

# Whey to go

Kirsten MacFarlane talks to the man who wrote the book on one of our favourite dairy products

**T**HE Swiss cheese sbrinz takes four years to mature. That's a long time on the rack, in the dark.

It's obvious from the moment Master of Cheese Will Studd picks up the phone in his Melbourne farmhouse, that he'd be struggling to last the distance locked into one place alongside a row of these hardened cheeses.

He likes to roam, and he's so endearingly passionate about the artisan cheese he's seen on his travels, barely stopping for breath between rummaging around the caves of Roquefort and climbing the Swiss Alps to watch emmentaler, the world's large cheese at 100kg, being bundled into its waxy tomb.

"Did you know there are only six producers of raw milk camembert in the world?"

No, but New Zealand cheese lovers do know that strict regulations deprive them of locally-produced raw (unpasteurised) milk cheese products.

"It's a terrible shame your cheese makers are forbidden to make cheese from raw milk. Flavour drives speciality cheese. If you want flavour, you must have access to raw milk," says Studd with foodie self-assurance.

But he is a global cheese guru. He was slicing cheese in his central London delicatessens in the 1970s, moving in 1981 to Melbourne, where he continues his crusade to promote a greater understanding of artisan and handmade cheeses.

Last month this Englishman joined the likes of Rick Stein and Antonio Carluccio in the Tasting Australian Hall of Fame.

As well as scoffing large quantities of cheese, Studd imports and sells it, judges it, and recently published an encyclopedic masterpiece on the subject — a chunky 380-page tome, *Cheese Slices*. His television programme of the same name is watched by 60 million viewers worldwide.

It's one man's cheese odyssey. Touring 10 countries in three continents, visiting dozens of small dairies, the series — which screens on Sky's Food TV — explores the traditions and history behind Europe's best-loved cheeses.

It also looks at the awakening interest in handmade artisan cheeses in the United States, Ireland and Australia, and he adds, "I've got plans to film in Zealand".

On the show, Studd is relentless in his pursuit of good cheese, and good talent. He travels to the Italian Alps to visit the Mauri family at Pasturo where taleggio is ripened in granite caves cooled by melting snow. In another episode, he cuts and grades cheddar with Randolph Hodgson of Neal's Yard Dairy fame at London's Borough Market.

Although miffed *Cheese Slices* has not screened in Britain, Studd is clearly proud of the series he created, financed and battled to get on air.

"TV executives were initially deeply suspicious of a show specialising in cheese," he says wryly.

Studd has a record for battling authorities. His most famous conflict took place in Australia over roquefort cheese,



*Englishman Will Studd is endearingly passionate about the art of cheesemaking.*

the sweet-salty blue cheese he'd imported from France.

In 2003, authorities ordered him to destroy 80kg of the ewe's milk cheese that had been impounded for almost two years.

It was the end of an A\$80,000 (\$95,500) legal fight. The guidelines on destruction of impounded cheeses were clear — supervised "deep burial" at a public landfill was required.

So Studd took the roquefort, draped in a tricolore atop a hearse, for burial at a tip while *La Marseillaise* played, and the cameras rolled.

"The [cheese] industry people treated me like a terrorist," says Studd gleefully.

From his seaside Flinders farmhouse, he continues his radical talk: "There's cheese revolution happening; one driven by consumers looking for flavours, textures, aromas."

His raw milk crusade may be gaining ground. Early next year, Food Standards Australia New Zealand is expected to reveal the findings of a review of raw milk cheese production in Australia and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, Studd is wooing new cheese fans with a series that's had plenty of highs and lows.

He nearly halted production after an Irish chef and fellow cheese enthusiast had a heart attack during filming and later died in hospital.

"It was a turning point for me," says Studd.

"He was so passionate about the series, and he made me realise how important it is to keep believing in your passion. I've just finished filming my fourth series."

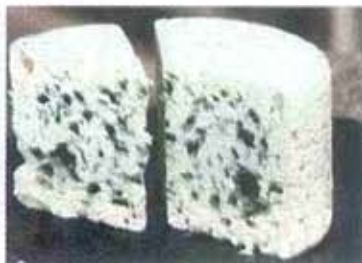
As for the laughs, the Switzerland episode reveals that his creative control doesn't extend to the local bovine.

"Oh yes, the piece to camera with the cows was a riot," he chortles.

"They kept trying to shove me down the hill."

And this fan is looking forward to the series in which Studd helps blow up a block of cheese.

"What else would you do with a rotten block of cheese?" he asks.



*There is a growing interest in handmade artisan cheeses.*

## WIN

We have five copies of Will Studd's book *Cheese Slices* to give away. To enter, write your name, address and phone number on the back of a postcard or envelope and send to: *Cheese Slices* competition, Viva, New Zealand Herald, PO Box 3290, Auckland. Entries close November 21; winners will be announced on November 28.

