Through no intention of my own, I have invented my very own cheese! A few, in fact. I haven't decided what to call them yet, but I am pretty pleased with how they turned out. How did I arrive at this place? Well, I had gotten pretty good at producing consistent results with a particular cheese recipe and I started thinking to myself, "How can I mix things up?" I certainly enjoyed the recipes I was using, but being a person who generally enjoys new and exciting flavors and foods, I really wanted to experiment. Some may call me crazy, but my house became somewhat of a cheese-producing factory. I now have a few tricks up my sleeve for quickly and easily changing up a recipe. And now, I gladly pass them on to you in the hopes of you finding new discoveries of your own (and sharing them with me!).

There are a variety of ways you can customize a recipe to suit your particular tastes and preferences. One of the easiest and most rewarding ways is to use an enzyme called Lipase (page). If you have made our recipe for Quick Mozzarella (page) then you are familiar with its use. Lipase is a fat degrading enzyme that is isolated from the stomach lining of a young ruminant animal (ours is from a lamb). The enzyme breaks down large fat molecules into smaller fatty acid molecules, which contribute flavor and aroma. If you want to make a cheese like Pecorino Romano which is traditionally made using goat or sheep's milk, but you are using cow's milk, then adding lipase will give it a more piquant flavor. I love the fresh and creamy flavor of chevre made at home, but I was looking for more of that tang and piquant flavor. I decided to use it in our Fresh Chevre (page) recipe even though I use goat's milk for it. I added a scant 1/16 tsp to the recipe and I got exactly what I was looking for. The cheese came out tangy, aromatic, and very "goaty" indeed. So if you want to use lipase in your next recipe, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, mix the lipase in 1/4 cup cool, non-chlorinated water and let it sit for at least 20 minutes before your addition. Also, lipase is always added *before* rennet. For fresh chevre, I add the lipase when I add the calcium chloride.

Another simple way to change a recipe is to use aromatic or flavored salts. This can be a tricky one. You need to find salt that is non-iodized, and that preferably has smaller flakes (not chunky or coarse). I have grown particularly fond of using Truffle salt in my cheeses. I do get teased at work, however, for adding "diamonds" to my cheese (truffle salt is rather expensive!). I follow the Valencay recipe (page) and transfer the curds to a cheesecloth-lined strainer. I mix in a total of 3/4 tsp of truffle salt for the whole batch, and gently stir to incorporate, and immediately fill my molds. Although I have mixed salt into the curds, I still coat the outside of the cheese with salted edible ash when I unmold them and it never comes out too salty. The truffles add a background of mushroom aroma that complements and elevates the characters of the goat milk. This particular cheese won a second place ribbon at the Marin County Fair this year. Although I haven't tried it yet, I would be willing to experiment with other flavored salts, such as smoked salt. Take a trip to Savory Spice Shop in Santa Rosa to see what they have!

Finally, one of the other ways I experiment with recipes is to change or blend the type of milk used. Since goat milk does not cream (not quickly, anyway), if I want to add more luscious butter fat to a cheese, I add cow's milk cream or half and half. Adding up to a

pint to a recipe should not warrant any change of the amount of rennet or bacteria, just follow the recipe as is. If you are making a Brie (page) or Camembert, you can add 1/3-2/3 goat milk and see how you like the results. One of my favorite renditions of changing up the milk was when I used cow's milk in the Valencay recipe. I followed the traditional recipe, except used cow's milk, and I only dry salted, and did not ash the cheese. After aging for two weeks, the middle of the cheese is still firm but the part close to the rind has begun to soften, creating a contrast in texture. The buttery aroma and flavor from the cow's milk shines. It's another favorite to add to the recipe booklet. Once I figure out a name, of course.