

GOLDEN LAGER RED ALE IMPERIAL STOUT
BREWBASE PORTER ENGLISH BROWN ALE
ENCYCLOPEDIA CHOCOLATE PORTER ALE
2011-2012 BARLEYWINE PILSENER BOCK
KELLERBIER LAMBIC SCHWARZBIER
GUEUZE RYE ALE SAISON IMPERIAL IPA
By Larry Hatch TRIPEL ALE OAK-AGED IPA
EXTRA SPECIAL BITTER AMERICAL LIGHT
HEFEWEIZEN SCOTTISH ALE KOLSCH ALE
BELGIAN QUAD DUNKELWEIZEN WITBEIR
**a frank, sometimes funny, detailed review of
the world's finest brews in portable formats**
SORGHUM ALE MILK STOUT OLD ALE
BIERE DE GARDE RED ALE OKTOBERFEST
BELGIAN IPA VIENNA LAGER LIGHT LAGER
OATMEAL STOUT SCOTTISH ALE ALTBIER
RED LAGER MALT LIQUOR DARK WHEAT
AMERICAN PALE ALE BLONDE ALE FARO
STEAM BEER CREAM ALE PUMPKIN ALE
DOPPELBOCK CHILE ALE MAIBOCK
KRISTALWEIZEN IRISH RED ALE HERB ALE

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New classifications splits are in the works. A few suggestions are:

- Ale - Fresh hops or wet-hopped
 - Lager - Kolsch
 - Ale - Saison and Sour
-

ALE - AMBER

Brewbase Fives



Aass Amber

RATING: 5.0

Norway

From Drammen and Norway's oldest brewery (1834) comes this clear but dark amber in a wonderful shoulder-less bottle and 19th century style label. The taste is unique among those in this file. This all-natural beer is hard to describe but one finds the taste of golden hominy, hops, Pils, and herbs to be most apparent. It is very refined at all taste levels and with such sumptuous hoppy flavors it could become one's favorite of all ambers. I considered it the best new amber beer I tasted in 1992.

Brewbase Fives



Aass Jubilee

RATING: 5.0

Norway

This bottom-fermented and lagered ale takes 3 months to brew. The seasoning comes from Hallertau hops and the color proves light amber. The taste of hops and fruit are abundant like an good amber lager. Even though the cap has green and red colors it is NOTHING like their Christmas Winter Ale. As their regular Amber is not a lager it too is quite different. While perfect it is in a crowded field of amber fruity lagers - including several Americans.

Abita Bock

RATING: 4.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

From Abita Springs in Louisiana comes this bock that is not described anywhere on the packaging. Color is light amber and the carbonation is lasting. Flavor is modest but nicely sweet and malty. Like their Turbo Dog is needs a bit more flavor to really contend with the competition. It is LESS hoppy than Rolling Rock Bock and vastly superior to Shiner Bock. One almost gets a very slight mint flavor with it. While not worldclass it is satisfying and

worth a try. Reviewers here noted "lovely semi-cloudy carmel color...nice sweet-fruit-malt blend" and "maybe not what German breweries send out as bock but still a rewarding drink with good balance...I'd prefer a bit more depth though". In 1995 three BrewBase users did give it a perfect 5 but most wanted more character.

Abita Bock (c. 1995)

RATING: 3.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

These green and yellow painted bottles set us back just \$2.29 (1995) and yielded a pumpkin orange beer with a persistent head and spritely carbonation. Like many Abita products it is a reasonable flavor value for the money but you never quite get worldclass quality. While their recent Fall Fest and Christmas 1994 specials were 'very good' (4 bottle rating here) this bock is not as enjoyable. There was a muddled flavor with some malt notes but no clear and orderly palate. The finish could be bitter (even at icy cold temps) and that too harmed the tasting experience. One of us described this as a bit like an 'amber malt liquor' as far as malt depth and clean finish were concerned. We know they can turn up the malt flavor. And they really must.

Abita Mardi Gras Bock

RATING: 3.5

Abita Springs, Louisiana

The bright orangish-gold (vaguely amber) pour has a very light, whitish head and limited carbonation. Noise is faint malt, pleasant so. I was surprised the the malt was so rich for sometime not nearly dark amber or brownish at all. The malt is warming, brothy, corn-flavored, bread-toasty, somewhat faithful to the style but a notch or two weaker than what anyone in Germany would care to send over. There seems to be some confusion and visiting their website adds to it. Their "regular" Bock has a blue and blue-green label and is said on the web page to be "very popular..especially during our Mardi Gras season". It is apparently not this Mardi Gras Bock with comes with a foiled forest green label with a purple and gold foil on it; unless of course repackaging has been done for the local festival. My companion reviewers here notes the occasional off finish note but we did not find that in all glasses or bottles. It is okay and not great, acceptable and in being just acceptable it will probably go untried by us again. It's a tough world for acceptable, decent beers these days and our increasingly limited greenbacks are more apt to go for quality and flavor values. Let me check out that Saranac stock...

Algonquin Special Reserve Dark Ale

RATING: 3.0

Formosa

This Canadian microbrew comes in 1 litre PLASTIC bottles like a big coke or something. That's a first for us. This selection which won the Gold Medal in 1991 Monde Selection is actually an AMBER ALE and not a dark beer of any sort. There are many darker ales in the world. The head is big, white, and foamy. It lingers. It first palate it appears somewhat thin but then a cascade of slightly fuller and sweet hops comes in. Reviewers comments that 'for an ale, dark or pale, it is remarkably thin on taste' and 'refreshing but still short of where it needs to be'. The misnaming was mentioned by nearly all and one noted that 'they need to RESERVE more ingredients to make it truly dark or truly ale...right now its neither.'

[Bierra] Amarcord Nero's 1st Century Double Dark Malt Ale

RATING: 3.5

Apecchio, Italy

These hardware-capped 500ml are surprising dark amber for something called "dark". It is not the least bit red (neither was their Red Ale) nor is there any hint of brown in any form, not chestnut nor mahogany nor anything even brownish-amber. The head is mid cream and fairly large. Small but visible lace. It is double-ish at 8% ABV and at first sip it is far more malty than the amber color usually predicts. It is richly Old World malt, ladden with some fruit of mixed quality, tropical in bits, quite dark and citrus-styled at other points, occasionally tangy towards a sharpish, dry finish. There was not enough malt nor raisiny dark fruit to match the name but judged for it actually is: we found it a bit tedious and annoyingly-semi-harsh from time to time. There were too many odd notes (not off nor ugly), just awkward and not designed to please. It is goofy and far too bitter in the finish more more than half our panelists. We found their Red Ale and this Italian treat at Trader Joes in Cary NC in fall 2012. More curious than enjoyable to all of us.

Brewbase Fives



Anchor Steam Liberty Ale

RATING: 5.0

San Francisco, California

This traditional ale from SF CA is colored cloudy amber not unlike a good rich apple cider. Using top-fermented yeast they achieve a very persistent white head and abundant carbonation. It aged for months and dry-hopped in sealed vats. While we thought the Anchor Steam Beer was less than perfect this ale has a complex herbal taste of the first order. It can have a slight bitterness that might give Sierra Nevada Pale Ale a slight superiority.

Brewbase Fives



Anderson Valley Boont Amber Ale

RATING: 5.0

California

This popular California amber is medium dark but still bright in a glass. The balance between hop and fruit flavors is refined and quite pleasant. When tasted head to head with North Coast Christmas Ale 1992 and Ruedrich's Red Seal Ale one can appreciate how hop flavors are more developed here with fruit more in the background. Finish is semi-dry. It is far sweeter and less herbal than Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. Both are equally sophisticated in their own way but beasts of a different order.

Avery Collaboration not Litigation Ale (Batch #2, Feb. 2008)

RATING: 4.0

Boulder, Colorado

If this big bottle had a celebratory cork I'd suspect this was a brew designed to help law firms laud a win between the walnut rails. Not a big market really but I'd figure they'd pay \$212 a bottle but tip and make it worthwhile for some brewery. This 8.72% ABV offering pours cloudy amber (so far so great), lace as persistent as an ambulance chaser with speed-dial, and creamy, firm head like the new blonde temp in the Class Action Department...sorry, went too far. First nose was malt with a curious punch of pecan...and you know by know I never name a fruit for sake of effect. I tried to read the brief from the foiled label with miniature black, thin font letters but even my magnifying glass gave up and dropped to the floor. Apparently the folks at Avery and Russian River Brewing both had great ales called "Salvation" and instead of giving away half their future and copper kettles to some sleazy firm downtown, they agreed to blend their two ales and share the profits.

It tastes like a simple sweet malt with much tartness at first sip, later developing some even more thick barleywine moments, later more generic fruit, back to the bitter pecans, and then a finish dank and dry, malty

all the while. Do we have a new arbitrated partnership of random and synergistic brilliance (which of course most of us as humans really are) or is it a hodge-podge of complex but imperceptible quality? Or something else? There are good fruity-nutty-malt passages that told me that we had a nice integrated, coherent product of 5.0 rating. Other sips are other temps were of the "everything but kitchen sink variety"; though the components were mostly a treasure chest of gold and gems. I'm a beer blender and am fairly decent at the odd art some 12 years into the passion. By now, I can tell a random blend from a purposeful, strategic one with a mission or at least half a goal. This is half a mission met and a great goal missed from my perspective as a drinker. From the brewery's slant it was thousands, maybe a mill saved, and I like their cleverness rendered into a fun marketing theme. Cool all that. But you must deliver in the glass - the full glass is everything - the ledger and marketing will take care of itself. It may have been their salvation but not mine. The amber doctrine here is too merky, the sermon too timid, and the yet the pure delicious gospel all there in disjointed, jumbled notes. Cool idea but you don't get T.D. Jakes and Billy Graham by confusing the pulpit with the choir.

Ballast Point Calico Amber Ale

RATING: 4.5

San Diego, California

This stuff won a Gold at the GABF 2001 and another at the World Beer Cup 2002. Six different malts are used to produce this dark amber creation with a big cream head of long duration. The nose gives sweet, fruity malt notes. The taste is mid-strength, not rich or demanding for the expert, very effortless and velvety. The ale fruit notes are supportive and much needed with a product mixed with so many malts and also blended with nice tangy hops. I found it a nicely-weighted blend, replete with all the good stuff, and teeming with quality ingredients from early to late sips. "Smooth and complete" was what one of my pals said and he gave it a perfect 5.0 bottles. I am not so convinced but it is surely better than most amber ales.

Bass Country Chase Ale

RATING: 4.0

Burton-on-Trent, England

Brewed to celebrate the old autumn hunt this brew is darker than regular Bass Pale Ale and is more desirable. Northdown and Challenger hops are used to create a nice malty, semi-sweet flavor with hops being a minor theme. It is worth trying but we doubt it will make any enthusiasts 'Ten Best Ales' list. On the other hand the package (though not so much the label) is truly a work of art. We only wish other breweries invested so much effort. Reviewers noted 'pleasant and smooth but neither unique nor truly memorable...competent' and 'the best of their products I have tried but many a UK ale is more rewarding at this price'. Reviewers posted ratings from 3.5 to 4.5 so opinions did vary. The best overall conclusion: very good but not great.

Big Rock Buzzard's Breath Ale

RATING: 4.0

This 'private formula' comes in clear light amber with copious carbonation. It is more hop-flavored than their Warthog Ale but shares with it some of the sweet candy-type finish. The unpasteurized ale is quite pleasant but somehow lacks the complexity we'd expect in a premium North American ale. Their McNally's product and certainly Adam's Boston Ale provide more of a convincing and impressive drink. It will probably sell on the name alone.

Big Rock Warthog Ale

RATING: 4.0

This clear amber ale has long-lasting carbonation and a flavor similar to McNally's made by the same brewery. While perhaps less flavorful than McNally's it shares the same candy-like finish and complexity of palate. Tasted together we must prefer McNally's although this 4 bottle selection will not disappoint many beer drinkers. The ink drawing of a warthog on the label makes this bottle very collectible and unique.

Black Ram Ale

RATING: 4.5

Masham, Yorkshire

From the branded mark you might think it is 'Black Ham Ale' but clearer script tells you 'This is Black Ram Ale, a culmination of five generations of brewing expertise'. It is brewed at Paul Theakston's Black Sheep Brewery and

some of you will recognize that Theakston named immediately - from the much-loved Old Peculier label. Color is medium amber with a dense ivory head. Moderate hop nose. It is a hop lovers dream with full and complex zippy flavors in rich excess. It is not so tart as an IPA but has some of those potent elements. The name confused some reviewers who expected a dark brown real ale and got one much paler - though fully as satisfying for many. One reviewer remarked on 'the sophisticated hops intensity that is neither sweet nor bitter...exactly spot on.

Black Sheep Wensleydale Riggwelter Yorkshire Ale

RATING: 4.5

North Yorkshire, England

This delightful amber ale comes with a fairly direct first approach, rounded hops and malt but in clear moderation. Head is beige and about as long as the name on the label. Finish has more complexity with molasses, sharp hops, caramel, and teases of other things. I personally like a bit more umph and potency in my \$7.00 (July 2008) bottles of English ale but one cannot fault this style on those times when meals require it. It's good without being great, a phrase I like very much for this book. The name Riggwelter refers to a black sheep or some other beast overturned and helpless, a state which no doubt several of these large one pint bottles could produce in black sheep of the human species.

Blue Point Springfling Copper Ale

RATING: 3.5

Patchogue, Long Island, New York

This label is quite a clean, luminous, green thing with lovely hummingbirds sipping on hop vines - quite a leap of artistic license given that those creature demand sweet nectar and not bitter stuff! I'm thinking hummingbirds would enjoy a sweet amber candy ale but they are bit fragile and might crash into your house if fed nectar-rich fluids in the ale family. No ale or hop vines for my local hummers. There are many NY wineries and breweries but one on Long Island that sticking-out-thing home to millions of people is a special note. Patchogue was named by western folks in 1893, has about 13,000 residents and is named for a native tribe called both the Patchogue and perhaps more accurately the Unkechaug Nation. Thomas Jefferson visited them in 1791 at Brookhaven I am told. More recently Gov. Bloomberg of New York State, Great White Father of the Moron Tribe, said these Patchogue-Unkechaug owe him money for cigarette taxes. Perhaps he also wants reparations for that horrible rip-off from the sale of Manhattan for all those priceless beads? You golf fans have heard of another old, LI tribe known as the Shinnecock. (No shiny cock jokes you lame ale swillers). The town is known for former resident and rocker Billy Idol whose family settled there in 1958. Kevin Connolly or "E" from Entourage was born and educated there; more impressive on the first accomplishment. Patchoque Bay is home to part of what is widely known as Fire Island. One of the few jokes I recall from my young years on Long Island not too far from Patchogue is saying an afraid person is "as nervous as a gerbil on Fire Island". 'nough said.

This brew pour a pale amber, copperish in fact, with a head in dark cream, medium duration. First sip is shockingly weak and a too watery for my taste, later we get some firm, semi-sweet malt notes, fading into a better hoppy-malt balance of good but wanting depth. It needs to be very cold to even hold your attention. And unless it's a local cheap brew...go elsewhere for your copper, firey islands with or without drunk hummingbirds. This brew needs a major ingredient intensity if not quality upgrade as for one of our panelists of native descent this is fire water well worth spitting out into the nettles. They may enjoy it.

[Rhineland] Boatswain H.L.V. (Heavy Lift Vessel) Ale

RATING:

Monroe, Wisconsin

This 7% dark chestnut-amber ale is characterized as "dark brown" by the brewer but under all our direct lamp views (LED, fluorescent, and incandescent) it is surely a dank amber thang. The head is dark cream and lasting. Rhineland Brewer makes this Boatswain line (pronounced "bo-sun") which we have only seen at Trader Joes here in North Carolina. Their stated theme here is sweet, roasted malts (so true), moderate bitterness (it's candy-beer), and a high level of hops (lost in the malty sweetness). It is delightful and mega-malty but the sweetness carries it for the most part. Panelists said "Sticky, molasses, dark fruit fun...but I cannot bear these heavy, sugary concoctions for more than one glass" and "There are many better ways to get sweet malty beer and these days most of them are barrel-aged and 'imperial' strong with some decent hops to round them out...a fairly

simple (but not crude) caramel overdose and I can make that at home only half trying...". The price point here is probably what they want but it would be better some real hopping, barrel improvement (a higher price required), and a stronger punch of estery fruits. I'd give the sweetness a dial down by 1 or 2 positions and bring out some hops and yeasty fruit.

Boone Blowing Rock Winter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

First of all, we are not sure on the relationship of their previous offered Winter Warmer (see review below) with the Winter Ale sold in Fall 2009. This one pours a beaming amber with a large rocky head in light beige, lasting well. My first reaction is that is a semi-sweet, English ale augmented lightly in hops, more fully hoppy by the finish and loaded with sugary caramel notes of moderate complexity. It's ultra-candy-hops ale pulled back to a respectable and entertaining level, a good balance of all fine winter ale things and yet terribly hard to make. It's good without being thrilling, satisfying only to our base instincts, fine for a party beverage but not a thing for a gathering of serious suds analysts. Competent but not memorable the whole week - I can say the same of my Aunt's predictably fun ambrosia salad and a couple of gals I see from time to time. There's a role for competent, predictable things of quality that don't exactly blow off the doors of your sensory mind.

Boone Blowing Rock Winter Warmer

RATING: 4.5

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

This specialty offering pours reddish-amber with a short-lived, smallish head. Their is light spice, some clove perhaps, general fruit ester (some think cherry is big), and there is clearly vanilla in the punch. It is not as big as some of the WW name but it is very accessible and smooth. Toasty malt is there, faint to moderate, sweetish but not richly so, varying with the temp and then come some faint caramel. Hops enter the finish late and with two or three in the belly, the hops flavor sticks more to the tongue, growing larger - they are oily of course. It is very pleasant and I think I pulled down four of the six the first evening while watching House M.D. Reviews online seem to be all over the map from low to high. While I think it should be more complex and layered, the entire effect and chilled, bright appeal takes it from 4.0 to 4.5 in my mind. I would not count on it warming (stick with stouts) but it...um...they cheered me up. Fine experience.

Boulder Singletrack Copper Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boulder, CO USA

Here we have a brew made with "Arapahoe Glacier Water" and honoring the singletrack bike riding territory of that beautiful region. Reading the ingredients one quickly notices that this amber ale includes both malted barley and malted rye. The color is bright copper, as one would expect, below a sizeable cream-tinged head. It is reasonably sweet, providing a very sumptuous caramel malt flavor with just enough hops to please. Singletrack is certainly one of the better, more sophisticated American amber ales. Reviewers remarked on it's "tempting aromatic quality that is fully rewarded in every sip...satisfying in a mostly malty emphasis...only some hints of uncomfortable bitterness" and "very special....I've had nothing like it....delightful and maybe just a bit too sweet". Some gave it a perfect 5.0 rating. Judging from our experience with all rye beers we presume some of this brew's determinate character derives from that worthwhile ingredient.

Brains Traditional Welsh Ale

RATING: 3.0

Cardiff, Wales

This luminous amber ale with a beige head is made at the Old Brewery of S.A. Brain in Cardiff, capital of Wales. Brain's have been making ales since 1713. This ale is certainly 'subtle at best and semi-light at worst' in the words of a taster here. There is a smooth, light hops appeal and a semi-sweet, smooth finish. To the Real Ale movement this must seem like a failure, traditional or not - though when American mainstream brewers say 'tradition' they ignor the rich brews their ancestors perfected. We trust this not the case here. However less than 7% of our reviewers indicated they would drink this product again. There seems to be no market we know about for such thin ales at UK import prices. The classy red, green, black label was the only honor here.

Brakspear Henley Ale

RATING: 4.5

Henley-on-Thames, England

Say it very clearly. That is BRAKspear. Since 1779 (mere young novices by British standards) they have made fine fresh and bottled ales that come highly recommended to our team. In exported bottle form it proves glowing amber with copious lace and a firm foamy head. It has a nice hoppy flavor and aroma but is not so much as Bitter as Bateman's Victory Ale. It is very smooth for that style and is less idiosyncratic than many exported UK ales. If you British ale tastes run more toward semi-sweet than the bitter side of the range this will surely. Our experience in the Southeast is that it tends to be rare and when found a bit pricey. Well worth a try.

Breckenridge Avalanche Ale

RATING: 3.5

Denver Co\Breckenridge CO\Dallas TX\Buffalo NY

Named for Breckenridge Colorado and a famous ski resort, this amber ale proves to be more golden than amber under full light. The head is ivory and of medium persistence. It has medium hops bitterness and flavor (not enough for all reviewers we must confess) and a sort of nip not found with all ambers. The brew is age-stamped, 100% natural, and should be kept refrigerated. The label says it is 'full bodied but tastes lighter than it actually is'. That statement is hard to debate on any front but suffice it to say some of us were not fully impressed at \$6.99. It did win the 1996 and 1996 Silver Medal at WBC in the Amber Ale group. Some folks who had no quibble with the depth said it seemed 'odd' - 'unique' to the bigger fans. Check out www.breckbrew.com if you like.

Brew Dog 5 A.M. Saint

RATING: 4.0

Scotland

At 5% ABV this is one of BD's less potent formulas. It pours dark amber under a head so large and foamy you'd think it came with a cork. This "iconoclastic amber ale" actually has an American Pale Ale nose and so do many of the early notes. Then you get a bit more warming, soothing malt notes and find the final analysis to be like a blend of 75% APA and 25% malty brown ale; a blend which I often make on my own for fun. The ingredients are solid and the strength 4 out of 10 with 10 being Imperial APA. It's an amber for hop lovers who think most of this category should favor the glorious, master vine.

Brewery Hill Honey Amber

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barre, PA

This Wilkes-Barre ("wilks-berry") brewery produces this fine pale amber brew flavored with a small addition of honey. The result is a moderately flavored amber with hops-malt balance but not an impressive amount of either. The finish is sweet as one would expect. And if you ask us this 'honey beer' trend is getting out of hand. Beer is beer and it should not be made too much like soda. The world needs beer not another Malt-Cola or Hopsi. Overall the beer was pleasant and very drinkable in quantity and the \$6.75 price seemed fair. For us a trend toward more flavor and less honey would be welcome. It has nothing special to recommend it over the usual honey beer although a few a more pricey.

Brewski Brew Pub Classic

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

Brewski of Portland calls this 'The Greatest Name in Beer' (tm). That and the \$5.50 price made us suspicious. So did the claim 'freshest' with no dating mark on the label. This golden amber proved to have a long-lived head and some nice hop flavor. While good it is not as complex and impressive as Sierra Nevada Pale Ale or Black Dog Pale Ale for example. While the first taste is pleasant it finishes a tad thin and occasionally with an off note. Bronze Medal in 1993 GABF in American Lager group.

Brooklyn Pennant Ale '55

RATING: 4.5

Utica, NY

Yes, it's made in Utica and I personally take no offense, historical or otherwise, to that fact. It's not like Utica isn't a sharp brew town and Brooklyn is just loaded full of free space for worldclass breweries. Before I go on with my usual ramblings, it bears noting this is a tribute the 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers. They beat the Yankees four games to three and was their first and only World Series title in that location. Take a look at this web page for more history on the tribute: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1955_Brooklyn_Dodgers_season

Glorious amber hues are covered by a foamy ivory head. Nose is mixed, complex, overall malty. First flavor is complex, rich, and unusual, mid-bodied overall, floral hops + malt overall. Fruit is weak but present. It carries to oddity of crystal malt notes and I find this form of them very pleasant. Yet there are more notes...many more. I could not come up with all of them so went online to ideas. Some terms included "pine", "minty hops", "mustiness", "grainy", "grape", and "nuttness". I think the graininess is quite accurate for it comes off a tad novel like a rye or sorghum ale. Digging more, I found that it is Maris Otter malts that may be giving this toasted flavor I like and do not find very often. Ratings here and elsewhere are very variable, high standard dev for sure.

Budweiser American Ale

RATING: 3.5

everywhere (and hopefully soon...nowhere)

One gets the idea they are going after Sam Adams with all their patriotic, American-based images. Could they even come close, dosing their brew with as much hops and malt the Sam, Wicked, and Sierra folks. If they could at a lower price we'd have a Hyundai or Lexus of beers. The website claims a heritage back to 1876. So why did it take a century and a quarter to get back to flavor? "Carefully brewed" is a phrase used everywhere and for a reason I suppose. They use caramel malted barley from "America's Heartland" with Cascade hops. "It's more than a new taste...it's a new tradition". What? I thought we were going back to our heritage. Reminds me of about twelve politicians I've been watching recently on TV. New but old, traditional but progressive, and innovative but old-fashioned. Breweries seem to want to have all old and all new at once. They lot of them must think we're idiots. I'm disappointed in fact (I was in truth cheering for them and my troubled wallet) that they do not come anywhere near Sam or Pete or anyone else in the macro-micro world. It may be the best Bud product in years but that is not really a compliment.

Color is amber, notes of medium malt, and a bit citrus please on first approach. The finish is a let down for those who love real hops and malt and anything approaching complex beauty. Carbonation might be overdone. It's a tad too acidic to drink in any mass way but then again that is taboo these days. It might be a value among the big producers but even a little grocery store will have better things for a buck or two more. Compare it to Saranac products which at hardly much more (no more on sale) and yet have rich hops and malt to a better degree. A-B toned down a micro recipe for the masses and priced it to match. They may do well with that price/ingredient point but not with me.

Burton Double Diamond Ale

RATING: 4.5

Burton-on-Trent, England

Made since 1876 the 'double diamond' symbol was originally chalked on kegs to denote Burton's finest ale selections. The twin gems now stand for what is correctly called (here at least) ORIGINAL BURTON ALE. Color proves light amber with a limited creamy head. It is fairly dry and of moderate strength overall. It has good ale fruit notes with a finish mixed with hops bitterness and less fruit. Most reviewers felt this classic in the ale world (indeed the entire realm of brewing) is still worthy of praise though few said it would be their top choice in modern times. There are simply so many fine ales from several countries to render this \$10.00 sixpack something of an occasional treat. Not all fans felt the legend was worth the extra cash.

Celt Experience Bronze Ale

RATING: 4.5

Caerphilly, Wales

This organic ale is 4.5%, a tad stronger than their Native Storm, really more of a golden-amber than bronze in all illumination types we tested. The head is also larger, longer and whiter than Native Storm. Crystal malts and a stronger flavor distinguish it as well. It is quite smooth, dry, and long-hop in a mild bitter way. Like Native

Storm (reviewed below) it does have notes that suggest traditional fermented beverage tea. There are of course aspects of Camellia tea which suggest ale brewing, fermentation, roasting, and malty notes to be specific. It is a unique experience at this time (August 2012) on the US market as anything dry and bitter from the UK is not nearly this malt-strong. One could say there are faint parallels to mass market Bass Ale and New Castle but they are much thinner and less impressive overall.

Celt Experience Native Storm Ale

RATING: 4.0

Caerphilly, Wales

The first surprise from this Welsh brewery is the authentic USDA organic certification, closely followed by the 4.4% ABV analysis. The pour is dark golden-amber (officially "light brown"), the head dark cream and semi-lasting. The claimed "spicy" and "biscuit" flavors are subtle because it has a bitter aspect like it was brewed from actual fermented, UK tea of the Camellia sinensis variety. It does taste a bit like real Irish or British breakfast tea. It is quite odd in this respect and yet it is an alcoholic beverage apparently made with malt and hops. The finish gets more fully a medium bitter with more sips and it does not have the classic biscuity flavor the label promises. The "long dry hop finish" is clearly true but one is going to have a very different experience here - thus very, very good and valuable for ale tasting parties. Some folks are going to think you put a non-sweetened tea into a glass half full of amber ale.

Clipper City Heavy Seas 2008 Below Decks Barley Wine Style Ale

RATING: 4.0

Baltimore, Maryland

The label mentions a fine layer of yeast in the bottom but with a strong swish I saw a tad bit of sediment. In the glass it glows a medium amber, long deep cream head. First sip is a medley of fruit esters, some highly strange notes, a malt backbone, 10% ABV punch for sure, and faint hops of mixed character. A beer so full of flavor and EtOH in a 12 oz. package is not typical of any country and certainly not a US microbrew; although these very strong, potent limited edition things are coming out more frequently in the late 2000's. The label's "fire in the hole" cartoon shows dynamite in a keg above an ale keg. The fruitiness is nice and reviewers on the web and in print mention every damn genus and species in the produce department; and that tells me they either have a mass spec machine calibrated to all known fruit esters in their brain or are bluffing us with pretentious crap. It's generic tart fruit married to malt and any pompous chat about cherry or kiwi or pineapple is...um...that purple stuff birds leaves on our windshields when done analyzing fruit. The elevated ethanol level is expected in the barley wine but in this case it gets in the way of a respectable, well-mannered finish. It is dynamite and ale exploding below decks on the heaving seas but my stomach and tastebuds are not impressed with such raw excess for its own sake. The Belgians, Germans, and a hand full of American masters have found a way to deliver big alcohol and big flavor without it being a concussion deep into the chestwall and a boozy cringe to the tender oral buds.

Coastal/Fordham Pamlico Amber Ale

RATING: 3.5

Dover, Delaware

The label says this brew is from Coastal Brewing but they appear to be an imprint or subsidiary of Fordham. This stuff turned up in stores in NC in very late 2008 as a new microbrew. It's just 4.7% ABV and is surprising sweet for an amber. The sugaring covers over the modest flavors. It favors malt slightly over hops but not by too much. It's very smooth in the finish but is neither distinguished or really yummy on my tongue. It got more pleasantly tart after 3 bottles but it's another miss in my book; a try for experience only me lads.

Brewbase Fives



Coniston Bluebird Bitter

RATING: 5.0

Coniston, Cumbria, England

Winner of the 1998 CAMRA Supreme Champion Beer of Britain award, this light amber ale has a very long-lived, faintly aromatic head. Bottle-conditioned with Challenger hops from a single farm Ian Bradley and Rob Irwin also employ pale and crystal malts. The result is simply a revelation. The flavor is at once flavorful and yet remarkably smooth. It has the appeal of a dry bitter and all the charm of a rich pale ale. Given the state of imported British ales these days one is likely to associate this more closely with the best of American pales ales. As far we know Challenger hops are not typical of two many Brit bitters. It is simply the best British ale we've tried in some time. For those of us crown collectors the glowing, blue metallic cap is a gem. This was my favorite British Ale in 2000 of all new trials.

Coors Eisbock

RATING: 4.0

This long-gone product was at the time, the best coors product I'd tried until 1994. Eisbock in its original German form was the original ice-brewed beer with something that the latest Ice fad forgot - REAL FLAVOR. Happily this Spring 1994 Coors adventure is sweetly flavored with amber chocolate maltiness and rich pale golden amber color. This is undoubtedly the best Coors product ever! The packaging is genuine art and first rate. We are still looking for the promised creamy head and would like a richer finish. A 'must try' surprise.

Brewbase Fives



Cotleigh Barn Owl Premium Ale

RATING: 5.0

Wiveliscombe, Somerset, England

I got a three-pack of 500mlers from the Birds of Prey series, each bottle showing a near-Audobon quality bird portrait and each purchase supporting the Hawk and Owl Trust. While just 4.5% ABV, this beverage shouts true British ale with subtle nut flavors, toasty warm caramels, subtle malts, and bittersweet hops lovingly added to augment the finish. Goldings, Fuggles, and Northdown hops are layered upon each other. It pours such a flashy copper-amber nearly any other ale on the bar will look less interesting. Cotsleigh as a name dates from 1979 but this brewery has been around 200 years. Wonderful, a nicely consistent, true-to-style excellence in every way.

Cotleigh Tawny Owl Ale

RATING: 4.5

Wiveliscombe, Somerset, England

Like their 500ml Barn Owl, this tawny beast comes with a paler golden-amber color and a very mild 3.8% ABV. The consider it a session ale, loaded with mild fruit, also citrus, biscuity malts, and some toffee. It is far more

subtle except for the tanginess of the finish - less bitter than the Barn Owl. I find the true fruits more clear here and yes it is very session-worthy. I prefer it cold but not too frozen on the order of average American bar way of delivering things so frosty you can't tell if your tongue exists anymore. They have their own Cotsleigh yeast and in this respect the 200-year-old heritage trumps the 1979 origin of this particular label. Here is good education for the ale lover in all of us. Here's the real core of all differences between a truly weak, poor ingredient amber ale and one just low in ABV but loaded with quality subtle flavors. In the beer realm like most in life, there is a great difference between ambiance and shallowness, mildness and cheapness, reserve versus weakness.

Courage Amber Lager

RATING: 4.0

Staines, England

While John Courage has been around only since 1787 (young by European standards) this imported amber is now a worldwide classic. Even with the name it is surprisingly pale amber (only 'deep gold' in some opinions). The head is large but carbonation is scarce. Our panel agrees that flavor is 'delicate or subtle' (a few say too weak) and 'unusually sweet for a Brit'. A full bottle is deducted as the finish has some 'indecision' and many other ambers are out there with greater character, refinement, and depth. Since our original rating of '5' in 1990 a host of American, Canadian, and European ambers have taken a higher place. Standards are higher now. Courage is a has been and the lower price of 640ml bottles shows it. It's good but we can all find better.

Cricket Hill Colonel Blides Cask Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fairfield, New Jersey

There are not a lot of New Jersey brews out there and very few of any quality. This is one very notable, famous exception. The pour is dark amber under a rich cream head. Slightly sweet hops come first, then some curious malting, and finally a fairly sweet-tart finish. We frankly have not tasted anything exactly like it. That fact is often as bad a thing as a good one! It is overall an English Bitter Amber Ale in 5.5% ABV but more fruit-filled and citrus-accented than the Old World, UK version. Is there such a thing as an American Bitter Amber? The nose is deceptively timid and not indicative at all of the flavor procession. We found consumption of a full \$11.99 sixpack (June 2012 price) easy even if it seems overpriced. The hops especially are modern and approachable, favoring citrus and some apricot, yet overall the excessive tartness made it slightly annoying in quantity. Sipping or session with one bottle and no more is recommended for that reason.

Dergy's Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Wilmington, North Carolina

The Wilmington Brewing Co. of North Carolina produces both a golden and an amber ale at their microbrewery. The amber is bright with a very long lasting head of minute foamy bubbles - it lasts 10 minutes or more! The flavor is of the MALTY AMBER class. The finish is just a bit shallow and too dry for our tastes. This C O U L D easily be a perfect MALTY AMBER. It starts as a sweet malt soda but trails off into less flavor and more dryness than it needs. At this \$8.00 price (even nearby in NC) one expects an amber with just the right sophistication from start to finish. It is best when quite cold but anything warmer is to be avoided. The head is truly remarkable. It is well worth a try. We tried it against Rogue's Amber Ale and it was less complex.

Diamond Knot Vienna German-style Ale

RATING: 3.0

Mukilteo, Washington

We've heard of Vienna Lager and it's as legendary a Mozart string quartet and half as yummy. Of course, Vienna is in Austria and while she's a sister country to Germany, this name is akin to Canadian-style American flags or Mexican-style Statues of Liberty. This hazy amber ale has a near white head, 5.6% potency (or lack thereof), and a nose of Viennese hookers in the summer heat....rewind...spicy malt. The first notes are a faintly sour, later malt but weak in depth, the finish with some hops with more sour fruit notes. By their website this Vienna Ale is "our answer to Oktoberfest" about which a Vienna Lager would be more logical. This is not without merit but it is without praise from our panel - and some of us are soft-hearted and generous in evaluations. The sourish, malty take is a bit different but it's more curious and "something went wrong" from the folks here. These days one can bottle swamp water spiced with coriander and Goldings hops and someone will think it's either drinkable or brilliant. "The ship on the label might be the Titanic....jumble of sour flavors, some of them bad...barely a

brew at times...the very malty finish saves it and keeps me from spitting it out". Another reviewer recorded "These Diamond Knot folks are starting to piss me off...what are they trying to pull with this swill water?". In their favor: "kind of interesting...perhaps only desirable if very cold...thin but I am intrigued by the middle malt notes".



Dilworth Albemarle Ale

RATING: 5.0

Charlotte, North Carolina

Promoted as 'Carolina Fresh' this Southern microbrew was new to us in Raleigh in Fall 1994. It has no additives and preservatives and won a Bronze Medal at the 1992 Great American Beer Festival. Color is bright amber with a decent foamy head. Dilworth Brewing returned to brewing in 1989 to regenerate the roots of Atlantic Brewery closed in 1956. This beer is stunning. You first notice the aromatic quality. Then you get a malty molasses bite not unlike a good Scottish or Old Peculiar Ale. It has both strong character and a candy-like charm - It reminded us of the worldclass quality of a Bert Grant ale. \$8.00 a six and worth much more.

Dilworth Red Hot & Blue Brew

RATING: 4.0

Charlotte NC

This beer with guitar-playing pigs in Blues Brothers shades was made for the Red Hot and Blue club by Dilworth of Charlotte NC. Compared to their wonderful Albemarle Ale (Bronze Medal at GABF) this shares a similar aroma and candy- caramel flavor. Color is dark golden tinged amber and the head is white and long-lived. We're not prepared to say this and Albemarle are the same but the same theme is used. Both of them will be certain to thrill you. Even consumed at warm (car trunk) temps it was enjoyable - something that is true of almost any well-hopped or fully-malted microbrew.

Dogfish Head Raison D'etre Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

Very class amber look, no real carbonation after a minute, a rocky nice head. At 8% ABV we have a little of a cross between a dark Belgian product and a good American mahogany ale. Roasted malts come to the brain quickly, a trace of caramel, then a bit moe, and faint sugar, a pleasant bit of ethanol, then heavy fruit (figs?), more sugar malt, more dryness again. But like any hybrid it's just as apt to have the parent's flaws as their strengths. If anything, this is an dark ale by committee, not too extreme, less to offend, not too much one style or another, and thus a compromise, a refined one, but not an admirable, brilliant, or focused one. If I want these blended styles and presentations, I pretty much want a full blown, high ABV Belgian item. Besides I can always take a Belgian corked product on sale and blend it weaker to fit a specific meal. I'm not calling this Belgian Light but it is Belgian Compromised Down. Perhaps if one considers price you have a market here. Just not for me.

Dogfish Head Robert's Johnson's Hellhound on My Ale

RATING: 4.5

Milton, Delaware

The dark, somber bluish-grey bottle features glowing amber bits like the brew itself. The blue legend Robert Johnson plays a guitar while a wild, mangy hound dances menacingly behind him. WHO LET THE SATANIC DOGS OUT???? In 2011 when this brew was released was the 100th anniversary of his birth. Legend has it that this legend sold his soul to darker powers to make his musical gifts and legacy sure. The ABV is 10.0%, the IBU's

100, the SRM color 100, the hops 100% Centennial, and the brew length 100 - sort of lucky with the darkside numerology theme we suppose. Johnson's mentor was Blind Lemon Jefferson so the brew is augmented with lemon flavor.

The resultant pour is rich amber, the head cream and mid-high and the nost of malty-citrus. There is lemon tartness at mid note and stronger in the finish, a shade too strong for some on our panel. I frankly like a lemon mashed into some paler beers - typically wheats and "summer cooler" ales - unless of course it is to add actual flavor to something atrocious and watery like a Corona - and this works for some/most of us. The interplay of malt and citrus is a tricky thing and I think the choice of Centennial hops was a very wise one in terms of harmony and compatibility. I would not want a gallon of us down the pipes but in moderation this is a very pleasant brew, different, clever, and up to the usual Dogfish excellence. Best very cold to frigid. They have done better things but these themed projects are interesting, historical, and quite our interest alive. Fear the hellhound of boredom.

Duchy Originals Organic English Ale

RATING: 3.5

Highgrove, England

This is as close to TRUE royal beer, at least in the UK sense. This organic stuff is made by the Duchy folks AKA His Royal Highness Charles, Prince of Wales. The profits go to his charities says the label and it also qualifies for the USDA Organic seal. Color is rich amber, quite hazy at that, not as full on first sip as expected but nearly satisfying in the finish. This "traditional yet exclusive" recipe using Plumage Archer barley and meets HRH's goals for the company to "Protect and Sustain". Duchy Originals also makes baked goods, wine, cider, sparkling water, herbal tea, biscuits (cookies), soups, honey, and many things more. Guess they forgot the full, traditional flavor of real ale when putting out the hives and vineyards! This is nice on it's own, hardly strong enough for the price, and not what Charlie's land stands for. Didn't he spend hours and many TV shows proclaiming the weakening of British architectural standards? His own brewing standards would bear similar scrutiny. I've had ordinary cheap import Bass Ale give more flavor. Compare this to the equally organic St. Peter's English Ale (under Golden Ales) and the Duchy better go home.

The Duck-Rabbit Amber Ale

RATING: 3.5

Farmville, North Carolina

This beer pours bright amber with a nice cream head of limited duration. This proves to be my least of favorite of their several dark-toned products - and they do not due golden anything by choice. The malt is very earthy, quickly becoming thin towards the finish, a bit of tartness that is short-lived, and hops very limited at all flavor positions. Very faint spice and grain come out and these are quality-filled themes but reside far to the back and then not enduring. Sweetness is not high but a notch over medium; maybe 6 on a 10 scale. Yet at times one gets sour notes (overcoming the caramel), grainy density of mixed value, and odd tartness in place of legit fruit. I'll be brutally honest having experience with five of their products to date. This one needs to be hung up until repaired; more than a tire rotation, this one needs a turbocharger on the recipe or lots of fast-furious tuning. Their brown ale is decent and does what this one could or should. Obviously the two labels must be differentiated but this execution is as weak and untidy as the flavors. There are several ways they can go to keep this different from the nice brown ale. It's their worst product of five tried and was a disappointment. The dishelved duck has fat furry ears and the calico, mottled rabbit is treading water for his very life. I've noted some online reviews which gave it a B+ or A grade from the tap version. Perhaps it only the bottled stuff that is bewildering, in disarray, and underpowered.

Brewbase Fives



Eel River Triple Exultation Ale

RATING: 5.0

Scotia, California

With the large bottle, barrel-aged status, and the word Triple in the name, I'd expected another California copy of a Belgian Brown Ale or at least a strong amber in a Flemish style. It is classed by the brewing house themselves as Old Ale, whatever that means. That would be a traditional, strong English ale with lots of malt and fruit in general terms. Old Peculiar was their model according to the website. The "ramped up" the ingredients to nearly 100 IBU, 24.0 OG, and the alcohol to a firm 9.7%. They call it the "Ozzy Osbourne of Old Ales" and I'm not sure if that means it's full volume and head-biting wild OR impossible to decipher and a more than a bit past it. Ozzie does look a bit aged in a barrel now that I think of it and Sharon more than bright amber; their children in reality Stout in build and Light in talent. (Sorry, I couldn't fit fruity sediment or any ample yeast joke into the analogy).

The color is a rich, darkish amber and the bottle swirls with delicious sediment. It is magically fruity in flavor, almost a diverse fruit punch of yummy notes, and yet with some bitter hops in the finish. And I mean "fruit punch" in the sense of homemade 100% juice punch using 22 different organic, tropical fruits and not that canned, dyed, corn syrup that has no relationship to Hawaii or actual fruit at all. It won a Gold at 2006 GABF and a Silver in 2005 at the Worlds. The current version, at least, is Certified Organic, and I cannot think of another high-scored ale with the organic plus working for it. The alcohol is somewhat noticeable, always in a good way tempered by full fruit esters and a little sweetness. Like many beers the hops kind of stick to your tastebuds (or brain) and get more obvious later on. The brewery's comparison to Old Peculiar is well...peculiar. That legendary beer is much more densely medicinal, dark as wood stain, and with more dripping Blackstrap than all the S&M parlors in Tribeca. Caramel malt holds it all together, overall a competent balance, and fruit trades off with toffee treats throughout the mid notes. Finish is fruity dry with following malt of intermediate strength, then a bit sweeter until your tongue detects some EtOH. You really want to drink it all up rather than move on the next bottle - and that is a compliment of the highest order in this field.

8 (Eight) Wired O for Awesome Imperial Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Marlborough, New Zealand

Looking like a hybrid between a Pergo display and a Wheel-of-Fortune set, this double or imperial amber impresses from the first pour, a dark brownish-amber tone under a light tan head. The 9% ABV suggests they mean business, serious wired, NZ brewing business. The history in faint silver letters over the faux wood label is both hard to read and comprehend. It is part IPA and part Scottish Ale in theme, using local NZ malts and hops. The dosing is very full as is the alcohol punch, mitigated and made sweet with delightful complex fruity notes. The finish presents itself as "unduly bitter" in words of one panelist and the following alcohol jab does not improve that lingering palette either. It almost has the choice, rich, sophisticated qualities of a Thomas Hardy ale or a premium barrel-aged brew from a leading US micro. Almost but falling a tad short. But almost any fool with enough muscle, wheel barrows, and trucks can brew up something potent and dark. Is this strong for it's own horn or strong-awesome? It is good but not especially yummy-enjoyable though better at a bit of a warmer temp to us. The vaunted 5-bottle brew to us or in our system Award of Merit brews just come up and bite you are being irresistible and wonderful beyond measure. There is very little debate, resipping, or careful swilling analysis needed. They grab you by the tastebuds and scream out their brilliance. This one is full, pleasant enough if sipped in session manner (very overhearing guzzled cool and quickly) but fails the instant "holy wow" test of a truly great imperial anything. If you like a nice quality fruit together with your hops and rich malts, this is a nice brew but it is stronger than it is truly refined. It is almost amber beer syrup concentrate instead of

being a fully ready, drinkable product. Vanna is awesome (or was) and this one leaves a couple of letters unturned in the final tally of things.

Elephant Red

RATING: 3.0

Canada

This tri-lateral beer is the work of Labatt of Canada under a license from Carlsberg (Elephant Beer) of Denmark under the marketing power of Anheuser-Busch of the old USA. The REAL Carlsberg Elephant beer is quite impressive but this red amber fluid from up north is not so ideal. It is semi-sweet (sugars are a cheap way to add appeal) and the flavor is clearly malty. The large white letters that proclaim '5.6 % alcohol' tempt one to a quicker and deeper 'buzz'. This beer is better than most A-B or Canadian brews but where complexity and hops are needed we only find a malty 'pop' with a bright coloration. At \$6.50 this is no bargain. At that price and with a beast so much bigger than a red wolf or red dog we would expect more power.

Elk Mountain Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Merrimack, New Hampshire

This product of Anheuser-Busch's Special Brewing Group is one of the finest things A-B has ever put their name on. Color is very bright orange (not nearly a reddish-amber). The earth tone label with a beautiful and elegant elk is real art. Unfortunately neither the bottles nor the packages gives any clues as to the processes or ingredients, leaving us with some questions concerning its unusual color, additives, preservatives, and usual tricks found in the A-B and 'Big Four' brewing labs. The flavor is nice with malt and hops well filled out and a finish that goes from sweet to rather dry in one second. It is not perfect nor hugely well-rounded but at \$5.50 or so has potential we hop they explore. It is far superior to Red Wolf.

Epic Cross™ Fever Amber Ale (Classic Series)

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

Early pros are 1) the cyclo-cross rider with bike on the label - I'm tired of ghosts and flying creatures on my labels, 2) sweet caramel nose and notes, 3) just \$4.99 (Feb. 2012) for a small bomber. Cons would be our past experience with the Classic Series vs. their two higher levels and just 4.8% ABV. The malts hit you by sip four of five unlike earlier and the hops are straight-forward smooth on the moderate side - the malts favor sweet in many passages but not all. One must decide if the malt is just moderate-restrained, semi-weak, or downright weak. I favor the first but not everyone did. Four bottles seems about right from our collective argum...I mean discussion. In all cases, there are far finer ambers even though few as good in this price range.

Fiddler's Green Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Utica, NY

The color is rich amber, the head full beige, and the aroma a sweet tantalizing hint of malt. The head will last all day. The flavor is grainy malt much like some German darks, moderately sweet and not overdone on that front. There are some thin or hollow notes toward the finish and these intensify as the temp drops. It must be served more cold than an amber usually requires for this reason. The nice dose of "comfort malts" is remarkable and gives the beer a substance behind the density of the ingredients. Hops is virtually absent except in faint echos in the background. I found it engaging but not completely memorable a week out. (Try 30-40 beers some week and 7 days later have yourself recite unaided from memory the best ones back in order. It's an interesting experience). It is surprisingly Germanic in style, a fair copy, and priced to move on that theme alone.

[PLEASE LINK TO WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM](http://WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM)

First Reserve Southern

RATING: 4.5

Winston-Salem, NC

This bright amber brew has a deep, enduring head of ivory foam. It absolutely fills the air with hops with even a

remote sniff. The flavor is however not overly hopped and the dose of the Liberty variety is enhanced with ginger - something done by Old Raleigh Brewing of that nearby city. Drum-roasted carmel malts add to the flavorful yet smooth mix. Overall we'd class it as a SWEET HOP- PED AMBER ALE, being different from the majority of microbrew Pale Ales in this country. Reviewers noted 'skillful blend of hops and ginger with only hints of malt...a brew stronger or weaker would be less fulfilling...just perfect.' and 'a bit too sweet like ginger marmelade for my taste in ales...very worth- while experience'. Beautiful label looks aged a hundred years. Nice cap too.

Fordham Copperhead Ale

RATING: 3.5

Dover, Delaware/Maryland

Fordham was established a brewery in 1703 and re-established as a modern microbrewery in 1995. This is their flagship beer and one honoring a Dusseldorf style. Color is rich amber and carmel malty goodness comes to fore, even if not highly saturated. It is a good moderate flavor product with 4.7% ABV. It is stronger at first than the finish, that later being a tad rough and metallic at times though never horrible. It is very approachable, hops being light, and sweetness well controlled down the center. It is more of a mixture of flavors than a refined, integrated brew. I suspect the recipe is not the old one from 1703 for it needs some fine tuning. Reviews in the trade and media are everything from A to C- and one can find both alot of good and raggedness in this product. I tend to think the ragged bits should be point deductions and potential not considered one whit. There are too many firms in this business to reward effort alone. Bring your best and pay the fine. We're all adults here and \$8.25 per six is real money. Nice product just not one of my top 300. It would be easy to "dose up" the brew but there is more needed than more ingredients.

Flying Dog Old Scratch

RATING: 3.0

Denver, Colorado

Broadway Brewing makes this bright amber ale with a lasting ivory head of minimal size. While their other ales had real substance proves much thinner though decently hopped. The finish is the flaw once again. 'For the itch that ales you' we'd try some of their others. They use 4 malts and 2 hops with a bottom-fermenting yeast that operates at ale temperatures. Even the label confesses 'medium bodied' and so too the word 'crisp' is usually a hint we have less substance. Reviewers noted 'fine ingredients but not enough of them or long enough brewing...weakish in short' and 'hoppy and refreshing but not rich like a good pale ale...I know 100 better ambers'.

Flying Fish Exit 9 Hoppy Scarlet Ale

RATING: 4.5

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

These \$9.50 bottle-conditioned bombers named for the famous NJ Turnpike exits are a fine value. This one near Rutgers U. is curious for it is dark gold under strong light and medium amber under my home conditions. If it was a red or scarlet ale when it when in the bottle, something very odd happened. Odd or not it is wonderful for the Chinook, Amarillo, Centennial, and Citra hops combine for remarkable harmony, rich, satisfying, and very comforting as hoppy ales go. It is big but not bold, rich but not overpower, subtle without wanting much. This is a label to watch and I for one will visiting every exit than comes my way.

Foster's Special Bitter

RATING: 4.0

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

No we didn't make a mistake. Foster's (at list in this trim) is from Toronto Canada too. They would be the kin from "Up Over" I suppose. Familiar Carlton & United of Melbourne licensed this SB (Special Bitter) to FBG Breweries. Color is medium to pale amber and the head is bubbly and quick. Carbonation is moderate. Flavor is a rather sweet balance of malt of hops in a tempered but apprecible dose. The hops finish has a pleasant and slight bitterness but this is far from the worldclass Fuller's ESB or other topnotch UK bitters. The sweetness and market timing would put it with Oktoberfest beers although at \$7.00 some of the good German ones are priced less. For Foster's this is a real improvement. But there are just too many SWEET AMBERS in the world and many British-style bitters that it's just another good beer.

French Broad 13 Rebels ESB Ale

RATING: 4.0

Asheville, North Carolina

I've always loved the Highland Brewery beers from out west in my home state of North Carolina. French Broad is a newcomer (opening in 2000) in the increasingly crowded SE USA market. They tag this product first with their 2002 WBC Gold Medal, not a bad start 2 years running. The "copper colored British style pale ale" has "biscuity malt, dark fruit notes, a BIG hoppy finish. The website says 4.8% ABV but my bottle bought at Whole Foods Raleigh NC in October 2008 said 5.2%. They will be competing with Rogue in our market with 22 oz. brightly colored offerings. Color is amber, favoring golden hues, very long lace, nice ivory head. It is not copper under any light known in the form I purchased. It has bitter BIG hops but it's no hop tea like a Sierra Nevada feast. It is probably toned down a bit (not always a bad thing) to be more drinkable and marketable. It is not extreme but it's full enough and classy. It's polished but I find fruit notes a'wantin' folks. It is balanced if you want hops a tad on the bitter side, not overwhelming but real, polished but not overdone or artificially altered with anything. It's somewhat memorable but perhaps that's not memorable at all. I like it and good down gallons of it but anyone outside the southeast or North Carolina would have little reason to seek it out.

Fuller's 1845 Bottle Conditioned Ale

RATING: 4.5

London, England

Actually the folks at Griffin have been brewing since 1654 but this partnership under the Fuller, Smith, and Turner name dates to 1845. This dark amber ale is covered in a lasting brownish head. It is intensely flavored in malt with enough hops to round things off. It was so strong in the malt vein that some casual drinkers did not find its taste pleasant. In other words, it might be an acquired taste unless potent malt is something you've learned to savor before. Some felt it crossed too far into the 'medicinal-herbal' side of flavoring (though it is NOT an Indian Pale Ale) while others relished such a distinct and strong beer. We did a few blends and some of us liked a 70-80% cut a bit more. It is as finely crafted as it is controversial.



Fuller's 2009 Bottle Conditioned Vintage Ale

RATING: 5.0

London, England

The textured maroon box with a linen and gold-trimmed label is fit for a fine Scotch. I am still trying to figure out what a 1 point 0.9 oz. bottle is but it's mighty tiny for \$12.95. It is amber, faintly cloudy, the head big and yellowish-tan. Brew Master John Keeling says he used Goldings hops, Tipple malted barley, and their own yeast to make the limited 160,000 bottles of which my first was 143920 and stamped as such. This is the 12th year of

the Vintage Ale product and first of it seen in North Carolina. It is a candy-ale but more sticky than sweet. The rich caramel flavors soak into the deep, rich malts for a product so heavenly one wished all beers were so bottle-aged and finely crafted. This nectar of the London gods (and they have one of those funny British accents of course) is remarkable, memorable, and one of the best beers tried thus far into 2011. Fullers is no new kid of the bottle-conditioned block and it shows. Here we have an ale so perfect for this genre. If you like your ales more bitter this will seem too much like great, handmade malt candy. If you like ales of this toasty, yummy stripe it will enter your dreams until the 2010 is available next year.

Geary's Hampshire Special Ale (HSA)

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Maine

This product of the famous Geary Brewing Co. is a vibrant amber with a long head of old ivory color. Aroma is moderate to slight but the first taste accelerates one quickly to pinnacles of amber ale excellence. The sweet:bitter hops manifestations are balanced very perfectly and with enough malt to complicate rather than veil the hops. After two or bottles, the bitter hops settles down on the tastebuds and it grows to nearly IPA proportions until the palet is cleansed. I like it very much but it is fairly hard to find on the east coast most of the time. There has never been a bad Geary's beer.

Great Divide Arapahoe Amber Ale

RATING: 3.5

Denver, Colorado

Made from 2201 Arapahoe St. in Denver this is the 'flagship ale' of a company now receiving more widespread distribution. Firstly, high marks for the scenic caps and tastefully asymmetrical photo labels - COLLECTORS OF DO TAKE NOTE. Color is dark golden-pale amber with a big cream head. It won the 1996 Bronze Medal at the Great American Beer Festival in the Festival-Scottish Style Ale class. It could be a fest beer but Scottish is pushing it. It is by no means a very potent ale (it is barely amber for one thing) but does have a certain refreshing, dry ale quality. It is slightly malty with medium hops bitterness and no fruit notes per se; someone did say 'dry apple' however. With a price over \$7.00 most of us would have expected more depth and character.

Gritstone Premium Ale

RATING: 5.0

Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

Niagara Falls Brewing (Canadian side) produces this bright amber ale in 22 ounce bottles for \$5.25 or so. The head is large and bubbly but can be short-lived. Carbonation endures. The flavor is a fine feast of rich hops quality with minor malty and semi-sweet herbal notes. There is some chocolate aroma as one gets from a much darker brown ale. Reviewers were much impressed and most of us agreed that 'this is the finest Canadian ale in ages... not since McAuslan Pale Ale has a Canadian brewery been so spectacular.'. Not one reviewer complained about the price - a price which is higher than some European imports of similar size. We are forced to place this on our 'must try - no exceptions' list. It is truly world-beating and a wonderful find.

Gritty McDuff's Best Bitter

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Maine

This bright BITTER AMBER ALE is a microbrew with a lasting off-white head. The hops quality is remarkable and instantly you know you have a true winner. There is also enough malt to make a fine balance. We tested it with Old Thumper Extra Special (Bitter) Ale, another Portland microbrew, and this is the more dry and hoppy of the two. However both will thrill most ESB lovers to no end. Reviewers remarked 'wonderfully deep...clearly from a refined recipe' and 'it would easily please most diehard Real Ale enthusiast on either side of the Atlantic'. Highly recommended.

Grolsch Autumn Amber

RATING: 4.5

With all the new imports becoming available around the country one of the great brands has been forgotten. For some beer enthusiasts in the 80's Grolsch was the first really good beer they tried after getting bored with Heineken. This new product is orange amber ('color of Indian Summer' what- ever that means) with a

respectable head. The flavor is quite pleasing al- though neither hops and malt flavors are clearly defined. It has semi-sweet virtues that make it drinkable near room temperature and the 'nose' is nicely developed. The word 'well-balanced' seems most appropriate. This top- fermented brew has no flowery hops character nor malty potency but it is simply competent and truly complete with a diversity of flavor elements. I have not seen this product in the US in years and do miss it some.

Harpoon Alt

RATING: 2.5

Boston, Massachusetts

This AMBER ALE is dark reddish brown so we have no idea why the label says 'deep copper'. The head is ivory and lasting. The described 'strong hop bitter- ness' is barely evident and only at first. The finish is decidedly watery though dry. It is official 'well attenuated' but we found the harpoon on the label was the only fitting that word. While it does have the general core of a bitter ale there are some very hideous bitters and odd thin places. A few reviewers that normally drink anything in a free beer found it hard to swallow. Given the nature of their other offerings it was almost unanimously a 'don't bother' beer. One reviewer like it a bit and said 'good color and head...subtle hops take a few bottles to figure out' while to another 'something went wrong that day'.

The first few sips are moderate with a healthy blend of hops and malt. Once your tastebuds get to that wondrous state of hops saturation, these tall bottles become even more appealing. This product is fully the equal of anything from the great ale masters at Rogue. Reviewers note 'spirited hops...delightfully deceptive.. very rewarding...I'll remember this one' and 'would prefer a notch or two more malt to round it out...but I was impressed overall.'

Jack Daniels American Ale

RATING: 4.5

Lynchburg, Tennessee

JD now offers 3 different beers and we almost unanimously agreed this was the most superior - and by some measure too. Color is bright red amber and the head is tall, beige, and finely foamed. Flavor is mid-strength malt and hops, some- what favoring the former, and finishing very sweet. It could pass for a decent Oktoberfest beer. However there is a bit of a carmel-candy flavor that gives the sweetness a superior quality. Some would prefer a more potent flavor but most of us thought it was strong enough for casual drinking. Reviewers noted a 'very big surprise...moderately sweet and malty...very appealing' and 'the only JD [of the three] I'd buy again'. The finish adds more bitter hops than the first bite. At \$6.99 it is certainly superior to some \$8-10 microbrews. In summer 2010, the JD labels are gone from our North Carolina shelves save for some mixed drink thingies. When in Tennessee I would and have sought out the bourbon-barrel-aged beers for most of them are rich, yummy, and affordable there.

Johnson's Authentic Amber Ale

RATING: 3.0

Charlotte, North Carolina

Tim and Susan Johnson of Charlotte NC produce this amber which is a pale 'punkin color and has a small lasting head. First taste conveys some nice yet mild malt and hops notes but it quickly enters into a dry and thin finish. Having been treated to some excellent ales of late from Rogue and others we find this one sadly lacking. Even your basic Bruin and Miller Reserve amber products carry more flavor and with greater complexity to keep one amused. This is clearly an AMBER LIGHT in our book although even the Cardinal Amber Light was more deep and pleasing. We like to encourage newer companies so we hope they'll merely turn up the flavor two notches and thrill us next year. Not recommended as is this year at \$7-8.00.

King and Barnes Broadwood Ale

RATING: 3.5

Horsham, Sussex, England

Subtitled the 'Best British Ale' this amber, aromatic ale has a long-lasting ivory head. It is named for the Broadwood families who are more famous for their pianos. Goldings hops are used in modest measure and the outcome is a semi-sweet finish a few of us though was less than semi at times. Like their Old Porter it had a few finishing flaws even though dated well within the normal span of things - in all cases. Reviewers noted 'if you like your hops sweet but not full of carmel...come here.' and 'sugar and flavor but without the complex malting

I've come to identify with a British import'. It may be their best but it's surely not the country's best.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Lagunitas Wilco Tango Foxtrot

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

By now the name Lagunitas always gets my attention when the local shops get a new label. This esteemed brewery makes some great stuff and some that is simply mind-expanding. This brown ale is subtitled (and my God beer names are getting longer every week!): A Malty, Robust, Jobless Recovery Ale. WTF = What the F*ck or Where the Fu*k unless you happen to belong to the World Taekwondo Federation or in South Park...World Takedown Federation. Then there's some bit about if we're not in the black nor in the red, we must be in the brown (ale). At 7.83% you get your money's worth but if one is jobless you'd better be on your third Pabst Blue Ribbon instead of enjoying one of these with me - yet. It pours dark amber-brown, not porter-brown but rich brown ale in color. They call it an Imperial Brown Ale but others place it with American Strong Ale. This is a Limited Release first for March 2010 when we neither jobs nor recovery but lots of brown oil on shores and lots of beer to drown out sorrows in.

The malt is surprising matched with strong but mellow hops, both of the highest quality, and it being very finely judged in this respect. They were very even-handed with the hops bucket as with the barley barrel. More hops-hounds would probably like the brown ale better if more them were this hoppy and had an elevated ABV level too. The parity and interplay of hops and malt, each one layered and above ordinary, is remarkable. The hops are buttery yet bitter enough, almost a high-end, limited style Sierra Nevada sort of easiness -

and for any brewery that should be considered a complimentary comparison. Cold or warmed at the table, this is one very impressive brown ale, better than most from any land. Here is a very worthy brown ale, different and sound in all those differences, and deserving a good search or long road trip.



Brewbase Fives



J.W. Lees Harvest Ale 2011 (Autumn Limited Edition)

RATING: 5.0 (Award of Merit 2012)

Manchester, England

This luminous amber pour has a rich cream head and a whopping, brain-cell-harvesting 11.5% ABV level. "This fully fermented, robust ale has been brewed as a celebration of the brewer's art...like a vintage wine for years to come". I can never age these J.W. Lees products. They simply have no shelf life at my house for I cannot bear to not consume ever drop that enters my door within the same hour. This is one firm I will always forgive for selling a tiny 9.3 US fluid ounces and somehow managing to do so for just under eight bucks. Curiously this was best bargain of the fall in beer buying. One panelist (he paid for his own freakin' bottle) said "bloody strong ale-nectar". Could BSAN become a new ale style? The pour is very amber, head mid-cream, smallish yet enduring, the nose like fine, sweet liquor. Wait...just got four more drops from my bottle...wait...one more. This autumnal gem is confection-rich yet substantial, supremely delicious; not a candy beer really but I think this high ethanol would make that some very fine, gold-by-the-drop candy. Three more drops. This ambrosial formula is executed to perfection as JWL is apt to do, producing precious drops of a carameluscious nature. If they sold this stuff in growlers for 10 bucks I would be found lounging behind a beer shop somewhere in patch of damp kudzu for the rest of my life starting tomorrow. To call this devine would be to suggest there is a diety capable of making a beverage as orgasmic and otherworldly as this. Wait for it...no lightning. Good. The best two brews ever made JC's HOLY SPIRITS 'DEVIL BE DAMNED' ALE Aged in Gopher Wood from Noah's Ark flavored with Bethlehem Wise Man-brand Myrrh circa 32 A.D. and this label. That is a bit of...you know. This is a very righteous and admirable brew, flawless, cultured, and worth every single drop. Oh, oh, oh...might get one more. Better run to run to our three Total Wines and get every last offering.

Left Hand Chainsaw Double Sawtooth Ale

RATING: 4.0

Longmont, Colorado

Usually classified as an American Strong Ale, this 9% product has an immense creamy head and the color of chestnuts. Early version of the label showed a tree trunk being

sawed in half but the latest 2010 version shows a wild, evil-eyed tree trunk in what can only be described as firstclass label art. It has slightly sweet hops and not nearly as much as I had expected given it's deep hue. It is akin to a moderate strength pale ale augmented with caramel and toffee notes. There is faint fruit (grapefruit and lemon) after two classes of saturation and more dryness than found in first sips. The hops is unabated throughout the process and those rich, piney notes never let up. It is nicely crafted and made of the right things and apparently long enough - yet I do not find an affinity to it. It is special just not very special.

Leinenkugel's Autumn Gold

RATING: 3.5

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

This fall 1995 introduction uses 7 varieties of hops and 2 versions of Yakima hops. But as noted before with their other labels is there ENOUGH OF THE VARIETY? Color is pale amber (not nearly gold) and the head medium long. Once again we find the beer some few increments too weak for the majority of ordinary beer lovers. There is a semi-sweet start with interesting hop character. Sadly it trails off into a very 'common finish that suggests more corn syrup than depth of ingredients'. Reviewers noted 'I think they tried but not long enough' and 'a fair value at \$5.19 but not memorable'. We do want to give high marks for a very beautiful foiled label with lovely trees and a covered bridge.

Lost Coast Amber Ale

RATING: 4.5

This medium amber-colored ale has a nice lasting head and is very flavorful from the first second on the tongue. It is quite fruity and gives us everything that was missing from their Downtown Brown Ale. It is the best of their ale products in our opinion - excluding the Stout which is also perfect and made with ale yeast. It makes a fine comparison with Anderson Valley Boont Amber but it was hard for us to pick one over the other.

Maclay Eight Shilling Export Ale

RATING: 4.0

Alloa, Scotland

This amber ale has a rich creamy head and is what they term a 'Scots heavy'. All the tradition of copper kettles and a century old cellar are there. They call the taste 'mellow, malty'. It is certainly less hoppy than their Wallace IPA nor is this a Scotch Ale in the usual sense. The malt and hops are moderate (not full) and are counterpointed with such skill it was a favorite with many tasters. Yet it was not rich enough for some nor mellow enough for others - in this regard the rating suffered a bit. There are certainly many other real UK ales to buy and this is above many of the mass market ones. Yet it is not entirely memorable - just competent and compromising in a good sense. Some of you will give it a perfect score.

Magic Jinx

RATING: 4.5

South Burlington, Vermont

The grinning thing on the label of this 6.9% product appears at first to be some New Age flower but has a vaguely scrotal aspect below the central heart. Drinking the stuff will make all that stuff do everything but go away - ask a friend next time in the bar. If you look long enough it's really three flesh-colored hearts plus a face. Color is dark brownish amber, flavor favoring malt but with comfort of a little hops, curiously balanced and am not certain how! This stuff has COMFORT as it's major theme. It's very appealing, one of those recipes that is just right - or "spot on" as they say in London. There's a bit of smoke to the malt, an Ovaltine-molasses drink in moderation. There are in fact Scottish Ale Light aspects to it without that implying an deficiency or lack of necessary flavor. Sweetness to moderate-high but it's not syrupy. I'm almost convinced we have a FRUIT-NUT-MALT tempered with molasses notes here in the final analysis. I'd guess some fruit flavor was added and there is very likely some real or fake hazelnut infused as well. To say it's mysterious would be a vast understatement. After two bottles savored many ways with all those snobbish tasting tricks was barely enough. One reviewer I respect said he thought it was a Scottish Ale blended with brown sugar and some fruit flavorings - add hazelnut

and we might have it all down. Maybe. Or not. Do give this enigma a date on your next beer tasting!

Their website is a slow and hideously useful as their beer is great - you get something approaching an adventure game but on wi-fi broadband there's no useful information until the programmers have done their cute, annoying things. After forty-four passes of the magic blimp I gave up on finding anything useful about this and any other label.



Magic Hat Roxy Rolles Hoppy Amber Ale

RATING: 5.0

South Burlington, Vermont

Before I move on, let's give this artful, inspired label some kind of beer label award. Wow. This stuff pours large and tall and with a head like magic expanding fire-fighting foam. The color is dark amber, brownish in the tones, and the gigantic head beige. There's a flavor cliff here. Hops fills the nose and then the first one or two taste notes, then you finish with brown malt added to velvet perfection. Magic Hat has been a revelation among even jaded foam sippers with decades under their bulging belts whose buckles can no longer be seen. If there's not a Magic Hat cult in all 50 states before long I'd be shocked. (Do these folks have a stock offering? The way my 401K is looking I'll set it door to door myself). This is one of their signature, truly magic products and I'd recommend it for everyone thinking they've tried every good variation on "tons of hops + tons of malt = crafty, cool beer". I could almost give up the IPA style if they all come with this much malt in the balance. This stuff is effective without being a spurred club to the tastebuds, a strapping entry in the "more is more" school of brewery, potent but never offensive, a sturdy item I will use to impress friends just off the 747 from the Europe.



McNally's Extra Ale

RATING: 5.0

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

I have not tried it since but found it my favorite Canadian amber ale in the 90's - that's perhaps like saying it's

my favorite Czech Republic, all-girl heavy metal band. Big Rock of Calgary Alberta produces this 'Irish style golden ale' that is rich golden amber with a bubbly head. It has a pleasant bitterness at first taste but it finishes very smooth and fruity. It is quite aromatic and also has a long malt finish - thus not for use with subtle foods. It is one of finest Canadian beers we know and is vastly superior to familiar brands. At \$8 for six 11.5 oz. bottles it is pricey. Distinct and very charming.

Mendocino Eye of the Hawk Select Ale

RATING: 4.5

Saratoga Springs, New York

This is the big, powerful brother of the more widely sold Red Tail Ale, it already being a very fine product. First thing you notice on the packaging is enormous red hawk head. Nice art. Next is the amazing 8% ABV tag. Soon I noticed it was not from CA but this microbrewed in NY instead. It is a dark amber, rich in malty nose but some hops tang there too. The head is large and light tan. First sip is a loaded, luxuriant presentation of malt and hops at near equal force, following a far more hoppy, bitter finish of excellent quality. As sips continue, some are more malt-saturated than others. The ABV is apparent with a bit of time under the suds and yet it does not offend in the least! One reviewer here thought "the high ethanol and generous hops conspired to produce some overly intense, bitter moments...not many, just more than I wanted". The sweetness is very evident but not excessive and I think it is absolutely necessary given the high dosing of alcohol and ingredients. In our latest terminology it does indeed qualify as an Imperial Amber Ale, stronger and more intense in all the aspects.

As pleasant as this ale is - and be forewarned that three consumed quickly can knock most folks into "silly space" - I did not adore it or what some taste testers call "love at first sip". For one thing, there seems to be a simplicity in the malts and hops that perhaps more diversity of them would cure - something the good barleywine ales do very nicely. "The eye", a very substantial ale was first offered in 1984 "in response to customer demand for a wider variety of our traditionally brewed ale". A special proprietary yeast is used with pale and caramel malts. It won First Place in the 2nd International Label Competition among 800 labels from 115 companies. So what is missing. First, I think the malt complexity could benefit from four malts, probably another couple of hop varieties in the mix (or at least a less harsh selection of them), and something to wrangle those very bitter moments that can grab you like a raptor from out of the sky and leave you helpless.

Mendocino Red Tail Ale

RATING: 4.5

Mendocino, California

Using a blend of pale ale and caramel malted barley this amber ale tends to have a slightly dry taste. It has transitional fruity and herbal tastes what are pleasant. It has good aroma and pleasant complexity. It is from Mendocino Brewing Co. of Hopland CA. It has 5.5% alcohol and has been sold in CA since 1983. It remains popular around the US in grocery stores.

Michelob Amber Bock

RATING: 3.0

St. Louis, Missouri

Packaged in black and gold (like the recent Jack Daniels beer) this label attempts to give Michelob a premium image. Even at \$6.00 there is nothing more than beautiful packaging. The amber color is just fine but only the slightest hint of the roasted malt and the weakest nip of hops are apparent. One reviewer said 'just when a strong finish with hops bitterness or other complexity might have saved it, a weak unpalatable watery nature appears.' Then there were the bad puns like 'send it Bock' or 'this Bock was made PDO'. Even for Michelob Dark drinkers it may disappoint and to ANYONE this price is a joke. When a label says 'Brewed with only the finest...' and then you see the word 'rice' - beware. Cheap grains don't belong in \$6.00 sixpacks!!!

Miller Reserve Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

This dark green-packaged product was a stunning surprise. It is by far the best Miller beer available. For just \$3.99 (1993) or so per sixpack it is the finest American ale in that price range. Color is rich amber and the flavor has many of hoppy details that make Sierra Nevada Pale Ale a true treat. At the price it one of the best values in

this database. As of October 1993 we find it scarce. We knew Miller could do it. This is a welcome sign for the future.

