

Shmanners 183: Charcuterie and Cheese Boards (Part 3)

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! This is your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: Alright. Fall is here. I love it.

Travis: I'm all laden with meat and cheese! 'Cause this is part 3!

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Of our super-cheesy, super-meaty, charcuterie and cheese plate, uh, trifecta?

Teresa: Yes. This is kind of like—this is, like, an accidental trifecta, because when we received this question, or this topic suggestion, really, we were like, "Oh, well, this'll be easy. Like, just put it all on a plate, right?"

But then we discovered as we—as I gazed into the minutiae—[laughs]

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: —that these things are all very separate. They all have their own little, like, origin stories and such. And so they needed to be divided into parts! Here we are, part 3.

Travis: And you mentioned that this was a, uh, topic suggestion.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: It was. Thank you, Abby, who suggested charcuterie and cheese boards, and has given us three weeks of content based of that, which I was not expecting.

Teresa: Yeah, that's—that's exactly what I said!

Travis: I know! But here we are! And here's the thing: I was very excited—this is also, just a heads-up, going to be the episode that contains questions, so we'll be addressing those, too, but this—I was very excited to get to *this* part of it, to talk about the cheese board, 'cause this, to me... I was more—I was aware of, like, the idea of puttin' out some cheese long before I was aware of, like, charcuterie being a thing.

Teresa: [little kid voice?] Cheese and crackers.

Travis: Ye—sure. Um, I have this weird, very clear memory of, like, growing up, like, just getting out—you know, that kind of, like, big, rectangular hunk of, like, cheddar cheese, and a bunch of slices of that, and crackers, and just sitting there and, like, just watching cartoons, or—

Teresa: Well, we've talked—I mean, it's kind of like... what we're assembling here is like adult Lunchable.

Travis: Right. Correct. Yes.

Teresa: [laughs] So what *you* had is just Lunchable.

Travis: Sure. Sure.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But it was [through laughter] homemade Lunchable.

Teresa: Lunchable. Homemade.

Travis: It was, uh, a bespoke Lunchable.

Teresa: Farm to table.

Travis: A farm to table, bespoke Lunchable. Um, but yes. So, like, this, to me—listen. Are we gonna get into the history of... cheese?

Teresa: A little bit.

Travis: Okay! That feels pretty deep! We should probably get started.

Teresa: Okay. Um, just—

Travis: As long as there's been old milk...

Teresa: —just to reiterate—so, the reason that we spread this out so much is because a charcuterie board is just the meats, and you can add the additions, the snackums like people like. You can also add cheese, but—

Travis: Yes, but at that point, the cheese is more like a condiment and not the focus.

Teresa: Exactly. So what we're gonna focus on today is a cheese board, or cheese course, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: Because that's real—I mean, there was a time where it was like, when you're talking—we don't really *do* courses here in the US, as a general rule, unless it's, like, an especially fancy occasion, but it used to be like if you sat down to dinner it was, like—well, at least in, you know, the fancy, well-to-do homes—it was like, you're gonna get, like, you know, a soup course, and maybe a cheese course, and this course, and a bread course, and—right? It was all coming in waves.

Teresa: Right. Um, so there's the a la francaise, which is the courses. A la russe is often referred to as "everything at once," right? So we have lots of different ways of eating, and specifically—so, in Italy, meals start with an antipasto, right? Which can be cheese and charcuterie.

Travis: Which, for a long time when I was a kid, I thought it meant just, like, the opposite of pasta.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: This is—this is the *anti*-pasta.

Teresa: It's more like *before* the pasta. *Before* the meal.

Travis: [through laughter] It—it cancels out pasta.

Teresa: [through laughter] No. And then, French meals typically have a cheese course after the main meal, before the dessert.

Travis: Right! I have seen—there are some restaurants probably—now I'm thinking French-based, where a cheese plate is included in the dessert menu.

Teresa: Yes. Um, and English traditionally have the cheese afterwards. It's meant to—the idea is to, like, seal the stomach. Like cheese and pork, right?

Travis: Yes. Okay.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: To seal the s—[laughs] I—I mean, I get it—

Teresa: Well, it doesn't—it doesn't—

Travis: —listen.

Teresa: —really, but—

Travis: I've eaten cheese. I understand why they would think that.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. So, cheese has been around since at least 8000 BCE.

Travis: Wow! That's... a long time!

Teresa: Okay. [uncertainly] Yyyeah. So—

Travis: Not as long as some things, I guess? I'm unclear as to what your response was meant to convey.

Teresa: —not as old as meat.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay, right? Because—

Travis: Well, cheese isn't... naturally occurring, like meat is.

Teresa: Right, but—okay. So we talked about in the charcuterie part about how it was probably an accident. Like, meat being smoked over a fire.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Where, although cheese also was probably an accident the first couple times, you had to have, like, access to domestic animals in order to get the milk needed to procure the cheese. You know what I mean?

