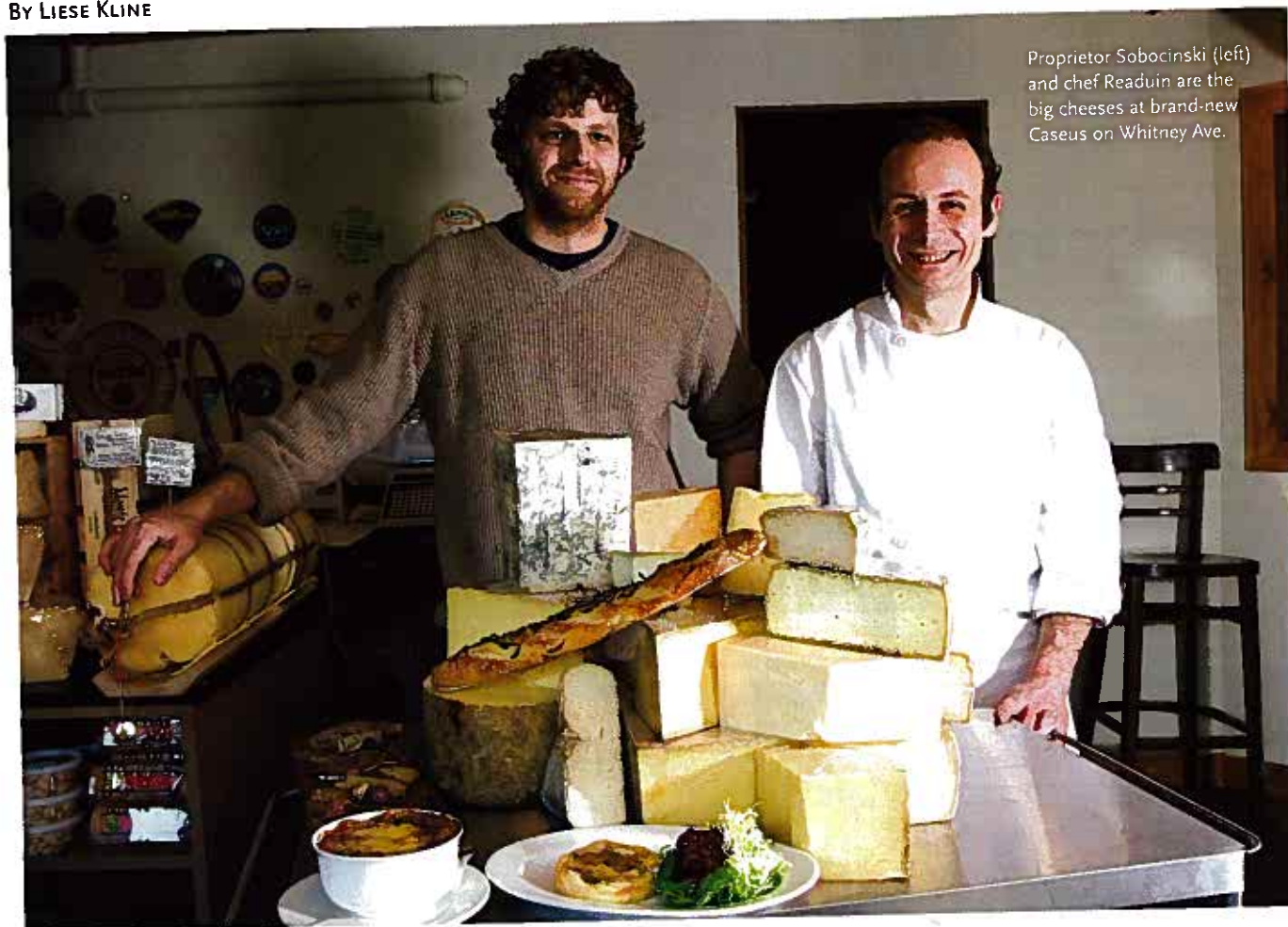


WORDS of MOUTH

BY LIESE KLINE



Proprietor Sobocinski (left) and chef Readuin are the big cheeses at brand-new Caseus on Whitney Ave.

PHOTOGRAPH: Anthony DeCarlo

NEW EATS: CASEUS

Youthful energy blends with traditional French bistro fare at Caseus, a new restaurant and cheese shop at the corner of Trumbull and Whitney Avenue near the Audubon Street neighborhood in downtown New Haven.

Jason Sobocinski, a 29-year-old New Haven native whose great-grandfather ran a Wooster Street Italian deli, opened Caseus right after New Year's on a corner that once housed a sushi bar.

Only a week after opening, the eatery was already doing a nice lunch business as word of the inviting space spread. Patrons can eat in the airy, wood-

paneled bar area or dine instead in a cozy basement area with a view of the "cheese cave."

Cheese is the focus of most dishes at Caseus, but Sobocinski doesn't limit himself to mundane pairings. A subtle and gently spiced French onion soup sports a cap of comté, raclette and gouda instead of the usual gruyere, adding complexity and texture. Salads, sandwiches and a *charcuterie* platter are also offered, along with unusual regional fare like *poutine*, a French-Canadian mélange of cheese curds, French fries and gravy.

An attached basement space houses

a shop with a full range of local and imported cheeses and specialty foods like olives, honey and incredible burnt-caramel chocolates from California.

"We're all about teaching people, having fun with them," says Sobocinski, who has worked at Chestnut Fine Foods & Confections on State Street and Boston's Formaggio Kitchen. He and chef Fabrice Readuin plan to match cheese blends with the seasonal menu and range into other continental cuisines. Wine and craft beers will be added to the menu early this month.

Caseus, 93 Whitney Avenue, New Haven (203-624-3373)