Murphy's Irish Amber

RATING: 4.5

Cork, Ireland

Self-described as 'deep golden' rather than amber, this beer quite firmly emphasizes a smooth malt flavor. What hops flavor exists is very mild and contributes only a slight amount of bitterness. It is semi-sweet and reminded some of us of the Aass label. It is certainly distinct among the more widely marketed beverages in the American market. There are those of course who prefer a balance between hops and malt - they'll not find it here. Yet this label will not overwhelm one as might a malty brown ale. It is perhaps an acquired taste but for a refreshing, change of pace there would be few better choices on the malty amber front. The label and cap are legitimate high design and among the most classy in the business. A distinct amber - yet not for everyone.



Neptune 66 Premium Ale

RATING: 5.0

Manhattan NY

Maybe bottled salsa from New York City (see the PACE commercial) is a bad thing but ale is another story. This stuff is rich medium amber with a faint cloudy haze. Flavor is ale fruity with a rich but smooth hop dose that holds nothing back. With the vast array of amber ales in the American microbrew market we need to single out ones like this as truly superior and above the crowd. Reviewers noted 'sweetish, hop drenched, and simply delish...not a single fault to find' and 'yeasty fruit flavor (missing in so many modern ales) and refined hops...satisfying but not overwhelming like some pale ales...good daily drinking ale'. We don't see this one as often as we'd like. If you can find some it is well worth an \$8.00 price or more. This could win some medals given a fair shot.

New Amsterdam Amber u raa 5.0 241 This is one of several rich and alluring beers to be brewed from Utica NY. Using a lager yeast with crystal and roasted malt in small handmade batches they have fashioned one of America's best flavorful beers - as several competition wins will show. The color is medium amber and the head only slightly persistent. It compares favorably with Portland Lager which in our area is more available.

New Amsterdam New York Ale u raa 5.0 243 This amber-colored ale uses dry-hopping with the Cascade kind and aging to produce a truly flavorful product. While it shares some of the floweriness of Adams Boston Stock Ale it is a very different brew in color and flavor. It is an excellent compromise between a high-flavored amber and very smooth premium beer that is consumable in some quantity. It satisfies without over-loading the tastebuds. Even the package describes 'aromatic oils and resins'.

New England Atlantic Amber Ale

RATING: 3.0

Norwalk, Connecticut

This CT borne AMBER ALE is additive-free and is a freshness-dated. The color is bright copper with a smallish but lasting head. Flavor is mostly malty but on the moderate to thin side. There are enough hops to notice. The finish is semi-dry. At the \$7.99 price most reviewers felt it was very lacking in complexity as well as intensity of flavors. There are just too many fine other ambers in that price range to recommend this one. Reviewers on our panel noted such things as 'more of a LIGHT MALT AMBER...nicely colored...need more zip' and 'Boulder Igloo Ale, Jack Daniels American Ale, and most Rogue ales are much superior in this price range'.

Brewbase Fives



New Holland Hopivore™ Michigan Wet-hopped Harvest Ale

RATING: 5.0

Holland, Michigan

When I saw this 4-pack going for \$15.00 at my local 400-label beer shop (Peace Street Market in Raleigh NC...plug, plug) I bit only because of the "wet-hopped" word - and because this is such a rare thing these days. I mostly know this "best practice", raise-the-bar brewing standard from Sierra Nevada and Left Hand where the approach is rather hop-robust and full blown. Damn you mother...truckers...I wish I had thought to TM Hopivore. I and I know many of you readers are hopivorous, consuming many more ounces of amber and golden hop-laden liquid than broccoli, tofu, and hummus in the average week. In our ethanol-buzzed summary, I guess this makes me (and many of you) broadly hopivorous, carnivorous and vulvivorous somewhere in the proven, late night, hard-to-remember process.

Where this Hopivore beverage gets us something special is the non-bitter, not potent as Sierra Nevada Ale approach. These pricey bottles with glowing lime green hops (very artful in fact) are glowing apricot-amber with a head like butter mashed potatoes and a faint nose. This is clearly no SN, over-the-top, always full throttle ale. Is there room for a fresh-hopping less bold, not weak but subtle, and maybe less about boldness for its own sake. This one is more about appreciating quiet moments and quality beer flavors even if not revved to the right side of RPM meter. This is a medium-strength, wet-hopped ale and in many ways nicer than the expected near-overdose than many Sierra Nevada products are becoming- type-casting is going to be a SN issue soon if not already. I can actually taste the soft, faint, and nuanced malts in this iteration of the new wet style. Do we really need many more Sierra Nevada, turbo-charged bitter malt ale tempered with malts but having an extra set of good chemicals? Organic, fresh, wet? Cool and at some point needless, the point proven. I hope more of the new wet creations are more like this one, allowing subtle malts and perhaps rare hop varieties and even special herbs to flourish unmolested by overbearing hops.

New Holland Sundog Amber Ale

RATING: 3.5

Holland, Michigan

One of these days I'm doing to write a piece on the obsession of breweries with using dogs and wolves in their label names. Anyhow, this New Holland product is a glowing amber of high aesthetic quality if only on account of the color and the very large ivory head. One gets bitter, slightly citrus hops in the first approach with the bitterness increasing as more layers of the flavorful vine come into focus. There's enough malt for depth but here we must say the depth is not what it could or should be. It's neither a good pale ale nor a malty enough amber to get good marks. Sweetness is moderate but favoring the indulgent side. I suspect they went for a balance of bitterness and sweetness and somehow it doesn't work. I'll leave the problem to chemists who might pin it down for them if asked. It is what they call "approachable" these days, a lousy term borrowed from the wine crowd but in the beer world meaning "not too flavorful or complex to trouble your brain with analyzing such things". It is crisp when served cold and is a mile from (above) the tragic junk peddled as "American Amber Ale", a term so unpatriotic I think any brewmaster who uses it should be shackled and immediately flown to Gitmo.

New Knoxville Mild Ale

RATING: 4.0

Knoxville, Tennessee

The name 'mild' here refers to the ENGLISH MILD style and certainly does not imply a weak body overall. Only the hopping is subtle. The malt is well balanced and dosed for both suitable color and quality. It proves to be one of New Knoxville's most impressive labels and shows their small batch, traditional craftsmanship to best effect.

North Coast Alt Nouveau

RATING: 5.0

Fort Bragg, California

Back with the computerized BrewBase this beer won our MOST ARTISTIC BEER LABEL 1994 This product of Ft. Bragg (Mendocino County) CA is a play on words - Art Nouveau becomes Alt Nouveau as 'alt'in German means 'old' or mature. The label artwork is impressive and very collectible. The bright cheerful color is a golden amber with a lasting head and good carbonation. The depth and quality of hop flavor is simply breathtaking and remarkable. While very hop-filled it is sweet enough to be festive. Very worthwhile. Classy.

North Coast Old Stock Ale Otsuchi 2012

RATING: 4.0

Fort Bragg, California

Otsuchi Japan was one of the most hit towns in the recent tsunami and since Fort Bragg was already their sister city, it was natural the two Mayors and this CA brewery worked to help. Over a quarter of million dollars have been raised by the US town and this is a celebration of the recovery and bond. I could probably sleep through a tsunami if this 11.7% fare was my daily drink. The real pour is dark amber, the head short-lived in cream, and the candy malt notes apparent from the get go. As with all the malt sodas we raise the question as to whether the malt and hops carry the product or are simply over-run with crude sugaring? This one has the goods for most of us, though we all thought the liquid caramel needed to be toned down a notch or three. One reviewer simply could not finish a large glass. Candy beer is an acquired taste and this is a nice one in general. The high ethanol and lofty malts serve it fairly well but there is hardly much more to the flavor profile that malts with sugar and sugar with malts.

Norvig Ale

RATING: 3.0

Wisbech, England

This 'Viking Ale' is actually by Elgood of Wisbech UK for Woodstock Inc of Vermont. The yeast comes from an old farm near Bergen Norway and not from a sunken ship like the Flag Porter. The Bergen yeast is combined with East Anglia malt, Kent hops, and water to produce a light to medium amber ale with a large head. It has no nose at all and one has to drink well into the second glass before any flavor registers in the brain. There are some very faint and somehow interesting yeasty flavors there but far too little of them to convert to any form of pleasure. Reviewer DM suggested that he would 'have a bad temper and want to conquer other lands if this was the only kind of beer at home'. If authentic it is not worth reproducing.

Nor'Wester Best Bitter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

This Portland microbrew won the 1994 Gold Medal at the World Beer Championships in Chicago. It is bright pale amber with a lasting head of medium size. Hopping is medium-high and sufficient for all tastes here. As the package indicates there is also a 'spicy malt' flavor component as well. It is semi-sweet in earlier phases but finishes drier. Willamette Hops from local Salem OR are the main hop of choice. This spicier, maltier, and mellower sort of bitter may be better suited to American tastes where a true UK ESB or Bitter Ale would be uncomfortably sharp. Reviewers applauded the 'excellent sense of hops-malt balance...substantial depth and refinement' and 'malty amber ale bliss gives way quickly to a British-style bitter finish'. Very worthwhile.

Ohio Brewing Cardinal Ale

RATING: 4.5

Niles, Ohio

This rich amber ale is moderately hopped with a strong nod to the malt side of the equation. Color is rich amber with an enduring, mid-sized head. Ohio Brewing was only founded in 1997 so this is a remarkable product from such a new brewery.

Old Cape Cod Smuggler's Ale

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

While named Old Cape Cod they smuggle it in from The Lion Brewery of Wilkes- Barre PA. It is like an English amber ale but 'lighter in flavor' - a phrase which froze us cold. Then they wrote 'crisp and clean'. Not again! Actually this light-colored amber is NOT a light-flavored amber. There are enough ale fruitiness and hops finish to be interesting. Still it is far from the perfect amber ale that several American premium microbreweries produce. This SEMI-LIGHT AMBER ALE is a fair compromise at the \$7.00 price for those who like flavor but not in big hoppy doses. You could drink 3 bottles (and we did) without having your tongue burned out on hops bitterness. It is also better than Miller Reserve Amber but inferior to most Rogue amber ales.

Old Dominion Patriot Amber Ale

RATING: 4.5

Ashburn, Virginia

We bought this simply on the basis of the packaging which said 'Seasonal Special' and only later found the name it bears above. After a few jokes about the home town of the brewery we settled down for tastings. Color is bright amber under a cream head of small size but good duration. It is rather sweet and dosed favorably with ample hops and decent malting. Hops prevail. It has a bit of that 'candy beer' quality (partly caramel malt) but so much as Big Rock brews. Reviewers were mostly impressed and one declared 'perhaps the finest Southeast microbrew AMBER ALE I know...thoroughly enjoyable'. While another reported 'a smooth way to get your hops...they don't have to be bitter to please'. If you tastes run to the SWEET HOPPY AMBER ALE variant this is a sure winner.

Old North State Red Drum Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Youngsville, North Carolina

This NC microbrew comes in a strong box for easy carrying. The rather minimalist black label has sparse red and blue letters; and the 'Red Drum' channel bass. The flavor is not fishy but has a nice bitter hops and malt balance. The orange red color is pleasing. The malt is moderate tending toward sweet caramel quality. It was too weak for some. The hops seems more clear with a bitter to flowery effect. Ratings ranged from 3.5 to 4.5 so it was perhaps a bit on the questionable side; owing that we rarely recommend anything under a 4.0. There are red amber ales both better and worse. For \$5.99-6.99 it was quite satisfactory.

Otter Creek Copper Ale

RATING: 4.0

Middlebury VT

Brewed in the style of the Northern German altbiers this American version is golden amber with a strong head. It is actually not as coppery or orange as the name suggests. In a dark bar room it will be copper enough to spark a conversation. A "special yeast" (aren't they all?), six malts, and three kinds of hops are used in the kettle. The label says "medium bodied" and that appraisal is correct by our standards. This is one of those ambers which is nicely flavored with quality ingredients but will not smash your tastebuds like some ambers and pales out there. The sweet-dry balance slightly favors the sweet side. The hops are tangy with very strong malts coming out in the later notes and finish. If one was blindfolded you might almost class it with brown ales with its prevailing malt strength. There was a bit of raspy bitterness that might put off some drinkers. Reviewers told us that the label was 'fair complexity...quite thoroughly malted...a little too harsh' and 'lots of flavors but not a unified theme'.

We have to give a credit to their marketing folks who manage to fit (and that quite attractively) an 800 number, web URL, map, date, batch number, plug for their brewhouse giftshop, and friendly intro on every single bottle. It is also one of very few seven dollar, American microbrew amber ales with a twistoff crown. The whole package says friendly but we might be happier if they sent it down with a shot of maple syrup to clean up the finish.

Otter Creek Mud Bock Spring Ale

RATING: 4.5

Middlebury, Vermont

While the words OTTER and MUD don't usually make us salivate this spring amber bock is certain to please. It's 'aroma celebrates the arrival of Vermont's sloppy spring'; whatever that means. Elsewhere the label is right: light

hops and deep malt. The depth and quality of both is perfect for the malthead. If you love malty beer this is a real find. Some of us thought the hops could have been turned up to aid complexity; sacrificing nothing in malt notes. The finish is semi-sweet and not unlike a few Oktoberfest from the home of that style. Reviewers noted it as 'One of the country's best MALT BOCKS' and 'sugar malt themes...limited hops...would be better if more dry'. Well made but the sweet malt extreme will not please everyone.

Palm Amber Beer/Palm Speciale

RATING: 3.0

Steenhuffel, Belgium

While this amber-golden beer is an ale from Belgium, it is not made in the classic Belgian ale style with spices, rich yeast flavor, and often a big ethanol dose. It is basic semi-malty amber ale. It was created in the early 1900's to blend the complexity of an ale with refreshing nature of a Pils or similar lager. The lace is lavish and the cream head with nice endurance. The flavor is that of subtle, semi-weak Euro-malts, faint ale fruit at times in some passages but more hoppy low-bitter in others. It does have lageroid quality as if a mild brown ale with blended to a weakish golden lager. Weak PLUS weak is an easily equation to solve. Sadly Palm will get you by but surely leaving you wanting for the real thing. (Bad joke. sorry). While pretty in the glass, it does have odd flavor notes in the later passages which are quite metallic and just plain "off" - even though our sample was still fresh at 9 months before their best-before date. There are hundreds of finer ambers and more classic Belgians around so movin' on to them.

Paulaner Bavarian Alpine Extreme

RATING: 4.0

Munich, Germany

This ALE was 'created especially for wintertime' and features a traditional alpine attire WITH modern reflective rainbow sunglasses. Color is pale amber and the head is lasting. Flavor is centrally a malt theme but with a dry finish. It is not unlike many O-fest beers except for the lack of sweetness. Some of the so-called SEMI-DARK GERMAN BEERS are similar though this one is classed on the bottle as an ALE. It is dry and refreshing but not very complex nor unusual. It is just a very decent malt-loaded amber. Panalists here noted 'deep dry malt taste...finish not bitter like a UK malty amber' and 'Quality beer (especially for \$2.59 per 17oz.)...not likely to be anyone's fav- orite...just quietly competant without any hops or novelty themes'.

Pinehurst Village Double Eagle Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Aberdeen, North Carolina

Aberdeen NC is between the golf meccas of Pinehurst and Southern Pines. As with the original Aberdeen of Scotland they try to make authentic powerful ales as rare and exciting as a 'double eagle'. The dark-toned, artistic 'torn look' labels also good attention from nearly all. Color is actually a deep amber, making it far lighter in shade than most BROWN ALES. The head is big, lasting, and ivory. Four different malts and 3 hops are used to make what is a well-hopped ale overflowing with delicious fruit flavors. They suggest apple, black currant, and pineapple. Pineapple and cherry turned up in our conversations before reading that suggestive label. Though mislabeled for both color and style it is quite pleasant. As a FRUITY AMBER ALE there are very few finer.

R J Rockers Bell Ringer

RATING: 4.0

Spartenburg, South Carolina

RJ Rockers became Spartenburg SC's first brewery in 1997 and we presume PBR was the reigning King of Beers in that town until then. Them all folks dun there done got BMW chic since then I do reckon. Yer brew needs some color and flavor if yer cruisin about in a Z8 with top down and yer best golden-haired gal Bonnie Sue. And RJ is giving brew up to 9.5% alcohol? Woo-eeeeeh. Bring it on!

Mark Johnson, a Gulf War vet from New Jersey decided to improve the quality of the local suds using his education from time spent in Germany. Make German influence a theme in Spartenburg and I for one see nothing wrong with that, having been through that town in the 1980's. This is a high grav formula with an impressive 8.5% dose, pouring rich orange, as hazy as a cider and resembling it except for the mid-length head. The say it's "an ale worthy of your sturdiest goblet or most treasured stein. Ring it!". We agree in terms of the color but for something said to be loaded with hops and malt, the effect is less than effective; making us want

more. Sweetness seems to be used to make up for the usual ingredients and that will never fool us.

Less is more in some realms and the malts here are subtle tending towards weakly and worthlessly so. It is not a weak beer but has quality covered up with sweetness to show the lack of quantity in those quality things. The hops are nice augmentations, complex, and of gourmet, elite brewer grade, zippy and nippy enough. It needs to be dosed up two notches if not more. Panelists here noted "too sweet at times for me, it sips well but does not satisfy quickly; you need a full bottle to even comprehend it....that is both good and bad" and "sometimes like hop soda infused with decent malt notes but it's got some odd moments...the concept is confusing...scattered flavors...I'm ring the bell to get an explanation". Our friend Jake said "kinda of a juicy girl beer but most gals won't like the bitter notes you get deep into the bottle...has potential but with 300 great beers out there, why should I wait for them to get this right?". Well said my friend.

Red Ass (Cold Spring)

RATING: 4.5

Cold Spring MN

We first saw this stuff at a college beer shop along with the claim about 'pure northern Minnesota spring water'. Then the simple label with Bucky the kicking red ass. We expected some watery pseudo-amber ale. Instead we got a richly hop- ped and malty beer with refined balance. It is more drinkable than an ultra potent PALE ALE but is fully as pleasing. Some of us rated it a perfect 5.0 if that tells you anything. And by the way, don't confuse your RED ASS with your RED TAIL. We summed it up: 'forget the RED ELEPHANT; the RED DOG is a mutt; RED WOLF is a howling bore; and RED SEAL isn't about the animal stupid'. We'd even go so far as to say this is one of best mass-market amber beers from the US. Even the biggest hop-a-holic will not turn this one down.

Red Hook Mud Slinger Spring Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The label says "Nut Brown Ale" but they must be using shiny chestnuts because this is rich amber any way I lite it up. The Liquid-Goodness-Since-1982 folks are notable for quality brews with super market prices and availability, a few misses, but mostly very decent stuff even if not always world-beaters. This 5.8% brew has a potent, mixed-malt nose, harsh and jolting in the good way. It is not mud colored (but could or should have been?) but gives a interesting blend of firm, abrupt, joyously bitter hops supported to a different degree by good malt, solid even if variable in complexity. There is something curious and noval in this recipe. By the way, what is a "spring ale" in the modern age of brewing? No one seems to know other than that I spring forth and buy all of them like an idiot.

Something be a brewin' strange with this one. Of course with me and most of you, odd is good if it's entertaining and tasty to the hilt. Here's a good one for the friday night beer taste club you might run - it's curious, very very good, and yet hard to pin down at times. I thought at first they put some unique hops variety into the kettle. Their website says Willamette and Northern Brewer so perhaps it's merely a clevor and very pleasing recipe.



Red Rose Amber Ale

RATING: 5.0

Numazu, Japan

When I got home from the 500+ beer store I was angry and ready to fire off an email to lots of people and maybe my congressmen (plus good ole Sen. Libby Dole). I just paid \$4.75 - what a fool - for a single bottle of beer for a Massachussets beer. Surely that meets some state or federal rip-off statute. The brewery was some

Baird company and the label oozed California graphics indulgence in funky, sometimes bad-is-unique style. Wait a sec! A company called Baird Brewing was from Numazu Japan, near the foot of legendary Mt. Fuji? They claim to be "Japan's pioneering craft brewery" with unfiltered and bottle "re-fermented" brews. And they indulged in a vaguely modern art, neo-impressionist red rose on the label with oddly spaced, New Age fonts? Wow, super wow, and a then a rethink moment. Okay...hold those emails. This 5.4% ABV drink is said to be the product of "high fermentation (with ale yeast) at an usually low (lager-like) temperature". They lay claim to the following words: robust, rich, fruity, malty, crisp, refreshing, dry, layered, and fragrant. Add "just a bit prickly" to all that.

I never got the prickly but that do pack lots of nifty, fine adjectives into this pour. There are globs of floating yeast at that point I figured I owned them another buck on this transaction given how crappy most of today's reviews with artificial additives and weak style imitations had proven to be. Here's a winner at last, I do hope and pray at the shrine. It is rich amber indeed with a head that might climb Mt. Fuji if a six pack was rapidly emptied beneath it. Here's the catch. It is one of the those subtle, smooth Japanese craft beers and not a hammer-your-tongue with hops 'til your numb ale. Nor is it a violent, onslaught of caramel malt. Here is tact and elegance in a pleasant form so much characteristic of it's homeland and ancient sensibilities there. I came away happy to have paid what I did, still thinking I owe them 2 bucks more and overall amazed they give that much flavor with such utter smoothness and finesse. If you love your ales favoring the artful, discrete, and sophisticated side this will amaze you. If you want a simple "more hops per barrel" approach without balance and gentle caressing do look elsewhere. Red Rose is delicate without being weak, refined without skimping, and utterly exquisite in the final analysis. Any North American microbrewery wanting to do a "more is less" ale without cheating the drinker-san of favored ingredients might give all their staff a round of Red Rose on a daily basis.

Rhino Chasers American Ale

RATING: 4.5

Chatsworth, California

298 BEST BEER WITH FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGN 1993 This 'small batch' from from William & Scott of Chatsworth CA has a unique niche. The 'majority' of profits are donated to the American Wildlife Foundation. Assuming the AWF does not have directors with 6-digit salaries it sounds like a good cause. The flavor is full and rich with pleasant bitter notes and only a hint of fruit. It is pumpkin-colored and has a long-lasting head. The bottle is ugly in patriotic-art deco pattern and an Americanized rhino head. Silver Medal in 1993 GABF in Dusseldorf Altbier group.



Ringwood (formerly Kennebunkport) Old Thumper Extra Special Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portland ME/Kennebunkport ME

Made by Kennebunkport Brewing Co. in our first taste, it now comes from Ringwood Brewery of Portland. It is almost too bad the name Bush Beer was not available, given the Bush-Kennebunkport connection of old. Judging from the label the 'Old Thumper' must be a really mean sort of warthog; ironic that a Kennebunkport brew would use a logo resembling an Arkansas razerback-from-hell; remember that whole Clinton-Bush War thing. Judging from the brew these folks know what they are doing and then some - their merchandise order line is 1-800-BREW-ALE. The pumpkin amber glow of the beer is glorious on any table but it won't last long. The head is ivory, firm, and lasting. Even with the 'Extra Special' name it's not highly bitter-dry. It is more of a BITTER AMBER ALE with a slight candy-caramel malt in the finish. Unquestionably first-rate and multi-dimensional.

Rogue's Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Rogue of Newport Oregon is famous nationwide for a dozen or so specialty ales ranging from chili-spiced Mexicali to rich hoppy ambers to a smoke- flavored kind. This 'regular' Rogue Ale comes in six-packs rather than the large bottles. It is a bright pumpkin amber color with a mid-duration head. It always seems to have an even-handed dose of bitter hops and rich malt qualities and a dry finish. It's very potent and more bitter than their other full-hopped ales. Identifying their various ales is sometimes difficult since flavors are temperature dependent. While this beer holds nothing back on flavor strength those flavors are not orchestrated to perfection. One reviewer said it's 'like a gourmet tea brewed for 2 minute too long'. Worth a try.



Rogue's Ashland Amber Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing Company produces a large number of amber-colored ales and this one is bright red-amber with a foamy head. Like their superb Mogul Ale this has a perfect hops delight. This one differs in bringing out the roasted malt flavors while keeping the finish smooth and clean. The St. Rogue Ale is also hoppy-malty in nice balance but carries a more spicy finish that they call 'sprucy'. This beer is highly balanced and like the Mogul Ale wins our top 5-bottle award.

Rogue's Maierbock Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

This ale from Oregon Brewing Company is a paler amber ('deep honey') than either the Ashland or St. Rogue's Red Ales. The flavor is also distinct as well. It is the most malty of all their ales with none of the rich hopping than the Mogul and Ashland convey. As American malty ales go this is one of the charming ones and if you are a maltophile this is sure hit. It is exceedingly sweet and calling it a 'malt soda' is both a criticism and honor. We thought it just a bit too heavily dosed although malt lovers may well give it 5 bottles or stars or barley malts or something. A little less of a punch would be ideal although blending it with their other ales can produce a desired effect with one's preference for malt and hop intensity.



Rogue's Mogul Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

This amber ale from Oregon Brewing is described as 'seasonal' (winter if if ski-carrying Rogue is any indication) and 'assertively hopped'. The head is large and enduring. Hop quality is strong and with the sweetish body it ends up being hops soda of the finest sense. It is highly drinkable and to some of our reviewers every bit as fine

as Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. It is not like many winter or holiday ales which have clear malt flavors. It is merely a fully hopped dark amber that while rich does not oversatiate the palate. It has a spicy and lively quality that is hard to describe yet we know it is not found in other brews that merely overload on hops. This is a skillful use of hops and and not just a massive one. Truly excellent.

Rogue's Smoke Rauch Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Be sober when you read this label. It is NOT Raunch NOR Ranch. It is Rauch. 'Dedicated to the Linguist in each of us' is sure to intrigue. It is very bright amber with a deep head and the aroma is clearly of burning buildings. They describe an 'alder aroma' (perhaps used in the process) but it is just plain old smoke to us. It has won 3 silvers and one gold at GABF but we like Golden Eagle in the SMOKE-BREW class. This is a notch or two more aromatic but does not go over the line into excess. Still it could not be used with any meals - and surely not one including light sauces or delicate spices. One reviewer called it 'liquid beef jerky'. Another 'a novel sipping beer.'



Rogue's Whale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

The splashing sea in turquoise and white on the bottle is the first thing to appeal. The black and white Orca (Killer) whale startles. While described as 'golden' the color is what we would call pale amber or golden amber. The head is enduring, foamy, and thick. The malty flavors are quite remarkable although not heavy nor harsh. You find a semi-sweet candy-like quality but not as richly as some of the Big Rock products. Rogues says the finish is 'herbal'. The flavor is quite uncommon among either GOLDEN ALES or MALTY AMBERS and while not unique it is unusual. Comments to us ranged from 'un- expected' and 'very different from their other range of ales'. It is very highly recommended if you wish to 'Save the Ales'. A much needed product. BrewBase in the old computer form rated it as the Best Spring Ale 1995.



Rogue's Wolf Eel Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

This beer is dedicated to the Oregon Coast Aquarium and a mini-ad for it replaces the usual beer description. The huge and 'fierce' Wolfeel is actually a shy 6 foot fish and his toothy image makes for one of the most interesting and collectible bottles around. His beer is bright amber with a mid-length head. Flavor is malty sweet and very much like their Whale Ale. Except per- haps for color the Wolfeel and Whale ales are close cousins and one is hard- pressed to pick one over the other. And now for a political message: if you are going to make a beer that supports conservation work better make it a flavorful decent one like Wolf Eel Ale or Rhinochasers Amber. Rogue has succeeded with education, artful presentation, AND super delicious beer.

Rolling Rock Bock

RATING: 4.0

We didn't want to knock Rolling Rock Bock. We don't have to. This bright amber has a foamy head and enduring carbonation. Flavor is roasty malt with a neat dose of hops. It is immediately comparable to Miller's Amber Reserve and both give much hope for mainstream American brewing. The gold, russet, and white painted bottle is the VERY BEST looking painted bottle known to us. It received a bottle deduction for a brief second of weakness at the finish. Very welcome but rarely seen today (2010).

Rowdy's Perfect Ale (Water Street)

RATING: 4.0

Chicago, Illinois

We might need a neurosurgeon after this review. The caps say 'TWIST OFF' and about ten shredded digits later we discovered they are not. Yet the contents were worth the aggravation though not as close to perfect as their lager. The dark amber brew has an ivory head of long duration. Flavor is of moderate sweet fruit, generous hops, and a full malt foundation. While very pleasant it is not as impressive in totality or any component as it might be. While it excited some reviewers ('aptly named...a real revelation') others noted a 'heavier malt saturation than I prefer in ales' and 'shows whispers of excellence but in the final analysis a disappointment'. Some thought it tried to 'be too much' and felt a more unique character should be refined.

Samuel Adams Boston Stock Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

312 This 'heartly' amber ale overflows with rich malt tastes and the strength of top quality Goldings, Saaz, and Fuggles hops. While it has more snap and zip than one expects, we have never found the bottled product to have a head of any duration or substance. It is nothing like American pale ales as with Sierra Nevada and Anchor Steam Liberty Ale. This proves much dryer and less deep than those classics. It lacks the 'floweriness' of their Boston Lager and that is by intention.



Samuel Smiths Pale Ale (Museum Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Like most Smith products the head is full and long-lasting. Color is bright amber. The balance between hop and fruit flavors is just right. It starts dry but finishes rather sweet. It is nothing like Sierra Nevada Pale Ale or Anchor Liberty Ale ales which are hoppy-herbal rather than fruity-sweet as with this Yorkshire masterpiece. It is less fruity than Red Seal Ale which we used as a FRUITY ALE for comparison. Clearly one of the finest bottled British ales.

Samuel Smiths Winter Welcome 1995-96

RATING: 4.5

Tadcaster, Yorkshire, England

This limited production out of Yorkshire has become a truly welcome winter find on beer shelves; especially as it disappears quickly. The 1995-1996 version shows white horses galloping through snow in the center. Some panelists remarked on the aroma. The color is vibrant amber with red hues. The head is large at first and carbonation is ideal. Some of us thought it was richer in flavor last year but not in three years has been a rich bitter ale. In short it is a British Octoberfestbier. Reviewers noted 'satisfying as always...it is that complex and perfectly blended finishing flavor that is such a sweet parting kiss' and 'mild (and never bitter) style ale that is impossible to resist'. In dissent: 'a little too 'skunky'...poorly hopped this year'. In general, this regular season

rates about the same. It's always a lovely bottle and pleasant re-experience.

Saranac Adirondack Lager

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

F.X. Matt of Utica NY also produces the notable New Amsterdam Lager and one fine version of Manhattan Gold. This lager is very light amber compared to New Amsterdam and has a thin head. Two-row malt blends with both Cascade and Hallertau hops for a superb marriage of American and German hop flavor. While complex and 'hoppy' the finish is clean. It is not 'flowery' like Sam Adams Boston Lager. A refined balance of Pils crispness with enough flavor to thrill. This is one of the best values in amber ale, available from countless grocery stores. The Saranac story is every bit as laudable and successful as anything with a Sierra or Adams name on it.

Shepherd Neame Bishop's Finger Kentish Ale

RATING: 4.0

Faversham, Kent, England

This long name goes with an even longer history. They've been making ales since 1698 when our country was a just a gleam in the Patriot's eyes. The color is stunning cherry amber with a huge head of large bubbles and furious lace. It is immediately aromatic but the flavor from cold to near room temp is rather mild. While mild it is not weak but has enough full Kent hops flavor to please the 'Real Ale' fan. As a bitter is does not offend like some British ales but given their diversity on these shores there are more fine selections - Fuller's ESB for one. This ale is well-made and is a real show off in glasses. Truly authentic. Nice Scotch-style bottle.

Shepherd Neame Master Brew Ale

RATING: 4.0

Faversham, Kent, England

While amber this Master Brew is shade less red than their Bishop's Finger Kentish Ale and the head is more foam-like. Using just Kentish hops and malted barley they have revived their traditional that is nearly 300 years old (1698). This brew is a 4 bottle on our scale if very cold but if even a little warm it is clearly a three. There is quality in the works but for 300 pennies and 300 years one expects rich complex flavor or at least a clear theme overflowing with Kent hops - this has neither. The finish is smooth and dry but unlike 'smooth' US brews you can actually tell that hops were required. Bishop's Finger is a bit better to us but Fuller's ESB and St. Andrews are much superior to both if you crave flavor and character.



Shepherd Neame Spitfire Premium Ale

RATING: 5.0

Faversham, Kent, England

This glowing copper traditional ale is lasting head and wonderful appeal all round. Kentish hops impart flavoring. It won the 1994 International Brewing Award Gold Medal and it shows. Most reviewers who had tried their diverse line felt it was clearly their best work. Flavor is endlessly cascading with depth and more depth. Reviewers noted 'it is flavorful yet so soothing and easy to consume' and 'it is one of those beers where the words JUST RIGHT are so exact'. As amber UK ales go the finish has suitable and expected bitterness no found in some US or European ambers that are much sweeter. As a REAL BRITISH ALE there are few better choices - Fuller's ESB is another that comes to mind. Expect to pay about \$3.25-\$4.50 a pint but it's worth every cent. Very remarkable.

Shipyard Export Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland and Kennebunkport, Maine

First you'll notice the detailed and classy 4-masted ship on the label; its the style of a hand-colored engraved plate of old and collectible to be sure. The color is a bright golden apricot orange under a dense, lasting head of ivory. It is remarkably fruity and aromatic so its color and flavor are both of the apricot variety. It is simply delicious very cold and near room temper- ature. If they do indeed export this no one will even think bad of American beer again. Reviewers often remarked in the style of Kennebunkport's most famous resident things like 'it wouldn't be prudent as this juncture to miss this beer'. If your taste in rich, true ales runs to the naturally sweet and fruit- filled side this is one of the best from any country. Absolutely a 'must buy'.



Sierra Nevada 13th Release Harvest Wet Hop Ale (2009)

RATING:

Chico, California

Hot on the heels of the well-received 24 oz. bottles of Estate Ale, this product came next in the store section. Using very fresh (that is "wet") hops, this shining amber ale brings home (literally) the notes of pine, citrus, and exotic-spice that hops should in natural form present. The nose is of their classic IPA, the head rocky and long in old ivory. While their IPA in all strengths tend to lovingly hammer us with hops, this one caresses you into a soft, erotic slumber with delicious dreams and happy endings. Sip this for an hour and any Pabst-chugging idiot will know what real beer is all about and n'er go back.

Sierra Nevada always makes fine products but of late the "more is always better" theme (from them and many other kettles) has gotten a tad old and predictable. (Aren't we about due for an Ultra-Mega, Super Nova, Knock-Your-Socks-And-Panties-Off IPA to the thirteenth power with enough ethanol to run a Hummer H2 stretch party limo for nine blocks?) Here is true quality with moderation thrown in for good measure. This approach costs us nothing for where the hops are not bold they are more overflorantly lovely and alluring. This might even be complex enough for a wine nut to come on over to sudsy side of elite beverages one night a week. In words that guys understand, you get lost in her sapphire eyes and instead of the long blonde hair - one is apt to miss alot by being too shallow and quick to judge by first, flashy impressions. I feel like sending a case to A-B with the note: "fresh is meaningless unless you use enough of them little green thingys hanging from those vine thingys". I need fresh air, demand fresh water, and simply adore fresh hops in liquid form. Wet is wonderful. Wet is wise. Now go get some before it disappears for the year!

Sierra Nevada Southern Hemisphere Harvest Fresh Hop Ale (2008)

RATING: 4.5

Chico, California

These oversized 24 oz. bottles are 6.75% ABV and pours in rich amber with a very long lace (very Belgian-like) and a strong cream head. There's hardly a California beer without a cork or Belgianoid name that has such extended a vertical show. It's not so full or hoppy as their famous Pale Ale so I'm placing in this classification, even though it outranks many in this group. The gimmick/brilliance/hook of this label is that they needed fresh hops in California's spring time and that required going to another hemisphere. They harvested the stuff and within a week this fresh New Zealand product was ready for production with good American malts. The hops will not full are satisfying and suitably spicy. What their Pale Ale does for mega-dosing this one does for subtleness and finesse. One is a sledgehammer and the other a woman's slow caress. I admire this attempt and think it works very well. Two negatives are the long name (not a factor for me) and the price on the east coast. SN has always been creative, clever, fun, and innovative, even crazy and brave. This one was absolutely right except for our two negative notes. There's one more negative: it will not be available for the rest of our lives and is a limited seasonal.

Sierra Nevada Tumbler Autumn Brown Ale (2010)

RATING: 4.5

Chico, California

The dark brown bottle full of autumnally shaded trees and amber, umber, and burnt browns is appropriate for a beer made with fresh malt right from the kiln. Fresh malt. Fresh hops. They have a theme going of late. It flows out rich amber-brown, a lasting head beige and pale. Nose is faint but quality malt. Where this label deviates from most of this session is the un-ending smoothness while maintaining a full-malt flavor. The fresh malts clearly have no bitter, unkempt, and cluttered chemistry of the type we have gotten used to for several centuries. These 24 oz. bottles are wonderfully clean in the malt presentation, a brown ale that delights very cold as well as slightly towards ambient temps. It is intriguing, educating, and a joy to sip - a joy but not quite an orgasmic experience. Another SN triumph

Spanish Peaks Black Dog Ale

RATING: 4.0

New Ulm, Minnesota

Okay. Let's get the puns out of the way. It's not black and it's not a dog. It's actually Irish Setter amber. The head is bubbly but non-persistent. Carbonation is strong for an ale. It is made by August Schell of New Ulm MN. For the color it had a surprisingly thin flavor. There are no fruitful tastes but a slightly bitter hops punch in the finish. Compared to Adam's Boston Ale (similar hoppy finish) this needs some work. Artistic label is collectible. St. Stan's Alt (Amber) u raa 3.5 599 Modesto CA California has yielded some superb amber beers in the last few years. This Modesto work is called Alt and they make both Amber and Dark versions under the Alt term. Color is light amber with a mid-length head and limited lace. The balance of hops and malt is about equal although one is not overloaded with either. This is one SEMI-LIGHT AMBER that needs to be served very cold. A favorable and subtle hops bitterness ranks this one over the myriad of 3 bottle ambers that now clog supermarket shelves. Still we suggest one look to Rogue for a range of very high quality ambers—a benchmark set that should be consulted by everyone from brewers to ad people to investors. Our sixpack sold for \$8.99 and even near that price we'd want more marks of distinction.

Stoudt's Scarlet Lady Ale (ESB)

RATING: 4.5

Adamstown

The impressive 765ml bottle comes with an art deco-like label showing a flirting lass with enough symbology to fill a Master's thesis. She's drinking white foam from a horn, has poppies and hop vines in her hair, and her creamy cleavage has a banner saying 'Since 1987'. And we suppose a scarlet lady could in fact be extra specially bitter in real life. Of all the ESB (Extra Special Bitters) we know this is surely the most reddish-amber (copper). The color matches the hair of the label lady. The head is long-lasting. Stop laughing! It has hopped flavor but is far more sweet than so many others under the ESB name. One reviewer said it was 'the most painless ESB known'. Others thought it was just a well-rounded hoppy amber; competent, misnamed. Seductive and full she is.

Strangford Lough Legbiter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Rochester, New York

The city of Rochester has always held a special place in my heart. Two of my aunts and several cousins lived there and I've driven there for 50 years to enjoy their company and the wonders of that glorious city. Rochester gave us images in three mighty forms: the Kodak pictures, motion picture film, and Xerox copies. Those are three technologies which transformed our world. Rochester also gave us Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony, two more rich sources of ideas for freedom. Then there's Bausch and Lomb with tiny replacements for eye glasses and really awesome eyewear like Ray Ban Aviators. In recent years this great city known for lilacs, great education, and quality living has been hit hard by the economy and changes in technology - like digital cameras.

Thus this new ale from Rochester with quality assured by partners in Ireland is going to be a welcome boost they need and deserve. The brew is 4.8%, glowing dark amber, nose of sweet hops, and stuff from the old country, made fresh in the colonies hereabouts. Legbiter was a sword used by King Magnus - you can Wikipedia the rest if you care. Flavor is mid-strength sweet malt, something like a more approachable Scottish Ale, toasty and roasty, and consoling. It is a worthy brew for Upstate NY where microbrews are scarce 'cept for the Utica gang and their contracts. Yes, yes - this is a candy beer but an invigorating rendition, more than sufficiently supported by malts, and in the final reading a very pleasing beer crafted as killer liquid candy must be made.

Cap is collectible with the shamrock on the cap.

Tap Room No. 21 Moe's Backroom Amber Ale

RATING: 4.5

Lacrosse, WI

In August 2008 this came to our market and is said to commemorate the 1933 repeal of prohibition. The nice amber colored fluid is 5.7% ABV and the flavor is a good hops:malt balance, favoring the later slightly. It is on the sugary-honey side but not excessively so.

Uinta XV Fifteenth Anniversary Barley Wine

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

I did not know 10.4% ABV could come from the state of UT but it surely does. This dark amber-brown ale has a small but long antique ivory head. The initial ethanol punch is moderate but it does creep up later to add bitter-potent notes of a less than ideal nature. Full half bottle deducted on that account. Malt is everywhere and nowhere, hopping stealing the show for a scene or two each sip. It reminds me of our late night concoctions working third shift at the [federal agency acronym] where the HVAC and security dudes made crazy things from the ample supplies of free lab-grade, 99.9% pure ethanol. We'd put two soda flavors together with anything we could steal from the cafeteria with things from our lunches and make odd punches. You've not lived until you've tried root beer-Mellow Yellow-strawberry ice cream-Honey Bun blend made into a 80 proof broth! The soaked bits of Honey Bun were enough to make the final three hours flow like the Nile. This reminds me of such an ethanol-drenched, pot pourri punch though at a much higher level of concept and execution. It's raw, it's occasionally crude, it's imaginative, and in the final analysis...way fun.

Wainwright's Evil Eye Honey Brown

RATING: 4.5

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The big scary letters 'Evil Eye' actually adorn two different brews: Amber Lager and Honey Brown. Unless you look close you might miss one. J.J. Wainwright's competitors accused him of giving the original brew the 'evil eye' but who knows what to believe on beer lalels these days. Despite the name this stuff is more honey colored than brown colored. The head is large-bubbled, small, but it can last in clean glassware. First impressions is of a cherry tartness with ale yeastiness and a moderate nip of hops; much more fruit than malt. Overall it is very sweet; a flaw for some reviewers but surely ideal for the mass market. Reviewers noted 'delicious and fruity but somewhat one dimensional' and 'very fruit-filled (citrus to apple), sweet but finishing less so, not very complex'.

Watney's Red Barrel

RATING: 4.5

London, England

From the Stag Brewery of London this fine deeply colored brew has pleasant non-bitter stoutness of considerable merit. It is a fine compromise between the often overpowering 'extra stouts' and your basic British beer. The wonderful amber color looks splendid in leaded crystal at your best meal. Although semi-stout it is never heavy. It is substantial yet smooth. This is not widely seen but is well worth sharing with your friends.

Well's Bombardier English Premium Ale

RATING: 4.5

Bedford, UK

Well's and Young Brewing make this 5.2% amber ale with Fuggles hops and crystal malts. It presents itself in bright amber tones, beige head that lasts, and very faint nose. Flavors are mid-low strength, best very cold but acceptable warmed a tad. The finish is tart at times, more hops than malt in the late notes, overall a very serviceable, pleasant ale - traditional for sure but not strong. It's real ale, very, very fine ale just not perfect ale.

Wellington Original County Ale

RATING: 3.5

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Color is medium amber with an tall, enduring head of cream. Three barley malts and five hop varieties are used to produce a rather moderate flavored ale. It is more malt than hops and was a good deal to weak for many of our reviewers; surprising when you consider how perfect their Iron Duke Porter was. It has a rather European malt subtleness that some beer drinkers (somewhere we suppose) might prefer. It is not thin in the mass-market pseudo-dark beer sense. It what you would describe as quality without much intensity as opposed to an absence of both. One panalist noted 'occasionally raw bitter though generally a low-medium potency affair...not impressed'. Another reported 'not much here to praise...I think they tried but should try harder next time'.

Wild Boar Special Amber

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

This American red amber beer from Atlanta won the 1990 Gold Medal at the Great American Beer Festival. Flavor if full with crystal and pale malts blending with some fruit and many hop elements. It is now widely sold in mass markets and a 22 oz. version has been added. They have much more competition now in the amber market and frankly our 'consultants' could not agree as to its merits above or below many other fine stateside ambers.

Wild Goose Snow Goose Winter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

This English style amber is gleaming in all glass, on the red side of amber if you will. The head is old ivory and short-lived for us. The label proclaims a "vibrant hop finish" and they are quite right there. It goes down easy like a good Brit-amber but there are the bitter, angry gods of the ancient vine to pay for your massive gulping. And the brief distress is all worth it! Even the label of this product is snow-dusted and when served very chilly there's a frosty punch to be accepted when sipping it long and full. It's very well made and you could serve to any European guest without losing your smile or temper at any point in the conversation. The wee bit extra 6.3% ABV is appreciated and serves the whole package well. I'm delighted and impressed with this fine offering and wish it would crowd out a third of my local market's hop-free crap each winter - if not longer.

Wychwood Hobgoblin

RATING: 4.0

Witney, Oxfordshire

In time for Halloween 1996 came this UK ale with the meaningest (yet a bit cute) creature from the underworld on the label. Fall of 2007 and 2008 I think just the same as before. The label is more foily and slick than you'd expect from an Old World ale. Color is rich amber red with a deep, lasting head of ivory tint. Progress and Kent Goldings hops plus a 'pinch of' chocolate malt. That pinch is quite real and makes a moderately strong fruity ale with mid hops balance. It's not a HOP-GOBLIN as a clever brewer/marketing guru might have suggested. It is complex and satisfying at first taste but the finish was too thin and unrefined for some of us. It is not just a marketing gimmick as one might suspect - but it is not a top notch Brit ale either. If you like a decent SUBTLE UK ALE (real but not crudely potent) on the tart, moderate flavored side this hit on all the good points. The label is sure a fun piece of style - lots of tempting art and shimmer. It's competent, nothing in the extreme to be sure, never striking nor outlying, almost a mass market amalgum that fails to stand out except for the packaging.



Young's Special London Ale (SLA or S.L.A.)

RATING: 5.0

Wandsworth, London, England

This London export from Young's Ram brewery is bottle conditioned and the effort is more than worthwhile. It is very pungent and rich in its cloudy amber color. It simply glows bright orange and is very presentable. The head is especially large and full for the style. SLA is highly sophisticated, fruitful, and continuously flavorful. Neither malt nor hops thump you at first sip. Here is a very excellent example of what authentic, sophisticated brewing can produce. It is easily one of the UK's finest export ales but is sometimes harder to find than others. Reviewers note 'sweetish, very fruity with supporting but faintish hops...refined and then some' and 'real, well carbonated and ever so smooth...why aren't American brewers doing this kind of bottle conditioned perfection?'. Another said 'hints of peach...here is one ale that compliments rather than fights a meal. This one was a real revelation in my beer tasting life'. Contrary opinions a lack of strong hops or malt character as a deficiency. One knowledgeable reviewer thought the bottle conditioning really made it 'a thinly disguised British lambic'. But as our Brit cousins would say "it is spot on". Such is to be expected from the country's oldest brewery - established in 1831. It has won the British Bottlers Institute Award for Excellence in 1982, 1990, and 1993. The word "special" is so abused today. This is one label that earns it to the very last drop.

ALE - BARLEYWINE AND WHEATWINE

What is a Barleywine and most importantly what was it in the past? Originally it was a malty presentation, hence a wine-like, rich soup of barley malt. Bass No. 1 Ale of 1870 was one of the first but doubtless people have made intense, malty brews for centuries, especially in ancient times when using bread as the basis for the bottled drinks. There are even ancient references to wine from grapes adding barley to give it a different, intense malty flavor.

Most labels are medium to dark brown, very high in ethanol (8-13%), some are

aged in barrels. Most critically, the major "fruit" involved must be barley or wheat (a grain) and not a classic berry or pome fruit.

Many modern barleywines are basic intense ales (usually with an mostly equal hops:malt balance) with the recipe doubled or tripled - or more. If you ever blended an IPA with a Imperial Stout, the effect can be similar. Some things today are Candy Beers or Sweet Barleywine in the sense the caramel malts are super sweet, ultra-rich, and producing an effect like liquid butterscotch or caramel candies. The other extreme might be called the Dry Barleywine where the malts and hops are in a mostly dry fruit or bitter non-sweet presentation. The Fruity Barleywine can be sweet but is very often on the dry side, using hops of this flavor profile, some laying down an intense grapefruit or citrus theme. Some experts say the American version of the Barleywine is more devoted to hops than the classic English form but there too many exceptions to accept that notion.

Beside rich, rewarding flavors, many Barleywines can be cellar-aged like a grape wine and they will generally improve over the next 1-4 years.



Avery Hog Heaven Dry-hopped Barleywine-style Ale

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

With 102 IBU's and 9.2% ABV, this dark yet luminous amber subject is made to thrill. The golden-beige head is large and lasting. Nose is very fruity. The foiled label with pretty pink, winged swine flying over a dark blue foiled sky is well...unique. While most hogs would in fact prefer a portion of unmalted barley, I am sure a few might special, Arnold-fine pigs would love a good potent beer. I for one would sit in my own sloppy filth for days just to try this fine beverage, followed by a very sound sleep. (I'm sure my editors will remove this previous sentence but in case they are too lazy to notice it, here goes). As our nasal sampling confirmed, this is one fruity, fruit-laden, ester-drenched ale. I would say it's as fruity and flamboyant as Elton John in his feather boa and big glasses period but my editors would never let that get to print. (Here goes, let's see).

Barleywines are all over the map these days and are lately just another way to say "Imperial" or "Ultra-Imperial" with out any regard to the classic use of the term. Some are so over the top they are Czar's sipping barleywines out of one Faberge egg while forking rare Caviar out of more gem-encrusted eggs. Hog Heaven is every day approachable, very full to be sure, royal in quality but working class in common sensibility. Most importantly strong for a real purpose and with a mission. That mission is getting fruit and awesome smooth hops delivered at the highest state of the brewing arts. Avery always seems to have a perfect yeast for their purpose at the moment and here you get a bottle that is worth every nickel - and you will need more than a pocket of Jeffersons to sip here.

Brewbase Fives



Bell's Third Coast® Old Ale

RATING: 5.0

Comstock, Michigan

The label is curious and as a wanna-be artist I kinda like their approach and execution. I'm damn sick of wild dogs, crazy old dudes, and anything that flies. The pure art scene in pretty charcoal and white shows a detailed winter day, doubtless from the Michigan, bordered in pink and lettered in violet-red. I rather like them recommending to "fill a sniffer" with it for beer as better than pedestrian brandy in many, many notable examples. The color is dark amber, head strong and biege, the lace weak. It sips very strong and like a energetic fruity ales. I rather enjoy some modern barleywines on the pomological side of things. I checked their website and yes they used the "barley wine" phrase; got something right for once. For us coastal-ready residents, the term "third coast" is used by them thar Great Lakes folks to imagine their big bodies are water are mini-oceans or something like that. The term is also used for land-locked Nashville TN in the entertainment business since they are neither LA or NY. There was also a time when Gulf Coast regions used this term as well so it's a registered trademark and yet historically muddled.

This vibrant, very capable brew is 10.2% ABV and like most old or barleywine ales it can be matured for extra goodness. If I had to pick a barleywine style I'd pick this approach which emphasizes insightful fruit esters above near-fatal malt and hops overdoses. This is real ale, true ale, strong ale, and I love it. There is controlled power here, skill and refinement in every sip from very cold to near room temp, a genuine accomplishment in the old molten arts. It is sweet even to the finish and I'd dry it out one notch perhaps if given a choice. And as they recommend on the label: put some bottles away to cellar and thus refine our patience and character. I have neither the patience or character to store this nectar for more than 32 minutes and as usual I depend on friends to do so.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



BrewDog Mikkeller Devine Rebel (2009, 2010)

RATING: 5.0 (2009, 2010)

Fraserburgh, Scotland

With the names BrewDog and Devine Rebel, an old town in Scotland is the last place you'd expect this exciting barrel-aged beer to come from. It has that Seattle grunge or California crazy look and sound about the bottle and the names. The 12.1% ABV is enough to get me to spend \$11.99 for the 11.2 ounces (June 2010) although the BrewDog name already is a "absolute must try" for me. THAT'S OVER 1 GREENBACK PER OUNCE FOLKS! The D-Rebel is actually a collaborative effort between BrewDog and Kikkeller, two creative names with various degrees of recognition in the US. Ale and champagne yeasts are used with a single hop variety, followed by both aluminum and Speyside Whiskey barrel-fermentation that is evident and as good as it gets.

It was pioneered in 2009 and I tried that lower 12.1% ABV. Tried again in September 2011, the label said 2010 and showed the higher 13.8% tag. Same awesome, intense flavors but more of a lingering whiskey-sort of nip which one's brain associates with high ethanol plus oaken flavors. It is the illusion of whiskey without being a real one. I would not call it Nectar of the Gods so much as the top 2% of all the ambrosial fluids on earth made by God's smarter, really handsome, and brighter older brother. If you can find a better barleywine (and I realize not everyone likes stuff this bold, sticky, and intense), then I hope you are entitled to your own opinion, and I don't care what you think anymore! Here is toffee overload, topnotch whisky oak, fruit ester nirvana, and sweet malt paradise with naked servant girls serving up everything from wafting vanilla, caramel candies, berries and cherries from their swollen lips, the smoke of passions past, and dripping raspberry vodka down their bosoms above our mouths. I'll pay \$3 an ounce next year as long as gifted servants come bearing similar gifts.



Brooklyn Monster Ale (Barleywine) 2007

RATING: 5.0

Utica, New York

I suppose the taxes and labor rate is lower in Utica than old Brooklyn. Too bad for the old traditional urban breweries but Utica has many good labels in this book so let's move on. The ABV is 10.2% and so the barleywine style claim may be substantiated. They print the particulars in tiny print in little black letters on chrome foil - impossible to read you idiots for anyone from 20-20 to coke-bottle glasses! This gem pours into rich amber hues, medium-dark side, and a cream-beige head of some duration. It is rather sweet and nicely malted, the alcohol only apparent in the pleasantly stinging, dry finish. You have a sugar-ethanol dry counterbalance going on here as one does with many Belgian ales and barleywines; a symphonic discourse I usually find to be soothing and as stirring as Mozart. You get the impression this might have been a bottle of concentrate for making about 120 kegs of Michelob's lasted pseudo-micro amber.

This is a strapping brew, double turbos under the hood, the real stuff, the strong stuff, and pardon me for saying the manly stuff too. (And guys usually like girls who like and can handle powerful stuff in the categories of adult beverages, power tools, and trucks if that matters at all. If it doesn't matter to you...drink on and enough your new chest hairs). This is a very persuasive example of why more is often more in the brewing world. That is a true statement if a brewer knows how to keep all the big chemistry within bounds, pleasant on the tongue, and intimately understands what separates crude-potent beer from the sublime-robust nectars of our memories. The men and women at The Brooklyn Brewery have this and much more down and on a truck headed our way.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Dog Fish Head Olde School Barleywine Style Ale

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

I believe that this bottle-conditioned 15% ABV is the strongest ethanol monster in this entire publication/website. There are a couple 14-something ales in this file but none a full 3x the usual supermarket potency. The price per 4-pack was \$8.99 at Total Wine (February 2010) and that's more than reasonable, almost a true value really when you consider it does the glorious, numbing damage of 12 regular beers. NOW THIS EQUATION IS MY IDEA OF LESS FILLING BEER! Forget the watery lights of the mass market and go with loads of the master molecule because it comes with endless flavor. My first bottle was on a relatively empty stomach...wow...watch out if you down these in public or in front of important company like your future inlaws or potential employer or pre-adoption counselor. In college we used to trim up beer with cheap jugs of vodka and sometimes that would knock a buddy on the floor if he was not expecting a Pabst to be so potent. Heads would spin with or without the added influence of palmate foliage products. Later as an adult I learned to use lemon/citrus vodka to turbocharge an already strong wheat or Belgian ale where the hard liquor is easily hidden.

This thermonuclear barleywine pours bright golden-amber with a substantial head. Some barleywine-like products come off a tasting like "beer concentrate" which like orange juice and soda syrup merely need water to become marketable. This product remains sufficiently diluted and drinkable to be an impressive dose of sugar, malts, and hops though invariably this style dictates that sweet malt wins out - otherwise they would Imperial IPAs if they were double to triple strength teas made mostly of strong hops. I was curious about beer flavors one day and as I'm in the habit of making lattes with molasses, thought I would do some Ovaltine (full of malt) with the same bootstrap brand I use most. There was something very much akin to barleywine flavors in this blend of syrup-drenched malt thought based on milk and not the water base of beer. There is a very clear nip of both alcohol and hops here, though one is not always sure which is doing what to you and when. While barleywines can easily become too much, creatures of excess for marketing and other reasons, Olde School provides a savory broth without being heavy or cloying. This is very much at the pinnacle of brewing art and yet priced not to offend, a fancy yet very approachable ale of the highest rank. Dogfish Head make another deep, wide mark in the headboard of legendary North American brewers.

The Duck-Rabbit Barleywine

RATING: 4.5

Farmville, North Carolina

The Duck-Rabbit Craft Brewery started in 2004 in Farmville, NC (a pretty town of 4500 folks) and do not provide a full line as most southeastern micros. Dark and potent beers are their thing and it shows. The name of

brewery comes from Gestalt psychology where the viewer is asked to view a thing and decide if it's a duck or a rabbit when it could be both or neither. Brewer Paul Phillipon decided to work on the void of good dark beers in the southern market. It pours a darkish but bold mahogany-amber with a full cream head. The nose is luscious caramel-IPA. I was ready to write something dumb because I figured my tiny \$2.99 from Whole Foods of Cary was weak in the department where barleywines always do well - ethanol. Then I read 11% on the label. Well hidden guys. First merit point.

Their formula has changed a bit, sugar coming down since early years, and hops increasing I think. It's much like an IPA warmed by caramel malts and while I love a no-excuse IPA, this balance pleases me greatly. There is more fruit the longer you sip, notes of cherry terminating into hops bitterness for a very dry ending. The hopping is IPA strong as I said and on the floral side - so if you love those Sam Adams floral notes this will blow your doors off. Perhaps I should say this barleywine killed me softly for Farmville is often known for Grammy-award winning, amazing singer Roberta Flack who taught music there. Feel like making love...the first time ever I saw your foam...



Flying Dog Horn Dog Barley Wine

RATING: 5.0

Frederick, Maryland

Dateline 2027. Young Darius Jones is finishing up his Ph.D. project at the Compton Institute of Technology. Working late in the C.C. Broadus Jr. Genomics Lab, he lets out a shriek, pumps his fist, and notes the perfect merger of the RainPit and Rhino7 gene clips in the new embryo after 3 years of work. He has successfully combined the Rainbow Bull Terrier, a friendly but muscular pooch with multicolored hair patches with a gene group known to put a 7-10 inch cellulose horn on the head of any mutt. Such is the raging, rainbow, horn dog portrayed with artistic lines and subtle colors on the label of FD Horn Dog Barley Wine.

I did not always have a barley wine category in this book because that name is used today for many things including oak-barrel-aged products, golden ales, dark brown ales, dark lagery things, and other warm malty excesses. It's a fun name but ceases to be a coherent, clearly defined style today. This splendid fluid pours a glowing reddish-amber, head beige-cream but mid-length, not much lace. The aroma however is caramel enchantment cubed. I had hoped so. First notes are tartish, faintly hopped but they quickly progress to a substantial tastebud bath of liquified beer-candy; an entertaining and toothsome nectar in fact. The luscious, malt is generous in a collapse of a Hoover dam holding back 12 cubic miles of toffee syrup way. There is a great difference between cheap soda-beer and a superficially similarly sugar-malt barley wine of this caliber. The malts here are clean and sharp, richly layered, sugar fused to flavor (not following it crudely), and augmented with authentic notes of licorice, banana, and mild hop-derived spice. The cheap stuff has none of those fine touches is a simple hops syrup in a bottle. Try this against (sip vs. sip) any of those beer sodas, side by side and you get a brew education better than most. High marks go to FD for offering this in their 4-pack called Canis Major, an affordable sampler of potent, very well-brewed products that set a very high bar. I can't wait for their future Nympho Newfie Nectar.

Grado Plato Kukumerla Ale Chiara

RATING: 4.5

Montaldo, Italy

This classic Italian barleywine is a whopping 10% alcohol and it pours a golden-amber under a yellowish-cream head of some duration and large bubbles. The nose is a mix of fruit, buttered veggies, and malt. The ethanol is not disguised and my enthusiastic first sip was like the first time I did a jumbo shot of Jaeger. I'm a big boy have

have 1530 different beer labels under my very expansive belt. This was almost a belt too far. The American barleywine is that of quadrupling everything so you get something like a double IPA mixed with a blackish, imperial stout. This creation almost has Old World liquor elements and something an ultra-strong, nasty mead I had one time. If this brew was not sweetened so much (and one suspects it has candy sugar, honey, or brown sugar added at some point) it would be unbearable and asking you to say "uncle". The carbonation is modest but the floating yeast, spices, and haze are full strength. As to the spicing I cannot be sure but at some point coriander and something throwing off licorice notes is suspected. Beer reviewers (old and new) imagine nearly ever known fruit on God's fine planet. These esters are potent but their diversity never gives a mixed punch effect ever. As we said before there are buttery and perhaps honey-roasted vegetable notes too. One reviewer thought it could be honeyed carrots but this is very academic as I doubt carrots are actually used - honey might be? This is certainly a very unique product and I'd recommend any beer tasting worth it's salt for eccentricity and diversity of styles include this in their annual cycle.

Brewbase Fives



Lagunitas Undercover Investigaton Shut-down Ale

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

This "Especially bitter ale" (not an ESB in truth) is brewed in celebration of the "2005 St. Patrick's Day Massacre...and the subsequent 20-day suspension in January of 2006". Say what? This label has led to some speculation but the true story seems to be that the police had the brewery monitored for a time in 2005 after maybe one person was seen opening enjoying a cousin of the hopvine in smokable form at a beer tasting. Reportedly, law enforcement tried to buy the stuff and failed, though offered to get some for free. They shut down Lagunitas for 20 days after a raid on St. Patty's day that netted a couple of arrests.

Now the Beer Advocate classes it as a American Double/Imperial IPA but the hops are nowhere near so strong even though the 9.25-9.7% ABV (labels show both) is charming and in similarly deep waters. Their website calls it "our oxymoronic 'Imperial Mild'...unforgiven and unrependant". It is nearly barleywine though very mellow in all respects and it would be fitting for it to be cool and mellow, given the history involved. It comes down to us as a rich, darkish golden-amber with many red hues, a mid-length cream head. It is ridiculously smooth for such a high ethanol level and so it sneaks up on you like a good hit of top shelf...well...you know. It is more sweet pale ale to me but things are usually called barleywines when flavors are intensified with this level of ABV. I got a nice sixpack for \$8.99 in June 2010 and that is a STEALLLLLL for something of this gravity and quality. The stratified, multi-natured, and luxuriant flavors are mind-blowing (even without that other green herb) and one is better for having experienced it. I'm NOT a big fan of ribbing our honorable, badged men and women in blue, but I guess the folks at Lagunitas felt it was their right to claim innocence and get themselves vindicated nationwide in a clever, liquid way. Perhaps the whole lot can sit down (off duty of course) and have a couple; getting sober rides home of course. Perhaps it would be better if CA could get their budgetary act together and settle the whole herb issue once and for all to most people's satisfaction. In any case, this brew is delicious, delectable, deep, and a crowning accomplishment for a very skilled team of apparently abused and confused folks. Here is the wine of beers and now that the smoke has cleared, a juicy feast true and triumphant.

Dear Blue Cross and Blue Shield Insurance: I feel I am deserving of medical barleywine - not a whole treatment but at least a case a month delivered from a reputable vendor directly to my home - I'll take it from there with the help of a nice, friendly, smokin' hot nurse I know. In return, I will never visit your pricey shrinks for any kind of mental health issue or need to order Cialis - as barleywine always lifts my spirits and most everything else of importance. Signed, Larry

Left Hand Widdershins Barleywine-style Ale 2009

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

This curious brew is 75% ale together with 25% ale aged in oak brandy casks. It still goes for \$10 a 750ml bottle but would be much more if 100% oak aged. Belgian candy sugar is employed in the process. It pours cloudy amber with some smears of cream yeast in the bottom of some bottles. The head is large, foamy, lasting, tinted antique ivory. Its comes after the tastebuds aggressively at first, nippy, tart, strong, and bold in early notes. Then some more candy sugar comes on, leaving malty-molasses at mid notes, and a finish mixing tart and sweet. Hops of some strength is theme throughout though various interludes occur to present minor performances. It is not as smooth as many barleywines available and will surely benefit from aging. One experienced friend called it 'Barely Wine', an easy joke perhaps but with a element of truth. 10% ABV is not weak addition either. I found it alluring and once again found myself murmuring about how much of my month this Left Hand firm is getting.

Mad River John Barleycorn Barleywine Ale

RATING:

Blue Lake, California

This 10% potent beverage has a curious mottled label in tan and olive tones. If you study the long-bearded fellow on the label his beard is made of wheat clusters. The fluid here is tribute to John Barleycone though the guy looks more like an altered Bob Marley to me. Marley would have loved a super-strong ale like this to be sure. The pour comes out as reddish-brown or brownish-red, quite heavy on the red side in most light conditions. The head's a pale tan and mid-sized. The nose is scotch-like, favoring sugar-malt even though this is not aged in barrels and it's clearly no lightweight on the aromatic esters. This is clearly on the beer candy side of the philosophical debate of what a barleywine could or should be.

New Holland Pilgrim's Dole Wheatwine

RATING: 4.5

New Holland, Michigan

One is first attracted by the pumpkin orange graphics painted/tampoed onto the dark brown bottle. Nice artwork all around. From their High Gravity Series, the name is based on a 14th century custom of rationing bread and ale to "nourish wayfarers on their holy pilgrimage". This is supposed to be our road to enlightenment made with 50% wheat instead of the usual barley but still in the barleywine ale style. It pours a luminous pumpkin-copper, some lace though long, a hugh golden-beige of largish bubbles. Nose is sweet malt, favoring caramel overload. It sips like a rich barleywine, 10% ABV, oddly different in the grain notes and of course they told us why! The big 22 oz. bottles are more than enough to get a full assessment of the qualities - and they are many. Early notes are very sweet but the ethanol dries out the finish some. You get lots of buttery malt, occasionall pops of tart hops, lots of syrupy excess, and various spices rounding out the finish. This will be too much for some and in fact I blended part of one glass to a regular Hefe-weizen and enjoyed the 25% "weaker" version much more. It's a tad too much of a Candy Wheat Ale for my taste but nicely done overall. As one gets to the last pour, the high ethanol gets a bit weary and in the way. A small glass or brandy snifter would be enough for most sessions. A whole bottle is an overload. Given the character of it with the wheat switch and all it's a nice choice for your next beer tasting challenge.

Old Hickory Irish Walker Barley-wine Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Hickory, North Carolina

Long, slow fermentation with cold-aging makes this 10% rich ale a bit different from some. The class is dark brown with subtle reddish flows of just some light - mahogany in brewer-speak. The head is quite golden for such a tan thing. English hops are used for a spicy presentation but it's all densely mixed with fruit esters and caramel malts. It is not like "ale concentrate" in the sense you think it not diluted enough perhaps. While hops bitterness occurs at mid flavor passages, the finish tempers it and simmers it ddown considerably to sweet malt and fruit flavors. Some barleywines these days seem like double IPA's with added malt and sweetness but this is truer to the Old World origin in our opinions. Given the number of ultra complex, more heavenly-than-nirvana, barrel-aged barleywines and imperial ales, this one comes off a bit off the new 2010's standards - not far off. The lofty ethanol is disguised and never hinders anything. Two panelists felt it one notch "too thin" and others felt the flavor components were all there just not in perfect harmony and synergy. "Nice things are there in

strong doses but the notes come up and down, favoring one theme one microsecond and another the next two...that lack of even balance in mostly the mid passages needs work...blend the soup my friends!" This formula and execution as Irish Walker is "near greatness" and that sums up what most of us intended to write. It would like the brewer's barrel-spin on this but home again should work too - but we can only review the juice we have now.

Brewbase Fives



RedHook Barley Wine Ale

RATING: 5.0

Woodinville, Washington/Portsmouth, New Hampshire

RedHook's latest super-strong ale is in their Limited Release Series, 10.1%, flowing out a hazy amber with a rocky head reminding me a rootbeer float. Can anyone dare say....Barleywine Float? "Vigorously hopped and patiently aged...double mashed". There is hardly a label anywhere that is this potent and this smooth. The malts and hops are sweetened, yes, but to a tasteful degree than brings out a caramel candy aspect of the highest order. Malt interwines with licorice, snippy nippy hops with other blended notes, some of which approach a Scottish Ale. This tasty treat is a barley-hops soup of the finest type, a level of accomplishment in all brewing aspects. The harmony here is what separates all from other things which might be sold as Imperial Pale Ales or strong amber ales. I found a single glass sufficient for the first session as the ABV and flavors are rapidly saturating to the tastebuds - though as tender as thermonuclear wines can get. Delicious in moderate doses is the best way to deal with a barleywine just one goes low volume with a plummy vintage port or thick sweet sherry. Just because they are not for mass consumption does not make them hostile and impenetrable - they potency and dense flavors are their glory and one must be as moderate with a barleywine as with any strongly flavored beverage.

Brewbase Fives



Smuttynose Wheat Wine Ale

RATING: 5.0

New Hampshire

Here is a remarkable, truly laudable cross between the traditional barleywine and a solid American Wheat Ale. A Gold Medal Winner in the 2005 GABF, this label has become something of a beer aficionado's fav labels. ABV has varied over the years but is usually in the 10-11.5% range. They include in their "Big Beer" series and all of them are super-potent in terms of both ingredients and our favorite intoxicating molecule. It pours golden-amber, favoring a bright but lightish copper. The flavors are intense including caramel, sherry or whiskey perhaps, vanilla, sweet spice, wheat, and faint fruit. I think I smelled pears somewhere. Some people notice cherries. Hops are quite faint and despite the name it is no dark wheat. Finish is high ABV bitter but some caramel creeps in. Sweetness varies a bit but overall it's more sweet in aroma than taste. It's one of those labels ideal for a beer tasting group as opinions and flavor notes will be all over the map with arguments endless. All of you will be right.

Stone Old Guardian Barley Wine Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Escondido, California

Here's a very potent, 11.1% ABV ale with a small gold-lettered novel printed on the back of the bottle. Those of you with 20-20 vision will still need an 8 inch wide lens to read it. Color is rich amber, medium to darkish, old ivory head of some duration, and a very hoppy nose. It is nearly an Imperial Pale Ale with high ethanol but one can see resinous and medicinal elements of the Indian Pale Ale; that other IPA thing. It's therefore super-nippy from the two traditional bitter elements. It was a little extreme for me and I do love a hoppy, high ABV beverage. A little measure of moderating sugar or malt would not have hurt and gotten me over my minor doubts.

Widmer Brothers Galaxy-Hopped Barleywine Ale (Reserve, Special Release #4, Spring 2011)

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

This dark but glowing amber barleywine has a cream head like a cream soda, a nose of very sweet hops. This formula is brewed with huskless malt and Belgian candy sugar, resulting in a ten dollar bottle (October 2011) with 9.5% alcohol and loads of flavor. The first few sips suggest a sweet malty ale, deeper than a mere ale soda or sugared-up fest offering. These come in boxes (even in the most common of supermarkets) and suggest immediately presentation and price that this is a treat for the masses with a couple of dollars to spare. As I often remind the newbies in brew tasting, a 9.5% packs the punch of two 4.5% bottles of ordinary, lightish faux Pils - so figure the punch is just \$5.00 a bottle in the BAC Buzz Value Equation. The sweetness is not crude nor excessive, nicely judged, and a just a little good-bitter with bud saturation towards the end of your bottle. The very high quality Galaxy hops notes function like a horn section to the ever-present malty strings. They are there occasionally and in good timing but not always being heard nor necessary. The balance of flavor notes is very pleasant but given the high standards in this section and in brew world generally these days, we found the malt complexity a shade or notch under the highest bar we know. Reviewers here said "sugar-malt lover's delight...the supporting hops give it a perfect profile...5 bottles for me" and "all good stuff...but maybe too much of the kitchen sink approach than a harmonious recipe...I'd buy it again but only if I had no new choices".

ALE - BARREL AGED AND OAK-MELLOWED including the occasional Lager

I exclude the barrel-aged Belgian beers (usually brown subcategory) and they are covered under the Ale - Belgian sections. Age stouts and porters remain under those sections. Also, barleywines can be barrel-aged and some are included there but I will duplicate others here as well if there is merit in two classifications.

"Smoked and Oaked" beers are not entirely new and I first discovered them in Kentucky bourbon country in 2008. In 2010 and 2011 they became more widely sold in beer stores.

In January 2013 we split off the Stout - Barrel-aged class.

Barleywine and Christmas ales with barrel-aging are covered in those sections.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Allagash Curieux Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Maine

For me any of the corked, 750ml Allagash issues are immediate purchases, even if the plastic must come out to acquire them. 760 casks of bourbon heritage were made of this potent 11% brew, first bottles in February 2010 and come to my specialty beer store in North Carolina in April 2010. It pours as pale as a Belgian white but has surprising limnited last and a docile head. The more yeasty pours - and the bottle shows evident cloudiness (I almost put down "clear cloudiness") - are fruity and complex, delicious beyond compare and nearly as good a treat as Orval. Even the early, less yeasty pours are luminous in all possible ways, formidable among scores of sound American 750's, and so wondrous I almost have to stop and give it physical salute. Maybe I should write them. The probably with this statement of equality is that our American worldclass ales are one-offs and limited production. The European craft it all under their one name and keep it all steady, perfect and famous for centuries. It's almost like we're ashamed to be world-beating, idiocyncratic, and crazy awesome all the time! Here is a grand, mind-blowing ale that needs to let it's light shine on a world stage - and get laid down 10,000 casks at a time.

