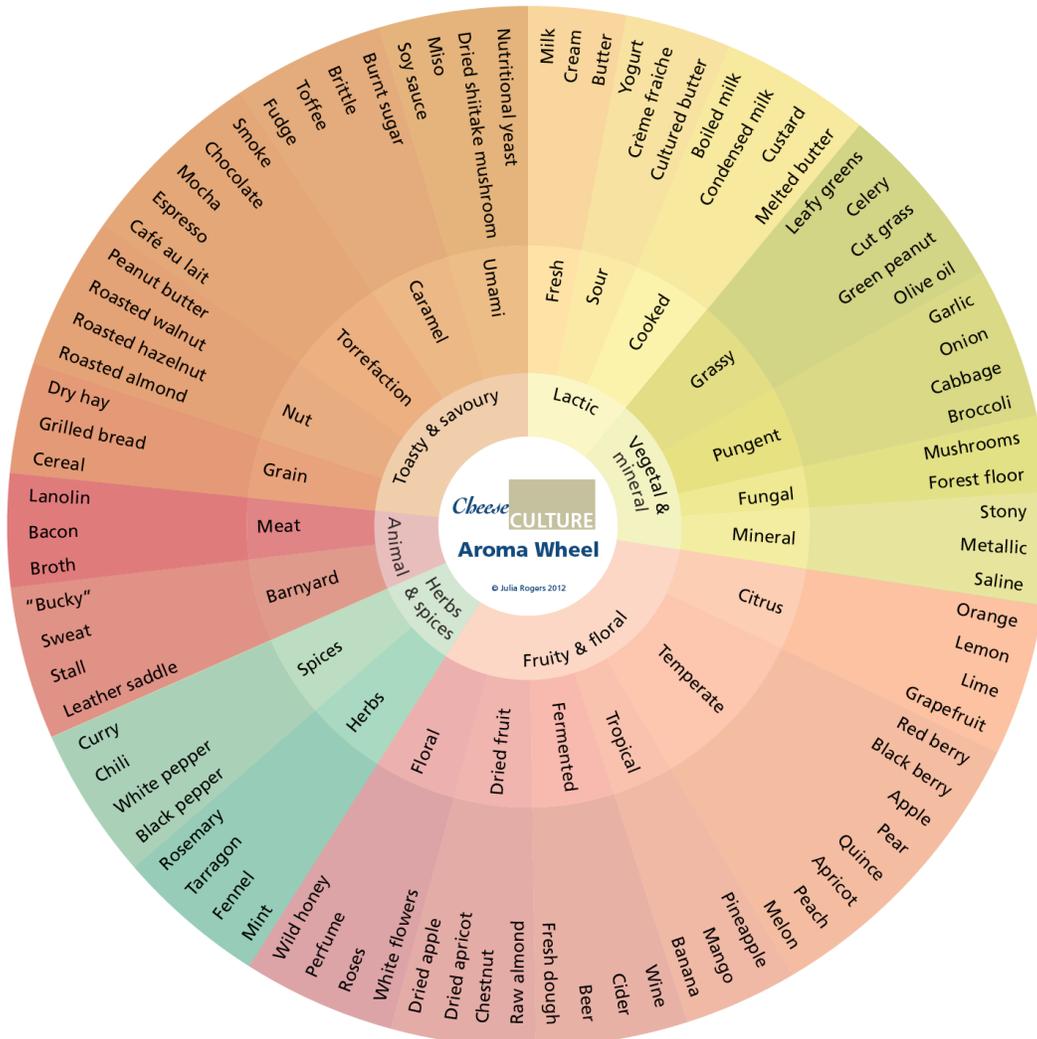


News, lore and bite-sized reviews



Graphic by Dave Mazierski, © 2012

## Visualizing Aroma: What's in a Wheel?

Most students of wine are familiar with [Ann Noble's Aroma Wheel](http://www.winearomawheel.com). Developed in 1984, this tool groups wine aroma descriptors into categories depicted as spokes of a wheel ([www.winearomawheel.com](http://www.winearomawheel.com)). The graphic permits viewers to quickly make sense

of a large amount of verbal information. Inspired by Noble's example, there are now aroma wheels for honey, coffee, maple syrup, beer and many other iconic food products. I have come across an aroma wheel for Comté cheese ([www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com)), but not one for cheese in general, so I thought I'd wheel out my own. It was very simple to turn the table-form tasting tool I developed in 2005 into a wheel. Although the information remains exactly the same, the wheel commands attention where a list of words may not.

