

2011 CANADIAN CHEESE GRAND PRIX

Judging Process and 2011 Jury members

Every cheese submitted to the 2011 Canadian Cheese Grand Prix is judged by a jury of Canadian experts in the food, gastronomy, hotel administration and restaurant industry from coast to coast.

THE JUDGING PROCESS

No matter the type of cheese, there are certain sensorial factors jury members take into account when judging each entrant.

Before evaluating, they try to optimize conditions to make sure their tongue and olfaction are ready. To do so, they avoid subtle distractions such as hair spray, strong cologne or lipstick, heavy meals, and other odours such as those from onions, chili or other foods with pungent aromas.

Also, if any smoke, it must take place a minimum of 2 hours prior to the evaluation on the outdoors of the premises.

Additionally, they isolate the cheese. Cheeses absorb odours from anything nearby, so just like a fine cheese shop, the jury will keep strong cheeses separate.

Lastly, the jury does not judge all cheeses by the exact same criteria. Certain basic factors should be common but each cheese type has a distinctive colour and general appearance, texture and body, flavour and salt content.

For example, the *penicillium camemberti* used in surface-ripened soft cheeses gives the cheese a mushroom-like taste and aroma. The nutty flavour of Swiss-type cheeses comes from the bacteria that are essential to their production and is responsible for the “eyes” typical of Swiss cheeses.

It is important to note that the jury members judge each cheese objectively using this methodical approach.

KEY STEPS

The cheese judging took place on February 19th and 20th at l'Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec in Montreal. One of the duties of the jury members was to respect established rules for serving temperature, an essential part of cheese judging.

The judging started with the milder cheeses and ended with the more full-bodied types. Between each tasting, judges cleanse their palates with lightly moistened bread and water. The bread acts as an abrasive and removes residues, while the water serves to completely cleanse the mouth.

Cheeses from all 18 categories are judged according to well-defined criteria and characteristics elaborated by cheese experts and using a standardized vocabulary. All cheeses have very distinct flavours and texture. Clean knives or cutting tools are used for the cheeses that are evaluated by the jury.

For instance, members of the jury evaluate:

- General appearance
- Colour: uniformity of the rind, uniformity of the body
- Body & Texture: elastic, uniform, firm, semi-firm, soft, pasty, flexible smooth, breakable, creamy, openings (“eyes”) and their distribution in the body
- Compactness
- Flavour: neutral, acid, hazelnut, cream, fruity, sharp
- Salt content

To be eligible to enter the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix, cheeses must be made in Canada exclusively from 100 per cent Canadian cow’s milk, milk-derived ingredients from 100 per cent Canadian cow’s milk or both. No imported dairy ingredients are permitted. They also have to be available at retail at the time of the competition. The identity of the cheese makers and the cheeses are not known to the jury and will not be until the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix Gala of Champions.

Each submitted cheese must be accompanied by its packaging label featuring the 100% Canadian Milk symbol. The 100% Canadian Milk symbol must be an integral part of the packaging label; stickers or other means of representation of the symbol are not accepted in the competition.

Cheese entries showing evidence of sampling cavities/trier holes and/or of having been cut or trimmed are not accepted.

Champions chosen in each of the 18 categories, as well as the Grand Champion, will be awarded their prizes on April 20th, 2011 at the Palais Royale in Toronto during the Gala of Champions.

MEMBERS OF THE 2011 JURY:

Phil Bélanger, Jury Chairman

The longest-standing member for the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix, Jury Chairman Phil Bélanger has been a part of this prestigious national competition since its very beginning in 1998. A graduate of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, Phil's distinguished career in the Atlantic agrifood industry includes a tenure as Director of the Provincial hotel Training Institution in New Brunswick, which later became the Atlantic Centre of Excellence in Tourism, where he developed and managed all aspects of the hotel, restaurant and tourism programs. He also provides consulting services in the hospitality and tourism sector, including seminars on Canadian cheese and how to pair them with wine and beer throughout the Atlantic region. Currently Senior Consultant for Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour for the province of New Brunswick, Phil is also Chairman of the New Brunswick Chapter of *La Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs*.

Gurth M. Pretty

CheeseofCanada.ca President and founder, Gurth Pretty is a true cheese lover and connoisseur. Passionate about cheese since childhood, Gurth went on to become a professional chef, where he continued to gain appreciation for cheese throughout his travels and international work experiences. Gurth's special passion for cheese led him to pen *The Definitive Guide to Canadian Artisanal and Fine Cheese*, which won the World Gourmand cookbook Award for best cheese book in 2007. He also co-wrote *The Definitive Canadian Wine & Cheese Cookbook* (2007) and was invited to be the Canadian contributor to *The World Cheese Book*, which was published in 2009. Wanting to educate more Canadians regarding the delicious cheeses produced in our country, Gurth launched his company, Cheese of Canada, which distributes and wholesales Canadian cheese to Toronto area stores and restaurants. Gurth and his staff also feed the public's demand for local cheese by selling it at five summer farmers' markets in the greater Toronto area. His desire to see the industry grow and flourish also led Gurth to become President of the Ontario Cheese Society, as well as a member of *La Société des fromages du Québec* and the American Cheese Society.

