

Bob Koenig – 2011 ACS Scholarship Recipient

Carr Valley Cheese Co.

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Montreal 2011

First off I would just like to say thank you to the ACS Scholarship Committee! Without you my journey to Montreal would not have been possible and I can't stress my gratitude for my ACS experience enough, so again, thank you!

My ACS occurrence started with a very nice plane landing, with a beautiful view of Montreal and a curiosity of what was to come. My first thought of Montreal driving to the Westin from the airport was the amazing architecture. The synergy of the giant prolific buildings and modern architecture styles really intrigued me, and I found myself doing a lot of walking during my stay because I wanted to see it all. One of my favorite parts of the trip was Wednesday's tour.

After a short bus ride across the river we arrived at L'eChoppe des Fromages. I was one of the last off the bus, and as I was walking up I heard what I thought was a belligerent dairy goat, vying for the last bit of feed; but NO, it was none other than the proprietor of the shop Max Dubois! I believe he was trying to explain something about sheep and goats, and by the loud noises and movements he was making, I think he was doing a good job. After an amazing breakfast of cheese, fruit, sausage... and a triple espresso, I was ready and raring to go!

Our next stop was an IGA supermarket. Now I was wondering why we were visiting a chain of grocery store that I have around my hometown, but after seeing their cheese case, I could see why. It was a pretty normal sized grocery store with multiple massive cheese cases; everyone from the US was impressed. One thing I noticed was the difference in packaging, they have a much more modern approach than we do. I also found this to be an opportune time to buy a "Tide to Go" stain removal pen to remove the nice strawberry "accent" left over from breakfast at the cheese shop.

Next up was an hour long bus ride to the winery. Nestled in the gentle rolling hills next to a river was the beautiful Le Cep d'Argent. Soon after arriving we were walking through the vineyard listening to the tour guide explain their microclimate and wine making process. I've been on winery tours before, and I've never seen the process explained quite this well. I felt they showed the steps

well and you could really get a feel for what the process is really all about. I think the most interesting part for me was the explanation as to how they make their champagne, “sparkling wine” if you will. After the tour was the tasting. I’ve done a few wine tastings before, but none that went this in depth... There were many steps to their wine tasting process: observe the wine, really take a big whiff, take a small sip to ease into the glass, gather the rest into your mouth and swish it around mouth wash style, then tilt your head forward to gather the remaining wine towards the front of your palette and gently suck in, creating a bubbler effect of wine goodness... then stand on one leg, spin around three times, and do a lap around the tasting room. Okay I made that last part up, but it was a really good wine tasting and you could truly taste the subtleties they were explaining.

The next leg of the trip, the Abbey, was my favorite. We pulled up to the front of the complex from which vantage point you couldn’t tell how big the place really was. As you walk in the entrance room you are greeted by an ornate, multicolored tile floor, very tall ceilings with intricate concrete molding, and of course our tour guides, five Brothers of the monastery. They separated us into groups, our monk’s name was Brother Jacques. He took us through the monastery’s many corridors, eventually taking us by elevator up to the top-most point of all the buildings. It is from here you get a sense of the massive size of this place. There are branches going out in all directions with churches, their library, dining hall, living quarters; I felt I may have been visiting Hogwarts. It’s hard to describe the serenity of this place; you could tell they had great passion for their lifestyle. I desperately wanted to see them make cheese, but that was the one place they wouldn’t let us go; contamination issues I believe.

The rest of the week I spent following my passion, cheese. I learned a lot from my peers about cheese cultures, tasting cheese, and many cheese related issues. The knowledge I brought back to the US with me is priceless. It’s not very often I get to co-conspire with that many people in my field, so it was fun meeting new cheese makers/mongers/marketers who all share the same passion that I do. Through all the sessions, tours, cheese festivals and parties, I feel as though I’ve gained a lot from visiting Montreal. Again I give a huge thank you to the American Cheese Society for this life changing event and I’m already looking forward to possibly coming to Raleigh, NC for next year’s conference!