Alltech Lexington Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale

RATING: 4.5

Lexington, Kentucky

The red light on the self-scan cash register flashed. A bold but stern electronic-female voice boomed that I should remove the object from my bag immediately and contact a cashier. The long-haired, somewhat rotund and rumped lady cashier holding a portable computer and obviously baffled by all the technology came over and in a thick Shepherdsville KY accent informed me I had violated the local Sunday laws about buying beer. "I'm from out of state..I didn't know" I said in a mousy, apologetic voice, trying to avoid her continued glare as if was trying to fool her. But it was five PM in the afternoon! Even in our strict North Carolina valleys we can buy beer after 2 PM or church, whichever ends last. This damn grocery store was a piece up the road from Jim Beam and half the great bourbon factories in the world for God's sake! The hotel manager said I could buy some up in Louisville or another county just 20 minutes away. Not withstanding my first attempt to buy a four-pack of this brew, this is a very fine smooth product, more sweet than it needs to be but absolutely "elegantly smooth" as they planned and declare. The supply of barrels is close and likely affordable, so perhaps all that glorious, seasoned, blessed oak will do us US beer lovers more good in the future; instead of going over to Europe to make their malty stuff. It won a Silver Medal at the ABF.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Times



BrewDog Paradox Isle of Arran Stout

RATING: 5.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

The idea of a stout aged in whiskey barrels is enough to...well...make me pay \$7 for a small bottle of beer. The aroma is hard to pin down and so one must sip. The best way to think of this fine 10% brew is that of classic super-malty stout spiced with a bit of cinnamon, vanilla, and that whiskey-barrel nip which is probably 289 different nameable chemicals - were I to have a mass spec machine on this desk. Oak aging can be overdone and underdone but here it is judged just right to compliment rather than be subdued by or dominating the classic stout theme. It is very much a spiced stout in practice and one that is ultra-yummy. This would be fantastic as some kind of flavoring for a sauce or batter given the depth and quality of flavors. I rarely get two bottle beers in one day and this one came directly after 8-4-1 Redhook so I was even harder to amaze. This is a savory beer in a good sense, satisfying down to the gills, a rare combination of flavors should should be more common and be tried often again.

BrewDog Storm

RATING: 4.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

This is going to be one of the most controversial beers you try when you see it and sip it down. Stormy for sure. The teal blue letter on the black label while challenge one's sight for one thing. The "malt beverage" tag partnered with barrel aging is quite new - a cheap thing together with a premium thing. The color is hazy gold and not exactly the expected aging material that normally is loaded with dark malts. It is almost smokey enough to be a rauschbier and has a harsh, medicinal finish that is either "dripping with oak, lurid, and challenging to love" or "wow...new and crazy...just what I needed today, something well made and creative" to quote two of my trusted advisers who drink too much beer and call their mothers far too seldom for their hobby. For me it is big, eccentric, hard to love in some ways, maybe like a bad girl who want to like very much but know better. Storm as smokey as three block of burned out warehouses with three companies still hosing it down to embers and Sal grinning from his white Cadillac four blocks down. There are thing here I do not identify as beverage or food flavors. Hops are there but musty fungus is three notches above that mess. The whiskey barrel nip is there and that makes things probably about another compounds far more complex. Many folks are neutral on this. Being a beer blending, I look as this one as an opportunity to make other beers more odd and this one improved with certain things like sweetness and more malt.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Times



Clipper City Heavy Seas Mutiny Fleet Barleywine Style Ale

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

Clipper City has the whole pirate thing down in spades, both in the insufferably longnames and graphics which seem to bring some clarity to whole confusing brand. They have a clipper ship theme, a heavy seas subbrand, something about "Mutiny Fleet" and other things about "Below Decks". And finally we get to Barleywine Style Ale name in 22 ounce doses. I'd be confused and annoyed by all this plank-riding 'cept a certified grog at 10% beats a rum swig any sea 'a any day from the worthies...splice the mainbrace. Drink the dark and sudsy faire and smartly lads. [pirate lingo over...I love and hate it both, so be forewarned]. An over-the-top barleywine seems easy and common these days now that everyone is turning up all the ingredients up twelves notches and doing crazy things to them. This stuff is oak-aged in bourbon barrels in a cellar; hence the "below decks" reference. It pours out a dark amber-brown, the head ivory and lasting but low. The the nose is whiskey-malt and clearly special. First sip is so delicious and smooth I am instantly compelled to order my assistant Guido to order me a case...but alas I do not have an assistant and must go back to Whole Foods on my own and do bottle grab among the young, agile, beer smug patrons. There are no heavy seas, mutinous events, or bare bones deception here.

The only thing on a pirate theme I might offer is that this is brew as smooth as the Cap'ns best velvet hat or his favorite silk scarf or his mistress' bosom. This is true luxury and exotic pleasure among us fools and common men; a brew so exalted and commendable I feel not prepared for or worthy of it. There is no barrel-aged brew more fine as I write this in June 2010. I am smitten, surprised by this firm in fact, and in all respects enchanted and ravished by molecules full and cleverly delivered. The seas may be heavy but my weight is lifted and my horizon clean and clear, blue and blissful with every sip here. I'm so glad an American brewery has reached to this lofty place and found a way, a joyous and charming way to succeed so fully and with such consummate perfection. The molecules all align in this bottle and in this pour and the brewing arts have never had a better advocate. There is clear and present danger for no wine or simple liquor will engage one as this blessed and grand barleywine. If a barleywine can trump any wine costing as much then is here is one statement towards that proof. Few wines in this price range will be half as noble or enticing.

Brewbase Fives



Firestone Walker Double Barrel Ale

RATING: 5.0

Los Olivos CA

Using an oak barrel fermentation process they describe as exclusive, this Cali- fornia microbrew produces a fine golden-amber ale with a persistant creamy head. It is slightly aromatic and is immediately flavorful with high quality malt and ale yeast flavors. An authentic English ale yeast and five blended malts are employed together with both English and Slovenian hops. The two brewers note their wine making experience with oak has helped their work with this amber beverage. Reviewers with extensive ale experience were almost uni- formly impressed with the sophisticated flavor components, roundness of the appeal, and moderate sweetness. You could present this to any real ale fan from 'over there' and you'd th be impressed. Highest recommendation.

Brewbase Fives



Founder's Backwood's Bastard Bourbon Barrel Aged Ale

RATING: 5.0

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The four pack tells me they're going for quality and a price point that had freakin' better deliver. If it doesn't a go mega-savage on their tails. The musty, somber tan and gray tones of the long-beared backwoods dude on the label is plain and simple amazing art - so good a beer label of any fluid brilliance may be in the final analysis unworthy of it. I get the backwoods thing with that old Kentucky (or maybe TN) bourbon barrel theme - though those Tennessee Bastards (read: Jack No. 7) don't technically qualify as bourbon with all their fancy but effective carbon filtering and such. This stuff is 50 IBU's and 10.2% ABV. It pours as reddish-copper as an old Kentucky single batch fav, probably a red ale in general classifications, and the head a tall stack of golden-beige bubbles. You get the true nose which this style should confirm - sassy malt with tall whiskey notes all around, a very authentic presentation from nose to sip here. I'd almost swear the North Carolina ABC folks made a mistake and let a 20 proof whiskey slip by in little, artful 12 oz. bottles. "Oh God...this is real...yes, yes" was by unexpergated first impression and it sounds kinda dumb if you don't taste this stuff a bit warm for the first time. Those barrels are cranking out flavor like I've never found in any beer before and while I'm no whiskey hound, I have experienced some of the best and can appreciate smooth work of KY geniuses entering by body and thrilling my mind. The whiskey notes almost give it a medicinal theme, far different from the Scottish (Scotch) Ale approach, wrongfully bitter to some tastes but good old bastardic southern charm to me. I'd almost want to hang a new classification of this one label as Whiskey Ale for nothing in this group is so authentically suggestive of the stronger drink or it's glorious casks as this one. The other 's are wonderful and priceless and saintly in their way but here is whiskey flavor as it deserves to be. The art on the label continues as majestically through the glass and into every pour. I am simply blown away.

Brewbase Fives



Innis and Dunn Original Oak-Aged Beer

RATING: 5.0

Edinburgh, Scotland

The Scotch bottled-styled presentation is pleasant and interesting. A small lower decal mentions it's aged 77 days in "select oak barrel". Color is light amber with a largish head. Flavor is smoother than any Scotch on the planet. Vanilla, honey, strong but never bitter hops, and citrus notes come to the brain in wonderful thumps as if from a Nerf hammer. Complexity abounds and I wonder why not more ales are made this way. Time it takes but we have the money and will gladly pay! Heck, add another 20 days and bill us more! Anyone, everyone who drinks this nectar of the gods will want more and more. Price is no object when quality is so high and the style so remarkable. This is beer making at it's finest and is one of my top 20 new finds this year.

Innis and Dunn Rum Cask Oak-aged Beer

RATING: 3.5

Edinburgh, Scotland

Unlike the Original barrel-aged above this product found in Summer 2012 is aged 57 days and carries a 7.4% potency. The dark amber pour carries a golden-tan head of short duration and a fizzy carbonation that makes it appear to be cream soda. The flavor differs from classic whiskey/whisky-refined products and does carry a pleasant rum flavor. "American oak and rum-infused oak", apparently two products were employed here. Some panelists found the carbonation that remains a tad off-putting while others felt it was merely an idiosyncrasy of little concern. It is "warming and rummy...by no means a substitute for real liquor...for the times one wants something lighter and more refreshing". It did have some annoying moments aside from the carbonation when some of flavors collided and the rum-filled finish became a little irksome and oversaturated. The rum flavor is not so pleasant one needs to get it for half an hour. Then again most of us were not rum lovers in particular. If you are a rumhead, your thoughts may be more generous. This is a nice recipe but icy, cold, or warmer it has issues with drinkability and refinement. Their Original remains our choice

Brewbase Fives



J.W. Lees Harvest Ale 1999 (reviewed July 2008)

RATING: 5.0

Manchester, England

Purchasing this \$5.99 single bottle (275ml) of beer clearly stamped 1999 in gold required some explanation when I checked out at the local Whole Foods. The pretty cashier, something like an approachable more blemished version of actress Christine Taylor, was curious why it might be "6 dollars or something". A long, eager fellow also enamored by the girl went running for a price. "No, it's from not the singles cooler (by the crawfish fritters, over-vinegared fresh salsa, and pesto dip)...I got it over near the meat counter" where they keep those corked Belgian treats but not the one's in the cooler. Kudos to Whole Foods for carrying so many beers at fair prices. Anyhow, they assumed it was the entire 6-pack price at \$5.99 like the Saranac I suppose. I assured them it was not and this required an explanation why Bud from 1999 would be dreadful and this nectar

from East Kent Goldings hops and Maris Otter barley malt aged and "laid down" would be more like aging a very, very fine wine and something approach heaven-on-earth. Yes, we call them Barley Wines and for good reason.

Color is rich amber, bordering on brownish-amber, lace long and well-distributed, given rise to a beige head of much length. ABV is 11.5% so one does get something extra besides the "educational value" of trying a beer that's a full 8.5 years ago. Aroma is sweet-malt. First taste is impossible to describe without resorting to things I know much more about that aged ales - though I have had a Thomas Hardy's or three. If I drizzled molasses into a pan, melted down some Butterfinger candy bars, and added it rapidly to a cold British ale with idiosyncratic fullness, this might be the result. I'm happy they did it the long, hardy way and did not use food science magic or formulaic "factory beer" shortcuts. If there ever was a sipping beer this is it. If this book sells more than 12 copies, I'll get me a sixpack of J.W. Lees and head for the beach...or bed. The strength of the alcohol is well-hidden and I'd have guessed 6-7% tops. But overall this is wow, wow, wow and a bunch of them squiggly scientific notation thingies over the wows for good measure.



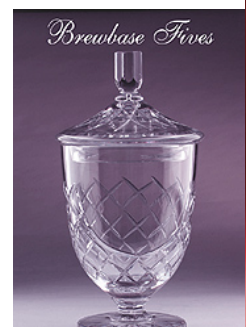
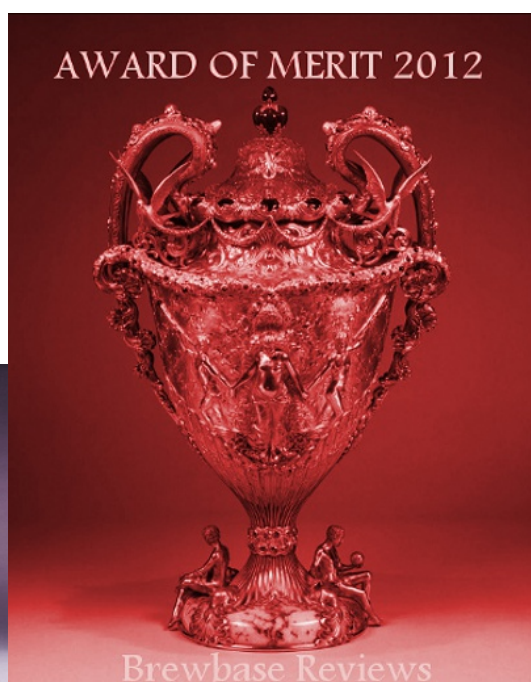
J.W. Lees Harvest Ale Matured in Calvados Casks 2008

RATING: 5.0

Manchester, England

In March 2012 we found Port-aged and Calvados aged version of their famous aged ales. Both were 11.5% but a shocking \$10.99 for 9.3 fluid ounces. The Calvados version is also amber but more hazy. For those of us not as familiar with hard beverages as beer, Calvados is a controlled appellation from the Normandie region of French for an ancient version of apple brandy. Most need two years in casks with double distillation. There are sweet, tart, and bitter variants. Calvados is very much more than a hard cider in complexity and price! Like the Port variant, Lee's aged ale is full of sweet candy caramel notes but is a bit more sticky and simple. Both are remarkably delicious but our nod clearly goes to the Port variant. The Calvados is more sweet and mono-dimensional as such and we all felt the Port version gave more interesting barrel flavors. I would not think the Calvados worth this price while the Port was supremely educational and rare.

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J.W. Lees Harvest Ale Matured in Port Casks 2008

RATING: 5.0 (Award of Merit 2012)

Manchester, England

Now in March 2012, these mini 9.3 oz. bottles of either Port-aged or Calvados-aged ale are \$10.99 or more than a dollar an ounce. ABV is a bold 11.5% as it pours bright golden-amber with a small tan head. The barrel flavors are so smooth and subtle that the caramel notes are like buttery candy. Reviewers here said "CANDYLICIOUS...a real revelation...can someone make this stuff in the US and for less money? Please!" and "This is brew to give to your wine-snob friends who think ale is easy to analyze, simple, and not worth their time...this is elite ale, rich yet smooth...it makes my month in ale drinking". Here is Haute couture of the liquid world, so dazzling and with only the mere form of things with similar colors and names. This ale is not an ale when Lees put their all through and around it. It is a thoroughly different creature, one so silky and glorious. It's elaborate layered notes are accessible to beer fans of all levels of experience. It impresses all and leaves nothing to want...except more. The highest pinnacle, peak of the brewing arts. Award of Merit 2012.

Jack Daniels Oak-Aged Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Lynchburg TN/Cincinnati OH

JD is at it again. This Oak-aged Pils and an American Ale have been added to their premiere Amber Ale. That Amber failed to move us except for the the very lovely labels. Color is a bit darker than expected for a Pils. The head is microfine and lasting. Flavor at first palate suggests it is a step above a basic AMERICAN GOLDEN LAGER PILS. The mid palate has some 'inappropriate and abrupt bitter notes' as one reviewer put it. The finish is weaker, ragged, and semi-dry. At \$6.99 one can do much better although we would recommend you order their cute bottle opener for \$2.00. It is drinkable but clearly this 90's effort is not as refined or polished as their harder stuff.

Brewbase Fives



Mendocino Talon True Style Barley Wine

RATING: 5.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

This very dark amber ale is 10.5% ABV and densely malty for it's long process of worshipping barley malt. It is so tangy, molasses-infused, and just plain yummy it could easily pass for a Scottish Ale. It is perhaps best classed as a "fruity amber/Scottish ale" if one judges it on taste alone - process and formula being something else in the brewing world. The finish has enough hops to round it out and earn my highest rating. The ABV is about right and does not overwhelm or offend at any point in the unfurling of taste notes. It is downright scrumptious on a cold evening, better than many wines, and yet with more ethanol than lots of grape-derived stuff. Criticisms in the media have included a lack of carbonation (not sweat to me) and a syrupy approach - show me a barley wine that is not a sweet molasses pour and I'll show you barley wine light! It is aged over a year and so we place it with his group of wine beers. It has been on the market since February 2004 and is still going strong now in 2008.

New Holland Blue Sunday Sour (Vintage 2012, The Cellar Series)

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan

New Holland had a very fine idea to mellow out the sour of a Saison with oak-aging. It takes the sometimes harsh nature of the usual thing down a peg or two. The hops are of the finest quality, bitterish, and pleasing. The malt side is lacking and this later point is our only complaint.

Olde Hickory Eirphiotes Imperial Pilsner Aged in Chardonnay Barrels

RATING: 3.5

Hickory, North Carolina

Here we get the "occasional lager" in this category. Eiraphiotes is a Greek epithet for Dionysus meaning "twice born. One life is as a strong Pils and the second aging in white wine barrels. This 2012 production was \$11.99 (April 2012) and 7.5% ABV. Color is medium-dark gold, faintly hazy but no visible yeast residue. The head is old cream and largish. The nose is faintly fruity and rather covert. First sip is a "wow" moment for a rich concoction of flavors conspires to be difficult to analyze without a room full of million dollar machines. The barrel notes are surprisingly early in the flavor passages compared to other white wine barrel ales we know. There are fruit esters everywhere but eventually get a little rough and tart. The Pils base, imperial, double, or not are lost in the zippy barrel flavors almost as if a spicy white wine were actually added. Hops and Pils grains are so to background we not sure if they exist and if so in what shape. This is quite a unique brew and one your beer tasting party will have a field day over. They may not all adore it - but talk they will! Our debate suggested they bring out more Pils flavors next time and reducing the barrel notes either with time or preparation of the the wood. We would like Imperial Pils plus SOME of these fruity, tart notes but not at the expense of everything else. Reviewers noted "almost undrinkable by the second glass but I think it could be blended down to grainy, malty bliss just accented with fruit...as is...forget it" and "love this novel approach and enjoyed so many flavor combinations I never knew possible...occasionally like a cough medicine from my youth...a few nice fresh fruit peaks...still a bit off-putting and too tart if you consume more than 16 oz. or so". They have something just a expensive "work in progress" that better be better next time. What is Greek for thrice-born.

Otter Creek Quercus Vitis Humulus French-Oak-aged Ale

RATING: 3.5

Middlebury, Vermont

As a botanist this is a name after my own heart - Quercus=oak, Vitis=grape, and Humulus=hop in the familiar Latin. This Imperial Series product is a whopping 12% ABV at 27 deg. Plato using Bohemian lager yeast. French grape juice is added and a second fermentation with Champagne yeast is added to the process. Then it is aged in lightly toasted French oak, the entire passage being a full 6 weeks - compared to about 6 minutes for your average American piss-water lager. It pours a light golden-amber with an enthusiastic, bubbly head in golden-beige, the lace long and slow. I've been very critical of grape juice mixed with ale before (at they have almost always failed), but here they seem to have it dialed in with some sophistication - and that means not overdoing the grape-i-ness. While not wrongly blended, it doesn't improve it much in the final analysis. There's a bit of cloudiness here (slight) and some sticky carmel malts to make one think barleywine. The entire presentation comes often jumbled and confused at first. Many sips later does to clarify the goal or end game at all. Usually the malts, hops, yeast, and other notes saturate the tongue and you get a theme of some known kind, even if unique and creative and crazy. Here we have more of that kitchen-sink style of brewing where more of everything is simply culinary clutter as opposed to diversity and depth. I like it better very cold but even a little warmer (as any sipping beer must endure), one gets a muddle of good things which in the final analysis is just a pile of good things without synergy or harmony. A stack of chrome, burlwood, pounded metal, and fine leather does not a Rolls Royce make.

Rodenbach 2009 Vintage Oak Aged Ale

RATING: 4.0

Steenhuffel, Belgium

As Champagne-corked brews go this \$11 purchase (March 2012) is just 7.0% ABV but a true "Flemish red-brown ale of mixed fermentation". The oak vats are old, some dating to 150 years, and this one is named to Barrel 145, age not given. Duration of aging is two years and that will put many American we-barrel-age-for-3-months lads to real shame. The color is brownish-red or reddish-brown, the head dark cream, and yet with little or no

lace. No yeast the bottom. As we mentioned in other cases, barrel-aged does made a sour ale a bit more tolerable to the American sense of taste. This is hardly taken down by much even though complex barrel flavors appear. Is this from the age of the vats (for we generally need fresh charring for portable flavor infusion) or lack of aging time. Clearly no on the latter. I suspect if they used younger port, whisky, or whiskey barrels the sour-mellowing would be better and the finish notes even more impressive and layered. Perhaps the Belgian sense of style does not lead them to tone down the sour flavors as might our US saison agers? I believe this later question will prove closest to the reason for the limited reduction in sour flavors. This one is sour PLUS new SOME notes - not tartness MUCH REDUCED with LOTS of new oak-derived notes. Of course in the lovely world of modern beer blending one can take this and others sour beers and design them to one's own sensibility. Reviewers said "surprised the oak vat has limited effect...feel like I'm drinking apple juice with just the hint of old barrels and nice malts" and "nice saison... refined, very apple fruity...the finish has some charming notes...one of the finer tart ales we've gotten on this shore in years".



Rogue John John Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

Rogue actually makes beer and spirits and their two masters of each realm have the first name of John. The ale guy uses whiskey barrels from the distilling dude to produce this amazing product. The ale pours a rich honey-amber gold, loaded with Dare and Risk malts as well as Saaz, Willamette, and their own Rogue Revolution hops. Pacman yeast is used and this all results in an exhilarating brew with a medium-sized ivory head. First sip reveals the depth of a barrel-aged ale which is similar to a bottle-conditioned barleywine at times. Notes of oak, vanilla, whiskey (which is in part oak), and very smooth fruit esters come after a time. The hops are not rich but saturate the tastebuds after the first glass. It has a thick, sticky presentation but because the sweet malts and hops are moderate in the finish, it is neither cloying or annoying. This vibrant, sweet liquid is well-crafted and like so many Rogue productions, a sure sign of their preeminence in the American brewing landscape.

Sam Smith's Tadcaster Yorkshire Stingo Bottle-conditioned Ale

RATING: 4.0

Yorkshire, England

It had been some time since I'd sipped at Sam Smith's product - not for lack of appreciation of the brand but more for the cornucopia that the brew world has become - only so much time, money, and belly space to go around you realize. This new 550ml product is aged in oak barrels for over a year. It pours a dark brownish-amber, the head dark cream in color and of medium duration and size. This take on the aged ale has a truly British theme - being drenched in sweet caramel goodness, complex with their style of malts, and overflowing with subtle charm. The Brits do these things better than most everyone. ABV is 8.0%, stronger than their regular line, and the barrel flavors are more subdued than many American barrel creations. It is an ideal Christmas beer for it's sweet delights but the purists here found it overly sweet. Others found it like a sweetened Scottish ale for the deep herbal and molasses notes.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Shmaltz He'brew R.I.P.A. (Rye Double India Pale Ale) on Rye

RATING: 5.0

Sarasota Springs, New York

Paying \$11.99 (August 2010) for a single 22 ounce of any beer had better lead to some burning bush class revelations with all the miracles and fanfare possible from a liquid libation. Unlike their Lenny's Bittersweet RIPA, 6 Year Sazerac rye whiskey barrels were used to take this very complex recipe to 10% ABV and matching sophistication of flavors. Ten different malts, including some rye-based one were added to seven different hops, three of which were involved in dry-hopping later. It pours a nice bright amber, the head very deep at first, intermediate between beige and light tan. The nose is a stern blend of hops and fresh ryebread fresh from the bakery. Wow and superwow for aroma. All those flavors combine to make something of a sweet broth formed of rye flavors and malts, supported in the mid to late notes but zingy, spicy hops; of this in turn mellowed by the kind of oaky-whiskey finish you only get in these aged, rare beers. It would probably undrinkable and common-barleywine abusive if not aged as nicely as a it is. The refinement here is remarkable and everyone here was impressed beyond measure. We're delighted and shocked and wondering why we did not have aged brews from the US this noble 10 years ago. This is a pinnacle of American brewing, worth even more than charged, so above the fray you have to drink it long and lovingly to know. This is one of the most interesting beers I've discovered in a year or two, endlessly revealing and all of those surprise notes better than the last.

Terrapin All*American Imperial Pilsner

RATING: 3.5

Athens, Georgia

Imperiality or doubleness in most styles usually requires a stronger dose of the traditional ingredients and often a much higher ethanol thump. The ABV dose here is a steady, honorable 8.9%. The pour is a slight bit golden than average in Pils and the lace is much longer than most US products. The turtle is wearing a red, white, and blue Uncle Sam hat with similar suspenders, white shirt, and red tie. Curiously is in a tutor-style Old World village, more Brit than Czech or German to our eyes. It is All-American in the recipe down to the malt, hops, yeast, and water. It is clearly a potent Pils but by mid passage it has the defined aspect of a hoppy golden lager though Pils grains are apparent and "enjoyful". The Hoppy Pils whether imperial thick or not is not the classic preference of the style's main advocates here. Does being USA-strong ("shock and awe" or "overwhelming force") a case for ramping up the hops when that is not done much in the Old World. Is New Delhi IPA flavored with curry reasonable or a valid spin? To me this is not a Pils as the hops are close to IPA strong and I'd prefer to class it as a Hoppy Golden Lager with Pilsoid notes and lots of our precious, favorite molecule. Whether a Czar or King or Grand Poobah or Most Exalted Ruler, an omnipotent force must be bearable and easy-going on the masses; or eventually there is hell to pay. Taken as a hoppy golden lager we surely have intensity and strength

here but we do not have have sophistication or complexity. Nor do we have true likability or even half a whimpering wow. As we've said many times, any brewer with available muscles, trucks, money, and hefty wheel barrows can make something strong but only a great brewmaster will make it enticing, multi-layered, and instantly orgasmic. We have brawn over brilliance in this label. By the second glass the finishing bitterness with the lofty ABV was somewhere between "harsh" and "nasty" to four of our panelists. I could bear that bit but there was no thrill or joy.

Brewbase Fives



Thomas Hardy's Ale

RATING: 5.0

England

This Gourmet ale comes individually numbered like a good rare Port and is well worth searching out. It is imported by Phoenix Imports of Ellicott City ME who can help you find a local source. It comes in 6.33 and 12 oz. bottles about \$2.70 and \$6.00 respectively. This very old recipe was re-created in 1968 and first came to the US in 1986. This full yet smooth ale is better than most beers and wines. It ages to become creamy and smooth.

Stone Oaked Arrogant Bastard Ale

RATING: 4.5

Escondido, California

As a 7.2% ale, this stuff is "brewed WITH American oak wood chips". That apparently doesn't mean it's seen a barrel for even a minute but the chips do mellow most brewed or distilled beverages of the ethanol-containing variety. Besides the "You're Not Worthy" logo on the very complicated painted bottle, I could not read half of the hype and don't think I missed too much. Go to www.arrogantbastard.com if you want a bit more hype and just a little fun. "This is an aggressive beer. You probably won't like it". I don't like reverse psychology in my beers but I'll forgive them for trying to get noticed in a very, very noisy field of endeavor. You can get your baby a set of Arrogant Bastard "onesies" and I don't believe that comes with a dozen year of therapist fees. Admittedly they say "MY DADDY is an arrogant bastard".

This brew is pretty strong, loaded with clamorous hops, later with notes of caramel, potent pine, fig, early hops, ample malt, and some resinous-raisiny glory. It's not chuggable and is best dealt with in modest doses; the patient sips of a leisurely drinker in fact. It's a good experience, too intense for some folks, never horrible, a bit too piney for some people, but a rather potent potpourri overall. It has enough mellowness (from the oak chips perhaps) to be drinkable and overcome that overall everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach to formulating a truly strong beer. Complex it is but then so is the state fair or flea market with everything under the sun and not one central theme except to overwhelm the senses. Sensory overload is possible and clearly planned. It is a bit forward, harsh, not entirely integrated, and bitter in some of the finish moments and not all of them will be the same. Their website term "aggressive" is probably a good moniker for it. AB is devilishly domineering and daring with a dash of moderation from time to time. It's strong, full of good and odd notes, robust but at times less so, mellow just when you felt offended, substantial and at times less so. You're thumped with a pretty velvet hammer, sometimes softly and other times painfully and yet you're more amused than angry from the experience. It's hard to review and thus a good thing for your next home beer tasting. Controversy follows this label and perhaps that is half the marketing plan; whether they're brewhouse geniuses or rabid fools will take a decade or so to determine. Sip it long and over and in so doing you get more confused and somehow more addicted.

Brewbase Fives



Uinta Cockeyed Cooper Bourbon Barrel Barley Wine Ale

[Crooked Line]

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

Very strange label this - red bearded, hat-wearing fellow riding in an oversized barrel down some rapids, the 11.1% stamped contents also bearing the likeness of a famous toy plastic monkey. Whilest (that is proper Utah language) their similarly corked Pils for the same \$12.95 is very much a missed opportunity (to be at my very most polite verbiage), this cherry-amber pour with a ginormous pale tan head is something of a different quality and interest level. Reviewers here are still sleeping it off at press time so no added comments from that scurvy lot. If any cooper tried to haul around barrels after a few sips of this firm stuff, he'd either be floating down this same waterway or perhaps singing tunes while his sleeps under a nearby bench. First sip is silky smooth, quickly giving dried fruits (much more than raisin for once!) and a fine malt and hops foundation of the finest sort. Vanilla and those oaky barrel stave notes are there in...well...barrels full. Beer like wine and every other zippy, adult beverage should first and foremost be highly enjoyable beyond the basic ethanol buzz. It must be sip-worthy and easy and fun for consumption in a reasonable volume.

This wine from barley is sublimely worthy of the style, crafted with care, surely, and sumptuous without being heavy or overwhelming. A first-timer at barleywine will get this, not be overwhelmed for the sake of a brewer's reputation, understand the style quickly, and come back for many more of them. Remember the first time you cornered a BMW at 60mph or heard the sound closure of a Mercedes door while dropping into firm heated leather? You and I learned that day that dad's Dodge Dart and uncle's Ford Pinto left alot to be desired. Here is a superb barleywine primer and one the experienced amongst us will cherish too.

While some barleywines get lost in dank, somber plum or raisin notes, this one is glowing and cheerful in the fruit notes. The complimenting flavors from wood aging come to the foreground and fade sometimes, a flash of hops bitterness coming up from time to time as you ponder this with more sips. I could drink this one for hours and do so for days to come until I found myself curiously floating down a river with a red beard and images of toy monkeys all around. This just might loosen SLC up if widely distributed to the faithful and already unfaithful. Pass this one out if you ever want the Tabernacle Choir to present a Hip-hop Inspired Funkadelic Opera in 39 Acts with Wild Flying Monkeys; and maybe a Talking Rainbow Salamander selling auto insurance for good measure. This broth just maybe could make that happen.

Unibroue Grande Reserve 17 Bottle Fermented

RATING: 4.0

Chambly, Quebec

Pouring out a dark butterscotchy amber, this uber-hazy, 10% ale is aged with French oak, bottle fermented (corked), and further augmented with spices and natural flavors in the broader Belgian Dark style. This 2011 iteration harkens back to the original 2007 celebration of their 17th anniversary - and the formula and number stuck. The best before date is an amazing 12-12-2016 in this 2011 offering - clearly sholwinmg their confidence in it's age-worthy status. Spices are quality but modest, the malt supportive and at times thick, and the sweetness variable but mid-rich in some passages. Panelists here found it everything from merely "enjoyable" to "sumptuous". We varied quite over the map and supporters did not dominate in the yes/no 'buy again?' question. The effort and history are there but the juice is wanting and had some off notes for us.

Brewbase Fives



Weyerbacher Insanity Oak-aged Ale

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Virginia

Immediately you notice the cloudy amber color that approaches a cider-like appearance. The 11.1% ABV on the label is also attention-grabbing to be sure. It sips with an elixir, nectar-filled quality, on one level a potent oaky hops tonic and on another plane a fruity malt liquor. It is wonderful in a brandy sniffer. Reviewers noted rich fruit flavors of raisins, hops, dates or fig, vanilla, faint banana, liquid brown sugar, paler molasses, and genuine bourbon flavors. As barleywines go this one is complex and the whiskey-barrel aging adds of course a different set of flavors. The ethanol is more disguised than I would have expected but it is surely there. It is smooth in the whiskey smooth sense but unlike a whiskey it has fruit and malt flavors that are more approachable and beer-like for the average drinker. The oak and whiskey flavors are heavier than in some other labels where they scale down the barrel flavors to a hint. Here one gets a full treatment and perhaps that has to do with the barrel treatment or merely the length of aging. Here is a product of the highest order, the finest in executions, and one would be fully insane not to try it often.

Widmer Brothers Reserve Barrel Aged BRRRBON Ale (2010)

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

This Fall 2010 variation is #3 in their boxed series of special brews. Using Kentucky Bourbon barrels, this dark amber ale has a large beige-tan head of some duration. Nose is subdued malt. Mouthfeel is thick, yielding to semi-sweet malts of medium complexity and a yummy bourbon-tinged finish that gets dry at times. It is not as overtly barleywine-ish as some in this character but is quite approachable as a result. 9.4% alcohol gives it some punch but one is not inclined to notice that at first. Having had ordinary Kentucky-made supermarket bourbon-aged ales (for regular sixpack prices near Louisville) as well as pricey things above, I have a feel now for the good, the average, and the brilliant product in this relatively new category. This is mid-strength, and average complexity, a few oak staves above the norm and some below the most elites. It's a very nice product, good deal at \$10 a small bomber and yet nothing to write Maker's Mark about.

Widmer Brothers Reserve Barrel Aged BRRRBON Ale (2011)

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

The August 12, 2011 version was not boxed and emphasized the secondary and tertiary fermentation on the more simple label. Rating was the same 4.5. The approach is similar, the barrel flavors quite tangy and stiff at times, overall getting gentle and smooth as the session lasts.

ALE - BROWN AND BLACK

A basic classic Brown Ale is basically in the real world any ale with enough malt to make it medium to dark brown but not so pale or reddish to be a red or amber ale. It came to popularity in London in the late 1600's.

The "mild brown ale" was one which favored malt above hops to various degrees. They lost favor about 1800 but came into some limited popularity again from 1920-30 (Mann, Whitbread) and more fully after WWII.

The Belgian brown ale is quite a different thing and given it's own section here. They tend to be very malty, more fruity and bright than a Bock or Dark Lager. They vary widely in the amount of hops but in general they favor malt side; the more hoppy brown ales being called Pale Ale by default. The fairly recently created concept of Imperial Brown Ale is often a intense infusion of both malt and hops and is less potent than the full blown Barleywine. Sweetness varies but Mann's Original Brown Ale is sweet and Newcastle more dry and hoppy. Most of us tasting a very sweet brown ale are apt to confuse it with an Oktoberfest Dark Lager where malt and lots of sugar sources are used to full effect.

The Nut Brown Ale is usually on the pale, reddish-brown side, invoking the hue of beechnuts, hazelnuts, or chestnuts. For good measure, this style may have a nutty (generally hazelnut-type) flavor in addition to the color. Hops bitterness add to the nut-like aspect. The NBA form tends to be paler in color and less densely roasted in flavor. Some of them would ordinarily be put in the Amber Ale group except for their stated name.

Welsh Dark Ale including the richer yet Welsh Black Ale have been around a long time. They tend to emphasize caramel, chocolate, coffee, and dark fruit notes - in other words ranging into a candy-porter style with an ABV closer to 4%.

The American Black Ale is we suspect loosely based on the Welsh Black Ale though others say most of them are essentially the style known also as the Black IPA. We have placed the blackish or very dark brown IPA brews with extra strength under our Imperial or Double IPA group. The dark, lower ethanol "singles" are found here, showing their extra color due to extra malting with dark, dank malts.



Adnam's Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Southwold, Suffolk

This beer is nut-like in flavor but not in color. It is actually a very dark brownish red. The head is ivory, thick, and enduring. The label is attractive and collectible with a perky little squirrel; not exactly art but very realistic. It has that perfect MELLOW flavor many of us crave in BROWN ALES and so often fail to receive. Some brown ales are sweet and others are LIGHT STOUTS. This is rich and dry without being hard to take in big doses. We tested it with Morland Old Speckled Hen which while equally smooth was watery. This is clean and drinkable but without a single diminished flavor note. Crystal and pale ale malts are used in perfect strength. Their 'distinctive tang' is there but very subtle. Comparisons to an old Scotch are inevitable. Not to be missed. In 1996, it was awarded the BREWBASE BEST BROWN ALE.

AWARD OF MERIT 2012



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Times



Anchor Brekle's Brown All Malt Single Hop Ale

RATING: 5.0 (A.M. 2012)

San Francisco, California

This unique formula is a tribute by Mark Carpenter to their first Brewmaster Gottlieb Breckl (1871-1888). It was created in 2010, first bottled in 2011. From the glued-on collar sermon I took away "complexity without heaviness". It pours reddish-brown, some haze, and large beige head. Nose is malty, almost of a breakfast cereal toastiness. Citra is the one chosen hop. Munich, 2-row, and caramel are the blended malts. It is citrus-rich and yet malty rich in the finish, tangy and comforting in the space of microseconds. This 6-percenter is supremely refined, a brown that is bright and cheerful at a pleasant pace with due respect to the somber chemistry of malts. Citra hops (only available since 2008) can be sharp (or too light) but they are finely graded here. Citra makes things luminous-fruity more than flowery, medicinal, or bitter. And what a better place to get luminous and fruity than...never mind. Brekles is quite an impressive, individual accomplishment, taking the style to new places, not for being novel alone, but reaching a valuable transformation. This brew has value, true value for education of genuine beer lovers - as well as brewers everywhere who should reconsider their own boring brown ales. There are sure to be 79 copies of this in the works. Here is an extraordinary liquid statement and one both fascinating and quenching of all good malt desires. Hopheads can adore it too and treasure it's focused, monovarietal purity. My final word is...resplendent. Award of Merit 2012.

Baird Angry Boy Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Numazu, Japan

The chaotic, multi-colored, angry label art suggests an American microbrew from the first first sight - Colorado or Maryland being a good guess. Instead, this 6.2%, huge-headed brown is made near the base of Mt. Fuji in Honda-land. One might also be confused for the crazy rant on the label is very American, something about the "cool facade of the warrior, a red hot flame of intensity" - maybe a little Samurai-like there. If you study the label art in more detail, it is quite Japaneser in theme. The "malty sweetness" is there, carefully and not the easily crafted sort, almost doppelboch-like but having a nip of more hops, favoring the ale side of things. Good yeasty ale fruit supports the warrior as does the extra ethanol. I found it very appealing even if not as comforting and warming as the label suggests. If you like your browns with an extra hoppy nip, ie. the Hoppy Brown Ale, this is a nice choice in that subgenus - though I'd tend to go to the Belgian browns for this aspect.

Bateman's Victory Ale

RATING: 4.0

Wainfleet, England

George Bateman and Sons make this Midland style ale as alternative to their Triple XB ale. It is a much darker

reddish-brown with a bubbly head. Given its color we tried it from 40 to 55 degrees to probe its full flavor range. As with the XXXB it has a thick nectar-like feel and a malty theme. There is nothing of the sophistication of Caledonian's Double Dark Ale (a worthy comparison) although it has better aromatic appeal. Towards the warmer temps it gets too bitter and so maybe 45 degrees F. is a good compromise. It is best described as interesting and pleasant but like the XXXB it is not fully satisfying for either a hops or malt lover. At \$2.39 a decent value.

Bear Republic American Brown 27 Tribute Ale

RATING: 4.0

Heardsburg/Cloverdale, California

This brew is in tribute to Pete Brown (1949-2002), their "Million Dollar Man" Sales Manager. This 6.3% creation is very dark brown, barely translucent, the head dark cream and fluffy. Golden brown sugars and molasses are mentioned and they must be used with much discretion for it finishes a tad sweet but never sugary-sweet. The malts are very rich, reminiscent of European darks but perhaps more stratified and diverse. The overall effect is just a shade too thin for my taste as some of their formulas seem to be. Again, Bear Republic seems always to be about quality ingredients and solid recipes but maybe 50 horsepower short of a sweet ride. Their efforts are almost always fine and reasonable but somehow always a notch short of full satisfaction and what we call the "Holy...Wow" factor here. They can do I am certain...just turn up the doses.

Big Boss Bad Penny Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Raleigh, North Carolina

Like many of this classification, Bad Penny Brown Ale is neither overwhelming nor weak in taste. It's a good balance though not of the greatest complexity known. This 5.2% alcohol ale is also freshness dated. It is something of a Lite Porter in the best sense of that phrase. It is good but not as good as it might be. I suspect it is better experience in the confines of their rustic, slightly unkempt for effect, tavern full of typical comes. The color is darker than some of this style and the head is thin. Carmel and nut notes are too faint to earn a higher score. Sweetness is just right and I give them marks for not favoring the easy, sugary way of making a brown ale popular. Their other labels are sometimes better so I have hopes this will improve in time. The brewery mentions a "dark fruit finish" and from 1 to 6 samples I struggled to find that exact note. They malt the old-fashioned way per the propaganda with pale, chocolate, and crystal styles. The goal they proclaim was being "very reminiscent of northern English ales" and I can't fault that overall. Consider they do rare oak-aged ales and limited editions from ancient recipes, I expect a bit more of them. Good beer just not great.

[The] Celt Experience Dark Age Organic Crafted Ale

RATING: 4.0

Caerphilly, Wales, UK

95% organic content makes this Welsh product a bit of a novelty on the US market, both for its authentic Dark Welsh Ale flavors and the brewing system. It's a low 4% but such is traditional for the style and we will never fault authenticity. Coffee, chocolate, dark fruits, and caramel conspire to make this a very rewarding, handsome ale in rootbeer brown with a light tan head. It is more dry than the forementioned list of flavor notes would suggest. Two panelists here thought the finish was a tad weak (though never raw) in places and in this regard we must say it is not porter - though the stronger black Welsh ales sometimes tread bravely into porterland. It is quite strong enough and Old World special enough for the rest of us and we enough each sip and bottle. It could be better but hardly truer.

Cottonwood Low Down Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boone, North Carolina

Cottonwood was established in 1992 in the Blue Ridge Mountains in a town between Charlotte and Asheville - best known for skiing and resident evangelist-charity operator Franklin Graham. They're off to a good start with a Bronze medal for this label in the GABF in 1997. Brewmaster Don Richardson uses three malts and Mount Hood hops to make this reddish amber ale have moderate to full strength Carbonation is steady. It is very malty at first taste but those full Mt. Hood hops enter stronger into the finish for more equal balance. Indeed the dry finish borders on an malty IPA for overall effect. While lots of American Brown Ales go the sweet malty route to

success this one aims for a far more dry approach. It is very rewarding product and only a shade from perfection.

Devil Mountain Five Malt Ale

RATING: 4.5

"Cinti." OH

Five malts plus Liberty and Cascade hops are used to make this reddish brown ale. The creamy head is long lasting. It is not unlike Pyramid's Best Brown Ale tried recently. If your tastes run toward a very malty yet smooth brown ale this is a similarly wonderful find. Reviewers commented on it's 'complex work of malty beauty...would like a touch more hops' and 'malt overdose, barely any hops, semi-dry, polished finish, hard to handle in big quantities.'. Another malt lover gave it 5 bottles and felt the lack of clear hops was intentional and therefore not a flaw. Overall we felt Pyramid's brown was more smooth for mass consumption.



Dogfish Head Indian Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

One of American's finest offerings in this style. It is said by the brewer (and for once they get it right!) to be a cross between a rich IPA and a Scotch Ale, being both malty and hopped to abundance. Aromatic barley gives it a full bang and a nearly unforgettable style. It is potent on some many levels of malt, coffee, molasses, hops, chocolate, and fruit. The 7.2% alcohol boost is another plus.



Dogfish Head Pale Santo Marron Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

This is no dogfish at 12% ABV but is the Carcharodon megalodon subsp. brunneus - which for those of you from Rio Linda means a 30 foot long, giant brown shark. No wonder the label starts off with "Malt beverage aged on

Palo Santo wood" - they can't call it a beer in half the country or more! I've always enjoyed some of the best Dogfish fantasy creations but an "unfiltered, unfettered, unprecedented brown ale aged in homemade brewing vessels" is preaching loud and proud to the choir and getting a lively AMEN, AMEN, and PRAISE JESUS BROTHER at stalinglass-shaking decibels. By the way, the matte-finish label done in cedar tones is a nice touch we did not miss in our quest for all the best that wood can offer. Any true beer lover is getting wood in all the right ways at first sip. And the Dogfish dudes had best deliver for in these days of economic gloom, doom, and tomb I don't spend \$13 for 4 regular bottles lightly when Budweiser is about sixty cents a gallon - actually I do but don't tell my accountant on this book project. He'll likely point out that I somehow missed the commemorative Pabst 78th Anniversary can which he and his mother enjoyed en masse last Saturday night and never a finer time could be had with Uncle Harold taking out his dentures, telling old jokes, and Aunt Millie showing her "fresh like" gall bladder scar, and Cousin Bertha showing off her 1/5 caret ring...tis real rose gold you know...just come off layaway at Walmart which would be a fine, affordable opportunity for some fellow wanting a bride in the 450 to 525 range with a fully paidoff Apache 317 model singlewide with the dee-lux olive and chrome trim ya'll. Anywho...this beer is as dark as the blackest stout, the head tanner than tan, and mid-length.

The brown shark casts a wide shadow but it is gentle, caressing, and in the final analysis very impressive but harmless fun. The aforementioned Palo Santo wood comes from Paraguay and Dogfish was 10,000 gallon tanks made of such - thought to be the largest wood tanks since before Prohibition. Having enjoyed oaked beers before, ranging from Frenchified Euro stuff to KY bourbon barrels, I found a familiar elegance here but one taking me light years above Kentucky supermarket oak-barrel brews of late. Here we have a spinning, dancing, sweet herbal quality, not easily explained but wisely judged by the Brewmasters. I'll assume one must go to Paraguay for such a precise and exact flavor. There are notes of licorice drops from childhood melded to strong florals that approach homemade rose hip candy. Being so dark it is drenched in malt, not so much drenched as angelically-brewed and melded seamlessly with novel and choice aspects; a beer worthy of our most careful and expert considerations, and rewarding on dozens of subtle points. These points may be alien, otherworldly, and enticingly exotic but they always deliver with grace and real ale passion. In truth, I cannot appreciate it fully even four bottles in and such is the mark of a fine liquid feast meant to be put before our internal jury, over various moods, pauses in evidence, tides of time, and diverse sensory places. The label says "lush and enjoyable" but their chosen word "epic" matches my feelings best and I am not generally known for feelings. Here's a beer I really feel and care about. It is at once dainty and crazy, violently wrought of the earth and yet refined already, calming in the long sip, a synthesis of plant stuff old and new, hard and soft, not offending or puzzling at any time. PSM is Einstein and Wyeth smart with both logic and emotions satisfied. I find it of priceless appeal, easily the most rewarding new brew find in the last part of 2008. Collect some at all costs and conference among knowledgeable and deserving friends to get your own rankings if numbers and words matter at all. Forestry has met gifted brewing and on this memorable tasting day we are all the wiser and more hopeful for it.

The Duck-Rabbit Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Farmville, North Carolina

Duck-Rabbit, the self-described "Dark Beer Specialists" have a nice dark amber-brown ale here with lovely malts and moderate sweetness. There is nice chocolate malt quality blended to modest amounts of Amarillo hops for spiciness. Saaz hops is added dry in the fermentor to add floral notes. Seven varieties of malt are used and that diversity shows in the final product. Very often when a brewer brags about "small batches" I think: thank's for sparing the world the nuisance of your inferior product. Here we hope they get production up and outside NC and TN where they abide now. I would like it a bit stronger in the finish but it's very smooth as is. Their choice of chocolate malts over nutty or earthy ones suits me fine but this will not be universally true among brown ale freaks.

George Killian's Irish Brown Ale

RATING: 3.5

Golden, Colorado

While Killian's Red Ale is somewhat tolerable (never exciting) pop red ale this IRISH BROWN ALE is a superior product. It is nicely flavored with malt character but like so many specialty brews out of Golden CO it fails to go beyond into the realm of true excellence. One reviewer described our major conclusion: 'it is one Coors I'd

actually think of buying again'. The finish is full and satisfying though not world-beating. Carmel and chocolate malts are used to make what is perhaps the best mass-market American dark beer - excluding perhaps Miller's Velvet Stout. Scores of microbrews will beat this but at the \$5.50-6.50 price tag only a few like Saranac would compare. There are also quite a few more expensive brown ales that are less pleasing.

Goose Island Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Chicago, Illinois

Made in the traditional British style, this ale has a chestnut color with a balance of sweetness and malt. The nut flavor is clear too.

Griffin Biere Brune (Brown Ale)

RATING: 4.0

Montreal Quebec

McAuslan of Montreal has gotten high marks with us and elsewhere for their St. Ambroise beers in boxes. This Griffin sixpack product is also \$10 around our area. Color is medium-dark amber and rather bright with a huge head. Flavor is on the medium malt side with a little zip of bitter hops. It is one of those ambers that is subtle without being weak and complex without being heavy. With Thomas Hardy's as a long-time standard for Brown Ale this one is a tad inferior. In the World Beer Championships this earned a 88 while Sam Smith Nut Brown got 81 and Newcastle Brown scored 84. That shows just how this fits in that acclaimed international taste test. We can highly recommend this beer although we think they'd sell more at \$7-8.00.

Harviestoun Black Ale "Old Engine Oil"

RATING: 4.5

Alva, Scotland

We don't have a "black ale" category here so I'm putting this super dark, porteresque ale in the Brown Ale group as an extreme dark rep of the group. This aptly badged "viscous, chocolatey, roasty" ale is named "Old Engine Oil" for it's visual similarity to ancient, filthy petroleum; the sort of stuff you drain with some amusement from your pretty girl friend's 1977 Honda Accord after she mentions it hasn't been running well since that oil change "maybe four or five years ago...bla bla bla...something a Macy's sale that spring so maybe it was six years". She adds that she's has faithfully changed the windshield fluid and tire air twice a year. This brew is pleasantly dark at first punch, densely malty to be sure and in this respect resembling some fine porters. ABV is 6% and I'd have boosted that some to give it more elite, memorable status, especially with the mid-premium price point. I rather like it but don't expect to buy it often except as a joke which is handles with as much smoothness as the finish.



Harviestoun Ola Dubh Special Reserve 16 Ale

RATING: 5.0

Alva, Scotland

I'm still not sure what the black ale in the "Old Engine Oil" bottle was all about so when this second offering called with 8% abv and the flavor notes of 16 years Scottish whisky, I had to smile. The labeled is signed by a brewmaster and a "Master of Wood" - that will go over well in a few bars I know - should they still be capable of reading the fine, fine print. Eight full bucks for a measly 11.2 ounce is sad but I always somehow manage to forgive the quality brewers for being a bit stingy with liquid black gold. I too am a wee bit Scottish. "Ola Dubh" means "black oil" and this particular batch owes it's rich, nippy elements to Highland Park's Special Reserve 16 from Orkney; which my Googlings tell me is easily a \$60 bottle unless a put-away older vintage. It is so named for it is "gloopy and viscous" - only yes on the second adjective. The color is porter black. "Bittersweet" is right too but only in a very subtle way. This stuff is SMOOTHER than the Berliner Philharmoniker principal violinists working their skilled way so intricately around a Bach cello concerto while riding in a Maybach down the Autobahn on a crisp, clear day - OR Prince Harry's latest girlfriend's soft, creamy posterior while on holiday picnic in the remote woods at Birkhall - whichever analogy you find most interesting. All masters of wood. Ola Dubh.

Johnson's Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Charlotte, North Carolina

Our earlier review of Johnson's Amber Ale suggested an effort full of quality but sadly thin on flavor compared to other \$7-8 microbrews. This 'honest ale' uses pale, crystal, and chocolate malts and arrives with a decidedly dark brownish red color. Under lower light it almost looks like German darks. The head is light tan and lace is variable. The flavor is quite impressive with a wonderful malt complexity that might be termed a LIGHT STOUT - which after all a malty BROWN ALE really should be. (some BROWN ALES of trade are just malty AMBER ALES with no deep chocolate malt sophistication.) A reviewer said: 'appeals to dark/stout/porter drinkers...but is more harmonious with lavish feasts and finishes decently dry.'. A much needed US ale. Highly recommended.

King and Barnes Festive Ale

RATING: 4.5

Horsham, Sussex, England

This amber-brown ale is bottle conditioned with yeast sediment. The head is ivory, finely foamed, and lasting. It proved for us to be superior to their Broadwood Ale; oddly named the Best British Ale. Even in one case where it was dated a full 25 months (long conditioning for a supermarket stock) it was quite heavenly and had no bad flavor elements. It was less sweet than the Broadwood and only the finish provided a bit of dryness. The bottle conditioning no doubt provides more depth of character and quality ale fruitiness. Their Christmas 1997 product was more impressive overall but this one will not likely displease anyone. This is one good example of how American microbrewed ales don't always measure up. This bottle-conditioned quality can't be faked.



Lagunitas The Hairy Eyeball Ale

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

"Here's lookin' atcha!" says the label, noting "no actual eyeballs can actually be found in the bottle". This is a big, BIG, BIG brown ale, so much so I wondered if it was a barleywine. They make something called Gnarly Wine so I

suppose this is the weaker cousin at 8.8% ABV. It has been called an American Strong Ale and that's about right too. It's a "warmer" as they say and loaded to the hilt with crystal malts and just the right amount of sweetness to my taste. It pours a ruby-brown shade, the head off white and shorter than I wanted. I like a good nuclear malt ale and this is more of a battlefield strategic nuke on the scale - not to say weak but say it's on the moderate side of very, very strong. There's faint hops in the balance, more apparent with saturation of the buds, some vanilla I suspect, possible spices, and deep plummy-raisiny fruit esters as befitting a worldclass ale. I bought a six of this to celebrate the 2010 Oscars along real cheddar-filled soft pretzels and chili-cheese shredded beef burritos. I had dream more vivid that Avatar that night! Lagunitas is marking their mark in the US brew scene and they have truly achieved here, an execution so advanced I find it effortlessly pleasant. Some of the best strong ales are solid, satisfying, and clearly above the rest for reasons that defy analysis. It's instant admiration, love at first sight of the liquid variety, and adoration plain and simple. Lagunitas products and especially their seasonal treasures are always must tries and joys of the highest order.

Left Hand Deep Cover Brown Ale

RATING: 3.0

Longmont, Colorado

A purple-tied spy looks through binoculars on this stunning label. The brew pours glowing amber with a beige head of long duration. There are passages of malty interest but overall this beer is far too thin in flavor. There is no real hops for balance and a pure-malt brown ale is okay really - but not if you're freakin' stingy with the malt guys!!!! There's a little hops spice now and again but essentially that ingredient doesn't exist. I'll make 'em a deal. How about using more malt, more varieties for depth too, and spending less money on the website tricks flying over the glass and bottles and dunking the viewer in suds? It's just 4.23% ABV and that suggests they make it in 3.2 nanoseconds for profit reason. The website speaks of "light body with nice complexity" which is off course only HALF TRUE. And thanks for using Goldings hops. I'm sure the Tonka dump-trunk full of them you bought to cover the whole year's production must have been a real investment! As a friend of mine suggested with a wry smile, the purple tie dude with binoculars on the label must be looking for flavor because it's not on the other side of the label. Maybe it's just a ruse; actually being a strong, wonderful brown ale but made to taste like watery crap to stay under deep cover.

Legend Brown Ale

RATING: 3.0

Richmond, Virginia

The creamy-yellow, gold, burnt orange, and white label with a prancing unicorn crest is very Old World in appearance, almost third world in this approach and sheen. ABV IS 6.4%, a bit higher than generics, and the amber-brown fluid with a deep cream head is appealing. The nose is mid-malty and variable. First sip is mid-strength, not terribly impressive, German bready malts coming to the foreground but not a revelation by any means. There is some tartness in early notes and yet the finish settles on some loose notes we did not find appealing. There is some sickening sweetness in the mid passages, none of it redeeming or endearing. It is "another why bother brown" according one assertive panelist. That sums up our collective evaluation and while we tried various temps from cold to room temp, nothing seemed to save it's reputation. This brew has some good online reviews but nearly all are of the tap, keg-based offering. We cover bottles and not kegs so you may want to go another route if trying this one.

Leinenkugel's Fireside Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Chippewa Falls MN/Milwaukee, WI

I've like some of the Leinie's products of late, finding their Sunset Wheat to be a glorious bright spot in the affordable, supermarket-based beer universe. This 4.9% "beer with natural flavors" was okay but given that the flavor was unspecified I began to assume it was some food science, lab-made hazelnut extract like we get in coffee creamers and such things these days. It's tasty but this seasonal amber offering still troubles the mind for it's natural yet artificial (to brewing) approach. Natural flavoring added to naturally brewed beer is after all artificial to the real brewing process. Add as much fresh organic raspberries or mothers milk to beer as you will - and you still have a unnatural amended thing. Their website admits chocolate, maple, caramel, and HAZELNUT "top notes" and I think the confession is in the later name. It's a mass market product and will be drunk but millions of frat boys and their bleached blonde girlfriends in the early part of the semester when the bank

account is fat. Working slups like me will try it once or twice and maybe one more time when the convenience mart has it on some up front display stand.

Limestone Dark Ale

RATING: 4.0

Lexington KY

Made by Lexington Brewing Company, this dark ale has a moderate strength of hops and malt; slightly favoring the later. The is dark brown with a head of moderate size. It is very satisfying and carries a good amount of dryness overall. The bottle is freshness dated.

Lost Coast Downtown Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Eureka, California

From the famous Lost Coast people comes this ale that is dark reddish brown and with a foamy biege head. It has a nice mixture of fruit and hop notes but is not nearly as fruit-filled as Red Seal Ale that comes in similar bottles. As a dark brown ale the color and long-surviving head are perfect. The finish is a bit weak and we'd perhaps like more enduring depth in malt or fruit elements. With fine-tuning it could be one of the Left Coast's very best. Bronze Medal in 1993 GABF in American Brown Ale group.

Lost Coast WinterBraun Ale

RATING: 4.0

Eureka, California

American pale malts are included with chocolate and caramel malts to make this medium-hued reddish-brown brew with a firm, lasting cream head. Saaz hops give it spicy notes from mid note to last. I would not quite call it "spiced chocolate" but as sips continue you get more of that hop theme sticking to ole pink buds. I like a bit of nip with my chocolate whether it be mint or hot pepper or a tart berry. I do not feel I am wrong to say this fine, rich ale is porterish in complexity and strength. As your sips grow, the Saaz spice and later smokey notes become more apparent. It is best evaluated only with a full bottle and two is even better; I have always despised little plastic sippy cups like found bound to a Nyquil® bottle. That is not now nor will ever be "beer tasting". Any fool who thinks he's a beer pro and even slightly informed having downed 300 mini-cups at some beer festival is like the guy "test-driving" exotic cars on internet by surfing through some video or online simulator. On another note, the dark-skinned fellow on a snowboard on the label surfing through wintery snow may raise a few questions in this hyper-sensitive age. Not sure I've seen a "person of color" as the fictional spokes-figure for a brown ale - had he been white or yellow I would have called him a label boy. I don't like being politically correct, incorrect, or just plain stupid. I guess I should let others decide if this is an issue or not. In any case, it's one very tasty brew.

Mendocino Black Eye Ale

RATING: 3.5

Saratoga Springs, New York

Once you get past the whole Mendocino/New York disconnect, the title "the ultimate blend" comes to one's attention in a hurry. Color is gourmet rootbeer dark. Head is smallish in a minute but from something much larger. Lace is weak. It is technically a "black and tan" and it comes across rather sweet from the get go. There's lots of caramel, decent strong malt, little noticed hops, and a fairly acid finish. At 6.5% ABV it's a bit above average. One of my friends considered it a "soda stout", a beer of that famous style but sweetened and carbonated up for appeal. Most reviewers I polled agreed that it's too sweet (damn that easy, popularizing feature so available to brewmasters!) and it did not do as well as it deserved for that one reason. It's a potentially very fine product (made hoppier and bitter by two notches), damaged by it's over indulgence in too accessible sugars. We have spoken elsewhere of BEER COOLERS, very easy ways to take hops and malt with ease. Let the medicine go down...just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.... I will be clobbered with mercy for calling such a "girl beer" but it is fair to say our better halves or future halves tend to like things a good deal less bitter, hoppy, strong, and idiocyncratic than the average guy. That said (of course, of course, mercy please), there are probably 22.1 million females in this land and any other who appreciate beer at or above the average male's ability. Let's be reasonable and fair. MANY women and SOME guys without appreciation of bitter, hoppy flavors will love this. Others will think it a cheap route of Escape to Sugarland for a

brewery known for much better. Kill me now.

Mercury [Brash] Clown Shoes Pimp Double Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Ipswich, Michigan

"When life's a bitch, be a pimp" motivated this formula with a couple on non-pimp-looking pimps and a black '66 Lincoln sedan on the label. Their story even mentions the famous suicide doors and an 8-track stereo. This ultra-dark reddish-brown pour has a golden-tan head and lots of early lace. Brash and Clown Shoes made two batches of brown ale at Mercury and they were then blended to make this product. ABV is a whopping 10% so wearing gold metallic pants would definitely be appropriate. Add a fur coat, feather boa, platform bicolored shoes, and diamond-studded jewelry will be a nice touch. Malt is big and the themonuclear dose of ethanol are apparent from 2 seconds onward. We actually cut a couple glasses down with a rich porter to get away from the rich molecules. We would not recommend removing these suicide doors or the boa but slow sipping is recommended here. Panelists wrote "very memorable...a true winner...very strong in all good respects but not super-fun for me" and "this is pimp-bold...over-the-top, tacky, and loving it!". This is a potent fare, nicely built, a 48DDD of brown ales, and the taste embeds in your brain like your first hooker or herpes or both - did we say that out loud?

Naked Aspen Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cold Spring, Minnesota

Color here is a very red amber with a small head and some carbonation. It has a sweet malt aroma. Reviewers agreed it was the best of their 3 labels we've reviewed in full. If you put it against Johnson's and Rogue Hazelnut Brown Ales (that we liked so much) it is outclassed. While many BROWN ALES emphasize chocolate and crystal malt tastes this is a candy-like caramel sort of ale. As with their Pale Ale it's a shade too thin at times although thankfully the sweetness is not overdone. One reviewer noted 'if they are aiming at sweet caramel flavor they'd best use Old Peculiar as model'. To another 'not enough depth and diversity in malts' and also 'enjoyable but needs fine-tuning'. With the \$8.00 pricetag that fine-tuning is mandatory.

Natty Greene's Old Town Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Greensboro, North Carolina

2006 Silver Medal at Great American Beer Festival in English Brown Ales. Very refined, deep, complex, and delightful. Pour is dark reddish-brown, head big and yellowish-tan. Nose is of full malts, mellow but above average in malt strength. It is fairly clean and on theme, never hoppy-bitter in any aspect, perhaps "too monodimensional" said one panelist here. It is warming, overall mid-complex, roasty and toasty. It does not converge on porter space as do some stronger browns. It is not a malt:hops balancing act and clearly favors the malt side. Brown ale drinkers tend to have distinct opinions on how much hops they require. Overall this is one of the best ales from a SE US brewery in some time. "Malts are rich with endless flavor but still missing for me on that "wow" factor" said a reviewer when we did a retrial in 2012.

Neptune Dead Sea Premium Ale

RATING: 4.5

Manhattan, New York, NY

The name 'Dead Sea' might suggest the latest Isreali microbrewery. Not so. The second image we had was the pictured NYC waters and somehow our thirst left us. The third impression was the lovely dark brown color of this ale and a rather nutty, sweet aroma that your chief editor thought resembled the scent of his mother's freshly baked carrot cake. It is in fact quite sweet, grain-flavored, malty, and fruity as such a baked treat would also deliver. Among our panal (one of the more experienced in recent years) it was widely described as 'unique' and therefore 'a must try'. If you do not like a SWEET MALTY ALE then you have our permission to skip it unless you collect very well done labels. One reviewer called the flavor 'raisin-like'. Are you curious?

New Belgium Clutch Dark Sour Ale (Lips of Faith Series)

RATING: 4.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

This stuff is as dark as stout viewed at midnight under a tent with only a black cat to reflect to star light. Head is a decent, rich tan, mid-duration. Nose is malty malt with more malt. ABV is a very nice 9.0%. It is named for the rock band Clutch of Germantown, Maryland, though they seem to be pale and not very sour. "It started as chance, a sandwich shop encounter between the band and a fan. It ends as Clutch Collaboration". Choco, coffee, and black are used, infused, apparently in high quantities. Hops are of the Target variety. It is not lambic sour but with enough malt to make a mountain of malted milk balls, the effect is tempered and nicely so. It is actually a blend, very refined as such, of 80% stout and 20% dark sour wood beer. The full sour thing would put off much of their market and perhaps some experts who know a sour Bret ale for what good it can do. This 20% blend is a solid, reasonable choice without being a bad compromise. I admire it and will try it again though these LOF things tend to disappear quickly in my market.

New Holland Cabin Fever Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan

If the fogged-out gray message on the back of the label doesn't hurt your corneas, the idea of pairing it with smoked or gruyere cheeses will puzzle and confuse. Everyone knows a smoked cheese should not be with a dark, malty beer - or so we? Who the blank, freakin' cares. "Hints of rye, roast, and raisin join a subtle caramel sweetness" is plan for the concoction. It pours nearly opaque brown but gives a red-rootbeer glow under strong light. The head is biege with lingering, lumpy peaks. Brown ales are always a problem with me because many are too sweet, too weak, and are frankly the scrawny cousin of a robust porter more often than not. This one has a nice nip, faintly of licorice and rye in fact - smoke being more apparent as the buds saturate in your head. Good solid malts are abundant and satisfying from start to finish. Love the snowed-in cabin art before I forget to mention it. There is nice rich, malt-laden caramel sweetness and this is nicely judged - no one on our panel felt that sweet aspect was off by even a notch one way or another. It is quite interesting among the usual lot of American micro-browns. While not perfect or sensational it is memorable enough and quite pleasant. If you demand a brown ale not being a watered-down porter, cheap to make and just filling up your line, this is one choice that will please. Sadly for them there are several other browns a cut above.

Newcastle Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newcastle Upon Tyne, Scotland

McEwans comes from Scotland and this label comes from Newcastle Upon Tyne in good old England. This is a bright and dark amber-brown with a bubbly head. It is not as strong as McEwans Export Ale but still carries a very pleasant traditional British ale body and taste. It is crisp enough to drink in some quantity - unlike some British ales - but does not compromise on taste. The finish is short so it will not intrude upon a gourmet feast. Good table ale and readily available in the US for over a decade. Their 2012 Founders Ale eclipsed it by some measure but is a more golden, hoppy ale.

Old North State Box Turtle Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Youngsville, North Carolina

The North Carolina State reptile appears to have some connection with this rich mid-amber ale. The brew is made slow with carmel and roasted malt flavors; like the turtle it is worth the wait they tell us. The beast's 'quiet and unyielding determination' is perhaps what the brewers wanted in their own nature. The results show with a rich malty dose with enough hops to fill up a good balance. It is semi-dry in the finish and is certainly a good value when found. If you like your brown ales more on the order of the so-called LIGHT STOUT this will please. It does not have overwhelming chocolate notes but good toffee and coffee qualities. One reviewer noted: 'malt lover's choice...made with refined judgement. I salute them.'

Brewbase Fives



Old Peculier

RATING: 5.0

Maskam, Yorkshire, England

I remember the first time I tried this sacred brew in the 80's, I realized that I knew very little about the true brew world - unless this label was so strange it was a unique anomaly. It was and is an anomaly about readily available brews in the US but one finds the occasional British import or domestic micro with similar traits. No having had a Scotch Ale back then, I had not sampled the wonderful molasses-drench, caramel-filled malty delights of the Old Country. Now that I've sampled scores of them here and there, I still feel unquestionably this is a remarkable, praiseworthy ale. Familiarity does breed contempt among beer reviewers but some like Old Peculier and Orval tend to have the reverse effect. Since 1827 the Theakston Brewery of Masham Yorkshire has made this perfect dark traditional ale like those we seen on British TV programs. The initial taste has a bit of a bite like Molasses but the other flavors are smooth and complex. It is just as impressive and enchanting at room temp as when chilled. \$7.50-\$8 turned your table into a pub in 1994 but today in 2010 expect to pay \$11-13 or more.

Ølfabrikken Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Roskilde, Denmark

This bottle has that Grolsh-style, reclosable hardware at the top and thus a price to match. Eight cereals and malts are blend to give some sweetness, vague citrus notes, and above all else rich malt. It is unfiltered and unpasteurized for our benefit. I don't consider it in the Belgian style for the most part.

Oregon Brown Ale

RATING: 3.5

Portland, Oregon

This product out of Portland uses Crystal, Pale, Roasted, and Victory malts to achieve what they call a 'tawny nut-like flavor'. Nut-like we understand but what is 'tawny flavor'. Anyhow the head is tawny beige and is quite large with micro-foam. Low carbonation. The choice of malts tells us up front it's not the LIGHT STOUT brothy kind of BROWN ALE that is made using chocolate malts. Reviewers noted 'big lasting head and cherry red color but flavor is too mild' and 'Surprisingly dry and rather simple at first but the finish and enduring tastes are more malty'. A nip of hops was noted by a few in the finish. Most of us felt it was a shade too thin for even a non-chocolate kind of BROWN ALE. Others felt it was as good as some German darks at higher prices.

Pete's Wicked Tenth Anniversary Ale

RATING: 4.5

St. Paul, Minnesota

The label has the friendly (?) pitbulloid face of Millie, the brewer's family pet. Of course she does look like Spud's sister at the very least! Made in the 'original American brown ale' style it is rich brown with a lasting head. Flavor is malty and hoppy with good balance. It is not a startling or very shocking beer but in its simple quiet way it is quite drinkable and rewarding. But if one tries to contrast it to the vast number of new Wicked flavors it would be a difficult task. This one is rather uncommon so the label is worth collecting we suspect.

Pyramid Best Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Seattle WA/Kalama WA

This winner of the 1990 Great American Beer Festival for BROWN ALE brownish- copper with a persisting ivory head. Flavor is overflowing with smooth, brothy malt but barely enough hops to round out a semi-bitter nip. It is positively the most smooth malty beer of the full-bodied sort. That is a real accomplishment. The finish is semi-sweet and very refined. Those of us who might prefer a BROWN ALE more on the chocolate or even caramel side are still happy. If you love a good German dark (single bock) this is sure to please you. Priced at \$7.99 it is surely a good value given the depth and sophistication of the product. Reviewers noted 'malt lover's nirvana...so smooth it almost seems like a non-alcohol drink'.



Red Hook 8-4-1 Expedition

RATING: 5.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

This limited release brew for Spring-Summer 2010 is tabbed as an American-style Imperial Brown Ale, a worthy and promising class not shown everyday in any country. At 9.5% ABV it is wizard, old time czar, Bosendorfer and Chrysler Imperial imperial. It is named for eight brewers who worked in four teams and had their recipe blended into one final product; sort of a strategy used in whiskey and wine blending but perhaps harder to pull off in the beer world. It pours a clear dark rosy-brown, the head large and creamy in both color and texture. Flavors are pure yet complex in the final analysis, well developed and also harmonious, including dose after luscious dose of sweet malt, some smoke, and even oak qualities. Like a well-tuned orchestra, the sweetness and ethanol sections seem to know just when to solo strong and when to be soft and when to be silent. Sugar comes from the use of honey, brown sugar, and candy sugar but with all that ethanol is not going to be sickly sweet.

The finish is actually quite dry and smooth for this much of everything. Malts include wheat, pale, Munich, Caramel, Smoked, and chocolate type. Hops as one would expect are diverse too, covering Crystal, Sterling, Cascade,

Alchemy, and Willamette varieties. Hops are medium on the bitter scale to me, mostly this rich due to dry-hopping later. For all the blending, the devotion to theme and style is not lost. The idea of shared excellence, minged this well, is not easy to pull off especially with eight chefs working in the kettle. Brew cannot be stew and vice versa. There is surprising unity and I suspect this came from merging the recipes are a particular ratio and not in four equal portions. In other words, "let's add 5% more of #3, not quite...now add 8% of #1...perfect. Stop. Record the percentages." They've melded this truly imperial product into a champion nectar and one of the most impressive brown ales I've tasted in the last few years. When I think of all the money I wasted on bad brown fest lagers and horrible mass market darks, I take refuge in the fact that brews this good exist on earth and we are capable of making them and fusing them into our bodies. Can we dream that brews this good be available in every US super market every single day of the year?

Ridgeway Bad King John, Very English Black Ale

RATING: 4.0

Oxfordshire, England

With my set of strong LED lamps this stuff is darker than some brown ales, hardly black as others and with a bit of red sheen under it. The head is big, beige, and the nose very British and frankly a bit confusing. "Real Ale" is surely in the works here. "Black...bitter...intense...like the ruthless man it honours, do not come here looking for subtlety!" warms the label. This all juxtaposed next to slender, raven-haired maiden hanging from a noose - they should expect calls from NOW and Gloria Allred any day now. This 6% ale was not intense on first sip but the later ones got stronger, almost Old Peculier-like but weaker in a way that neither "bad" nor good. It's less "bad" than Old Peculier meaning less good as it were. This is not something some kettle in Colorado or Nor-Cal will be making anytime soon not should they really. It is bitter, true to the label, but I'd give them the noose for it being not molasses-loaded enough. If you're a "bitter ale must taste like gall", no compromise sort of drinker, this is one rarity for you. Maybe it's because Theakston Old Peculier gives bitter intensity with a nice finish of molasses and malt, that this monarch does not rise to the peak of history. It is true to name perhaps, ruthless as King John, and with none of the polish, manners, and sweet charm of recent monarchs.

