

Page 3 Profile: Matthew Feroze, British cheese lover beating the French at their own game

A new culinary star?

Matthew Feroze has just been named France's most talented cheesemonger. The accolade is all the more prestigious as Mr Feroze, 30, is not French at all but an English civil servant. He is the first foreigner to win the Concours National des Fromagers at the Salon Mondiale de Restauration et Hôtellerie and the lack of foreign victors before now isn't all that surprising. France is a nation of cheese lovers and even Charles de Gaulle once said that it was impossible to govern a country which had so many different kinds of cheese (more than 1,000 experts say).

Ooh la la!

Feroze defeated 15 fellow cheese sellers at the bi-annual contest in Lyons over the weekend, but he was gracious in victory. "There was some surprise, certainly," he said. "But the members of the jury and the competitors were very encouraging and friendly. If there was any resentment, they did not show it."

What did the French have to say?

Organiser Catherine Bonnetaud conceded: "He was best. He worked hard on his presentations, with great passion and knowledge. The judges decided his cheeses were 'le top'."

How did he secure the win?

During the course of the competition, he had to blind-taste cheeses and cut slices of cheese to specific weights. He also had to present a cheese platter he had selected and matured himself. For this important challenge, he needed a solid selection of 10 cheeses for the "prescribed" section, and 15 of his own choosing for the "freestyle".

Any Wensleydale in there?

No, but he did include a cheddar and a stilton. His favourite, however, is the Beaufort Chalet d'Alpage.

I take it they don't make that in Yorkshire.

It's a cheese from high alpine pastures made "in picture-book farms from picture-book cows".

How did he find the time for such a big competition?

Feroze is on a two-year sabbatical from his job as a government accountant in London and has spent the past 12 months as a professional cheese refiner. It has been his dream for almost a decade: he became a fully fledged Francophile when he came to Lyon to learn French after university.

From bean counter to celebrity fromager in just a year?

His rise was rapid. He took a temporary job at a cheese shop in Lyon, where they were so pleased with his work they offered him full-time work. "There is something very deep and rich about cheese and about the people involved in cheese," he said. "It attracts people who have a real passion for what they do."

Will he go back to his old job?

"I am considering looking for a new career in cheese," he said.

