

# Richmond Hill cafe & larder

## CHEESE NOTES

### **Ossau Iraty**

Basque, France

The Basques call their cheese *Ardi-Gasna*, which simply means sheep's milk cheese. This style of cheese making has been going on in the Basque country for over 4000 years and even the breed of sheep remains relatively unchanged, a black faced horned variety of the *Manech* breed. Each sheep is adorned with its own bell that is attuned to the harmony of the entire flock.

This cooked curd cheese has a natural rind that has benefited from ageing in underground humid cellars. This contributes to the cheese's complex savoury flavour. Often sweet and grassy *Ossau Iraty* has a creamed nuttiness that changes as it lingers long on the palate.

The cheese making season for this cheese officially begins on Christmas Day during Midnight Mass when a newborn lamb is carried in the shepherd's arms to the altar of the church in the village of *Iraty*. The season ends in July when the rams are let out amongst the region's several thousand ewes. The ewes carry the lambs for five months and drop them in the first half of December, allowing milking to commence again on Christmas Day. Between July and September many flocks move up the high mountain pastures that are rich in plant species and only accessible during the warm summer months when the snow line rises. The slow walking pace of this annual journey has been sped up by the introduction of multi-levelled sheep trucks and new roads. This transhumance, as it is known, allows the farmland pastures a chance to rejuvenate before the coming winter months.