It’s a cold, blustery January day and we’re sitting in the paradoxically warm and humid front office of the White Gold Cheese Factory. Fiorini oversees this business with his cousin Paulo Campanella. I scan the wallpapered desk in front of me and see the compression of this room: the books and crumpled paper behind me are piled high with stacks of papers and bulky equipment. The sweet yet slightly sour smell of fresh milk permeates the air. The process seems to work through the pores of the building.

Fiorini’s alternative to talking, searching Google for a map of his home town in Italy, checking Alberta Milk’s website for stats and linking LinkedIn for the contacts who’ve made the rapid growth of this cheese-making start-up possible. He’s the adventurous one who initially left Italy as a flight attendant, gathered a keen sense of business in his travels, and arrived in Calgary as part of WestJet’s start-up team. It took time before enough money was saved to bring Campanella to Calgary, but in the past the pair opened their company’s mission, “to provide the best tasting Italian cheeses using all-natural and 100 percent Canadian milk.”

I brought along a 500 ml of home-made Italian cookies, and Fiorini and the three others who make up White Gold’s business team point towards the treats and the thoughts they share with me, the friendly quips at each other, the never-ending buzz of their cell phones. The cheese-making process seems to give them the luxury of a brief mental trip to their shared Italian roots, far away.

Fiorini freely fondles the thought that he left Italy to start his own business. White Gold, he tells me, is the affectionate alias that the people in his hometown of Buiano (also spelled Bujano), Italy, give him. The milk he turns into fresh cheese and monetary gold. I notice the thick shock of milky white hair frothing over his chest, but vow that expansion will come with the cash flowing solely from their own efforts.

Fiorini blends into the front office as he talks. His long hair stretches over his shoulders. “We’ve come too far to turn back.” He gets a dreamy look in his eyes when we talk about it…someday, he says... someday. Today is the first day I’ve seen Campanella without his white lab coat, rubber boots and head cover. He’s got longer hair than I thought he would have, a leather bomber jacket and fashionable jeans. We turn into fresh cheese and monetary gold. I notice the thick shock of milky white hair frothing over his chest but vow that expansion will come with the cash flowing solely from their own efforts.

Campanella joins the conversation and shudders a little when he tells me how that works. Many of the world’s factories use machinery to separate milk. They remove the cream of the expensive orange juice and replace it with milk powder and calcium chloride before churning out the machine’s rubber balls of cheese they call mozzarella. Campanella, on the other hand, is a master of heritage-handcrafted Italian cheeses. He started working at age twelve in the factories of Buiano where only 100 percent milk is used. The purity of the milk is what built and protects their reputation. White Gold cheese maker is not about to change a centuries-old formula.

Campanella lives on four or five hours of sleep a day, frequently arising at three a.m. to begin days filled with eighteen-minute precision. It takes patience to make cheese the way he does. He watched him ply milk curds in buckets of boiling hot water with his bare hands until the lifeless white ball expanded to its signature Harding-preserved delicacies. Despite his expertise, the pucks of making cheese in Calgary – rare for frequent and unusual climates – still cost White Gold an estimated quarter million dollars in butter alone. For their first year, though, now three years in, the partner has held on to science.

Today is the first day I’ve seen Campanella without his white lab coat, rubber boots and head cover. He’s got longer hair than I thought he would have, a leather bomber jacket and fashionable jeans. We joke that when he married his cheese-making, he’d already make scorn for a good woman on the side. He gets a dreamy look in his eyes when we talk about it... someday, he says... someday.

Sorina Paparonto is niece, bookkeeper and odd-job doer for the staff. She urges proudly tell me that she earned a diploma in languages in Italy as they send her off to get me samples of their cheese.

These people are the pieces that fill in the puzzle of how White Gold, in just three short years, has grown to where it is utilizing about seven percent of Alberta Milk’s tightly controlled quota. Five years ago, White Gold was struggling to make a living from the family business. The newest member of White Gold’s small but mighty team is Dr. Tirtha (Terry) Bajga, plant manager and advice when it comes to how to use the cheeses? “Don’t hold onto them; use it as the centerpiece of a great salad platter or cheese board. Nodini – a tender cheese with exceptionally firm texture – adds variety to your next cheese platter.

NUGGETS OF GOLD – WHITE GOLD CHEESES

Burrata – mozzarella stuffed with a mozzarella inner – it’s like a cream cheese in a tube filled with cream cheese and drizzled with honey and candied pistachio.

Fior di Latte – 100% whole milk mozzarella that tastes like digging a group of melon and sweet milk when cut – it’s high and piquant ripened with garden herbs and allowed to by White Gold and served in a salted cracker or vegetables.

Nodini – a tender cheese with exceptionally firm texture – adds variety to your next cheese platter.

Ricotta – crowd-pleasing cheese with smooth notes – Alleviano cheese to make three cheese fillings brown as gruel. (Learn how to make pici on page 28)

Scamorza – spreadable, sweet, creamy cheese – try a small sample knife and challenge them in a duel to the death of the mozzarella in front of you.

Trecce – braided soft cheese with a planet-like milk taste – use it as the centerpiece of a great salad platter or cheese board.

Tuma – urban, artisan Sicilian style cheese with a firm texture – serve it as a parmesan spread.

AGED CHEESES

Burrini – soft, mild and elegant – a cheese to be eaten on its own.

Caricacciole – melding sharp cheese with hearty greens that easily adapt to the mouth – an efficient and healthful starter for a new family classic.

Caciotta – light blue with a firm composition and yellow rind – excellent with both pasta, peas and grilled vegetables.

Provolone di Bomba – firm and beautifully sharp, its slices melt like a dream. Alleviano pressure of a banquet of cheese and provolone, but not to the taste of the original gold cheese.

Smacca – your favorite wine or white-note cheeses of high quality with a bit of heat. It’s hard to believe that an all-white cheese can have such a whiff of mustard as a counterpoint to the smoke and richness.

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