Travis: Yes. You have to obtain the materials, as well as understand the process to do it, right?

Teresa: Right. So it was after the plow, probably, because this is when the nomadic people of probably the Fertile Crescent, which is, if you've heard of this, this is between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and kind of like where Iraq is today.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: They had plows first, because they probably settled, and had farms that had domesticated goats and sheep, at least.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So then they would harvest the milk, and they realized that if you left it out in warm conditions, probably like the sun if we're talking, like, modern-day Iraq, right? Uh, it would sour. So then the lactic acid made proteins coagulate, which caused soft clumps in the milk, like cheese curds.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Yeah? And—

Travis: Just this process as you describe is so unappetizing.

Teresa: You don't know how cheese is made, sweets?

Travis: No, listen! I know how it's made. Hearing—I don't know why the phrase became "You don't wanna know how the sausage gets made" when how the cheese gets made is a far more upsetting idea to me.

"Well, you just gotta let it go sour, and it coagulates, and basically it's bad. But then you eat it, and it's good!"

Teresa: But it's not bad. Yogurt's the same way.

Travis: Yes! It goes bad! [laughs] Like, it is milk that has gone bad, but tastes good.

Teresa: So anyway—

Travis: Which sounds like I'm making, like, a femme fatale cheese character. Like—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —"I'm just milk that's gone bad that tastes so good."

Teresa: So once the proteins make the cheese curds, you drain the liquid, which is called "whey," right?

Travis: Uh-huh. Your curds and whey, yes.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. And then these soft clumps can be eaten fresh, or fried, like delicious fried cheese curds. Mmm...

Travis: Which is one of the best... things, on the planet. Yes.

Teresa: So good. [laughs] Okay. Um, and so—

Travis: If you're ever goin' through the Minnesota airport, there's a Minnesota Twins restaurant—

Teresa: [gasps] Yes there is, so good!

Travis: —that has really good cheese curds. Just a little hint. And right across from there, uh, there's a chiropractor.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And a playground. It's great!

Teresa: It's great. We spend a lot of time in airports these days.

Travis: We do!

Teresa: Um, so then these curds where they've been separated from the whey is, like, the cornerstone of all the cheese products we have today, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So cheddared cheese has these curds that are salted and introduced to bacteria and then squeezed.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Okay? That's what cheddared cheese means. And then softer cheeses are different bacteria that's introduced. Maybe different rind washes, different waxes, all this kind of stuff. Like, it just explodes out of this basic cheese product.

Travis: Yes. 'Cause you have—But I assume—I mean, if you just think in terms of, like, goat's milk, cow's milk, whatever milk, right? You're pretty much gonna get kind of the same base curd, right? You're talking about how you then take that curd and make it into the cornucopia of cheeses that exist.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Cheese was also one of the things that really helped neolithic man advance, because even back then, actually especially back then, lactose intolerance was a big problem!

Travis: Well, because we were just developing the very idea of consuming milk, right? We hadn't—like, it was not a thing that the human body—or at least cow's milk or whatever had lactose in it.

Teresa: Yes. I mean, even human breast milk has lactose in it, but that's something that you grow away from as you age, and so the protein digestive enzymes—

Travis: Same with most cats, by the way. The idea of, like, cats love cream? Well, little baby cats like cream. Older cats, it tends to upset their tummies.

Teresa: Yes. Um, but the lactose is significantly reduced when you make cheese, so it was a great, nutritious source of this protein and enzymes without all the tummy trouble.

Travis: Okay! Thanks, cheese!

Teresa: So now we are up to the bronze age, okay?

Travis: When we made bronze cheese.

Teresa: [laughs] Noo, that'd break your teeth!

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: But—

Travis: Unless you're Iron Man.

Teresa: —cheese was a common product used for trade, throughout the Mediterranean area.

Travis: Makes sense.

Teresa: And throughout Mesopotamia, cheese was not only a staple in the table, like, in a meal, but also it was kind of, like, used for religious services? Which is pretty cool.

Travis: Okay! That tracks. I thought you were going to say "medicinal." I was ready to hear about medicinal cheese.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I guarantee that's happened, right? We'll have to talk to Sydnee.

Teresa: Yeahhh. I—I think so, right?

Travis: Sure. Medicinal cheese? Okay. Probably—like you said, plug up the stomach, right? There's gotta be some—

Teresa: Yeah, probably, like, for digestive issues.

Travis: Right, yes.

Teresa: When they didn't know that. Anyway.

Travis: Stop you up! Okay.

Teresa: Okay. Alright. So, the modern cheese as we know it—

Travis: [robotic voice?] I am the modern cheese.

Teresa: —really has to do with the discovery of rennet.

Travis: Rennet?

Teresa: It's an animal byproduct produced in the stomach of certain animals, like cows, which can accelerate and control the coagulation I talked about.

Travis: Ohhh!

