

The Herald Tribune



Volume #22 Issue #2

Newsletter of the Ann Arbor Brewers' Guild

February 2008

February Meeting

This month's meeting of the AABG is Friday the 8th and will be hosted by **Matt and René Greff**. See the map and directions on the next page. The featured style is **Belgian and French Ale**.

16. Belgian and French Ale

- 16A Witbier
- 16B Belgian Pale Ale
- 16C Saison
- 16D Bière de Garde
- 16E Belgian Specialty Ale

17. Sour Ale

- 17B Flanders Red Ale
- 17C Flanders Brown Ale/Oud Bruin
- 17D Straight (Unblended) Lambic
- 17E Gueuze
- 17F Fruit Lambic

18. Belgian Strong Ale

- 18A Belgian Blond Ale
- 18B Belgian Dubbel
- 18C Belgian Tripel
- 18D Belgian Golden Strong Ale
- 18E Belgian Dark Strong Ale

AABG 2008

January	Randy deBeauclair	Dark Lager*
February	Matt & Rene Greff	Belgian & French Ale
March	Porter*
April	Alex Pettit	Light Hybrid Beer
May	Stephen Krebs	Extract*
June	Mark Zadvinskis	Smoke
July	Mead*
August	Chris Frey	Light Lager
September	Jeff Renner	Imperial Anything*
October	Jason Henning	European Amber Lager
November	Chris Frey	English Brown Ale
December	Rolf Wucherer	Cider/Specialty

* Denotes AHA Club Only Competition Style
All meetings are the second Friday of each month beginning at 7:30 p.m., except for the July meeting (BeerBQ) which is the second Saturday.

AABG Pico System

The guardian of the club's pico system is Mike O'Brien. Anyone wishing to use it should contact him at:
734.637.2532 or e-mail:
mobrien315221MI@comcast.net

Saison

The French word for season, *saison*, has become a stylistic designation to distinguish a group of beers from Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium. Today, these historically seasonal ales are brewed year-round. *Saisons* present a complex character that is both aggressive and subtle. Unmistakably Belgian and unequivocally rustic, they beckon exploration.

Brewing in Wallonia

Belgium is divided into two roughly equal regions along an east-west boundary. Flanders comprises the northern half, and Wallonia, the southern half. Wallonia boasts some world-class breweries, including three of the famous Trappist operations: Orval, Rochefort, and Chimay. Less famous are the secular farmhouse breweries that dot the Wallonian countryside. Like the monastic breweries, they are down to earth, individualistic and quite dedicated to local brewing traditions. They are also responsible for the sole purely Wallonian beer style, *saison*.

Saison is a relatively old style of beer, not so much for the usual stylistic guidelines like appearance and strength, but for the seasonal constraints under which it was produced. Before refrigeration, Belgian brewers had to brew in cold or cool seasons, as brewing during warm months invited too many inconsistencies and blemished batches. The beer was then stored for the warmer months.

Being brewed on a seasonal basis, these beers, which became known as *saison*, had to be within a specific strength range. Too strong, and they wouldn't be a decent thirst quencher. Too weak, they wouldn't hold up during the storage period. Moderate to medium-strong became the default potency. And, similar to other ales, like IPA, that had to endure prolonged storage, *saisons* were hopped liberally to combat contamination and add stability.

Saison Personality

Saison as we know it today is quite true to its roots, retaining its character as a rustic, unpretentious and somewhat unruly brew. It is still mostly brewed in modest farmhouse

breweries that blend in well with the local culture and architecture. At least one is an operating farm, in addition to a brewery. Yet another can claim to be the only operating steam-powered brewery in the world.

