

MAKERS AND MONGERS

Inside the minds (and rinds) of the cheese world’s brightest

Adam Moskowitz champions cheesemongers through the Cheesemonger Invitational

By Christina Paschen

NEW YORK — For Adam Moskowitz, cheese was never supposed to be his future.

A third-generation cheese importer, Moskowitz grew up around his father’s business, Larkin Cold Storage. But his mother insisted he would never work in cheese, and for much of his early life, Moskowitz had ambitions to go beyond the family business.

After graduating from George Washington University in 1996, he worked at Larkin for about nine months before moving into the emerging world of internet sales and business development. He spent roughly a decade working for Yahoo! and other startups before leaving the technology world to pursue music, DJing, poetry and painting full time.

At 32, Moskowitz was preparing to move to Los Angeles to pursue acting when his father asked him to stay. Seeing something in his son that Adam hadn’t yet seen in himself, his father told him, “I see an entrepreneur.”

Instead of moving to California, Moskowitz took a job doing digital marketing for Redondo Iglesias USA, a Spanish producer of premium cured meats. A business trip to Spain with his father and several others in the cheese and specialty food world changed the way he viewed the industry.

He encountered people who were curious, creative, thoughtful and passionate about food.

“They are my people,” he remembers

thinking.

When he returned to New York, Moskowitz took a \$13-an-hour job at Formaggio Essex, the Manhattan outpost of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based specialty food shop Formaggio Kitchen. Here, he worked six days a week behind the cheese counter, learning to cut, sell and talk about cheese with customers. After years in internet sales, he was captivated by the immediacy of the work: He could recommend a cheese, watch a customer enjoy it and know immediately that he had made the sale.

“Cheese saved my life,” he says. “I was rudderless. I was depressed, emotionally beaten down. I started selling cheese and I was in love with life again.”

Six months into cheesemongering, his father asked if he wanted to buy the family businesses. And he did.

That decision set him on the path he follows today. Moskowitz now owns and operates Larkin Cold Storage; Columbia Cheese, also known as Maker to Monger, a cheese importing business connecting cheesemongers; the Cheesemonger Invitational (CMI) and SHH: It Happens, a cheese media company.

• **Putting the monger at the center**
Working behind a cheese counter changed the way Moskowitz understood the cheese supply chain.

Distribution, he says, is logistics. But none of it matters if the final connection with the customer fails.

“As a cheesemonger, all is for naught



Photo courtesy of Liam Myerow

RALLYING MONGERS — Adam Moskowitz, known as “Mr. Moo,” gets the crowd fired up at the Cheesemonger Invitational, an event he created to celebrate and elevate the work of cheesemongers.

if they don’t deliver a delicious sample and then a perfect quarter pound,” he adds.

The cheesemonger samples the cheese, talks about it, answers questions and ultimately puts it into the hands of the customer.

“The whole supply chain rests on the hand of the monger,” Moskowitz says.

He describes cheesemongers as the “DJs of flavor.”

“They’re dealers of smiles,” he says.

For Moskowitz, the best cheesemongers combine passion with humility. Passion drives them to learn, study and perfect their craft, while humility keeps that knowledge from becoming arrogance.

When asked what makes someone a truly great cheesemonger, Moskowitz says, “Sharing passion. Passion is contagious. You can’t teach that.”

He has seen that combination in cheesemongers including Emilia D’Albero, Courtney Johnson and Hanna Lee, all of whom have been featured in Cheese Market News’ Makers and Mongers series.

It was that belief in the importance of the cheesemonger that ultimately led to one of Moskowitz’s most lasting contributions to the industry.

• **From warehouse party to CMI**

By 2010, Moskowitz was running

the family’s cheese-importing and distribution businesses and attending industry events such as the Fancy Food Show. But he found the large, crowded events overwhelming and wasn’t always sure who they were serving. He wanted to create something more focused on the people at the center of his business: cheesemongers.

With his background as an entertainment promoter, Moskowitz envisioned a party at the Larkin warehouse. He turned the idea into a competition, bringing nine cheesemongers together for the first Cheesemonger Invitational. At CMI, Moskowitz goes by “Mr. Moo.”

“At CMI, it’s for cheesemongers by cheesemongers,” Moskowitz says. “That remains the heart of it, which is why we continue to grow and be impactful.”

As he walked around his warehouse the night of the first CMI in June 2010, Moskowitz realized something bigger was happening. There was a particular look on people’s faces in the room — one that communicated how incredible the experience felt to them.

