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FRESH ALTERNATIVES

The exciting trend towards new wine varieties in our vineyards and on our merchants' shelves has cheese-lovers hot on the trail of the perfect match.

We are big supporters of the alternative-wine movement. Just as you don't listen to the same music all the time, or eat the same kind of food, we believe that diversity is also important when it comes to what you drink. So we thought we'd find some great cheese matches for a few of the new and emerging exotic grapes and wine styles that have been appearing on our bottleshop shelves and restaurant wine lists over the past few years.

What we like about many of the alternative white grapes, in particular, is their ability to produce characterful, cheese-friendly wines with refreshingly moderate – even relatively low – alcohol. We also found that these wines tended to match best with cheeses from the regions in Europe where the varieties originated.

THE CHEESE *Casa Madaio Aged Canestrato*
THE WINE 2008 *Trentham Estate Vermentino*,
Murray Darling, A\$20/NZ\$36

There are many cheeses named Canestrato in the South of Italy but it is hard to beat this artisan example from Basilicata. Made in the early summer using fresh raw ewe's milk, it was specially selected for extended maturation in the damp cellars of Casa Madaio. Beneath the thick, leathery brown rind lies a moist, crumbly cheese with a sharp, salty, spicy flavour and a hint of lamb. Definitely worth the wait.

Vermentino is best known in Sardinia, where it produces dry, savoury, refreshing white wines, but it is also grown on the Tuscan coast, and in South West France (Languedoc), where it is known as rolle. This example from Trentham is a lovely, light 11.5 per cent alcohol and, although bone-dry, has wonderful, lifted green apple flavours that bring out the deeply savoury saltiness of the cheese.

THE CHEESE *Sbronzò*
THE WINE 2008 *Chalmers Fiano*, *Murray Darling, A\$30*

This unusual cheese is made from pure buffalo milk using a traditional Caciocavallo recipe in the Campania region of Italy. After three months' maturation in wooden wine barrels containing red grape must (made from the local aglianico variety), the rind develops a striking purple colour, which contrasts with the smooth, moist yellow inside. The strong flavours of this cheese are not for everyone, but we find it hard to resist the sweet, buttery taste, hint of animal and, of course, the barrel influence.

Fiano has been grown in Campania since before Roman times, and produces wonderfully aromatic dry white wines. This medium-bodied example from the hot-climate Murray Valley vineyards of Chalmers, pioneers of southern Italian varietal wines in Australia, has an almost gewürztraminer-like, honeyed quality, perfect with the sweet and complex nature of the cheese.

THE CHEESE *Charles Arnaud Comté*
THE WINE 2009 *Gemtree Moonstone Savagnin*,
McLaren Vale, A\$25

This cheese is matured high in France's Jura mountains in the natural underground cellars of the Fort des Rousses by fromagerie Charles Arnaud. After maturation for 18 months, six months longer than most aged examples of this classic cheese, it has developed a thick, crusty rind and dense, concentrated texture. But it's the kaleidoscope of flavours and lingering sweet, nutty finish that make it exceptional.

The best wines for Comté are the hard-to-find whites of the Jura, such as those made from the gently aromatic savagnin grape. Luckily, Australia boasts a surprisingly wide array of savagnins – because many winemakers planted it over the past few years thinking it was the trendy albariño grape. This cracking example from McLaren Vale has lovely lemon creaminess, grapefruit-pulp texture and plenty of blossomy fragrance to play with the mouth-perfume of the cheese.

THE CHEESE *Lincet Chaource*
THE WINE 2008 *Kooyong Beurrot Pinot Gris*,
Mornington Peninsula, A\$30

This classic mould-ripened cow's milk cheese dates back to the 14th century and takes its name from a small village in the Champagne region of France. Traditionally made using a slow, overnight fermentation technique to enhance the natural flavours in the milk, its chalky, slightly acid centre has a mild but refreshing creamy tang.

Kooyong's second-label Mornington Peninsula pinot gris takes its cue from the name often given to the few examples of pinot gris grown in Burgundy, and reflects the grape's ability to produce wines with full-bodied, creamy, even fat texture (after all, beurre is French for butter). This full-ish-bodied (13.5 alcohol) example has plenty of peachy, nutty flavour and texture, which marries beautifully with the complex, buttery richness of the cheese.