Teresa: So now, with the addition of rennet, this is where the real explosion happens between cheeses. Um—

Travis: Not literally.

Teresa: No, no, no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But it made—

Travis: Because I don't know what rennet does, and I don't know [through laughter] how volatile it is to, like—

Teresa: [laughs] The *varietal* explosion.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, because it made it possible to create harder cheeses, which last longer, which are easier to ship, which are easier to trade, which means global expansion.

Travis: Yes. Like a Parmesan.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: A very firm cheese. Crusty cheese.

Teresa: Crusty! There were cultures all around the world that fully embraced the whole cheese thing, right?

Travis: Like, say, Italian? French?

Teresa: Yes?

Travis: Uh, Wisconsin?

Teresa: Okay, uh-huh? So—

Travis: That's it. That's all I've got.

Teresa: In—in different ways. So, South Asians would make paneer, right?

Travis: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah!

Teresa: Greeks made feta, Egyptians made cottage cheese. You know, all these kind of different flavors and techniques were available, depending upon the region!

One of the things that really, like, spread the cheese in the European world specifically, one or two different kinds, right? Was the Roman Empire.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, it was an essential ration for the Roman soldiers, and things like Parmesan, Roquefort, Muenster, all of these cheeses can be traced back to the Roman cheese ration, because after the Roman Empire fell, the cheese stayed.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Totally.

Travis: Listen: cheese. The cheese stood alone.

[pauses]

Teresa: Um—

Travis: No, I'm sorry. I don't think you caught that. The cheese... stood alone.

Teresa: [fake laughter] Yes.

Travis: Think—'cause it's like the s—

Teresa: Sorry, I wasn't listening.

Travis: —yes, like the children's song? Okay.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay. Just so long as we're clear on how funny I am. Go on.

Teresa: Alright. So, let's move just a little bit closer to modern era.

Travis: [time travel noises] Woo woo woo woo woo woo woooooo!

Teresa: [chuckles] Um, sadly, factory-made cheese...

Travis: [clicks tongue]

Teresa: ... yeah. Started with the Industrial Revolution, because we—the demand was for large-scale cheese production, and not everybody wanted to make it themselves anymore. I mean, because we were, you know, squeezed into tenant buildings in cities, and you didn't have access, maybe, to a cow, and the milk that you needed was—

Travis: I bet it brought the price down, too. I mean, frankly, that's one of the things about factory-made goods is, like, because you can mass-produce it, it's probably cheaper than going to, you know, your local individual cheese-monger and buying cheese by, like, the pound or the ounce or whatever.

Teresa: Sure, yeah.

Travis: I mean, not that that's good. I'm—I'm grimacing as I say it, because what we've seen—I think in a lot of things—we talked about this in the charcuterie episode too, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: You saw it go from, like, a very specialized skill and job and person, to being completely condensed into, like, "Yeah, somebody pushes the button and it just happens." To now, we're expanding back into, "But what if we focused on quality again?"

Teresa: Exactly!

Travis: "And what if we cared about where it came from and how it was made and how sustainably and ethically and all of those things?"

Teresa: So, uh, the pendulum starts to swing again after World War II, like a lot of things that we talk about. So, in the last 30, 50 years, the slow food movement and interest in organic and locally-sourced food has made a cheese-making Renaissance.

Travis: Which is great.

Teresa: Today, the world produces 22 *billion* kilos of cheese a year!

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: And a lot of that—

Travis: That's a lot of cheese!

Teresa: —yeah! And a lot of that is local farms.

Travis: That's good.

Teresa: Um, because cheese can be highly regionalized.

Travis: Much like—uh, we were talking about, like, smoked meats like capicola or salami or something like that, where it can taste different in each place, right? 'Cause your—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: I imagine, like, you could down to an individual, like, family of cow and, you know, the way that this one family processes this family of cows' milk, it being a specific cheese that you couldn't get somewhere else, right?

Teresa: Right, and that's the marketing ploy.

Travis: Like wine, right?

Teresa: Like wine! Every single, like, batch of cheese could be different depending on the season and what whatever was making the milk ate and where—and, like—

Travis: If the cows were happy.

Teresa: [laughs] I suppose so. Happy cows make happy cheese.

Travis: I think that's important. That's what I'm saying, I think it's important.

Teresa: So, that is where I think is a good place to stop and thank our sponsors!

Travis: I agree.

[theme music plays]

Travis: This week, we are sponsored by Bombas! I like a comfortable sock.

Teresa: Ohhh. Yeah.

Travis: Listen. We've talked about how we're in airports a lot, right? Teresa and I, we travel a lot, go to conventions, we do live shows, we walk around cities, you

know? And man, you really appreciate a comfortable sock when you're doin' that, you know?

Because here's the thing. Listen, can I ask you all a very personal question? When was the last time you refreshed your sock drawer, right? Do you have a sock drawer that's full of those socks that maybe you're pulled on one too many times, and all the elastic is loose, and maybe there's some holes in it?

