

Artisanal cheese and fine wine gets top billing at Toronto bistro

22 hours ago

Following in the steps of several upscale New York restaurants dedicated to serving their customers the finest artisanal cheeses, a Toronto eatery has taken the leap as well.

Reds Bistro & Wine Bar, located in the financial district, has collaborated with Cheese Boutique, a provider of gourmet cheese, to develop an ambitious menu that includes 33 carefully selected international varieties.

For Afrim Pristine who is in charge of the restaurant program at the Cheese Boutique, his hope was to find the right venue to share the many fine cheeses carried by his family's firm with the dining public.

"I've been waiting for a restaurant to do something like this for 10 years," he says.

Mike Steh, executive chef at Reds who was already buying cheese from Pristine, was enthusiastic about the idea and the pair began working together to make it happen.

"Mike is really dedicated to doing this the right way," Pristine says. "I'm proud to have helped create this menu."

Pristine is involved not only with providing artisanal cheeses from all over the world to Reds, but he is also giving seminars to the staff on the proper way to handle the different varieties, to identify them for patrons and to match them with the right wines.

Artisanal cheeses are primarily handmade and produced in small batches by tradition, predominantly non-mechanical methods.

For Steh, who is a proponent of the slow food movement, this is a perfect fit with his beliefs.

Red's sommelier Taylor Thompson has deployed the restaurant's list of beverage offerings, including 70 wines by the glass. A training manual informs and instructs the staff about the nuances of the cheeses and he is educating staff on appropriate wine matches.

The restaurant has a dedicated refrigerator to store the cheeses and Pristine visits the kitchen at least once a week to check on their quality and rotate them to assure they are fresh and in top condition, says Steh.

The menu includes an assortment of cow's milk, goat's milk and sheep's milk cheese which hail from Canada, Australia, England, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Scotland and Spain, says Pristine.

Customers are offered a cheese menu that is priced at \$6 per 30 grams (one ounce) or \$15 for 90 grams (three ounces).

Steh says that much of their clientele for the cheese offerings are people working in the area who drop in after work for a glass of wine and to sample something from the cheese menu.

"We have a culture of people who come here after work and another group who live in downtown condos who like something to nibble on with their wine," he says.

"For me there is nothing better if you have half a bottle of wine to finish off is to enjoy it with a wonderful cheese," he says.

For more information about Reds, visit www.redsbistro.com.

Hosted by 

Copyright © 2007 The Canadian Press. All rights reserved.