That experience led Moskowitz to host the event again the following year and explore what it could become.

Today, CMI is held every year in New



Photo courtesy of Kathryn Sheldon

BUILDING CHAMPIONS — Adam Moskowitz coaches a group of cheesemongers during the 2023 Cheesemonger Invitational (CMI) Masters.

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York City and now includes three days of private education and interactive guided tasting with the world's best cheesemakers. As CMI grew, Moskowitz wanted to give American cheesemongers a way to prepare for the international stage. He created CMI Masters to replicate the eight-hour highly technical atmosphere of the Mondial du Fromage cheesemonger competition in France. The CMI Masters competition gives top American cheesemongers a chance to earn a spot on Team USA and compete at Mondial.

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For Moskowitz, though, the competition itself is not the point — it's a result.

“The point is to motivate, inspire and celebrate the incredibly challenging work cheesemongers do,” he says.

Cheesemonger and business owner Brandon Wood understands that impact firsthand.

Wood was working behind the cheese counter at Whole Foods Market in Oakland, California, when he attended his first CMI in 2015. He saw himself primarily as a grocery store employee.

CMI changed that.

“It showed me that I was much more than a grocery store clerk,” Wood says.

“It exposed me to this community and these hard-working humans who looked at my life and what I did for a living as this highly valued part of their community and what it meant to the cheesemakers and farmers who cared for these cheeses until they got to me,” Wood says.

Wood was close to leaving the cheese community around the time

he competed in his first CMI. He told Moskowitz he wanted to try but was afraid, and although the two barely knew each other, Moskowitz reached out and encouraged him.

“CMI and Adam are the reason I stayed and found the cheese foundation and the support and love within,” he says.

Today, Wood owns The Cheese Parlor in Livermore, California.

• From CMI to the world stage

CMI's connection to the international cheesemonger community deepened through Moskowitz's friendship with French cheesemonger Rodolphe Le Meunier, one of the figures behind the Mondial du Fromage international cheesemonger competition in France. An earlier French competition, the International Caseus Award in Lyon, helped establish the idea of a formal cheesemonger championship and helped influence the creation of Mondial's competition in 2013, Moskowitz says.

Moskowitz now serves as the primary head coach for CMI's Team USA, spending years helping American cheesemongers prepare for the technical demands of the international competition, where European cheesemongers have historically dominated.

In 2025, Emilia D'Albero became the first American to win gold at Mondial du Fromage.

For Moskowitz, the accomplishment represents more than a medal. It is evidence of how far American cheesemongering has come.

He says CMI has “legitimized, elevated and inspired cheesemongering.”

He has watched competitors return after disappointing performances because the experience motivated them to become better at their craft.

The journey from CMI to the international stage also became the subject of *The Big Cheese*, a documentary that Moskowitz executive produced and stars in.

Released in 2025, and currently available to rent or purchase on several streaming services, the film follows Moskowitz and Team USA as they prepare for the 2023 Mondial du Fromage, documenting the competition, training and relationships that have developed around the American cheesemonger community.

• From maker to monger

The connection between cheesemakers and cheesemongers has become another central part of Moskowitz's work.



Photo courtesy of Charles Braddock

SPREADING THE CHEESE — Adam Moskowitz films an episode of *A Cheese Course*, his YouTube series featuring conversations with guests over curated cheese courses and bringing cheese education to a broader audience.

Through his import cheese program Maker to Monger, he works to connect the people making cheese with the people selling it. His philosophy was influenced in part by Neal's Yard Dairy and its approach to working with cheesemakers and cheesemongers.

“The point is to motivate, inspire and celebrate the incredibly challenging work cheesemongers do.”

Adam Moskowitz

Moskowitz says he “works every part of the supply chain”— visiting farms, working with makers, helping create and move products, coordinating logistics and working with the cheese-

mongers who ultimately tell the story of those cheeses.

He believes cheesemongers are the mouthpiece for the cheese.

Cheesemakers may think about pH, humidity, aging conditions and production systems. Cheesemongers think about floral notes, texture, nuance and the words that help someone understand why a cheese is worth taking home, Moskowitz says.

The ability to connect cheese with people is what keeps Moskowitz fascinated.

If he could change one thing about the way Americans understand cheese, his answer is simple:

“Cheese is not expensive, it's valuable,” he says.

After spending much of his early life believing the family cheese business represented failure, Moskowitz ultimately found in cheese a community of curious, creative and passionate people.

Then he built them a stage. And he keeps inviting them onto it. **CMN**

Know a standout maker or monger?



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