Teresa: Oh yeah, I get holes right where my toenail hits it.

Travis: Right, yes.

Teresa: Because I—you know, I've—I take care of my toes, but that constant pressure—

Travis: Listen, we got blades on our feet!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's it! That's what it comes down to. We all got blades on our feet.

Teresa: We all got blades.

Travis: And the thing is—hey, listen. If you're like me before I found stuff like Bombas, you know, you had, like, three pairs of socks that you really liked to wear, and then the rest were like, "Oh no. Now I'm down to *these* socks." Right?

Why not refresh your sock drawer and get a bunch of Bombas? Bombas has a new line of Merino wool socks that are made from soft, warm, and naturally moisture-wicking Merino wool designed with all of Bombas's classic comfort features.

And for every pair of socks you buy—this is my favorite thing about Bombas. For every pair of socks you buy, Bombas will donate a pair to someone in need. Which—that's amazing.

Bombas—this is their tagline, I believe, and it's—I like it? It worries me—I'll just say it.

Bombas are what feet daydream about.

I don't like the idea of my foot having an individual consciousness, [through laughter] but I understand what they mean.

Teresa: Maybe it's because wearing them is like a dream—

Travis: No, I do—

Teresa: —come true!

Travis: —I understand that. I don't like the idea of when I go to bed, my feet begin dreaming. That's we—maybe when feet fall asleep they dream!

Teresa: [gasps]

Travis: [gasps] Ohh!

Teresa: Did it. And what they dream about? Bombas socks.

Travis: [simultaneously] Bombas. So, buy your Bombas at bombas.com, that's B-O-M-B-A-S.com/shmanners today, and get 20% off your first purchase. That's B-O-M-B-A-S.com/shmanners for 20% off. Bombas.com/shmanners.

Okay.

Teresa: Okay. So—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: —okay.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay!

Travis: Whoa, things are getting tense.

Teresa: [laughs] So, when you think of cheese...

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: What... what country do you *really* think about?

Travis: [sighs] Okay. When you first asked me, F... probably France.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: Right? But then my second impulse was Switzerland.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: 'Cause they got the Swiss cheese.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Well, France is the correct answer.

Travis: I—cool! I nailed it.

Teresa: [laughs] 'Cause that's what I'm gonna talk about. Uh, the reason I'm going to talk about French cheese is because they have over 400 types of regional *specific* cheeses, which is amazing, uh, considering it's not, like, an enormous place.

Um, and like we were talking about, they really embrace the idea of every family farm has their own family of milk producers, and they make the cheese this way, and they do the thing, and they've been doing that for as long as they've had cheese, thanks to the Roman Empire, like I was discussing earlier.

Travis: Listen. I've only ever been to France stopping in the Paris airport, but... I can say pretty much with confidence, I'm pretty sure France likes food. So, like, I—I think—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: —I think they deeply appreciate the artistry of food, so I'm not surprised to learn that they are at the forefront. It's the reason you say, "Where do I think

of—" I think of France, right? Because they seem to me to be a culture that, like, is invested in the quality of individual foods. And you know what? Maybe I'm rufflin' some feathers saying that—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: —but that's how I feel. That's just me.

Teresa: So, um, like champagne from the—

Travis: From Champagne Urbane—what—no—

Teresa: —from the region of Champagne.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: A lot of the cheeses that we recognize today are named for French towns. Brie—

Travis: Uh-huh, named after Brie Larson.

Teresa: Noo.

Travis: Noo.

Teresa: Uh, camembert is from Camembert, which is a town in Normandy, by the way.

So, they tried to keep it a secret but everybody was like, "Noo, this cheese is too good!" So that's why, like Champagne, they had to, like—they—"You can only call it brie if it's from this thing in Brie."

Travis: Is that still true?

Teresa: Yeah, basically.

Travis: Really?

Teresa: I mean, just like, you know, you can see lots of bottles that are labeled champagne. Uh, they're not all champagne! They're not real champagne.

Travis: They're like champagne-style sparkling wine.

Teresa: Exactly, unless they come from Champagne.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, so here's the thing. You could make an entire cheese board just from the French cheeses, and because they're so delicious, that's what I'm gonna talk about. [laughs quietly]

Travis: Okay! Well—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —or you could not, but now we're gonna focus on French cheeses.

Teresa: [through laughter] Now we're gonna focus on French.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uhh, they're amazing. So, here's the thing—

Travis: You could also make one out of different kinds of cheddar. Go on.

Teresa: You could.

Travis: Which is my favorite kind of cheese. Go on.

Teresa: You definitely could.

Travis: Ooh, a nice Welsh cheese? Ooh. That's what I like. I like the English cheeses. Now please, tell me more about French cheeses.

Teresa: [laughs] French cheese has four categories: soft, semi-soft, hard, and bleu. And the flavors are—they run the gamut.

