

# Richmond Hill cafe & larder

## CHEESE NOTES

### **Parmigiano Reggiano**

Emilia-Romagna, Italy

Probably one of the more famous exports from Italy, Parmigiano Reggiano can only be made in its zona tipica, ensuring that the milk comes from cattle fed on the zone's fresh grass, rather than on silage or fodder from other locations. An entire wheel of Parmesan can be collateral for a loan in Italy and wheels are required under D.O.C. to weigh at least 33 kg with a maximum weight of 44 kg. Parmigiano Reggiano must be aged for at least 14 months - many are aged for around 2 years which are usually more expensive.

The milk for the cheeses comes from two separate milkings, morning and evening, and when the two milking are combined most of the naturally accumulated fat is skimmed off. The milk is then heated slowly in huge copper cauldrons over open fires and the curd is cut into very fine particles and lifted into a large piece of cloth with a wooden paddle, then gently pressed to expel any remaining whey. The wheels are stencilled with the words Parmigiano Reggiano and the date of manufacture (this practice began in 1964). The cheeses are regularly turned in their moulds until they are placed in huge brine baths for about three weeks. The salt creates a rind for the cheese essential for its proper lengthy maturation. The cheeses are given brief exposure to the sun and then taken to the cascina (climate controlled warehouse) and placed on wooden shelves where they are regularly brushed and turned.

Parmigiano Reggiano should be sold soon after the cheese is cut and not handled at all on the cut face as this encourages mould growth, giving the cheese an unpleasant mouldy taste. The colour should be golden and like a cliff face, flaky but moist. The flavour can be entirely fruity and sweet, sometimes pineappley with a consistent granular crunch from the calcium crystals. The flavour is long and often caramelly from the cooking of the curd resulting in caramelised milk sugars. Just a little hint - Parmesan benefits from a layer of aluminium foil wrapped over the paper when placed in the fridge.