



GUY FREDERICK

The Round Table

Fine cheese from the cellar door.

Martin Aspinwall has perfected the art of affinage. Owner of the Canterbury Cheesemongers, he practises the age-old tradition of cheese refining and maturing.

Fine cheese has long, complex flavours that should roll around the mouth. To achieve the perfect balance of taste, texture and aroma, Aspinwall washes his cheeses in salt water, then leaves them to grow a

natural rind of mould in a room purpose-built for cheese ripening.

The Yorkshire-born aficionado spends his days educating customers, making sure each one knows cheese is like wine – it needs to be cellared. When shrink-wrapped and left in a store's refrigerator for weeks, the rind of bacteria so carefully cultivated ferments back into the cheese, ruining its taste.

"Affinage is all about the controlled spoilage of milk," Aspinwall says, explaining that



cheese needs to be kept in a high-humidity, enclosed space. The cheese room at his central Christchurch shop is dedicated to ageing great flavours, with conditions set at 94 per cent humidity and a constant temperature of 14 degrees. "You can't just stick it in a fridge and expect it to taste as it should."

For Aspinwall, cheese is a food group all of its own. He asks customers to buy only small amounts at a time, encouraging them to develop a taste for enjoying cheese by itself, rather than as an accompaniment to other foods.

In the UK, Aspinwall worked in London's famous Neal's Yard Dairy for eight years, ageing and selling cheeses from 70 British and Irish artisans. There he fell in love with his Kiwi co-monger, Sarah, and migrated with her to New Zealand.

The couple started their first cheese-refining venture together from a 20-foot shipping container in their backyard. At first they sold their wares at weekend markets, but an emerging cult following led them to open a shop in 2002.

Today, a trip to the Canterbury Cheesemongers is a theatrical experience of sight, taste, touch and smell. The space was built with a glass wall down the middle so that Aspinwall can put on a real show – taking customers through the whole process of cheesemongering before they buy.

"If you want a quick in and out," he warns, "you're probably better served at your local supermarket." **LEE SUCKLING**