Most of those cheeses from France are also seasonal, so you can get winter cheeses that are harder, summer cheeses that are softer, and all this kind of stuff. But, you know, here's the thing. If you're making a French cheese style cheese board course, even, you have a lot of those to choose from, and you could even

make, like, a whole, "We're gonna do a hard cheese course, and here is a summer one, and here's a winter one, and here's—"

Travis: I think that's a pro-level maneuver, though.

Teresa: It is a pro-level maneuver.

Travis: That's a pro-level cheese board maneuver. My advice, if you're starting out, you got your soft, your semi-soft, your hard, and your blue. You're gonna want one of each, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: If you're—because different strokes for different folks. And listen, here's a little top tip from me to you: you can get less of the blue, 'cause less people are gonna be into that. That is a more specialized—blue cheese, you know, you're talking about a very pungent, some might say stinky cheese.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? Not everyone's gonna be down with that, and a little bit goes a long way, so you do not need to have as much blue cheese as you have of say, like, a—cheddar, right? Or a brie, as you're saying, right? A brie is a more spreadable cheese, a little bit milder. More people are going to get brie than they're going to get, like, you know, a blue cheese.

Teresa: Um, and again, a lot of these cheeses also pair well with bread, like a baguette.

Travis: Mmm.

Teresa: And crackers. When you use a cracker, though, it shouldn't be overly seasoned, again. You're trying to let the cheese *shine*.

Travis: I—I remem—I hit on this in the last episode. I would say rather than cracker I would think wafer, right?

Teresa: Yeahhh.

Travis: Thinner, less bready, less flavored, is a conveyance, you know?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. But again, like the French do, you don't even really need those for cheese.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Nope. Take it out.

Teresa: Most are fairly easy to pick up with your hands. They have—if you don't have a hard cheese, usually a lot of the softer cheeses have rinds that are edible, so you can pick it up there, you won't get so messy.

Travis: Yes. I think in general if you're doing a soft cheese, though, a brie, you need *some* kind of conveyance, right? You need something to put it on.

Teresa: Sure. Sure, sure, sure. Um, and so what you need to think about when you serve your cheese board, you know, your different types and flavors, but also flavor-enhancers.

Almonds are often good, because they have kind of a rich flavor, but still, like, they're not mouth-coating.

Travis: No. They're a good palate refresher.

Teresa: Exactly. Like I said. Apricots, fruit spreads often are paired with, like, bries and camemberts, just because they tend to bring out the different notes, like an acidic note, if it's something sweet, all that kind of stuff.

Um, but a lot of things, everything goes! Uh, pickles, olives, honey, everything that, you know—

Travis: Especially, by the way, olives and blue cheese. It's very good.

Teresa: [chuckles] You do like that, don't you?

Travis: I do. I like it a lot.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: I like the pungent cheeses. In small bits, right? I think they are one that you especially need to pair with something, because they can be a lot on their own. Uh, but paired with the right thing, it's great.

But here's the thing. You're talking about, like, accouterments, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I would say, you also need to think about hardware, because I would say, unlike meats, different cheeses, as we're talking about soft, semi-soft, hard, and blue, like, need different utensils.

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: Especially those hard cheeses, right? You need to think—that's why for those, I really like, um, a little bit serrated where you're going to slice, right? Rather than just chop straight down, because sometimes with a hard cheese it can end up just, like, crumbling or breaking instead of slicing. Uh, so you want to be able to saw it a little bit.

With a soft cheese, you want more of, like, a palette knife, right? Nice and broad knife that you can get a hunk of to spread on the thing.

Um, blue cheese is gonna crumble a little bit 'cause it has the natural, like, breaks and separations in it, so you want maybe a little bit more of, like, a scooping thing for that.

Like, and different knives—we have this really great board the I love that has, like, the top—you know, it's got kind of a marble top and a little drawer in it that when you pull it out has four different utensils, so you can use four different cheeses, because cheese gets sticky, especially when you're talking about, like, a blue cheese or a brie or something, right?

So cross-contaminating between, like—say you had, like, a cheese with fruit in it. You wouldn't want to use the same utensil for that as you do with a blue cheese, right? They would ruin the flavor of either.

So having, like, separate knives for each one, at the very least separate knives for each one is important.

Teresa: Yes. Uh, so you don't contaminate knives.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Yeah. Um, so, there is a—there is a woman currently referred to as a cheese rock star in some circles—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: —named Tia Keenan. Um, and she writes in her book, *The Art of the Cheese Plate: Pairings, Recipes, Style, Attitude*, that the cheese plate is the holy grail of entertaining. She writes:

"A great cheese plate tells a story through an arc of flavors and textures. It can also tell a cultural story: of a country, of an animal, of a style of cheese. We eat with our eyes, and a great cheese plate is beautiful. Then we next eat with our mouths. A great cheese plate is delicious. We eat with our minds. A great cheese plate tells us something about cheese, about the person who is feeding us, and ultimately about ourselves; what we like, what we love, and how we connect to our food and other people."

