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ACF Chefs and Culinary Professionals of Chicagoland, founded in

Grilled Cheese

I was asked the other day, "What's your favorite grilled cheese sandwich?" I want to be straight up and say that the question has so many issues with it. First, are grilled cheese sandwiches really that good, and does anyone really have a favorite?

For those who are chefs—and those who aren't—the question "what's your favorite dish" is really a question that most of us loathe. Why? Because it can change in a heartbeat, and foodies love all food. Tasting is continuous; ask what your favorite cocktail or beer is, and you probably get a different answer at any point throughout the year. Winter is for stouts and bourbon, and in summer it's lagers and tequila.

I do an occasional virtual beer tasting on Zoom, and even over the course of the evening, my favorite may change as the number of options change and I get a bigger picture of what I have in front of me. The next time you are subject to drinking in front of a bunch of people you may not know, you will have a completely different set of choices—and of course will be put into the position to answer the never-ending question of what's your favorite. Yes, people can even change their mind mid-confession after hearing someone else's justification for choosing a favorite.

So, when asked what my favorite is, it will probably be the one dish or beverage I am enjoying at the moment. When the chef, artisan or distiller put all their effort into the details of their creation, from the quality of the ingredients to the craftsmanship and passion of putting a good product in front of you, why wouldn't it be your favorite?

As for the grilled cheese, yes—it is a very strange dish to say the least. What we know as the grilled cheese is a product of manufacturing and survival. Prior to the late '60s, cheese sandwiches were open-faced and toasted. The other key was that they traditionally used real cheese, not the iconic pasteurized processed American cheese food (the cheese where if you blow on it, it could melt). American cheese, invented by Kraft early in the 1900s, eventually got married to pre-sliced processed bread and was used to feed soldiers and sailors during the wars of the middle of the 20th century. These food memories endured, and then canned soup manufactures jumped on the bandwagon.

The tomato soup and grilled cheese set is definitely a mass-marketed sales campaign and became iconic for a slew of reasons. I never really liked the classic, even when it was all I had to eat. Soggy white bread that

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The Cicerone Certification Program certifies and educates beer professionals in order to elevate the beer experience for consumers. cicerone.org.

really doesn't get that crispy, slightly salty cheese and fatty tomato soup. Don't you add milk or cream to canned tomato soup?

The art of the warm cheese sandwich is really about real cheese, freshly made bread, butter, a balance of flavors and more butter. A sandwich based solely on bread and cheese is a nutritional nightmare as well. Carbohydrates and saturated fats are not a good foundation of a healthy lifestyle, but they are certainly a favorite when you are eating a really well-made sandwich.

Stay safe, and I am looking forward to having a tasting in person as soon as we can share a non-socially distant bar stool and a great toasted cheese sandwich.

- Chef John Reed, CEC, CCA

The List



The hunt for unique craft beers is just as fun as the tasting. Here is [The List](#) of beers that we have tasted at our weekly craft beer tap room meeting.

What really goes well with a grilled cheese?

German Dunkel! I really like dryness and malt backbone of a German Dunkel. It pairs well with a gouda on pumpernickel grilled cheese with mustard butter and gherkins. This was German beer before Pale Pilsners, and Munich Helles (Lagers). Here are two of my suggestions.



I had this offering several years in Kansas City and the bar tender could pour enough of them over that week. It's a must try from [KC Bier](#).

If you are in Chicago and have a chance to venture out under the new relaxed Covid rules look out for this great version, [Dunkel from Dovetail](#).

Cheese



Not to be shy about it, but I have been able to work with [some](#) of the best Italian cheeses you can get, and they do make awesome pizza. If you haven't tried them, definitely look for [Galbani](#) next time.



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Customized Culinary Solutions

9450 Keystone Ave
Skokie, IL 60076
(847) 287 3604

