

NOTABLE EDIBLES



Photo by C. Coutant

FAT TOAD GOAT'S MILK CARAMEL

Cajeta, a unique and delicious caramel made from goat's milk, is a specialty of the town of Celaya in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. It is also a specialty made in Vermont, on a back road in Brookfield at Fat Toad Farm. Called simply Goat's Milk Caramel, this incredible sweet is a result of the labors of Steven Reid, Judith Irving, her two daughters Josey and Calley and a band of Alpine and Saanen goats, who greet me with luminous upturned eyes and a cacophony of unharmonious bleats when I arrive for a visit.

The room where the caramel is made is steamy and the smell is overpowering: milk and sugar and an underlying scent that suggests earth and fire and spice. On a small gas stove a pot sits, filled with goat's milk, sugar and cinnamon sticks. Fat Toad Farm makes four types of cajeta: original caramel, caramel enhanced with pure whole vanilla beans, caramel infused with two types of cinnamon sticks and a magnificent coffee caramel in which they use whole roasted beans for flavor. Irving tells me the exact formula will never be revealed. It takes four hours of slow cooking to make twelve quarts of caramel.

Josey stirs the pot with a long spoon, frequently checking for that "sheeting" behavior well known to makers of jam. She is in her twenties and talks freely of her love of the farm, the animals and, perhaps most eloquently, of her connection to family and her desire to give back to the community in which she grew up. Her sister Calley, who was off the farm on the day of my visit, is responsible for that secret recipe, which she brought back from her extended stay in Mexico. Their mother says both are enormously dedicated, talented and hilarious. She is delighted to be able to share this way of life with them on a daily basis.

But the caramel awaits. After the mixture reaches just the right creamy thickness, Judith dons a ski glove to protect her hand from burns, fetches her funnel and ladle and pours the sticky dripping liquid into waiting jars, which then are hot-water processed, labeled and readied for sale. The farm recently added a wooden gift box assortment, padded with raffia and straw, to their product line—the perfect present for those with a serious sweet tooth.

I find it hard to decide which variety I like best. The other night I sautéed local pears in butter until they were soft and golden brown, then added a generous puddle of coffee-infused caramel. I have also filled hollowed-out apples with the cinnamon caramel and baked them in a slow oven for about an hour until the two flavors merged, and the distinction between apple and sauce disappeared. I can be persuaded easily to add a spoonful or two of the vanilla caramel to my Sunday morning cup of milky coffee. But my favorite is a bowl of vanilla ice cream topped with the anything-but-plain Fat Toad Farm original Caramel, a few toasted pecans and a small dollop of loosely whipped cream. One of the glories of being alive is that something so simple can make you so happy. —C. Coutant

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Photo by vm/iStockPhoto

VADEBONCOEUR ARTISANAL
FRENCH NOUGAT

Sometimes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That is certainly the case with Vadeboncoeur Artisanal French Nougat: The simplest of ingredients are expertly hand-crafted to create a confection that is, to my taste, perfection.

Didier Murat began as many artisans do, fulfilling a desire to create a candy that he would like to eat. Having spent some of his childhood years attending a school at sea, he learned early that when he wanted to eat something delicious, it was best to prepare it himself. Each year, during the holidays, those lucky enough to receive a package of Murat's nougat all responded with the same phrase, "You really should sell this!" Encouraged by his friend, Floery Mahoney, owner of Daily Chocolate in Vergennes, Murat's holiday ritual evolved into one practiced much more frequently. He now prepares nougat, in small batches, several times a month and sells it at selected stores in New England and through his website, vadeboncoeurnougat.com.

Murat insists on using only the finest organic ingredients, sourced locally whenever possible. The recipe begins with whipped egg whites mixed with a heated syrup of sugar and Vermont honey. When the mixture achieves just the right temperature—a critical factor because this determines the final texture of the nougat—Murat blends in pistachios and toasted almonds. He has mastered the ratio of nuts to confection so that each bite provides a balance between crunchy and chewy, salty and sweet.

The shape and size of the bar also contribute to one's enjoyment. It's small enough to be manageable for one enthusiastic eater, yet large enough to share a bite with a deserving friend.

Although Murat is of French heritage, the name he selected for his creation does not have any particular significance, other than it is "a great old French name that I love." A classic name is most appropriate because nougat has a long history. According to legend, nougat was first prepared in Italy (it is called *torrone* in that country) in 1441 to celebrate a medieval wedding in the city of Cremona and was introduced in Montelimar, France, in the 17th century. A very familiar confection in Europe, it is now becoming more popular in the United States. And, thanks to Vadeboncoeur, in Vermont.

When he is not making candy, Murat can be found absorbed in his other passion, building replicas of historic sailor's chests made from rough-sawn planks and featuring hand-forged hardware and handmade handles. The influence of those early



Didier Murat
preparing his
signature confection.

years at sea has found its expression in the culinary and creative endeavors of Didier Murat.

—D. Schapiro

Vadeboncoeur Artisanal French Nougat
104 South Water Street
Vergennes, Vermont 05491
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vadeboncoeurnougat.com



A NEW CHOICE
IN THE NEW NORTH END

Vermonters who prefer meals without any animal products have had a hard time eating out in Burlington. Until now. According to owner Owen Hoppe, Burlington's New Ethic Café is the only eatery in the state with an entirely vegan menu. Located at the junction of North Street and North Winooski Avenue in the Old North End, the café has been serving up quick, delicious and creative meals for dining in and taking out since late September.

Hoppe's vegan philosophy has informed his eating habits since age 13, and he's been an avid kitchen experimenter ever since. The unique menu at New Ethic Café consists of well-vetted Hoppe creations that are certain to leave patrons feeling satiated, whether they be vegans, carnivores or something in between. From the nacho plate, to the many "chicken" sandwiches (made from homemade seitan, or wheat gluten), to side dishes of cornbread and macaroni & (nondairy) cheese, New Ethic's aim is vegan soul food. Other instant hits? The sweet chili burger served on perfectly toasted Klinger's bread and the intriguing hickory-smoked coconut "bacon," which is an impressive imitation in both looks and taste (add it to salads, burgers or a baked potato).

While not all ingredients on their diverse menu can be local (Vermont is known for our dairy cheese; there is currently no

locally made vegan cheese), Hoppe has incorporated local flair as much as possible into the menu and beyond. The brightly painted walls of the café are decorated by local art, and the airy space is as comfortable and satisfying as the food. Will adamant localvores give in to the temptation of an admittedly exotic plantain burger knowing that the compostable take-out containers come from a paper company in White River Junction?

The volume and diversity of customers frequenting the café—Hoppe has been surprised by the number of families with little kids and teenagers and those traveling from far outside Burlington—speaks to the niche New Ethic is filling for an underserved community of eaters.

One of their most popular creations thus far is a "sinfully delicious" vegan donut, currently available only on Saturdays. For people avoiding eggs and butter, good donuts are hard to come by. Says Hoppe, "We provide a place for vegans to indulge."

—M. Meece

New Ethic Café
260 North Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
Tues to Sat, 11 am to 9 pm; Sun 11 am to 7 pm; closed Mon.
802.540.2VEG www.newethiccafe.com



Photo by Melissa Meece

Owner Owen Hoppe at
Burlington's New Ethic Cafe.