

Rouge et Noir

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I have something to confess. I'm only minimally ashamed about my bizarre snacking habit—Liz Lemon of the popular NBC program calls it “working on her night cheese.” After a grueling day of work, particularly in colder seasons, there's nothing like coming home, making toasts on the cast iron and having a delicious 1:00 a.m. dinner of night cheese, eaten at the kitchen counter. I could write some excuses here, but really, who amongst you would say no to a nice Humboldt Fog or Rouge et Noir Brie toast? Even at one in the morning? (I know my father is reading this, and thinking that he would unequivocally decline, so I'm not counting him.) Even Louis XIV's dying wish was to have a last taste of Brie de Meaux.



Brie de Meaux aging on straw

Brie de Meaux, the most traditional French Brie is an AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) product which is made about 55 kilometers north east of Paris, and is so named for the city and region in which it is made—Meaux in the Brie region. Its fluffy exterior and soft interior are products of raw cow's milk cheese gently aged for four to five weeks. The longer the cheese is

allowed to ripen, the more pungent and dry it becomes. In In Île-de-France, brie is allowed to ripen until the point of the rind becoming dark, dry, and crumbly, and is then sold as “Brie Noir,” or “black brie,” and eaten soaked in cafe au lait. The French have been manufacturing Brie since the seventh century, and it was purportedly even enjoyed by the Emperor Charlemagne. Prince Tallyrand declared Brie “the king of cheeses” during the Congress of Vienna in 1815.



Picnic table at Marin French Cheese Company

The history of the California cheese making establishment of Marin French Cheese Company, first known as Thompson Brothers Cheese Company, began only fifty short years after the Congress of Vienna when during the gold rush, cheese maker Jefferson Thompson began to supply the port of San Francisco with a fresh cheese to supplant the declining supply of eggs to hungry dockworkers. That same cheese is still made today—the Breakfast Cheese, which after a brief ripening becomes their award-winning, mouth-watering Rouge et Noir Brie.



The original dairy barn circa 1914

The cheese was made, and has always been made on the same property in Petaluma since the company’s initiation in 1865, and solely from milk produced on their farmstead until 1925. Now, the Cheese Company incorporates the highest quality rBST-free milk from neighboring herds. In the early days, the cheese was then transported to the Petaluma River via hose and wagon, then to the port of Yerba Buena by the Steamer Gold, along with the other bounty of Marin County that began to flourish around that time.



photo by Craig Lee

The Thompson Brothers began to make more European styles of cheeses during the turn of the century including Neufchatel, and Camembert, which heralded the birth of artisan cheese making in California. Their achievement and quality have been recognized by connoisseurs all over the country, and in 2005, internationally when they beat the French at the World Cheese Awards in London.

Visit the Marin French Cheese Company's [website](#) for more information and to find out about [visits](#) to the esteemed Company itself.

You can buy cheeses from Marin French Cheese Company at the [Davis Food Co-op](#).