Hence, this quaint, anachronistic style of ale precedes many of the tight and detailed classifications that we now use to pigeonhole almost every beer. Today's *saisons* share many things. They are rambunctious, frenetic at first, in both aroma and flavor; they exhibit an earthy quality like few other brews; and are they usually bottle conditioned. *Saison* is also categorically pliant: its brewers making their own version at their own whim. Most *saisons* range from 5 percent alcohol on the low end, to as high as 8 percent. Their color traverses the spectrum from full gold to reddish-amber. The majority of the malt grist is pale or pilsner malt, accounting for all of the malt in some of the golden *saisons*. Occasionally, wheat is used. Darker malts, like Vienna, Munich, aromatic, and caramel are also utilized, but would comprise a minority of the grist. The amber varieties of *saison* would get some of their color from these character malts. Munich malt especially contributes a rich malty flavor and aroma, with a little extra mouthfeel. While *saisons* are in general fairly crisp, they do present a tangible mouthfeel that assuages any impression of thinness.

Augmenting the refreshing side of *saison's* multiple personalities is the bountiful tally of hops. Almost exclusively, traditional and noble continental hop varieties from England (Kent Goldings), eastern Europe (Styrian Goldings), and Germany (Hallertau) are used, often in combination. The hop blending can add even more complexity to a beer that seems intent on such expression. Hop character is usually very noticeable as a resinous, herbal, and earthy quality and is complimentary to the malt backbone. As with most Belgian beers, yeast imparts its own footprint on the beer. In the case of *saison*, the yeast is often a very flavorful one, contributing many subtle notes. Combinations of yeast may be employed. There might even be an influence from some wild organisms. While

See *Saison* continued on page 3...

When and Where

Friday Feb. 8, 7:30 pm

Matt and René Greff

1305 Grant St

Ypsilanti MI

678-7620

1305 Grant

AABG Policy

AABG encourages responsible, legal consumption of homebrewed and craft beers. As such, we request that if you are under 21, you do not attend our meetings.



Guide for New Members

Bring 1–2 bottles per batch of your beer that you'd like to share, or an interesting commercial beer. Bring tasty munchies to cleanse the palate and sop up the alcohol. Feel free to share and sample with other members and make and accept constructive comments. Please use good judgment while imbibing and don't drive while intoxicated.



16C. Saisons

Nominally seasonal beers for the summer, but available all year round. Only in a country with so many strong beers would brews of at 5.0 to 6.5 per cent be regarded as "light" summer specialities. Despite their typical strengths, Saisons usually have a citric, peppery, quenching, quality, due variously to hard water, heavy hopping, spicing or deliberate souring. They are usually amber to orange in colour, and often very quite dry. Saisons are largely local to the French-speaking part of the country, especially the western part of the province of Hainaut, in old, small, farm-like, breweries close to the Borinage coalfield. Examples include the crisp Saison 1900, from the brewery Lefèbvre, in Quenast, south of Brussels; the tart Saison Silly (named after its home village); and the spiced Saison de Pipaix. The last is made by a steam-powered brewery dating from the 1780s. The brewery Brasserie ^ Vapeur works only on the last Saturday of the month, starting at 9.0 in the morning. It also has tours on Sundays at 11.0, and a shop open in the second half of the week. The hugely lively Saison Dupont is made at farm brewery that uses its spent grain in bread and produces a hop-flavoured cheese (5 Rue Basse,

in the village of Tourpes, near Pipaix. There is a café opposite the brewery). The perfumy Saison D'Epeautre (made with the grain spelt) is produced commercially at a private house in the village of Blaugies, near Dour, South of Mons 435 Rue de La Frontière. The aromatic Saison Régál is from a larger independent brewery, in Purnode, in the province of Namur. A variety of interpretations for different seasons are made by the Fant™me brewery which opens its own café at weekends and school holidays village of Soy, province of Luxembourg. Many small breweries in the French-speaking part of Belgium make similar beers, not necessarily identified as Saisons.

The style does not exist in the Flemish-speaking part of the country, but a paler, wonderfully flowery, hoppy, beer called Sezoens, made by the Martens brewery, of Bocholt, in Belgian Limburg, is something of a counterpart. This is a house speciality at a café called De Ultieme Hallucinatie, in Brussels.