Rock Creek Nutrageous Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

This nut brown ale is fairly outrageous and carries a rich flavor. Sweet malt flavors predominate what is a nicely crafted product. Slightly bitter hops back it hop as a secondary theme. It is not fully overwhelming but it will delight most brown ale lovers.

R.J. Rocker's Bald Eagle Brown Ale

RATING: 3.0

Spartenburg, South Carolina

As many of you know, Spartenburg once was a lousy, poorish town and not much to write home about. Today some of finest BMW vehicles come from it's massive white factory and many even make their way back to the Fatherland. Their motto is "every beer, every drop, every time". The company formed in 1997 with owner/brewer Mark Johnsen, an NJ native who'd home-brewed for years. He served in the Gulf War and in 1991 found himself stationed in Germany, trying to learn as much about brewing as possible. He paired with John Baunight IV of Highlands, NC and Nick Wilkdrick of Jacksonville FL to get things going. The label is odd and is I think a black-and-white picture of a mountain. At first glance it looked like a sleeping dog or nest of hamsters. Perhaps a graphic artist needs to be consulted or change who they've got now. It's a rather goofy, fragmented label. The ale pours bright amber with a fine-textured cream head of good duration. Chocolate and black malts were used and 5.6% ABV is planned. The malts are earthy but sadly on the weak side. "Smooth" is correct but smoothness

should never come at the expense of depth, ingredient integrity, and satisfaction. Sadly, here it's too much of a compromise and I doubt the now educated beer-drinking masses will not trust this label. One could get away with this in 1980 but not today. There are too many good, complex, full browns about for this to succeed. I do look forward to their other products, many of which are reportedly stronger and up to 8.5%. This one I'm writing off. The Bimmer has bald tires and the tank is nearly empty. This would be a BMW 301 on the traditional scale of things.

Rogue Creamery 1935-2010 Anniversary Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

Celebrating "a fellow Oregon Rogue revolutionary" maker of cheese, Rogue the brew dudes made this very dark brown ale with feast of exotic ingredients: Crystal 75, Weyermann Carafe Special II, Malteries Franco Belges Kiln Amber, Hugh Baird Brown, and Rogue Micro Barley Farm Dare™ and Risk™ malts. I've never had a Rogue cheese but given their awards and number of blue cheese varieties, I suspect they are at least as good as the famous Maytag operation. 7.6% ABV is respectable but one does not detect this addition. The head is creamy-tan, medium in duration. The bursts with mild caramel malts, moderately sweet (though one reviewer here felt it was over-sugared), turning later on to notes more nutty and roasty, layered and never too strong or rich. It is a Mild Brown Ale in the sense there are not bitter or overtly hoppy notes but it is well balanced and well-dosed - mild yet not weak - this being a concept very important in the beer world. Given the thick ceramic-like black bottle that will last until the roaches take over the world from the apes, the \$15.99 price is understandable. Give it to someone who collect cow pictures or bovine memorabilia. Great and fun beer, informative and pleasing. Notable to but could go the extra mile.



Rogue Hazelnut Brown Nectar Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

It been about a month since we've found a new John Maier ale. That's way too long. This 30 IBU ale comes with a bald guy in the lavender shirt painted on the front. I guess he is the 'Home Brewer in Each of Us' given the dedication. Color is dark reddish amber (not nut brown) with one big foamy tan head. The hazelnut part of the name refers to the aroma and flavor - not color. One notably sophisticated reviewer used nothing more than 'wow!' at his first sip. The list of 13 elite ingredients makes fun reading. Highlights include chocolate malt, Saaz hops, Pacman yeast, and hazelnut extract. While it's not as nectary as some it's quite sweet. It remains a standard of great American brown ales and has been so over a decade now. It is endlessly impressive and if I had a dozen labels to serve a British or German visitor, this just might make the list.

Samuel Adams Longshot Hazelnut Brown

RATING: 4.0

Cincinnati, Ohio

This is a copy of an award-winning brew out of 1680 entries in the World Homebrew Contest. Sponsored by Boston Beer, this APA category was won by Doug and Vicki Parker of Leesburg FL. Original Gravity is 13.9 and 17 Hopping Units are reported from the analysis. The 'nose' or aroma is something that would remind an angel of home. There are hazelnut, vanilla, and coconut things going on; you'd swear it's a form of a trendy coffee. It's colored bright and dark brownish-red with a lasting off white head. Doug and Vicki have made a very tempting beer with full flavor and superb drinkability. The main complaint (offered by some folks only) is that it's 'a bit too International Coffee/artificial to be beer'. If you like to experiment with beer flavorings it's a winner.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Smith's Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Tadcaster, England

The Old Brewery Tadcaster has since 1758 made traditional ales. This BROWN ALE carries a nut brown color of reddish-amber not unlike your average acorn. The head is tall, enduring, and foamy. Earthy aroma. Flavor is a good blend of hops bitterness (as any real UK ale) and malt depth. Reviewers have commented on the 'assertive malting that finishes dry and wonderfully bitter' and 'one of the best imported British ales if your body needs malt like mine.' It is not chocolatey like Johnson's Brown Ale nor does it use a diverse malts and real hazelnut flavor like Rogue Hazelnut Brown. A few folks thought it was too strong and one suggested it was better if thinned by lager to 90%. A very rich and wonderful ale for those like a dry bitter perfection to malts.

Schmaltz Hebrew Genesis Ale

RATING: 4.5

Saratoga Springs, New York

Yes, there is such a thing as Kosher beer...so much better for washing down those tasty Hebrew National franks at the ballpark; though I still think chugging Manischewitz Concord Wine in that big rectangular bottle would be a close second. Read the label and a beer review practically writes itself: "Chutzpah never tasted so good". Cool line. "Smooth and distinctive" comes next. Ditto on the first word, very nearly so on the second. It is called "light brown" but under most light conditions I found it "brownish-amber". The off-white heads persists in some size like...like that cloud thing Moses saw in the desert. 'Nough! The quality of the malting is very high and it's finespun, artful balance in all aspects makes it a delight whenever found.

Brewbase Fives



Schmaltz Hebrew Jewbelaton Twelve Ale (1996-2008)

RATING: 5.0

Saratoga Springs, NY

This wonderful dark brown (porter dark) ale commemorates their anniversary since the founding in 1996. It is 12% ABV made with 12 different malts and 12 different hops. The number 12 means completeness in old times and the 12 tribes are an easy connection here; Jacob had 12 sons. On the whole completeness theme Jesus had twelve disciples for example and many corporations today main that number with exactly 12 board members. The book of Exodus had 12 signs. There are 12 days of Christmas (named for the world's most famous Jew) and after drinking this sumptuous brew you and I may need a 12 step program!

The long lace is surprising for something so dark and carmel-drenched. It is almost syrupy in mouth feel and the sweet, luscious candy malt thrills the tonque like sweet treats for Hanukkah. This is truly a beer to remember, done to excess but not crudely so, always giving on-track, refined, sophisticated notes. It could almost be a sweet Scotch ale for its molasses charm and mahogany opacity. It is a simple theme but very nicely crafted, well-supplied with all the good flavors, lavish, and truly remarkable. The plentiful approach is

appropriate for an over-the-top anniversary ale but in this case it is more about the beer than the celebration and cute label. Very, very nicely executed from people who's brewing art is rapidly approaching legend. If you love a sweet malty beer do find some of this limited stuff and you'll probably consume it in 12 minutes.

Schmaltz Hebrew Messiah Bold

RATING: 4.5

Saratoga Springs, New York

The last time I heard about a bold Messiah he was turning over the tables of the money changers in the temple and had a member of his posse who chopped off some dude's ear with a sword. They claim this Kosher brew is "worth waiting for" and a couple of other jokes. This might be the only beer label with three bible verses cited on it. Could be a trend for good. I have great beer recipe and story that fits Ezekial Chapter 23 to perfection. Color is very dark reddish-brown, head an antique ivory and lasting well. Aromas hints at strong malt, the first taste confirms medium malt density and a very high level of smooth, stirring attention to detail in all the flavor traces. It jumps on you a bit tart, then soothes you in refined malts, covering your tastebuds and brain like a thick comforter on a cold night. The softish malt notes pacify and soothe, giving you good things only and nothing harsh or rough ever. I would like it a notch fuller and then I might compete with some other offerings in this section. Not quite despised and rejected here but I'd like it more parting of the clouds and loud trumpets strong. But I suspect my Messiah is not there. Considering I like my malt coming down like a B-52 full of cluster bombs and painted on with fat, thick brushes, this product just might be a bottle for some of you with different sensibilities.

Sea Dog Old Gollywobbler Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Bangor, Maine

You'd better try to pronounce the name OLD GOLLYWOBBLER before consuming your first bottle. Afterword all attempts will be futile. Color is reddish-brown with a dense cream-colored head of foam. While some browns are a massive dose of chocolate and others are a malty treat this is something else. It is rather malty but the hops side of equation is not neglected and gives a full roundedness to the brew. We might call it a MALTY PALE ALE to sort it out from the LIGHT STOUT sort of BROWN ALE. Reviewers remarked on 'lots of good ingredients, skillfully handled...finish was a touch too bitter for me' and 'more hop-drenched than typical but for the hop lover that is a positive thing!'



Smiles Heritage Ale

RATING: 5.0

Bristol, England

One is not used to seeing a British ale maker dating from just 1977. But in this case the centuries short of experience definitely never shows. In fact some of the big, old giants had best watch out. This dark reddish-brown ale is immediately appealing to the tongue as being unquestionably full-bodied. There are quality notes of molasses, caramel, bitter hops, and tropical fruit competing for your attention. Every fool and his brother seem to be bottling their ale for the US market. This is one effort we welcome as a genuine real ale well worth the effort to import it. We'd certainly welcome another 3 or 20 labels from this firm.

Southend Chocolate Ale

RATING: 3.5

Charlotte NC/Charleston SC

This product from both Carolina states is brownish amber with a small tan colored head of moderate duration. A

faint malt aroma prevails. Flavor is choc-olate-like (no Cacao-based additives) as advertised but this is surely not a very full ale as one usually gets with a chocolate theme. All stouts and most brown ales with this flavor element prove a bit deeper and fuller. However it is not a weak beer by any means. The balance of sweetness and hops bitterness is not quite right but if you thrive on the popular German darks (ie. DAB, St. Pauli, Becks) this just might be your thing. There are certainly several superior brown ales from the Carolinas (among them Johnson's and Old North State) and a host more from other Eastern firms. As with their Carolina Blonde they require more complexity.

Star Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

Since 1894 the Star Brewing Co. of Portland has made quality beers. This BROWN ALE is dark reddish-brown with a big dark head. Little lasting carbon-ation. They describe it as 'medium maltiness' and that is quite correct. The comment about 'robust chocolate flavors' is questionable compared to other browns such as Johnson Brown Ale. Northern Brewer, Perle, and Tettnanger hops are used and show in the finish which is more hoppy than normal for the style. Reviewers noted 'a real buffet full of malt and hop flavors...truly delightful' and 'I tasted more hops than chocolate but what I found was simply first class'. The finish is semi-dry and has a long hops 'carry over'. Packag-ing is like Rogue and we applaude the similar ingredient list. Recommended.

Strangford Lough St. Patrick's Best Ale

RATING: 4.0

Rochester, New York

This dark amber-brown ale is just 4.2% ABV but the flavor is more intense than the ethanol. It has some mid-strength malts, sweetish but not so candy-based as their Legbiter Ale in amber. Imported ingredients, not the usual American stuff, comes from Ireland and the good folks in Rochester made frehs micro-ale for the masses there and on the East Coast. There is some caramel depth and a molasses nip something on the order of a weaker but still decent Scottish Ale. Hops bitterness is stronger than the Legbiter and one gets a balanced delivery of malt-sugar and hops by the finish. You must like sweet malt ale to love this and many of you will - a good percentage of you will be think it not bitter or malty enough.

Tolly Cobbold Cobnut Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Ipwich, Suffolk, England

This very dark ale has a persistant tan head and a dose of roasted malt that is quite near the realm of the porter. It is sharp and tangy but the finish is smooth, clean, and dryish. it is quite pleasant and flavorful though there are irregular notes to be perceived on occasion. Some reviewers were totally convinced and thoroughly impressed while others had some reservations on the refinement aspects. It was a bit harsh in the first taste for some while others found the occasional flat or metallic note. It is not what one would expect of a modern UK ale but like some of them it is truly a bit idiosyncratic. This is a fine choice for your taste tests.

Unibroue Chambly Noire Dark Ale of Lees (Black Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

This 6.2% ABV is an opaque blackish-red with a beige head. It is bottle fermented. They have emphasized the richness of toasted malts, some spice, smoky flavors, and aimed for a clean, dry finish. Hops bitterness is minimized but compliments the malt well. The flavor here is a revelation, more like some German darks lagers I've tried than than their usual Belgian fare. Thus I feel it belongs among the brown ale group instead of the brown or dark Belgians. The Beer Advocate puts it the Belgian Dark Ale but it shares very little with the classic style in my opinion. The first sip is tart but it quickly unfurls into a very different universe, one loaded full of earthy malts, notes of corn, bread, quality fruit, smoke, faint yeast, generic "nut", and a clean, dry finish. It's not the forceful, Hemi-charged, high alcohol labels that has made their fame but it's still a very nice product. If you rate it as a strong dark Belgian ale it fails but I find it not fully of that classification and best evaluated as it is, regardless or name or label. Their website never uses the word Belgian for this label and neither should you or I.

Williamsville Studley Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fernandina Beach FL/Doswell VA

The name alone ought to sell this a few hundred extra cases but it truly stands on its flavor merits. (They didn't pander to the stud thing too much - the guy on the label looks like Martin Short playing Patrick Henry). Actually the name comes from Studley VA where the company farm is located. It is made near a FL beach however. Confused? Color is medium brown with a deep tan head. Flavor is different - one of those quirky little full malt punches that not everyone will appreciate. English hops and yeast were used. While the early notes are a medicinal-malt the finish is dry and hops bitter. One taster said: 'distinct but that is that a good thing here? Let's say it is not a smooth or easy drinking beer...'. Another wrote: 'a harsh way to get quality'.

Yeastie Boys Pot Kettle Black

RATING: 4.5

Invercargill, New Zealand

One of the southern breweries on on planet has a cool and appropriate name and this aptly named creation is broadly in the American Black Ale style. "This ale is like a spring thunderstorm: dark, breezy, exhilarating, and unsurprisingly wet. The pour of this 6% ale is a dark brown, hence not technically black or opaque brown. You'd have to be a bar in a coal mine to think this was actually black or blackish. The head is medium-high, rocky tan head of rich coloration. The approach is mega-malty, brighter and more crisp than mosts porters (which often approach the black ale domain), and there is some interaction between the somber, full malts and heavy fruit esters. These boys know how to get the fruit yeasts going even if the malt will overshadow them. This would be a lovely ale to barrel or shelf age as is.

ALE - EXTRA SPECIAL BITTER (ESB)



Anderson Valley Belk's Extra Special Bitter (ESB) Ale

RATING: 5.0

Boonville CA

Found by us on Halloween 1994 this Californian ESB from the great Anderson Valley people has a cheerful pumpkin orange color. The head is substantial and enduring. It is pleasantly bitter and overflows with rich hops which the label accurately describes as a 'savory fragrance'. The 'ambrosial maltiness' is less clear to us. If your taste runs to a fully hopped BITTER this is one of the best around. Like many rich ESB offerings this one can overpower subtle foods because this amounts to an alcoholic herbal (hops) tea. Carbonation, color, and head make for a superb presentation in fine glassware. Belk's ESB is distinct from Fuller's ESB but both are 5's to us.

Avery 14'er E.S.B.

RATING: 4.0

Boulder, Colorado

Here's a coppery brew named for the beautiful, complex, and big peaks in Colorado, notably the 14K footers. Under my nature-simulating compact tubes it actually pours a dark gold and not the copper you may find in some dark, dank pub somewhere. Maybe. The head is near white, as rocky as well...near the brewery, and the aroma is sweet hops with some malt. It sips tart, not giving it's true character up with the first sip or two,

especially if very highly chilled. Eventually you get more bitter hops and a nice framework of refined, semi-sweet malts. It's not as bitter as many with the ESB initials but is more drinkable and less of an acquired taste for us Americans perhaps. I called in a friend with a E.S.B.A. degree and he found his favorite style both too weak and not bitter enough to deserve the name. But what of it "as it" without regard to claimed style? (my usual theme). "A decent golden ale with a malty tendency" and so I judged it with that and my own thoughts of it, misclassified or not. There are couple of off notes to be sensed on occasion but it's sweet and yummy overall; even if not a champion in this class or any other.

Brewbase Fives



Fuller's Extra Special Bitter (ESB)

RATING: 5.0

London, England

Since 1845 Fuller, Smith, and Turner of London PLC have made superior ales. Curiously our US labels never use the word 'bitter' - I suppose it would frighten off some Americans from spending \$7-10. Bitter means quality to them, something far different to the uneducated this side the pond. Color is dark semi-cloudy amber with an firm head. Flavor is glorious with rich carmel tones and sweetly-balanced perfection. It is fruity and candy-filled and bitter all at once. There is no better British ale sold in the USA. It will impress your friends. Among bottled offerings, this remains a standard or benchmark for ESBs so always use it in your trials.

Green Man E.S.B.

RATING: 3.5

Asheville, North Carolina

Influenced by the "Legend of the Green Man", a sort of Father Time with hair and appendages of foliage and in this case ears sprouting hop vines, this "iconic ale" is pleasant but not terribly firm in the British ESB style. If I were to say is neither extra, special, nor bitter that would be too easy a joke but a medium stone's throw from the truth. The G-man in British pub house stle was often carved in wood or stone, a face made of Acanthus or other things, and sometimes his private bits a planter or root or whatever might be displayed without too much offense. Color is bright amber, head short but decent for decoration, and nose hoppy sweet. The bitterness is there is moderation and not traditional nor impressive really. It is pleasant and true to our Brewbase greed we always rate a beer mainly for what it is above what it is called. \$10.99 for 1.5 gallon brown jug (true NC style) is fine and one can hardly get more semi-respectible, surely drinkable ale for such a sum. There is no offense here and in quantity something of a curiosity at the nomenclature.

Old Hickory Wilson Creek E.S.B.

RATING: 4.0

Hickory, North Carolina

The aim here is a classic, Brit-like ESB with a balance of earthy hops and British grains for biscuity ale flavor. The actual Wilson Creek is northwest of Hickory NC closer to a town called Lenoir and quite a scenic run of whitewater and small, pretty waterfalls. This formula pours a darkish amber with a bubbly, short-lived head toned in light tan. I found it's citrus notes and rather traditional flavors to be ultra-refreshing on a hot June day. It might pass as a Brit to the real limey class but it is clearly no generic hoppy-biscuity amber ale. It is alive and tart at the right moments and fades into a deep, fairly dry malty finish of refined quality. I suspect my ESB preferences range on the less earthy side than this one but it was a truly enjoyable, easy summer refresher when tried first in June 2012. And for this \$3.99 bomber price...a must try where found.

Redhook ESB Ale

RATING: 4.5

Seattle, Washington

Though described as deep amber the color is light, bright amber. The ivory head is long-lived and finely foamed. It is richly hopped with a suitable bitterness befitting the named style. It finishes dry and bitter as expected. They also microfilter it instead of pasteurizing it to preserve quality. While some other (namely the renowned Fuller's ESB) are a bit richer, this is enjoyable at slightly lower price. The finish on your first bottle may seem thinner than desired. But that 'hops carryover' after a few bottles (we drank many each) helps later on. Reviewers noted 'wonderful true bitter quality and lovely in its glowing color' and 'very well polished formula and easily one of the better American bitter ales I've sampled this year'. Try against Fuller's ESB.



Rogue Imperial Younger's Special Bitter Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

I'll have to admit not trying this beer until 2009 because the bottles in local shops looked nearly identical to their Imperial Porter save for the lettering. Simply missed it! These grand ceramic vessels, and vessels is a good word for them because our grandchildren can still use them, are wonderful items once the sting of the \$16.00 price (March 2009) goes away. There is a white bottled version with a horse and red X's but I don't know if that's a new or gold bottle style. 2-row and crystal malts are used. Hops are Willamette, Kent Golding, and Amarillo. Before I proceed, be sure not to confuse this with Young's Ale of the UK who make a world famous bitter in a 3.7% trim. This lovely beverage reveals itself as a lovely golden-amber, the head large and quite golden-cream for any style of ale. It's falsely weak at first in the sense of Darjeeling being a weak tea until it comes over you in waves. The hops are refined, subtle in that good, restrained way. Malt support is decent. It gets more crisp and bitter with repeated sips - and any ESB is made for repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat again until the sidewalk becomes the horizon! There's not a sweet or caramel moment in this brew, the spicing of the bitter hops the reason for it's existence and our joy.

One must dismiss the impressive vessel for even crappy beers come in nice bottles for very nice sums. There are rich supportive notes in choir, grapefruit tartness beyond any doubt, grass, faint grain on the earthy side, faint floral hops (adding to the more assertive bitter ones), and not as much EtOH as the 7.4% analysis would suggest. I found it best very cold and crisp, bitterness persisting but two friends though things towards 50 deg. F. made the malt balance more to their liking. This is a very praiseworthy product, with or without the fine dark container, a true delight and honorable American copy of an old UK style. The BEST AMERICAN ESB IN 2009 and giving Mother England a run for her money.

We retried the 2010 offering in cut, semi-collectible 7 oz. bottles for \$4.99 - this stuff is getting as expensive as perfume and copper. The dark glowing brew is thick and sticky, almost barleywine territory for all the intense flavors. Reviewers here sampling their own bottle said "bowed over...more bitter than I like but respectable for it's complexity and almost liquor-like intensity" and "could be mistaken for beer concentrate given the size of the bottle and the boldness of it....want to dilute it a little with a good amber ale. Is there any end to how potent an ale can become?"

Sierra Nevada Early Spring Beer (ESB) 2009

RATING: 4.5

Chico, California

This unfiltered SN offering is said to combine the best of English-style ESB and the West Coast Style. Two-row Pale, Crystal, and English Maris Otter malts are used with English Challenger hops. Some East Kent Goldings is used in the finishing bit. Dry hopping includes the two previously named varieties along with US Challenger, US

Goldings, and Crystal. It pours light-medium amber, a simple cream head, and a hoppy nose. The flavor is rich hops, bitter to perfection and what SN is all about and has always been about. It's dry delicious but not as extreme as when served very cold. Out of my sixpack I held back a single bottle to drink warm the next day. It was a very different, less hoppy, and even slightly sweeter beer. It is hop-dominant at all temps and bitter in the very most precious, sacred sense of that often misapplied word. This is one fun-bitter, giddy-bitter, hop-a-holic heaven but not quite Imperial IPA-insane when warming a bit. IPA fans will still probably respect it. They gave us a bit of sweetness and special malt to round it out. SN is frequently brilliant with these little recipe variations and formula twists. The whole US and Brit Challenger thing is a nice, rare touch.

Rounding things out is what great breweries do and SN is highly skilled among them. I had to pay \$8.99 per six (January 2009) and that was getting close to offensive. Some criticize SN for doing twelve hundred variations of their legendary Pale Ale and that is not as bad an idea or easy a performance as it sounds. It's worked for...[name any Fortune 500 company, Oscar winner or famous designer here]. ESB 2009 is a "good take" as they say in Hollywood; a valuable, new, refreshing, view of old territory but twisted just enough to thrill. It's also a year-dated seasonal so they are giving us a fun thing to keep us buying and asking and debating and buying and loving them and buying.

Stoudt's Scarlet Lady Ale (ESB)

RATING: 4.5

Adamstown, Pennsylvania

The impressive 765ml bottle comes with an art deco-like label showing a flirting orange-locked lass with enough symbology to fill a Master's thesis. She's drinking white foam from a horn, has poppies and hop vines in her hair, and her creamy cleavage has a banner saying 'Since 1987'. And we suppose a scarlet lady could in fact be extra specially bitter in real life. Of all the ESB (Extra Special Bitters) we know this is surely the most reddish-amber (copper).

The color matches the hair of the label lady. The head is long-lasting or at least until I cannot see the lace on cream. Stop laughing! It has hopped flavor but is far more sweet than so many others under the ESB name. One reviewer said it was 'the most painless ESB known'. Others thought it was just a well-rounded hoppy amber; competent, misnamed. Seductive and full she is. I revisited this label in 12 ounces in 2009 and found it even more of a taste challenge. There is bitterness at mid note and so the ESB moniker should never be removed. It faux-weak. Yes, you do get a very gentle, soft-as-a-kitten finish here (unlike nearly all UK ESB products) but there is lots of malt in that de-clawed end. There's enough early astringency, harshness, and hoppy thump in mid passages to please me at least. An ESB that finishes smooth and painless is perhaps not to everyone's taste. I don't always like to cringe at lingering bitterness and here we have a nice alternative to the usual wincing. As with most bitter ales, the more you consume, bottle for bottle, the more bitter it gets from bud saturation.

Sweetwater Motor Boat Ale

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

"Our version of a tantilizing ESBTTTTTTTTTTTT!" shows a motor boat trying to catch a rather colorful (rainbow trout?) fish doing a back-first move of Olympic skill. From the seasonal "Catch and Release Series", this bright amber beer has an enormous beige head of long duration. It's a fine pale ale sort of thing with just enough bitterness to qualify it authentic-like for an ESB merit badge. There's stiff, sharp hops loaded to the gills. Sorry. No more fish analogies. Sweetwater is a promising...no...actually succeeding and respected small microbrewery from a city known for beverages that rule the world. Let's all hope they outlive that nasty, dark syrup crap that rots your brain, teeth, and is a good way to clean rust off your bumper. This superior, true beverage is captivating and pleasant, not a world-beater but neither would you hesitate to pour one for the most jaded visitor from the old country.

Weyerbacher ESB Ale

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

This ESB is bright pumpkin amber with a medium ivory head of good duration. Flavor is rich with hops of smooth bitterness and enough malt to please. It is bitter in the good way but not a rich, impressive feast the

way Fuller's ESB (our ESB standard) is. One reviewer thought it needed to be just a bit sweeter while a few thought it was a 5 bottler all the way. This Lehigh Valley product does have potential to be one of Northeast finest hoppy amber ales. It is a fine, brain-nourishing beer for test tasting with other amber microbrews as few are quite as hop-saturated. Very well worth your consideration.

ALE - FRUITED AND FLAVORED

I have decided to put the Pumpkin and spiced brews with Oktoberfest types as they are usually marketed around October/Halloween in the US and pretty serve as the same marketing theme. You will also get similar effects as these ales from fruit and flavored lagers.

Some with specific timing are spiced ales which are sold as Christmas ales aka Holiday or Winter Warmer ales are found here.

The traditional Belgian ales often have citrus peels, coriander, and grains of paradise as the traditional dosing. Those are not considered "fruited and flavored" as they are normal (quite standard) for the Ale - Belgian classes.

Abita Vanilla Double Dog XXV Anniversary

RATING:

Abita Springs, Louisiana

Given the \$4.99 bomber price (quite low in 2012) and what we know of Abita from the past, this label did not really get our tastebuds and brains a whizin'. This 25th anniversary brew is based on their famous Turbodog but adding more generous amounts of pale, caramel, and chocolate malts. Willamette hops are then added in goodly quantities with whole bean vanilla. ABV is a nice 7% and the pour is dark reddish-brown with nice early lace. The head is dark cream. First notes are promising, decent vanilla but nothing to right home about. The malts are semi-choco rich which caramel spikes in later passages. The finish like some other Abitas trails off more than we would prefer. Still it does have a charm and is "something of a value" to quote one of our panalists who added snobishly "for those who need such things". By the way the bottle is cuter as twenty turbo dog pups and painted on for collectors. Really nice design with gold paisley pups singing a song. We found this malty brew a bit better less than super-cold and the flavors get more complex and enjoyable with a temp closer to room. Overall it is a fine value and probably the best thing Abita has made in years.

Allagash Fluxus (Ale Brewed with Yarrow)

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Maine

Yarrow? Is this a tribute to Peter, Paul, and Mary? I do love yarrow and think it's cool in cough drops and wine too. I almost did a Ph.D. on garden yarrows but found a better-paying-than-a-professor computer job more tempting. It's a good genus, flavorful at times, very ancient in uses, and colorful in flowers. Not sure I like the name of this name as it suggests Acid Reflux among other things. ABV is an even 10%. Allagash's motto is ALWAYS AN ADVENTURE. That is both good and scary in the beer world. For them, it's almost always a calling card towards excellence. This label in their Tribute Series means they give a buck a bottle towards good local organizations and that might be good or scary too. (I'm never too sure what philanthropist-brewers do with their money and what they are imposing with my coin towards puppies, children, fetuses, politicians, farms, schools, parks, and wetlands). Color is ultra-hazy in very rich gold, even having an orangish-golden sheen at time under full fluorescent light. Big head, good lace, ending soon enough for a corked product. As I suspected, one needs to drink nearly the entire bottle to get the BUDSAT (taste bud saturation) of the special ingredient. It adds some herbal charm to what is a slightly sweet hoppy product with a half token of maltiness.

Having grown lots of yarrow plants and crushed more than few to fit in an electron microcope, I have some idea where yarrow begins and hops ends. I think. Yarrow can be bitter but it's not usual floral so much as medicinal and earthy. I think the label shows Achillea millefolium, the common yarrow with it's fine ferny foliage. I don't think you'd guess it had yarrow unless told but you might expect a curious mix of hop varieties? Maybe. It is not a liquid cough-drop but it is a tad sweet in the finish. I would have left it more dry and bitter by one or two notches. A liquid herbal cough-drop loaded full of corn syrup is hardly a standout and a sweetish beer with such

ingredients is apt to be misunderstood and underappreciated too. I would have turned up the yarrow and maybe added another nice herb or two from the North American flora to make this an even richer, complex, herbal brew. I appreciate the effort but it's a one-time purchase in this trim.

My first reaction to the name Fluxus is that it is something I coughed up last week at 3AM after downing a few too many 650 and 750ml micro-ales and assorted other things now in my recycle bin. There was a tin of Hormel Chili and box of bridge mix in there for good measure - or not. Fortunately, our Portland friends have presented a dictionary style def of fluxus on the label next to some golden sweet potato leaves. More about them leaves later. Fluxus - noun, Latin, 1. a flowing or flow. 2. continuous change, passage, or movement. That tells me maybe...dynamic, shifting flavor notes. Oh yes, it is brewed with sweet 'tators and black pepper in a 8.3% ABV recipe. OK....

The robust, corked bottle shows ample flaky yeast in the bottle unless they be givin' us some mini swee-tator chips down in thar. It pours a rich golden-amber, yeast flakes in tow, the head very tall, very open, and ivory. I think I get a pepper-bread malt nose but then again I knew which spice to expect. Seing as sweet potatoes are produced in my home state of NC more than in any US state (LA is #2) and certainly ME (and I've met a couple of dudes who came to Raleigh to get their Ph.D. in sweet potato genetics), Allagash may have scooped all our southern US microbreweries in using their yummy tuber before they thought of it. Did they succeed? Yes and no. I love the sweet, earthy and malty effect this recipe produces and the pepper is only faint but any tuber needs a bit of spicing to give it balance and punch. Fluxus is classicially a nice Belgoid ale, rich and moderate in alcohol, and made "own our" with a popular American crop - and I mean American in collective North and South American sense. The added species originated in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula or perhaps Venezuela about 2500BC. This is stuff of our history, our very old history. There is an abrupt, really lovely smoothness in the finish that a complex root like sweet potato can easily deliver with all it's diverse cocktail of good, tasty stuff. If sweet potato pies warm the heart, heal the soul, mend faster than a gallon of Rocky Road, and charm the tastebuds shouldn't a liquid form be made to do something of the same? Next time I want a truly Southern take on the tuber taken dark, sweeter, and drenched in buttery malts. Good first effort.

Allagash/New Belgium Vrienden Ale Brewed with Hibiscus and Endive

RATING: 4.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

Following the Allagash Yarrow-themed brew, this "collabeeration" should not be so surprising but I almost fear for a future of ales all based on new, noval combinations of culinary ingredients. "Good barkeep...set us up with a round of Kiwi and Chive ales will ya!". I can see a bar brawl around 2030 started over the lack of cummin-bean sprout-stout in the cups of the NFL franchise the New Bangkok Pounders. God pity the day that happens some place on earth. I do know Hibiscus is a nice additive to herbal teas and there it has a role for both flavor and color. Endive? I'll wait to see on that one. The label is a curious painted thing half a scrapbook and half ransom note. It tells us in the variable fonts and colors that Lactobacillus and Brettanomyces are added for yet more flavor. "Bliss" is a repeated theme. The bright golden-amber brew has a near white head of short stature but some duration. It gives a very herbal-veggie beer set of notes on first sip, fading darker and obscurely malty. The flavors are all over the known universe and I suspect they wanted this one to be a beer-tasting parties nightmare or source of conversation early into the next morn. Lots of people, pretty much any of us, can make enigmatic, veggie beers that are at least drinkable. The question here is this: is this a recommendable one worthy of these two fine brew houses? Or is it a "one-off, experience it once but never buy again" sort of creature? I decided I need to analyze slowly and lovingly an entire bottle - one can never look an enigma or riddle in the face without slow sips down the tubes and over the buds - slow and steady, thinking and drawing on past experience. Repeat 30 times.

I found bright orange juice fruit notes at one point but that is hardly laudable in this context - just familiar. There were nice lambicoid characters as we expected from the micro-beasties in the broth. B+ there. Fruit esters and yeast are all over the place, kind of like a fruit punch that is made with the 47 fruit species you happened to find at the market that day but having no uniformed, cheap red punch theme. Vreinden is in one sense a wild, mixed, stew of brew, and "pot luck" for the copper pot, lots of good things, very few off ones, and yet the single theme is that there is no single theme. I would call it Diversity Soup but that probably violates some EEOC subparagraph. The "whole bottle" reaction is better than at a half glass point or half bottle point.

There are glowing citrus and fruit neon signs bursting in the beer lobe of my brain (some of us have one by now), tempered by very subtle, dark malts, recessed hops that mingle with microbiology's best offering in the beer world, descending up and down a flashy herbal ladder where one samples many things, hundreds of chemicals I suspect, and nearly all of them interesting but like fireworks not easy to recall for long. The next explosion is the most important thing and it could be any thing; even a dive into an Olympic endive pool with fluorescent wavelets of asparagus and lemon.

Big Boss The BIG Operator Ale with Raspberries

RATING: 3.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

This very dark ale pours positively opaque brown yet I cannot quite consider it a fruit porter. The rich malts certainly has more of a stout-like comfort effect, being rich and smooth. There is berry-like flavor in the finish but you'd be stumped all day unless having seen the label first. Berry is there and too faint to be appreciate though most beer reviewers will despise the opposite extreme of "berries with ale". I'm really not sure what they were trying to accomplish here, so unclear is the fruit flavoring. One may easily mistake the slight tartness as the normal approach to brewing and nothing more. I'm nearly inclined to think my bottle was labeled in error; so doubtful is this additive and it's ultimate value in adding to the product.

Bilboquet L'Affriolante

RATING: 4.5

Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, Canada

The pour is juice-like amber, the lace strong and lasting, the head cream and medium length. Honey and spices conspire to make this "beer on lees" that "sometimes teases you and sometimes charms you...One does not know how to approach it". Another ale becomes mysterious chick theme. That is getting a bit old wouldn't you say? 7% ABV combines with a rich, very fruitful sweetness that strongly suggests a medley of tropical fruits were used in the mix. It is almost like Hawaiiin ale punch. Instead we think yeast, honey, and spices were used to construct them and with quite some skill at that. You'd really swear a pack of juices were added but the labeling suggests they refrained from that approach. As to the "slightly sweet" claim they have have that about two full hives short of reality. Our esteemed panel remarked that it "it's as sticky and fruity as a kindergarten class on their first field trip to an orchard...pleasant but too over-the-top for me" and "something of soda-beer but clearly not a wine cooler...spice and fruit are okay, a bit too much, and the honey is cloying at times". Over-the-top makes this lady not so mysterious and coy. Pardon me for saying that the melons and peaches seem real but are likely formed another way with tricks. She's more a carnival street corner gal with everything on display and taken to extremes for marketing purposes - honey and spice to the max - very much like the lady figured on the label in fact. Over the top - top to bottom - empty head to stiletto toe - round the world strong. Lots of bang for the buck (\$8.59 per 500ml, July 2012) and you may or may not want to come back for more. That's your choice and what you can live with.

Bison Organic Honey Basil

RATING: 4.0

Ukiah, California

This amber ale is given a slight (and I mean appropriately faint) bit of sweetness from honey and a touch of spice from basil. If I had not known about the basil, I'd have guessed it some modern, very nippy forms of hops taken to a strong level. I am not yearning for a Oregano Hefe-weizen or craving a Thyme Porter anytime soon but there certainly is a whole cupboard full of good plants worth using in brews. Coriander and anise certainly have a long history of being brewed in kettles though the more savory, earthy herbs are yet to find much of a home. I would tend to think a combination of fruit and herbal flavors might be the best path, such as a lemon-thyme flavor using actual lemon thyme rather than a true citrus product. There are many flavors of basil too besides the stock, Italian basil flavor and those might be explored in some worthy combination. This is a nice product but neither stunning or extensively memorable.

BrewDog Dogma

RATING: 4.5

Frasersbrough, Scotland

Let's say for the sake of argument I went insane some day, sold everything, and bet the retirement farm and Hot Wheels collection on an eccentric brewing venture. Okay, maybe not that odd a thought. If I said I was brewing a 7.8% ale flavored with kola nuts, poppy seeds, and guarana, my friends would be over shortly and have me try on a nice new white suit with the aid of the nice big men who are just here dear to help you. Hey! These sleeves have long white ribbons on the ends! This is not a suit!

BrewDog has gotten rabies (and is hereby in full froth) or maybe just a really neat creative bug and made an ale for the aforementioned odd ingredients and a bit of Scottish heather honey. "Innovative and enigmatic" as they call it is polite speak for people who are functional crazies and have a job and money to prove it. This "conspiracy of transcontinental ingredients" was arrived at while musing over some 17th century philosophical papers - in other words like most everything made by Pabst (LOL). Hops include Bramling Cross and Amarillo while the malts are Marris Otter Extra Pale, Caramelt, roasted barley, Dark Krystal, and Munich. "This beer is not cool. You may think it is, but that is just a beautiful lie fabricated by clowns and gypsies" says their website. New suits with ribbons await them.

The red on black label has a small book written on it - one I could not read with a box of reading glasses and six microscopes. The beer pours a rich amber, the head large, foam-laden, and antique ivory in color. Nose is herbal like no other ale I've sniffed, ever, anytime. First sip suggests a subtle ale, made with fine ingredients but very restrained in the style of many UK breweries who would rather kick their dogs their assault a customer's tastebuds with anything really strong. I do notice the honey and it is never overdone or far from an add-on; it's a very superb use of this ingredient. I cannot say much for the other ingredients except the entire package works and works very neatly. Call back the Loony Bin Brigade (as I imagine they must be named in Scotland) for those mad dogs have a few years of raising revenue for the Crown and delighting brew drinkers the world over. Splendid work and git oot yer face on this broth. Now go see to Black Donald for he's a' havin' a time with all 'da dang shellycoats bathin' themselves in the kettles.

Brewery Hill Raspberry Red

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Many of the raspberry beers on the market are made with a wheat base. This and a few others are ale-based. Real juice and 'natural flavors' are what gives this one the flavor and a pale amber color with red tints. The head is very small but lasts a bit. They describe the flavor as 'delicate' and that is appropriate and fortunate. Naked Aspen and Oregon both over-indulged in those mysterious natural flavors. This brew is restrained and has better juice qual- ity too. Reviewers noted 'Ale and berry flavors are about equal though I still do not see the appeal in beer cooler theme' and 'highly drinkable...a respect- able outcome in a group of beers that so often go wrong'. The BERRY ALES from Rogue (Rogue-n-Berry) and Star are the most worthy comparisons to date.

The Bruery 2 Turtle Doves (2009)

RATING: 4.0

Placentia, California

This second annual incarnation of the a dark flavored Belgian ale comes in thick 750 mils with a cap and not a cork. The opacity and head resemble a good stout. Nicely roasted malts are available in spades, augmented with cocoa nibs and toasted pecans. The ABV is whopping 12% and the total presentation is all the following things: potent, heavy, and for slow sipping only. It would blend well for it's almost a dark ale concentrate. No mild dove, weak, shy and faux-wounded here. In other words, it's a turtle dove bred to a rabid falcon assisted with 4-yard bionic wings and atomic malt arsenal of an F-22 Raptor. The fundamental medium here is of a ethanol-drenched, vaguely spices abbey-style brown and so it is not Belgianoid in name only. (perhaps for our next edition of Brewbase Reviews there will be a Belgianoid category for more and more things are coming up that way). I wanted to like this concoction but found it excessive maybe for it's own sake. I put it away for awhile and a second opinion. I sipped a bit more again and found it still overbearing. The merit of a beer is no more found in only it's simple boldness but in it's overall enjoyability and in the later aspect I found this a bit wanting. I liked it in such small doses I could not really bear to praise it.

The Bruery 4 Calling Birds (2011)

RATING: 4.0

Placentia, California

The "Twelve Days of Christmas" series has reached this name - I guess we missed 3 French horns or whatever the hell it's supposed to be. 3 French hens? 3 French whores? If she's my true love I'd appreciate 3 French whores playing horns and carrying plates of roasted, plump, delicious, greasy French hens. This unfiltered, bottle-conditioned ale came to us as \$11.99 (December 2011) in a thick brown bottle. 11% ABV with the intended flavors of gingerbread are good signs. The whole gingerbread thing makes this very much not a tripel, dark Belgianoid ale we figured up front. The pour is very dark, dank like a porter with a light brown head. Malt to be sure.

The nose is spice, not clearly ginger though. First sip shows the high ABV followed by moderately sweet notes of a quality malt and then quickly a reasonable, semi-gingery spice. It has an overall barleywine mouth feel and ditto that for it's intensity. For fun, we used a glass of this like "beer concentrate" with some weak Pils and made a rather nice brown ale cut 50:50. It was in fact too thick and intense for two on our panel but others questioned the basic recipe regardless of strength. There was a bit of that same sentiment with the 2 Turtles Doves. "Overwhelming" and "strong for the sake of being strong...sips well but you get bogged down and bored after a few sips". I would add the word cloying; something initially pleasant but quickly becoming too rich or sweet. There are a good number of barleywine or strong spicy ales which run circles around this one. The next days should become better and for this price we hope so.

Carolina Strawberry Ale

RATING: 4.5

Mooresville, North Carolina

I was very suspicious when this sixpack appeared at the Kroger in Cary NC in November 2008. The whole red label was like a soda label from one of those gourmet soda companies. Perhaps they were being honest as many fruit ales as more "soda beer" than true ale. This is NOT their earlier Strawberry Blonde formula by the way. I was surprised and wrong, one of those delightful discoveries I find just once every week or two in beer tasting. *Fragaria x ananassa* is a major spring crop in NC, accounting for over 20 mill a year though just a smidge compared to FL and CA. Most strawberry ales are good or mid-rate ales flavored with a vague fruity tartness that may or not be recognizable as to the genus. Others are sweet things flavored with artificial berry flavor and rate as absolute crap - neither a good berry soda nor a bearable beer. These folks got it right, the berries very clear and sharp but the ale background is clear and not always in the background in fact. The fine-tuning could be done 212 ways I suppose and this formula is nearly where it should be. It's not too tart nor too sweet nor is anything really wrong with it. Their website quotes a Robin P. from Pittsburgh PA who said "I have never believed in mixing fruit and beer, but after trying your Strawberry Ale, I can't get enough". I can get enough of this but if I did the same with our state's blueberries and raspberries, we'd have much more praise to point in their direction. If strawberry ale has never been real, good, or even palatable to your before give this one a try.

Dogfish Head Midas Touch Handcrafted Ancient Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

Dogfish makes some very fine, curious beers, a few dogs, but most are respectable hits. This formula is very different for it's made with barley, honey, white muscat grapes, and saffron. Say what!!!! This 9% ABV selection is colored like any golden ale, no strong nose, and slow lace. One does not get the grape clarity as with the SA Longshot Grape Pale Ale but yet you know something is there. I've loved saffron as a flower and cooking ingredient since childhood and I must say that it's contribution is fairly slight (perhaps a good choice) and only is detectable after drenching the tongue with a full bottle or two. You certainly would not guess grapes or saffron even if your life depended on it in some sadistic game of beer tasting and analysis to the death. It's okay, differentish, not great nor memorable, no way near worth the \$3.49 a small bottle that Whole Foods inflicted on the research budget.

Dogfish Head Theobroma

RATING: 4.5

Milton, Delaware

The dark, subtle Mayan sun-clock on the label features a sort of big-eyed princess, apparently munching

something from a bowl. It's cute and sort of like Polly Pocket as an ancient deity. These Dogfish folks are getting famous for artful liquids and artful labels and we can use much more of both. To say this ale is flavored is an understatement. Ancho chillies, ground annetto, and honey compliment the main ingredient - Theobroma. Make that Theobroma cacao. Think Godiva, Swiss Miss, and Ghirardelli and maybe that sweet town in Pennsylvania full of factories and ferris wheels. This 9.4% beverage present itself in dark gold with an ivory head. Lace is endless. When was the last time a beer flavored with chocolate and named for such was less than a dark brown? Is this a white chocolate thing or something new called liquid golden chocolate?

Remember that Dogfish markets themselves as "off-centered ales for off-centered people" and has their typesetter going nuts raising letters up and down on that sentence. Askinosie cocoa nibs and cocoa powder are added to the recipe along with the forementioned peppers, annetto, and honey. At first and second note points, I get something very rich and deep, especially for such a golden ale. The depth of the faint cocoa replaces traditinal, darkening malt in one sense. The finish intensifies (especially after 4-5 sips) to reveal the ancho addition. After most of the bottle, the ancho faded to a minor flavor and let new things happen - all very, very good. Iron Chef Bobby Flay would have made this for the GABF; though probably with deep-fried drinking straw formed from a tube of chives and lemon grass foam. The Chairman checks his purple satin pocket square and smiles-nods in approval.

Theobroma means "food of the gods" and it was once reserved for offerings to unseen gods, human royalty, and the wealthy at one time. There was no Snickers machine for the working man in those days nor could such a sweaty fellow buy his lady fine Lindt truffles at the gas station on the way home from work! I like this beer and it provided me and friends with endless opportunities for productive discussions. It is not a cocoa-rich beer but is in fact one which uses those rich, dark flavors to replace malt to some extent. Mixing chillies and chocolate actually predates it's blending with nuts, coconut, peanut butter, and even milk. This is a fine product, not as cocoa-laden as it might be but a good step in the right direction. How 'bout an Imperial Theobroma?!?!



Dogfish Head Aprihop

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

Once you remove the lovely copper-coated cap, the bright golden-amber product comes up with a thin ivory head and no lace to speak of. Having tried and hated dozens of fruit ales, one is immediately impressed with the fact that this one is based on a potent IPA, ie. very hoppy ale. There is no generic, formulaic, sweet ale trash that was "fruited up" with some frozen juice from a restaurant supply company. No, here one gets "real apricots" and a flavor that confirms it from first sip to loving last. It goes from apricot tartness in mid-presentation to a rather less fruity, solid finish, hops jumping about throughout but having no solo of it's own really. Apricot and it is surely real is truly the star and rich bitter hops the very superb choral background to use a theatre or opera analogy. It is not apricot with nothing. It is apricot plus hops more than hops tarted up with apricot. This approach and sincere approach works and works very well. A lesser brewery might not have pulled this philosophy off. Howls all around for dogfish - or should that be a tip of the dorsal fin.

Brewbase Fives



Dogfish Head Chateau Jiahu

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

Name me an ale brewed with grape concentrate and hawthorn fruit and you'd pretty much better name this one. "9000 year old Chateau Jiahu stands apart as the most ancient, chemically-arrested alcoholic beverage in the world". Microanalysis of old Chinese (Jiahu) pottery in the Yellow River region determined that a recipe with rice flakes, honey, muscat grapes, barley malt, chrysanthemum flowers, and hawthorn fruit was in order. Dogfish Head is not only making some unusual recipes but some very impressive and supremely memorable ones too. The pale-skinned Chinese lady with a bare back on the label is impressive and memorable - more fine art from this firm - art equal to winemakers and then some! When was the last time your brewer consulted a Ph.D. archeologist before developing a production model and marketing plan?

This eccentric nectar pours in dark gold, shaded to amber, the head near white but thinnish for me. The nose is frankly that of over-sweetened, bubblegum-laden crap beer. Sorry but true. But the first sip loads you with dozens of things - explosive diversity like a Celestial Seasonings label - tartness proceeds to rich malts as wide and deep as China from New York. There are complex fruit esters, some sweet, others less so, and this explains the superficial "bubblegum" note in the aroma. There are bananas with honey, grapey malt, floral musk, mums with apricot, faint ginger spice with healing roasted barley, light Belgian Saison, and anything with everything. Some reviewers felt this more of an alcoholic herbal tea which any of us might create with a bag of something and a splash of Grey Goose. It's too potpourri for many traditionalists but I for one like it and apparently people in China must have. Forget about the Chicoms and remember the rich glory of that land when people were free and culture free to run. It seems we may have lost some of beer's diverse, botanical charm by insisting on the Teutonic Holy Four and narrowing our options for these last few centuries in North America. It so often takes an Asian influence to make us Euro-Americans free to appreciate new-ancient wonders. This recipe is peculiarly novel, exciting and singular, and at the same time as radical as it is historical. Sound but unsound, something new and yet something quite old. Two criticisms that might hold sway with you or yours: 1) the lack of overpowering hops offends some who insist all beers must have this aspect and 2) excessive sweetness. Regardless, Chateau Jiahu informs us about history, not our chosen history but REAL HISTORY and does so with uncompromising, vivid flair. I frankly hope more Ph.D.'s influence brews in the future and I surely wish Dogfish Head to be making them.

Dogfish Head Noble Rot Ale Brewed with Grape Must and with Grape Must Added

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

This is not technically a beer x wine hybrid because the grape juice is not yet fermented. "Must" is a very fresh, high-solid juice, not filtered nor pasteurized, and usually made from pulp, seeds, skin, and even some grape stems. ABV is 9% and the pour is pale yellow, the lacer slow but long, the head cream and thin after a minute. Alexandria Nichole Cellars helped them with the grape must thing and the label calls this a "sort saison" style. First is light, juicy, quickening turning into a sour Saison style with white grape flavors but the semi-dry finish. The must is "botrytis-infected Viognier grape" which is good kind of fungal infection on a white cultivar proven since Roman times. "Must" as in musty like the old pair of swim trunks you forgot about and left in the trunk for a week in July. Hence the name Noble Rot. This formula is very tart at times, sour at others, and overall a fairly successful blend of fruit juice and golden ale. This ale is likable, more of a creative exercise than a really sessional pleaser. The final word is not out on grapes mixed with ale or wine-2-beer blends. Perhaps they might be avoided altogether but one has hops...!means hopes given this recipe's promise and the decent product that

is the Widmer Lemongrass.

Dogfish Head Urkontinent Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

This is one of the strangest looking labels you will ever see on any product. Looks like a sci-fi writer was trying to write an aesthetioc ransom note. But then is no conventional ale. It is brewed and flavored with wattle seed (fruit of Australian Acacia trees), amaranth (a seedy grain), rooibos (South African plant also known as red tea), Myrica gale (Latin name for the shrub bog myrtle or sweet gale), and something odd called honey. The sweet gale is an abortifacient not recommended for pregnant ladies but we presume they have not used very much of it. This 8% curiously augmented ale pour dark reddish-brown with a positively dark tan head of medium duration. As an "off-centered for off-centered people" (boy, did they send that up our alley!) the very malty infrastructure is broadly in the Belgian dark style. The spicing is clearly different and creative. It is more different and creative than brilliant - more of another route to decent, fine spicing but nothing to praise as a breakthrough. Panelists here noted "just another novelty to me...very drinkable...heard it was made in Dullaware" and alternatively "a refreshing change of pace...DFH is always pushing the frontier and going so far outside the box I need a telescope...you need long sipping time to get everything out of each ingredient". Yes, you can't evaluate this one quickly or without reading a bit about each herbal item to know what you are looking for - unless you were raised on wattles, myrtle porridge, and red tea. Overall, it is more of a clever idea and while not bad it is scarcely more than good. For \$11.99 for a medium bomber (May 2012) I'd think twice before making the investment unless you are a try-every-known ale drinker. That said, it makes a curious addition to a beer tasting party for not even your most educated foodie, snob friends will get the ingredients right. Spring it upon them (give no clues or research time) and watch them squirm for their low Ale-Q score.

Dogfish Head/Dan The Automator Positive Contact Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

Now that we beer-wine hybrids, it seems there is going to be a rush to beer-cider hybrids; especially where golden ales and ciders can share similar spicing. This 9% product is based on an ale blended to Fuji apple cidar, slow-roasted farro (sugar), cayenne, and fresh cilantro. Okay then, maybe it's then a beer-cider-salad hybrid. The pour is lightish yellow, lace small but long, the head near white. Giving the Fuji apple addition, this ale has something of a farmhouse or saison-quality and the spicing adds to that Belgian taste and feel. We have undertaken a number of beer-cider blends on our own so this is no our first barley-apple rodeo. It is a very pleasant formula and with added sips you get more of the faint cayenne spice. The cilantro might as well pass for general spicy-veg notes. It is by no means salsa-like in the least and we have tried both apple and peach salsa before. Reviewers here noted "curious and fun...I was getting bored and found this intriguing but not world-changing as a whole...nippy and reserved...a nice trend" and "CIDERALES in the future must be very crisp and spectacular because any fool can blend a very good microbrewed ale with an elite Brit cider...and get something very, very nice". The cidarale future is before us and Dogfish Head is giving us an early benchmark to lay out and measure.

Epic Sour Apple Saison Belgian-style Ale

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

Imagine a vat of brew that accidentally had an extra barrel of pie spice added. What to do? Add apple flavors and call it an Apple Saison. This is by far the most spicy ale, Belgianoid or otherwise, in our known world - and our panel goes a good 2000 labels deep. The initial effect is shocking but one later gets used to the effect of granny overspicing the Granny Smith apple pie again this ear. The pour is absolutely pale yellow, the lace decent, and the head very near pristine white. Just 1800 bottles of this label (or is it just Release #6) were made so not every spice girl and guy are going to get this experience. Still it is delicious even if not a very sour in either saison or apple terms. Nor is it intense and layered in the Belgian style. Pleasant, curious and fun, occasionally too intense, and well worth seeking out.

Epic Brainless on Peaches (Exponential Series)

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

The 10.5% ABV is enough to make one temporarily brainless or at least deprived of the former brain cell count. It is very pale yellow, Belgianoid in theme, hazy, and with a mid cream head. Nose is acidic. French oak barrels lend to the flavor improvements which are very evident after two glasses. First notes are tart with no peach, later unfolding to a bitter, dry peach layer. Peach is fuller with more sips but surprisingly it is never sweet at any point. The finishing notes can be "rather harsh" as one reviewer here gasped and nearly all of us thought the fruit was poorly integrated into the basic brew formula.

First Coast Mango

RATING: 3.5

Wilmington, North Carolina/Fernandina Beach, Florida

First Coast has named their beers Mango, Beach, and Bikini. They are hung from their lids and sold three to a pack costing around \$3.50. Mango is made with ale naturally flavored with mango flavor. The packaging is bright, festive, and very tropical. The two places where it is made know something about partying anyhow. The color is medium yellow with a lasting near white head. The scent is of fruit juice. The flavor is fruity and much to our collective surprise - very dry! The underlying ale seems to be okay though modest in flavor. Some reviewers complained it was a little bitter at times - and not the hops kind we adore. It does have a substantial quality and unique flavor to it but is very hard to rate. There is something about it worth studying.

Fort Collins New Planet 3R Raspberry Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

This gluten-free ale uses sorghum and corn extract with raspberry puree and orange peel. The pour is a curious melon-orange shade, not classic orange or amber, the head near white and vanishing fast. The nose is dark, some medicine, some malt, some thick esters. Lace is medium fierce. First is muddle of many of things, none too familiar, followed by dark berry notes (not bright or tart like many raspy ales), and a finish both weak-tart, and mellow grains. I do like a fine sorghum ale but one had better be informed of it's inclusion and value or this may come as an awkward surprise. This ale is fine for what is needed to be for the gluten-challenged and gluten-avoiding population. Panelists were not sure who wide a birth to give this approach as the approach is very much a medical issue. Does one dare compare sugar-free, chocolate lumps in a plastic bag for diabetics to hand-made treasures from one's local, seducing-like-Satan chocoletier? As a general market beer it's decent and dankly devoted to sorghum grain notes. As an alternative grain beer it's above many attempts to fruiten up the class. We are very mixed here and given an everchanging benchmark we have for gluten-free beer this one is not as good as some unfruited choices.

Founders 2011 Blushing Monk Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.0

Grand Rapids, Michigan

This pretty-in-pink 9.2% ale is based on a Belgian style but fermented with raspberries as a Lambic - yet different. The pink portion is actually the glowing head as the brew itself is an opaque violet-red like real fruit juice. It is slightly sweet, no Lambic sourness here, and I'm guessing they used one heck of alot of berries. I'm normally hard on and very critical of brews where the quality of the actual brewing cannot be determined for all the "natural flavors". But knowing something of this brewery and having consumed a full bottle, I consider them except for this scepticism. Surely there is no scrimping here in terms of real juice vs. flavorings. This monk is so dark red, he was either burnt to a crisp on the monastery roof or is about to have a full-blown coronary. Perhaps this is best classified as Lambic for Americans, not off-putting with tartness but still having genuine, very bright fruit flavors of the highest quality. There are background malts but you need many, many long sips to evaluate this in the way it deserves. Some tart notes occur but they are short spikes and never result in a rough finish. Nor it it ever a soda-sweet or any other kind of fructose bath. I would a bit less juice with malt turned up some. This is hard to judge and yet a somewhat unique product worthy of your opinion too.

(Brasserie des) Franches-Montagnes

RATING: 4.5

Jura, Switzerland

Literally brewed in the Swiss mountains, this 6% unfiltered ale is pale yellow and as cloudy as a yeasty beer gets. It is also brewed with the herb sage - hence the placement in this section of the Reviews. Now, \$6.99 for one 11.15 (not even an 11.2 ounce!) bottle is a bit steep but this slightly tart ale is warmed and augmented only lightly by the culinary herb sage (*Salvia officinalis*) - it is not liquid crotons in other words. You might guess it was herbed at all if you think of it as a tart European golden ale in the first place - where stuff is added anyone and you just flow with their own local recipe. Even in this tiny bottle, one could probably strain out a quarter teaspoon of yeast particles if you tried - very densely cloudy on the last slow pour! It is pleasant beer if you things on the herbal-fruit tart side and occasionally I really, really enough that change of pace. It will not likely be your favorite brew but could be a popular "now for something completely different" presentation to friends and family.

Frederick Hempen Ale

RATING: 4.0

Frederick, Maryland

This medium amber-brown ale is brewed with hemp seeds (yes real Cannabis). The labels are bordered in green pointed pot leaves though they are considerably toned down - fogged out and not realistically pointed to be exact. I shocked a co-worker the day saying I bought a "bit of Cannabis" during my lunch hour. Eyebrows were raised until I produced the bar of peppermint-scented hemp oil soap that was on sale at Kroger! The brewers claim the additive adds a creamy head and an herbal flavor. No doubt sales are enhanced as well. Investigating that flavor one would be hard pressed to tell it from a good ordinary hops dose and indeed this might be compared to a lighter IPA. But are hemp seeds a worthy new ingredient to revolutionize the microbrew industry? Probably not. This may be regarded as mainly a novelty - though a very well made one at that.



Frederick Robinson's/Unicorn: Robinson's Ginger Old Tom Ale with Ginger Root and Pear Juice

RATING: 5.0, Award of Merit 2013

Stockport, Cheshire, England

The neck label says "made with the World's Best Ale". With? Is it some kind of blend? This 6% fare pours a dark brownish-amber, more medium brown in pub-type lighting conditions. The head is middle-toned cream, lumpy, medium in size. The nose is highly aromatic and tempting, clearly like a ginger tea augmented with faint malts. The ginger nip is wonderful, sweetened enough to make it never bitter and always invigorating and zesty.

Pear juice is a unique choice for fruit-sugaring but it works very well here. Old Tom is a legend among Brit ales and this is a lovely spin on that impressive, sophisticated theme. If you don't like ginger this could offend slightly but we found not one detractor here. Here is a superb, ideal example of ale flavored to make it interesting and supremely enjoyable without diminishing the excellence of the base ale notes. I have had many forms of ginger tea (which also have dark, tannin-loaded flavors) as well as ginger sodas. This is my favorite ginger-infused drink yet (January 2013) yet I must say potent Chinese ginger tea flavored with powdered honey is a close second if far less complex than this ale. Panelists "I am not ordinarily a fan of ginger drinks but this was a revelation...simply a perfect interaction of malt, pear, ginger, some plum, and lots of sweetness" and "wow, super wow, clearly an Award of Merit winner to me...absolutely top drawer without any doubt...brewing perfection....and most importantly an experience to be cherished and repeated". This is lofty accomplishment in expertly flavored ales and one not to be missed. Ginger heaven on the Cloud Nine level. Here is true brilliance and the apex of fruited ale execution.

Great Divide Wild Raspberry Ale

RATING: 4.0

Denver, Colorado

Hundreds of pounds of red and black raspberries were used in each batch. The Dunns also remind us to 'insist on real fruit in your ale' - good advice in this age when even top brewhouse names are using 'natural flavorings'. The brew here is amber-red with a pinkish-cream head and the authentic scent of the real berry thing. It is truly Rubus flavored though some of us thought it was overdone - not a wine cooler this time but perhaps an 'ale smoothie'. Others were pleased with a mild tartness and some decent malt notes coming through. Even a few big burly guys admitted to liking it. Yet for those with a taste for a good berry lambic it does not exactly come home with the gold medals. A fine product - but do we need it?

Green Flash Saison Diego Ale Brewed with Spices

RATING: 2.5

San Diego, California

This farmhouse ale was headed for Ale - Belgian - Golden, White, or Wit bin with it's Seville orange peel and grains of paradise. It was the Chinese ginger that got it here are some out of the basic Belgian realm. Color is hazy, pale yellow in the Belgian style, the lace scattered but lasting, the head frothy and near white. It is unfiltered from our view at Whole Foods it was a mess of pretty sediment from the start. The spicing turns out to be semi-authentic, very nice in some passages but hopelessly thin in others, a very mixed experience. The nip of ginger is somewhat apparent but this is hardly a ginger-citrus ale which do exist in clear intensity. The finish had some very off, metallic rough notes even though the bottles did not come to our Whole Foods until the current week. For \$8.99 a small bomber is a bit of bargain but not much considering the sketchy quality. Panelists here remarked "does not live up to the fine sales pitch and ingredient list on the label...big time disappointment" and "a few choice fruit, faint spice, and lofty citrus notes but lots of other flavors get in the way and muddle it up". A muddled disappointment is about right though it is drinkable.

Heather Alba Scots Pine Ale

RATING: 4.5

Alloa, Scotland

My grab at the beer market was based on a label not seen before but my usual joy at tasking another Scotch Ale. Wrong! It is from Scotland and an ale. This 11.2 oz (deductions!) bottle is 7.5% ABV (points replaced). It is based on an old Viking custom of using spruce and pine sprigs to flavor beverages including ales. This practice continued in Scotland until the late 19th century and now we have it again. Bruce Williams of Heather Ale makes this product in way done before by many others. Captain Cook is one famousname known to have used spruce ale as it handled long voyages. Their label proclaims "Scots Pine" (and it is not Scottish Pine either) and the curious Latin name of Pinus Alba. Being something of a conifer nut (two books and a Masters thesis so far), I knew that Pinus alba means nothing and that the noble Scots Pine is actually Pinus sylvestris and has been since Linnaeus in 1753. Their point with Alba was unclear and there is no chance this is a white or wit ale from its' rich amber color. I lagter learned that Alba (Latin for white) is gaelic for Scotland. It pours luminous amber, slightly cloudy like a rich lemonade, strong lace at first, a medium to small head in cream. With the proclaimed additive it was expective "resinous hops" or "piney finish". Instead we get a very brilliant (in all meanings of this word) ale that is a revelation and revolution all in one. Wow, wow, and quad wow! I cannot place most of these flavor in traditional terms but find them all amazing. Berries are certainly there in bunches, malt on the

foundation, very little hops as I know them, caramel sugar supporting, and lazy citrus too. Their is certainly complex coniferous chemistry in the works too but not in the bold nor overt way. I was something at a loss for another aspect of the flavor until I read duffextracold on the Beer Advocate: "smells way too much like red twizzlers [a fake licorice brand], with a hint of bitterness". He nailed it.

Then the finish. Sad that. The carbonation and a bit too much EtOH make things a bit of course and crazy strong. This stuff won a Gold at the 1998 World Beer Championship. It is complex and pleasantly sweet in a the style of a quality candy which needs not too much sugar to impress. One I genuinely admire and adore this approach, the whole "history revisited" concept, and the startling early flavors. The finish drives me crazy for a good thing is ruined. I'd redo it with more spicy charm and less fake fruit. It impresses but there's too much fake licorice fruit in the overall presentation.

Hoppin' Frog Frosted Frog Christmas Ale

RATING: 4.5

Akron, Ohio

This 8.6% ale sold for \$10.99 for a smallish 22oz. bottle, a rich hazy copper brew infused with lovely ruby tones. The head is mid-tan, rather dark, bubbly and short-lived. The infusion of cinnamon, ginger, and nutmet makes for a very festive, spicy ale; one loaded with sugar plums (yes, I've had them) and more clearly the flavor of something called mincemeat - the later spicing resemblance is very clean. Mincemeat is dominated by raisin, nutmeg, cinnamon, citrus, and brandy. Ignor reviews which speak non-sense of similarity to holiday fruit breads and rancid fruit cake. This is liquid mincemeat in the very finest sense of that aromatic, darkly fruity style. It is very unique and festive, not the basic holiday spicing that we get for October, halloween, and in pseudo-Belgian offerings around the last part of the year. This is very rich, sipping rich, and righteously strong.

Kid Notorious Apricot Ale

RATING: 4.5

Waynesville, North Carolina

The Smoky Mountain Brewery of Waynesville, North Carolina makes this unique and well-refined ale with apricots brewed in. Color is a cloudy, shall we say apricot shade of orange - redder than most amber ales. The head is surprisingly dark tan (give the fluid color), is small, but lasts. The carbonation is quite enthusiastic. Flavor is very natural and it reminds one of the very best type of berry ales; that is, the real fruit ones. Hops and malt seem well-balanced with the fruit; complementing but not overshadowing the apricot. Reviewers marked that 'even if FRUIT ALES are not your thing this one has appeal' and 'no lambic to be sure but very drinkable and well crafted...partial nectar qual- ity...big thumbs up'. This is truly a must try for its uniqueness AND character.

Kona Koka Brown Ale Brewed with Toasted Coconut (Aloha Series)

RATING: 4.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Yes and no. Those are the respective answers to "does the coconut add value to the flavor?" and "is this stuff brewed in Hawaii?" It is made quite a world away as noted above. It has a nice nutty, roasted appeal from the malts and the kernal of the famous palm does give it some interesting flavors on the order of a German chocolate cate but never so sweet. Great stuff and very enjoyable.

Laughing Dog Huckleberry Cream Ale

RATING: 3.5

Ponderay, Idaho

Here is one of the coolest beer names of late and they resisted the urge to name it something stupid like Huckleberry Hound; even though a nice creamy hound appears on the impressionist-brushed woodland label. I am told the beast might in fact be an ordinary golden retriever like their mascot. How knows or cares? We'll call her Huckleberry Cream, hound or not. I always love it when breweries use the native fruits, spices, and grains in a new way. The ABV is 5% and the pour medium gold with a semi-lasting, off white head. The nose is fruitful and berried of a different sort. First sip is scarcely definable and estery-fruity, leading to a bit of tartness and some cream ale notes of mixed sort. I'm sure idiot on Beer Advocate is claiming mango or star fruit notes with grassy hops and toasted Thomas' English muffins. The real result is a very different fruit ale and one both curious and slightly uncomfortable. By a second glass, I was more accustomed to the huckleberriness and the

other flavors that seem to be background malts, though oft badly muddled and not always creamy smooth. I like the potential but even if very cold, this ale comes off more gimmick than solid execution. Pleasure trumps novelty in the beverage world and this one is sure to sell but requires refinement. If pleasure was not paramount, I would be rich with my mango-spinach-cinnamon IPA.

Left Hand Good Juju Beer Brewed with Ginger

RATING: 4.0

Longmont, Colorado

Here's a label to make even the most appreciative of Grateful Dead fans adoring. The psychedelic chartreuse, white, olive, and red label has a million flowers and one large skull with one snake and one salamander swimming in the eyesockets. Ju-ju comes from the West African culture but is apparently a version of the French jujou (literally "toy"), meaning a supernatural object or fetish - either for good or for evil. The brew comes at us in richest gold, the head rocky, cream, and of medium duration and height. Ginger or some nippy vegetable is apparent in the aroma. The ABV is listed at 4% which I found disappointing but perhaps they are aiming at the widest possible micro-market this time around. There seems to be a lack of hops and what malty base you get is as subdued as a Deadhead with a pocket full of curiously missing Quaaludes. The ginger gives a nip to the finish, a quality and good one and this intensifies as you consume more ounces and bottles. This seems to be a miminimalist beer in many respects and I have no fault with that theory in this age when everyone has labels just about "more" regardless of the consequence. It is light, faintly sweet at times, not weak light mind you, just faint malts of quality dancing quickly now and then with ginger and then it all going quiet for a note or twelve. I would not confuse the subtlties here with weakness and cheapness for there is more at work here. This "refreshing frivolity" has a quality of malting that approaches buttery, smoothness and in fact some reviewers think they do in fact taste butter! I should be very cold in general to give zest but even warmed a bit (as was my first bottle) the malt and ginger holds up nicely. It is sure to be controversial in any informed session of beer tasting and Left Hand is not new at messing with our heads.

[PLEASE LINK TO WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM](http://WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM)

Lost Coast Raspberry Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Eureka, California

This glowing brownish-amber ale comes with a short-lived head and a nose with the essence of generic fruit and malt. Chocolate and caramel malts round out the main flavor positions, giving a mid-strength dosing that is neither too bold nor too soft for the raspberry flavoring. It is very faintly tart, joyously not oversugared, and is respectable as a fruit-flavored ale instead of the horrible alternatives - beer soda, malty wine cooler, etc. I found it very refreshing and enjoyable quite cold, not a brew for room temps by any means. It is decent though not earth-shattering. On the whole, Wynkoop Solstice Summer (Belgian Raspberry) Ale would be my pick for a domestic raspberry ale.

Melbourn Brothers Apricot

RATING: 4.5

Stamford, Lincolnshire, England

This brew is amber golden with a small head and rich fruity aroma. Looks almost like a glass of apricot juice with some carbonation added. It is a bit more tart than their Strawberry version (below) and in most opinions not so refined. It might have used a shade more sweetness or probably a bit less of the juice. The splendid balance of beer and fruit seen in the Strawberry has gone slightly astray here. We are talking \$6.00 (Spring 2000) for a 500ml bottle so the standards ought to be high. We'll admit that some of us today are influenced by apricot nectars which are artificially sugared - perhaps prior to purification with vodka! But if one compares this to pure apricot juice blended to an ale (it's a nice experiment) or a Peche (peach) lambic one could imagine they have options for improvement.

Brewbase Fives



Melbourn Brothers Strawberry

RATING: 5.0

Stamford, Lincolnshire, England

Melbourn Brothers brewery was founded in 1825 and rebuilt in 1876. Strawberry juice is added to the normal hops-malt-water-yeast quartet, producing a 500ml product that cost us \$5.99 (Spring 2000). That is lambic price and more in a few cases. Color is golden amber with a big, bubbly head and strong lace. An authentic strawberry aroma overwhelms you at first pour. The balance between tartness and sweetness is just right. Unlike some American attempts at fruit wheats or fruit ales the essential flavors of a good strong beer are equally matched to the fruit juice. In other words, the quality was there before the juice went in. But unlike a lambic there is not the powerful acidity and yeast complexity - that is both good and bad. While slightly less rich than most berry lambics it is very well crafted and equally satisfying to most of us in the review. The price is more than justified. For a genuine beer with strawberry flavor this is one of the top choices in the world. A very good beer for a special occasion with friends - or that special gal who is not ordinarily a beer lover. This was my favorite new fruit ale in 1999. I have not found it since.

New Belgium (Lips of Faith Series) Eric's Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

This is a wood-aged ale and said to be a sour fruit ale for those who neither like sour ales nor fruit ales. It had better be something special for an ordinary bomber tagged me for \$9.99 (June 2010). ABV is 7% and it pours rich amber-gold, suggesting the real peach juice in every bit. The head was thin but ample for a time. The first sip is off-putting but once you get acclimated to the sour approach (which is true of most anything edible and sour) you begin to explore some wonderful notes. Rather than being peach wine cooler simple, this sour adaption is very workable. The ale framework harmonizes well with the juice and yet the neither is favored in many of the sips. The aging make it more nuanced and stratified. Over the years, I have had some good peach wines (not cheap stuff either) and this is generally more enjoyable though I no time was I was really bowled over. Here is one of the beers in the "well made - change of pace" classes but it may not change your world unless you live entirely for fruit ales as the primary reason for your happiness in life. I might have gone another way with a bit of cherry which associates well with peach and added some malt in the finish. Fun and tart and miles above most any fruited beer in your supermarket. There is a good niche to fill if this Sour Fruit Oak-Aged Ale submarket is developed in the US in a way the Peche lambics have developed in Europe. This is more approachable than many peach lambics and I rather think an American approach will be interesting to enjoy in future years. In other words, great first effort but do experimenting.