Antoine Sicotte

Artist, television host, photographer, musician and self-taught cook extraordinaire, Antoine Sicotte is the author of the best-seller *Le Cuisinier rebelle*, a cookbook as unique as its author. The book was honoured in the Best first cookbook category at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in 2009, and won silver in the French cookbook category at the 2010 Canadian Culinary Book Awards. An ex-founding member of musical group Sky, winner of a Juno award in 2000 for best new group, Antoine later embarked on his culinary career with just as much gusto and passion. Inspired by local, as well as foreign and exotic cuisine, this self-taught cook loves culinary discoveries and new experiences. He is constantly looking for the best in terms of products and flavours. His first cookbook was the inspiration for a television show of the same name, which Antoine hosts on Zeste television station in Quebec. He is currently working on two new cookbooks, as well as several additional television projects.

Rita DeMontis

Rita DeMontis is an award-winning writer who has been with the *Toronto Sun* newspaper for over 34 years, where she currently resides as Lifestyle and Food editor, as well as National Food Editor for the Sun Media chain. She has a weekend radio spot on Newstalk 1010 and has been a frequent guest on several television shows, including CITY-TV's Breakfast Television, Global TV and Canada AM. Rita also hosted an 80-episode national cooking show called CUCINA etc and has appeared on Marilyn Denis' Restaurant Makeover show on the Food Network. She has also written for several national magazines, including *Canadian Living*, and was voted most popular columnist at the *Toronto Sun* in 2006. Shortly thereafter, she was honoured in a national Canadian book celebrating 32 of the most influential Canadian women of Italian origin. An active volunteer for various organizations, Rita was recently awarded the Ontario Produce Marketing Association's Person of the Year award for "demonstrating, on a regular basis, untiring efforts to improve the quality, distribution or consumption of fruits and vegetables marketed within and around the province of Ontario through innovation, cooperation and hard work."

Allison Spurrell

With her mother being a Cordon Bleu graduate and Maître-fromager, Allison Spurrell certainly grew up in the right environment to gain a taste for all things related to cheese and fine food. Her keen interest in cheese and cooking eventually bloomed into a catering business specializing in wine and cheese events. Along with most of her future ventures, Allison launched The Menu Setters catering company with her mother, Alice. Encouraged by the growing interest in fine cheeses in Canada, the mother-daughter duo opened Les Amis du Fromage in Vancouver, a specialty cheese shop with a mission to make great cheeses available to everyone. The specialty boutique stocks anywhere between 400 to 500 fine cheeses from across Canada and Europe. The busy entrepreneurs opened another boutique in Vancouver in recent years and they also supply wholesale cheeses to the city's finest restaurants and hotels. Allison also opened a cheese-focused restaurant, *Au Petit Chavignol*, with her husband Joe Chaput and her mother Alice. The restaurant is in the same location as the second boutique. As a recognized authority on cheese, Allison also conducts cheese tastings and interacts closely with many of British Columbia's great chefs and wine tasting societies. She holds a certificate in cheese making technology from the University of Guelph and was recently inducted in the *Confrérie des Chevaliers des Fromages de France*. Allison has been a member of the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix jury since 2006.

Ian Picard

Ian Picard's love affair with cheese started over twenty years ago, as he was studying hotel management in Montreal and working as a sales clerk at specialty cheese shop *La Fromagerie Hamel*, a family business opened by Fernand Hamel in 1961. After obtaining his degree in hotel management, Ian enrolled as an apprentice at the *École Nationale d'Industrie Laitière et des Biotechnologies de Poligny* in France, to learn everything he could about cheese. While there, he studied with renowned master ripeners in Paris, Dijon and Alsace, where he refined his techniques and broadened his understanding of cheese. After being promoted from apprentice to master, Ian brought his passion for cheese back to Quebec, where he built ripening cellars. He used his cellars to ripen carefully selected cheeses from Quebec, France and his native Switzerland and mature them to perfection. Ian also went back to work at *La Fromagerie Hamel* where he worked his way up to vice-president, a position he still currently holds. *La Fromagerie Hamel* is one of Quebec's most renowned specialty cheese shops and has since opened four more boutiques. With a workforce of 80 employees and a selection of more than 450 cheeses, *La Fromagerie* is devoted to satisfying the taste and curiosity of its diverse clientele.

Michael Howell

A Nova Scotia native, Michael Howell trained at the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago. He held his first position at the prestigious Everest Room in Chicago for three years, which led to other opportunities in New York City, Detroit, Toronto, Newburyport (MA) and the Green Turtle Club in Abaco, Bahamas, where he held the position of Executive Chef from 1999 to 2002. That year, Chef Michael returned to Nova Scotia and opened Tempest Restaurant in Wolfville. He is currently the leader of Slow Food Nova Scotia, the president of The Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia and sits on the Board of Taste of Nova Scotia. He is an ardent supporter of local products, as well as farmers and local producers. His first cookbook, *Atlantic Seafood*, won honorable mention in the 2010 Cuisine Canada Cookbook awards. Chef Howell was also the winner of the Grate Canadian Grilled Cheese Cook-off, held by the Dairy Farmers of Canada this past summer.