Most Wisconsinites take cheese seriously, and Ken Monteleone is no exception. His staff will taste 300 varieties to select the 60 sold at Fromagination in Madison, Wisconsin. But Ken aims to transcend curating. He wants to educate, too. He can explain the limited-quantity allure of Rush Creek Reserve, a spruce bark-wrapped soft cheese made only of winter milk from cows that graze in southwest Wisconsin. He can advise you to serve “stinky” cheese, like Emmi Roth’s Moody Blue, as a dessert course with roasted nuts and fresh figs. And he can suggest a wine or beer pairing—though he’d rather nudge you to a less expected match, like vodka mixed with Door County tart cherry syrup. The point is, good cheese is available everywhere these days. But supermarkets can’t offer insight like this.

AND MORE

DeBRAND FINE CHOCOLATES
Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Indianapolis
Pretty truffles and luxe sundae sauces, plus warm lighting and dark walls to set the mood for indulgence.

THE SPICE HOUSE
Milwaukee, Chicago and Evanston, Illinois
A nose-tickling array of spices (like, say, powdered sassafras leaves), with 60 years of experience to back up the cooking ideas.

CHURCHILL’S FINE TEAS
Cincinnati
Tons of loose-leaf teas with detailed info on each, plus classes to build brewing and sipping know-how.