New Belgium (Lips of Faith Series) Peach Porch Lounger

RATING: 4.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

This curious pint shows an old shingled house in white with a transparent, bottle-colored dude playing a glowing orange guitar and harmonica. Very cool and peachy so far. This Bret-infused ale used molasses, lemon peel, and real peach juice to make it a fun, super thing; luscious and refreshing at every passage through the peach orchard. Some of us thought it a peach wheat at first sip, so earthy and grainy were the earliest notes. The 9.4% ABV score endears one to this formula too. The color is amber-gold or perhaps we should say a peachy-hued gold with a last cream head of fine texture. The nose is like sniffy a warehouse in Georgia full to the rafter with overripe Prunus persica pomes. Reviewers here noted "awesome summer refreshing, a near perfect choice of ingredients [molasses, lemon peel, peach]...the finish is slightly abrasive and strong, partly from the bumped up alcohol and likely also from Brettanomyces too...the could improve that finish and really

should" and "no complaints and my highest score [5 bottles] on this one...a sublime product and more appealing than frozen peach smoothies or peach schnapps". This is a superior, very fine formula, very good execution but the finish is a tad overwhelming and what I would call "pleasantly ragged" and yet in need of refinement.

New Belgium (Lips of Faith Series) Prickly Passion Saison

RATING: 3.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

The lovely painted bottle features a prickly pear cactus aka *Opuntia* with Passion Flower aka *Passiflora* flowers too. The juice of the species' fruit are said to have magical cures but at the very least they're mighty tasty. The prickly genus of cacti is said to have benefits for a bit of anatomy close to the word prickly but leaving off the last two letters. Add in the passion fruit and me might have something-something useful here. Then again, just about ethanol-infused liquid works fairly well too unless overdone. French Saison yeast was used. The pour is dark gold, more amber-gold in a dark room, the head rocky and creamy and made of large bubbles. Flavor is fairly sweet at first, drenched with the curious flavors of the two added species, and finish is more dry but not always easy to get past. The malts and hops are there but do not support the fruit species as solidly and harmoniously as they might. A retune of this recipe might be in order though we all enjoyed the new experience; having only had prickly pear beer once before and that without the passion vine. It's certainly off-based, a big change of pace, and yet not pleasant nor unpleasant. These strange ales for their own sake are a mixed lot, entertaining to be sure but hardly advancing the brewing arts more than pouring some exotic fruit smoothie into a glass of ale or vodka. I felt this was juice squeezed into a ale bottle and not ale augmented by and improved by juice. The juice must enhance and be secondary to the ale or we have a premium wine-cooler priced to match. Enjoyment of the brew must be paramount and novelty, screwy labels like this are seldom more than "buy and try" experiences. That is enough for many breweries but it leaves us impressed only at their marketing skills and creativity for recipe building. Were I to invent a Kiwi-Coffee-Mint Porter it need to be rewarding, buyable again, truly memorable, and damn near awesome or I will be charged with assorted offenses as a gourmet fool. Don't be curious and peculiar for it's own sake folks.

WARNING: don't attempt this recipe going cold unless you know some botany. *Passiflora* leaves are often very toxic. A couple of species are toxic in their fruit too. We're talking cyanide poisoning folks so it's not a great idea adding stuff to home brewing unless you know your species, the chemistry of their various parts, and are very sure of the ramifications. This recipe is about their fruit and the cactus fruit too.

New Holland Beerhive Tripel (High Gravity Series) Brewed with Honey and Ginger (Vintage 2011)

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan

The first two or three times I read the label I swear it said Beehive. The brain is a lovely thing. Besides helping us really enjoy beer and other sensual pleasures, it tends to tell you might it thinks might make more sense - hence Beerhive becomes the vastly more likely word Beehive. (By the way, Beerhive pubs exists in Salt Lake and Pittsburgh). You might guess that a hexagonal waxy hive pattern in rich gold and scarlet is the background of the label. It is also a Tripel with that notorious Belgian spelling. Little John contributed wildflower honey for an earthy and sweet effect. 8.47% of our favorite intoxicating molecule is employed in this rich amber fluid (not honey gold actually unless it's an organic, raw wildflower honey). The head is mid-toned cream, medium sized, and lasting a short while. Nose is actually of honey and fine ale malts. First sip is perplexing, the ginger kicking in a bit quickly, tempted by reasonable, well-judged sweetness, faint hops, and substantial background malts.

Reviewers here added "not clearly a Belgian Tripel with ginger being the main spice...coriander is quite secondary at that point" and "smoth, very pleasant...highish ABV is nicely disguised...liked it but love here". Tarting up a Tripel, no matter how quality these two additions could be questioned and we only want to do so a little bit - and to make a nice joke. I just painted my new navy Mercedes S-class with "Tangelo" stripes but used only the highest quality, custom-mixed, pearlized, metal-flake paint with the finest 23-layers of rare, premiere "wet wet" clearcoats shipped from China in small drums on Gulfstream jets twice a year. Does any of that quality stuff matter after the S-class word? Do we tinker with indisputable greatness (S-class or Tripel) and if so, what are the boundaries? Is gingering and beehiving up a Tripel acceptable or even a good idea given the dosing here? I say it is acceptable and decent even if not perfect. My proof for that theory is that the ale base is high gravity, well-carbonated, high ABV, and not a foil for weak recipe. They added good to great and the aspects of

taste (in all senses of that word) are up to consumer. The foundations here are solid even if the architecture is a bit gaudy and maybe too sweet for it's own best interest. I would make it again, more subtle and with more of the original spices and yeast coming out. It's a nice spin but I think overdosed in the two main additives and I would think they go more subtle next time 'round. Does any of this matter if half of us (and perhaps half of your suds-drenched cohort) left unimpressed in terms of "likely re-buy preference"?



New Holland (The Cellar Series) Envious (Vintage 2010)

RATING: 5.0

Holland, Michigan

This is one unique bottle, very classy design in an almost wine-like style with old fonts and ornate crenulated borders in dark violet to pale lavender tones. The vio-purple foil is unique in American beer marketing vocabulary too. Nice touch even if an unneeded expense. The 7.5% formula is augmented with Michigan pear (juice form) and raspberries - can't say in all my years I've combined those too in any pie or beaverage...I mean beverage. Can Georgia peach and asparagus ale be far behind this one? It was further aged in oak and this surprising dark amber-red ale comes with a large head of strong tan color. The fluorescent light hue would be all Cherry Coke, dark and lusty. The nose is uber-fruity and earthy ale. First sip is a bit odd, very malty and not clearly a fruit-enhanced product as one would expect from Joe's Raspberry-Pear Ale in the grocery beer section; something favoring a wine cooler at best. The Cellar Series was launched in February 2010 and these 22 ounces came first.

Here is a laudable, very unique oak-aged ale that happens to have fruit to improve it and diversify and enrich it. It is ABOUT THE ALE and not about the fruit. That's a central point of important distinction when great fruit ales are to be judged and set apart from the juicy masses; the pseudo-wine coolers supposedly based on ale, lager, or wheat beers but only malt beverage crap in the final analysis. Here is the real glory and attainment of real fruit ale. I get the raspberries by the fourth sip though these are never sugary nor tart. The pear is a mystery and I needed to be told it came with the package. I like fresh pear juice and make it often and in the mid analysis (by sip 20) assume it has stratified itself with the complex malts to augment them and not defeat nor contest them. I think the finest, most rapturous passages with this ale is when the sticky-malt flavors nearly drown you in heavenly music and quickly some tart razzleberry comes up quickly with a lusty bite. That berry can jump up and explode in good ways, very short bursts and again, never too tart but always pomologically smooth and crisp. The pear never nips or kicks or bits but is on background, supportable, and valuable. The pear may serve in the "dark fruit" realm as would notes of raisin or fig in stronger barleywine. Yet Envious is brighter and more peppy and crisp than a barleywine so it will not classify well there. The *Pyrus communis* is perhaps angelic dark matter to blend with dark matter of the malt universe. Pear is both hard and easy to cook with and so in brewing we have a challenge too. I love what they have accomplished here and even with the full 22 under my belt, I feel there are new places to explore. I do need another bottle and the IRS can dispute this if they will.

The "session" term is overused and abused so let's go with tryst and intense seminar; informing with lots of everything flirty, cunning, and yet ultimately performing. Performance counts as much as dream and passion in the eccentric ale world. Envious is not a mountainous wedding cake with a train running around it's tiers costing \$11K (as an object of envy) but more an Iron Chef worldclass squash soup; conquering and successful but on the shy, shrewd, and savory side. New Holland is one of the Top 10 microbreweries for mischeivous imagination paired to actual proficiency. Their tricky, well-planned preparations shock our brains and thrill our hearts. May the Cellar Series live long and charm us over and over.

Old Tom = see Frederick Robinson

Pete's Wicked Mardi Gras (Ginger)

RATING 3.5

St. Paul MN

This February seasonal appeared here in January and is a mid-strength golden ale with a ginger flavoring. The tapestry-like colorful label received very high marks. The flavor was something else. As some of us have made a steady diet of Old Raleigh Honey Ginger Wheat microbrew the simple and shallow nature of this product was suddenly apparent. The \$5.99-6.99 price (1990's) was more than acceptable if the rarer Raleigh product is not available. No doubt the Mardi Gras revelers would not notice if the beer was flavored with swamp water but we'd like to think the first few should taste worldclass. Pete has had a few misses (though many hits) of late and we hope this market-driven seasonal is not a trend when it comes to quality.

Pete's Wicked Strawberry Blonde

RATING: 3.5

St. Paul, Minnesota

Pete's newest adventure is a golden ale flavored lightly with natural strawberry flavors. It is ale first with the flavor being subtle - it is no beer cooler by any means. It must be near freezing or it can be strange and boring at once. The berry flavor while intended to be thin is realistic. Pete decided to be very 'PC' as the label shows but three ship hands - with a name like this we can think of a dozen more fun pictures (some G-rated too)! Reviewers had widely divergent opinions from 'neither a good ale nor a good fruit beer...waste of time' to 'high praise for being tempered and skillful in the use of flavors... just right'. However most felt it was a 'TOO' beer - Try Once Only. There are certainly many better fruit beers - strawberry lambics for one. Pete's Wicked Winter Brew (rare after January) is far more sophisticated and spritely. Nice collectible painted bottle. Nice experience but you could overlook it.

Rogue Chatoe Rogue First Growth Creek Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

In the First Growth Series, the Roguestas (or is that Roguites?) grow their own goodies, in this case Dare™ and Risk™ malted barley, melded to Rogue Hoggard Revolution Hops, adding Pacman and Belgian yeast. The "Creek" thing is a play on the world Kriek used to denote a cherry Lambic ale. This cherry-augmented ale uses Montmorency cherries. It pours a delightfully foggy reddish-brown, like a cherry desk color perhaps. The head is dark cream, lasting but low. I just gulped it down like a refreshing beverage of a more simple, less potent sort and found it satisfying, loaded with malt, and more delicately lined with cherry flavors, dry in the yummy finish. It is never Kriek or cherry lambic tart or sour - no - not that kind of copy even though Belgian yeasts have been employed. It is faintly tart in mid notes and with the even beat of true fruit and rich malt, you get a wonderful concoction. It is ale with fruit, not fruit juice that happens to have ale malt.

Rogue Voodoo Doughnut Bacon Maple Ale

RATING: 3.0

Newport, Oregon

If the name does not fascinate you the bright pig-pink bottle will stand in any beer section. The ingredient list is a crazy thing involving applewood-smoked bacon, Briess cherrywood smoked malt, Revolution and Independence hops, and Pacman yeast. The real theme of course is that of a mock breakfast like a feast of donuts, maple syrup, pancakes (not included except for malt bits), and bacon. The pour is rich golden-amber, the head dark tannish-cream, and medium in duration. The nose is unparalleled and wierd. The fact that that maple syrup flavors drowns out most of the smoke is a good thing and saves this curious entity from being either unbearable or horrible. Still, no one asked for a second glass. It is briefly fun and very soon annoying. Are we in the beer world so bored we no longer need stuff like this instead really good Belgian chocolate porters and heavenly bourbon-influenced ales? Those are getting good but far from mastered. Voodoo here is time badly spent and we need to move on to more profitable tastings. Just because you can does not mean one should! Now back to my recyclble all-bacon car. Damn those hounds!

Samuel Adams Norse Legend Sahti

RATING: 3.5

Boston, Massachusetts

Ole Sam has gone crazy and off tradition since 2010 or so and more on the experimental side like the Dogfishians. That is not a bad thing. In fact, Dogfish does make their own Sahti as does New Belgium. Real Sam actually sold malt and never brewed beer as we understand history. This 7% ale is both brewed with and "aged on" juniper berries. Should that idea sound familiar, juniper berry beverages are usually sold as gin. The "Fresh, Bold, and Lively" recipe is said to be based on kegs found on Viking or Norse ships. "Herbal, woody, and ripe citrus" notes are to be expected here. Then the juniper berry is said to "enliven the sturdy and smooth malt backbone". Here we tasted Batch No. 1. There is absolutely nothing gin-like about this mellow, faintly flavored ale which is sophisticated and far from the beaten path of flavored and fruited ales found here. The pour is glowing amber-red, the head light beige, and foamy-enduring. Sahti is a Finnish beer dating to the 1500's made with barley, rye, wheat, and oats, both malted and unmalted and even bread on occasion. Juniper berries are used to flavor it instead of hops with the mash filtered through juniper twigs. Baking yeast is used and this tends to produce isoamyl acetate that yields banana-like flavors. While this item has some sweet phenolics and esters, none of them shouted banana to us. Regrettably we could not come up with any Sahti imported from Finland for this review so our appraisal is preliminary at best. This offering is flavorful and pleasant in slightly odd way and overall we asked our panel if it was "bad odd" or "good odd". The later phrase won. I personally expected more banana glory and would have liked an ABV closer to the traditional 7 to 11 peak. "Sweet banana" is missing here even if the herbal-earthy-woody notes are respectable enough and half-way to nirvana. The intellectual brain enjoys this more than the culinary side of one's gray matter. Until we can find the Finnish import as a benchmark, we have only this brew as a de facto mild disappointment. And we have a question about the strength of the Juniperus berries for in the ancient gin recipes they had very strong medicinal effects not entirely friendly to the next generation.

Samuel Adams Verloren Gose (Batch No. 1)

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Massachusetts

Gose (say "rose-uh") is a German ale that basically includes coriander and salt, the later either added or from local slightly water. It is associated with Leipzig and usually included both wheat and barley, adding yeast and some lactic bacteria for fun. With it's additions it does not meet the pure Reinheitsgebot but is old and dates from the mid 1700's. It is top fermented but originally they added yeast and let it done it's thing in bottles pretty much at random. This SA version is a tad stronger at 6% ABV. The flow here is bright gold, the head near white with clear but well-spaced lace. "Bright and elusive yet utterly distinctive" is the marketing tag but SA in their new-found wildness (mostly since 2012) has had a few misses. They also compare their Gose to old Saxony products and having a base of unfiltered wheat ale. Odd the stuff is not hazy at all. Salt is said to give it a mineral drink buzz while the coriander clearly suggests both spiced wheats and Belgian golds. The flavor profiles are rather flat, not salty but clearly not sweet either. The coriander is hard to detect but there is something vaguely peppery and nippy there. Hops are classically backgrounded in this style and do not explain any nips. The salting down perhaps makes it a very tame, neutral brew, about as interesting as coriander-flavored salt water! We are pleased that it is a style most of us had not tried and needed to Google several times before Sunday. It is very much a specialty brew and we credit SA well with going out on this very remote, saline limb. "Mild and subdued" is what the German Beer Institute says of this style. They also mentioned banana, green apple, dried apricot, zest, and whiff of spicy coriander. The apple and apricot seem to be here. Having no authentic Saxony Gose to test with it, we are unclear on the quality of this facsimile. Overall, it is boring but competent, kind of like your dull accountant who you really need sometimes and really want to avoid most of the year.

Shipyard Applehead Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Maine

Taking up on their Pumpkinhead theme, a respectable halloween ale, they are now using apple "natural flavors" and cinnamon to augment the fine wheat ale base. Willamette and Hallertau hops join malts of the 2-row British Pale, Light Munich, and Malted Wheat categories. Pour is dark gold, the head near white but short-lived, and the nose of spiced pils. First sips is mid-potent golden ale but quickly the fruit and spice, authentic apple pie to be sure, comes out and gives one something of a dessert ale thought not overly sweet at any time. Applehead stands above other apple-pie ales in the authenticity of the flavors, the desirable dry, cider-style finish, and it's refreshing charm when icy cold. Reviewers here said "great stuff all around... a celebration of brewing, orcharding, and baking in one liquid dream" and "everything is nicely judged and I did not expect that from my

Pumpkinhead experience...this spin was needed and necessary...top notch".



SLO Brewing Blueberry Ale

RATING: 5.0

New Ulm, Minnesota

Whereas SLO refers to San Luis Obispo this arrives from New Ulm, MN that source of a few decent microbrews. Natural blueberry juice (should there be any other kind) imparts no color (somehow?) of its own. Aroma is unmistakable however. The rich golden color (maybe a touch cloudy) is topped by a sizeable head of near cream color. Flavor is sweet, genuinely of the Vaccinium sort, and not tart like so many berry beers. Many of reviewers felt it was one of the more successful berry-based beers from the US and far preferable to those hideous raspberry wheat things that inflict our shelves. Even the head persists as long as you can bear to leave outside your body. It is both refreshing and charming glass after glass. And it doesn't leave your lips purple. This is one of the best true-berry ales in my memory.

Rogue's Cran-n-Cherry Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Samuel Adams makes a Cranberry Wheat (not a true lambic) but this one is based on ale with Pacman yeast. Saaz hops and the two real juices are included. We have no idea what 'free range coastal water' is but we hope it has nothing to do with 'free range chickens'. Color is amber-tinged red. The head is indeed 'purplish' though our resident colorist says its more 'ivory mauve'. First response is that is 'sweet tart' (like those silly candies) but not a lambic sort of acid. The hops and malts GREATLY moderate the fruit flavor and round it out well. Reviewers say 'you know this is real beer...fruits HELP rather than monopolize the presentation' and 'I did not really identify the fruits too well...maybe that is good'. We like to call it a FRUIT-N-MALT ALE actually.

Rogue Juniper Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

This 34 IBU ale in 650ml brown bottles is made with Pacman yeast and Northwest Harrington, Crystal, Triumph, Maier Munich, and C-15 malts. The hops are Styrian Golding and Amarillo varieties. Juniper berries are used for flavoring. Most of you know that juniper berries (technically they are not fruit but flesh strobili or cones) are the traditional flavoring of gin; though a great manner other spices contribute to the modern recipes. The label shows something like a red cedar, the country's most common Juniperus but the traditional gin is made with Common juniper (Juniperus communis). It pours bright yellow ("saffron" they call it at Rogue), good lace, and a medium duration cream head. First sip is that of rich, earthy malts, slightly sweet in the mid notes but quickly becoming bitter and dry in the finish. There is something more than hops in the flavor and the strobilus of the juniper is apparently it. It is not a gin-like flavor to me. It won 2006 and 2007 World Beer Championships with Gold medals and quite a few other awards have come to it. It's a remarkably refreshing ale, a nice change of place, and despite the pale color it's one that malt connoisseurs will surely respect. With more sips, the juniperiness comes out more as a strong spicy-herb in effect and many online reviews condemn it for this additive's taste alone. I like it and respect Rogue's nerve to go in yet another creative direction.

Rogue's Rogue-n-Berry

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing Co. of Newport OR makes this unique brew using 'Marion berries' (no not the Mayor) added to

an ale. While one expects berries in a Belgian lambic this recipe and Pete's Wicked Winter Brew (raspberries) prove to be a different style - sweet, fruity, less tart. Lambics are based on wheat while this is ale-derived. This style is sometimes called FRUIT BEER or BERRY BEER and puts all berry wine coolers to shame. The bright color is more red than amber and is superb in classware of all kinds. As an experiment it is pleasant and highly drinkable IF VERY COLD but

Rogue's Somer Orange Honey Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

One would think a bottle full of yeast and flavored with spices and orange peel would be an attempt to make a Belgian ale of some sort. Not so here. "This unfiltered ale is medium bodied with no harsh bitterness". Two row malts, Crystal and Rogue Farm Willamette hops, coriander, orange peel, chamomile, honey, wheat, oats, and Pacman yeast conspire to make this interesting, truly medium-strength ale - very suitable as a super cold summer...make that Somer pleaser. I'm guessing the athletically clad lady painted on the bottle who looks like Martha Stewart's young, less cute sister must be "Somer". That's probably not fair to the real girl, assuming they had one in mind, for if I were painted on anything...it would not look half pretty. Never mind.

First pour to me was generic golden ale honeyed up to an offensive level. The remaining pours got me a dose of that sweet, fruity yeast; which looks like the milky way galaxy hidden in a bottle and suitable for use in the movie MIB III. The yeast adds much, balances much, and gives the other flavors some stability and centering that gives it a true Rogue quality and their usual smart level of appeal. It's cloudy gold if that was clear before. Your average golden Belgian or a US clone of it would have far too much EtOH to be a chilly summer cooling beer. By the way, some folks susceptible to ragweed and other daisy family pollen allergies are allergic to chamomile and its inclusion here should be noted for such people.

Samuel Adams LongShot Grape Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

The SA LongShots have been fun, mostly hits and a couple of close misses. This 2007 Winner from Lili Hess of Hawaii, a SA employee is thankfully not the color of Grape Knee High nor does it have a faint violet tint under light. That test is passed. It's amber, well-carbonated, and the head is respectable strong. A medium-rich pale ale got the addition of natural grape flavor (not juice I must note) and maple syrup. Her inspiration was not a purple or Concord-style grape but the fresh, crisp, "white" (green) variety. That's a nice clarification. That would be champagne territory then added with the sticky byproduct of *Acer saccharum*., dripped slowly, boiled long, and bottled. I did not like it from the fridge at first and found its weakness a flaw and yet the sweetness not overboard. The grape was not reaching me. Very cold from the freezer for a short period made this a bit more impressive, not great but interesting. "Interesting" is enough in this crowded beer market where any fool can brew from 200 world-class recipes on the web with a little practice and patience. It's new, a little different, and now I move on. Why did they bother? Sales, sales, sales - and that can hinge entirely on fancy names and novelty value. They still delivered a decent brew even if it did not make us beg for more grape ales.

Samuel Smith Organic Cherry Ale

RATING: 4.0

Tadcaster, N. Yorkshire, England

This is the best of Smith's organic fruit ales in our opinion, rich in true cherry notes even though the ale is secondary to the cause - true of all this series in fact. It pours juice red with a hint of amber from the malt no doubt. The USDA Organic seal has turned up recently. Reviewers here noted "very pleasant...too much of a girly brew to me...a notch or two above the similar wine cooler" and "well made and authentically infused with real cherry juice...the ale is subdued and hard to pick out from the fruit notes". This product once again proves it's still hard to merge fruit juice with ale and have a good, resultant authentic and bright on both accounts.

Samuel Smith Organic Raspberry Ale

RATING: 3.5

Tadcaster, N. Yorkshire, England

One normally expects a raspberry ale from the other Samuel place, that one in Boston and not the Old Country. One cannot hardly say no to British razzle-dazzle added to a legendary brewery's stuff. They also do a cherry juice infusion. Even the lovely foam has a pastel lavender-rose sheen to it, suggesting good things...perhaps or

not. Fruit ales are a minefield and not a few great breweries have gotten their figurative extremities (not to mention their berry clusters) blow off over the years in the review process. This one pours a curious dark amber-red and smells of genuine fruit at least. My first reaction is overload, a raspberry broth tinged with ale perhaps? It is not soda sweet but neither is it lambic sour. It does have the fruit density of a lambic and in the final analysis I am going to label this a Raspberry Cider and not a true fruited ale. It is a very pleasant and agreeable product, neither fruited ale, wine cooler, lambic, nor raspberry malt beverage. Perhaps they tried to learn from other firms where the fruit flavor was too subtle and much secondary to the ale notes, sometimes conflicting with strong hops or not paired well to the local malts. I think they turned up all the digital knobs very high and turned a potential berry ale into a berry cider. I like it but cannot call it a real ale by any allowance of my conscience. I love a good Brit cider (and they make many of the finest ones) and will consider this for my table but only in that classification.

Samuel Smith Organic Strawberry Ale

RATING: 3.5

Tadcaster, N. Yorkshire, England

Much as stated above for their cherry and raspberry variants, this has nice juice and is more of juice flavored (a bit) with ale. Not what it could have been and should be in future. No doubt this "soft" beer will sell for its delicious flavors that have little to do with brewing arts.

Shmaltz He'Brew Origin Pomegranate Ale

RATING: 4.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

The Torah refers to the pomegranate fruit in romantic tones, erotic even, and the label here cites one such verse from the Song of Songs (Solomon). The reference to "Origin" is curious because some scholars believe the *Punica granatum* tree is in fact the real "apple" of the Garden of Eden; the first forbidden fruit. It appears in very ancient illustrations with a serpent in the boughs and a lovely long-haired lady debating on whether to pick a fruit. The unique shape of the pomegranate calyx makes the identification unmistakable. The fruit has always been a symbol of fertility, being choke full of large ripe seeds like...you know. It is also said the wild (not garden) species was a source of early birth control chemistry because it would cause fetal absorption - I must strongly add the modern garden forms and juice therefrom no longer have such properties. Today the tree is a source of tasty beverages and desserts, known widely for its powerful antioxidant qualities.

The pour of this fruity ale is hazy, mid-amber with a rich cream head. As one should expect, addition of the juice makes this a very tart, fruitful affair. The "Imperial amber ale" base is both strong in hops and malt unlike the majority of fruit-augmented ales offered today. ABV is an impressive 8%. It is pleasant and very drinkable even though the background ale elements disguise the fruit a bit. Still this is better than an fruited ale which is all flavor and nothing of ale. This is by all means a real potent ale to its very core. Panelists here summed it up with "authentic, high quality ale but it does not delight as it might...perhaps the existence of yummy drinks made using grenadine syrup...make it suffer in comparison" and "ultimately disappointing...I would dial back the assertive malts and let more of the fruit shine". For some of us the idea of a pomegranate lambic or saison would be a far better choice to showcase this fruit species.

Shelton Brothers Pickled Santa English XMas Ale

RATING: 3.5

Oxfordshire, England

Brewed with spice, this 6% ABV is a Christmas special and I noticed there was a choice of cute Santa caps for this one single label. It was brewed by Beer Counters Ltd. for Shelton. Cinnamon, nutmeg, and coriander are used so it reminds me of some recent Halloween, Pumpkinoid offerings. The color is amber-gold, the head ivory, fluffy, and long. Their claimed "ruddy chestnut" color is laughable to anyone who has ever seen a chestnut of any species. It has a rich bread-like flavor of a good English ale but the finish is neither bitter nor sweet - yet smooth in the lightly spiced presentation. This product made exclusively for the US market is no hasty, cheap gimmick - it's close enough to real ale even if not as bitter as my real ale fans say they had expected. The finish gets a bit weak at times and I wish the spices were taken up one gear. It's what I expected, wanted, and a smidge less. A couple notches up and we have a good theme and 4 bottles. Must be chilled for near room temp it will get wimpy on you.

Shiner Ruby Redbird (Summer Seasonal)

RATING: 3.5

Shiner, Texas

I had expected this to be a ruby red ale of some sort. Instead and perhaps with a better result for this brewer (who tend to make weakish, failing mass-market ales), it's Texas Ruby Red grapefruit juice from the Grande Valley mixed with ginger in a golden base. Pure Munich malts are blended with Citra, Mt. Hood, and Cascade hops for an interesting spin. The result is tangy, zippy a bit, even if very carbonated and soda-like in the immediate presentation. I am not a fan of a beer that stands only on the merit of fruit and herbal flavorings, even if real, authentic, and strong enough. There is no "beer here" if you will and only the citrus juice and ginger give it merit. That is philosophically a problem for me and some of you too - I am certain. I could take weak-as-water Pabst and add any lime or tomato juice and cilantro and make it delicious and for once desirable. It would not constitute great beer by any calculation known to real beer enthusiasts. The result without the philosophising and pundatry is respectable and enjoyable when super cold. Fairly cool stuff really and never bad. It will give them a decent rating for this is the only one of the Shiner bottlings to date (June 2011) I would even consider buying again - even if the top 10 microbreweries went away with the great, inevitable west coast earthquake. Ruby Redbird is a cheap, cheating formula but is effective and portable. Any fool can can make fun grapefruit-ginger beer but I give them credit for actually going there and apparently doing it first and at a fair price. Now can we have a real beer on this theme, perhaps an Imperial Grapefruit-Ginger Barleywine spun and crafted to real perfection.

Sierra Nevada-Dogfish Life and Limb 2 Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware/Chico, California

Very pretty, artistic label for starters. SN and Dogfish making a joint ale is something like Porsche tuning your favorite somber Mercedes S-class sedan - which of course did occur in the mightly 355bhp 500E. This champagne-corked pours a nearly opaque brown (porter dark) with a big, rocky, dirty tan head of long duration. Nose is semi-sweet malt, very weak and non-hoppy for a Sierra Nevada label. The roasted malt brew is flavored by maple syrup (not a new thing at all) but also something called birch syrup. Both bold and aromatic hops are used, sparingly it seems. The sticky Acer product comes from Calagione Farms in Mass. I've never seen birch syrup in stores but my research says it comes from Alaska where hardly any maples are cold hardy. Less than 1500 gallons of the stuff is made worldwide. Flavor notes with Betula sap include sweet-spices including hints of sorghum, horehound candy (something like herbal coughdrops), and complex honey; more more spicy and caramel-like than maple stuff. It's about two-thirds sugar, half fructose and half glucose with bits of sucrose and galactose. One things annoys me. Only one leaf in the label tree looks like a maple and maple just three approximate a birch.

Surprisingly the additions are moderate and this is no a sweet ale by any means - something which 10.2% ethanol helps to curb. Malts are not overly complex but are layered with these two complex sets of sugars for a very pleasant effect - more simple and only faintly hoppy with taste bud saturation. It is perhaps the least hoppy SN product I know. Life-limb.com has more of the story but is confusing with their separation of the 10% and 4.2% versions with different ingredients; even if you drag the blushing daisy down the very bottom of the vertical scroll bar. (Here is sadly another overproduced, under-functioning beer website, more pretty than accessible. Perhaps this is emblematic of the ale itself, lots of fuss and aura but substance and message are wanting). My bottle had a big number 2 on it meaning something....This beer can be aged with success (we are told as I will not bother), even more than the wood used in the original product. Reviewers here said "seems more Dogfish-like than a Chico product...pleasing without being really complex at all" and "too expensive...very drinkable but for the life and limb of me I can't understand what all that syrup does for it". Martin said something about being a sap and we'll not record that comment here. Other good remarks included "why bother?...no one here [our panel] seems to know why and how this exists...maybe a badly planned merger with muddled goals...might be SN's worst failure...is that a cuckoo bird I see in their label tree?" and "yes, yes..really...they went out on a limb, got some syrup and need to be rescued...gotta have more hops in the finish, richer malting, maybe wood-aging tooked the zip and sugar out of it?...please try again". The finish gets sweeter and more spicy (hoppy spicy) as the sips progress. One little cup is not beer tasting I must say for the 1200th time! Is it simple perfection or much-ado-about-nothing - the truth may be in the middle. Maybe we're so used to SN and Dogfish blockbusters were expected the tree sap to be another worldclass, game-changer. It is pleasant but not impressive nor really worth the money if truth be told. It reminds me of a very expensive cab

wine with a label and name so fetching your eyes are more dazzled than our taste buds. It is never a bad experience, perhaps an opportunity lost for lack of malt layering and missing diversities there - just not the wow that corks and these breweries usually produce. Is the shark swimming below the label an ominous sign?

Spanish Peaks Honey Raspberry Ale

RATING: 3.0

LaCrosse, Wisconsin

The chance of me liking or even respecting in the morning any beer with "honey" in then name is about 231 to 1; against. Here is comes..."light bodied amber ale". Let's admit failure up front and on the top label - a kind of truth in advertising that any real beer lover will notice. The fruit is "raspberry extract" (okay?) and the honey is from...dare I say..."wildflowers". What? As opposed to all the honey made from greenhouse flowers and florist's fields or city parks or pots in homeless garden? It pours medium amber, the head mid-duration and cream in shade . The flavor is big raspberry, a good copy at least of the real thing, modestly sweet (which I had not expected), and yet some supporting malts for quality. The finish trails off into places I care not to describe and you would neither care to read or experience for yourself. Very chilly it is a bit better but I evaluate with at least 5 degrees off the optimum which is a real life situation for every brew, especially at a fine meal. The malty infrastructure is nice but it's going to feel like a raspberry soda (made with real fruit) augmented with malt and no hops for most of us. I don't hate it as it's very pleasant at some points before the finish. Still, I'm not about fruit juice flavored with beer. If you are, give it a go and don't pay microbrew prices. I do not support fruit anything that obscures or mitigates a need for brewing skill. Points removed.

Smuttynose Hanami Ale

RATING: 3.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The label is unusual with a little picnic scene, two Japanese dolls, sushi as miniature food, and a sushi sudare (bamboo mat for rolling sushi) as their blanket. Cute, double cute. Girlie girls will reach for this bottle. Hanami refers to the spring tradition of cherry blossom viewing - hence this is a spring seasonal. Nice art, great colors. The brew pours rich amber, slightly hazy, the head big and ivory. It is comes off medium bodied from the start and from their it gets neither better nor worse. Tartness increases and one gets semi-sweet malt some oddish form of hops; the later being Styrian Golding. The tartness comes from cherry juice (fitting for it's name) even though the spring cherry viewing species are only remotely related to our edible/juicing kind. I would have guessed cherry unless told - and that speaks volumes good and bad - very subtle and yet too subtle. ABV is just 4.5%. Malts used include Pils, Carabell, Aromatic, and Carafa. I would turn up the cherry two or three more notches and copy some of highly-rated cherry ales, wheats, and lagers as a model for determining strength of the juide.

Star Pineapple Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

The only pineapple beer we had before was a nice lambic. This ale self-labeled as 'A Vacation in a Bottle' was quite different. Cascade and Columbus hops plus fresh pineapple are used. Color is very light amber and a fruity aroma is impossible to miss. Big foamy near-white head. Unlike the lambic the 'pineapple flavor gets a bit lost in the hop-malt balance but that is okay... pineapple is a part of the whole flavor palate and not the biggest part at all'. The label describes a 'smooth citrus finish' and this is true. The beer is unique and very good so our recommendation is very positive. Some skilled beer tasters said 'a more worthy fruit additive than nearly all berry beers tried this year' and 'skillful intergration of many components'.

Steamship Raspberry Ale

RATING: 4.0

Norfolk, Virginia

This cloudy golden beverage has a persistant near white head and some pleasant yeast dregs. The 'all malt' ale is brewed with raspberries and gives it a rather understated fruit flavor. It is NOT one of the those berry-cooler sort of tastes but instead presents itself to be beer first and fruit-flavored second. That said it was hard for some people to name the fruit when given a so-called blind taste test. It also proved a bit tart for some folks but those used to the regular fare of fruit-brewed ales felt it was among the better ones. We still maintain that

Rogue-n-Berry is perhaps still the best of this lot. Yet at the \$0 price we paid for this it is surely a fine enough value and would be welcome at almost any table. The style is yet to be perfected.



Stillwater Artisanal Cellar Door American Farmhouse Ale

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

This pretty, artful, ornamental label is the work of [Lee Versoza](#) and we like the idea of crediting the few skillful label designers out there. Then we realized that through all the creamy smoke that CELLAR DOOR was the real name of product; so hard to comprehend you'd need to stare at it for 27 hours in several buzzed states with a pile of magnifying glasses to figure it out. The "hard to read" approach is popular with some web fonts but on a product it's a marketing risk when you're asking for thirteen whole dollars (Feb. 2012) for a beer made with sage of all things. It is also 6.6% ABV and that's a good deal shy of the desired potency for a premium beer at this price point and with so much lazy crazy hazy haze. I am not surely how many ales ever flowed from American farm houses but we in the southern US done prefer things a mite stronger and out in the woods if ye will. Malts are German wheat and pale, hops citra and Sterling. Now that sounds promising! A bit of white sage finishes it off. We think this means *Salvia apiana* though common sage, *Salvia officinalis*, is occasionally called white sage for it's silvery-white colored leaf. The sage, tangerine, herbal, grass, and yeast flavors are very lovely, smooth and delightful from first note to last. It's a herbal ale in the best sense of that name, a sophisticated tea and laudable ale in one luscious package. Cellar Door is a pioneering brew, a fresh lesson in new hops (Citra) with herbs (white sage) in a full-bore yeasty package with refined malts. Reviewers here noted "I've made herbal tea with vodka and this is a much finer choice by a farmstead country mile...the wheat malt and yeast prepare it for perfection" and "they got this one just right...spot on...I could not stop pouring and consuming....just a revelation...thank you Stillwater". One descending opinion was "yes they tried hard but sage in a farmhouse ale?; which should be a bit sour and not like a smoothe from a New Age cafe...lock it and that spooky label in the cellar like your crazy aunt...marketing will not impress an ale lover...". We wonder if a Rosemary Red Ale or Borage Brown are next. Actually,

brewers have yet to explore even a hundredth of the rich flavors in the world's herb garden and many of them will love being blended with hops and barley; umm...the herbs not the brewers; they're already spiced and sauced. Can Herbs of Provence Country Ale be far from our shelves? It will pair well with Veal Parm and pizza. Here is a controversiALE that we figure 90% of informed drinkers will adore and 10% will find a way to call the rest of us gullable and herbally compromised. They do that so let them be. Try it in all cases.

Stone Saison de BUFF

RATING: 4.5

San Diego County, California

This bright lemon yellow ale requires more explanation than a Mel Gibson tape to his last six girlfriends. It is filed here under Stone but accurately if made by BUFF (Brewers United for Freedom of Flavor) which adds the fine folks at Victory and the even finer folks at Dogfish Head. At 6.8% ABV and \$3.99 (July 2010) for a 12 ounce, it needs to be very special and quite good. The head is ivory and huge. The nose is pure herb garden. One is immediately caught by the tamped on freehand speech over where the label normally would be - kinda like a transparent letter to the would-be buyer. The "saison of sorts" is "hellaceously herbaceous" adding parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme for flavor. Thyme and time I suppose. Those exact four herbs should set your head and feet a tapping to a certain pop folk melody from....you know...Paul and that guy with big hair. Do I like herbal beer? Yes, I do and most particularly this one. It is restrained and well-dosed but it might well have been a mess. Rosemary is hard to use in anything and sage and thyme can take over any recipe very easily - sometimes fighting with each other rather than harmonizing. I think they succeeded in part because there is some sweet fruit in the yeastiness to count the savory herbal qualities of the good additives. Big kudos to getting this right and giving us a new, worthwhile, almost fun experience in new brews.



Stone/Fat Heads/Bear Republic TBA Extra Hoppy Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Escondido, California

This 7.1% ale is brewed with brown sugar and molasses, also extra-hopped. The pour is reddish-brown, the head rich tan and lasting. The head has a particularly fine-textured bubble formation, ie. foamy, and very aesthetic in a glass. Nose is sweet but hoppy, very far from a candy-malt as such. This "wickedly exciting brew" is made at Stone with two of their respected peers, hoping to take an old style to slightly new, zippy places. First sip is not as sweet as the lovely additive list would indicate. In fact, it is not really a sweet brown ale as normally defined or formulated. It is actually more hoppy, dry, licorice-infused, and supported with complex, good brown malts. They resisted the "candy it up" impulse and we applaude that as much as we love the result. Licorice-noted ale can be a very nice thing even if firm, dry, and tangy. Good real licorice of the candy sort is actually not very sweet and can be dry and bitter in it's natural perfection. This is a very nice brown ale and a lovely addition to the breadth and range we have today. It is needed and we loved it. This is a new benchmark among dry, hoppy browns and simply fills a void we had never knew existed. That is a true accomplishment in any field.

Terrapin-Schmaltz Reunion Ale '11

RATING: 3.0

Athens, Georgia

Terrapin of Georgia has teamed up with Shmaltz Brewery to "Present a beer for hope", raising funds for The Institute for Myeloma and Bone Cancer. I generally dislike "charity beers" because often they are either eccentrically or feebly awful - and it's not very PC to criticize good intentions. The 7.6% ale pours very dark brown with a tall but fleeting beige head. Chile peppers, vanilla, and cocoa nibs were added to soup up the broth. It first sip or two, the approach seems pleasant enough and even a bit interesting. By sip eight I almost feel that someone put liquid pepper extract in my brown ale as a prank. It becomes almost undrinkable for some folks at some point. Intentions aside, this is one beer with too much going on and too much added of those things. I drank one bottle, wishing they'd called it Tabasco Ale and inherited one from a panelist who was done with it far too early in the tasting process. There are good Chile beers, bottled as such or made after pouring, and all the good ones are fairly modest and subtle; teasing you with delicious hotness inside of being a vegetable sledgehammer. I had to cut my second half bottle down with some sweet, fruity ale to even get it down. Chile may be useful to cure some cancers but this recipe will make us think twice for spending bucks on all the Terrapin specials in future.

Terrapin Peach Ale Brewed with Peaches (Midnight Project Brew Four)

RATING: 4.0

Athens, Georgia

This lovely ale pours a peachy-amber color under a mid-tan, lasting head with variable textures. The flavor of authentic peach juice is very evident on first sip. Tartness and sweetness are nicely balanced, fading into nice malts in the finish, a few nippy hop saturated after more sips - hops not being evident early on. Peaches from GA and CO are used in the batch, making a fairly potent 7.2% buzz. Bottles were \$7.99 for slim bomber in September 2011. It would make a delightful summer cool-down beer akin to a hard lemonade for refreshment after mowing the lawn or a hard day putting all your empties into numerous recycling bins before the wife kicks you out.

Reviewers here noted "best very cold...more cooler-like than an impressive ale since the background hops and malts are very far in the background...as luminous as a peach" and "nearly drank the entire bottle in one minute....alive, refreshing, bright with real juice...a good standard for a true fruit ale". We discussed whether more overt but complimentary hops could have been used, bringing up that flavor element to an exciting level. One of us joked that maybe the hops are so complimentary to the peach juice we cannot detect them! Perhaps so but we think not. The world is loaded with peach-based adult beverages so why should this one be an ale - an ale for its own sake when peach juice, vodka, and assorted more things will satisfy to the hilt? Great recipe but more malt and some complimentary hop layering would make this a real...gem. And get more sleep next time (just kidding).

Terrapin Samurai Krunkles Ale Brewed with Ginger and Green Tea (Side Project #17)

RATING: 3.5

Athens, Georgia

The crazy white dude on the label (maybe an insane British madman based on the facial hair and goggles) is pouring a green tea bowl surrounded with ginger root. He seems to be screaming as hops and wheat surround his batch of something. My two favorite drinks are beer and tea and I've always hoped the two worlds would not try much to merge or converge; despite IPA being something of hops tea in its oldest variant. Tea-tea does very well augmented with vodka and one can add herbs and spices (with or without *Camellia sinensis* in its green, white, or black forms) in many ways until the cows and teaballs come home. I do not think the other brewing world need intrude on our existing teabag, teaball, and vodka-adding world unless it must. Malt is no friend of the tender tips of *Camellia* nor is the harsh, abrasive, very overt hop vine. This true brew uses ginger, jasmine green tea, and jasmine rice if the curious on the label is to be literally believed.

The pour is bright amber-gold, the head small, off-cream, and the lace short-lived. I served this very cold at first and gave a second serving a little warmer to be fair. It proved to be a "goofy brew" (Thanks Ron), odd for its own sake, faintly of green tea, nips of hops and ginger both, and overall more a curiosity than a precious transformation of the Art of Ale. Terrapin go off into broadly-angled tangents, trips to a maybe non-existent moon, and uncanny combos which will never become fades. On some level I adore their creative juices and experimentation thrust. On the solid, regular ale-swilling level who pays the bills for \$10-20 bottles of experimentation, I need to reign in the craziness. Wild exploration, a distribution system, and suitably bold, new

graphics do not enhance brewdom in the final analysis. They just make people more skeptical of the odd newbies and make the brew-reviewers job a bit harder. Too much crazy is bad for the business. Unless one loves the ginger-hops nexus of bitterness and cannot live without it, this was a wasted set of kettles. Triple-dosed Green tea with real ginger bags and a splash from adult decanters makes this flakey ale unnecessary - and the real green-ginger nexus will be full of phytochemicals to heal unlike any bottled ale.

Terrapin Special Anniversary Ale (2012)

RATING: 4.5

Athens, Georgia

First off you notice the cut-out or irregularly cropped label with a math equation, some dude's purple head, and the lovely 9.969% ABV or pretty damn close to ten. The equation solves for 10 so that implies the 10th Anniversary as their website confirms. Nelson Sauvin hops are used with Pils and Malted ryes. Spices and adjuncts are coriander, chamomile, dextrose (a complex sugar), and two kinds of orange peel, thus quite Belgian-themed which the yeast also matches in origin. The light-bright yellow pour carries an rocky ivory, quite Belgianoid to be sure. The nose is of faint spices and not much else. Does the rye make a difference? I say yes but only in what might be termed "breadly depth". The spicing is of mild mint which these traditional often create in combination. Nelson Sauvin hops are from Nelson, New Zealand so this is very much a international assembly of stuff. This hop gives a supposed grapey (not Grape Knee High) flavor of the famous Sauvin style. Others say it is more goosberries and passionfruit or kiwi. There is clearly a good sweetish fruit flavor in the base here and so this very special brew offers one a "spiced white wine" quality. Cheers for this creative, unique recipe even if there wows but no holy wows in our group. It proved a small measure "contrived, gimicky" to one panalist and "too much like fruit-flavored mouthwash" for another. Most of us were far happier with it but not one found perfection in the sips. I have had Nelson Sauvin hops before so perhaps this needs a companionship with a varietal of another stripe, citrus, Brit bitter, or floral would get this recipe some endurance under another name. Mono-varietal hop ales are sometimes fine but Nelson Sauvin is not a good choice for single hop products in my opinion. Semi-awesome, delightful and very informative at a minimum, and surely unlike any other golden B-Ale. Please do this kind of thing again and again but they are very apt and clever at experiments and successes already.

Tommyknocker Imperial Nut Brown Ale Brewed with Pure Maple Syrup

RATING: 4.0

Idaho Springs, Colorado

For you geo-curious folks (and I confess to be one of y'all), Idaho Springs is on 1-70 west of Denver and another town well known for golden brew...Golden CO. You'd probably pass by this town and brewery on your way from Denver to Vail or Breckenridge. Now the shock. I paid \$3.99 in distant NC for a 650ml bottle with the word "Imperial" on it, a special (pricey) additive, and a whopping 9.5%. This is either the best deal in microbrews since Idaho Springs ran out of gold or it's a faux deal. More explanation is needed of the name even if you've seen the Stephen King book and/or movie . Tommyknockers were mischievous (oft evil) elves who slipped into 1800's mining camps, stealing stuff and generally causing chaos. They are, in short, the Welsh-Cornish version of Irish leprechauns.

Now for the beer....It pours very dark reddish-brown, as dark as some porters in fact, the head is nearly impossible to make large. Nose is sweet malt, faintly so. When chilled, it begins EXCEEDINGLY tart, soon crystal and choco malts coming to the fore and then the maple sweetening up the whole affair for a more easy finish. European and American hops are used. The alcohol is strong in some passages, annoying once or twice, but again calmed down by the boiled down Acer saccharum to a nice level. It is said to be a bigger, bolder version of their Maple Nut Brown Ale and having never seen that one, I must judge this with reference to other brands. It is a superb value in a strong, flavorful beer but the harsh tart start and ethanol burn is off-putting in SOME places - though the better, sweeter, smoother sips are rather more refined. I think things rendered "Imperial" in a beer style but not an imperial sword to the throat. Perhaps it merely needs to be served on the warmer side, blended down a fraction, as the tart bits are worse when ordinary cold for a brown ale. The 2007 GABF Bronze Medal may say I am wrong but I wonder what temp they tasted at?

Tommyknockers Maple Nut Brown Ale

RATING: 4.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

The high ABV Imperial version of this product but less than it might have been but this common label (which comes in their popular Trail Mix sampler), is more direct and on message. It pours medium brown with a lasting tan head. Very pretty beer in a glass. Pure syrup of the familiar tree is used with ample persuasion for a real candy beer that could not be consumed in any real quantity. It is something of the sipping port or sherry of the beer world. I think the maple-ness or Acerocity is perhaps just a single notch too high and I'd really like the syrup supporting the malt rather than dominating it. As with the Imperial version, chocolate malts with nutty flavors are used and give a nice supporting base note that is unwavering. Treat it like a good porter and drink a small glass for fun.

Tommyknocker TundraBeary Ale

RATING: 4.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

The pretty scenic label features a rather large, fuzzy cinnamon "beary" dining on native berries with lots of green meadows and Colorado-style, snowy peaks in the background. By the way, these guys don't generally share their produce patches even if very cute. The brewmasters admit to blueberries and raspberries; confessing "other fruit juices" in the process. One usually gets either Vaccinium or Rubus with an ale - seldom both. Color is cloudy amber, a near white head of some duration, and an estery aroma over weak malt. The balance of berries and hops is much in favor of the fleshy, dark-colored fruits and in this regard some are going to think it a Beer Cooler on the first and usually wrong first approach. In early sips (and NEVER LATER) it seems simple and coolerish but enough malt in the backbone arises to make those wild berries harmonize with full freshness and delight.

Lots of fruited ales try to mix hops and berry and come up with all sorts of tart-bitter-estery-sweet blends - many of them very conflicted, discordant, and lacking unity in all respects. I don't think traditional hops varieties are made to mix with berries. Yeasty-fruity wheat beers with fruit is quite another thing. But pairing malt with berries as performed here is a more successful approach. I did not notice this at first but it is very valuable determination. I will warn you of one thing - TundraBeary is shallow and perhaps too coolerish in the first few sips - even the first entire bottle. I did three 12's as is my custom so the saturation of flavors and the shift of temperatures from cold to less cold would influence me towards fairness. As I say often these days, now decades into beer reviews: "if you find a questionable recipes and flavors from an otherwise proven, high quality brewery at first presentation...sip and sip on...there is often a wiser, later conclusion to be found". Reality tends to dawn with more exposure. Ethanol rarely improves my opinions and oft to the contrary; I tend to get more ballistic and mean with a buzz; and god help you if your label is full of ugly flying dogs in some annoying color. When a second or third bottle transfuses and doses me towards discernment, I should learn from that experience. We need time and volume in this field of beer tasting. Tiny little paper cups and even one oddly cooled bottle at some Fair is no measure of a label! Our final conclusions will become more accurate with more ounces consumed and vapors processed. Beer tasting should be a slow, lasting, totally encompassing experience and not one limited by money or hours available. Work late, spend lavishly, and write from the heart as all the organs, nodules, and glands inform our skulls.

TundraBeary is more of an impressive Malty-Berry Ale while also being a multi-berry blend! It resonated with me more with volume and my loyal tastebuds by mid pour of a second bottle. I almost feel myself as a grumpy, malty-brown bear browsing for sweet treats but finding it here in a vessel as cinnamon as me.

Unibroue Ephemere White Ale with Apple Juice, Coriander, and Curacao

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

I poured this the first time and was utterly shocked. Did I get a sour, spoiled bottle? Probably not, the fruitiness was real, sweet enough and very tart. Then I spied the fairy-like nymph on the label toughing a giant green apple (an Garden of Eden reference?) and the whole apple thing clicked in my brain. (Okay, I have my slow moments but please read on...). Color is bright, lightish yellow, the lace unceasing and casually timed. The sour aroma is off-putting so just don't sniff the stuff and QUICKLY move on to the part where the liquid goes into a human mouth. The first sniff of the 5.5% beverage is very tart, then Granny Smith apple (the exact cultivar they employ), and then some faint spices said to include coriander. Sweetness is moderate and kept in check. High marks for avoiding that deep pit. Curacao? A beer flavored with a tiny Carribean country? Them must be some big ole shiny copper vats in Chambly thar! Actually the "curacao" name here also refers to liqueur flavored with

dried Laraha citrus peels (resembling the Valentin orange but more bitter) from the country of the same name. Thank god they didn't use the ugly blue-tinged curacao stuff in a bottle - that would be some ugly fruit beer - or not. I'd have made it a little green like Granny - a very pleasant color in fact.

Maybe on St. Patrick's or Curacao Independence Day. Curacao Flag Day is July 2nd - another good excuse now for a long, beer-drenched week. Party on! This stuff is almost a cider-brew and I mean that in a very positive way. There are good apple beers and many bad ones. This is a great one and a genuine winner. They just need to get rid of that sour, swampy aroma and it's a 5 bottle for sure. The website says to serve it with Cheddar cheese, pork, or onion soup. I tried the first and yes the acids seems to meld very well.



Unibroue Quelque Chose

RATING: 5.0

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

The corked bottles sold for \$13.99 (October 2010) and pour a surprising clear reddish-brown. Quelque chose is French for "something", something of a trifle or insignificant in general - quite the wide opposite in this case. The formula is 50% dark ale and 50% brown ale brewed with cherries - geared up to just 8% ABV. I am confused as some online reviews which compare it to a cherry lambic for my bottle was never tart or sour as that entity and quite the sweet malty cherry ale of a very different and significant character. It is warmly spiced, a deep and yummy flavor as if a cherry pie were made with healing and old-fashioned apple pie spices; giving it a harmonious and comforting aspect. There are good notes of mince meat pie, somber malt, and sugar-laden cherry pies all throughout the journey of flavors. The label confesses to notes of vanilla, clove, cinnamon, and honey. If anything is claimed to be wrong, it's too syrupy for some tastes, though I feel it was expertly judged and gotten righty.

Unita Labyrinth Black Ale Brewed with Licorice

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

"and there are faint licorice, plum, and banana notes". Like hell! Much of that wine and beer stuff in fancy media is really just imagined grandeur and semantical silliness. Few real humans with real tongues and informed brains detect more than half the fancy, named stuff - and this includes trained, sensitive tasters. In the case of Labyrinth the licorice and fruit notes are not imagined. The fruit is more background and what I would call non-tart cherry. They actually brewed it with licorice sticks (natural we hope and not the commercial artificially flavored, sugared up stuff?) and then age it in oak barrels. The ABV is a whopping 13.2% and I felt my living room was soon a labyrinth wrapped inside the corridors of Pentagon superimposed on the hidden chambers of the Valley of the Kings, flipped into a worm hole and folded into a hop-laden origami map with a raised fractal surface. Back to....I forget now.

This is one fine, firm, malty buzz. Color is stout opaque, the head semi-lasting, low and tan. Like their Tilted Smile (forgettable) and Cockeyed Cooper (memorable and deep), this Uinta offering is a pricey at \$12.99 (February 2011) in its corked majesty. I like a rich malty beer (stout, porter, or black ale) with a nippy finish. Usually that comes from hops and a bit ethanol - but here we have a third nipper in the licorice bite. The aging may be short (can't say for certain) because the usual barrel notes are subdued though clearly there. Fascinating and informative but there is a bit of room for improvement. More mellow, oak-based aging just might get them to God's highest heaven or whatever they call it in Salt Lake these latter days. Back to the Labyrinth...

Unita Birthday Suit Sour Cherry Ale (Crooked Line)

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

The corked, caged, and bottle-conditioned giants pour a curious reddish-amber color under a reddish-tan head; showing there is surely some juice in the juice. This "sinful pleasure" marks the brewery's 19th birthday and so the cherry tree became a scene from Eden. It needs to be very cold. It has lots of carbonation as bottle-conditioning often produces and the cherry flavors are real enough but tending to the sour side. It is no sweet cherry ale as some others are. Nor is it as sour as a cherry lambic, though the finish is a tad sour and dry. It is pleasant enough offering but fails to get us contemplating vile things with or without fig leaves and serpents.

Well's Banana Bread Ale

RATING: 4.0

Bedford, England

There are a bunch of good fruit ales...sorry. Let's start over. Using mineral water and "fairtrade" bananas (which I think means the employees are paid 1 US cent more a week) is blended with barley malts, fresh hops, and "peppery spice". It's 5.2% ABV and the poured aroma is enough to drive a barrel of monkeys insane. The concept comes from the warming quality of a good banana nut bread which is hardly beaten anywhere by anything in the baking world if you ask me. It is further extended by the history that beer was in ancient times "liquid bread" that was a way to preserve carbs over time because of the ethanol in it. The tint is that of slightly amberized gold with a big off white head. The flavor is "spot on" as our English cousins say, not some tarted up ale with banana extract tossed in at the final hour NOR is it weak real bananas because real fruit, fairtrade or otherwise, is quite expensive to add to anything. One detects faint spicing at some points but the flavor notes are irregular are a few positions, hollow and empty in the finish owing to it's surprising dry nature. One might have ruined banana bread beer twelve ways and the most obvious is making it overly sweet like banana-ale soda. I think they may have erred on the dry side for it has metallic, uneven aspects to the flavor that a little more sugar might have covered. At the risk of sounding arrogant, I'd advise them to sugar it up just a notch, maybe two, and clean up those awkward, dry flavor notes. The concept is a very 'peeling one and deserves another go towards excellence.

Widmer Brothers Prickly Pear Braggot Ale

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

Usually it's colorful foiling, a cork and wire job, a very thick brown bottle, numbered edition stamps, or just simply the price that sets special brews apart from the ordinary stuff. In this case it's a simple cardboard box with a label that holds this bottle that sets it apart and makes a bit curious. ABV 10%. Check! Honey and prickly pear (*Opuntia cactus*) juice. Check and double check! Now being a botanist I've eaten prickly pear juice from the pads and fruit both and even had it fried with peppers of all insane, delightful things. Walk into the desert...free food and instant hydration. Then there is that Braggot thing, a difficult topic in bars perhaps when talking about stuff with pricks and honey. Braggot (sometimes pronounced like "bracket") dates from the 14th century and is related to mead, being a blend of such with traditional beer, spices, and herbs. Braggot is usually more hoppy and malty than mead but spiced mead is not uncommon these days. There were forms with and without hops for spicing in early times. It can be 6-13% ABV so this 10% is mid strength actually.

In terms of modern brewing it is something of a Strong Honey Ale and not much more than that. Curious, fun, nicely brewed, but don't expect any top medals. I'm pretty sure Chaucer, the dude who told us that "love is blind", told no tales about adding a cactus to honey. He did say that "by nature, men love newfangledness" and prickly pear ale becoming popular would make him right for the 13th million time in the history of product marketing. Our curiosity and boredom will sell the first hundred cases anyhow. Color is dark gold, tinged amber, head short-lived and near white. The honey is needed for the *Opuntia's* raw vegetable nature is on the bitter side here, not unexpected to me, but savory enough to need sweetenin' up as we say in the South. There are many edible species (100+, 10 common), many ways to process the PP juice, varieties of various colors, and hence different flavors - raw chlorophyll, citrus, watermelon, honeydew melon, and fresh strawberry being commonly cited. I have no idea what kind, quality, or amount they used here but surely it was not the concentrated, red pigmented stuff. Prickly Pear drinks are usually mid to dark red. There are interludes in this brew that are pure honey ale, faintly mead-like but still more malty and hopped, but overall we have something a tad different from not straying too far from my comfort zone. There is a rumor that prickly pear juice soothes hangovers (and treats everything from cancer to diabetes) and that is not established by anyone I can cite with authority - and surely this brew would not have enough concentration to do any of that to much effect. The real genius of using this member of cactus family in beer is that it has a long history of use in Margaritas and what is good for mixed drinks will eventually find its way into the brewer's kettle and bottling machine. Bring me that Melon-Appletini Wheat Beer and make it fast!

Wynkoop Solstice Summer (Belgian Raspberry)

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado

Color as expected is reddish amber with a smallish yet enduring head tinted of rose cream. The raspberry flavor is mightily authentic and presents itself with just the right measure of sweetness - this being an art not all raspberry ale and wheat brewers have perfected. They do dare to use the name 'Belgian' four times on the label, making a comparison with aged, bottle fermented lambics a near necessity. Frankly this cannot compare for overall complexity - even though one must recall that berry lambics are rather tart. This is certainly one of the top berry-flavored beers from our country and only a tiny minority considered it fit for the wine cooler crowd. If fruit-flavored beers usually offend you give this one a long sip.

ALE - BELGIAN STYLE - BROWN, AMBER, OR RED (ROUGE)

Abita Abbey Ale (Double)

RATING: 4.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

Even the Abita folks are in the Belgian game now and none to soon. I'm sure we'll have a Bud Tripel next week; tinted with only food-coloring, sparse malt, and raw sugar of some horrible crude variety. Anyhow, this stuff pours a bright reddish-amber, faintly cloudy, no real visible yeast in the bottle. The head is golden-beige and the lace will last until the entire glass evaporates in a year's time - or if you prefer: as long as it takes to build an abbey clock tower. The painted bottle in gold, cream, and verdant vines is very pretty; collectible even. Their goal was "rapurous perfection", a good theme for an abbey-based thing and secondly to give 25 cents to St. Joseph's Abbey, presumably the one near their town(?). Sweet malt flavors are medium complex, very drinkable and highly carbonated even with the 8.0% ABV punch. Tartness overcomes the sweetness in some mid and later points but most will be fairly sweet. I found it only fruity in terms of dark, malt-like fruits, pear perhaps and then a bit of citrus here and there. Spicing is on the light-moderate side, apparently and supportive but not overwhelming. These 650ml bottles are quite affordable as are most Abita offerings and their "liquid bread" is a very nice value. Next review...Bruges Blackened Crawfish Casserole. It would only be fair.



D'Achouffe McChouffe Artisanal Belgian Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Ardennes Mts, Belgium

The colorful painted gnomes (or are they Ardennes Fairies?) on the label mark these D'Achouffe products from your usual paper labels with flying dogs, jumping idiots, and grinning cats. The color is a rich amber brown and one gets a depth of meritorious and elaborate, earthy malts impresses at first sip. This is surely what a perfect Belgian Brown needs to be plus or minus more EtOH and spice. Frankly, I might ramp this one up on both fronts for a special seasonal but I'd never change this recipe and execution anytime in the next three centuries. The head is bigger than needed, the hue a very presentable amber-brown, the aroma of sweet malt. Pils-type malts are used and it's spiced with English Golding and Saaz hops. The double fermentation with a dash of added yeast is well worth the effort. It came tightly capped and not corked. It's just 8% ABV and I find this lower, non-intrusive dosing to be just right in this ideal arrangement of refined brewing flavors. The interplay of spicing, hops, and judiciously sweet malt is a balance I find remarkable and rare from anyone; including a good number of very old Belgian abbeys and farmhouse factories. Study this when you want to find what malty joy can and should be in a dark brown beer. Study it lads, study it long and full. Drink ten cases if you need to. For all the

silly, kaleidoscopic gnomes in their checkered drawers, this is one very serious ale. Sometimes a brew is so perfect it will appeal to us snooty pseudo-gurus wearing 2000 labels over our Saks belt buckle AND ALSO the dude who snorts out "never did like dem dark ferin beers none" and silently reviews this with a toothless smile and a lightbulb going off in his mullitt-draped skull. Quality appeals all around the planet and over all the classes, experience levels, and ages. Here's a refined ale that is immediately likeable, accessible, and transforming of all our opinions of the brewing arts. It's plum without tasting like plums and ditto for peachy perfect.

Affligem Dobbel Abbey Beer

RATING: 4.0

Brouweij De Smedt of Belgium export this DARK Abbey brew in \$0 25.4 oz. Champagne-style bottles. This 'Belgian Burgundy' dates from 1074 AD. The label says you can pour yeast into your glass for a 'nuttier taste'. Or not. Color is dark amber with lasting head and lace. It is very malty but not nearly so rich as the color and word 'Dobbel' suggest. Affligem is not immediately captivating but it will surely please. Starts semi-sweet but ends a bit dry.

Andelot Cuvee Angelique Dubbel Belgian Ale

RATING: 3.0

Lochristi, Belgium

This brewery has a lower price point along with their plastic corks and lower ABV - 7% for a double is more than low. The hue is amber-red, faintly cloudy but variable with the pour angle, and the tenacious head a light beige. Sweet malt is the first nose and the first sip as well, very clearly oversugared for many people's sensibilities and that includes your faithful author. This is a what I might term a beer soda with a smidge of extra depth - just a mite's leg's worth of depth. There are some vague dusky fruit notes, plum for sure, all these melded to malt, quickly overcome by excessive sweetness, a bit of mulled wine even, still too simple and mono-malti-dimensional to score higher.

They need more ethanal for sure, 9% at a min, more malt layering or richer fruit esters at first sip. This is tarted-up, over-sweetened malt beer and not a credit to their national tradition in my opinion. I'd serve it to a blonde...err...blond angel with dubbel qualifications at my local bar and she'd probably thank me in unspeakable ways aftering asking me for another kiwi-cranberry wine cooler for the road. I make three hand signals to my bud Phil behind the bar and he loads the bottle with his proven, secret, Cranberry-Lime Panty Peeler (19.5% ABV) instead. I never think of this beer again except during a lucid patch in 2028 when the the new miracle Alzie medcaps kick in. I smile like a goofy idiot from the memory for six straight hours and call in my nurse Angelique for a refresher on that GPS-guided, sponge bath thing. "More to the right dear" as I slip a Pres. B.J. Clinton Commemorative Gold Piece into her green pocket and she hands me a real Double Belgian Ale from Kasteel.

Anker Gouden Carolus D'Or Belgian Ale 2007

RATING: 4.5

Mechelen, Belgium

This "Grand Cru of the Emperor" is brewed once a year on the 24th of February to commemorate the birthday of King Charles The Fifth - Carolus being a form of the name Charles. The pour is rich reddish-brown, a mahogany glow in fact, with virtually no lace but a rocky head of long duration and beige color. The nose is that of tempty malts, likely sweet. First presentation comes off quickly tart then rapidly opening up into very sweet, layered malts of distinct qualities all around. Domestic US breweries who have resorted to making malt sodas would do well to turn here for how sugar and malt can be abundant without being crude, simple, and a sticky nightmare. We'd not expect 10% ABV with a domestic sweet, malty microbrew ale but they'd VERY WELL to copy the rest of the multi-dimensional, intricate notes give sufficient ingredients and brew time. I rather like it a bit cold though malty Belgian browns usually get served a bit on the warm side. The ethanol is covert and the brown sugar-drenched flavors are endlessly engaging. The fruit notes are dark and faint (raisens and plums I figure) and I'd have given it a perfect rating if those were better developed and layered throughout the middle approaches. Hops are not there to any degree and I think all the spicy nip comes from either spices or our beloved intoxicating molecule. Happy Birthday Charles and I'll be sure to celebrate you and your label again and soon.

Brewbase Fives



Avery The Reverend Belgian-Style Quadrupel Ale

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

The Sect of the Boulderites have gone forth into their hewn abbey and made a supremely righteous ale. While most Belgian abbey brewers are more likely to be friars than Reverends, the folks at Avery claim this was God's Eighth Day creation; "strong-willed, assertive, and pure of heart". One pour of this dark amber brew suggests an apricot nectar in appearance. That suggestion is good for it is truly a nectar of fruit and malt as if such a pomological creation existed in the Garden of Eden. The short-lived head is my only negative on this label and I generally do not deduct points for that element and have not here. Fruit reminds me of subtle cherries (despite the apricot color suggestion that will not leave my brain) and their website mentions currants and molasses. I think we have mild cloves or some generic Flemish spicing in any case. The supernaturally omnipotent 10% ABV gives a dryness to what is otherwise a well-sweetened broth, ample with ripe fruit, and not much hops; of which the later is said to the Styrian Goldings cultivar.

It's 1.093 OG, 10 IBU's, and solid in mouthfeel. Rev-Quad was actually created as a tribute to the life of their Sales Manager, Tom Boogaard's grandfather, a real Rev. of the Episcopalian persuasion. I'm certainly of this Rev's persuasion and I found the 750 mil's to be far for adequate for my cold thirst tonight. The brew's "heart of candy sugar" is true to the style, especially of the XXXX strength, but it's not sloppy sweet nor sticky nor ugly. These Quad things are like top-fuel dragsters (to change the analogy on ya); awesome power and force are worthless if not flawlessly directed, steered with experience, kept from blowing things apart, and put on a straight line to the specific goal and always in bounds. This is a ride-on-the-rails perfect run. The malts are nicely balanced and they've employed two-row, Cara 8, Cara 20, Caramel 15L, Caramel 40L, and Belgian Special B to give it a rounded quality. It can cellar for up to 4 years. I will drown my sorrows in this far too small bottle before going onto to my chosen evening stouts. I should have bought two or three more. One often says that of Avery's big bottles and that is a testimony to their excellence, both long known and always expected in the new labels. Holy Boulder...we have perfection coming from the choir; harmony and glory all around; majesty like Handel's Messiah to 'rouse one on a cold, otherwise boring night. And the congregation said...Amen!!!!

Brewbase Fives



Barbar Winter Bok

RATING: 5.0

Quennast, Belgium

We were confused for a minute the "winter bok" tag and the notes it was brewed with coriander, orange peel, and spices. That sounds very much like....a...Belgian ale. Sure enough it is. At 8% ABV this dark amber-brown creation has a head bigger than all of Texas and Belgium combined. The label confesses to natural honey, bitter orange, wheat, and both Hallertau and Styrian hops added as well. It's got a nice kick, not from an over abundance of alcohol as many dark belgians but from tartness, sweetness, malt, and hops giving a series of coordinated caresses over a few microseconds. Wow! This is very special stuff for not having a cork or hardware.

It is far more fruity, not just citrusy, than expected and one can enjoy this stuff very cold in summer just as easily as a wheat beer with lemon. It is crisp and self-cleansing enough to make a good summer brew. Highest marks in a class that is get too busy these days and increasingly hard to grade for what college coaches called "widespread parity".

Boulevard Nommo Dubbel Ale (Smokestack Series)

RATING: 4.5

Kansas City, Missouri

This slightly hazy amber has surprisingly little lace for a corked production and maturation at 8.1%. Spices (cinnamon, coriander, star anise) are used of course but they also add the non-traditional molasses, a nice alternative to honey or candy sugar. The authentic abbey yeast provides additional banana-fruit and clove flavors. It is modest and restrained at first, the molasses not overt but apparently adding to the darkish flavors not suggested by it's amber color. The name comes from the Dogon Tribe of Mali who worshiped hemaphrodite, mermaid-like creatures that are paired and something of conjoined twins of the scaly, aquatic world. The name also means "to make one drink". I suspect one had to have a couple of pop to see these siamese beasties in the first place. The flavors work very well together, gentle and yet deep and satisfying. It is a very interesting recipe even if not completely fun. We liked this pricey (\$14) gem but not one of our panel thought it ready for the higher marks. I made a mean latte with molasses and spices that is a thrill to me but not one friend prefers my creations to Starbuckian slurps.



Boulevard The Sixth Glass Quadrupel Ale (Smokestack Series)

RATING: 5.0

Kansas City, Missouri

Quads are few and far between in and this one has the whopping 10.5% credentials going into your first sip. Color is hazy amber, the golden-cream head very tall, and lasting a century or two. The lace is slow and limited, surprising for a caged-corked product. The "Sixth Glass" reference is based on Hans Christian Anderson's *The Watchman of the Tower* from which *The Little Mermaid* arises. What an exalted, grand literary thing this is and how far above the Bud and generic chips crowd which considers anything starring Ricky Bobby as equal that-there limey Shaking Spear guy I dun heard 'about. The Sixth Glass is the residence of the Devil himself dressed in a fine suit - but on this label the evil one looks like a drawing of Tom Selleck with added beard, 'stache, and horns. Close enough. Curiously this label offers a web address on which the HCA tale can be read. Beer that educates in quadrupel way. Wow. First sip shows the high ethanol getting in the way of what later becomes a subtle malty, spicy thing that is mellow but never weak, substantial but not overwhelming, impressive by our three finishes. It is a very refined product, one of the best strong amber, Belgian-style creations from New World shores. It is zesty without being too robust, rich and sumptuous without annoying in the least, highly refined in all passages. The alcohol punch is real and the faint-hearted and those unfamiliar with elite Belgian brew may find this excessive in that respect. Given the mandate for a 10+ dosing of our favorite molecule, this is one classy American brew which I do not think could have existed 30 even 20 years ago. You can present this to a European guest with no shame and in fact much honor. Do so.

Brewbase Fives



Bourgogne des Flanderes Belgian Brown Ale

RATING: 5.0

Itterbeck, Belgium

The \$3.69 bottles (Nov. 2010) poured with a tall head in medium-dark amber-brown, the head creamy and lasting at some size at least. This immediately presents itself as a sour/tart Flanders Ale; one generally on the sweeter side, hence sweet-tart on a reasonable, moderate scale. As with anything in the beer world, one can be tart and harsh for trueness to some old style but in the final analysis a brew must be pleasant to be bought and enjoyed over and over. This is a pleasant one among some which are barely drinkable in my opinion. One sees strong steel beams made of malt between the windows of tart, bright ale flavors. If you are not sure you want to present a tart Flanders Ale to new beer lovers, this would be a place to start for it is that one word - accessible. But it is accessible without being weak, simple, or plain - in the same way you can jump into a BMW 5-series and just go learning with admiration for every curve. This is great stuff, one of the best of the sweet-tart dark style.

Brasseurs Beer of Paris

RATING: 4.5

Paris, France

This champagne-bottled beer merits comparison to Jenlain, Trois Monts, and several others with similar presentation and price. Brasseurs De Paris from Douai France produce this exceptional reddish-amber beer that is pure heaven for complex malty flavor. It is sweet and fruity like a British or premium American ale but with that French and Belgian spin to it. Yet it is NOT potent like some ales and finishes a touch dry. We enjoyed it every bit as much as Septante Five. A good choice for parties.