It's beautiful, but sounds a little intimidating.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Right? It doesn't have to be.

Travis: This is the thing, once again, like we talked about with the charcuterie, all of this is, like, the epitome, right? This is the ideal, right? But if you're throwin' a party for friends and you go—listen. Straight-up, if this is your thing, you go, you get a couple blocks of, like, "This is a Colby jack, this is a pepper jack, this is a cheddar," right? And you slice those up and you have some crackers out, people are gonna have a great time, right?

Teresa: People love cheese!

Travis: This is the thing. [through laughter] It's really, really hard to go wrong with putting cheese out, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like, it's—it's not difficult. And also, not hard to juj up, right? Like, you get those things, if you put 'em on a nice plate, you have nice utensils, you add, like we were talking about, you know, olives and almonds and stuff to it, you can have this without breaking the bank, you know?

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Uh, you can also do, very similarly to what we talked about with the charcuterie, you can make quadrants, right? Making sure that the cheeses that are adjacent pair well together as well. Um, but you don't want to actually have your cheese touch.

Again, it can, like—it's kind of a living-ish thing? So the flavors and the smells and all that kind of stuff can rub together and not make it as interesting an experience, so don't let your cheese touch.

Travis: We're talkin' about cheese and my tummy is rumbling.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, also, some people like to arrange by putting sweeter cheeses more toward the center and the harder cheeses toward the outside. Some people like to do a kind of scale where it goes from, like, soft to semi-soft to hard to bleu, like all that kind of stuff.

Travis: Yes. That's what I—

Teresa: That's what you like to do.

Travis: —that's what I tend to lean towards, yes. Also—oh, let me give you another Travis McElroy top tip. Pre-sliced some chee—this is true of charcuterie and with cheese board. No—psychologically, for some reason, no one wants to be the first person, right?

Teresa: I know, yeah.

Travis: So you need to go ahead and have some slices off and ready to go.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But, this is why it's trickier with cheese than it is with meat. Cheese—some cheese, when exposed to the air, will, like, crust a little bit. Don't do it until, like, at the start of the party, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That's not something you wanna do—and if you *do* do it ahead of time, cover it with cling film or plastic wrap or whatever.

Teresa: Some would suggest wax paper.

Travis: Oh, okay. Cool! Um, something like that.

Teresa: So that the cheese doesn't sweat.

Travis: Yes. Um, but I would recommend—what you wanna do is, at the start—like, when the party starts and people starts showing up, you, as the host, be the person who cuts the first couple slices, so people can start, get the mome—get the cheese momentum going.

Teresa: Right. So, if you are the first to cut into this wheel of cheese, you should cut a slender piece, about the thickness of a pencil, out of the wheel, like you're slicing a pie, right? And then, cylindrical cheeses should be sliced into discs as you eat them. Pyramid-shaped cheese should be cut into one slice, and then in half, okay? Uh, because that's a—I mean, if it's like—pyramid is like—

Travis: Oh, I see, yes.

Teresa: —yeah, it pretty big. And so then you wanna make sure that as you are doing it, nobody ends up with just a slice of rind.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Right? So cut from—if it's a wedge, you want to cut from an open side, and not from the point.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: So I have some questions.

Teresa: You do?

Travis: Yes, we have some questions, here. This is from Charlotte.

"How can you stop yourself from eating all the cheese?"

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, could you maybe address this a little bit?

Travis: Yes. Here are some top tips from Travis McElroy. You gotta circulate, right? Because it's very easy for a cheese board or a charcuterie board to become a stop, right? That you stand in front of it.

Do not do that. It should be a conversation point, right? It is not a plate for you to eat off of. So I would say, what you want to do is get a plate, put some cheese and some meat on it, and then continue on your journey as you move around, right? Unless everyone is hovering around the cheese board, at which point you're all picking off of it and you're all doing that, right? I think that that is fine, but just standing there and continuously, like, eating from it? Get a portion and move on would be my advice.

Teresa: I think that is a really great idea. Um, also, one of the things that helps me slow down eating is talking.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Uh, so if you are—if you're really enjoying the cheese plate, ask the host about the cheeses they've procured!

Travis: Right. And I think that this also holds true if you're at a restaurant, right? Instead of it being a party, is depending on when you get it—but rarely, if ever, are a cheese plate or charcuterie board the, uh—the entree.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Um, so I think it is important—it's so easy to sit down and your super hungry and you just wanna throw it all in your face. I get that, right? But that's not the point of a cheese board or a charcuterie, and so I think anticipating that the rest of your meal *will* be coming, and this is just to soften the sharpness of your appetite—but talk about it! It's like, "Ooh, I really like this one."

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: "I think—oh, it goes so well with this, you have to try it." Right? That kind of thing, I think, makes it a community experience, which is what a cheese board and a charcuterie should be.

