from me. Provided you can get past the optics.

## **Market Review: Borough Market, London Bridge, London**

There's nothing I love more on a sunny day than wandering aimlessly around a food market. When I lived abroad, I did this quite regularly. But food markets in the UK are few and far between. Luckily London is an exception. It boasts numerous markets that sell produce from all over Europe alongside the freshest fruits and vegetables from local farmers.

Borough market, located in the shadow of the Shard, opposite London Bridge tube station, is perhaps the best-known and most varied food market in the city.

Half of the market is dedicated to street food stalls, serving up dishes that would rival any restaurant. From venison burgers, prosciutto panini and hog roast rolls, to veggie curries, truffle tortellini and freshly caught Dorset scallops, it's a gastronomic paradise.

The other half is dedicated to take-home produce. And you'll be happy to hear there are plenty of samples to taste! There are cheeses and charcuterie from France, Italy and Spain, towers of flour-dusted breads and buttercream-crowned cakes, fresh seafood that won't assault your senses with a pungent fishy odour, and oils, balsamics and spreads with bowls of bread for dipping.

I spent quite some time sampling the oils. Much like fine wines, each oil has its own aroma – some are fruity and light, others buttery and rich, with all flavours in between. One producer sells a selection of young olive oils – something I'd never before tasted. Pressed while the olives are still in their infancy, these oils are light in colour and flavour. It produces a much fresher, fruitier and thinner oil than those from a mature olive and are great drizzled over salad or lightly steamed fish, or simply used as a dipping oil.

There are also endless varieties of balsamic vinegar, both natural and flavoured, vintage and young, and some reduced into an irresistible balsamic syrup.

With a cheese stand at every turn, its tough competition. But one in particular caught my attention with its unusual varieties: Jumi Cheese. Planning a cheese and wine party? These artisan cheeses are not something you're guests will expect on a cheese board.

Founders Juerg and Mike produce all their cheeses in the Emmental region of Switzerland, using milk from their own cows. The cheesemakers' speciality is their trade marked "Belper Knolle" – a hard raw cow's milk cheese that's rolled in a mix of Himalayan salt, dried garlic and pepper, which gives the cheese a truffle-like appearance. But it was the "Blue Brain" which intrigued me most. I'd never seen anything like it. I love blue cheese, but this looked barely edible! It took a little persuasion before I built

up the courage to taste it. Verdict: a smooth and creamy texture with an incredible unique flavour – there's a subtle fruitiness to its flavour that I didn't expect.

You'll find everything you need for a mezze meal here. Olives marinated in garlic, chilli or herbs, hummus and tapenade, artichokes hearts and sun-blushes tomatoes in oil, the works.

If you're a fan of funghi, you'll find everything you need to make an incredible mushroom dish – there's oyster, shiitake, chanterelle, portobello and more.

Once you've worked up an appetite for a proper bite to eat (don't fill up too much on the tasters[!]), you'll be spoilt for choice.

Spanish deli Brindisa's legendary chorizo rolls deserves all the acclaim its received. A toasted ciabatta roll is filled with thick-cut succulent and spicy chorizo, fried to create a crisp exterior until it oozes its sunset-paprika oil, and accompanied by peppery rocket and sweet Piquillo pepper. Or if you prefer Italian meats, Gastronomica fills chunks of airy ciabatta with top-quality prosciutto, salami and mortadella.

Northfield farm offers a generously stuffed salt beef sandwich, packed between two thick-cut slices of granary bread spread with piquant English mustard and topped with tangy slices of gherkin.

La Tua Pasta is a popular choice, serving up fresh tortellini, ravioli, pappadelle and gnocchi in minutes to a long line of hungry customers. The ricotta and spinach ravioli is light and creamy, needing no more than a drizzle of olive oil or ladle of simple tomato sauce. Or for something a little richer, try the mouth-watering venison tortellini.

The giant skillet of paella at Café Brood is extremely tempting, as is the spread of nutritious Indian dishes from Gujarati Rasoi. Try the creamy daal or colourful cauliflower curry – you can taste the chefs' passion for traditional home-style cooking.

After all the food, battle the crowds at Monmouth coffee for a cup of their house-roasted beans. The blends transform with the seasons, but Monmouth's style is unchanging – pure, unadulterated filter coffee. They'll push to a splash of milk, but frothy cappuccinos and creamy lattes are not on the menu.

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