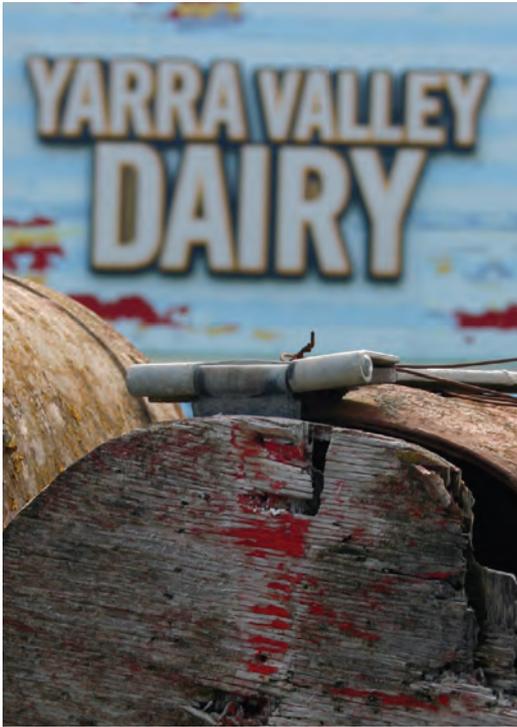


A close-up photograph of three round cheeses, likely Brie or Camembert, resting on a white, textured cloth. The cheeses are arranged in a slightly overlapping manner, with one in the foreground and two behind it. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the creamy texture of the cheese and the fine details of the cloth. The background is softly blurred, creating a sense of depth.

# ***JACK OF ALL TRADES***

MEET YOUR MAKER

Words: Irina Fairberg  
Photos: Emiko Davies, Irina Fairberg and Zachary Iuebbbers



**JACK HOLMAN NEVER THOUGHT HE'D BE A CHEESEMAKER. THEN, A CHANCE MEETING IN INDIA, NEW FRIENDS FROM FRANCE, MILKING COWS IN CANADA AND A SNAP DECISION TO FOLLOW HIS PASSION LANDED HIM AT YARRA VALLEY DAIRY.**

Jack graduated from university with a degree in environmental management. To celebrate, he took an overseas holiday to India and fell in with three Frenchmen, who just happened to be third-generation cheesemakers. They invited Jack to stay on their farm in the south of France. It was supposed to be a holiday, but having grown up on a farm in South Australia, Jack could not resist the chance to get his hands dirty and lend a hand around the factory.

"At lunchtime, they would go to the maturing room and grab some cheese for us to have at lunch. That was a 'wow' point for me – here we are in the morning making this cheese, and we're eating the final product for lunch," Jack said.

"It was a simple kind of enjoyment – seeing the whole process and making a living using your hands. I thought, wouldn't it be cool to do that? But I was studying in another field."

His French holiday over, Jack went to look for agri-forestry work in Canada. But when a job came up at a small cheese factory on Saltspring Island, an idyllic spot in the Strait of Georgia off the coast of Vancouver Island, Jack could not resist.

"They weren't interested in me at first. They wanted to get a local who was a bit more permanent. But I told them that I was there for a year, that I was passionate about cheese, that I'd made cheese in the south of France with friends, and that I'd love to give it a go. They were very generous and gave me an opportunity, and I'm very thankful for that.

# I HAVE LEARNT THAT EACH CHEESE YOU MAKE NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN ITS OWN WAY, IN ITS OWN UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT.

"Moonstruck Cheese Company is an organic farm, with a 12-cow herd. We'd milk the cows in the morning, shower and make the cheese in the afternoon.

"It is small enough that you can be involved in the whole process. It's good to do this at some point in your life as a cheesemaker – milk the cows and experience that side of things.

"When I came back to Australia, I was at a crossroads – do I pursue a career in the field I'm trained in or follow this new passion of mine?"

The turning point came when a job in environmental science came up and Jack turned it down without much regret or hesitation.

"A week later I saw an ad in the local paper for Yarra Valley Dairy. I was very excited. I was the only applicant with any kind of cheesemaking experience, and I was very passionate about it," he said.

The owners, Mary and Leo Mooney, took Jack on as a cheesemaker's assistant. Today, he's Yarra Valley Dairy's head cheesemaker and factory manager, and one of Australia's leading cheesemakers.

Yarra Valley Dairy is best known for its Persian Fetta, which has won top marks at the World Cheese Awards and the Australian Grand Dairy Awards, as well as a host of other accolades over the years. The cheese is made from the milk supplied by the dairy's own herd of about 200 Holstein Friesian cows.

Jack also makes goat's milk cheeses, including White Savourine, a white mould cheese in the shape of a log, and Vintage Savourine, its double-ashed, matured cousin.

Then there's Bullseye, a semi-hard cooked curd cheese that took Jack five years to develop.

"I really enjoy making hard cheeses," Jack said. "The process is very involved – you've got to be delicate, careful and patient. You look after the cheese for 12 months, watch it mature, turn it. You develop a relationship with it."

Another important relationship in Jack's professional life is with the animals. That's because you can't make good cheese without good milk.

"Happy cows make happy cheese, so I've spent time

milking cows to understand and respect where the milk comes from.

"I see the animals and talk to the dairy farmer every day, so I know what the herd is doing, if they are calving, what they are eating. I can see the condition of the pasture every day.

"With some products, we try hard to maintain consistency, but with other products we encourage variation with the different seasons.

"We don't standardise our milk, so consistency comes back to the cheesemaking process. I use all the tricks I learned in cheesemaking school and overseas to get the consistency right.

"Over the years, I have learnt that each cheese you make needs to be understood in its own way, in its own unique environment. You get to learn so much about each cheese and what it can and can't do. I love having that understanding and being able to produce consistent quality cheeses."

Would Jack trade the early mornings and the back-breaking factory work for a nine to five office job? Not in a million years.

"At the end of the day for me it all comes back to passion and loving not only cheese, but good food in general. I grew up on a farm and have always been involved in growing, creating and producing food. It's in my blood!

"That passion cultivates and develops into fun. The whole team here are fun to work with, and I keep getting up at 3am every working morning because I want to be a part of it!" 🌱

Previous page left to right:

One of Jack's signature cheeses, White Savourine; Yarra Valley Dairy's mailbox; head cheesemaker Jack Holman.

This page:

Juno, Cardi and Saffy, marinated goat's and cow's milk fettas.

Opposite left to right:

Jack shows off one of Yarra Valley Dairy hard cheeses; cheesemaking; maturing room; Yarra Valley's own herd of cows on its way to be milked.