The Bruery Black Orchard™ Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.0

Placentia, California

The big, brown, capped bottles are just \$8 a piece for 750ml. The ABV is 5.7% and the color very opaque brown - more in the porter and stout style of coloring. The lace is good at first, the head tan, and medium-long. It is a bit fizzy and as the color suggested to my first instinct, this is very much of a lightly spiced porter with a dash of citrus and wheat for fun. The malt, unfortunately overcomes the spice and citrus so any attempt at developing a world-leading [Belgian Porter Ale](#) has gone unrealized. It is bottle-conditioned and bottle-fermented which is remarkable at this price point. At one point on the label they admit it's a [Black Wheat Ale](#) but German dark wheat flavor is missing. Perhaps the mission is muddled in the murk of the beverage and needs a long rethink.

La Caracole Nostrodomus Belgian Brown Ale

RATING: 4.0

Flamignoul, Belgium

The glorious, shining reddish-brown color is what you notice first. Thus it looks smashing in a clear glass of some size. The 9% ABV is moderate and Saaz hops are used in the recipe. It is of the so-called "Wallonian Brown Ale" style and is a rather dry malty feast overall. Some reviews say 9.5% but my bottle was clearly 9% on inspection of the script with a lens. There is variable fruit (more in later or strong pours), nothing as rich as some reviewers pretend to sniff, a bit of nippy licorice in the finish, good chocolate malting (moderate though), and an almost wine-like character. This glowing ale is not cloudy in the yeast and no sediment can be seen at all. It won a Gold Medal in 2002 World Beer Championships and that's quite an honor.

As to the Nostrodomus connection, the name is revealed by fantasy characters on the label, one with a telescope

viewing another with a snail-shaped helmet. Guess the artist was about 7 bottles deep when he painted this label! The spicing is mostly from the hops which is not true of all strong Belgian ales and the lace is quite limited for the style as well. It's more much on red side than most of them. They recommend serving at 55 deg. F. and that is about right in my tests from cold to room temp. It is simple on one level but as you sip more of it, longer in fact, at various temps, some of those subtle fruit, roasted malt, and licorice notes add up and you realize first impressions were not everything. Still I think a beer where you have to strain your tastebuds and use labware to assure the perfect temp and humidity is a beer not accessible enough for a high rating. There are 11% ales with less of an alcohol thump than this one and had they spiced it and hopped it two notches more, we'd not be deducting points. It is a slow sipping beer for contemplating one's future but I'm sorry to say this one is not likely in mine - given the number of more enjoyable bottles calling my name. By the way, the real Nostrodomus was an apothecary so this would have been a perfect opportunity to do a strange but delicious herbal ale.



Castle Kasteel Cuvee du Chateau (2010)

RATING: 5.0, Award of Merit 2012

Van Honebrouck, Belgium

Purchased in December 2012 (the 11.2oz version not the corked one), we surely hope this brown Belgian ale is better for the time spent since 2010. The ethanol in 11% and that is certainly time well spent! The pour is a hazy brown in multiple shades, as if someone made a malted barley and yeast smoothie - very odd look in bold glasses. It something of a lovely butterscotch-chocolate swirl, alluring and curious. The head is thin, tan, under a nose faintly of beer and quite heavily of alcohol. Malt mouthwash anyone? The first notes are not malt but strongly of glorious, bright cherries and assorted other fruits as if I dropped into the Garden of Eden on orchard harvest day. Holy pomes this is one fruity dark ale. This is the most fruit punch I've ever found in a brown ale and by this I mean homemade, fresh, liquored up punch and not that canned Hawaiian stuff. These Award of Merit beers we find are so honored to sip are immediately apparent for their supremacy and out-of-this-world excellence. We instantly adore them and want them around every day. Being Belgian you might think this is some sort of cherry lambic but it is not. It is slight sweet, never sour like a cherry lambic, and all that fruitful delight surely comes from amazing, brilliance use of a yeast. Some of the world's finest wines have the Chateau name and it is thus approach we have that term here. While slightly tart, slightly sweet lovely cherries form the early notes, the later ones are more dry, and favoring malty, dark fruit. But never are the malts are big deal here except as supportive to the fruity magic. Panelists here said "stunning fruit flavors, cherries, sugar plums, red wine, and brown sugar meld to take me to an Old World Christmas, maybe even our Lord's birthday in heaven itself...highest marks..." and "one of the finest fruit ales I've had in years...simply beyond words...my nearest analogue is cherry brandy or Kijafa cherry port...but here we have the added complexity of rich malts and yeast...I had no idea an ale could do this". The fruit here is so bold, luminous, and omnipresent I am inclined to

think this label is a new style all on it's own. As a fruity Quad the ethanol is minimal except in the nose. The rest of the passages are delightful to the 20th power, a scrumptuous feast of finest kind in the ale universe. When luscious flavors combine with high ethanol we are all impressed and here we were instantly impressed to highest possible degree. In more than 1500 tastings, this is truly one of the finest, most memorable, and radiant ales I know. Do not miss this one at any cost even if you need to travel to secure a bottle or acquire a hoard to share with friends who will love you for the experience. Here is the ale to make your day and your year at once.



Castle Kasteel Donker

RATING: 5.0

Van Honsebrouck, Belgium

I usually ream out breweries for selling 11.2 mini-bottles for in that little bit of savings these ounce-cheaters gain millions from us fools about the drinking world. My only exception to this anger is a very, very good, strong Belgian bear whose quality of ethanol makes the quantity a moot point. This sumptuous drink is 11% ABV and pours a medium-dark amber-brown. The head arises quickly in the Belgian traditional and remains a nice froathy light tan mass for some time. It is not bottle conditioned and so lace is lacking but conditioning in traditionally capped 11.2 mini bottles shipped across the oceans is a risky thing. First sip nearly shocked me for it was a blend of very tart and sweet malt to such excess and density I almost think it was a concentrate for making beer from a tap! It was like drinking "ale syrup" and to maltheads like myself that is a very nice thing. The unyielding inundation of the malted barley will put some folks off; not us happy maltheads who like malt like our alcohol in very generous, surplus doses. Folks talk about Trippel ales but if anyone is really making a Quad this would be something to compare to it. Let me not rest on the phrase "ale syrup" too long for it is not overly sweet in this concentration and this separates it from the ordinary brewers with a passion for excess without reserve and some restraint. It is overload but not overkill, more than enough in little bottles and quiet sips after a fine dinner.



Chimay Premiere Ale (Red Ale)

RATING: 5.0

This classic worldclass beer has been renamed but it retains its charm and potent 7% (by volume) punch. This reddish amber has a good head and very wonderful elements of spice and fruit and yeast - the later furnished by a secondary yeast fermentation and witnessed by some welcome visual effects. The Trappist fathers of Belgium have retained for themselves one of the world's great mortal pleasures. It may vary but in all forms is a delight. I still look to this label and buy a bottle or two as my standard for Belgian reds.

De Konick Ale

RATING: 4.0

Antwerp, Belgium

This amber-shaded ale is top-fermented [sic] and made using Saaz hops. The unusual bulging neck, 11.2 ounce bottles hold a pale amber fluid with good lace and a firm head. We classify it with the regular amber ales in this file as it has more in common with them than the special, spiced Belgian brown or amber abbey ales. This \$10.99 six pack (March 2000) is nicely flavored and it benefits from the enthusiastic carbonation. Reviewers noted 'lots of class...and fragrant Saaz appeal' and '[a] commendable even if not particularly special effort'. Despite its price tag it is a agreeable experience and for crown (cap) collectors it is a nice find.

De Koninck Winter Koninck

RATING: 4.0

Antwerp, Belgium

De Koninck has been in operation since 1833 and it shows in this 6.5% product. It comes in a hue of cloudy dark amber with perpetual lace and a tan, smallish head. It is pleasant malt feast, moderate as the style goes, very refined still but not as much as I'd wish. As a summer brown ale, it would do well, served icy cold and appealing. Served in winter and likely in a warm room it does not fare as well as some of the competition might in my opinion. It is darkest of several products they make, including an 8% Tripel which I think is a much finer product.

Dubuisson Freres Scaldis Noel

RATING: 4.5

Pipaix, Belgium

The bottle is "tarted up" as our British friends say, a tiny 8.48 ounce thing with a big, bright blue foil sash covered in bright white stars. A pretty red, blue, and white Christmas scene from the home town shows on the main label. It has been called the "Bush de Noel" formula but perhaps the Hillaryites and Obamists among us would not buy something so named before November or December 2008. This special Christmas is brewed for the year-ending season to "delight the most demanding connoisseur". First of all, what are the Europeans always inventing smaller bottles to give us less of their chosen, blessed broth? I mean besides the whole money and profit thing! I am more lenient on the Belgians because their stingy bottles of beer tend to be potent and flavorful enough to compensate. This stuff is a whopping 12% ABV so they're half forgiven. The rest of the absolution must come from the flavor if at all. It's a dark cloudy amber, head shorter than most from this land and also not much lace for me. It's a moderate-full fruity-malt product, mid to high sweetness as expected for a Noel special, the alcohol unremitting at all flavor notes. There is moderate malt, not stout strong of course, some fig, no hops to be detected over the ethanol flourish, some earthy rye, and none of the spicing that Belgian are famous for. I sipped again and again and tried to find a spice, any spice. I settled on the fact that the spice here is called EtOH; a favorite among our species for flavoring drink since about 7000 BC. I've tricked up lots of beers with shots of very clean, triple-distilled vodka and the effect here is similar to that approach. They have to make this on the sweet side or it would come off at 12% like a malt martini.



Duchesse de Bourgogne Flemish Red Ale

RATING: 5.0

Vichte, Belgium

The strong wired-cork bottle contains a blend of oak-aged 8- and 18-month old top fermented ale in an unpasteurized form. Color is rich reddish-amber and it overflows with tart-malty goodness. The head is beige and of a domed, ice cream float type. The lace is less than expected but it suffers nothing from this. It won a Golden Medal in the 2006 World Beer Cup. This stuff is so smooth it makes a mountain-top telescope mirror look like a rutted gravel road. The supremely agreeable combination of caramel malt, cherries, passion fruit, mellow citrus, and some chocolate notes is unadulterated heaven on earth. There are very sour and tart notes but they do not hinder so much as support the main flavor notes. It is never oversweet nor bitter but a constant

fest of marvelous, truly awesome flavors. I suspect the younger 8-month brew contributes to the tart, more fruity nature (as it has some lambic qualities) and the older 18-month stuff a richness of sauve, sweet malt. It looks smashing in good glass or crystal and should impress any guest. Introduce this gem as a "Belgian Burgundy Beer" for those not yet informed as to its charms. Some of our latent friends need their love of wonderful beer to surface from fancy, trendy, Euro-chic, and prestigious places. Do what you must to ensnare and addict your pals. Money will be an object and be prepared to spend it before they start buying wide Belgian vials for you. It's plastic cash and very well spent. Trades. Delight. Dose for dose and parties choice.

Brewbase Fives



Epic Smoked and Oaked Belgian-style Ale (Release #5)

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

We are beginning to think Epic's Exponential Series is about 40 exponents more interesting than their cheaper Elevated Series. This is proof they can actually excel if they want to. This particular release (and they do vary somewhat according to their website) is 9.9% ABV and made in just 1800 barrels. That sounds like a bunch of barrel-rolling but in the wine and whisky world 1800 is a mere handful. We paid \$10.99 for a medium bomber (September 2011). It pours a bright ice tea-red, a very curious and lovely shade. The head lasts but is lower than a corked product might be. The flavor is clearly on the sweet side of barrel-improved Belgian darks and it's a Trippel by any standard. The sweetness tempers the near 10% ethanol punch. The whisky flavors are good strength, moderate, and not harsh. There appears to be some Belgian-like spicing and there is definitely sugaring of a type. It's a nice sipping beer, perhaps too sugary for some purists. Release or Batch #5 is not on their website but judging from previous four they use Belgian-style yeast, Colorado whiskey barrels, Demerara Rough Cut Candy, barley flakes, with perhaps Maris Otter, Weyermann Pilsner, Cherry Wood Smoked, and Caramel 60 malts. Hops in the other releases included Perle, Tettnang, and Sterling varieties. We show releases #1 and #2 to be weaker-dosed at 8.8% ABV.

Brewbase Fives



Fantôme de Noël 2008

RATING: 5.0

Soy, Belgium

Brasserie Fantome was formed in 1988 under the guidance of Brewer Dany Prignon and uses the ghost theme and a general Saison style of brewing. They are in the style of a local farmhouse brewery deep in the heart of the famous Ardennes Forest. The green bottles come capped-and-corked, a bit different for a Belgian but no less an good economic compromise without affecting quality. Their annual Noel or Christmas Ale is from a different recipe or theme every year so I dated this review. Their logo ghost (like Caspar's evil twin) put on some rotund girth and looks like a snow man for this label - clever that. Carmelized and highly roasted malts are used in abundance and that is true of something called alcohol - the later being 10%. The cloudy butterscotch-amber broth is tangy, citrus-infused, and hops:malt balanced in the first sips. It mid-notes with stronger malts, medium sweet, very sophisticated and layered, finely textured, and always pleasant. The finish is a stronger

dose of malt but rubbing one's tongue you get engaging bits of hop spice like bursts of cinnamon gum. (Note to self: invent beer-flavored hoppy gum with an ethanol liquid center). I paid \$11 for the 750ml offering at Whole Foods in 2008 and that is about as expensive as most seasonal Belgians get. The experience is more than worth the price of admission even if running to the kitchen for a corkscrew was annoying. Overall, this cheerful gift is joyous sleigh ride through many of the brewing worlds good flavors, fading and erupting as it should, inspired all the way, and never with a jar or rough spot. I can't wait for Noel 2009 and even if it's a full Prez Jackson and comes with three corks, I'm there to buy a couple.

Brewbase Fives



Green Flash/St. Feuillien Friendship Brew™ Black Saison

RATING: 5.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

San Diego, California

Brewed in CA, this is joint project with the famous Belgian firm of Brasserie St. Feuillien who make some heavenly saisons and other styles. This second collaboration between the two used both European and American hops, Belgian hops, and a carefully selected spice mix. The ABV is low at 5.7%, the pour a dark rootbeer brown, very dark for a spice, Belgianoid ale. The head is dark tan-beige, very little lace showing. Spiced malt is the nose and a bit different, intriguing so far, clearly not what is expected of Belgian Browns, double or tripel. And the ethanol level is very low for a dark triple from the Old World. First notes are mixed, faintly spiced, some licorice coming to the foreground, and assorted other flavors of fascinating complexity and "several enigmas" in the tongue of an experience panelist here. We decided to bring our bottles down from 40 F. when first sampled and see what will come out as the brew warms - and this is always useful for a very dark beer. Two of us said "very pleasant" within seconds of each other and most of us are fussy, prudish little beer snobs. The malts are clearly there but clever and relenting in the background like a good chorus, the hops are there but pleasant bitter and tangy, not banging one over the head to justify a price. The finish brings out more dark fruit but it is not fruity by any means, the tart licorice-hops theme being by far the predominant theme. The spicing intensifies with the ounce consumed. It is far less old world and especially Belgian malty as one might expect.

Jenlain French Country Ale

RATING: 4.0

France

This French classic comes in Champagne-corked 750ml bottles for around \$0. It is a medium dark amber with much less carbonation than the cork implies. Flavor is malty but not overly full in its Alsace hop. There are licorice and minor fruit notes. This 'Biere de Garde' is pleasant but can have bitter elements and an occasional bottle may taste stale. Castelain Blond is superior due to better carbonation, sweeter finish, and more interesting fruitiness.

Kasteel = Castle

Koningshoeven Dubbel Trappist Ale

RATING: 4.5

Tilbert, The Netherlands

This one pulls a fast one - trappist monks from Holland and not that B place. Strangely, my large brown, champagne-corked bottle gave no ABV rating. Other sources confirm 6.5% and one says 7%. I don't know what Dutch for "super yummy, cloudy brown fruit soup" is but that should be on the label somewhere. It pours a cloudy, amber-brown, nearly opaque for all the good floating stuff. The head is big, light brown, and lasts forever. This brewery was started in 1884, making them mere neophytes in the realm of old trappist brewers.

Since 1969, InBev has been licensed to market their yummy stuff. It starts vaguely tart, then one gets malt richness, and then finally the orchestra opens up and plays fruit notes in rich diversity, clarity, and brilliance. Here it differs from the majority of Belgian doubles I know and surely their American knockoffs. There is some sweetness in the finish but it's restrained and perfectly judged. I get a little vanilla at mid note. For the fruit's clarity, it is clarity in terms of phenols and esters perfects because no single genus of common fruit comes quickly to mind. There is a bit of apple perhaps, raisin (an I told but personally don't get), surely pear in the later notes, and the usual clove but in rare moderation. There is clear butterscotch in the finish more so than caramel or generic sweet malt. I've never found butterscotch in a beer before so I'm not trying to be puffed or clever here. Let me call it lots of "beer fruit", molded by refined subdued sugars, and be done with the feeble analysis we human can do. I actually found it best when very cold, 45 deg. F. and lower. I'm actually cheered that the ABV is this low and never at any times intrudes into the joy of this malt smoothy.

De Landtsheer Malheur 12 Ale

RATING: 3.5

Buggenhout, Belgium

The first sip of this rootbeer-colored, bottle-conditioned ale is that of 12% alcohol with a malt chaser. They make as 10 Ale but I've not tried that as yet. For those of you keeping score at home, this is supposedly a quad or quattro Belgian ale, not that they always multiple 3% alcohol x one, two, three, or four to get their rating. It's never so simple in Belgium or Europe in general. The head is a firm tan and it was too dark too see much lace, though friends assure me it's abundant enough. While the initial sip (and it was my first beer to review today) was somewhat offensive with so much EtOH overpowering the flavors, the later appraisals (after about 5 decent Belgians) have me inured to our beloved molecule. Not surprisingly the same can be said of a fine whisky or Cab wine since the first few sips of the evening (or morning if you prefer) will be a bit sharp, awkward, and biting. Inure me and it all will get better (most of the time), hardened to the pleasures of alcohol without letting it overcome the flavors we love to place around and under and over it. This is a semi-sweet ale, not a syrupy as some report, nice malt but simply layered and monotone, and decent fruit (not great) which is variable with the temp and pour style. Anything cranking out 12% ABV is going to finish a bit dry unless the whole of Hawaii's sugarcane production for the year is somehow stuffed into the brown bottle. It is a nice concept, far less complex or layered in the dominant malts that it might be. If one were to compare it to the top barleywines (and one should) it is not where it needs to be. Many Belgian fans on the web and in print have heaped it with love and also very low ratings. I have to say the high ABV together with it's simplicity are flaws, severe flaws. One reviewer even called it "grape coughsyrup". I read a couple of online reviews who said the 12% fix was not detectable. Unless those guys are use to moistening their morning Wheaties with Grey Goose, their reviews are utterly incomprehensible and worthless. The 12 foot tall Ethanol Gorilla in the room is a problem here. For this premium money (\$11 on January 2009) I was profoundly let down and even after ethanol acceptance period of an hour.

Legendes Noel de Geants

RATING: 2.5

Irchonwetz, Belgium

Made in a medieval castle, this cloudy amber-brown concoction is 330ml and 8.5% ABV. Wheat floats copiously in small bits around each bottle. One gets a nicely spiced malety beer at first and mid notes but sadly the finish is filled with metallic tastes we found thirdworldish and offensive. Two bottles were tried and both had this uncomfortable, ruining aftertaste so we must judge it the way many people are likely to find it. Perhaps next time they should brew it with something other than mote water.

Brewbase Fives



Liefman's Goudenband

RATING: 5.0

Belgium

This FLANDERS BROWN ALE is a classic among Belgian ales and is one of the finest beers ever made. The corked bottles sell for \$7 or so in the first year and can be aged like wine. We hear the 1986 vintage is perfect. The current 1994 crop is amber brown with abundant lace. The flavor notes are fruity and malty with endless complexity to thrill the tastebuds and the brain. The tartness may suggest to the naive that this is some brown wine cooler. But when the final palate hits you it proves to be a well-crafted beverage of the finest order. World class at any party. Flavor elements include carmel, honey, plum, cherry, malt, and chocolate.

New Belgium 1554 Enlightened Black Ale

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

Where is New Belgium Brewery? Fort Collins, Colorado, of course. I might have bought Brooklyn or some sleepy town in Vermont. Anywho...this recipe is based on an ancient Belgian text dating to about 1554, recording a sumptuous dark drink reproduced for us today. It pours dark amber-brown, quickly disappearing head of cream, and some lace. ABV is just 5.6% but the high carbonation gives it a slightly higher effect. Flavor is weak for the style, still it's nicely malted, backbone of some hops, and with the price point I guess the "bargain Belgian" market is aimed for in terms of everything. I would pass for a mid-rate German dark lager if not for all the hoopla. Nothing special, just new. I have no reason to try it again nor do you a first time.

Lonerider Belle Starr Belgian Holiday Ale

RATING: 4.0

Raleigh, North Carolina

The silhouette of a pig-tailed young lady under a cowboy with rounded, female shoulders is quite an enticing look. These 22 oz. bombers are 7.7% on my favorite meter, the pour a very nice reddish-amber under a light tan head. The nose is complex, suggesting fruit, mid-strength at best. "Beware of Starr's smile..there's something sinister behind her innocent look" says the label. Proclaimed to be the Belgian dubbel style, this ale is made with a "special Belgian yeast strain", carmelized sugar, and holiday-style spices. The spices are broadly in the apple pie style but sufficiently restrained to be sinister and interesting rather than Cat House bold. Belle Starr is not for sale...except for the right guy with a sufficiently large diamond perhaps and then with only the appropriate interval of courting and all - or if handsome enough there is an express program.

The Belgianosity (and if the word does not exist, it does now) is somewhat confused under the spicing which is more of an American theme - though I see the value of merging two traditions now and again in the beer world. I found this beer better served less than very cold, nearly room temp in fact. Reviewers here remarked "far too weak on the malts for a Belgian Double...I admire the outside-of-the-box try but there are too many things going on for me" and "got my attention but a fusion that doesn't work for me...but they should try again". The young Miss Starr does not know what she will grow up to be, it seems. I would welcome more finishing school for this recipe though the bone structure and basic feminine charms are clearly there in fascinating doses.

Ommegang Art of Darkness

RATING: 3.0

Cooperstown, New York

If you get past the spiel paying homage to brewing dark Belgians, this 8.9% pours dark brown, semi-translucent

under a mid-tan head. Tart malts present well with a mid-low pH. Other passages are more full, other notes frankly hollow and divergent. It is faintly Belgian in spicing but fairly ordinary as a copy and at this price point we need much, much more. One panelist here called the finish "cheesy" and that struck a note with the rest of us. Quality normal with Ommegang (though not universal either) is curiously absent. The darkness is good but the depth of it and it's spices need work before it can be called artful.

Ommegang Biere d'Hougoumont (Bierde de Garde)

RATING: 4.0

Cooperstown, New York

This corked and wired feast has yeast raining down and lacing bursting upward - quite a show in a tall glass. The hazy 7.3% offering is a very hazy amber, bright against strong light, the head cream, short, and yet lasting well. It aged on both maple and oak wood staves, made with eight different malts, authentic French yeast, and French Strisselspelt hops. It is named for a famous farmstead near Waterloo where Napoleon met his match and then some. The flavors are refined, complex, and fairly difficult even for experts to sort out on the first sips. Given time we found it had a tart, faintly cider flavor, augmented with very background hops, and much mellowed by the wood. It is not weak nor it is very assertive. And it's just there, mid-powered caramel, moderately dark-fruity, refreshing, very competently brewed, and yet without a real wow factor for any on our panel. I needed to personally down a whole bottle just to get my head and buds around this one - or so I told them. Panelists remarked "the wood aging matters and does not add unwanted whiskey flavors like some other farmhouses with barrel treatments...the French yeast and hops lend some special notes...I learned from them...none of them particularly amazing but a nice change of pace" and "very mellow but satisfying doses of caramel, nuts, dank fruits, some appley tartness...virtually no spice I think...just before the finish you get a punch of bitter hops, ending much cleaner". The combination of non-whiskey wood flavors and a rare (to America) French hop variety along with Ommegang's usual spin on old recipes make this a truly uncommon even if not brain-charging choice. Ommegang go off on limbs not well traveled by the squirrels. Even squirrel buses don't run out that far. I applaude this surprise and educational offering even if our socks are still on. This is the first brew we've tasted using maple wood aging (October 2012) and we hope they do more creations and I know they will. The squirrels and their socks await their next amusing, contribution to the elite realms of American microbrew art.



De Proef Brouwerij Monstre Rough Imperial Flanders Red Ale (with Terrapin Beer)

RATING: 5.0

Lochristi, Belgium

These 750ml bottles weigh in at 8.5% and a whopping \$17.99 a bottle (July 2010). It is a curious inter-brewery or collaboration brew, this time an Amer-Belgian hybrid from Terrapin in Maryland (Spike Buckowski) and De Proef in Belgium (Dirk Naudts). "All gloves and brewing boots were off" in this Brewmaster's Collaboration Series product, to be at once traditional (a red Flanders ale) and yet pushing the envelope ("loosely based on Terrapin's Big Hopy Monster"). They spun it another couple notches by adding rye malt and special Brettomyces for a different flavor. It was toasted in American oak for the final punch. Color is hazy amber, about as hazy as all the London fogs that ever spread merged into a single damp morning. The head is light tan, lasting long, variable depth. The nose is candy rye. First sips are crisp, clear, loaded in quality malts of much complexity and fervor. Some caramel fades in and out of the picture, finishing a very bitter hop style which is drenched in background of supreme quality. Munich and Crystal malts compliment the rye malt and are used in big doses.

This brew is not so much as Imperial as a Master Ruler and King of the Entire Known Universe though my Trekie

friends will surely remind me than Imperial storm troopers did/do/might (they're all confused) dominant the entire known set of galaxies despite the fact they NEVER EXISTED OR WILL. Whatever. From all pours, this yeasty, malty, sufficiently sweet, deep as 200 light years brew churns with much carbonation and charm. This beer has the whole package (Old World and New World) just like a crazy ass Bentley Continental has the best of traditional craftsmanship and the finest of new technology. Carbon fiber with polished chrome. There are some Imperial stuff today (usually called barleywines) which are overwhelming just to be potent and over-the-top (I call them beer concentrates sorta like Coca-cola syrup in a can). This one is actually drinkable and enjoyable, everything strong (yes) but in good measure and for a reason, proportional and purposeful. There is very little perfection in any product without the potency directed towards a special purpose and function. Mind-blowing stuff. Here we have "near excess" and in that approach suitable restraint. Whether considered imperial, regal, noble, lordly, presidential, or heavenly (hence god-like), this is one awesome beer, a superb collaboration and a very successful and exciting one. I hope Spike and Dirk and company make another 300 more such labels and then I can die happy somewhere around 2059. I don't know how to end this review except to say I found this \$17.99 more than worth every drop, truly inspirational, a ray of new hope for Euro-American cooperation, and just plain freakin' righteous.

Pike Tandem Double Ale

RATING: 3.5

Seattle, Washington

This very dark amber ale has a rocky light beige head and 7% ABV with nothing but water, malt, hops, coriander, organic sugar, and yeast. Did any of that get your attention? The addition of coriander and sugar tells us that a Belgian Duppel was intended even if the price is below the originals and most American copies. 650ml full of rich but non-hazy fluid is an introduction to the Belgian Double about as much as your 1968 VW Beetle was introductio to the Porsche 911. Bug eyes, raucous noise, domed shape, and rear engine but not much similar beyond that. I did find some nice Belgoid notes here but others were thin and ragged. This one ran out of horsepower, fit and finish, and smoothness at the third or fourth sip. If you've never had a great dark Belgian ale this one might give you brief delight for it is not useless or harsh or horrible. It is good without being great and from me that is both a compliment and a warning.



De Proef Brouwerij Lozen Boer (Abbey Style Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Lochristi, Belgium

This corked ale comes in ultra-thick brown 750's with the "Brewmaster's Collection Special Reserve" tag and a \$11.99 tab (June 2012). The pour is dark, hazy reddish-brown, a shade slightly paler and more ruby-tinged than a porter or stout. The head is light tan, tall, and lasting. The brew is named for the famous Lozen restaurant near their Lochesti brewery. The word Lozen means "gentlemen farmer" in Flemish but means "discharge" in Dutch and also refers to a warrior-phophet of the Apache Nation. The label informs us the anise, coffee, chocolate, and vanilla will be our future experience should we carry it out. The flavor notes start fairly tart though never Saison sour or bitter, ending with a plethora of lovely flavors including those mentioned in the previous sentence. It is complex, herbal, malty, spicy, and fruity in the space of 10 or 20 seconds; most every single note being delightful and rewarding. "Most" is the operative word here for two panelists found some (just a few) vegetal and herbal points less than perfect - in their words "too odd", "softly annoying", and "off theme". Still the label scored an average of 5.0 bottles (rounded up) though missed an Award of Merit by two of eight votes. It can be recommended as a very educational, worthwhile dark Belgian ale experience, not to be missed, and on the whole very agreeable.

RJ Rockers Fish Paralyzer Belgian-Style Ale

RATING: 3.5

Spartenburg, South Carolina

This name grabs you as does the label with high artistic value and merit. These "Ales From the Dark Side" come from a town better known for truckstops and really cool BMW SUV's and convertibles. The story connecting this ale with Belgium, South Carolina, and a killer fish escapes other than it being a simple, campfire-style tale of horror. You've got to admit it takes some big fish balls to name a beer this way - just in case it would suck enough to paralyze the taste buds. This amber-brown beauty has a thinnish head and with just 7.5% ABV the paralyzing is not being done with ethanol I would venture. The first notes are malty, dancing quickly into Belgoid spices, and a finish even more idiosyncratic with what seems to be hyper-spicing. It almost has that aspect like a cheap gin or Chinese herbal tea of having just a bit too much in the medicinal, herby form of excess. This is not the say it's barely drinkable for in some curious manner the bitter spices mimic the nip of higher levels of ethanol. Hence we get the feeling of being poisoned in what is mostly a good way. That hardly make sense I know. If one must go out with beer in hand then coriander would be one way to enjoy your demise. Curious, worthy of your tasting parties, and strangely fascinating; however neither great nor easy to enjoy. I might well blend it as one would use a bottle of liquid herbal tinctures in liquors.



Rocs (Brasserie de) Triple Imperiale Belgian Special

Dark Ale

RATING: 5.0

Montagnies-Sur-Rocs, Belgium

This potent 10% ABV beverage comes in large 750 bottles capped stoutly and covered in black foil at the apex. It glows in darkish amber, yeast floating and dancing like a 60's lava lamp, and the nose of medicinal-earthy malt. First nip is richly malty, molasses and caramel to the hilt, faintly Scottish in style, and not overly giving up it's strong ethanol hand. The yeast when consumed full and long and spread about the receptive oral papillae gives imaginative fruit notes to the pallet from most any of the pours; the bottle so vastly yeast-loaded THERE ARE NO BAD OR WEAK POURS EVER! This is truly great stuff and may I say that for \$11.95 (February 2009) it had better f*cking be. This triple is not a triple play but a grand slam in my record book. The wonderful intertwined flavors from fruit to malt and caramel to grainy goodness are beyond reproach and worldclass in every sense. [You lardass, pimply beer review snobs go ahead and name the 22 non-existent fruits, vegetables and spices you imagine here while I deal with reality. Hey moron beergod23! They wouldn't know a mango or star fruit in Rocs if it was shaped like Saint Peter and could do the rosary in nine languages with a Karaoke reverb!]. I will say that all the dark debris will put off an uninformed drinker for this one floats and flies as much as any brew I know.

Think of it like luscious, fresh orange juice pulp if you must - the parallel is close. (In fact, I've hired a 200-ton river dredge from up Norfolk way to clean my glassware tomorrow with the explicit order to retain and conserve every last bit of sediment for my future use). In the elite pours with the most balance, this stuff is loaded full of caramel sugar, augmented by a matchless Edenic orchard, and finishing with just enough EtOH to dry things out. Big malt, big fruit, and big alcohol - no better way to construct a triple anything. When it comes to our beloved, intoxicating molecule, this label wears it well. One could argue there is no finer dark ale in the world and if the famous "desert island" question came before me again and I had to make choices in Belgian terms...it would clearly be Rocs Triple Imperiale and Orval for the rest of my stranded, drunken, insane, volleyball-humping life. Alright...would one of you darn abbeys put a few pretty nuns wearing bingo-board bikinis on the label sometime? They could be handing out bananas and lollypops to feed to poor, perhaps. We helpless castaways just might need some spiritual inspiration out there...I'm going for a triple today.

Brewbase Fives



Rodenbach Grand Cru (Red Ale)

RATING: 5.0

If there is a beer worth \$24.00 a sixpack this is it. Color is dark red amber with high carbonation. Special sugars and 2 years fermentation in oak make for a luscious, wine-like quality. Flavor is fruity and acidic not unlike a Lambic. Alcohol is lower than most Belgian darkish ales - 4.1 weight/5.2 volume. This is undoubtedly one of the beer world's classics and must be tried as part of a basic education. Their yeast strain alone has 150 years of refinement. Superb!

St. Amand French Country Ale

RATING: 4.0

From the makers of the well-loved Castelain this rich red amber beer is corked and has superb carbonation. In the BIERE DE GARDE group of ales it begs comparison to Jenlain, Trois Monts, and Jade French in your own testing. It is fruity but surprising light in the overall manner of some American amber ales. We'd consider Jenlain (5 bottles) to be more tasty and refined but this is superior to Jade French (3 bottles). Jenlain has a longer finish.

Brewbase Fives



St. Paul Double

RATING: 5.0

Belgium

This is not St. Pauli Dark from Germany - just to get that potential confusion out of the way. Sterkens Meer of Belgium call this a BROWN TOP-FERMENTED ALE and use the phrase 'the beer paradise'. Their skinny bottle used for the Blond ale was unique. This fat bulbous 1 pt. 0.9 oz. thing is downright odd. You have copper foiled caps, glowing modern graphics label, and gold glitter imbedded in black glass! Oh yes. Is that worth collecting or what? Color is bright amber tinged a bit red. Head is large-bubbled with some lace. The flavor is one massive mystery. It meets the '1516 Law' so they can't use spices like the Blond. Steady sweetness meets a rather unique set of flavors that are hard to pin down. Reviewers suggested a 'sweet cherry but not lambic' flavor and a 'fruit drink surface quality adds malt and arrives at deep unique places.'

Brewbase Fives



St. Feuilien Special Brune Ale (Brown Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Belgium

Le Roeulx Brasserie Friart produces this twice fermented BELGIAN BROWN ALE which actually appears as a lightly hazed amber under a ivory head of immense size. It carries a pleasant sweet malt character of many German darks but yet keeps one foot in the less heavy amber world so as to be more refreshing. It is a very cultivated balance between richness and smooth, drinkable excellence; a state one rarely finds but is most apparent when confronted. If you need an ideal example of a superb BELGIAN BROWN or DARK ABBEY STYLE ALE there are none any finer. Some may prefer one or another French label but we would strongly recommend putting any of them (despite their impressive corks and elegant bottles) up against these 11.2 ounce wonders of the brewing world.

Brewbase Fives



Saint Sylvestre 3 Monts Golden Flanders

RATING: 5.0

France

Being French this is pronounced 'Trois Monts' (Three Mountains). Brasserie de St. Sylvestre has just 13 employees recreate this trappist-style ale. The huge corked and sculptured 750ml bottles sell for about \$0. The head is full and persistent over a pale amber fluid and medium fast 'lace'. It is creamy and well-flavored but cannot be called rich - a virtue since it goes well with rich cheese and meat. Flavor is distinct and it finishes pleasantly bitter.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Adams Stony Brook Red

RATING: 5.0

Boston, Mass./Hammondspport, New York

This big corked and wired brew from New England's grant dame comes in very dark bottles shaped like abrupt, pointy artillery shells. This 9% formula pours a dark brownish-amber, the head light cream, lasting, and with very long lace - 18 minutes and counting just now. This "unique Belgian style red with a hint of tart fruit and toasted oak character" from the oak barrel aging is the real deal. Flemish Red Ale was the inspiration. The

combination of faintly malty, sour flavors, tempered with some finishing sweetness, and BOTH bright fruit layers and dark background fruits is simply ingenious. In late 2012 one does not think of Sam Adams as inventive in the niche, barrel-aged genres of ale but they are getting there and this is their first expert leap in 2012 in my opinion. Panelists here (and I must tolerate other, worthless opinions by our rules which I foolishly wrote and codified years ago) said "sour glory...a liquid treatise loaded with fresh fruit and raisiny notes in a very pretty package...yum, yum...lets get more of the SA Barrel Room Collection" and "A stretch for Samuel Adams with their weary even if proven mass-market sixes...dudes like Rogue, Dogfish, Terrapin, and Sierra Nevada have forced SA to think outside the blue Boston Lager box...I'm glad they're not happy with the mega-cash, actually care about their legacy, and are not resting to retirement like so many other successful micros on the limp laurels and boring stuff with nothing new but graphics...this is some awesome brew, deep and complex...I do not usually like sour Euro-ales but this one is 5 bottles all the way from pop to last drop."

Terrapin Georgia Theatre Double Feature Belgian Dubbel Ale (Session Two)

RATING: 4.5

Athens, Georgia

Never seen a beer package with the phrase "Sears and Roebuck leases the ground floor". I guess you have to be there...Georgia that is...most particularly Athens that ultimate in cool southern college towns. Not a bad place from my one visit and a pretty fun one to live in if you have money or four years of college money. Found it bit a like Chapel Hill but with more size and perhaps a shade more class. Surely a finer football stadium and more fine old neighborhoods.

Anyhow, this is Session Two in this Belgian ale series, bright amber, head largish but not Belgian huge, the nose very sweet and authentic enough. 100% Belgian malt is employed as is the candy sugar, the later evident from first sip, though never sickly sweet and always a nice balance. A Trappist type yeast strain is also used. The flavor is quite radical for an Americanski copy of Belgian darks, surprising European in those malt notes - their efforts pays off big time here. The candy fades nicey into a much drier finish. ABV is not listed anywhere but I think it's medium. The gold foil (on a US Georgia micro!) and cardboard box surprised me but I guess if one is needing to charge \$13-20 this all helps build a "red carpet worthy" experience. It is suitably sticky in mouth feel for the Style, the ethanol more apparent as the 650ml disappears down the old Hatch hatch. The finish is sometimes puzzling, odd at times, very Old World in general, alcohol-malt blend like an medicine, and far more convincing than most American copies of the Belgian Dubbel. I'm not sure you could fool a Belgian drinker but you could fool most American beer experts and that alone demands a nice red carpet, fancy curtain, gold foil, and 4-color printed box.

Thomas Creek Kind Beer Belgian Style Red Ale

RATING: 3.5

Greenville, South Carolina

The dudes with the wood-grain six-pack holders came up with a Belgianoid ale that is unfortunately just 6.0% ABV. It pours with a fine, frothy head of ivory, a good classic color and not much of a nose to tempt one. It is weak in ABV but I would accept this for a mass market ale for other, true qualities. Spicing is mild, not full-bodied, good caramel notes at times but occasional odd in the finish, and deficient in the idiosyncratic notes of the original, Old World vessels. It falls short and the blower ABV could been have overcome with quality but they could not or did not.



Unibroue Maudite Ale on Lees

RATING: 5.0

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

Since 1992 this "strong red ale" has been bottle fermented to 8% ABV, pouring a a bright amber color and not the mahogany of the marketing people - stained or unstained. They make a nice use of coriander, hops, and other spices in a light-moderate way. "The Damned One", as the name translates, is hardly hellish or condemnable and Unibroue notes it was the "first strong beer to be distributed in Quebec grocery stores". They say it lasts up to 5 years in the bottle and becomes more port-like, complex, and rewarding, with time. I cannot say it impresses above their Don-De-Dieu which is spiced and yeasty-fruity to near perfection but I know some of you demand a rich malt backbone to your strong ales - or at least like that way of ending a flavor trip. "It must be served cool but not cold" and in that one sees a difference in the presentation of their red ales from their golden ones. If one can afford to do this and has the patience, try these Chambly gems at various temps and measure one that suits you. The flavor notes change like a bit a symphonic orchestra in a cheap hall vs. an acoustically-designed one. Temperature is both the friend and enemy of beer chemicals and you get some of what you need at different levels. Generally, you can do lower in temp the darker the brew but that is a generalization that does not fit all the labels on the market. I know red ales that kill when cold, die warmer and Pils which are finer with some warmth and are generic if too cold - many are the opposite. You must know your beer, be willing to experiment, have fun, and love this liquid God and good men have given us.

Unibroue Terrible Ale on Lees

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

The jokes are obvious except that in Cub-heck they probably pronounce it TEAR-EE-BLA; more a real terror than a disappointment. The brown 750mlers are wired and corked and a whopping 10.5% ABV, pouring out near-opaque brown with smallish, finely-textured head. The nose is fruity-malt. First sip is rather curious, sour in some notes, more sweet and malty in others. Settling down to less than chilled temps, the flavors spread and unify better. Malt flavors when too cold do not impress as well as they could. Belgian-style yeast flavors provide a fruit-filled and tart base on which other notes like licorice, assertive raisin, subdued fundamental malts, unclassified bright esters, and tart prune flow back and forth; not all of them revealed at once. In my analysis, this ale is not awful nor a fierce terror but interesting and complex enough to get one's attention. As I say so many times it's a like rather than a love connection; respect without adoration. This is almost a premium dark fruit juice with yeast and alcohol added as a secondary reason to spent this amount of cash. That might sound harsh but having had cranberry-prune "health juice" with vodka and assorted "boosts", some of these corked gems do not refract like some people think they do. Their Maudite label is a finer offering for me. If time and money supports you, I would surely experience all the Unibroues.

Unibroue Trois Pistoles Ale on Lees

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

The House of Chambly is one of the most classy and accomplished on all the North American continent. It has been popular for American breweries to make a belgian-style ale for more than two decades and some of the results are shaky at best; a few being spectacular and noted here on these pages. Chambly makes at least twelve very good Belgoid labels and there's not a mediocre one in the bunch. This offering pours rich amber-red, a rather dark shade, lace endless. The head is beige-cream and lasts well too. The appearance of generic fruit is obvious on first sip and at all the points of flavor from early to late. The finish is malty and moderate on the maltiness scale. The ABV is a traditional 9% and it's bottle fermented, even in the diminutive 12 oz. size. The official website describes the flaver as "wild fruit with an aftertaste of port". It lasts 8 years or more so can be put away to make even finer. It is certainly as smooth as a old port (and I have sampled my share of those as well) but the comparison is not valid in general. The blend of choco-malt and layered, diverse fruits is a nice accomplishment and thus is makes a good dessert wine on the order of a port.

Val-Dieu Abbey Brown (Brune) Ale

RATING: 4.5

Aubel, Belgium

Val-Dieu Abbey dates to the year 1216 and was founded by Cistercian monks. The peacefullness of their valley lead to farming and brewing in time. They withstood fires, destructions, and explusions during the Napoleonic Era. In 1997 they cranked up the long lost operations again using the old recipes. Today, all their labels beer the stamp of the Belgian Brewers Confederation, aptly named www.beerparadise.be

While I found their popular golden offerings to be less than interesting, this rich amber-brown product is very pleasant and enjoyable. The head is beige, rough, "jagged" as they call it, and enduring. The malt layering is very good, not worldclass, but inspired to be sure. At 8% it's a tad weaker than the 9% Triple and even their website admits it's more ruby than brown. (Would it kill a Belgian brewery to make a Ruby Ale and not falsely pigeon-hole everything!). The first sip is coffee, intensifying some into mocha with richer coffee yet, no sweetness, and virtually no bitterness. It's one of the smoothest dark beers that one could want and this without sacrificing satisfying malt values. Overall, Val-Dieu Brune is a pleasurable drink, well built in the flavor note department, solid and yet not stodgy, never heavy or crude, a bit like dark ruby velvet cloth against your skin.



Van Steenberg Gulden Draak

RATING: 5.0

Ertvelde, Belgium

The pretty white-enameled bottles catch the eye. It's probably because they reside next to Duvel and other premium baby-bottled Belgian classics in very select location. Four 11.2 ounces for \$16.95 (Feb. 2009) is a bit shocking. The 10.5% ABV is a mitigating factor - the ethanol might as well be from eight bottles. Besides this pretty, durable bottles can be reused, sometime, somewhere, when I get around to it for...something...or maybe. It ours a rich orangish-amber, the head rocky and beige-cream, the lace moderate. Sweet malt delights the nasal passages. From this point on, you'd gladly take out a second mortgage at 78.9% for just one more alabaster bottle of beneficent Golden Dragon. The Golden Dragon is named for a huge stature on the clock tower at Ghent, Belgium, dating from the year 1111. By the way, they're the same corporate conglomerate as the Texas-born Celis White Belgian-style ale and the popular Piraat label in mini or gigantic bottles. Secondary fermentation in either the bottles or keg make it richer than your average brown Belgian copy. Their website claims is as "so glowing" and we did some pours and found it very popular for aesthetics alone.

Tart complex malt appear in first notes, the mid point being rather sweet, and the finish a drier, high ethanol style. Coffee, toffee, and chocolate come to the foreground early. I found it nice that their website says "The English call this type of beer a Barley Wine". That's a frank admission and interesting point of convergence between two proud countries with rich, glorious brewing heritages. In 1998 the American Tasting Institute called it the "Best Beer in the World"; Schlitz and MGD are not going to accidentally slip into the that title so it's a true, very real honor. This brilliant brown, strong ale is a grand presentation of Belgian brewing arts, a time-honored recipe executed to exact precision. This beer has virtue and liveliness in both color and flavor. It glows and pops on the tongue, a malty indulgence of the highest order. It's a big beer, yet a very silken one, endlessly mellow and toothsome at once. In today's business models (okay: paradigms) we talk about products being customer-centered in their focus. Many beers are about "I'm a hip genius brewmaster, here's my brilliant recipe from my new shiny tanks (that Bank of America still owns along with my house and Corvette)...and if you're smart you'll adore it and beg for more". This is a stunning beer made quite simply for real ale lovers - not a pretentious thing we're supposed love if we're clever, informed, or rich but frankly can't bear with it's ragged, quirky, rustic bits. Gulden Draak gives us exquisite balance, refined sensibilities at every flavor stage, and luminosity in at least two ways. And frankly: they don't need you, I, or the ATI telling them so.

Here's a trick for surprising beer-innocent friends with more money and youth than taste: buy the big champagne-corked version of Gulden Draak in it's glowing white enamel and put on a table for a special occasion. They'll not only be shocked you brought a beer but the flavor will grasp their attention and joy like a golden clawed monster from mythology, swooping down to impress and inform. And should they dislike it...find a better class of friends.

Brewbase Fives



Weyerhauser QUAD Abbey-style Quadruple Ale

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Pennsylvania

This potent, 11.8% ale is nectar-like in color and mouthfeel, as aromatic as a hundred acres of prime orchard country in the autumn. An ale where you smell fruit esters both BEFORE and ABOVE the malt nose is sure to be heavenly in flavor too. It pours the color of apricot-cider (and yes it does exist), the lace very long, and the head small but creamy. To say this American copy of the four-barreled Belgian blunderbuss is well crafted is to say "they do some good work over at that thar car shop...them folks going by the name Rolls Royce". This brew is ambrosia in every sense of the word. The word "feast" comes to mind over and over. The high ABV will bother come not used to this elevated fortitude; though it is hidden as well as possible. Fruit, malt, and enough hops to please are skillfully woven in an modern Belgian-style tapestry of the utmost appeal and refinement. It is THE NEW STANDARD for US-made Belgians on the dark side and put's a few to old country to shame as my tastebuds "see" it. There's a dignity, depth, and joyous brilliance to this nectar; always ready to please and yet so hard to find on a regular basis. If any US beer is worth the hassle and cost of mailorder, this would be one that comes to mind. There is no more super Fruit-Malt Belgian-style ale on the planet. And it ages well...

ALE - BELGIAN STYLE - GOLDEN, BLONDE, WHITE OR WIT

I had thought about separating out the stronger, darker double and triples ales from the singles but I think the reviews work better in one group. There are things golden, strong, and yet not called "dobbel" that give as good a punch as a pricey triple in the darkest of shades. There are things dark in color, called doubles but weaker than the singles or regular labels of another brand.

I love turning on people to Belgian beer and order it at restaurants and bars at every possible occasion. It usually works out well. Okay...it's very expensive. More alcohol? How much? That's good. Then they taste some of mine and usually get one to be polite or three to really learn the style. It works out very well most times. It's usually a good conversation except for one young lady who exclaimed: "No way! You mean like THEIR PREACHERS over there...like make and sell beer?!?". That got me to thinking about doing such here in the Protestant Bible Belt. "That First Baptist Dobbel Brown is so smoooooth...you'll be immersed in heavenly clove and banana notes until Lord returns". "That's nothing man. You gotta try Reverend Thompson's Golden Trippel from over at the Halleluiah Praise Temple of God. It's called the 10% Tithe-inator and after one sip you'll be watching the lace until Wednesday service".

Give a nice Belgian ale instead of Champagne next time!

Andelot Cuvee Euphorique Blonde Belgian Ale

RATING: 4.5

Lochristi, Belgium

These big wired and corked bottles have simple and straight-forward labels but you notice the plasticized cork -

not exactly Trappist material of old. I love their series of cute names. Color is cloudy gold with hints of amber light, lace very long, and the head ambitious and white. Delicious fruit comes off the pour to mouth-watering excess. The notes are unified and yet complex, a mix of fruit-yeast and moderate spicing in the country of origin's style. Euphoria is any obvious adjective and it fits well enough. I am inclined to favor "nectar of the gods" or "liquid supernatural food of angels". Yeast swirls to excess and that cheers the top-fermented if not not pickled cockles of my heart. It is priced in my area below many of those Belgian labels with fancier painted labels and corks whose mom was an oak tree. If I dare call it a low-ethanol, bargain Belgian I'm sure to be misunderstood for quality is ample even if it's sweeter than I sometimes like. There is a nice spicy, earthiness to this ale. The optimal, most yeasty pour is best of course and one gets new notes and revelations as the bottle grows low. We would have enjoyed more than 6.5% to put us once and solidly under the table for night for it's a fine ale with which to end the day.

Anderson Valley Brother David's Triple Abbey Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Booneville, California

Not many beer makers can get away with saying "Open the bottle and greet the High Priestess...You are worthy" in ornate, ancient script and not come off looking pretentious or goofy. AV can and it's not just above the 10% ABV. The High Priestess of Fermentation has surely pleased them for this hazy golden-amber brew has a long-enduring even if very slow, relaxed lace. Flavor is reasonably sweet and the ethanol punch is reduced to a mere, welcome tap. Spicy is restrained (something many Amer-Belgian brews have yet to master) and all the other flavors solid in good amounts. At \$7.00 for a large bottle (no cork or hardware), it remains a good value against many of the real Belgian brews at the current exchange rate. Yet it is not a pinnacle grade abbey ale and so we move on neither enlightened nor displeased.

Anker Gouden Carolus Tripel

RATING: 4.5

Mechelen, Belgium

This bottle-fermented blonde is 9% ABV and light straw yellow with a foamy, domed, whitish head. The product is lager for two weeks. (by the way, am I the only one who finds the idea of "uncorking a lacy blonde" a slightly erotic theme? Aside from the yeast-laden thing, of course). It opens up faintly tart, soon a medley of moderate yeast fruit, malty backbone, and traditional spicing. The finish is dry, even alcohol-laden at times. I think coriander is the dominant spice but there's more citrus tartness in the later notes. Yeasts float generously in the bottle. The fruit notes are banana, generic citrus, faint ginger, dry pepper, and malted milk balls. What?! Malted milk balls count as a serving of fruit. I'm sure I read it some place. No!? Oh dear, I'm due for scurvy slump any second now. In general, the balance is well judged and either cold or slightly warmed, this is a sumptuous feast. The finish is occasionally too tart, sliding to ethanol awkwardness, and I'd have bumped up either the spices or banana another notch. I was surprised to read some online reviews of it being too sweet. My bottle (and I did suckle her long and carefully) would have benefited from a little more sweetness to temper the finish. Won a Gold in the 2002 World Beer Cup in the Triple category.

Augustijn Belgian Abbey Ale

RATING: 4.0

Ertvelde, Belgium

The thick, brown bottle with cork and painted image of a monk dipping into barrels is standard stuff and lovely comfort to prepare the tastebuds. I drooled all the way home. ABV is 8% and the lace variable but carbonated to the hilt when in one's mouth. Color is dark straw, quite nearly a gold, the head a solid cream, continuing long. It sips only faintly sweet, oddly metallic in others, Pils-like and grainy at times, a firm malt infrastructure. There are bright elements that are best described as "vanilla malt" and these are more simple and contrived than usual for something in this trim. Fruit is there, not a yeast-produced variation, more of slightly tart apple, giving a crispness. The finish is smooth, drier, and of mixed strength. Spice is slight and nothing can be named. These folks have been brewing something since 1295 and who am I, a brew-dazzy American in 2009, telling them they have a little problem cold or cool? I'll have to assume they like it very much this way and perhaps I should too? The malt intensifies on the buds with more sips and half way through the bottle, the odd notes slightly recede. I thought I was imaging some of the odd things until I got a friend to call it "musty" and noted the same Pilsoid flavors that contradicted the usual ale view of the world from that side of the world.

Avery Salvation Belgian-Style Golden Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boulder, Colorado

This is the pale counterpart the The (Amber) Reverend but in a slightly more modest 9% ABV trim. The label could have been foiled off Russian church iconography. They have deliberately made it "lighter" with apricot, peach, nutmeg, and cinnamon flavors instead of massive malts and dominant doses of joy. Belgian candy sugar is used once again. The head is twenty times as ambitious as The Reverend, the hue a light amber-gold, vaguely cloudy. It's almost a Peach Ale and not in the sense of a far more sour Peach Lambic by any means. Belgian yeast and Styrian Goldings hops are used, the later evident in the mixed finish that alternates among alcohol, fruit, malt, and spice/hops even when very cold. Warmer it's all over the map. The flavors here are terrific at times but are sometimes disappointingly twisted and something I can only express as "empty but tart". I should have known from their "lighter" and "delicate" description on the website we did not have a double turbo, overhead cam golden ale in this offering. Still it is not light nor always delicate and the ABV will stroke you again and again when think you figured out all the notes. "Soft and Champagne-like" says their material.

There is so much going on here and even at one temp you get lots of different flavors. Warm it up and get another twenty-six. Is Salvation just schizophrenically brilliant or a turgid ethanol soup with a recipe containing too many flavors and none of them balanced or always strong enough? There is something known as "complex" in the culinary and beverage worlds and there is also...unfreakin' comprehensible. Is the praise here just batty and over-a-cuckoo's nest or sincerely speaking-in-tongues of which I have no hope of understanding in any life? I like this brew but some might hate it. Give it your first go very, very cold and then let it sit and try it again. It's redeems one on the oppressive, humid August day if chilly as a glacier and used as the so-called Summer Refresher Beer; in this respect a German wheat with a slice of lemon will have nothing on this Boulder build and oft be a tragic second. I'm glad religious salvation is not so hard to figure out because this beer demands grace, works, study, temperature control, differential sip angles, consultation with twenty smitten friends, and regular renewal; and perhaps an international tribunal in Stockholm. If the bottle came with an 1132-page catechism hanging from cap, we all should be praising in a day or two. This is not an easy salvation nor a clear doctrine and perhaps that is what all the preachers and brewers need; for both want us thirsty, a bit confused, ready to shed bills, and coming back for more.

Ballast Point Wahoo Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.0

San Diego, California

Of late this brand has not gotten the highest nor expected reviews but I like their label art and approach as if that counts as trying. This one won a 2002 Gold Medal...at the LA County Fair. That speaks volumes and enough gigabytes to overload three Google server farms. Despite the name, your first sip gives you the coriander-curicao-orange peel vibe and the label actually confesses to it being a Belgian style Hefe-weizen using both wheat and oats. It's super yummy cold as a so-called "summer cooler" but is a tad too thin for me on the background flavors - any fool can get spices right! It pours extra cloudy so the yeast is at least ideal. This gold Belgianoid slice is a very crowded market from Buggenhout to Boulder - so one really needs to rise above everything, including the nice price point of just \$4.99 for 22 oz. They are competing against thing easily ten dollars more a bottle and on rare occasions now to \$20 more. Still - if cash and plastic run short, this is not a bad way to get the wit beer experience for a McDonalds value meal price

Big Boss Blanca Diablo

RATING: 4.0

Raleigh, North Carolina

Literally named "white devil" this is perhaps a back-handed homage to the great legendary label Duvel (aka "devil's beer") which is a standard along with Orval. The chrome and white label is a bit scary (yet good art) with a dude resembling Vincent Price in full-evil horns with something like The Joker's most haunting smile. It pours with traditional traits, a haze quite apparent, but at 4.3% it will remain a "weak states" copy of the real, true potent stuff. It is bright and cheerful with spices not upfront but coming into the mix later than many of this style, mid-strength there and nice formed with more spice than citrus I believe. They clearly spent time to refine this recipe and I'll accept the need for low ethanol in this backward country we call the US. Excluding all those counties is a hard for a new brewery to handle up front. For wicked pete's sake, a high

school kid can so easily nab a bottle of JD with ease or drink 26% mouthwash at 3 AM from the grocery store but they're worried about kids and widows sipping real beer with more than 5% ABV!



Blanche de Bruges

RATING: 5.0

Bruges, Belgium

This unfiltered and bottle-conditioned BELGIAN WHITE is from a 300 hundred year tradition of the Vanneste family of Bruges. Color is very pale yellow and its overflows with carbonation. Flavor is distinct from BELGIAN WHITE by Huyghe which has more apricot than the apple and citrus notes found here. It is very smooth and malty in the finish. Unlike some Belgian beers it is not overly potent and is compatible with a full dinner. A real treasure. It was our computer database's BEST BELGIAN WHITE IN 1993.

Blue Moon Abbey Ale

RATING: 4.0

Denver CO/Utica NY

This American made copy of an ancient Belgian style comes off frankly as an Americanized beer; but not one lacking in all quality. It is clear light to medium amber with an tall, enduring head of ivory color. It is low alcohol compared to the real thing (the first noticeable difference). The rich malt is there but seems single dimensional. It is quite smooth and not unlike a decent German dark in basic theme. The price can be very good at times but if not the real Belgian thing we must judge it simply as an other amber ale. In that arena too it is not the best one could get. It will not disappoint the average enthusiast but if you've had a dozen good ambers in your day you will know enough to grab something else. I've asked for this label in many art deco-drench restaurants and at many oaky-bronzy bar thingies because I could not bear another Sam Adams and everything else on offer was...crap. I never had a bad night and once in awhile I got to explain to some nice person why cloudy beer is a good thing.

Blue Moon Belgian White

RATING: 3.5

Denver CO/Utica NY

Celis of Texas has earned some high marks for their very believable copies of ancient Belgian beers. Other US microbreweries are trying the styles as well. This one is wheat-based (not unlike Hoegaarden above) and they admit to careful spicing with coriander and orange peel. Color is hazy light orange (more amber than many whites from Belgium) and the head is the familiar big fine foamy kind. Lace is obvious but perhaps more limited than traditional. A big citrus 'nose' hits you but unfortunately the complex and mysterious flavor is missing. One reviewer said 'more of a formula attempt than true mastery' while to another 'VERY pleasant even without the big alcohol smack... not authentic...barely overspiced...could be a new AMERICAN WHITE class.'

Bockor Bellgems Bruin (Red Ale)

RATING: 4.5

West Flanders, Belgium

Despite the word bruin (Latin for brown) it is called a 'West Flanders Red Ale'. Color is reddish-brown with a large creamy-brown head and 5.5% alcohol by volume. The tartness is apparent in the nose and one gets a very good introduction to tart-malty ale from the very first sip. This extreme flavor is perhaps not for everyone and in fact it even borders on the acidity of Berliner Weisse. It is clearly a well-crafted beer and is unique even among brown or red Belgian ales on American shelves.

Bosteels Tripel Karmeliet

RATING: 4.5

Buggenhout, Belgium

Being an ignorant, silly American, I figured karmeliet meant this ale was going to taste wonderfully of caramel; maybe even triple layered caramel. Yum! Actually this 3-grain, triple-strength blonde ale is from a 17th century recipe used by Carmelite monks from Dendermonde. Oats, barley, and wheat are the lovely grains of choice. The label proclaims "robust" and yet this is a pale-as-ale-can-get presentation. Spicing is apparent, moderate-full strength, the head giant and tinged like old golden-ivory. ABV is 8.4% which is low-average for a triple. I actually like ABV below 9% for a golden ale for it allows more flavors to stroke or club me for the ethanol does. I am certain I can taste the difference between this 3-grain recipe and that of some other triples which use only barley or the equally fine barley-wheat blend. The backbone, foundational flavors here are very solid, strong, and yes...a bit robust like a C cup plus a Wonderbra. (beep...sorry for the sexist analogy again...this is a recording). I do really like this beer but it does not amaze or slay me like Duvel or some other 5-bottle rated classics. Perhaps it is the spicy a touch too high for me or even the occasional rough finish note - it is most certainly not the solid grainy framework.

Br. Bavik Petrus Aged Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

Bavikhove, Belgium

As a 7.3% ale in 11.2 ounces from Belgian, we have nothing unusual. The 20 months of oak-aging is a bit special. This is not an American Pale Ale but a classic Belgian wit though in a sour style. It pours crystal clear, bright yellow, close to Pils pale, with a near white head of moderate size and long duration. The sour predominates the malt and hops and if one likes a sour ale, you need to judge it on those merits alone. It is far from accessible to even the average American beer lover who probably thought the pale ale name with promise of hops and malt meant something else. As sour ales go, it is above average but the lack of underlying malt and hops in the presentation bothers me. I would have more malts in the mix and still they could have been true. I doubt they will care what some American idiot named Hatch says about them. Still, if one's product is to be surprising and different from expectations, it must also be likable, complex, and illuminating. Surprise goes only a small way here and with a number of good sour Gueuze and other lambics available in in the US, the comparison will continue to the unfavorable.



Brooklyn Sorachi Ace Ale

RATING: 5.0

Brooklyn, New York

This is by far the most fancy Brooklyn product I've seen - thick foiled labels, wire and cork, thick brown glass, and a \$13.19 pricetag (September 2010). Their special Belgian yeast is 100% refermented in the bottle for a modest 7.6% but the carbonation is wildly enthusiastic and the pale yellow haze convincing. Spicing is mild, effective enough, waning in the finish to stronger citrus notes which I found simply enticing if more juicy than the Old World standard. It is named for the rare Sorachi Ace hop which with the ample lemon zest makes for a very notable product; far above even their usual standard. This highly sophisticated ale is spicy and uniquely flavored in the hops element, extra yummy for the added lemon zip, and the rest is just a very good copy of European excellence. I hope they make more of these offerings and I'd rather one of these \$13 bottle than two sixpacks of most anything else. Home run for Brooklyn! Make that a Grand Slam announced with a Belgian accent.

The Bruery Saison de Lente Belgian Style Saison Ale

RATING: 4.5

Orange County, California

Coming near the season of Spring, Easter and Lent and all those fun times, is this very fun golden Belgian style ale. It's just 6.5% ABV and so a bit weaker than the classics. Their goals are "clean and hoppy" but with some "earthy, wild notes". It can be aged up to two years and the bottles are subtly brown-tinged and stoutly built. It pours a rich amber-gold, cloudy as any day in Seattle, and with a jagged eggshell head. Did I say eggshell? Slap me somebody...I meant off white.

The first notes are stiff, spiced to a degree of sinfulness and hopped to the point of a faux-alcohol nip - I really thought the later could be simulated and this is nice example of confusing an herb with the big, bad beloved molecule sought by billions and taxed by politicians. This ale has a nice fruit subtext but hops is the main plot at all times and it coats and envelops the fruit in time. As for their "earthy" bits, we find them too and they are nice in form of mixed spice acids and esters. This is an ale not to be forgotten.

The Bruery White Orchard Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Placentia, California

Th but to be missed during the days of Lent which frankly many of my readers will not know nor appreciate or care for. For those of you who Lent and re-Lent, three bottles of this, a MILFy brunette flight attendant with years of onboarding experience, and a last minute Priceline.com jacuzzi suite near Terminal C your celebration will be memorable. The old lady will do after a trip to Vic's Secret (go peach lace babydoll this time) as will a cherubic Novitiate needing one last lesson in giving up and not going without and things to come.

The Bruery Trade Winds Tripel Belgian-style Ale Brewed with Rice and Thai Basil

RATING: 4.0

Placentia, California

Rice is usually not a premium beer ingredient, a cheap grain to made cheap beers more profitable yet so beer execs can ride in long, grand, leather-clad limos and get touched by at least three prostitutes before getting to the meeting. That's called a Tripel in the general American beer boss world. Extra points if you go blonde, brunette, and red in one ride. Rice makes a brew smooth for it's not roasted, toasted, or strong in flavor - check out rice wine for natural flavors. These fat 750's pour a lazy, hazy mid yellow, the head foamy, substantial, and just off white. Choc-tee! is cheers in Thai and their basil does wonders for this beer as the rice appears to mellow it.

I am not willing to pay big sums for an endless series of exotic herbal beers in the next decades, each one using a more exotic species or chemotype cultivar than the one before. I can do this at home with a cheap sixpack of golden lager anytime I want - lemon thyme and rosemary over Bud Light. Yes, any moron with a spice rack or pot of herb can do as well as the basic theory. Is brewing in the herb any better than spicing it later? Kudos to the brewmasters for using the basil in a way similar to traditional Belgian spicing, not too over the top, restrained, and in some ways echoing the original style - a good homage in fact. What is lacks is perhaps a second spicing or herb to give complexity. The classics have 3-5 botanical additives and by some reports even

more. A Single Herb Ale is not the same as Single Malt Scotch by any means! The yeast ale base is somewhat wanting but only a little and I think the 8.1% should be at least a 10% offering to make this stuff pop and please. I suspect the Thai basil is really a fun head game because if one was not told (do this in your next tasting), I think 99% of beer snobs would never guess the underlying botany - especially as they've studied everything about hops and nothing of other herbs. Good game but I rate this on enjoyability and not on the trick.

The Bruery White Orchard Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Placentia, California

The big, brown, capped bottles are just \$8 a piece for 750ml. The ABV is 5.7% and the color very pale. The head is large at first, made of dispersed bubbles, and short-lived. It has the usual "orchard" of spices but a hint of lavender and some added wheat. That lavender thing seems to be real and that brings about a new meaning to a "floral ale". Actually this herb works for me. It is supremely refreshing, not potent or alluring for complexity but neither simple or weak. It is curious brew...er bru...overall and one I recommend for a group, blind tasting. See if they can determine what flavor note is new! Nice value even if less than traditional.

Bruges Staffe

RATING: 3.5

Bruges, Belgium

This Belgian ale comes in 750ml corked bottles that undergo a second fermentation once corked. This is a BELGIAN WHITE ALE and not a brown or amber as are many others. Quite frankly the depth of flavor does seem to justify the \$7.00 price more than one time. It does have one of the most lovely labels for artwork so collectors of same do take note. Like most Belgian ales the head is deep and aromatic. Flavors span yeast and earthy malts but the finish is very simple and 'off'. It lacks the sophistication typical of the country and this price range. Reviewers reported 'lovely hazy-cloudy yeast flavors but low on the depth and alcohol scales...give me a Duval' and 'more subtle than I would expect for the city of origin'. See De Halve Man Straffre Hendrik for a newer version of this product - we think.

La Caracole Troublette Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.5

Flamignoul, Belgium

Despite what some stores show, the brewer is Caracole and not Troublette. It's 5.5% ABV and for the steady price approaching \$9-10, that's a bit weak. The bottle swirls with fine yeast like a sound hefe-weizen. It pours cloudy, pale yellow with a very brisk lace, and near white head of large bubbles, constantly reinvigorating by the ascending carbonation. It is grainy but not so wheaty as many German products. There is faint spicing which normally differentiates the Belgian wheats from the German ones. The odd label with the snail touching the water and making the word "Troublette" ripple (an effect that three of these bottles would produce anyhow) and the snail-helmeted guy are very distinct among modern beer offerings. They use 100% organic malt and of the Pilsener sort. Hops are Styrian and Saaz.

It gained fame in the US with a 2002 Gold in the WBC. The fruits intensify with some yeasty pours and one gets very nice fruits at times, mangoes, fresh sweet apple variety, and faint pineapple I figure, later more citrus tartness. There are sweet places and it ends more sweet than dry; perhaps a 6-7 on 10 scale of sugar. The spice is too faint to identify but it there in more than the elements which come from the hops. The shift between tart orange, lemon, and sugar is remarkably well done and the spicing supports this rather than being equal to the main notes; kind of like faint background percussion and harp play. It is best served at about 42 deg. F. they recommend; and I agree. I'd have boosted the ABV without sacrificing it's comforting, mellow sweetness, also raised the spices, and tuned up the fruit with a tad more complexity. There's also a solid place for more earthy wheat flavor and I'm not sure why Belgian wheats are not as wheaty as could be. It's a very fine beer but most of us in larger cities have dozens of large-bottled gold beers to choose from.

Celis Golden

RATING: 4.0

Austin, Texas

Getting a Belgian ale from Austin is in theory about as risky as ordering barbeque cooked and pulled in Bruges,

Belgium. Using Belgian methods and nothing but water, hops, and barley malt the brewmasters in Austin have mostly succeeded in creating a Belgian effect. The color is exceedingly light straw yellow and is closer to a Belgian White than our idea of golden. The carbonation is large and long. The flavor is not rich and nectared like a Belgian white or gold. The alcohol content is so much lower and adds nothing to the aromatic quality. This Celis Golden is less enjoyable than the Celis Pale Bock but is a worthwhile experience if you think you tried every style made in the States. This one does not have the flavor or aroma of a light-colored Belgian brew but is at least as entertaining as many imported Pils. Light and refreshing if very cold.

Brewbase Fives



Celis Pale Bock

RATING: 5.0

Austin, Texas

Belgian style beer out of Austin Texas? Next thing you know they'll be raising cattle in Argentina for hamburgers sold in Texas. Both are true. While this label has won some nice awards (tho not many Belgians enter US festivals) the diehard beer elite have not unanimously approved. If you give an unmarked glass to a skilled taster they'll guess France or Belgium. This is very un-American and surely not Lone Star. The lovely label with copper margins has an aura of quality and craftsmanship. Perhaps this is to Belgian beer what Lexus is to Mercedes - mostly equal but in a few details better OR worse yet still lacking that thing called prestige. Now that California can make a decent Champagne it is time the secret Belgian art to come under assault.

Brewbase Fives



Celis White

RATING: 5.0

Austin, Texas

Celis of Austin TX makes 4 beers (Pale Bock, White, Golden, and Grand Cru) that use natural ingredients to recreate a Belgian style. Having only tested the first three we find this white to be the most convincing and appealing. While the high alcohol bite of a true Belgian white is missing, a pure and mysterious fruitiness is obvious. Experts in beer (as with wine) will shout for hours as to the right adjectives. Famous Belgian whites are hard to describe with any real precision. This effective recreation suggests sweet pear juice with a large bubbly head. It is more cloudy than many German wheats (warm or cold) and yes, that is a good sign. We have never seen a cloudy beer that was not a thrill. This is supreme proof that America can brew.

Cisco Grey Lady Ale

RATING: 3.5

Nantucket, Mass.

Named for the foggy, greyish island on which it is brewed this formula is designed to be "a complex, earthy nose with sophisticated notes". The old-timey lettering (like a colonial era printing press) gets your attention but so does the mermaid with an exposed breast on a teal blue sea. The pour is faintly cloudy (not nearly as much as Port City Optimal trialed at the same time) and the head is classic, whitish, and lasting. Virtually no lace. The

spicing is a bit off traditional and seems to favor the coriander-mint side of things. It would be worthwhile on a hot Nantucket day and appealing but there are dozens of better choices from the US if one gets a pick. I could see it gathering a following for those who prefer this more minty type of spicing and wishing to bring up the topic of the revealing mermaid at a bar. Both might be risky.

Clipper City Heavy Seas Red Sky At Night Saison Ale

RATING: 4.5

Baltimore, Maryland

Pouring rich gold with a yeasty haze, this is one of the finer copies of the Belgian article from American shores. The 7.5% ABV, imported yeast, candi sugar, and wheat shows in the results for it is endlessly flavorful, spiced correctly, and as refreshing as the real thing. It is delicate where it needs to be and rich where the style calls for it. Most North America copies are too weak in ethanol or flavors or strong in spice to be as good as Red Sky. This is not to be missed, even by those authenticists who only drink the French and Belgian versions.

Coronado Orange Avenue Wit

RATING: 2.5

Coronado, California

The western US label flows from a bottle ladden with luscious sediment and 5.2% in ABV. It's normal for aesthetics, favoring the weaker, straw-colored side of colors. In this age when everyone - and I mean your three crazy neighbors brewing Bud imitations in their garage - has a Belgian style wit, this one misses the mark. The spicy seems to be missing, the yeast flavors hidden under a strange, subdued set of malt notes that suggest something went very, very wrong. It is not refreshing - the minimal, polite comment for a mediocre wit copy - and indeed gets offensive at times with off, metallic notes in the finish and a generally disagreeable effect enough to put one off fancy new labels forever. There are 300 friends with tanks in Calie that can visit to get something better if they care. In the meantime, don't abuse your tastebuds and drink pretty much anything else yellow and foamy. Big miss.

S.A. Damm Estrella Damm Inedit Trippel

RATING: 4.0

Barcelona, Spain

These 750ml bottles adorned with only a big gold star at the base are labeled "malt beverage brewed with spices" - but only having that classification for unknown reasons. ABV is just 4.8%. It has a Belgian witbier aspect but is more clean and fruity, almost like a hybrid to a Pils - a blend experiment of two styles I know well. Their website is slick, loaded with YouTube videos and "tasting notes". It took two years to develop this style, many recipes tried and disgarded. The "high intensity and aromatic complexity" is somewhat there - more Pils fruity and clear - no haze or yeast cloudiness at all. "Long aftertaste and pleasant memory" - semi-so. The name "inedit" means new, original, and even unpublished. It is something of a departure, not unlike some witbier-Pils blends I have tried. Spicing is very mild and far down that spectrum from the Orval and Duvel standard, for example. The clear, clean, fruity flavor seems to be what they wanted. Malt is there, more than a good Pils but overall something like a fruity Pils in my final analysis. "A bit of a puzzler at first" wrote James here, "...have they invented Spanish witbier?". That would be Cerveza Blanca we suppose. Another reviewer here declared "very crisp, not good graded as Belgian gold...too malty and with good yeast fruit but only barely cloudy".