— Michael Jackson



Saison continued...

most saison breweries use their own house yeast, there is no mistaking the similarities among the different brands. Perhaps some of them share a regional ancestor, or the method and conditions of fermentation have helped develop the unusual underpinning contributed by the yeast.

Being bottle conditioned, saisons age gracefully. They can become winey, tart, dry and nuanced beyond belief. Young saisons smell and taste fresh and somewhat soft, rich with the aroma of hops and malt.

Some saison brewers strive to make their product even more distinctive with some personal flair. The use of spices—running the gamut from sweet orange peel to pepper to ginger—is not uncommon. One brewer adds one or more fruit juices to the brew.

Weathering Saison Saisons are for adventurous beer drinkers. Conformity within style is not a priority; complexity, be it intentional or natural, is a badge. If you are lucky enough to get some in hand, savor, compare and share them; they are worthy of discussion.

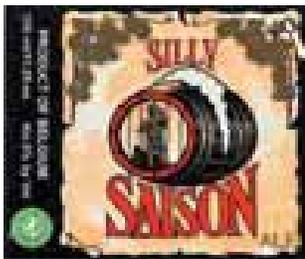
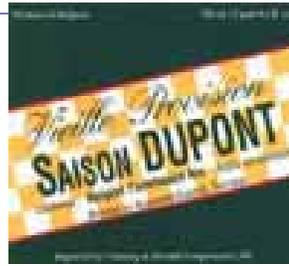
Saisons are usually packaged in corked, 75 cl bottles, adding to the presentation. Saison demands attention from the start; it is a lively pour. If that doesn't nab you, the aroma should. Serve in a wide-brimmed, stemmed glass to get the full sensual force. Spicy, musty, and fruity, the aroma of a saison is stimulating, and makes you wonder what a taste will reveal. The flavor is just as complex. Saison can resemble lambic with a lightly sour, cellar-like background. The hops, depending on the age, can be starkly bitter or fresh and resinous. No beer is earthier, and a hint of spice is there, leaving one wondering if the yeast or an actual spice is the responsible party.

Saison has been described as a vanishing or endangered style. Several saison-producing breweries remain in Wallonia, however, most of which are conveniently proximal to one another. The Artisan Press publishes an excellent guidebook—*The Beers of Wallonia* by John Woods and Keith Rigley—that concisely directs the beer traveler to the region's brews. Many saisons are available via export, including Saison Dupont, Saison de Pipaix, La Foret, Saison de Silly, Fantôme, and Moinette to name a few. Some of them are organic.

In the United States, Hennepin by Ommegang and Southampton Saison by Southampton on Long Island are finely crafted farmhouse ales. The McKenzie Brewhouse of Chadds Ford, PA, makes a saison that is indistinguishable from a Wallonian example.

Drinking saison is like a walk in the woods. At first you notice only the forest, but then you discover the individual trees, and finally the smaller and more discreet inhabitants. Sensory stimulation is everywhere. The subtle notes sit beside the bold notes, each expressing itself. Summer is here, and there are worse ways to laze away an evening than by savoring this intricate and multifaceted brew.

— By K. Florian Klemp



Saison Dupont From the class Wallonian brewery, Brasserie Dupont in Tourpes, Hainaut, it is the quintessential saison. Rich gold in color, Saison Dupont pours with a creamy, white, lingering head that presents an aromatic, wonderfully fresh hop bouquet. The flavor has a stiff dose of bittering hops, a light cellar character, and a grainy finish. Bottle conditioned, of course; as good as it gets. 6.5% ABV.

La Foret Also brewed by Dupont, it is the exported, 100-percent organic version, exhibiting the same resinous hop aroma that Saison Dupont features, with a little more mustiness in flavor and bouquet. Made with filtered artesian water, it has a bold bitterness and a soft malty background. 7.5% ABV.

Fantôme Brewed in Soy, Luxembourg province, by the Brasserie Fantôme, it's named for a haunting spirit that inhabits some local chateau ruins. Brewed with pilsner malt, hopped with Goldings and Hallertau, and accented with special "mysterious" ingredients, two fruit juices and two herbs. A complex fruit and spice aroma with notes of watermelon, peach, apple, and anise. The flavor features light maltiness and a reserved horse-blanket note. 8% ABV.