Teresa: And, I have to say that if you also find that you are eating too fast, you may choose to employ a fork, which will help you slow down, instead of using your fingers.

Travis: Uh, this is from Jes—

Teresa: A plate and a fork, obviously.

Travis: —yes. This is from Jessica.

"As someone who is super cheese picky, is it rude if I end up being the main consumer of a certain cheese?"

Teresa: As long as you allow everyone else to taste it to their, you know—so that everybody gets a lil, lil bite—

Travis: Right, especially at a restaurant, where you've ordered and there's, like, four portions for four people.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I don't think it hurts to say, like, "Um, is it okay if I have another piece of this? Like, did everyone get a chance?" I think that's fine.

Teresa: Certainly. At a party atmosphere, I think that as long as you don't eat the *whole* thing, that should be fine.

Travis: Right. Um, let's see.

Teresa: 'Cause I also—you talked about cheddar. Uh, I also really love a great sharp cheddar, and if I find the one on the board that I like, I'm gonna go back for seconds and thirds.

Travis: Listen—yes, it's so tempting. This is from Wolfthorn.

"What is the etiquette for sharing knowledge about the production of the cheese, bread, wine, etc, without sounding like a know-it-all, or like I'm bragging?"

Teresa: Uh, I think you have to wait for the question.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, if you are—okay, I'm gonna backtrack just a second. I think you can do a general overview of the things that you have laid out for people, but then, before going into detail about anything specific, you need to wait for someone to ask.

Travis: I think it also is important to know your audience.

Teresa: Sure!

Travis: Like, I love finding out that stuff. That's why we're on the show. I like finding this stuff out from Teresa, right? And so if somebody said, like, "Oh, do you know why it's like that?" Right? Or, like, "An interesting fact about this—" right? And if that person is then engaged with it, I think you can keep talking, right? It's a conversation piece, right?

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And if you know something—but I think... listen. It's a fi—it's a finesse thing, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Of, like, you don't wanna [imitates sound of kicking a door open] butt into the conversation—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —and be like, "[loudly] Lemme tell you about Roquefort!" Right? But, like, I think if you're like, "Oh, do you know why it's like—" like, if somebody says, like, "Oh, I love when they have such-and-such." It's like, "Oh yeah, it works like this," right? The end. Right? And then if they're like, "That—"

Teresa: I would steer—steer away from the word "actually."

Travis: Oh, *yeah*.

Teresa: Um, which has become, in recent times, a very, let's say, quote, "mansplain-y," quote, word. Um, so stay away from that word. Also, I think that if you... keep—keep the technical things down—I know that we went through a lot of

the technical stuff but, like, this is an informational podcast, so that—if we didn't talk about [chuckles] the technical stuff, there'd be nothing to talk about. So—

Travis: Yeah, we would just be talking about what kind of cheese we like.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Which, don't get us wrong, we'll do!

Teresa: We will!

Travis: Ohh, a lemony Wensleydale? Ohh.

Teresa: [through laughter] A Wensleydale...

Travis: It makes you think of Wallace and Gromit, doesn't it?

Teresa: It sure does.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It sure does. Um, so keep it away from there unless you find someone just—their, like, rapt attention.

Travis: I also think that it helps—we talk about this a lot. Speak in "I" terms. Don't say, like, "Do you know what *you* would find fascinating about this?" Right? Because that's a weird energy to bring to it. But instead say, "You know what I think is super cool about this kind of cheese," right?

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: And then you share the fact. And if they're like, "Wow, that *is* cool." Right? Like, great, cool.

Teresa: And you can keep building off of that. Or they may be like, "Oh, okay." [laughs]

Travis: But the—'cause you never want to assume someone doesn't know something, especially—*especially* if they're the host and they've picked out that cheese.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Don't assume—never assume someone doesn't know something. That is an uninteresting and bad energy to bring to it. Assume that they also know it, and you're sharing in the joy of that knowledge with them, right?

Teresa: That's lovely, dear. I like that.

Travis: Thank you very much! Uh, let's see. We talked about this a little bit in the last episode, but Jeeves wants to know:

"When serving a platter or board at a party, should you label the different items for ease of identification, or is the selection of the type meant to be a conversation piece between guests?"

Teresa: It depends on, first of all, if anyone has any food aversions or allergies or specific diet requirements, I do suggest that if you know that ahead of time, that you do label them, just because that kind of, like, uncertainty standing in front of the cheese board can make people uncomfortable.

Travis: Yeah. I'm just a boy, standing in front of a cheese board.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Hoping not to get sick.

Teresa: Uh, so if you know about those sort of things ahead of time and you know that there's no one in your party who has a specific problem with a specific thing, then don't worry about it! It can be part of the conversation.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But, you know, know your audience.