Let's take a closer look... (Visit [www.cheeseculture.ca](http://www.cheeseculture.ca) for a downloadable PDF)

### **Circular Logic: Elements of the Wheel**

A well-constructed aroma wheel is much more than simply a “dartboard” of evocative smells. There is an **underlying logic** to the selection and grouping of aromas, which makes the wheel useful for both description and analysis. Humans can identify many thousands of aromas, but the wheel highlights only those most common in cheese. To select the most **significant aromas**, I surveyed sensory assessment protocols from all over North America and Europe, read the descriptions of eloquent authorities, and of course, tasted systematically and extensively.

Patterns among descriptors suggested a large number of **general aroma families**. The ones I eventually settled on (Lactic, Mineral etc.) are **fundamentally meaningful**, because they derive from different aspects of the cheese making process: primary ingredients, initial fermentation, additional microbial activity, and transformations due to aging. Thus, a blind “nosing” yields information about milk type, cheese style, and maturity. Once texture and primary tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter and umami) are taken into account, an experienced taster can make a confident statement about **cheese identity and quality**.

### **Using the Wheel**

Budding cheese connoisseurs will find the wheel an aid in developing **sensory acuity** and in putting words to perceptions. From an initial impression of, “Gee, this cheese is smelly,” it may be possible to identify some general aromas (inner ring). With effort (or the right cheese) specific aromas (middle and outer ring) make themselves known. Or, working in reverse, when a cheese offers up a very strong specific aroma, but it is difficult to name, searching the outer ring may lead to the word that's “on the tip of your tongue.” Because the descriptors on the wheel are in common use among cheese professionals, this **vocabulary building exercise** quickly makes the novice taster conversant with the expert. And – no small thing – it will help immensely in communicating what you want **at the cheese counter**.

More advanced tasters can expand their skills with a variety of challenges:

- Taste 3 similar cheeses (e.g. St. André, Riopelle, and Triple-Crème du Village), and try to pick out the **characteristics that are unique** to each.

- Explore the connection between quality and **expressiveness** (specific “outer ring” aromas clearly present) as well as quality and **complexity** (diverse aroma families noted).
- Turn your observations into **written descriptions** that are personally meaningful and broadly communicative.
- Challenge yourself to a blind nosing/tasting. This is a **fun party game**.

### Limits to the Wheel

Aroma is a large part of our experience of flavour, but it is not the only part. Intensity, primary tastes, texture and body are less fun to spin adjectives about, but they are very important to the overall perception of cheese – consider how often your dominant impression of a cheese is simply “strong” or “salty” or “creamy”. These observations are especially important when considering pairing possibilities. Because the **impact of food on wine** is determined for the most part by primary taste interactions, matching wine and cheese based on aroma alone is doomed to fail more often than not. For example, a lemony fresh chèvre and a citrus-scented Chardonnay make sense on the nose, but if the cheese is higher in acid (as is likely), then the wine will seem dull and flabby by contrast.

### In My Fridge

Old World classics that continue to appeal...

**Esrom** is a Danish stinker with Trappist origins. Fermented, yeasty aromas join the anticipated barnyard bravado. Complex and savoury. Great with onions and beer.

**Idiazábal** is the only smoked cheese I don’t get bored with. A toothsome little drum of raw Latxa ewe milk, smoked over hawthorn and beechwood by clever Basque foodsmiths in Pais Vasco and Navarra, Northern Spain.

### On The Calendar

New learning opportunities for the New Year. Visit [www.cheeseculture.ca](http://www.cheeseculture.ca) for more....

#### Jan. 26

##### Alpine Cheese

Leslieville Cheese Market East. 891 Queen St. East, Toronto.

416-465-7143. 7:30 p.m. and 8:45 p.m.

<http://leslievillecheese.com/schoolClasses.php?fmLocation=east>

#### Feb. 8

##### Dessert Cheese

Leslieville Cheese Market West. 541 Queen St. West, Toronto.

416-361-3111. 7:30 p.m. and 8:45 p.m.

<http://leslievillecheese.com/schoolClasses.php?fmLocation=west>

(Repeats on Feb. 9 at the East Market.)