

SMOKY, CHEESY COOKIES

1 stick (8 tablespoons; 4 ounces; 113 grams) cold unsalted butter, cut into 16 pieces
4 ounces (113 grams) cold smoked Gouda, cut into tiny cubes (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
2 ounces (57 grams) sharp cheddar, shredded ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup lightly packed)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon fine sea salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Pinch of cayenne pepper
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups (170 grams) all-purpose flour

These cookies pose the favorite stumper in bakedom: Is it the texture that makes them so good or is it the flavor? You know when you find yourself pondering these issues that you've got a winner. They bake to a flakiness you'd have thought only hard work could achieve: Break one in half, and you'll see layers too numerous to count.

The cookies are quick to make, easy, always good and delicious with so many things, from aperitifs to soup to snacks. Smoked Gouda (I use a fairly inexpensive cheese from the supermarket) gives the cookies just a hint of smoke — more ember than campfire. Make them once with this cheese, and then see if you'd like something stronger.

I like the cookies with white wine — they can stand up to a big chardonnay, if that's your druthers — but they're also good with Bloody Marys at brunch.

Makes about 45 cookies

Put the cold butter and Gouda, the cheddar, salt, black pepper and cayenne in a food processor and pulse until the butter is in bits and the mixture forms small curds. Add the flour and pulse again, in long pulses, until the dough is moist and forms larger, popcorn-like curds.

Turn the dough out and knead it gently, just until you can shape it into a ball. Divide the dough in half and pat each half into a disk.

Working with one disk at a time, place the dough between two pieces of parchment paper and roll to a thickness of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Slide the dough onto a baking sheet — you can stack the slabs — and freeze for at least 1 hour.

GETTING READY TO BAKE: Center a rack in the oven and preheat it to 350 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Have a $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-diameter cookie cutter at hand.

Working with one piece of dough at a time, peel away the top and bottom papers and return the dough to one piece of paper. Cut out as many cookies as you can and place them on the lined baking sheet an inch apart. Gather the