Travis: I think also it's important to decide, is this going to be a conversation piece or not?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? Like, there is a different between having a cheese board on a counter—like, for example, we have, like, an island in our kitchen, right?

Everybody ends up standing around it during parties. Cool! We're all gonna—it's all right there.

Teresa: We're gonna talk about the food.

Travis: If you had, like, a separate dining room where you set up all the food and everybody's in the living room, you might wanna have it labeled there so that people don't have to keep coming in going "What kind is this? Well, which kind? Which are—the one on the le—" like, that, you might wanna do just for ease of conversation.

Uh, one last question here from Chrissy May Katie.

"If I can't afford the really nice cheese and stuff, should I even try it at all to do a cheaper version, or will it be obvious?"

Teresa: Oh—so here's the thing, right? Cheese is delicious.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Uh, I don't even really like the pungent cheeses, but I often can find a cheese on a cheese board that I enjoy.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, um, like Travis said earlier, if you just go and get blocks of cheese, one that's kind of, like, mild, one that's a little spicy, and one that maybe a little, like... ooh, like, that has an additive like horseradish or something, that's enough!

Travis: That's fine. And the nice thing is, we talk about the, like, additional stuff, the snackums, as we've been calling it. The nice thing about that is, that's not, like, single serving stuff, right?

A lot of the time what we do when we're setting up a cheese board or a charcuterie or whatever for a party, we look in the refrigerator to see what we have. We look in the pantry to see what we have and we're like, "Oh, there's some pecans. Oh, here's—"

Teresa: "Oh, here's some pepper jelly."

Travis: "—oh, yeah. Oh, we have some almonds left over," right? And then you use those. You don't have to, every time you're setting up for a party, go out and buy different things every time.

So—and here's the thing. The other thing is, very rarely... in fact, I don't know of a time where I put out a cheese plate or a charcuterie thinking, "I hope this impresses them," so much as I think, "My friends will like this!" Right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: And then it's—that's really the goal of—when we talk about these, like, communal plates, and you're talking about, like, everybody eating from it, right? It isn't about, "It has to be the best it could be. Oh, I'd hate to disappoint them with my cheese choices." Right? Like, trying to have a fun evening with your friends.

And, like, we talked about fondue before, and we've talked about, like, these kind of party atmosphere... if somebody comes to your house and they judge your cheese choice or your charcuterie, and they're not impressed that you didn't spend enough money, they should not be your friend.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's just a little note from Travis and Teresa to you. That is not a super-cool friendship.

Teresa: And here's the thing, right? It is *very* French. *Very* French to get one, single wheel of cheese, put it in the middle of a—like, a wooden cutting board, surround it with, like, grapes, and then a stack of baguette, and that's it!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's all you need! That is a cheese course. *Very* French.

Travis: And, like we've been saying—you know, like the cheese rock star, the cheese star said of, like, "First you eat with your eyes," right? So if you want to, if this is a thing where you're like, "Every party, I'm gonna have a cheese board and a charcuterie from now on." And you want to make sure it looks nice no matter how much you spend on it, invest in, like, a good board.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Invest in a good platter, where every time people'll see it like, "That is—" like I said, we have that one with the drawer and the marble top. I got that on clearance at Bed Bath & Beyond, right?

Teresa: It looks very sleek.

Travis: Right? And I probably spent 15, 20 bucks on it, right? But because I spent money on it and bought the thing, it makes everything look nicer, right?

Teresa: And we use it all the time!

Travis: Yeah! We use it over and over again. Uh, so that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for joining us on this cheesy, meaty journey.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, over the last three weeks. And like we said, this was a topic suggestion from Abby. If *you* have a suggestion, you're like, "Oh, I'd love to hear them talk about this!" Please email us, shmannerscast@gmail.com.

Teresa: And when we pick those topics, we then call for questions on our Twitter, which is @shmannerscast.

Travis: Correct.

Teresa: And then—

Travis: Let's see. What else?

Teresa: What else?

Travis: Uh, thank you to Max Fun!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Our podcast home! Go check out all the other amazing shows. If you like our show and you aren't listening to *Sawbones*, what are you even doing? This is a sister show to *Sawbones*. They go through the history of stuff. They just go through medicine instead of etiquette. Go listen to it.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, also, if you enjoyed this episode, please go and join the fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners, where you can give and get excellent advice. And that beautiful photo, thank you so much to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography. That photo was done by them.

Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. Thank you to Brent "brentalfloss" Black for our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. And thank you to Alex, our research assistant. As always, so great at organizing our topics.

Travis: Oh, and if you liked this episode, please tell people! I think charcuterie and cheese boards is probably something a lot of people are interested in, and maybe a little intimidated by, so I think this would probably be a great episode to share. And if this is your first time listening to *Shmanners* through these episodes, go check out all the other ones! They're really good, I think.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: And listen, maybe I'm a little biased—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —but I think they're all very good! Uh, and that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners! Get it?

[theme music plays]

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