Saison de Silly From the Brasserie de Silly in Hainaut, this is one of the darkest of the saisons. It has a reddish-amber color and is slightly sweet and fruity with a modest caramel finish, reminiscent of honey as the beer warms. Dry and earthy, light in body, and very refreshing. The balancing hop dose is from Kent Goldings and Hallertau varieties, and provides a nice soft bitterness. 5% ABV.

Saison de Pipaix Produced by the Brasserie A Vapeur (literally, "steam brewery") in Pipaix, Hainaut. Dark gold/light amber in color; brewed with pilsner and Munich malts, hopped with Hallertau, and spiced with coriander, pepper, curaçao and sweet orange peels, and ginger. It is complex, fairly tart and lambic-like, rich and malty, with some strong cellar character. Quite dry and quenching, it ages well. The vintage tasted here was 1985. 6.5% ABV.

McKenzie Brewhouse Saison Brewed in Chadds Ford, PA, this brew is as authentic as it gets outside Wallonia. The hop aroma is fiery and resinous, with a rich, earthy bouquet. Hopped exclusively with East Kent Goldings; tart, well attenuated, dry, and perfectly balanced. Golden-amber in color and malty, it has a long hoppy finish. Ingredients are Belgian pilsner malt, a dash of German Vienna malt and some Belgian candy sugar. 6.2% ABV.

Be on your guard for fine French beers

Some Britishers look across the Channel and see winegrowers. That is an unsophisticated view. We beer lovers scan the horizon and see splendidly rustic breweries.

We barely need to cross the water and we are among them. The port of Boulogne itself has one brewery, and there are about 20 in this northwestern corner of France.

Many of them make bières de garde, a spicy-tasting, ale-like style, much more interesting than the lagers of Alsace.

Perhaps because they are so near, I seem to be asked about bières de garde more than any other style. Now is a good time to consider them; they were originally produced in February and March to be laid down as provision for the summer, when the warm weather and airborne yeasts made brewing impossible: "beer to keep."

In those days, the beers were filled into the customers' own bottles, with the addition of primings. Wine bottles, and sometimes gin crocks or brandy flasks would be used.

This area regards itself as being part of the Low Countries, albeit definitely French, and its regional traditions include not only the brewing of beer but also the distilling of genièvre (gin).

The culture is especially strong in the sub-region that regards itself as Flemish France. In this area, many of the place names are clearly Flemish.

After the war, when breweries began to modernize, bière de garde almost vanished, but the odd brewery kept it alive, doing its own filling, often into Champagne bottles. In recent years, several breweries have reintroduced bières de garde.

The grist for these beers usually includes some very aromatic malts, sometimes made from local barleys. Typically, their gravities are in the range of 1060-76 degrees, producing an alcohol content of 6.5 to 8.5 percent.

Some of the brewers boil their wort very intensely, with a view to achieving a degree of caramelization and concentrating it by evaporation.

In aroma and flavor, the emphasis tends to be on malt rather than hops, though they are also a local element. The Belgian hop-growing region of Poperinge is just across the border, and cultivation spreads into France as far as Hazebrouck (about half way between Calais and Lille).

This is a very old hop-growing area, probably dating back to the early use of the plant in brewing. Several varieties are grown, especially Brewer's Gold and Northern Brewer, and new ones are being introduced in an effort to slow the

decline of the region.

A beer that contains more than 51 percent local hops is permitted to carry the regional appellation Nord-Pas de Calais.

Some of the breweries use top-fermenting yeasts, while others employ warm temperatures with lager strains. Several use different yeasts for products in broadly the same style.

Some of these beers have a maturation of several weeks, or a month or two in tank, usually at cool temperatures, and one or two have a suggestion of "cellar character."

Some people regard this as a defect, suggesting mustiness; others, myself included, feel that it sometimes adds complexity and charm.

