

FOOD STUFF

Florence Fabricant

Cheese and Cabbage,
Canoodling

There are cheeses wrapped in grape leaves, chestnut leaves, herbs and even strips of bark. An alluring Italian newcomer, a goat-milk robiola made by La Casera, is wrapped in vibrant leaves of savoy cabbage and tied with strands of straw. It makes an inviting package. The leaves keep the moisture in so the delicately tangy, creamy cheese, which ripens for 20 days, has a lovely freshness. The leaves imprint the cheese with an interesting texture.

The cheese, from 13 to 17 ounces, is \$35.96 a pound at Fairway and \$34.98 at Ideal Cheese.

This cheese impressed me so much I took the idea into my kitchen. With eight ounces of fresh, soft goat cheese (a French variety costing 7.99), I made a squat loaf and enclosed it in two leaves of savoy cabbage, without the heavy center vein. I tied it with affia and put it in the vegetable drawer of my refrigerator. After five days it was lovely to unwrap the leaf-patterned cheese on a plate and serve it, deliciously moist and spreadable, though not as complex as the robiola.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Gift for a Sweetheart:
Chocolate, Wine and Thou . . .

Pour on the chocolate for Valentine's Day. This sauce from Bennett Lane Winery in Calistoga, Calif., is made with Maximus, a cabernet sauvignon-merlot-syrah blend. It works over cake, profiteroles, berries or ice cream, and it can go into a chocolate soufflé. The sweetening in the sauce, which offers winy flavors, is restrained. It is \$18 for 375 milliliters from bennettlane.com. Packaged with a bottle of the bold, fruity 2005 Maximus, it's \$50.

. . . Oh, Yes, and About That Loaf of Bread

Monica Von Thun Calderón, right, the owner of Grandaisy Bakery, has a long-term plan. Ms. Calderón, who has shops saturating breads and pastries in SoHo and in the Upper West Side, opened another one Feb. 2 in TriBeCa at 250 West Broadway Beach Street). Behind it is a big production area, where baking for all the shops will be one in a month or so, replacing a similar kitchen at her shop on Sullivan Street in SoHo, where the lease will expire next year.



THE MINIMALIST

Mark Bittman

Make It Snappy,
And the Richer,
The Better

IF you think of crackers as little bits of pie crust, or fast-cooking bread, you quickly comprehend why they're so easy to make. Which only makes it more befuddling that no one does, since packaged crackers are universally overpriced and often contain ingredients with which you'd never cook, starting with artificial ones and continuing with dough "conditioners" and preservatives.

Crackers can be made with just flour and water (as in water crackers, or matzo), but like almost everything else, they're better with richer ingredients. These, typically, are butter, oil, and milk or cheese or both, along with flavorings like seeds, herbs and spices. I like a simple, flakey, buttery cracker, often with cheese. This could stem from my childhood addiction to Cheez-Its.

This is basically pastry dough rolled out thinly. But it's easier in a way, because while you want to keep a pie crust tender, and therefore work the dough as little as possible, here you can beat it up a bit. You're going for a substantial bite, and developing the gluten — the protein in the wheat — will help you get that. Even if you have to roll the dough out more than once, even if you roll it thrice, the crackers will only become flakier.

Once you get the hang of it, which will take exactly one try, play around. You might

