

Creating a smooth, sealed rind

Yes, the trick is to create a temp gradient, or outright warm the curd when you're forming it. After you pack it under whey, and plop the entire curd chunk in your cloth-lined mold, it should have all sorts of surface pits and imperfections.

Take the mold, fold the cloth over, put the follower on top, and put the entire thing in hot whey, or hot water. About 110-115F hot. You want it to be hot enough to really create curd fusion, but not so hot that you dehydrate the curd excessively. The temp gradient will also create a slight moisture gradient - the outer layer will be more dry. Not a huge deal unless you really hold it in the water for a long time. It actually helps a little with rind formation when done right.

Anyway, you plop the entire mold in the hot water or whey, and then pour more hot water into the recesses of the mold follower, on top. Press by hand, press really firmly. You can even press unevenly, one corner at a time, making 1/8 turns. Press down and squeeze and really embed the cloth into the surface. Unwrap, flip, repeat, unwrap, flip, repeat, until it looks done. Make sure you soak the cloth in whey beforehand.

What you're doing here is a hybrid technique. It's the approach used for large comte and alpine styles, but they use a huge screw press, and really hot curd, and a huge wheel. Here, wheel is smaller, and needs less weight. But, the curd isn't really hot enough to do it properly, so you have to warm it up some. But not warm it up enough to dry it too much or lose fat. As soon as you have the impression of the cloth, wrap it in cloth one more time, and put a slight weight on the mold (10 lbs or so). Should be good to go, you'll get a great cheese. Even if the edges will have wrinkles, it'll be OK because there are no fractures to the inside, so if something like a blue grows, you can rub and scrape it off. The worst is when you have fractures inside, and the mold gets into the crevices, and it's a blue mold.

The other option is to keep all the surface imperfections, but use a rind blend that gives you a full, candidum, or thick geo mat in 1-3 days after the make. That will protect against unwanted molds through competition. If you do this, keep humidity 95-98, and high O2 exchange, then cut the humidity back to 80-85 to slow things down, and then knock back the growth and start layering morge on top of the mycelium mat. This type is a very tricky rind to do, have seen many commercial makers fail at it, would not recommend for beginners. But great when done right.

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