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V.I.P.

Sophisticated Americans are embracing rich, savory triple-crèmes, exotic chèvres, etc. These shops satisfy their discriminating tastes.

best-sellers



Across the country, cheese is replacing chocolate as our number one indulgence. Perhaps not since the fondue fad of the '70s has America had such a love affair with cheese. And today, with literally hundreds of varieties to try, love is better the second time around. The following stores offer the finest quality and selections: **C'est Si Bon** 280 Sunset Ave. Palm Beach, FL 33480. 407-659-6503. Situated across the street from the only supermarket on Palm Beach island, this is the place where the private chefs of tycoons such as Perelman, Trump and Taubman order their cheeses. During the winter season, owners Arthur and Aris Voyer stock an average of 100 types, ranging from unusual goat Brie and sheep's milk specialties to classic imported Swiss and cheddar. "Our Reggiano Parmigiano, aged nearly three years, is delicious with red wine," promises Arthur. "A lot of Europeans purchase it."

C'est Si Bon caters parties, creating edible displays

of 10 to 15 different kinds. But the owners are equally happy helping their affluent clientele to select one perfect cheese and an appropriate bottle of wine—which they also sell. "Proper freshness is most important. All cheeses have a life span," Aris says. "Palm Beachers come to us because we have a high



It's all in the presentation. With over 300 varieties to choose from, Dean & DeLuca (all photos) has the makings of some very artful displays.

turnover. They simply want the best."

La Ferme Beaujolaise 2000 Hyde St. San Francisco, CA 94109. 415-441-6913. This is the only U.S. branch of a French chain with shops in Lyon, Cannes, Nice and Niort. Opened in 1984 by Chantal Plasse, it's also the exclusive importer for Androuet, the highly regarded Parisian cheese company (and restaurant). The shop focuses on farm cheeses—made from milk from the farmers' own herds—with half of the 100 varieties on hand coming from very small, independent producers.

Plasse, an expert in "affinage" ("bringing a cheese to perfect maturity") ages her stock in a special room, carefully monitoring temperature, ventilation and humidity. "Cheese can be aged from one day to 10 years to bring out the best taste," she says. "It's a very subjective art." Favorites include Pavé d'Affinois, a soft double-crème from the Loire region; the nutty Saint-Marcellin from Lyon, prized for an earthy flavor; and Pont l'Évêque, a semisoft cow's-milk cheese that is almost, but not quite, bitter.

New this month is an exclusive line from England and Scotland. And customers can dine on cheese and charcuterie at tables near the front window.

Dean & DeLuca 560 Broadway New York, NY 10012. 212-431-1691. A food mecca in the trendy SoHo district, this soaring loft-like



space is on the scale of a giant supermarket, but the decor and merchandising more closely resemble a designer boutique. The scope and quality of its foods—particularly its cheeses—have made owners Joel Dean and Giorgio DeLuca local celebrities. With an assortment that approaches 300, Dean & DeLuca try to have something for everyone. Their diverse clientele includes NYU students, neighborhood artists and stars—John Malkovich, Lauren Hutton. . . . The competent staff takes cheese very seriously. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 156)

CECIL FOTHO