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CHEESE PLATE, GLORIOUS CHEESE PLATE —

It's time for that classic to get an update. Lisa Tolin hunts down the finest dairy products for a first-class cheese plate.

Not since the beer keg has a party staple become as ubiquitous as the cheese plate.

This is a blessing for the culinarily challenged. Take a bit of brie. Maybe some goat. Grapes, if you're adventurous. Add some thin crackers and voila: classic.

But there's cheese and then there's cheese.

At the Fancy Food show last week in New York, Cypress Grove Chevre -- makers of the award-winning "Humboldt Fog" -- introduced the kind of cheese that makes you curse. Curse for the intense flavor you weren't expecting. Curse for making all other cheese seem meaningless. Curse for making you want to order a case on the spot.

It's called the "Truffle Tremor." It's a goat cheese infused with truffle. And it's incredible.

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If all this sounds hyperbolic, consider that sales and marketing manager Bob McCall returned from the food show to 17 media requests, including this one. You can buy it now in parts of California, but it doesn't hit national stores until Aug. 12. This is no wallflower cheese.

But even a cheese this good cannot stand alone. May we suggest the following to round out an unexpected cheese plate:

- Queso blanco with chiles and epazote, Mozzarella Company: This unusually zippy queso blanco was created by Dallas-based cheesemaker Paula Lambert for chef Rick Bayless. The chiles and herbs were inspired by the roadside stands of Mexico. Also suggested: Lambert's pecan praline mascarpone torta for dessert.

- Caley & Cobb's honey garlic cheeseball. This California company recently added cheeseball kits to their line of soup mixes, herb rubs and condiments. You might ask, "Isn't a cheeseball ... cheesy?" We might answer, "Shut up and try it."

- Vermont Butter & Cheese Company cultured butter with sea salt. But this is not a cheese! What is it doing on your cheese plate? This butter is made in the French style, which means it's cultured, literally and poetically. It's studded with grains of Atlantic sea salt and presented in handmade packaging. This is butter to be savored.

- Savannah Bee Company honeycomb: This pretty square of honeycomb pairs well with a mild cheese -- don't waste the "Truffle Tremor" -- and sliced apples.

For information on where to find these products:

Cypress Grove Chevre: <http://www.cypressgrovechevre.com/>

Mozzarella Company: <http://www.mozzco.com/>

Caley & Cobb: <http://www.caleyandcobb.com/>

Vermont Butter & Cheese Co.: <http://www.vtbutterandcheeseco.com/>

Savannah Bee Company: <http://www.savannahbee.com/>