AWARD OF MERIT 2012



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



De Dolle Bos Keun Speciaal Paasbier

RATING: 5.0 (Award of Merit 2012)

Belgium

The pour is dark yellow to mid-gold, the head fluffy, very aggressive, with small off-white bubbles and lace lasting for minutes. There a crazy brown, buck-toothed rabbit-like cartoon beast on the label for no apparent reason - other than strange fun. But on more research we found that Boskeun means "rabbit of the wood" and so our happy, hoppy, hopping, furry ale-swilling friend now makes more sense - maybe. Paasbier means Easter beer and it showed up in Raleigh NC in March 2012. It is spiced for certain, lightly at first, very somber-malty and cloyingly rich for such a pale-colored beer. The ethanol club is evident from at least the second sip onward. You might close your eyes and imagine it a brown, double Belgian. We are told it was one of the first Easter or Paasbiers from Belgium, Slaghmuylder's Paasbier (though just 6% ABV and also more lager-based) being the first of the style to get marketed by most reports. The thick, rich nature comes in part from cane sugar used for bottle refermentation. Pale malts and Golding hops are used.

The nose is of quality Belgian yeast, floral notes (not much from hops) and rich malts with honey and grain come next. Fruit (of yeast not hops) is dreamy, modest to medium bore, more bold in the occasional passage, and something of a pome (apple-pear) blend, balanced to absolute estery perfection. The balance of sweetness, quality sugars, fruit, and grainy-malt density notes is remarkable. The lingering finish is that of mild spice, pepper to some, but I your editor do not find anything so overt as pepper. The head has high-overflow risk so be careful at all temps. Not one drop of this glorious fluid should be missed. Boskeun is a truly remarkable, slow-sipping beer, made by saavy brewmasters, providing a virtuoso performance like nothing else. Amazing PLUS unique are requirements for our Award of Merit and Bos Keun hopped away with facile speed and furry finesse toward that certain conclusion. There are few brews of any style and origin as satisfying as Boskeun. Some of you may grill me for saying this brew might be or should be an apocalyptic experience. I will emphatically say that Boskeun will fall somewhere between highly informative and orgasmically transforming in your pilgrimage to comprehend all that is beer. I would drive for hours to obtain a bottle or chase down one short sip. I would crawl down a dozen rabbit holes and fight off rabid beasts and venomous snakes below the Belgian woodland soils if I knew they had some. Buy it online if you must. Get one or ten in all cases as if your very beer life and future expertise requires it - for it surely does.

De Dolle Dulle Teve 10 Trippel

RATING: 4.5

Belgium

This even 10-percenter has a head so large it wants to take over it's glass and two nearby. Beware of opening it at room temp or anywhere without a glass ready to hold the full volume. The lace is endlessssssssssssssss.

Color is a good, mid yellow, bright enough. The 11.2 ounce offering is pricey at \$5 bucks (August 2008) and yet we expect such investments from other there. The label may be the ugliest thing out of Belgium, a goofy long-chinned dude with purple hair and lightning bolts coming out of his golden ears. I'm guessing some kin of the owner must have designed it for such would not survive any marketing department on earth. I'm informed of late the purple and gold dude may in fact be a ugly girl for the label means "mad bitch". It is potent for the alcohol, spicy is moderate at times but the finish a bitterish affair from more spice and hops in colusion. I like it alot and for a trippel it's about what we want in that style. I deducted one half point for it's failure to be much better or really any better than other trippels; 5 bottles need to grab me for their superiority and this is just another down-the-line, highly competant label.



Dentergems Wit

RATING: 5.0

Dentergem

A BELGIAN WHITE ALE is a world apart from what most Americans understand as beer. Color is light straw yellow and the carbonation is swift. The highly aromatic first appeal is that of mint. Flavor at first rush is a mixture of herbs, malt, and mint and is distinct from other WITBIERS like Duvel or Blanche de Bruges. The flavor depth is sophisticated but it is not for one who thrives on rich hops or heavy malt. At about \$5 per 750ml it costs about what a thrifty CA or NY Sherry costs and is a better education. We wouldn't drink it every week but now and then its quality will impress. Unlike Duvel it is light enough to consume in quantity.

Dogfish Head Pangaea

RATING: 4.5

Milton, Delaware

This big-bottled, 7% ABV offering from one of the country's promising, upstart breweries is a tribute to Pangaea, the supercontinent that once united most of the world into one landmass; "One happy world" or "one hoppy world" if you will. Ingredients from the various continents today are used. There's crystalline ginger from Australia, Antarctica water (why bother except be a bit too cute and clever?), basmati rice frm Asia (is rice good in a premium ale?), and so on. I assume North America and Europe are represented by their usual good brew stuff. It pour dark gold, head long, and you quickly come to think of it as a ginger tea, faintly spiced for a moderate gingerbread fantasy. I'm convinced (as are others I consulted) that nutmeg and coriander elements are in the mix. It is said to age well. There is a worldwide symphony of flavors but I'm afraid they have two conductors; one liking a ginger fast pace and other a slower more Belgian theme. It's a very fine product, creative really, even if too drenched in United Nations-flag flying, one-world hype for me. Thank god the UN didn't decide on the recipe because this busy brew already with 13 flavors would be required to have another 196 to keep everyone happy, fed, economically stimulated, empowered, and quiet. It does have some oddly blended, watery moments, the occasional one more fragmented than others; which I think stems from the "everything but the kitchen sink" school of brewing. Maybe they should have stuck with East Pangaea and offered us West Pangaea's treasures next year.

Dupont 'Saison Dupont' Ale

RATING: 4.0

Hainaut, Belgium

This 'Belgian farmhouse ale' from Hainaut is champagne-bottled and is dark cloudy golden bordering on light amber. Carbonation and head last for ages. It remarkably complex and overall wonderful. At first experience it reminds one a bit of a great Hefe-Weizen but is quite dry. It is unfiltered and bottle conditioned and is the best

known example in the US of the Saison or Wallonian Style. It is a semi-thrilling treat and a nice alternative to sparkling wines or the golden German stuff. Nice but not with the true greats. Dare I say it? Some American brewers do better here. Dupont's famous yeast is used by other brewers or often something very similar.

Dupont Avec les Bons Voeux Saison Ale (2008)

RATING: 4.5

Tourpes, Belgium

This is a special "holiday" ale designed to be "redolently aromatic, rich, and velvety" and is often enjoyed to celebrate the coming New Year. This 2008 offering comes in yellow label with an orange-toned drawing of bottle racks and black lettering. Previous years have included a blue background to the label. It is super-floaty in the yeast department, the bottle just a tornadic cone of the stuff. The lace lasts forever and the frothy, coarsely-bubbled head is near white. It uncorks a bit skunky but second wiff is of firm spiced ale in that nation's familiar style. Very nice tart, citrus notes come up quickly and the finish of this comes from the 9.5% ABV, faint yeast fruitfulness, and clove. The spice and the hops intensify the longer you sip it; to the point one of my trusted would-be-beer-guru friends felt it was overspiced. The balance of tartness, sweetness, and a dryish finish are well judged at midpoint but too tart for me in the final campaign. I consider a "holiday ale", a special seasonal in fact, to be justified in going the extra mile in any department as long as it does not offend or make one cringe. This profusion of good botanical stuff from Belgium's spice drawer is not only welcome but expected; though not everyone will want to go this far. It's not an everyday find and as a special seasonal, you want to have some extravagantness now and then. A found the endless drumbeat of the citrus tartness a bit wearing in some finishes and wish they'd sweetened it up just a bit more; orange is after all best when more sweet than tart. Perhaps a warmish malt framework would have given the finish an even more complex edge. Still it's dangerously drinkable; a richly-flavored potion with which to restore the health (yeast) and spirits (spices). I'll be sampling every year I can get in the future.



Duvel

RATING: 5.0

Belgium

Moortgat Brewery of Belgium produces this true classic. It pours cloudy light yellow and is nearly all head - the label warns: pour slowly. Lace is perfect. Flavor is unbelievably full and nectar-like but not with the apricot theme of Orval. The potent alcohol content (6.7 weight/8.2 volume) is immediately apparent and gives it a fine liquor quality. Duvel means Devil - fitting for a potent seduction. Pay what you must and unlike those pretentious Champagne labels this one will never, ever let you down. Drink much, savor over time, and consume wisely. This is one of the elite beverages in the ale world and it should not be missed except for a day

or two to try other inferior products.

Duvel Tripel Hop Special Edition Ale

RATING: 4.0

Belgium

My short conversation with the knowledgeable cashier at Total Wine ended by comparing this \$18.99 (November 2010) bottle of Duvel with a special edition of a Rolls Royce. The regular thing is amazing enough but can one go higher and more special? Saaz, Styrian Golding, and Amarillo hops are added to a cloudy Belgian ale base flavor profile though the predominate spice is....you guessed. There's even a cute little booklet with a red string to explain their dry hopping and the value of each hop variety. The bottle is made to look like a primo Champagne more so than most - the foil as thick as anything in the beer world and the label as detailed and ornate with one of the those appellation-type charts. It is only 9.5% ABV but I find that a decent compromise for what is intended here. The head has some of the finest-textured bubbles I know too and they last forever. The ethanol is apparent to me and one knowledgeable reviewer here considered that a cause for minor deductions. Having blended Duvel and other real super-Belgians with hoppy beers (mainly worldclass IPAs), I know a bit about what a hopped-up Belgian gold could, would, or should be - at least in order to impress me. I like the mild hopping here, though it needs to be turned up 1-3 notches, but it's drowned out by the ethanol and fruity yeast in many flavor passages - and to me a "flavor passage" is a group or run of taste notes which form a significant experience. I would forgive all that if the finish thumped hard and fast with a sprucey, piney, or nippy theme - it does not so don't wait too long for it. The mix of the three legendary hops is a good idea, principled and brilliant on paper, but this execution is in the final analysis not impressive, really "special", or different even. If your concept is vastly better than your delivery AND I'm paying 20 bucks with tax, you've either 1) failed for want of any ability, 2) decided to become a con artist with image over substance, or 3) are a notable genius group having an off day for no clear reason. I love Duvel so will put them down as the third choice. Perhaps this is a case of a grand, old name being timid and not going all crazy, imperial, bold, and barleywinish on territory where American microbrewers no longer fear to tread. Reviewers I trust told me "as Larry said, not 'special' in any way really...except for presentation and pricetag...got some mixed notes that jumped from yeast to hops to spice and I did not enjoy all that jumping back and forth" and "great idea but they need to go back to their drawing board or tanks...way damn overpriced and I'm a big fan of regular Duvel...maybe they need fresh, stronger hops?". My final thought is this was an opportunity missed and I'll think twice before buying more than one of their next special edition. I buy one of everything and more of stuff promising. Do pardon the crude image but this bond was more dry humping than dry hopping.

Epic BRAINLESS® Belgian-style Golden Ale (Elevated Series)

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

The Epic record so far is their top tier Exponential Series are sure hits, most awesome. This second tier Elevated Series are a mixed lot, average to decent, some forgettable. The pour here is classic in color, head, nose, and first sip Belgianoid note. We lit up the bottle for a few minutes with our usual kit of LED flashlights and close approaches to fluorescent tubes. Promising clumps and particles of many sizes are seen a floatin' in what the Belgians might call in Dutch the Meer van Gist or Lake of Yeast. So is this copy of the style without brains and intelligence or the classic "no brainer", very wise choice?!

First sip is overtly of the right spices, perhaps a tad too exuberant by some reviewers here. The 8.5% is respectable but perhaps not enough. Release #22 provided our sample for the record. Our purchase from Total Wine on 1.29.2012 shows BRAINLESS TM but their website accessed this same day shows a registered (R) trademark for BRAINLESS. Later pours or those carefully contrived are of course more yeasty and luxuriant; some of them lusciously fruity and spicy in a good hybrid of those flavor themes. The spice:yeast:ethanol balance is finespun in these more hazy, clump-loaded pours. Their website says the hops are often cultivar/strain Noble - but Release #22 employs Premiant, Tettang and Saaz - not traditional but they work. They lowered the Tettang hops in #22 to "let the sweetness of the light candy sugar and over-ripened fruit shine through". Malts are Premium Weyermann Pilsner, Matis Otter, Briess Carapils, flaked oats, and some Briess White Wheat. On the more vintage side of their recipe they boil up rock candy sugars and yeast of Belgian origin. "Deceivingly drinkable.... some liken these ales to Devil sneaking up on you" is their claim and we agree. Their capitalized Devil reference is a clear attribution towards Duval (which like Orval) are two legendary, unimpeachable, Old World benchmarks for this style. Isolated for concentration, the more yeasty pours are super-fruity and with a

nice spicy tang of a better balance still. A very fine copy and quite affordable. Hit it with a shot of elite vodka if you lust for the ABV up to 10 or 12.



Epic Elder Brett Saison-Brett Golden Ale (Exponential Series)

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

Only of a few thousand bottles are said to exist of this, perhaps only for Release #1, but it is scarce regardless of the number of releases. Saison-like ales are not common but they are coming to almost ever microbrewery near you. The exponentially nerdy Elder here is named Brett A. Nomyces and he smells of fungus, old socks, smoke, and taint. Then they put him in wine barrel and he came out tasty and Tide fresh. The yeast *Brettanomyces* is used to both wine more complex and avoided for lack of metallic, "Bretty" flavors. In beer, it makes an ale more sour, often with notes of earth (or barnyard hay), spices, smoke, medicine, or ripe cheese - all done with care so things don't go too wrong. Using Brett is like carving a tall statue of wood with a chainsaw - extreme care and experience are needed. This formula is aged in wine barrels for a tempered, mellow sour taste which suits our American tastebuds to perfection - more is less when it comes to sour ales which often feel like you've blended in a case of sour candies with ordinary ale. Elder Brett pours hazy gold with a lasting head in near white; a very lovely presentation in all light conditions. Reviewers here noted "barrel aging is just what the style needed...this one is approachable without sacrificing complexity...highest marks in every category" and "Saisons to me have been like stinky French cheese...I am told to admire them and must in certain company but at home not so much. This one I can enjoy at home with apologies to no one...no cringing either!". Americans do not always do European things better and sometimes we ruin and mimic them with painful glimpses. This Barrel-aged Saison approach could easily catch on worldwide and perhaps should. The Belgians and French should be heard on the the whole Brett + Barrel thing. They have nothing to fear but praise.

Flying Dog Kerberos Tripel

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

First of all, Mega-kudos to FD for offering this gem in an affordable 4-pack called Canis Major which included four of it's best, strong beers. I love this label. There's a green, multi-headed, dragon like dog with long fire-like tongues seeming to conquer a nearby small abbey. It turns out to be a hellhound, surely not the friend of abbey business but perhaps useful in warnings to the wayward. "Greetings, oh god of the barstool. In your hand resides might's Kerberos Tripel...". I Googled Kerberos and found out it's a network authentication protocol and according to one Google Image a three-headed dog who loves kissing naked white chicks. Now I get it. Tripel, three-headed. Snarling, strong alcohol. Kissing naked chicks, three or four full sips at most.

The 3x juice is 8.5%, medium gold, barely cloudy, and with a lace as limitless as the known galaxy. Head is big, near white. It is brighter, tarter, and nipier at first sip than any golden triples, a very alive and potent presentation. There is low spicing, faint coriander I suspect, perhaps more peel from a hesperidium, and lots of love in the execution. There are formulaic recipe Belgian products out the ying-yang these days and some of them in six-packs for a buck more than junk pale ale. Flying Dog clearly cared here and it shows. This is an admirable copy, the nearly perfect "Rollex" fake, always pleasing, a full triple to be sure but very easy on the tastebuds. I would have turned the spice up a notch and worked off one or two odd notes in the finish; the later being a variable hopping that is either a wrong variety or too many flowers for my taste. It is very near.

Flying Dog Woody Creek White

RATING: 3.5

Frederick, Maryland

The founder of Flying Dog is George Stranahan and he is the unofficial mayor Woody Creek, Colorado, a self-described community of social misfits. Like that town, this brew is unfiltered, spicy, and I suppose...dominated by haze. At 4.8% it is more of a ultra-faux Belgian in this respect. It is refreshing but then so is lemon water and Koolaid. The spicing is moderate, modest, and nicely judged. I cannot recommend it for the lack of overall depth and low ABV value.

Four Plus Monkshine Belgian Style Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

The town that's given us "thou shalt not drink" as well as Polygamy Porter brings this surprisingly authentic golden Belgian to the market. I paid just \$9.99 for 6 full-sized bottles. The lace was endless, columnar, very convincing. The minimalist label too is not your basic Utah expectation either. The mostly black label carries a single blue M with a golden halo over it. Somehow the beers of SLC can hardly escape religious imaginery or so it seems. So many US copies of the real style are too golden, have no lace, wrong spicing, not white enough a head, etc. This one is spot on for authenticity points. I found it very refreshing, the spicing moderate to near full, not terribly complex and most of all never terrible in those delicate finish notes. Four Plus is actually a Division of Uinta. While this brew is a superb value, very enjoyable, crisp, and pleasant, the 4.0% ABV and lack of complexity slightly mar the experience. It is a Ferrari, yes, but only 82 horsepower. Low ABV in a Belgian gold is not my first choice for building what is otherwise a fine knockoff.

Gordash Holy Mackerel Special Golden Ale (2008)

RATING: 4.5

Melbourne, Florida (2008)

Not alot of beers are brewed in the Sunshine State and even fewer have a drinking fish with dreadlocks on the label and 8.5% ABV. This "small batch beer" from 2008 is done in the Belgian style, rich medium yellow, and with a large cream head. It has no lace but no all golden Belgian ales come in those huge corked bottles in the first place. They claim it has a "Florida twist" but then they go on to explain use of German Pilsner malt and Czech saaz hops. Fruit flavors, especially citrus and banana are pleasant but moderate. While it begins sweet it ends a bit drier and nicely balanced. Overall it's on the sweet side. Some reviewers have said it is sweet and little else but it gives a very appeal if you like your golden Belgian ales with less spice. If you want the whole citrus and coriander dose to extreme - look elsewhere. "Refreshing yet complex" is the goal and they've hit the mark near to bullseye with a sweetish, very rich, yet lightly spiced golden ale of supreme quality. It needs to be cold but I tried it at ambient room temp and found it pleasant - as if sitting on my table for a long, leisurely two hour meal with friends and family. Gordash actually brews it "by agreement" at Florida Beer Co. in Melbourne but doubtless it's their concept and recipe. Apparently the founder was a winner of a Sam Adams World Homebrew context and is now in business on their own. The website talks about "fine sipping beers meant to be savored not rushed" and they've definately hit that mark as well.



Gordash Holy Mackerel Special Golden Ale (2010)

RATING: 5.0

Greenville, South Carolina

Both labels dated to year, the 2010 entry is technically different from the preceding, even if made by Gordash

directing Thomas Creek of Greenville SC this time around. The first pour was clear yellow, tangy, nippy spices immediately clear. The second pour got the yeast out and showed good haze. It remains 8.5%. It is one of the finer stateside copies of the old stuff, having on occasion, dare I say, Orval-like moments of quality from time to time. The yeast is very well judged to choice and dose. I found this one a step above the 2008 and it is now as close to perfect as we will get from this shore or any other south of the pearly gates - and I do expect the angels there to be consuming Belgian Golden Ale between harp lessons.

Grain d'Orge Belzebuth

RATING: 4.0

Ronchin, France

Paying \$9.99 for a three pack of anything worth less than diamonds is not my cup of tea. Then if these brews as tiny 8.4 ounces and would normally be screaming like a bat or demon from below. The really "good", yea heavening thing about this underworld-inspired broth is the 13.0% ABV value. Billed as "the most unique ale in the world", we suppose this thing is a homage to golden Belgium ales of legend. It is made in France and they regular do the trappist sort of brews. Color is darker golden than most such products and there is so much alcohol I'm not sure if I'm imagining bitter spices or not! As a friend of mine says, "in the final analysis, ethanol is the best spice of all". He lives a spicy life and it shows. It is not yeasty by any means in flavor or appearance. This stuff has more malt than the color might suggest and one does get some dark, vaguely raisin-like fruit notes. Experts in the style tell me that Belgian yeast is apparent to them but what is there's and what is old French yeast is surely open to national debate. This product is as controversial among ale lovers as their claim to be the most unique ale on the market. It's no Duvel and in that one respect it fails to climb very high on my "buy again" or worship-at-any-cost lists.

Great Divide Colette Farmhouse Ale

RATING: 3.5

Denver, Colorado

From her two silhouettes on the label, Colette is evidently a smokin' hot farm girl but one bearing a sharp pitchfork in case the lads get too amorous. The label says it's an homage to Belgian farmhouse ales and includes wheat and rice in the formula. Their goal was a fruity flavor, tartness, and some dryness. The tartness of a Belgian homage is there but clearly not the lofty ABV. Spicing is moderate and nicely done. Dry to be sure. I like but there are so many labels richer, more passionately layered, and beckening. Colette has spice and looks in some of right places but surely not my ultimate hayloft fantasy. (I really hope certain people don't read this.)



Green Flash Le Freak

RATING: 5.0

San Diego Co., California

A freak it surely is. The label proclaims "extreme ale converging San Diego-style imperial pale ale and Belgian style trippel" with 9.2% ABV. It is cloudy in butterscotch gold, hinting with amber in strong light, lace as endless as any authentic Belgian product, and the head about as yellow beer heads can be. The "imperial pale ale" side of the genepool seems to indicate a strong hopping but most drinkers will think this a very hoppy trippel or an IPA x Trippel merger. It is vaguely spiced (nothing clear) but hops the the primary flavor element at all temps. It is extraordinarily soothing and refreshing cold or even close to room temp. This may one of the finest idiosyncratic American beers I tested this year (2008). It really must be tried as a precious oddity and creative effort that was pulled off with much skill and excellence. Some hybrid styles are just quirky and are marketed as some dramatic world-changing thing. Remember Mr. Brewer everywhere that hybridizing styles is as easy as mixing any two brews in the same glass, stein, or pitcher. Beer Blenders, an increasingly growing group of brew

lovers, do this all the time and with economic ease. Green Flash has made this intermediate curiosity a worthwhile experience and done it at the fair price (\$5-6 per 1 pt. 6 oz.). I'm trying to avoid the overused phrase "a must try" - how about "mandatory beer training".

[De] Halve Maan Straffe Hendrik Bruges Triple Ale 9 (Anno 1856)

RATING: 4.0

Bruges, Belgium

A look at the bottle with full blast of LEDs makes you think good things as a knowledgeable Tripple-head and horrible things if not. The yeast floats in such fullness top to bottom in the brown, caged and corked bottles, I could barely wait to sample it and alot of it. First point of education is that this is not a Belgian Triple but a Burges Triple, authentic for that esteemed town, full of 6 different malts, Saaz and Styrian Golding hops, and in this variant much more sweet and malty than spiced. Bruges triples are more dark, amber and malty than the golden triples offered from other lands including Belgium itself. De Halve Maan is currently the only active brewery in Bruges and dates from 1856 - at least. Town archives mention a brewery to 1546. The pretty label has antique gold and forest green, a face approach a young Abe Lincoln on the face of a half moon. ABV is 9% and mentioned more of an amber than some triples, the lace a bit shorter than expected, and the head cream with medium to low duration. The flavors are open, simple at times (grainy, corny sugar malts) and other times a mix of very detailed flavors, suggesting the interplay of the six known malts. We tested a brew called Bruges Staffe some years ago with 3.5 rating and while perhaps from the same people (the De Halve Mann name being missing), this is surely a different grade from that one brewery town. We found it variably interesting ("curiously layered" to "a one trick pony") and occasionally annoying like malt soda while at once being the last living execution of this very old style, the later suggesting we the Straffe Henrik or "strong henrick" be giving due respect. There is also a quad we hear in this line and this may be what it takes to fully impress. There are a few dried fruit notes (fig is a popular choice) and yet most of think a good spicing would be in order - but would the later approach dishonor their old recipes? We have no idea what those treasured documents call for. I think the sweetness gets to most folks when consuming more than two small bottles or going for the big one. If anyone tells you this brew has raisins or rich spices in the mix, they probably just ate a box of raisins and jar of cinnamon. It's hard to rate the last of legend for anything other than it's pleasure value. "Imagine this is a new micro from Peoria...now write clear, be honest, and cut to the truth" is how we educate or panelists. There is a solid refuge in veracity for no everything old, honored, and legendary will be your cup of tea.

Hoegaarden White Ale

RATING: 4.5

This unfiltered BELGIAN WHITE BEER (Biere Blanche) is your typical cloudy (yeast-hazed) whitish yellow beer with very large head and carbonation for the next decade or two. Like other classic whites it has a light fruity aroma with nice spicy notes. Unlike other Belgian ales this lacks a high alcohol potency. It also lacked a nectar-like quality but reminded some of us of a pear spritzer. Even at the required cold temps and with a practiced 'swirl and pour' it proved a bit weaker on both flavor and alcohol than we would have expected for an \$8.40 FOURPACK. There's a juvenile interest in this label that has nothing to do with it's quality or history. Everyone from college jocks to thirty-something Enginerds while laugh far too long about oral delights from the "Ho Garden". It's get's really old, really fast but expect it in American ale houses and sports bars. The 45% unmalted wheat may well account for the milder and less familiar flavor. This beer has been a genuine classic for maybe 5 centuries. Do try it.

HØgne Ø Tiger Tripel

RATING: 4.5

Grimstad, Norway

In the Belgian style, this 9% Norwegian ale is mostly clear gold with very obvious long lines of lace under a massive light cream head. Malted barley, malted wheat, and wheat are the three grains which provide a deeper, substantial flavor. The tiger on the label is wearing goggles but he comes off looking like a cool cat wearing sunglasses. The spicing is moderate bordering on the high side. One notices the ethanol in the early notes but as usual a 9% becomes largely bearable in few minutes. Even though the head was annoyingly massive (awkward for those of us with facial hair), this proved to be a better experience than most New World triples and many from Belgium itself. The label proclaims "it is difficult to brew a complex and balanced Belgian-style tripel ale, but we have made an attempt at brewing one anyway! Our respect and admiration for those who master the skill

and art of brewing excellent ales of this style is limitless". Very well said and we must say their attempt is both noble and successful. There were minor deductions from some panelists here for the lingering ethanol ("medicinal-herbal distraction") and also the uncontrollable head. Still a must try for Belgian-heads.



Huyghe Blanche des Neiges

RATING: 5.0

Melle/Ghent, Belgium

The color of this BELGIAN WHITE BEER is pale yellow and a touch cloudy. While samples were completely headless with only thin lace, the flavor was quite full and so distinct from British ales. It has one of the strongest and most fruity 'noses' (aroma) you can imagine. First taste is like apricot nectar but it finishes fairly dry and with more alcohol than expected. Paying \$3.00 per tiny 11.2 oz. bottle may offend some but a true enthusiast will be happy. The "Delirium" line seems to have replaced this 1990's series in the US.

Huyghe Delirium Tremens

RATING: 4.5

Melle/Ghent, Belgium

It's very hard to ignore a beer bottled in a what appears to a putty-colored, sprayed-on, ceramic coating with black specklings, glowing in bright sky blue foil, and named for one of the major results of ethanol withdrawal among alcoholics. In the case, one being weened from alcohol or opiates have tremors and sees all sorts of crazing things including bugs on your skin, tiny mystical characters, and even pink elephants. The entire bottle has SEVEN pink elephant on it in case you need some inspiration to get started on the long night. There are also two dancing green alligators on the main label - or so I very much hope. Give me a minute...back, back, back...wrong way...sorry...have to rangle all the baby roaches back into my radial artery; I clearly heard the end-of-recess bell guys! Paranoia, panic attacks, fever, and severe accidents are common. About 5% die with treatment and a full third of anyone not getting some case. The DT's as they are called in the rehab business are a very serious business but in the regular drinking community a source of some fun. You certainly will not suffer from DT with this 8.5% fix of the active ingredient of our choice unless those \$4 a bottle charges are hard in this time of economics and you have to settle for Bud Light the rest of the week. I wonder if the caring people in the Bamalot administration will help me out here and give me a bailout check for Huyghe Withdrawal Syndrome and let me stay home from my real job. I can truly say I've experienced this DT several times recently in my kitchen and three times more in my living room. Anywho...it's a very crazy name and concept overall and sort of like McDonald's selling Big Macs with a 600-pound lard ass dude, a pretty casket, and a pristine angiography suite on the box. I'd play that Lottery board game!

Anyhow, Huyghe has been making Belgian ales since 1654 and this is one of the palest yellow beers that has any flavor. A faint haze hangs over it but no much in that way. Lace persists long and the huge foamy white head is classic of something from a recipe this old and juice this pale. The sugar and spicing are weak to moderate and the 11.2 oz. bottle is a nice 8.5% in potency. It is not as fruity as some native and US golden products, the bananas being faint and just a hint of pear and palest grape. Acidity too is low and I like that about it. Orval and Duvel still get my money for special occasion but this is a very nice buy as well...when money is plentiful and the brain sound. It would never call such a fine golden Belgian ale a "light ale" but if one wants something more restrained on this general focus, here is a good choice to serve icy cold.

Il Dolle Stille Nacht

RATING: 4.0

Esen, Belgium

One you get past the busy label with a smiling snowman wearing a wide grin, drinking a red drink, and waving a star-pointed wand, you come to realize this is not the product of some crazy graphics artist in Oregon or California. Are the Belgian's really this silly and fun? Guess so. Your night will not be silent with a few dozen of these pricey charmers about the winter table. Beer of this quality in some delightful, reasonable quantity does produce noises in a place - many good, some bad, hopefully many of them very pleasant. The brew is bright amber-gold, lace endless, and the head low to moderate in size after an initial inflation. You have much satisfaction, with sweet caramel notes not dominated with spice of all much antipated things. It gives no orange and spice ale in the usual doses. It's quite a sweet malty thing but never monodimensional or boring. Many your seventh one would be boring but by them who cares? I rather like it for being different from the country's usual fare (though not the American Xeroxers) but I do miss some of the spice. If you like substantial, truly interesting "candy beer" this is one really nice liquid lolly to wrap your tongue around.

Jade French Country Ale

RATING: 3.0

France

The Brasseries de Benifontaine has many competitors but none of the others claim 100% organic grains. This Biere de Garde ale is lightly cloudy medium gold with enthusiastic carbonation. While pleasant it is not particularly flavorful when compared with Castelain and perhaps Trois Monts. Paying what is normally a higher price (\$6 per 750ml here) one expects more flavor of the style. Jenlain is darker and richer. This is a 'Biere to Disregarde'.

Jolly Pumpkin Bam Biere Farmhouse Ale

RATING: 4.0

Dexter, Michigan

Maybe it's because I grew up a "cat person" but I don't understand all the dog images on beer labels. I get furocious wolves and Flying Dog's Canis Major concept of tenacious, toothy beers but the rest leave me confused. Generally I don't want to be thinking about canines when consuming a golden fluid except in the overt case of Rogue's wonderful Yellow Snow IPA. It comes out medium-yellow tinged gold but not clearly golden unless sampled in a dark place. It is cloudy, more a swirl of carbonation than yeast, the head very rocky and creamy-white. It is very tart, almost the herbal-spicy mint gum of some Belgian Pales in the Saison style. Dry hopping gives it more merit but it's not an entirely genuine rep of the style. It is too sour for some and not enough for others but Saison is never everyone's tea in any event. It's a crisp product very cold, less impressive if not chilly, and as dry as the dark side of the moon. At 4.5% it's marginally weak but in fairness to JP they do have other stronger labels - which I cannot find anywhere! I judge beers as they are and not part of a line or a "body of work" from a brewery. Therefore, "as is" this one needs work. Remember the Cadillac Cavalier...I mean Cimarron? One is known some places, actually many places, for their weakest items and I hope to be delighted by their other more potent, stellar offerings in future months.

Jolly Pumpkin Luciernaga (Firefly) Ale Brewed with Spices

RATING: 4.5

Dexter, Michigan

This golden-amber fluid has a mid-cream head of some duration, the nose quite of Belgian gold. The buxom lady on the bow of the ship hold a lantern ("the firefly" of legend) which in this case is shaped like a ripe hop cluster. This lovely, thick-bottled offering is bottle-conditioned after barrel-aging. The result is an aged, Grand Cru-style but only 6.5% in the alcohol department - and that would be my favorite department in case you wonder. With the Jolly Pumpkin name and it arrival our shop in September 2011, we were inclined to think it was something of a Halloween spicing. Not so. The spicing is authentic Belgian with no a hint of American pie or scary hobgoblin ales. The label confirms Grains of Paradise and coriander are in the mix to full advantage. In concure and think this is a very tidy and authethnic copy of the Old World fluid; very impressive, solid, nicely brewed, and only the lower ABV rating was a even a concern from the primal sip. Is there anything to make it stand above the shoulders of the original masters and other Memorex-Xerox-clear copies from this land? No. In their defense, there are some real Belgian amber pours that are far more ragged and unpleasantly eccentric. They might well take comfort in that. A higher ABV version with some extra layers would be a sure winner.

Brewbase Fives



Kwak Belgian Ale

RATING: 5.0

Buggenhout Belgium

The label proclaims "seductive malt character" and that's about as far as I really need to go. But I can't be shut up so here goes more. It's 8% ABV (well hidden), a cloudy amber, full-bodied for a Belgian ale, never bitter, mid-length lace, and a head as tall as [your analogy here]. The spicing is low so the malt comes out fully without competition. It is only slightly sweet and so it does not fail there - for I like Belgians strong in other aspects, giving the number of sweet brown ales available in the US today. It is more fruity than spicy and that's a point of great distinction ; light cherry and bright citrus comes to mind. Some self-appointed, beer guru-fool somewhere is going to say "no, no, no it's ONLY pear and apple". Have it your way. Fruit mix is fruit enough. Kwak has made beer since 1791 and the work of Pauwel Kwak and it shows. Here's proof (if anyone really needs it) that Belgian Ales are not monolithic and essentially one recipe in three strengths. Kwak is a real "go to" beer if you're tired of the lethal ethanol, spiced-like-a-pie, richer than necessary Belgian ales of the mass market. It's a breath of very refined, malty and fruity fresh air.

La Trappe Trappist Ale

RATING: 4.0

Tilburg, Holland

Most Trappist ales are associated with Belgium. This product of Tilburg Holland originates from De Schaapskool (Sheep's School). The color is medium amber under a long bubbly head. Lace is very fine and prolonged. The flavor is a real mystery. It is unlike any Belgian Trappist ale we know. The aroma is more fitting Campbell's soup than a beer. It truly has a malty broth-like flavor which Michael Jackson chooses to describe as 'pruny' and 'sherryish'. So odd. It is not that we didn't enjoy it. We simply failed to understand it and thus our experience is broadened. Would we buy it again? Probably not. Would we try it once. Without question. You should too. Lovely bottle.

Lagunitas "We're Only In It for the Money" Belgian Style Triple Ale

RATING: 4.5

Petaluma, California

Never seen a beer labeled with permission of the Zappa Family Trust but this is a California product after all. Frank Zappa himself heads the label with his 1967 quote: "You'll be absolutely free only if you want to be". This label and bottle is a tribute to Frank's experimental album with The Mothers of Invention released in 1968 - this big bottle being a 40th anniversary celebration. It has been added to "The best psychedelic albums of all time", a top 500 album of all time, and even the Library of Congress picked it for the National Registry of 50 influential recordings in 2005. Jimi Hendrix appears on the album cover and apparently on this beer label too; though don't ask me where. The connection between rock and roll and beer is a rich history to be sure but more can be done. How about "Stairway to Malt Heaven" or "Back in Black Ale". I could easily drink "A Whiter Shade of Pale Ale" and definitely "Sweet Home Ale from Bama". Then there might be "Blueberry Hill Wheat Beer", "Alehouse Rock", "Tutti Frutti Lambic", "Every Sip You Take", or "We Will, We Will Bock You". Alright, I guess I ran out of material two or three back.

This stuff is definitely in a collectible bottle - I'm keeping mine for 12 years so some idiot on Disney-Apple-CNN-eBay2020 will liberate it from me for a hundred bucks plus shipping. Maybe I should hit Whole Foods tomorrow and pick up a couple more. In the glass it glows a good, bright amber, lace is very substantial and vigorous, the head less impressive or large. Would Frank have liked this. Yes but probably only after 22 or so. It makes them money I guess and he would have approved some of that. It quotes him on a useful, inspiring way.

Probably a good tribute all around. But is it a great beer? It's very nice, complex, low spiced, moderately sweet, sufficiently bitter for contrast, carbonated to style, and expertly malted. The stuff is more like a Double Belgian but since their Californians I'll give them one notch plus or minus for error. Things out there are...you know. Considering the quality of the brew and whole novelty label and collectibility, I give it very high marks.

Lefebvre Hopus Ale

RATING: 4.0

Quenast, Belgium.

The 11.2 oz. bottles come with complex Grolsch-type hardware, 8.3%, and the most hoppy nose of anything from Belgium I know. It pours gold with a massive ivory head of complex shape and dimensions. The "bitter, blonde, and bottle-conditioned" ale is curiously sweet at times, oddly herbal at others, not as spiced as most in this group (save faint cloves), and something of a strange, raw product. It is not immediately accessible or understandable. Where hop notes predominant there are strange notes of straw, celery, faint clove, weak citrus favoring lime I think, and something reminding me of a bitterish garnish of Artemisia or Galium. Others find pepper and wild, earthly hops (not from UK or the US) as it saturates the buds. "Oddly like a Ricola™ cough drop made liquid and hoppy" said Mark on our panel. Others said "vingar-apple sugared up to the hilt...medicinal but not in the usual IPA way" and "sour and sweet, much more than hops doing this...curious and not very appealing in the end". The tiny \$4 bottles are surely an acquired taste thought never really bad or offensive either. It is sweetened up enough to keep things from getting too bitter for MOST of us - some of you will think it still too acrid. If you want to shock and fracture your beer tasting party bring a six of these! Some have called it a Belgium IPA but I think Herbal Hoppy Golden Ale is a better fit. Love it or hate it, you'll find quality here and it worthy of a long discussion.



Lefebvre Manneken Pis Blanche de Bruxelles (Belgian White Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Quenast, Belgium.

At first glimpse the young (yet bearded) statue on the label seems to be adding Old World class to the label and cap. Upon closer inspection you realize he is doing the unthinkable and actually displaying his beer in its departing form and holding his cherubic blessings at the same time. If you re-read the brew's full name above you may suspect a pun for English speakers is also at work. This all said the contents prove as heavenly as any cloudy, light yellow (we probably should say white) Belgian ale can be. They confess to use of cor- iander, Curaceo orange peels, barley, wheat, plus Hallertau and Styrian hops. This \$8.00 fourpack is very much worth buying for the complex, sophisticated mastery of its style - the humor is merely a little bonus.

The Leyerth Urthel HOP IT Superior Hoppy Blonde Ale

RATING: 4.5

Flanders, Belgium

Nearly twenty bills for this special bottle was something of a hard hill for any corked brew to climb, even if a clever, classic Belgian in birth. The 9.5% ABV is a plus but maybe low for price. The head is large and ivory and it carries more haze than the air in a Grateful Dead concert. Lace is shorter than their Quadrium Ale. This "Dutch with a Flemish Touch" is based on Hildegard de Ostaden's visit to the US Pacific Northwest in 2005 where she fell in love with rich hopping and came away convinced of the value of a good IPA. "Hoppy, spicy, and fruity" was the goal. The spicy hops is sure there and rather more intense for a truly blonde ale. Malt must surely be very low given this pale infusion. Bitter in the early notes, it finishes more friendly, and with some complexity suggesting notes of Pilsener mingled with moderate ale fruitiness. I rather like it but am more amazed at the

price, marketing, and total symphony of flavors. It is not Mozart or Beethoven but far more on the modern side with notes flying here and there, good notes, even great notes, but not in the traditional neat or orderly manner. This free spirit, hoppy ale is very well made but it does not really seem to be mad or formed at all. It probably happens from a recipe, sometimes direct, other times very discordant, and in the final analysis special without being comforting. It's high art but not warm, fuzzy, or easily accessible art. And the beverage world, we need room for such surprising, unique inventions. I suspect more than a few folks will pony up the greenbacks for a second or third try. It will wake up your beer tasting party and that alone is worth some payout.

The Leyerth Urthel Samaranth Quadrium Ale

RATING: 4.0

Flanders, Belgium

These corked \$11.00 bottles (August 2008) yield a bright reddish-amber broth with infinite lace, haze, and good aroma. Starting out a little bitter, it grows sweeter than many Belgian ambers in the finish, more malty than hoppy. No clear spicing. The 11.0% ABV gives you a fine punch for the layout of molded plastic. And I do mean a layout because with a bottle of their fine Hop It Ale, we paid nearly thirty bills for the two wired bottles. Thinking in terms of wine dollars, the value is there, but given the number of good domestic Belgians, I wonder. I found the sweetness off-putting and yet the apparent lack of alcohol is well guarded. For a celebration and special presentation I'd do these again but for personal drinking or with close friends, the value is not there at the current exchange rate. It is "Dutch with a Flemish Touch" and only brewed FOR the Belgian Leyerth folks. Liefman's Goudenband bba 457 This FLANDERS BROWN ALE is a classic among Belgian ales and is one of the finest beers ever made. The corked bottles sell for \$7 or so in the first year and can be aged like wine. We hear the 1986 vintage is perfect. The current 1994 crop is amber brown with abundant lace. The flavor notes are fruity and malty with endless complexity to thrill the tastebuds and the brain. The tartness may suggest to the naive that this is some brown wine cooler. But when the final palate hits you it proves to be a well-crafted beverage of the finest order. World class at any party. Flavor elements include caramel, honey, plum, cherry, malt, and chocolate.

MacTarnahan's Spine Tingler Golden Belgian-style Triple

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

These 650ml bombers are a nice 8.5% strong with a pour a bit deeper gold than expected. The lace is long and luscious, the head near white and small. The first notes are rich and malty, only mildly spiced and the finish even more malty and Pilsoid. It approaches what we have blended as Belgian Gold x strong Euro-Pils. There are some more moderate nips from ethanol and hops by the middle of the bottle. Spice gets a bit stronger but not much, the overall theme still being a lightly spiced-malty golden ale with Pils grains. This was an especially fun take, always pleasant, and never raw nor off at any point. One reviewer here noted "quite a unique recipe for the name...good enough to pass as a rich Pilsy ale...but overall not impressed".

Malmedy Blonde

RATING: 4.5

Rebecq-Quenast, Belgium

Large-bottled and potent to 6.3-7.0%, this stuff is amber-gold with a massive head. Fruit, sweetness, and yeast will jump your tastebuds. Spicing is generally mild. The balance is nice but some people want more spice and complexity for an import; all of which are pricey with dollar's current value. If you like your Belgians a bit less potent (and I cannot bear to say "light" this time), here's a nice one to consider.

Mikkeller It's Alive Belgian Wild Ale

RATING: 4.0

This potent 8% stuff is a hazy butterscotch under a rocky cream head. Notes are slightly sour from the wild yeasts. The caramel-vegetal notes are curious and different but not really pleasant either. It is educational but a bit too raw to make our favorites or merit lists.

Mother Earth Weeping Willow Wit

RATING: 3.5

Kingston, North Carolina

This recent addition to the NC microbrews has already thrilled by fresh-hopping their IPA and making it a standout. My first reaction to this name is that Kingstonians will likely be calling this "that thar weeper willer beer" followed by the phrase "right good". Coriander and orange peel are used to make this pour spicy in the nose, very very pale and classic in all appearance elements. It is thin-medium in strength, a bit less than I would like and not quite up to their IPA in impressiveness. I was not expecting 10% ABV - which does of course go a long way into making a knockoff-tribute very believable. If one needs to be lower in the the buzz power, turning up the flavor and spices is a compensating approach that many micro firms take. This is nicely made, clean, not harsh or offensive but neither is it endearing or special. Blue Moon will kick it's tail up and down the bars in Southeast. And that will make some Kingston willers weep.



The Musketeers Troubadour Blond Ale

RATING: 5.0

Ursel, Belgium

The name is sometimes spelled Musketers in beer references but the label says otherwise. Paying \$5.99 for a single 11.2 ounce (Feb. 2009) is a bit of a bad start for any ale. The altocumulus swirl of yeast in the bottle restored my faith in my decision. (I've been badly burned on faux-righteous Belgian offerings before and probably you have too). The color is rich golden, darker gold than expected, cloudy of course, the head creamy, irregular, and mounded. First sip is tart, quickly turning into a rich malty treat. With eyes closed, one might swear this was a brown Belgian of some kind. This is highly malty for a golden anything! I detect little spice, including of the popular vining variety. It's 6.5% ABV, not good nor bad really, and the claimed "fruity esters" did not come out until much later in the single bottle and then only in the dry malt-infused finish. The curtain says blonde but the drapes tell me we have a natural brunette as we got more intimate. This is a remarkable beer and I don't think it needs any more spicing. Very nicely made.

The Musketeers Troubadour Magna Cascade Hop Belgian Triple (Special Edition 2011)

RATING: 4.0

Ursel, Belgium

It has only been a few years, since maybe 2009, the European breweries began to seriously use American hop varieties to expand their chemistry profile and we are hoppy...err..happy to say this tribute to 'Cascade' was a thrill to find. The \$12.99 price (March 2011) came as no shock for such a big 750ml offering. There's a mid to dark golden color here with haze and a rocky old ivory head. Scattered but abiding lace. "This brew is a celebration of American hops!" is hardly a bad way to start the light yellow, tannin-painted sermon on the reverse - especially if you wish to lure an US market. It proves to be a one-time variant in their Magna line made each October and combines both Cascade and "Simpco" (likely SIMCOE) varieties. At 9.0% it gives that Belgian Trippel feeling from the start, showing tender spices, supportive faint malts, and nippy hops early, then getting ethanol-heavy and more hoppy by mid finish. We've had Belgian-style ales with 'Cascade' before and this is a curious and not fully effective implementation of this theme. As the passages of saturation and new exposure rise and fall, mild yeast fruit appears interwoven with the citrusy, piney hops but rarely in way given to much honor to any of them. Sadly we found the concept better than the result, the flavors more curious than rapturous. One panelist summed it up here with his usual "TMGO or Too Much Going On" and this without harmony or synergy. Try it before it goes away or not. Either way, their Magna creations are still in general in our must-drink category.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Nebraska Melange A Trois Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 5.0

Papillion, Nebraska

Besides it's origins in NE, this first of their Reserve Series is a new thing for us. Aged in Chardonnay Barrels. Say what? One could well imagine that a potent, Kentucky bourbon barrel would simply overwhelm and thrash a blonde Belgoid ale with it's delicate malts and spices. One cannot say it tastes like white wine (particularly as we have white wine/beer hybrids now) but there are some of those notes in the 10.0%, cloudy straw yellow presentation. Certainly has a slightly dry white wine aspect to faintly bitter, dry finish. The lace is as long as...well....um...something that has miles of lace. Let's try that again. Melange A Trois has as much lace as Prince's walk-in closet. The head endures is largish.

The barrel aging is a long 6 months and this extra effort is justified in the final product. There are scores of oaky complex flavors which suit the golden Belgian style to perfection. I am thoroughly impressed and utterly joyed with the result here, unique, daring, and wonderful as long as very cold. There is one negative thing and that was the \$20.99 price (July 2011) which makes it one of the most expensive capped bombers in the US market....ever. Boutique beer seems to be the term these days for ultra-odd, pricey, long aged stuff of this caliber. It is absolutely worth that price, once or twice at least, to really, and I do mean REALLY impress your beer snob friends with a genuine great find. Here's a brew so fresh in approach, so inspired in execution, and so so right in actual delights that one hopes this series will prosper endure and somehow manage to get more affordable. Melange A Trois is an orgy of flavors, a weekend fantasy with a bus full of Tropic Something bikini girls in a daisy field, tasteful yet sensual by one ecstatic hour after another. You ladies think of something similarly nirvanic.

Brewbase Fives



New Belgium/Brewery Vivant Biere de Garde Ale (Lips of Faith Series)

RATING: 5.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

Pouring an extremely pale yellow with near white head, this 9% ale is cooperation of Colorado's New Belgium folks and Brewery Vivant of Michigan, the later famous for farmhouse ales. Vivant provided this particular yeast strain in the Biere de Garde style. Yeast floats but in moderation. "Hints of bergamot citrus" make this pair with French cheeses. Early sips are surprisingly sweet, ABV very covert, and then it explodes with notes of authentic orange flavors of the finest class and duration. The finish is dryer but my mind at least was tricked into feeling a sweetness presumably because I consume sweet o.j. every morn by the gallon. Dry orange beverages do not compute I guess. This should have been called a Biere de Garden du Oranges! The orange peel adds much but so does the yeast strain. Both are harmonized with ultimate skill for what is a very affordable product (\$8.99 per 500ml). This is one of the finest, most refreshing, and lively American facsimiles of Belgian-French ales seen by us in some months. Easily the best beer we had this year with a giant white rooster on the label. (Don't print that!). In fact, very highly recommended by all on our panel. All had high praise. This product is far more about the fruit than the spice - and that for many of us is a very, very good approach.

New Belgium Mothership Wit Organic Wheat Beer Brewed with Spices

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

Wow, this stuff is really "wit", a pale as an albino after 10 years living in a underground cavern. It's one of the lightest yellow beers I've ever seen, in fact. Head is big, white, irregular, typical of a Belgian white, no lace, but faintly cloudy in the pour. It's certified organic too. Spicing is traditional (coriander, citrus, clove), minty overall, on the moderate side. Only the 4.8% ABV keeps me from believing it was from the old country. That and the price suggest the "bargain Belgian" market in many US states was in their ship's sites. The label shows a small country farm and town from above like the mothership was observing it. The "mothership" is the nickname of their main, sustainable brewing facility. The flavor is very pleasant but I expect higher ABV when a style is imitated this closely and without it there is not much reason for me in a high ABV state to demand it. In the low ABV states...enjoy and sip away for you cannot get better.

New Holland Black Tulip™ Trippel Ale

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan

This brewery is gaining a rep in some circles for being a Rogue of the Midwest - lovely painted bottles, artistic and not in an way outclassing the liquid contents but matching it gold for gold. They are stars, quickly earning their bars and praise with every new offering. From their High Gravity Series, this 9% 19.6 Plato beer is wonderful but mislabeled. The "mysterious, alluring, and seductive" rep of the black tulip is invoked but neither the plant nor the lady seems to have any connection. I would have reserved this name for a blackish stout if anything. I guess the black tulip chick is a substantial blonde in their vocabulary. They describe it as "slight sweet" (yes) with notes of "rock candy", "Michigan sugar beet", "Belgian yeast", and "bananas". Really now? Now that's a head full of images to wrap your brain around. It sounds appetizing and so it is. In my crystal it's gold for sure, the head traditional, and there is more spice than bananas but neither too enveloping. The finish is truly dry as advertised and that transition from sweet fore-note to dry finish is very nicely directed. This Black Tulip, well-named or not, in the final sorting out has seduced me well and full, and I come away fully-favored and thoroughly comforted. A Triple was accomplished. I would not readily put it up against Europe's aureate gems but maybe it's our Corvette to their Porsche; audacity, art, price, and image counting for much.

North Coast Brother Thelonious Belgian Style Abbey Ale

RATING: 4.5

Fort Bragg CA USA

These big corked bottles in North Coast's American Artisan's Series are thick, brown, and as impressive as the real Belgian product for style and substance of the packaging. The 9.4% ABV brew is very rich reddish-brown, actually one of the most red ales we've seen in years. The head is dark tan and the lace will last longer than any of us can wait. The Thelonious Monk Institute devoted to great jazz music gets \$2 a case for this stuff and if you'll like the stuff as I do, they'll be adding new wings any day now. The high ABV is immediately clear, not

disturbing though, and the malt is less so, sufficient but no Mother-of-all-Malt-Bombs here. It is as smooth as something that ethanol-potent could be and yet it lacks some of idiosyncratic feel of the real European product. As the joke goes...they might have the gotten their monks confused. If one were to extended the analogy (and I can never resist), the real abbey ales are a bit more jazzy, an acquired taste, and subtle. This is polished, mainstream, Top 40 jazz, respectable but not going to wow all the gurus and abbey addicts. It's fluent, untroubling, highly competent like a bone-boring Japanese generic coupe, and also that phrase we all use when we're trying to be polite but just slightly disappointed - "very drinkable". I favor it for the polish and good-brewing values and not the lack of oddness. There are different approaches to quality and not all of them are this factory clean. Is getting rid of abbey ale complexity in the form of odd flavors a good thing? Yes and no both. Here's a computer-automated abbey and one gets all that such an approach will allow.

North Coast Pranzster Belgian Style Golden Ale

RATING: 4.5

Fort Bragg CA USA

As usual North Coast has added quality to quality and produced a remarkable domestic ale in the Belgian style. It does not have the potent nip of the real thing (likely because of alcohol content) but it has the authentic flavor and richness. At \$8.00 a sixpack it was no bargain as domestic "Belgian styles" often are. It was a pleasant experience even if not an economical one. The gray tone illustration on the label with a room full of chubby faced, smashed guys swiling the ale sets the tone for the experience they are selling. If you look closely (and that is usually the next day) the brewmaster's head is glued onto one of these plump, jovial bodies in the right corner.



Ommegang BPA (Belgian-style Pale Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Cooperstown, New York

While just 6.2% ABV, this is no super-potent Belgian ale but with Cascade dry hopping and warm-cellarage it was not going to be your uncle Christof's golden ale anyhow. Five different malts and two hops are used with Belgian yeast to make a slightly hazy amber-gold brew of amazing beauty in crystal. The head is near white, lasting long, firm lace. Their goal of "citrus and tropical fruit aromatics" is fully realized and one would be hard pressed not to think it did not contain at least 10% fruit juice! I have always liked a very fruit-filled ale when it drips in the mid to late passages with suitably fine malts and faint hops bitterness. This Limited Edition (found here August 2010) is a Hall of Fame hit from a town quite respectful of legendary performances.

Ommegang Duvel Rustica Belgian Style Golden Ale

RATING: 4.5

Cooperstown, New York

This pale golden treat is 8.5% and their "American farmhouse" interpretation of a double golden Belgian ale. Noble hops are used. It has a big cream head of course and the pour is something like a hazy, golden shandy, sparse but long carbonation. Yeast floats wildly in the bottom. It is very pleasant, rich in places, sometimes harsh, double only in the ethanol dosing because the flavors are tripel strong. The alcohol is fairly overt so it presents very much as a tripel. The flavors are classic in spicing, fairly intense on this account, and the yeast imparts nice fruit flavors. Since their use of the Noble hop group of varieties, it is fairly European in approach though the hops are more intense in the middle and finish notes than most Belgian golds. This is a delicious brew but slightly harsh for some of our panelists. The depth and complexity were superior to most American double golds of this style but there were some unsettling and non-harmonious notes which may have

to due with stronger hopper than normal.

Brewbase Fives



Ommegang Ommegeddon Funkhouse Ale

RATING: 5.0

Cooperstown, New York

There are many memorable things from Cooperstown, most of them made of hardwoods, tarnished bronze, and dry, desicated leather. Some of that lot shares the mustiness of this brew and here is an All-Star for this season at least. Brettanomyces ("Brett" to brewmasters) was added to the batch to make a brew that pours an amber so cloudy it might be fresh-squeezed, pulpy apricot juice. If I fermented apricot juice with malt and yeast and funk my junk and trunk, the result might be similar - were I to have any beverage-making skills. It smells of a fruity Belgian gold. ABV is 8%, moderate and well-judged in this formula. Brett can be good in a wine but is generally avoided. It is found in Lambics, Flanders Red Ales, and the occasional milk stout.

The bright scarlet and gold mushroom cloud of earth's final conflict on the label might be more appropriate for a 15% Barleywine but we get their aim to go all-out, nothing held back. It is very smooth beverage for the ABV is not excessive and the flavors of diverse, complex fruit well matched to other notes of faint spice, lemon, toasted bread, and assorted funky, earthy flavors that Brett will give us. They admit it's funky and that is good upfront admission - better than having reviewers not be sure it was intended and hating it somewhat. They made it presentable, easy on the buds, and not overly sour - and that is all about goodness, crispness, authentic yeast-fruit, and real poise. Not a few reviewers agreed with my pal James who said "A more approachable Orval, less ethanol but I don't miss it, fruitier than it, and in some respects just as rewarding". I found it a sure nectar-of-the-gods and if Ommegeddon comes I'll be drinking with my God and angels something almost as good up there. Here's a well-designed brew with elegance and funk, as supple and smooth as a mellow jazz crew on a warm Sunday evening, bursting out occasionally with savory bursts, not so much wild as a bit raw and comfortable. It is ambrosial in the true sense and I do not bring out that word very often - last time was for my Aunt's fruit salad c. 1973 with extra luscious orange bits, toasted marshmallows, and just the right amount of soft, thin coconut flakes. Ommegeddon is like delectable, liquid fruit salad stuffed into a warhead and about to daisycut my tastebuds five miles wide.

Ommegang Tripel Perfection

RATING: 4.5

Cooperstown, New York

This new 8.9% Limited Edition showed up in Fall 2010 in the usual corked-wired contraptions. "One cannot adequately explain perfection. One can only enjoy it." Anon. quoted on the label. This American-brewed product is part of the Duvel family so has legit roots even if the Upstate NY products sometimes stray into new, creative, only slightly bold areas. It pours medium hazy yellow but in a dank bar will prove a dank golden, the head in dark cream with fine texturing. The nose is spiced Belgoid ale, even if not tripel in potency. After all, some triples are a full 9-11% ABV and this one a bit less. I found the ABV more than enough here, the spicing of quality mild-medium richness, and the finish a dry thing augmented with quality malt notes. Calling something a "tripel", itself a rare and hard-to-master product is one thing but using gold foil script with the word "Perfection" takes some large Brewmastering cloves. I found the mid-note fruit notes from yeast decent but quickly overcome with the ethanol, ruined at times really. The later pours and my bud's adaption to higher ABV improved things a bit. I would not call it ultimate perfection but I would call it a workable, daily, hard-earned excellent. Your gal is not prettier or foxier than every supermodel but to you she is mighty cute and sweet and lovelier than anything on this earth. This is kinda a girl next door form of perfection, lust-worthy and wonderful to be sure but not likely to turn heads in the grocery store line in her tattered jeans, faded t-shirt, and greasy weekend hair. I found Ms. BPA and Ms. Ommegedon to be a bit more worldly, elite supermodel

perfect down to the millimeter and tenth of an angle. Perfection is like humility, some say...once claimed and proclaimed it becomes instantly lost.

Ommegang Witte (Wheat Ale with traditional spices)

RATING: 4.5

Cooperstown, New York

This is said to be a traditional Belgian White brewed in upstate NY with considerable experience from the old country. 5.1% ABV is hardly traditional and not what is expected for such as large, thick, and brown a vessel. Coriander, sweet orange peel, lemon, and unmalted yeast are used. Very fine-textured (not clumpy) and wispy yeast fill the bottle to a small degree. The flavor is supposed to be "as bright and soft as summer clouds over a Flanders field". It's more like a low dosing, spiced German wheat over the Field of Dreams. It is one of the palest yellow, non-light beers I've seen, cloudy also, but with a very white, foamy head. This is truly a Spiced Hefe-weizen in essence and I'm not telling any secrets with that classification; not a few Belgians made with some wheat really are that take on the German style.

Don't let it warm much or a metallic madness will come to the pallet now and again. It is slightly sweet and Pils in the mid notes, but dryness comes to the finish as do the wonderful, rounded out spices. I admire it and like it but there's no romance in the swirly chemistry. The low ABV will please some on drinkability and price points but offend others who like their Belgian golden elixirs with more nip and a more bracing brain buster. Their website calls it "a heavenly bite of orange chiffon cake". That's not going blow away or endear either the brewing and Belgian-loving beer communities anytime soon. This is perhaps intended to be an easy, accessible Belgian gold, made in the States to save money, not complex in fermentation or yeasting, a thing much above the average bar fare. Bargain, domestic Belgians are not a new idea (Celis was one pioneer) but we usually end up paying more for the real stuff. It is above most of bar offerings but not nearly eclipsing the best spiced Belgian blondes or German wheats. I can go elsewhere and get more or be happy with this if it's the best available at the time.



Orval Trappist Ale

RATING: 5.0

Triple fermentation including slow bottle fermentation plus dry-hopping and an exclusive single-cell yeast produce a very unique ale. The color is cloudy light amber with a lasting head. Hallertau and Goldings hops come through a slightly citric and acid start. It finishes fruitful and hoppy with the kind of detail you'd expect from such an elaborate brewing process requiring about 4 months. Few beers are worth \$4.00 for 11.2 ounces and that was 1992. This is a true classic. When I first sampled it in 1993 it was best Belgian I'd ever tasted and it

still ranks very much among the finest ever.

If you had to pick just 10 beers to spend the rest of your life with on a deserted island...make that deserted island...this would make many beer guru's lists. Heck. They just might say send me those 10 cases and make all of them Orval. It is truly amongst the finest beers planet-wide in any category. Rating this trappist treasure in numbers or words makes us all feel silly for the exactness of the perfection is obvious. "Yes, this new \$325,000 Bentley Convertible with 900 horsepower, matching luggage, and a full-time, live-in factory technician to care for it is well...um...kinda nice. It sure beats that Toyoto Yaris sardine can-with-wheels can I tested last week". Orval Trappist is far above being a standard by now. Calling it legendary or a classic is not enough. Try out: fabled, glorious, a pinnacle plus a mile higher, and the unreal ideal.

Petrus Dubbel Bruin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Bavikhove, Belgium

A "Dubbel" that comes out to just 6.5% ABV?!?! That makes it drinkable with more meals perhaps. Color is very dark, translucent enough. Head is very tall, large-bubbled, and a good, showy pour overall. Four-paks linked by a collar around the neck (these make me very nervous!) are the usual American marketing experince. The malts are very complex and so are the fruits. I get cherry drenching me quickly and then a little caramel and rum. The tartness suggests almost a Lambic x Brown Ale blend - and I have tried many of these for fun. It will be very different to most American beer drinkers so it's good for beer tasting unless you have an experienced gang. Too much sweetness occured to some of us but I think the idea of sweet brown lambic is a truly spectacular idea.

Pike Monk's Uncle Tripel Ale

RATING: 4.0

Seattle, Washington

The monk might have an uncle but on this label he's ugly and highly hirsute and drinking all his beer. In fact he looks a good deal like a Pan than a Homo...not than some Pans are not homos or some monks shouldn't be...or that some Homo are more Panoid than Hominoid...or Tripels are often dark and Pan always are but Homo come in all colors...monks and Pan are often rich brown in their coats...whatever...They do have triple the strength of humans. The presentaton is classic in color but very little lace and short-lived head. The 9% ABV gives an authentic punch as do moderate spices of fine quality. The 650ml bombers were must \$6.99 which is about what a single sip of some elite Belgians and arrogant American copies would cost. The lack of observed bottle fermentation and lace and a strong head put me off a bit though the price made me think my purchase was wise and smart. But do we want or need value in a Triple power anything? Perhaps but I would rather go with a more convincing presentation. Great effort but the aesthetics are not right. Organic malt and organic sugar are two of the five basic ingredients.

Port City Optimal Wit

RATING: 4.0

Alexandria, Virginia

From the suburbs of DC comes this Belgian-themed white which pours a hazy, straw yellow with floating yeast clouds under the pale cream head. Very little lace. ABV is 5% and the first notes are surprisingly acidic and tangy for the style. It settles down, very dry in the finish and with some medium-strong fruit notes and very traditional spicing. I prefer more ABV and depth of character but there are both worse and better American copies. One panelist here said "competent but not much more...". That pretty well sums it up, folks.

De Proef K-O Blond Beer

RATING: 4.5

Lochristi, Belgium

Dick Naudts in his scientific lab in western Flanders came up with this supercharged, 10% ABV, that is more WWE than a respectable, state-sanctioned boxing match in Peoria. Born of "science and passion", this big bottle has a sauve maltiness unusual for a pale product. It pours dark gold, a big cream head, nice lace. It has an earthy, corn-fed malt bedrock suggestive of many Germany ambers and moderate-strength darks. The word "beer" instead of "ale" got my attention and despite the German lager-like flavor I am assured it's a Belgian strong ale in basic classification; the muscular, malty, rabid character being a surprise in every round and jumping off

every turnbuckle when ou least expect it. Spicing is light but yet it reminds me of German lagers with each new sip; though the faint, extra flavor dimensions and EtoH are appreciated! Thank you, Prof. Naudts! There is candy sugar goodness at first and of course the high "active ingredient" tends to spin that down to dehydration and a loving bite. I'd have used more fruit (yeast or herbal) but the concept of a premium corn-malt ale in pugilistic trim, wearing amber glittering trunks, and ready to slug you with sugar, roasted goodies, and ethanol when we're comfortably against the ropes - is spectacle of sorts. A full glass of this may be more of TKO than a savage, sudden KO but the result is the same. This is more of a verdict on points than an old, crude, crimson, thugish-beatdown but either way I'm slobbering malt bubbles on the mat. Why does the ref look so much like Ginny, the corner man my mother-in-law, and why am I naked in the living room as the Deaconesses run for the nearest door?

Red Hook Tripel Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.0

Washington/New Hampshire

As a Summer 2009 Limited Edition, this 10.2% richly hued golden ale has distinct amber tints. It is no wallflower for color or ethanol or depth of flavors. Vanilla, clove, and cinnamon are notes that add to what the label calls a "warming" aspect in addition to a fine malty foundation. The high ABV is immediately apparent but quickly comes the spices and malts - once again is the zip from ethanol or hops or both. Both I conclude. I find the alcohol a bit over-to-top, especially where cane sugars and honey do not seem to be used to temper that flame on the tongue. Real Belgian tripels are often heavily sugared to make them more palatable. This XXX is dry, fruity, double-turbocharged and done so with no holding back or braking. In the final analysis, one has to love sipping a bold beer to genuinely admire it. I was almost happy to have finished my text here so I could move on.



De Regenboog Vuuve Ale Brewed with Spices

RATING: 5.0

Brugge, Belgium

While just 5% ABV, this unusual product is made with 60% barley and 40% wheat malt, some coriander for flavor, and evidently a large amount of orange peel. The large background of overlapping orange slices on the label should have been my clue but I'd didn't notice at first. The low ethanol lets one enjoy the flavors unaided or unaffected but it will never be traditional at such low horsepower. Color is medium yellow, not quite a gold, lowish lace levels, and a nice near white head. The aroma is odd, part fruit and part New Jersey chemical factory - not traditional by any means. This is one of those "drink don't inhale" brews. It is oddly mellow in some notes, quite tart and orange in others, fruit going on forever plus a century. It is a very quirky beer, extreme by design I assume, one of the most tart ales on earth. Hops is very light and malt not existant for me - though I would not overlook the possibility of some malt notes strumming a low bass not in the background that my tastebuds have ignored.

One friend who beer opinions I trust said "this is either a very bad beer or a stellar one" and unlike me he didn't have to decide and put his cowardly opinion in print! Belgians are no fools in most any realm and in the brewing realm one needs to assume genius. I remember a college prof telling me my wacky poem was either an A+ and an F and I ended up explaining my thoughts and got the preferred grade. Maybe Vuuve needs an explanation just like it's label. The spelling of the name on the label is curious. The two U's with either eyes or areola; and if were them I'd admit to neither. Belgian Citrus Ale would be a good classification for this one and I for one found it fascinating and exhilarating at low temps. Give it a try. It's a bit rare so buy it up instead. I hav a feeling it will become a cult classic, the kind of beer those expensive trendy bars charge \$10 for in a glass. If you want to tease, temp, and test the members of you beer-tasting party this is a very, very smart pick.

Br. Roman Sloeber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Oudenaarde, Belgium

A "sloeber" in Flemish is someone who indulges in cool stuff but with naughty bent. Sloebers to some are wild epicurians and by some translations quite devilish in fact, perhaps just crazy scamps. This 7.5% pours a light yellow, mostly clear, the head ivory and large at first. The spicing is hardly there though some citrus peel is evident to me. It is more malt-supported than I would have expected and that bit of depth saves it in my opinion. Frankly, I'd almost rather have a bit malt in a golden ale than a fake, facade of spicing which even a 4-year-old could master in a recipe. Mouthfeel is lighter than many Belgian whites but the moderate-strong malt is what keeps it from being dull. I found it best nearly at room temp and not as appealing very cold. It's a different experience, more a marketing thing I suppose overall, and not truly memorable in terms of the ale itself. I should have mentioned before that the bottle shows several dancing white bottles wearing socks for hands and having glowing scarlet sunglasses. Their feet seem separate from their bodies. Sloebers I suppose.



La Rulles Triple

RATING: 5.0

Rulles, Belgium

These Belgian bottles are so hard to alphabetize. The company is Brasserie Artisanale de Rulles and the label shows "La Rulles" in large letters - I guess that puts them with the R's. These big Champagne-like bottles are capped and not corked - I guess my \$11 was not enough plastic cash for that! Actually it was less trouble so I'm okay with the lack of hardware. It's unfiltered, unpasteurized, and bottle-conditioned, reaching a blessed 8.9% of the good stuff. It's one of the most yeast-dense Belgians I've ever poured and that should be a good thing. It's cloudy dark gold at every pour - and I do mean early to late pours of all angles and intensities. Lace is boundless and the off white head grows quickly. It is spiced to favor spearmint in the early notes and one does not get much more than that in my opinion. I suppose it could be cloves but I'm not inclined to counter my first chemical instinct. I'm not saying they use spearmint just that it comes off that way. Faint coriander is there and so is rich sugaring.

Primary fermentation is 10-12 days with dark candy sugar added for the secondary work in bottles. Kegs give it more power after 4 additional weeks. Orval's yeast is used. I was even more shocked to find out they use Warrior and Amarillo hops from Washington State. Wow! That's a New World-Old World hybrid if ever there was one. Ancient fermentation and Orval yeast with Yakima's finest?!? How do they leap around and blend tradition like that? Easy. The Brasserie Artisanale La Rulles was started in the ancient year of....2000. This is peachy stuff, the nectar of secondary fermenting gods, made better by American hops and one of the brewing world's most respected yeasts. I like it very much very cold and much less even a few degrees warmer. 5-bottlers become 3-bottlers in one damn hurry. You could sip this stuff all day and I have. Two bottles taken down slowly gets you ready for a good slumber like a fistful of Benadryl taken before a C-SPAN Congressional Hearing Marathon.

Red Hook Tripel Belgian Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Woodinville, Washington/Portsmouth, New Hampshire

These \$6.99 large bottles are partly affordable one reason. Red Hook has printed a Limited Edition bottle with their logo and only then affixed colorful labels in the center for each individual label. There is good economy in that way of labeling. This 10.2% ABV triple is very dark gold, loaded with vanilla, cinnamon, and clove flavors and pleasant in every respect. It is more pleasant and easy drinking than overwhelming. It's a good copy like a

Honda Accord V6 might pass for a BMW 325 once and awhile but not all the time, on every stretch, and on every curve. Sometimes you want 92% of a great thing for less money and other times it's all about performance and money be damned. This is a fine product, a worthy copy of a venerated style but not a head-to-head, all-out competitor in my opinion. Again, \$6.99 for what would be \$9.99-14.99 with other labels, some of them American, is not a bad compromise - sometimes at least.

Rogue's Mo's Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Rogue's of that other, western Newport makes this unfiltered Belgian-style ale in honor of Mo and Dutch Niemi who are honored in the local waterfront community. Both the flavor and rich yellow-orange color suggest a fruity apricot-filled beer. The lower alcohol content clearly distinguishes it from the similarly fruity Belgian whites. It is logical to compare this to Celis White (Austin TX) and of course any real Belgian nectar you can procure. While this one overflows with flavor and craftsman-like detail we prefer the alcohol-drenched punch of the real thing and some of its odd idiosyncratic notes that only a lab chemist could describe. As to value you will get two or three times the fluid for the buck and that is in its favor. Well worth a taste test.

Saint Bernardus Grotten Flemish Ale (Pierre Celis Signature Selection)

RATING: 4.0

Watou, Belgium

The massive bottle becomes a miniature of the world's largest lava lamp as lace ascends upward, causing the generous yeasty particles of variable sizes to dance up and down and occasionally sideways in the vertical column of golden exuberance. I've never seen such a show in any bottle of beer at any time. The straw-toned yellow fluid produces a head larger than some Flemish houses in near white shades. Lace subsides minutes after uncorking but it was quite a spectacle for some time. Pierre Celis, who is loved and hated, mostly adored by real ale fans know him for saving so much traditions since 1966 or so - or mauling them in a few, elitist opinions that you and I should absolutely dismiss. He is known for his Texas-based Celis operation as well as the wonderful white beers of Hoegaarden. Miller took over his Celis operation, ruined it by most accounts, and has closed as of 2001. His Texas operation will probably reimmerge I as write this under the guidance of Real Ale Brewery of Blanco, TX, a town name which conveniently means "white" in Spanish.

