

All cheese – naturally ripened



What is good for wine would certainly be even better for cheese. That was the idea of the owners of the family enterprise Neuschwander already some years ago. Originally a brickwork, Neuschwander now manufactures wine cellars for wine growing estates and private persons as well as ripening rooms for cheese factories. Wine and cheese have in common that they ripen at constant humidity and evenly balanced temperatures. This led to the idea of cheese vaults which has been realized in various cheese factories in Germany and other countries.

The special characteristic of Neuschwander cheese ripening is that by the construction of modules and the use of preformed elements the production costs for the ripening rooms can be kept low. Major installations could thereby start production already after a construction period of about 7 months.

But not only in building the vaults costs can be reduced. Also the operation of the brick vaults is characterized by the fact that climatisation can be reached without additional air-conditioning equipment. This enables significant economizing concerning energy consumption, which bring about - calculated for longer operational periods - a rapid amortisation of the installation. This energetic feat is achieved by the natural behaviour of the bricks which ensures a permanently high humidity by taking up moisture and which restores it again when the humidity decreases. Furthermore, the incoming air is led over a soil register where the air is cooled down. As the cellar is covered by about 2 meters of earth the variations in temperature in the ripening room are kept low in a natural way. Thereby it is possible to work nearly entirely without the usual cost-intensive cooling technique. Of course, a positive side-effect is that the original landscape can be restored, and so the ripening vaults are not visible from outside. Especially cheese factories are to be found in nature reserves and the area above the cellars can be completely renatured.

However, cheese ripening in vaults has further positive aspects influencing quality of cheese specialties in a positive way. By the form of the vaults air can circulate freely, there is no ventilation barrier but a continuous air circulation which avoids moulding. In addition, the lime content in the brick has a natural antibacterial effect, and strict hygiene regulations can be easier taken care of without the application of aggressive chemicals.

Long aisles enable the use of smearing robots for an economic treatment of the cheese loaves. In particular this form of technology is already in application in Switzerland at several cheese factories.

Meanwhile, in different countries semi-hard and hard cheeses are ripening in the Neuschwander vaults manufactured in module construction technology. At the beginning of the cave ripening is the joint planning with the engineers from Neuschwander GmbH. The size of the ripening cellars can be determined individually; width as well as height, and of course length, are flexible and can be planned according to the need of the cheese factory. After that the manufacture of the half bowls out of bricks starts in the brick factory in Brackenheim. Then, on the construction area the finished parts are mounted on a bottom plate manufactured beforehand and pointed up accordingly. After that the construction elements are protected from outside against humidity and the earth cover is deposited. By the unique static construction of the vaults, an earth cover of 2 meters in general makes no problem. The new roof area can be used for other purposes.

So, the architectural design tested centuries ago leads to completely new possibilities for the building of ripening cellars for cheese. The storage and ripening of cheese near to nature in earth covered vaults results in better products at lower costs. Apparently, a cave-ripened cheese can be presented in a more positive way to the final consumer. In fact, at a blank gestation of a Swiss Consumer's Magazine it was found out that four of five consumers evaluated cave-ripened cheese as more tasty and spicy. Many good reasons for systematic cave ripening.

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