

The big cheese



Patricia Michelson, owner of La Fromagerie, tells *Oliver Thring* about the best cheesemakers

Supplement?" cries Patricia Michelson. "How dare they call it that! You look at a menu, everything reads beautifully, then right at the end it says, 'Cheese supplement: £5.' They don't attach any meaning to it — the word is like poison to my heart."

Michelson has staked her livelihood on cheese in all its forms. As the owner of La Fromagerie in London for 25 years, she has done more than anyone to improve Britain's knowledge and appreciation of it. As well as her three shops, all in smart, villagey bits of the capital, La Fromagerie has a thriving wholesale business and supplies restaurants across the country.

The newest branch is on the car-free and picturesque Lamb's Conduit Street in Bloomsbury. To select the 200 or so cheeses she supplies, Michelson rigorously vets each producer, visiting — with her colleagues — up to 60 farms a year. "We prefer farm-made cheeses using milk from a farm's own herds," she says. "That means you know how they're rearing the animals, the pasture they're grazing on and the man making the cheese itself."

When she started the business, British cheesemaking was dominated by huge factories and economies of scale. Taste and quality suffered as a

CHRISTMAS CHEESEBOARD



MARBLE CHEESEBOARD: DAVID MELLOR

Photographs
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