I enjoyed seeing the hop gardens that fringe the Trois Monts brewery, at the hamlet of Saint Sylvestre Cappel, near Steenvoorde, just north of Hazebrouck.

It has been variously claimed that there was first a brewery on the site in the early 1500s, or from the French Revolution, but its documented history seems to begin in the 1860s, and some of the buildings probably date from that period.

It is one of the most rustic breweries I saw with the added quirk that its laboratory is in the former Parish Hall, which is decorated with a statue of St Philomene.

The present brewhouse dates at least from the 1920s and the steam boiler is coalfired. The brewery is run by Pierre Ricour, who is in his sixties, with his wife and their two sons.

Local malts and hops are used in significant proportions, but I have never met a brewer with such a strong interest in the influence of yeast on the character of his beers. He uses three strains, all top-fermenting, each for a different beer.

The principal product, a bière de garde called simply Trois Monts (the name comes from three small hills in the area), is made exclusively with pilsener-type malt, and some sugar adjunct, to a gravity of 1076 degrees. It is filtered, but not pasteurized.

Trois Monts has a full, gold, color; a slightly sour aroma (some cellar character?); a very dry palate, with some yeast-bite; a rounded wininess; and a hint of alcohol.

The brewery also has an unfiltered "abbey type" Bière des Templiers, again with a gravity of 1076 degrees. This is an all-malt beer, and it is superb.

Monsieur Ricour claims it is made entirely with Pilsener malts, in which case it must have a great deal of caramelization and evaporation. It has a rich, barley-sugar color, and is very complex.

In the old coalfield area, I visited the Castelain Brewery at Bénifontaine, near Wingles, just

north of Lens. This, too, is a family business, its utilitarian building bearing the legend Yves Castelain, Artisan Brasseur, Depuis 1926.

Through a window, the gleaming mash tun and two copper kettles are visible. Part of the building has been turned into a shop (13 rue Pasteur, Bénifontaine).

Although there is nothing elaborate about this brewery, there is plenty of evidence of recent investment to keep it in good shape. The present Monsieur Castelain told me that he had gradually abandoned more conventional brews in favor of variations on the Bière de Garde style.

This direction began 12 years ago, when he launched Ch'ti, the name of which is local patois for a Northerner. This beer now appears in blonde (1060 degrees), amber (1056 degrees) and brown (1060 degrees) versions. All are chaptalised with glucose, and bottom fermented. In general, these are sweetish, fruity beers.

The Blonde also has some biscuity maltiness. The Ambrée has more complexity (five malts are used), and a depth of flavors. (This is available in Britain as Sainsbury's Bières de Garde). The Brune is beautifully balanced, with some port-like notes.

The brewery also has an extremely pale speciality made with organic malt, called Jade (1048 degrees), which is delicately hoppy, clean and refreshing. All of these beers are filtered.

A newer, more interesting, speciality is St Arnoldus. This is a 1072 degree golden beer that is filtered then primed and re-yeasted for bottle-conditioning. It is very fruity, with some syrupy notes, and a firm, dry finish. The brewery also has March and Christmas beers.

Between Lens and Lille is the village and brewery of Annoeullin. This tiny, rustic brewery, established in 1905, is run by a very keen young couple, Yolande and Bertrand Lepers.

The family Lepers trace a history of hop-growing and brewing through five generations, back to 1880; Bertrand and his wife took over this brewery in the 1970s.

Annoeullin's Bière de Garde, which is bottom-fermented, is a spicy-tasting, well-rounded, product called Pator Ale (1060 degrees), made entirely with pale malt. I had always found this name rather confusing until I was given the suddenly obvious explanation: it is a pastoral brew. Nothing to do with pastors, or ales. "C'est une symphonie," says the slogan.

Annoeullin also has a spicy-fruity, very faintly syrupy golden, wheat beer called L'Angelus. This is made with 30 per cent wheat, unmaltd, and has a gravity of 1072 degrees. Both of these beers are filtered but not pasteurized.