

DIXIE *Mediterranean*

Alabama cheese maker Tasia Malakasis serves up Greek flavors with Southern flair. BY K. Faith Morgan | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Stephanie Schamban



Culinary Institute of America, before working with Belle Chèvre Tasia was unfamiliar with the cheese-making trade. “I didn’t grow up telling my first-grade teacher that I was going to be a cheese maker,” she says. “I didn’t even know something like that was a life choice when I was 30, much less 6.”

Tasia’s risk paid off in a big way, and she has since become the owner and president of Belle Chèvre. In her debut cookbook, *Tasia’s Table: Cooking With the Artisan Cheesemaker at Belle Chèvre*, she fuses her background in both Greek and Southern cuisine into a collection of fresh and simple recipes. “These two seemingly different cultures are, in actuality, very similar—especially where food and hospitality are concerned,” she says.

In a single chapter, punctuated by personal stories and a sprinkling of helpful tips, Tasia seamlessly

transitions from Hushpuppies to Greek Meatballs. Recipes like Pimiento Chèvre and Creamy Fromage Blanc Deviled Eggs artfully blend Mediterranean fare with robust Southern comfort flavors. Her Southern Basil Pesto substitutes a regional staple—pecans—for the more traditional pine nuts, and the distinctive tart flavor of goat cheese shines in her Creamy Belle Chèvre Grits with Sun-Dried Tomatoes.

Tasia sees her book as an inspiration for cooks to season with their own unique style. “My hope,” she says, “is that when I introduce you to a new recipe that I have really given you not one but ten new ideas on how to create a particular dish.” ❖

Published by NewSouth Books, *Tasia’s Table: Cooking With the Artisan Cheesemaker of Belle Chèvre* is available online and through select booksellers.



BLACK-EYED-PEA CAKES

Serves 4-6

1 cup dried black-eyed peas
3 cups water
1 large egg, beaten
½ cup finely chopped onion
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
½ teaspoon hot pepper sauce
1 cup all-purpose flour
⅓ cup goat cheese
1 tablespoon jalapeño peppers, seeded and minced
2 teaspoons (about) olive oil
Prepared salsa, medium-hot

1. Place dried black-eyed peas in medium pot. Add enough cold water to

cover by 3 inches; let stand overnight. Drain peas.

2. Return peas to pot. Add 3 cups of water. Cover; simmer until peas are tender, stirring occasionally, about 40 minutes. Drain peas, reserving ⅓ cup cooking liquid.

3. Cook’s note: One 16-ounce can of black-eyed peas can be substituted for the dried peas. Begin recipe here; rinse canned peas well before using.

4. Transfer 1¼ cups peas to processor and puree until smooth, adding enough reserved cooking liquid, 1 tablespoon at a time, to help blend. Transfer puree to a large bowl. Mix in beaten egg, onion, lime juice, hot pepper sauce, and remaining whole peas. Stir in flour. Season with salt and pepper.

5. Mix goat cheese and jalapeño peppers in small bowl. Let stand 30 minutes.

6. Preheat oven to 250°. Heat ½ teaspoon oil in heavy large skillet over medium-low heat. Using 1½ tablespoons batter for each pancake, spoon batter into skillet. Cook until batter is almost set, about 3 minutes. Turn pancakes over; cook until cooked through. Transfer pancakes to baking sheet; keep warm in oven. Repeat with remaining batter, adding more oil to skillet as needed, making 24 pancakes.

7. Spoon salsa onto plates. Arrange 4 pancakes alongside salsa on each plate. Top with goat cheese mixture and serve.

Not long after stumbling upon the exceptional goat-cheese products of Alabama-based creamery Belle Chèvre in a New York specialty-foods store, Southern gal Tasia Malakasis called the fromagerie’s founder and said, “I just quit my job, and I’m coming home to make cheese.”

Although she had long nurtured a passion for food and had trained at the