This 7.7% production of Pierre's is described as "unique" and the already described carbonation and yeast show is enough for me to adhere that adjective. It's lightly spiced, very creamy and smooth, faint malt support in the finish, and a quality yet muffled herbal hops approach in all taste points. I would have expected it more fruity for the colossal quantity of the yeast particles. An ale of this type can hardly be rated by a small glass (how convenient!!!!) and one needs several pours over some minutes to give it a fair assessment. I poured and dispensed some more until all the alledged complexity was hashed out. There is more fruit in some pours and I sometimes love a tall crystal glass (highly etched and cut Ralph Lauren being the favorite) to allow one to get a good sample. Some I pour direct for a large head and yeasty splash, others slower and more gentle, a third inbetween. I felt that for the \$11.00 price it was a tad weak in spicing though one cannot expect Celis or any other brewer to be traditional in all their labels. For a "Signature Selection" one expects all the stops on the pipe organ pulled out and all the flavor notes full or subtle with a quality that elevates the oral-neural buds to heaven. It is not complex or full enough (it could be either or both) and ends up being a lighter tasting version of what I should be at this price and marketing level. I take price and value very seriously and even as a \$5.99 750ml bottle I'd have it placing at 4.0. We do not get worldclass values here as pleasant and rousing it gets at times.



Brewbase Fives

Legends

Brewbase Fives



Saint Bernardus Trippel

RATING: 5.0

Watou, Belgium

The 8.0% is lowish for a Triple but I'm less inclined of late to demand 9-12% ABV when it gets in the way of the relaxing, sip-worthy experience. I like my punches to arrive slowly and with affection; not the brutal KO for it's own sake. "My ethanol is bigger than yours!". Triples and Quads and male egos. Let's just make awesome ales and forget the names and faulty taxonomies and the Global Ethanol Escalations. The lovely painted bottle shows a smiling priest holding the glowing, rich gold fluid aloft. Thank the Lord he's delighted to be slurping on a young, golden creature of the legal, liquid variety. It pours cloudy gold, medium to dark side, ample yeast floating about from even a weak, early pour. The bottle reveals under light such a chunky hop and malt soup they might slap a Campbell's label on it sometime. The lace is decent and the creamy head lasts long and smells fabulous; and I use that word in a manly, beer-drinking, he-man, sort of way. The flavor is the Belgian Philharmonic playing Pleckman's Swing March at full volume.

There is no golden fruited ale as pleasant on the planet. The pomological notes are crisp and elegant, banana for sure, densely squeezed but not tart orange, and good yeast esters overall. As you get deeper and more saturated into the bottle, the malt foundation becomes appreciated, especially if sipping at a warmer temp. This golden nectar is as complex as the engineering schematics to the Space Shuttle and it floats as high and impresses as quickly. The sweetness is there but well controlled. There is supreme sense and sensibility in this bottle. It can be aged up to 5 years for even more heaven. Some people think it's too pale, too low in ethanol, and not malty enough for a Belgian Triple. Here we have a certain demonstration, as the Belgians often give us, that names and styles are open to regional variation, artistic brewer's license, and special interpretation. Is an American Pale Ale sweet or dry and what hops must they always use and are you allowed to have any malt with it and must it always be brown or can it be dark gold? Belgians bend and innovate and have done so for centuries. Styles will not so much converge as diverge in such a rich, ancient brewing culture; especially when time, personalities, and unexplained tradition gets stamped onto the program. If you want your Triples different than this sparkling rock then go elsewhere. You have lots of elsewhere. There's room for all of us and our preferences and I for one adore this exalted, expertly crafted ale.

Brewbase Fives



Saint Landelin

RATING: 5.0

France

This Blond Abbey Ale is from the Crespin Monastery of France. We are classifying it with Belgian Ales as you'd never tell the difference. It has that same strong nectar-filled and spice-enriched quality that one could drink until dawn - and some of us did/. (We'll spare you the songs). Reviewers noted 'total quality from first sniff to last milliliter on the palate... mid-strength alcohol intensity' and 'outranks many Belgian abbey imports and all US clones in my opinion but not up to Blanche du Bruges'. Others noted the lovely stained glass label but they may not always arrive in unbroken condition. If we did a perfect mathematical computation it would rank about a 4.85 or 4.9 since a few found a 'low spot' in flavor depth.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Adams Imperial White

RATING: 5.0

Boston, Mass.

From the Imperial Series, first seen here in 2009, this glowing cloudy amber is "wit" or "white" in name only, being very strong and richly colored. Where it is a shade browner it would be put in the other section. Head is everlasting cream, the lace very strong. Coriander and citrus is moderate with maybe a plus to be added there. The mouthfeel is thick but it is not oversweetened as one might easily be tempted to inflict upon the drinker - especially at the 4 bottle for \$10 retail price. The goal was to "push out the boundaries of the witbier" and frankly they are not alone in that. ABV is 10.3% which is very close to my boundary. There is comforting sweetness enough to cloak the ethanol and yet good spice and malt moments without it being Triple or Quad dense and cloying.

This is not your father's Samuel Adams for those of you who've come drooling, crawling, hop-crazed, and stumbling to the SA altar in recent years. They've pushed themselves and asked us to follow; and for the most part we all have. They've gotten rich and famous and have yet to sell out. Lord help American brewing if SA goes from pounds per barrel to waving a single dry hop over the kettle for three seconds and calling it a genuine lager. They've had occasional misses, nothing horrible ever, more missed opportunities in fruited things and wheat variants. This is very clearly a bullseye by any measure; potent, yet comforting and pleasant, sip-worthy but never weak or odd in any flavor passage, effortless in its pleasing ways. It's a brew-syrup without the sucrose overload, thick in the best possible way, balanced as if they've made it for three centuries in brown robes, impressive without being idiosyncratic and "oddy European". One could argue a faint flavor point here or there if one likes more citrus than coriander or less malt in a strong white, etc. I am too busy enjoying my first four-pack here to quibble on miniscule, reviewer's points which tonight would hinder my pleasure. I find nothing major or minor to improve and will not slurp and swirl until a one note in a hundred raises a question. There will be no nit-picking this eve. There's naught but delight here. Sip and sip well, my friends. Better four like this than a dozen of peasant grade. Now I run to the castle for the last bottle...someone hand my dark

brown Snuggie™ will ya...

Samuel Adams New World (Golden Tripel)

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

Some surprises. One does see SA with a cork and wire cage too often nor have we ever seen a bottle shaped like a small Abrams tank or artillery shell. This 10% offering is oak-aged and is designed to favor spices and tropical fruit. It pours a dark gold, hinting to amber, with a giant Old World sort of head in cream. The lace is endless and in wide curtains. This one is a performer in any glass vessel. The aspects of a tripel come to the mouth by mid passage, being very rich, showing the strength from aging, and having more than the usual SA ethanol profile. It is good enough to serve your most brew-engaged European guests. They would think well of it. It is quite a good session beer and one cannot gulp this without paying a bit of remorse. It is New World, American Century kind of strong, honoring the old and giving it something new. The tropical fruit notes are real, a tad generic at times, and not always meshing well with the barrel-given notes. The spicing is rich and authentic, nicely metered out. This would be a nice "no label" taste test with your local council of experts, offering an assortment of golden triples, as some will suspect it's an exotic Euro thing and others will find the oak flavors right away and suspect it is a trick! Very nice, worthy product just not endearing to date. We do hope for more fine barrel treasures from SA in future.

Samuel Adams Summer Ale

RATING: 4.0

Boston MA

According to the brewers this is a new class: AMERICAN WHITE ALE. (and we don't mean that stiff-looking fellow always re-inventing government and measuring ozone patches). Color is very pale yellow (like a BELGIAN WHITE ALE). The head is big and the lace half what a Belgian master would tolerate. Lemon zest and 'Grains of Paradise' ('a long forgotten and mysterious brewing spice') are used in the European tradition. First of all, the potent alcohol zip of a BELGIAN WHITE is missing. Depth and charisma are missing. It is more on the order of a refreshing CITRUS WHEAT beer with emphasis on subtleness and need for very low temperatures. We applaud their initiative but they need to do more and do it better to found a new class. So far Celis of TX has a superior Belgian copy.

Samuel Adams White Ale

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Massachussetts/Cincinnati, Ohio

Officially this is an 'American ale brewed with spices in the classic Belgian style'. The 'intricate blend of unusual spices' presumably includes the usual coriander, orange peel, and maybe nutmeg. It is a densely cloudy pale golden ale with a whitish head of appreciable duration. Of course you Belgian ale aficionados note the beloved zap of higher alcohol is missing (for legal distribution reasons no doubt) but much of the rest is there. Some felt the spicing was 'too prominent' or 'overt'. Another noted that a refined herbal mintiness of many Belgian whites was missing - though we might recall such brands were called a 'light mouthwash' by one detractor. It seems a reasonable compromise but in this form it will not replace the real thing.

[Matt] Saranac Belgian Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

This pale yellow ale has a suitably tall cream head of some duration but sporadic lace. They use 2-row and traditional Euro-malts together with a genuine Belgian yeast strain to produce what is termed a "sessionable" product. The nose is tart and spicy. With no yeast float and sediment one can only get so much yeast fruit but they do surprisingly well for a clear, filtered formula. There are many better American copies of the golden Belgian ale but none at this price. They do give it a more rounded, malty base than many New World copies and the fruit flavors are surprising good too. Good not awesome.

Schelde Lamme Goedzak Ale

RATING: 4.0

Belgium

A \$12.99 bomber (no cork, no wire) in September 2012 here is a precious thing, not a light investment for most of us. The pour is fairly dark gold, a bit darker than some, the head large and dark cream. Now that price and a 7% is already a minus unless this thing tastes like the best Belgian golden ale on earth. Spicing is not bright at first but it develops a clove and coriander theme of some strength which reminds me of a organic mint toothpaste for both good and bad. There are both clouds and clumps, these adding to the flavors as one might expect. The bottle looks like my 8th grade chemistry experiment gone wrong except without the explosions - the rapidly evacuating foam is a similar reminder. The basic grain flavors are decent but the spicing is very assertive and that both pleased and dismayed our panel. The fruit notes from the yeast exist in good quantity but their quality and intensity varies with the pour. For price we would have preferred a bigger ethanol dose and more than strong spices to carry the concept to our shores. The fruit notes are not complex or rare enough to deserve a high rating in the opinion of the experts we chose. As one summed it up quite accurately: "big spice does not justify big price". Do Belgian brewers overspice and use fancy names to command more euros and dollars just as American microbrewers used cheap but "Imperial" doses to fill the coffers? Hell yes. We love capitalism but we love great beer even more.

Southhampton Double White

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barres, Pennsylvania

"Brewed and served in the house that beer built", the Southhampton Publick House is partly the work of the "obsessive brewmaster" Phil Markowski. This cloudy brew is based on unmalted wheat and the flavor is good, towards the medium or moderate side. The traditional coriander is added to both orange and lemon peel - spicing in sound balance, again on the moderate, intermediate side. At just 6.6% ABV it is no replica of real Belgian product as often found nor do I expect they wanted it so. The label does talk about mastery of the style but they're no fools and know this low ABV version is not going to pass the "abbey test" anytime soon. This is a more effortness, accessible, mass market version for the American market; a fun and capable introduction to spiced ales. It lacks snap, ethanol drenching, and odd abbey flavors but served icy cold it will drive away those sweaty summer blues. It's not bad in the dead of winter either - just not excellent.



St. Feuilien Special Blonde Ale

RATING: 5.0

Le Roeulx, Belgium

Since 1873 the Friart family has made traditional Belgian ales such as this one which is pale and double fermented. Color is the familiar cloudy pale yellow of the style. The head is big, rocky, and persistent. It has all the rich herbal hops flavor of the BELGIAN WHITE heritage but with perhaps less strong alcohol than some. While many Belgian and French blond ales have a similar light, crisp, refreshing flavor this one has an extra measure of refinement and polish. The squat 11.2 oz. bottles are beautifully painted with a cozy city scene - smaller bottles are typical of Belgian products. Reviewers noted 'malt, mint, bitter herbs blended to liquid perfection' and 'Absolutely the ideal representative of the style...as perfect as they get'.

St. Feuilien Special Brune Ale (Brown Ale)

RATING: 4.0

Belgium

Le Roeulx Brasserie Friart produces this twice fermented BELGIAN BROWN ALE which actually appears as a lightly hazed amber under a ivory head of immense size. It carries a pleasant sweet malt character of many German darks but yet keeps one foot in the less heavy amber world so as to be more refreshing. It is a very culti- vated

balance between richness and smooth, drinkable excellence; a state one rarely finds but is most apparent when confronted. If you need an ideal example of a superb BELGIAN BROWN or DARK ABBEY STYLE ALE there are none any finer. Some may prefer one or another French label but we would strongly recommend putting any of them (despite their impressive corks and elegant bottles) up against these 11.2 ounce wonders of the brewing world.

St. Paul Special

RATING: 3.5

No we didn't misclassify this one. It is not St. Pauli. We've had their Double (glitter and all) and their Blonde before. The bottle may have the biggest height to width ratio in the business - to you in Little Rock that means: right skinny. One reviewer thought the brand has a future in sales within adult bookstores. Color is bright pumpkin amber and the head is nearly too overwhelming like many Belgian beers. Flavor is Pils but a measure fuller. The comment that it's 'like an AMBER PILS' is most direct. While the depth of flavor is sufficient the entire harmony a little off. We're not too sure how to explain it. It is one of those brews where Pilsoid power seems to alternate with watery notes and then malt then some sweetness and back again. The theme is not so consistent. It WILL generate varied opinions for you too. Whether in the large or smaller 12 oz. bottles, the bottle fermentation is a work of great art, a strong golden ale of immense quality and highly complimentary, luscious flavors.



Smuttynose Homunculus Belgian-style Golden Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

From their Big Beer series, this is "The Gnome" reborn under the Homunculus name. Reborn is a curious term as the label is a flow of human faces in sperm-like bodies headed towards a golden-leather coaster that resembles an ovum. It would have made a good Beatles or Talking Heads album cover. "Impregnated with loads of hop character" and 9.9% ABV this is no...why do analogies fail me at such times. The golden is hazy gold, lots of lace, and a frosty near white head of variable texture and long duration. Nose is Belgian-like all the way. I an authentic Belgian aura all around. The first sniff and sip is strong in ethanol and spice - this is a copy worthy of Xerox and Memorex. The finish is surprisingly complex and better than some real Belgians in my book even if one cannot claim these overt fruity esters are authentic to the old country. There is more fruit, alcohol, and spice than you'd expect of an American clone no matter who the daddy is. They've done very well here...maybe Duval bred to a Yankee mom, hardy, strong, and true. Examining the label's sperm-bound faces, I am sure one is a gal. Could we have a golden lesbo Belgian here without need for stuff from the lads? Who knows? Beer and baby recipes are both mysteries these days. Smutty or nutty or nut-less this is one very good golden ale and quite a feast for eyes and buds.

Sterkens Dubbel Ale

RATING: 4.0

Meer, Belgium

This dark amber ale has a full lace and mid-sided head of good duration. While clear it has a moderate to full flavor of yeast. Even with the word 'Dubbel' on it this ale is not very strong in flavor or alcohol. Indeed among the amber brown Belgian ales it seems to be one of the thinner ones. Still it is quite pleasant and satisfying. But at \$13.49 (March 2000) we would have hoped for a big punch and a tad more complexity.

Stillwater Artisanal Cellar Door American Farmhouse Ale

RATING: 4.0

Baltimore, Maryland

This pretty, artful, ornamental label is the work of [Lee Versoza](#) and we like the idea of crediting the few skillful label designers out there. Then we realized that through all the creamy smoke that CELLAR DOOR was the real name of product; so hard to comprehend you'd need to stare at it for 27 hours in several buzzed states with a pile of magnifying glasses to figure it out. The "hard to read" approach is popular with some web fonts but on a product it's a marketing risk when you're asking for thirteen whole dollars (Feb. 2012) for a beer made with sage of all things. It is also 6.6% ABV and that's a good deal shy of the desired potency for a premium beer at this price point and with so much lazy crazy hazy haze. I am not surely how many ales ever flowed from American farm houses but we in the southern US done prefer things a mite stronger and out in the woods if ye will. Malts are German wheat and pale, hops citra and Sterling. Now that sounds promising! A bit of white sage finishes it off. We think this means *Salvia apiana* though common sage, *Salvia officinalis*, is occasionally called white sage for it's silvery-white colored leaf. The sage, tangerine, herbal, grass, and yeast flavors are very lovely, smooth and delightful from first note to last. It's a herbal ale in the best sense of that name, a sophisticated tea and laudable ale in one luscious package. I wonder if a Rosemary Red Ale or Borage Brown are next. Actually, brewers have yet to explore even a hundredth of the rich flavors in the world's herb garden and many of them will love being blended with hops and barley.

Stillwater Artisanal Stateside Saison

RATING: 4.0

Baltimore, Maryland

When I first heard of Stillwater Artisanal beer and the lofty \$12.99 price (December 2010), I figured it was from Oklahoma. But I suppose only one tenured Prof of French Literature somewhere hibernating in Stillwater OK could spell "artisanal" so it would not do well there. "It's kinda like a fancy Pabst Blue Ribbon for them folks up yonder in them thar skyboxes at the big pigskin stadium" would be how that would sell. Mentioning the 13 bucks a bottle would be after I had a running start of 30 or more paces. Nobody ever bought a bottle of anything for thirteen whole dollars in Stillwater Oklahoma except that one time some rare Yer-a-Pee-in perfume accidentally got shipped to the Five and Dime once back in 2001 and Mayor's daughter decided to break in her new VISA card. Fortunately this Stillwater plan is from Baltimore, Maryland where things this pricey do well and fit their image very nicely - Inner Harbor Aquarium and Johns Hopkins smart and cool to be precise. Cloudy, pale yellow pour, big off white head, and sour nose are promising. Spicing is modest, dryness clear, fruit notes subdued, and carbonation rather strong. Grain is firm in the background, more intense with tastebud saturation - that is, by half bottle or 20 sips. As a farmhouse or Saison goes, this is modest and timid though not necessarily weak or wandering from the theme. I get more malt and pepper flavor with oral saturation but never strong there on either point. Sourness goes away quickly and so it is marketable in those Inner Harbor restaurants where any bottle costing \$13 is likely to say Coca-Cola on it. There is more fruit with some mid passage notes, good but light grapefruit esters in general, but not always found early on. Later notes get a touch of banana but weakly so. The 6.8% ABV makes it widely saleable but weaker in that note that it should be. The familiar farmhouse funk comes and goes and mostly goes to suit the predominant American taste for Belgian beers. If there such a thing a low-funk Saison this would be it. For me, it's a tad too harmless and timid to get very high marks.

Brewbase Fives



Thirsty Dog Cerberus

RATING: 5.0

Akron, Ohio

Sampling this brew was something of a recurring, déjà vu moment all over again, blasting from the past. Actually our collective beer-addled brain was close enough for comfort. There is another dog-themed beer named for a three-headed hound from Hades. That would be Flying Dog Kerberos Tripel - different spelling but similar idea and execution. These gold-foiled 4-packs look from the Old World for all the world - at least not from Akron. Their approach is probably not wrong as on my retailers Belgian-only shelf they fit in well with the real thing and one would be hard pressed to sort this one out as an American entry.

This brew pours medium gold with no hint of yeasty deposit and a short but lasting head in old ivory shades. ABV is a whopping 10%, fitting a Tripel and one would again be hard-pressed to separate it from the genuine malty, spicy beast. So which dog is king of the tricapitate creatures? The Thirsty version is a marked way finer, both in presentation and actual flavors. This veritable copy of the vaunted euro-classic style is Memorex and Zerox faithful. It is one of the best American products in the the Belgique market and while 90% of the copies are weak in ethanol, this one comes up with real goods in every way. For me, nothing is missing and it neither tastes like spiced lager nor golden mouthwash - which is a not uncommon, sad outcome from our shores. Here is a reasonably priced domestic which tastes like it spent weeks on a boat and had some balding, brown-robed, pious dude lovingly transfer it from cask to bottle. A friend of mine said this is an American "hail mary" play but given the church connection to abbey ales, that might offend someone somewhere - but I don't care 'cause I'm a radical libertarian Baptist and these days offending the robed, lacy clergy might just might spare your innocence. But in the case of Cerberus please savor and swallow. Cerberus is a honest rendition of an Old World treasure, a loving and impressively executed version steadfast to the world standard. It's a new American Tripel Ale benchmark and you can carve your bench with the wild face of a three-aged pitbull any time now.

Tournay Traditional Belgian Beer

RATING: not graded yet

Belgium

I bought a single 11.2 oz. bottle of this at my local beer store for \$5.59 and figured it to be some basic, 7% Belgian golden ale. First sniff was skunky and then it poured a hazy gold with only the least bit of wit bier spicing and many other perplexing things. The font size on the label is so minute I doubt the world's most observant gnat could read it while sitting on the bottle itself! I do see a pretty bridge with trees so an attempt was made to be artful but the whole scene is very dark and not ready for primetime in the scale, colors, and brightness used. As the skunkiness shows it had some age on it, and such is only tolerable in a golden lager (if then), I will reserve my judgment for another batch and time. It was far from out of date (02/2011 in 06/2010) but with just a single bottle I will not score it yet.

Triangle Belgian White

RATING: 4.0

Durham, North Carolina

Durham, home of the Bulls minor league team and the even better Duke University basketball team is part of "The Triangle", a space made between Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill. When I first saw these gold, white, and black cans I figured it was yet another local microbrew doing some clever or cheap or both. It turns out this 5% formula is actually a Belgian white in a can! Somewhere in the old country, monks are spinning in their simple pine boxes. They use white and red wheat grown in Scotland...Scotland County NC that is. It is suitable in color, unfiltered, and is one of the first cloudy brews of any style I've flowed from a tube of aluminum. Carbonation is high but the head did not overflow the cap as I had expected. Spicing is moderate but authentic enough. At \$8.99 per six vessels, it's a decent value but I do miss the higher ethanol. As American copies go, this our local Belgian copy in central NC is a little better than average, neither too memorable (cept for the canning) nor weak as mass market Belgoid simulations. It is certainly portable enough and if only I could fit some in a PBR can, half the state would become educated to good beer. By the way, Durham is also home to All About Beer Magazine and that too is a very good thing.

Unibroue Blanche de Chambly White Beer on Lees

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

The huge white head covers a light yellow brew with moderate but sufficient spicing and just 5% of the active ingredient. One can get a similar formula in the stronger flavored and 9% Don-De-Dieu version but I find a reason for both to exist. This is more easy drinking on a hot day, served icy fresh in fancy glasses or just any mug hanging around the garage; well, almost any mug. The same recipe (I suppose) for a cold night is the Don-De-Dieu which needs slower sipping and more leisurely contemplation.



Unibroue Don-De-Dieu Ale on Lees

RATING: 5.0

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

Of the more than seven varieties of Unibroue's expertly made Canadian, Belgian-style ales this is one of the very top. This 9% ABV elixir using wheat is Pilsoid gold with enduring lace and a fast-erupting near white head of fine texture. The merger of traditional spices with yeast fruitiness is as fine as anything from the Old Country and perhaps better than many of them. The complimentary flavors unite in a golden ale that is full strength and full warmth, yet silky smooth. The effort is remarkable and it never lets one down. I have paid as little as \$2.29 a small bottle in 2009 and that is a supreme value when bars are selling half-warm Corona crap for 3 bucks. This is a true delight and a real masterpiece. It is essentially a stronger version of their Blanche de Chambly and frankly there is a time for both.

Unibroue Quatre-Centime Commemoratif Ale on Lees

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

This amazing product commemorates the 400th year of settlement of Quebec City (1608-2008). If that's not enough a rather interesting history lesson is finely painted on the bottle along with a very realistic, shadowed facsimile of a printed label - very neat print work there folks. Bottle collectors not this and get one. They have even "tampoed" on the UPC code and it works very well too. ABV is 7.5% and the color is light yellow, steady but moderate lace, tall but short-lived head, and a curious mixed aroma. It is not so spiced as yeasty, moderate for the pale Belgian style but easily consumed in all it's haze-making, potent saucy way. It reminds some people of a strong ethanol wheat beer and there is some insight with that thought. Malt is weak, citrus is at some moments but stronger at other points. It is overall on the dry-bitter side but you get generic honey sweetness in the earlier notes. You get quote a range of effects depending on the temp, the oral duration, and as with all cloudy-yeasty things the actual pouring points. A later "dregs pour" is the most inviting and surprisingly that cannot be said of all yeasted Belgians. And oh yes! This is a Canadian copy.

There are probably 32 things that need to be delivered to make a golden Belgian-style ale good and some brands accentuate a particular 3 or 7 things. Ditto for barbeque sauce and Cabernet. I always get letters when I compare beer or cars or plants to women but I refuse to stop. Men understand better and women do if they'd just admit it. God knows they compare us to far less pleasant things. This one is the gorgeous, leggy blonde with her biology degree instead of a nail saloon certificate. This blonde is however not the one finishing her Neurology Internship at Hopkins driving the black Z8 roadster. When is enough enough, satisfying just right, and yet one knows there is more out there? We have all the good stuff here (the chick analogy has ended) but perhaps the recipe has different high or low points than some of us like best in the style. This is a commemorative beer and not a regular thing so they have done very, very well to make it a bit different and special. Here's to another 400 and please don't wait that long to tickle us with lace and fruit again!

Unibroue St-Hubert

RATING: 4.5

Chambly, Quebec, Canada

This north-of-the-border product has lots of carbonation in the golden stuff, fruit-filled to a high degree, more malty than hoppy, and quite earthy on the yeast meter. Coriander and fruit appear quickly. It's not overbearing nor too acidic. The finish is occasionally ragged and too muddled for some tastes but it's very near to perfection if you like this style quite fruity.

Uinta Monkshine Belgian-style Blonde Ale

RATING: 3.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

Uinta has been a fav of our of late but they do have some misses. This is one clear failure. While the organic aspect is one positive, this 6.8% fare is more than a little timid and disappointing. The fluid is light gold, long but thin lace, ivory head of mid depth. First sip is tart but fading to weak passages that are not Belgian in the least. There are a few nice sweet malt notes but the spicing is far from the style even a moderately spiced iteration. Panelists said "a fake Belgian...a weak American golden ale at best" and "worst US Belgian gold copy I've had in some time...they are not hard to make really...was it brewed by monks or monkeys?".

Val-Dieu Abbey Blonde Ale

RATING: 3.5

Aubel, Belgium

The 6% ABV analysis of this light yellow ale is surprising low for the style. The recipe goes back centuries at this very old abbey. It is "partly filtered" yet unpasteurized. The head is immense and substantial in off white. Lace moderate for the style. The flavor was disappointing, almost like a bad North American copy in fact, the flavor elements of the tradition there but the execution far from excellent. Even with it dates 14 months from expiration, it found off notes and some "dead places" near the finish. This is Belgian Blonde Light if such a style should exist in name. I was not impressed in the least. Move on to their Triple for a golden beer but even better try other things first.

Val-Dieu Triple Ale

RATING: 3.5

Aubel, Belgium

Their Triple adds 3% ABV to the 6% of the Blonde for a more potent presentation. Color is darker (more gold than yellow this time). I found the flavor much superior to their Blonde which at best was vapid, uninspiring, and feeble. This stuff has flavor, more malt than expected, less spice and fruit than I'd like, and yet still off the standard I have in my brain. This label too was months from it's "best buy" date and with the brown bottles from a dark shelf, it should be a fair test. I must say this recipe too was a waste of time and money. The website calls it "progressive but never excessive" so I'm hoping they get excessive at some point and improve the stuff. While I normally my Belgian liquids on the pale side, I found their Brown/Brune product the only one of the three (Blonde/Triple/Brune) to be desirable.

Van Eecke Kapittel Watou Belgian Abbey Ale

RATING: 3.5

Watou, Belgium

Can we get a Beer Stimulus Bill from Congress!?! These tiny 11.2 oz. Belgian bottles for \$5.99 a clip are starting to cut into my political donation money. (I never had done that and never will but it sounds good in my emails to Senator Porktrough). This little bottle holds a potent 10% ABV nectar, cloudy gold, big lace, very swirly yeast in all bottles, and the head yellowish-cream. Like their Hommel Ale, which I found a horrible representative of the style, this bottle too was strangely flavored even though abbey ales usually hold their structure and quality well over months. I must assume the sensibilities and preferences of the Watau folks is far different from those elsewhere. May I was just Orvaled and Duveled to death in my early beer years; and now I can think of a golden Belgian no other way. But generally I'm quite open-minded and appreciate new things (expect one legendary abbey preference) and yet this one fails to get me happy or informed or excited on any level. The malts are very earthy, very odd to me, very crude at some passages, faintly metallic, other times medicinal, not in the form of stale beer though, and very off-putting. There are pops of corn, biscuit, very faint citrus, and faint yeast flavors in the entire, cluttered, shabby mix. I like a good corny-hominy malt ale but this is something far different and in a class by it's sorry self. I found other American reviewers who mentioned things going wrong for them,

"diluted", and "wierd" notes with this label. I'll not bother with another Van Eecke except to keep the next volume full and by no means with any hope of personal enjoyment.

Van Eecke Poperings Hommel Ale

RATING: 3.5

Watou, Belgium

The presentation on this \$14.99 ale was impressive. It was champagne-corked and capped and then enclosed in a photographically bright metal canister showing the brewery and brewing. It pours straw yellow with much sediment visible in the bottle. The head is very long-lived, cream in hue, and mountainous. The word "hommel" means hops by the way. Nose is earthy but not full strong. It sips very free of hops bitterness in the British hops ale style. There is quite a bit of corn-flavored malt in fact. It is lightly sweetened and just 7.5% ABV. It's a pleasant enough sipping ale (and the imaged canister shows use of a brandy sniffer) but not as strong as I would have like. You get modest hops and unfortunately some very curious metallic notes I found very offensive. It was dated 12/09 so I must assume the bottle is not past it - and a pale Belgian may not do so well with age as the darker, carmel feasts will. It is was more show than go. The long I sipped, the more prominent hops became in the finish but overall one is confused by this product. Just for the record, the firm of St. Bernardus is also from Watou, Belgium. I think it is best very cold but even brought down in degrees, I found it severely wanting.

Van Steenberge Oude Zuipers Belgian Tripel Ale

RATING: 4.0

Ertvelde, Belgium

This dark golden ale comes in corked, 750ml bottles with the name Papago Brewing Co. as well as the Van Steenberge brewery name. ABV is 11.0% and the head ultra-tall, and ultra-foamy. The foam is colored as old ivory. Flavor is light malt at first, biscuity and faintly hoppy notes next coming to the foreground. The ethanol is well-disguised and the longer one sips (and you will compelled to!) the richer and complex the malt becomes. It is just under \$12 in Summer 2009. I found it fine very cold but warming it bit it ceased to impress as much - and frankly any beer needs to sit and stand firm when served with a sumptuous meal. Oude Zuipers is surprisingly clear and free of yeast particles and this begins my problem with it. I loved their Piraat product but here is something less impressive and far from memorable.



Van Steenberge Piraat Ale

RATING: 5.0

Ertvelde, Belgium

This corked champion comes with the painted on "Absolutely one of the top five beers of the world", quoting the likely style-biased Guide to Belgian Beers. Their website claims a survey of "American beer connoisseurs" give it 98 out of 100 points - "no other beer scores better". It is "Triple by Strength" yet mid-golden in color, never dark. It is also "IPA by nature and history". What the &%@*!? Studying their website, they broadly intrepert the IPA style as anything made rich and strong, surviving sea voyages and out-at-sea drinking over the months. Forget that liberty with IPA history and enjoy it for what it really is: a strong, spiced, durable double-fermented ale that would last 2 years on board most ships but has nothing close to the hops slap, dryness, and medicinal approach of an authentic IPA. That which strengthens the "body and moral of pirates and other seafarers" is not exactly the market for the British IPA of old where it was sipped by fancy ex-pat aristocrats who's only sword and pair of pistols were for wall decoration. And they wore more likely to wear golden lace than consume it. They also claim the Vikings c. 800 AD took strong beers with them for nutrition and health. Maybe, likely, who knows. But as they stray from the pirate thing with all this IPA and Viking talk, the historical/marketing message becomes less

convincing and muddled like a dark stout.

The colorful painted label will last forever but is more like a good high school artist's production than a work of art for any museum. The 10.5% ABV (website says 9%) is more my idea of a truly cultured presentation! This stuff has more lace than all the Victoria Secret factories laid end to end and more head than...[your joke here]. It is lightly cloudy with a small amount of sediment. The flavor jolts one as highly pleasant and surprising all at once with notes of Belgian white ale alcohol, peppermint, and Santa's finest candy sugar. Fruit and spice made it the finest possible concept of a liquid fruit cake. Wowee cubed. Malts come to the back notes and final finish, ending more drier than I expected from the initial sweet thump. It's sinfully rich, a Johnny Depp sort of likeable renegade, traditional but over the top to be sure. It's somehow in control and regular but wild and fun like a new ZR-1 Corvette to try out in Wyoming in the middle of the night during the Police's Ball. There is a curious savage civility here and so the Piraat name is quite a fine choice. It is a beer of much charm, designed for sipping, and turning on anyone young and naive to really fine brewstock. It's a dessert choice above almost anything else and easily on par with the finest oak-aged products for a cold night. One cannot say a bad thing except \$11 a bottle which in today's economy is a bit much for some folks.

Victory Helios Ale (formerly V-Saison)

RATING: 3.5

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

Using Belgian yeast, German malts, and European whole-flower hops, this Farmhouse style ale pours pale but bright yellow, some orange tints in fainter light. The head is ample, mid-lived. It has a nice refreshing punch, 7.5% ABV, backbone of malt but not so much, and a finish that is very medicinal and yet not far from authenticity. Lemon peel and black pepper are among the "impressions" but they quickly add these were not added. The citrus notes can be bright and cheering but the finish is a bit heavy, funky, and frankly a tad annoying in it's raw potency ("substantial strength" per their website). It would be authentic and not as earthy-hay and medicine-drenched. Styles were created for enjoyment not overdosing and ultra-funk for their own sake. One reviewer here was even more offended ("soapy...tastes at times of perfume and barnyard SOMETHING...good at times...undrinkable and offensive at others") while another was more generous ("if well-chilled all those crazy Old World flavors blend well and make want to drink longer and deeper").

Victory Whirlwind Witbier

RATING: 3.5

Downingtown, PA

Color is hazy gold, carbonation like Niagara Falls in reverse, and therefore the head sustained and constantly refreshed. The aroma says Belgium as does the more generous-than-normal spice for this style. The cap is a keep with a big Red "V". Mister Whirlwind nthe label is a wispy-white-haired dude spinning around like something from the new frosty Dairy Queen menu. Unfortunately I can't read the tiny yellow letters on the bright blue background and I suspect I'm not alone there. Attention Brewmasters: don't write and printer cute, fun, informative pieces that no one even sober with 20/20 vision can read! I'd kill for a real Belgian drinkers opinion on this Penn's Woods copy of their sacred style. I'd suspect they'd agree with the overspicing remarks and seemingly weak ABV value. There's surely a market for readily accessible "spice beer" (as in various Christmas/Holiday treats offered over the years) but I will not be part of praising this single, easily-achieved dimension.



Westvleteren Blond

RATING: 5.0

Westvleteren, Belgium

One of the top rated Belgian blondes on the planet, this stuff packs just 5.8% of the good stuff. It is made in small batches in the trappist style and can be very hard to find.

Weyerbacher Blanche

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

The brewers developed this fine product after a trip to Belgium in 2000. It pours cloudy gold, head near white, short but lasting. They use light spicing with coriander and dried Curacao orange peels. It's just 4.6% unlike their thermonuclear Merry Monks label reviewed below. This offering is straightforward, non-laborious, needing no brandy glass or mouth swirls to scan it, but not compromised to a low level. You've got a well-made, low ethanol, lightly spicy golden ale that is best served very cold for a very hot day - the Belgian sort of summer cooler, almost as good as German wheat with citrus already in it. A hundred American brewers try this approach towards finding a lightly spiced, crisp, Euro-chic, picnic beer. Most of them do not succeed as well as this Blanche. In reality, it's more of a "honey, I finished cleaning out the garage [at least the central left side]"...so I'm going to have three or ten refreshing beers in preparation for thinking about preparing for the pre-game show four hours from now.

It tried this again in spring 2010 and found it still a 4.5 and frankly the lack of ethanol might as well be a larger deduction down to 4.0. Do we say that the new, sleek, red Kia GT5 is just like a Porsche but with skinny tires and a third of the horsepower? High performing, high-scoring beers must have ABV in the range of the original style and not a fraction of their horsepower and ability. You lose something in the conversion. It is not just about shape and flavor and ambiance. There is no replacement for ethanol. For fun I added three splashes of seven-times distilled Vodka to the label to see if things might be righted. Very soon I was thinking Orval, Duvel, Robert Duval, Oral Roberts with a 60 ft. Jesus, something unthinkable from Trappist monks, being trapped in a gold wire cage, farmhouse ale in a hayloft with golden bubbly and spicy farmer's daughter named Cori Ander, corks a poppin', numbness in general, then nothing at all.



Weyerbacher Merry Monks Belgian Style Golden Ale

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Pennsylvania

Except for the possibility of unabandoned indulgence in this fine product, I'll not ask why the monks are merry or something roughly synonymous with that word. Cloudy gold it is and the yeast swirls in the bottle like wood, chicken parts, and tractors during a Fujita Class 5 Tornado in Kansas. The head is big and ascends as quickly as anything with a Belgian town name on the bottle. Flavor is very pleasant, great cold and very drinkable at room temp we found out. This highbred copy of the real thing does not carry those import and weak dollar disadvantages and it has deep, dramatic appeal that I would not have expected. Three bottles were tried at various temps to be sure I was not missing something. All three moved and inspired. Spicing is traditional, mid-high potency and yet respectably wise; not that fake Double Mint Gum blast some cheap microbrews give us. Spice was best (restrained) when icy and yeast when warmer so aim for some balance if you want a perfectionist's take. ABV is 9.3% and a deficiency there would have scored them much lower here. It's the Lexus of Golden Belgian Ales and most of you guys will know that that means.

Weyerbacher Zotten Belgian-style Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

First of all this is not approaching their Merry Monks firepower with 9.3% and while bottle-conditioned this offering is 6%. "Zotten" is Belgian/Flemish for "fool" and while a 9.3% will get any of us fools-in-waiting there quicker than a 6%, let's judge this rich golden-amber ale on it's own merit - or not. The head lasts long, decent depth, and ivory-ice overall. The nose is Belgian wit all the way and absolutely not an APA (American Pale Ale) hoppy pull. The first sip goes all over the map with one nice malt note, much discordance and lack of harmony. Sips two and three show more regularity, much more hops than in the nose and yet malts exploding all around in the background. Being a devoted inter-style beer blending, I do know what a Belgian wit splashed with a classic American Pale Ale tastes like. Some of those combinations are rather yummy and have gone down in my journals in the "do again" or "refine a bit more" category.

Zotten, if not a deliberate blend, is crafted respectably by any method of technology to bridge a malty Belgian ale with some careful, professional hopping - something they do very well in other labels. By any means or methodology this is a hybrid and one I find alluring but not quite on point. Blends whether they be physical or in recipe or by some curious combination of the two must in the final analysis work and flow and glow with a high degree of agreement. We do not require ONE theme but they'd better not have twelve fighting each other with no logical order. Any chef or cook or brewer can throw 10 yummy flavors at the palette but only a master will give them integrated flow, something of a linear flow that makes sense from first to last. It's a form of "flavor choreography" but perhaps more like programming a fireworks show as some things need to explode before others and others only give background in pale tones and others wait for their own moment after another had lit up the world and gone black. Here's a mellow Belgian gold base, lightly influence by spice, the malt foundation moderately impressive and very evident, and the augmented and auxillary hops integrated well in some sips and at other times awkwardly dancing into the scene. I like this hybrid idea but here is a nice example of something clear and smooth at times while other sips are disintegrated and asymmetrically clumsy. While never offensive there is lack of grace which must be improved upon by altering either their process or their recipe. They are close to a refined hybrid but bumbling a bit. It's a green, semi-rough blend but with quality ingredients. Given the talent of this firm they will surely get there and educate and thrill us once again.

Wolaver's Certified Organic Ben Gleason's White Ale

RATING: 4.0

Middlebury, Vermont

Using Mr. Ben Gleason's organic wheat product from Bridgeport, Vermont, this label makes a highly carbonated, pale golden ale of nice spicing, moderate in all aspects, never weak nor strong. It is refreshing very cold, fun, and nothing special flavorwise. If you'd prefer organic and don't need the big ethanol buzz of more authentic copies, this is a decent choice. Reviewers here noted "faintly skunky at times, fading lemon, strong lace...yeast fruit fading to pepper notes, too variable for me" and "mid-potency, spicing and carbonation are about right but nothing much to rave about beyond that...competant and ordinary by today's higher standards". I don't consider the certification a big factor in my beer choices perhaps you do in yours.

ALE - CHRISTMAS, HOLIDAY, or WINTER

In this rather synthetic category, we include anything with a Christmasy theme. We've decided not to include Winter Warmers or Winter Ales for now. Some of this stuff is in the [Spiced Ale](#) genre while others are sweeter after a Fest style. Some breweries just make a Christmas ale that's a slight variation on their regular ales, nothing clearly organic or unique about the seasonal approach.

Anchor Our Special Ale 2010

RATING: 4.5

San Francisco, California

From about November to mid-January, one can usually find the "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"-bearing bottles of Anchor's spicy, liquid holiday feast. It is a different recipe each year but all are 4.5-5.0 products so one hardly needs to review them these 36 years into the tradition. The 2010 version pours a very dark cherry-brown, head ivory and semi-thick. It sips brisk at first, soon the spices and fruit notes coming into the mid and late notes, finish surprisingly dry. It is not overtly malty given the color but there's a thin skeleton of such

holding it all together. One could fault many Halloween, Fall, and Christmas beer makers for using a simple pumpkin pie themed recipe. Anchor uses some of the same comforting flavors but not with excessive strength or crude overtness. One should never have a spice that is more about spicing than about the beer itself. I can spice anything and make it all about the spice and very little about what I am spicing up. Beer is no different. Anchor gets this right once again. The always get OSA right so buy it each fall and enjoy.

Anderson Valley Winter Solstice

RATING: 4.5

Boonville, California

The AV squad sent us this lovely bright amber brew in 2011 with very high carbonation, mid-large cream head, and refined deep malty theme. It is superbly smooth, the finish very sophisticated, with hops nice on the background. The herbal cones are overt until a full-bottle saturation. Caramel, complex malts, unnamable thin fruit, vanilla, vague honey, and a good bread yeast are apparent to various degrees. Spices are faint so this is by no means a spiced Christmas ale. It is about a 4 out of 5 in sweetness. The sweetness was fine but has been turned down a notch. The spices might have been turned up one or two notches but we understand why they did what they chose. That said, this is now a competitive category with ultra-spicy barleywines and complex barrel-aged entities fighting for the Christmas brew dollar.

Aviator Frost Nipper

RATING: 4.0

Fuqua-Varina, North Carolina

This brewery resides in what amounts to South Raleigh NC (though with far more pretty views and relaxed attitudes) is on the grounds of an old airfield and makes bombers and jugs for the Southeast, most at a high level of expertise. The pour is dark brownish-red, a sort of cherry cola tint, the head short in mixed cream tones. ABV is 7.3% and this is slightly apparent in the lusty malt nose. The glowing, satiny blue reaper on the label is curious and apparently a character beckoning one to a cold, hoppy nip instead of eternal frigid-rigor. A friendly, polite, Duke blue reaper offering you a nice frosty mug of refreshment would be more a fittin' to Fuquay manners. Malts include smoked, winter wheat, 2-row, chocolate, and Special B. The Special B is dark among the Belgian crystal malt group, giving caramel, raisin, and rich malt flavors as well as dark brown to black pigmentation. The hops are Perle and Willamette. There are tart spice notes along with strong carbonation. While the recipe was intriguing, reviewers here felt it could be "too overwhelming" and "while well-spiced it was not coherent in all flavor passages". There is more smoke and depth of malt than many Christmas/Holiday recipes reviewed here but the abrupt and sometimes bitter finish notes could be evened out. We felt pleasantly nipped and reaped but there were abrasions and minor cringes that need not occur from such a well-chosen recipe. Opportunities abound.

Blue Moon Winter Abbey Ale

RATING: 4.0

Golden, Colorado

The pour are brownish-amber, bright in some lights, more dank in a bar, the head cream and low, the lace very long and regular. They add some Belgian candy sugar and wheat to refine it. They call it a Belgian single but that reflects (as experts will know) the ethanol dosing not the color. Tripels are not alldark and singles always pale gold as sometimes thought. Malting is different thing to them in terms of this three-tiered scale. Caramel and toffee notes are most evident, these slightly sweet but overly indulgent or too candy-like. ABV is 5.6% and while a holiday brew of sorts the spicing is not turned up or very evident to me. It something of a malty-caramel-wheat-ale with Belgian themes. Not all of our reviewers thought the sugaring was restrained but I feel the balance is decent enough. In some ways it is quite a simple formula but under that regime it is reasonable.

(Brasserie) Dieu du Ciel Solstice d'hiver

RATING: 4.5

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

\$4.99 for a petite 11.2 oz. bottles spawns cries of "it better be damn awesome". The bottles show distinct sedimentary deposits. It is butterscotch-amber with red tints, these made very hazy like butterscotch candy when the yeast flows well. The carbonation is high as would be expected with its bottle-conditioning. They

class it as a barleywine, having 4-5 months of aging too. The "liquor-like" texture and strength (9.8% ABV) are both remarkable. There are so many complex flavors in the soup, one is apt to be confused while also being thoroughly entertained. The elaborate labyrinth of flavors leaves one's brew senses tingling and well-fed. A red English yeast makes it quite fruity and when yeast is well-poured that set of flavors dominates the burnt caramel malts. "Candy beer with fruit...quite amazing really" and "perhaps over-contrived and not uniform enough...too much going on to comprehend it. Kitchen-sink brewing does not impress me" came from our panelists. There some bitter, severe, and sturdy finish notes which keep it from a 5.0 rating. Some of you may find it perfect or nearly so - we could not...not quite.

Diamond Knot Ho!Ho! Winter Ale

RATING: 3.5

Mukilteo, Washington

The first thing you notice about this amber hall is the 8.5% tag on the label. The head is dark cream, low, and lasting. Lace is limited but steady. Flavors include mid-powered malts, a slightly sweet finish with some bitter hops. It goes from tart citrus and weak fruit to an mostly even malt-hops balance in the mid passages. As the hops saturate your tastebuds, it becomes far more hoppy with malt quite in recession by later sips. It is very much a higher ethanol American Pale Ale overall, not as subtle or smooth as a Sierra Nevada. It overt and harsh at times but never offensive really. There are far more interesting choices for the winter or any other season.

Dubuisson Freres Scaldis Noel

RATING: 4.5

Pipaix, Belgium

The bottle is "tarted up" as our British friends say, a tiny 8.48 ounce thing with a big, bright blue foil sash covered in bright white stars. A pretty red, blue, and white Christmas scene from the home town shows on the main label. It has been called the "Bush de Noel" formula but perhaps the Hillaryites and Obamists among us would not buy something so named before November or December 2008. This special Christmas is brewed for the year-ending season to "delight the most demanding connoisseur". First of all, what are the European always inventing smaller bottles to give us less of their chosen, blessed broth? I mean besides the whole money and profit thing! I am more lenient on the Belgians because their stingy bottles of beer tend to be potent and flavorful enough to compensate. This stuff is a whopping 12% ABV so they're half forgiven. The rest of the absolution must come from the flavor if at all. It's a dark cloudy amber, head shorter than most from this land and also not much lace for me. It's a moderate-full fruity-malt product, mid to high sweetness as expected for a Noel special, the alcohol unremiting at all flavor notes. There is moderate malt, not stout strong of course, some fig, no hops to be detected over the ethanol flourish, some earthy rye, and none of the spicing that Belgian are famous for. I sipped again and again and tried to find a spice, any spice. I settled on the fact that the spice here is called EtOH; a favorite among our species for flavoring drink since about 7000 BC. I've tricked up lots of beers with shots of very clean, triple-distilled vodka and the effect here is similar to that approach. They have to make this on the sweet side or it would come off at 12% like a malt martini.



Fantôme de Noël 2008

RATING: 5.0

Soy, Belgium

Brasserie Fantome was formed in 1988 under the guidance of Brewer Dany Prignon and uses the ghost theme and a general Saison style of brewing. They are in the style of a local farmhouse brewery deep in the heart of the famous Ardennes Forest. The green bottles come capped-and-corked, a bit different for a Belgian but no less an good economic compromise without affecting quality. Their annual Noel or Christmas Ale is from a different

recipe or theme every year so I dated this review. Their logo ghost (like Caspar's evil twin) put on some rotund girth and looks like a snow man for this label - clever that. Carmelized and highly roasted malts are used in abundance and that is true of something called alcohol - the later being 10%. The cloudy butterscotch-amber broth is tangy, citrus-infused, and hops:malt balanced in the first sips. It mid-notes with stronger malts, medium sweet, very sophisticated and layered, finely textured, and always pleasant. The finish is a stronger dose of malt but rubbing one's tongue you get engaging bits of hop spice like bursts of cinnamon gum. (Note to self: invent beer-flavored hoppy gum with an ethanol liquid center). I paid \$11 for the 750ml offering at Whole Foods in 2008 and that is about as expensive as most seasonal Belgians get. The experience is more than worth the price of admission even if running to the kitchen for a corkscrew was annoying. Overall, this cheerful gift is joyous sleigh ride through many of the brewing worlds good flavors, fading and erupting as it should, inspired all the way, and never with a jar or rough spot. I can't wait for Noel 2009 and even if it's a full Prez Jackson and comes with three corks, I'm there to buy a couple.

Fort Collins Big Shot Seasonal Ale

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

Even though stuff showed in NC late January, the beer-swilling snow man on the label strongly suggests a "holiday" aka Christmas offering was intended. The passage on the label says winter warmer. It pours an amber-brown to reddish-amber with a fat mid-cream head. First sip of this brownie ale gives sweet malts, not overly done, and loads of nice toffee notes, agsaiion not overdone nor barleywine full. Unfortunately there are some gaps in the flavor profile, giving thin, disappointing notes at times. Reviewers here noted "good theme and concept but too weak for me...needs more intensity along the same path" and "found the finish too bitter and not seasonal, special, nor a gift really...not impressed."

Full Sail Wassail

RATING: 4.0

Hood River, Oregon

This slightly potent 7% ale is generally in the winter warmer style, pouring dark reddish-brown to brownish-amber made from four malts and a mild dose of American hops. It is roasty and toasty, rather comforting but not immediately too impressive. It is occasionally lightly sweet and faintly fruity in places but never overtly so. Caramel and mild bitter hops seem to last without taking away from it's bright, crisp approach when very cold. This is something of a controversial brew on our panel for reviews had quite a big range, some very enthusiastic and others frankly bored. It is true to the style but the enjoyability quotient was both medium to high for our panel.

King and Barnes Festive Ale

RATING: 4.5

Horsham, Sussex, England

This amber-brown ale is bottle conditioned with yeast sediment. The head is ivory, finely foamed, and lasting. It proved for us to be superior to their Broadwood Ale; oddly named the Best British Ale. Even in one case where it was dated a full 25 months (long conditioning for a supermarket stock) it was quite heavenly and had no bad flavor elements. It was less sweet than the Broadwood and only the finish provided a bit of dryness. The bottle conditioning no doubt provides more depth of character and quality ale fruitiness. Their Christmas 1997 product was more impressive overall but this one will not likely displease anyone. This is one good example of how American microbrewed ales don't always measure up. This bottle-conditioned quality can't be faked.

Mahr Christmas Bock

RATING: 4.0

Bamberger, Germany

The thick but sleek brown bottles are as heavy as a Panzer tank (sorry for the old memories) and look like an artillery shell in fact. The pour is medium amber-brown, the head mid-sized and dark cream, 6.0% strength, and nose of Old World earthy, hominy malts. It is not a double bock but a slightly richer, sweeter (less sweet than a Fest), and ver smooth creation. It is not an uber-potent dark lager in the overly intense, American microbrew style of making everything something of barleywine or Imperial Something-or-Other; often with a wierd

creature, flying beast of some species, or artwork from the Brew Master's cousin's college portfolio. Despite the monkey-man riding on a giant reindeer(?) with ram's horns this a hardly an elf or Santa graphic of American standard, grossness, or exaggeration. The finish is sometimes thin and fragile but doubtless the lack of lingering hops makes us in America feel very deprived.

Here is a German beer without any doubt, more pleasant than many dark lagers but not as fine as some of them. It is a good experience, a good coming back to the core of bock brewing, a re-calibration to Germany's import approach and the horrible dollar-euro exchange rate; the experience now mostly lost in the clutter of microbrews sold today - for both better and worse really.



Mikkeller Santa's Little Helper (2011)

RATING: 5.0

Orbaek, Denmark

Though dark as a stout, this holiday treat is based on a Belgian style broadly in the Belgian Strong Ale family. The head is light brown, not a tan either, a flavor notes overflowing in spice and quality malts. The finish is semi-dry. Reviewers on our panel proclaimed "love it...their is no better Christmas ale of any name or style" and "love it...perfect + + +...a malty-spice feast.". One might even consider it a spiced barleywine, giving the potency of ingredients and ethanol. Others felt is tasted like an Imperial porter blended to a richly spiced Belgian Trippel. Despite being an enigma, this is a coordinated brew and harmonious recipe, full and rewarding in every single sip. Here is a yummy winter treat; a warmer above the usual warming session brews. While reviewers on other sites thought it too sweet, not one party here did, and found it spectacular and flawless down to the last detail. This is an exquisite, carefully refined formula together with a exacting execution in the kettle room. Sir Kringle has never been helped so well.

The 2012 variant is very charming and is dominated by fruit flavors which we do not recall from the 2011 variant.

Brewbase Fives



Natty Greene's Red Nose Winter Ale

RATING: 5.0

Greensboro, North Carolina

The pour was enthusiastically foaming in rich cream, one well-settled bottle almost engulfing my laptop like a burning 737 at DFW. It's a hazy amber, sediment full in bottom of the bottle, with steady, well-spaced lace. Cinnamon from sticks, Curacao orange, and ginger are used to make it festive. Malts are both from wheat and barley (Munich 2, Pale Wheat, Cara Munich 3, Caramel, Chocolate, Melanoidin) in this 6.8% product. Designed to be a full-bodied winter warmer, the base is very rich in dark, dank, effective malts. The spices are mid-strong, very effective and enjoyable from first sip to last. We were surprised at the choice of bittering hops as Magnum but it is very compatible with everything this in this lovely 21 IBU offering. This is perhaps the finest of their products that our panel can remember and collectively we have 6-7 of them under our very long belts. (I have moved to full, real crocodile for holding up my hefty beer belly as no mere steer can hold up my stuff by now). This is a delightful, celebratory drink, actively bold and interesting at all passages and in all notes. A shaded malt, spicy-hazy thing with Magnum hops is a tricky project and we frankly find it a real accomplishment and a sign of their big league, inhouse skills. Other words used by our panel were hearty, surprising, substantial, and "Santa-in-a-bottle". Here is a very fine way to get red-nosed and very happy any day from now 'til December 25.

Pike Auld Acquaintance Happy Holiday Ale

RATING: 4.0

Seattle, Washington

The brew pours out a bright festive amber tone, the cream head rather dark, and the nose hinting of the orange peel, coriander, nutmeg, and cinnamon used to give it umph. The presentation of color and nose are remarkably well judged. The 5.5% ABV is disappointing but no doubt this gives them more markets with a single recipe. It is initially tartish with mid-powered malts, nice caramel notes, and yet overall not as rich as might have been desired. The finish is clean, dry-hops everywhere, and there remain good passages of spice, honey, and toffee. Panelists noted "a Winter Warmer at 5.5%????!! What an outrage even if this recipe is not bad. But neither is it remarkable." and "quite a bargain and with Pike you get some good and some average beers..this is very average and I'd rather spend more and get much more."

Ridgeway Reindeer's Revolt English Christmas Ale

RATING: 4.0

Oxfordshire, England

The Shelton Brothers bring over a number of fun ale for fall/Halloween and Christmas with cute inventive names and matching photos. Here's a reindeer in a wide straw hat, wearing a Hawaiian style holly-and-berry shirt, enjoying a suitably adult beverage, telling the barkeep that if the "over-sized, red-suited endomorph....slave-driver" comes looking for him then kep quite. His therapist want him to do things for himself for a change.

The 6% true ale pours amber-gold, the head surprising dark in golden-tan, the nose unmistakably of Brit candy-ale and good malts. While I generally despise candy-ales for their simplistic approach - kinda of like putting a mini-skirted blonde in a Ferrari to sell more gum or insurance - I see the need for candy-ale in the holiday season for most of us consume dense bundles of colorful sugar we'd never consider in March or July for many seasons. Actually when sipped the candy goes away more quickly than expected, leaving what is immediately a weaker, grassy ale flavor with mid-potency British ale malts. The finish grows more dry with time in the bottle. "Time in the bottle". Love that expression and learned it from a friend who is a rare whisky/whiskey expert and has more time in the bottle than the contents of a Pharonic clay pot found in the Valley of the Kings next year.

The candy lingers in the background, the malts surging up and down, the hops crisp and well-attenuated as support only. This is no anthropomorphic, reindeer-in-a-hat gimmick beer. It is not deep but is a surprising, decent and clever spin on old Brit ales, one I liked and thought was very worthy of the marketing plan. The candy-malt runs rich enough, never syrupy, and yet finishes dry, all the flavor passages and transit stops pleasant and expertly discerned. I would tremble if most American micro-houses attempted something this tricky and twisted as a derivative of the real ale genre. It would not go as well 99 times out of 100 from this shore. Revolt has charm and nearly about as much uniqueness as a Rangifer wearing a human shirt who's dising that well-known bearded oppressor of Achondroplasic sweatshop workers. For those of you as blonde as this festive ale that means...get an education or a fast connection to Wikipedia.

Saint Bernardus Christmas Belgian Abbey Ale

RATING: 4.5

West Flanders, Belgium

These corked 10% ales are made the old way and who better than a friar to know the story of Christmas of what is suitable. For me, alcohol would be on my suitable list. The brewery only dates from 1946 but that's old enough to be good, very very good. The head is as growing and massive as any Belgian, bigger than some, rich beige for sure, fruity aroma of finest features. Color is cloudy amber-brown. Hops are local and they have their own 500 foot artisian well. Aging up to 15 years is possible. I generally age my Belgian ales about 15 minutes from entering my house. First sip is complex, rather dark malty ale notes, mid notes turn in dense fruits, the finish dryish and a real cornucopia of everything lovely and good in the beer world. There's a carbonation fizz to note as well. As sips continue I think of quality chocolate, Belgian perhaps, filled with a real fruit cream. All the rich fruits come in the filling. One could almost go with the flavor of a fruit pastry at times, not a fruit cake ever, but a good German-style fruit bread maybe. This is a real Christmas ale, fruited and intensified with malts. It is a little too intense for me and I am one to love an Ultra-Imperial Triple IPA if one comes my way. Here's a brewmaker's extreme, a tad removed from my ideal pleasure session but it might just be your heaven in stockings.

Samuel Adams Holiday Porter

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Mass.

The pour of this 5.8% beverage is a very dark reddish-brown, generally translucent, the head a rich cream and very deep-lasting. Caramel, Chocolate, and Munich malts are used in strong doses to produce a traditional London-style porter that also relies on Fuggle and East Kent Golding hops. It is reasonably complex, very desirable if served a bit cold, and quite competent. It is not a world-changing product and is quite safe in it's traditional comfort zone.

Samuel Adams White Christmas

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

"As crisp as the first snowfall of the year"...this unfiltered, yeasty snack comes out dark yellow, more amber-gold in a darker light like a pub. The head is barely off-white, rough-foamy, and moderate in duration. Cinnamon, nutmeg, and orange peel are used for flavoring so this is not the usual, old Belgian lemon peel and coriander treat. ABV is 5.8%. The orange peel makes it more of an American take on the spiced ale style and produces a more approachable, fun, and peppy drink. It is more cheerful and bright offering than most Belgian golds. The lack of 8-12% ethanol makes it easy to down and not off-putting for the general masses as would be a tripel golden ale. This is far measure better than the usual bar fare where they drop 2-4 orange wedges into a Blue Moon. I would rather have integrated peel than fresh, infused juice. This is a very nice creation; useful being the word that comes first to mind. I wish it was not a limited edition seasonal for it might be a hit all year.

Scuttlebutt 10° Below Ale

RATING: 4.0

Everett, Washington

The ABV is 7.4% and the grinning polar bear on the label is cute and cuddly with a thick red scarf, holding an amber bottle and probably...um...ready to gulp your spleen and liver in the next six seconds. As for my liver, he

might get thoroughly wasted and drown with an even larger grin. (They did a \$2800 CT scan on my enlarged, fatty liver last time at the hospital and fortunately due to regular NAC and milk thistle I came away with not a single liver treatment or concern. 1500 different beers and a clean scan? Priceless). Anywho...this holiday...nay...Jesus-filled Christmas ale is cloudy chestnut red, the head a medium cream, irregular in bubble sizes, glass-grasping sticky, and lasting. The nose is pure sugary malt, not entirely unexpected lads. First notes are sweet and malty, holiday cubed sugars like liquid cookies with icing added to the blender. These stronger Christmas ales always do well with more alcohol content because that approach makes the entire palette a bit more dry, astringent, and less cloying in the finish. A high ethanol, dry finish is good for these initially sweet malty creatures. It improves and liberates them. With more sips you get to a cherry-drenched, fruity, sweet, malty place that is highly cultured and refined. Some panelists felt it too simple and formula-driven but a few of us (your Chief Editor included) think this has much charm, useful and slightly endearing at this fine price point. There are ragged bits, some "annoying", "uneven", and "cinnamon-malt soda...simple and wretched". Our positives included "cherry-malt-cocoa passion even if very sweet and simple" and "potent..lovely and enjoyable...a festive treat all around...don't change anything". They do an oak-aged version but we have yet to cuddle with it. I suspect the aged rating would be higher there.

Shelton Brothers Pickled Santa English XMas Ale

RATING: 3.5

Oxfordshire, England

Brewed with spice, this 6% ABV is a Christmas special and I noticed there was a choice of cute Santa caps for this one single label. It was brewed by Beer Counters Ltd. for Shelton. Cinnamon, nutmeg, and coriander at used so it reminds me of some recent Halloween, Pumpkinoid offerings. The color is amber-gold, the head ivory, fluffy, and long. Their claimed "ruddy chestnut" color is laughable to anyone whose ever seen a chestnut of any species. It has a rich bready flavor of a good English ale but the finish is neither bitter nor sweet - yet smooth in the lightly spiced presentation. This product made exclusively for the US market is no hasty, cheap gimmick - it's close enough to real ale even if not as bitter as my real ale fans say they had expected. The finish gets a bit weak at times and I wish the spices were taken up one gear. It's what I expected, wanted, and a smidge less. A couple notches up and we have a good theme and 4 bottles. Must be chilled for near room temp it will get wimpy on you.

Southern Tier Old Winter Ale

RATING: 4.0

Lakewood, New York

Three varieties of hops and two malts (none specified) are used to make this dark amber feast with a mid-cream head of medium duration. The nose is sweet, only faintly of malt, little of hops too. First notes are zippy, clearly hops-driven, the mid passage much the same but intensifying, and the later more smooth. Reviewers here noted "very much a Winter IPA if you ask me...interesting but not a great recipe either" and "intense hops...more bitter than fruity or floral". The overall consensus here that's fairly generic but sold pale ale, a bit more than intense than some and approach IPA potency. Nothing to write home about and not worth driving too far to try.

Sweetwater Festive Ale (2011)

RATING: 2.5

Atlanta, Georgia

This holiday offering comes in at 8.5% strength, reddish-brown with a weak head. It is so insipidly sweet it was almost down the drain for me. The spices are of cinnamon, mace, and malt - I'd almost rather be sprayed with mace at this point in the experience to get some relief. The red wax top is annoying, especially as the effort is not justified. One panalist here said "manages to be offensively sweet and bitter at once....hideous".

ALE - CREAM

What is a cream ale really? Many Americans have had Genny Cream Ale and know it when they taste it or wake up the next morning with...300 lb. creamy and foaming Jenny. The Genesee Brewing Company at creamale.com

says most of us experienced the style when dad left the fridge in the garage unguarded. Cool and maybe true. Their brewmaster Clarence Geminn said in 1960 "I think we have a winner here" and it was born. (Many Brewing History experts claim a similar ale hybrid style dates to the late 1800's). Sadly though in 1964 they marketed it as "The Male Ale" and marketed to the newly established Playboy set - and by the way your female sig-other may ask about why you have a website ending in "male.com" on your web history. "Is there something you need to tell me Harold?" she said with fear in her eyes. Women being women, she will of course Google the "crea" part of creamale.com and assume you have a thing for Italian men. Just be ready with it's "CREAM ALE DOT COM you dumb ass (or) sweetie" and have a pillow and blanket ready in the garage if you use the first version. In 1974 the short, "stubby" bottle was introduced and 1.4 million barrels were sold in one year. If the whole Playboy connection wasn't enough, a competitor started a rumor c. 1980 that the Moonies cult owned the brand and was using the money to do evil things we suppose. In 1988 the Genny Cream won the Silver Medal at the Great American Beer Festival. Whoa Nellie! Second in a style you created and master? Yes. The Gold in 1988 went to Little Kings. But in 2002 Genny took the Gold. In recent years, the GABF awards get complicated because Lone Star and Red Dog have won lately, suggesting the category might be expanded somewhat. In 2005 TAPS Cream Ale from California won. Milwaukee's Best has won medals and I can tell the cream style of a Genny from this 7-11 staple any day of the night unless I've had 12 or more or either. Even the great Anchor Steam Beer is said to share many things in common with the true cream ale and may be a close cousin in fact.

Most Brew Taxonomists will tell you that the style is based on that hideous thing known as American Light Lager but perhaps finished with a lager yeast or mixed with lager. In other words, cheap corn and rice are used to make it light and reaching a "price point competitive" (read: cheap). The amount of hops varies a bit. Other experts are more kind and say a German Kölsch style in lower strength is close. They are certainly light gold, smooth, and very creamy at times. The truth is perhaps more on the order that it's an ale at the start (weak hops and malt) but undergoes cold-conditioning or lagering to smooth it out, sometimes including the use of lager yeast in final steps. The adjunct corn and rice are important too. I personally think that malt too is used to "cream up" the flavor as opposed to "spicing it up" with hops. Carbon dioxide also smooths it around the old tastebuds. Rob Haiber in All About Beer wrote that indeed the true cream ale is an ale hybrid. It has ale yeast, not as much ingredients as most ales, and a lagering to make it very easy on everyone. Beer genius Michael Jackson describes the cream ale style as "may actually have been blended with a lager", otherwise a "very pale (usually golden), mild, light bodied ale". Most cream ales from the cheap to the microbrewed tend to need a very chilly temp when serving.

Frederick Hempen Gold

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

From our computer database: BEST CREAM ALE 1998. This cream ale is brewed using hemp seeds. They say they're pleased to provide yet another practical use for hemp and here it serves to give flavor. Their Hempen Ale was so rich it might be hard to separate hops from hemp - something we've not been called on to do since college. In this more mild, creamy form we think we have more appreciation for what the seeds actually give in the way of flavoring. It is certainly the best cream ale you'll ever try even if the hemp does not excite you. It is very delicious and most of us found it to be a 'super unique' on our life beer lists. That is, a brew so distinct you can recognize it anywhere anytime and would grab it without a second thought. It is first rate without doubt. Besides it might shock the in laws.

Genesee Cream Ale (aka Genny Cream)

RATING: 3.0

Rochester, New York

This was probably the first beer I ever tried. But then I again I used to like Ford Pinto with orange decals down the side, 2-toned platform shoes, and girls...nevermind. This Update New York favorite is made in Rochester NY and many yankees have missed it upon moving South or West. While only about \$4.00 per six pack of bottles the taste is distinctive and unmistakable. The green foil label is glowing. While superior to other bargains in bottles it has new competition. For a smoother creamy taste we now prefer Little Kings which is worth the extra dollar or so. We have recently found it in Southeastern markets.

Liebotschaner Cream Ale

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

This 1994-95 Gold Medal winner at the Great American Beer Festival is from Lion Brewery. They also make the Cape Cod Old Smuggler's Ale in case you found the name curiously familiar. The color is pale yellow with a short-lived tiny head. Carbonation is moderately full. As ales go this is a sweet and lightly fruity; scarcely full enough to please but just right if ice cold for a summer scorcher. It is miles ahead of Genny Cream Ale and so different from Little Kings they can't really be compared. Many reviewers felt the \$7.49 tab was rather (or VERY) steep for such a thin creation. A dose or two more of that wonderfully tempting ale fruitiness would make it one very nice beer. As for now it suggests why it won a narrow category; we still expect better.

Lagunitas Sirius High Gravity Cream Ale

RATING: 4.5

Petaluma, California

This 40.8 IBU "Special Release" ale is different from everything else in this section. It's 7% ABV for one, its' very thick and syrupy for another. For yet another, it tastes spicy and rich like a golden Belgian ale. It pours bright golden-amber, a righteous fine glow in fact, topped with a large cream, lasting head. Nose is very much of spice, hops or maybe something more. First nip is malty with hops coming on quickly to balance, thick mouthfeel, creamy only in the sense of being a thick as a creamy hops milkshake; should something that wondrous exist anywhere. The sweet, resinous hops are very nice but it's nothing like a Genny Cream Ale of my youth - and that would be 32 years old if mom and dad are reading this. It's overall a bit like a hybrid of American Pale Ale x Belgian Golden at this point, though taken back a notch in the strength department. On the Belgian front, I would not discount the chance some real citrus was used here.

Now that American brewers know and accept that Belgians "spice", I suspect many of the microbrewers are taking new licence with spices of all exotic kinds and types yet to be determined and cleverly not accounted. Cloves, coriander, citrus peels, and nutmeg are old choices. Ginger, peppers, "pumpkin spice", and vanilla have all worked well to date, of late, with one or two noted misses. Can a good anise ale or cinnamon lager be far off? I can almost see the Ben Dover Anise Ale coming from a No-Cal microbrewery available with extra long necks and a large, tightly bound cork to pop. Then there will be the Cine-Bun Lager offered at the Sundance Film Festival, so exclusive only 22 hand-signed bottles were made, then ramped up to 10,000 cases in time for Tribeca.

Maybe Sirius here is just a Cream Pale Ale if such a thing exists - but it probably should. Very oddly it's neither featured or described on their website as of today's review date. I am confused by the naming as much as I rather loved it. Perhaps they meant "smooth pale ale", ie. Cream Pale Ale. I suspect they wanted to make a creamy ale with actual flavor though any connection to cream soda, real or imagined by Genny drinkers, is absent. It stands out in this lot of similarly named ales as much as a Porsche Carrera GT stands out from a 1986 Ford Escort GT. At some levels, named don't mean too much...

Little Kings Cream Ale

RATING: 4.5

Cincinnati, Ohio

Our computer database gave it BEST CREAM ALE 1994. Schoenling Brewing of Cincinnati has won 3 gold medals at the Great American Beer Festival. And it shows. This creamy brew is highly palatable and is a pale mellow drink that lacks the compromises of lights. At about \$1 per 24oz. tall can a six pack worth (72 oz.) comes to a very reasonable \$3.00-3.50. This product is never bitter and at times we find the aftertaste semi-sweet. It is distinct enough to earn 5 bottles.

Riverside Raincross Cream Ale

RATING: 3.5

Riverside, California

Described as a 'good British sipping ale...dry...satisfying' we found this \$7-8 microbrew to be a poor value. Little Kings at much lower price was more satisfying in this class despite the 1995 World Championship award. Color is dark yellow with a long-enduring head of near white. Flavor at first palate is semi-sweet, lightly fruited, and faintly hopped. Second palate and finish are more dry, cream-flavored, and slightly bitter; not always a smooth 'good' bitter for some reviewers. Dry and easy to stip it is. Satisfying was a big negatory. Given the diversity of

golden microbrew ales, creamy or not, at this price we cannot possibly recommend it. High approvals did arrive for the label art. But any beer lover can safely save her money for another Riverside brew.



Rogue's Honey Cream Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

This 'great ale of distinction' is colored pale amber with a deep lasting creamy head of long duration. The head is ALL it has in common with Little Kings and Genny cream ales! It is immediately recognized as a well-hopped amber ale but is crisp enough to be a refreshing summer cooler. The key phrase is 'honey touched' not honey-drenched - it finishes rather dry and crisp. Reviewers noted "it is more like a HOPPY CREAM ALE...perhaps like a SEMI-LIGHT PALE ALE...absolutely perfect on a hot day" and "much better than the homely mild maid on the label would suggest". Our favorite comment from the Brewbase gang: "not overly hopped up on hops...just right for me". Pretty in presentation with a glowing light amber color and a head that lasts all morning - if you can resist it that long.

ALE - GOLDEN

A classic Golden Ale aka Blonde Ale is one far less malty (or at least lower in the strong malts) than an amber or brown ale and much less hop-driven than a Pale Ale or India Pale Ale. They are more apt to include crystal and pale malts than caramel, highly roasted, and chocolate ones. The color is light yellow to rich gold, bordering on amber in some incarnations. When gold they are often "crisp" and "refreshing", easy on subtle foods and ideal for hot weather. Lower carbonation is common. The Blonde Ale name is often favored in the US for the opportunity to put a sexy, light-aired lady on the logo or label.

Some Mild Bitter Ales are rather golden in color and easily confused with most of this style. Typically, they are more about nippy hops, especially in the finish, and have very little malt in the mid to late notes. A classic gold is more about subtle malts and fruit or yeast flavors and can be much sweeter than any bitter-type ale. Honey is a common additive to golden ales and the whole Honey Golden Ale sub-style is more popular than it should be in my opinion.

Sadly, some microbreweries (and not just the lower price point type) make their golden ale an opportunity to cut down all the big ingredients to virtually nothing at all; in fact making an insipid, weak-as-water Light Pils using ale techniques. They might add sweetness and a bit of citrus flavor to make up for the lack of everything good. Blonde should never mean shallow and easy.

Some of them are actually lagered and emulate the German Kolsch style of Golden Lager, being something of an Ale-Lager hybrid. There are now Kolsch Ales in that style. The best golden ales have subtle but quality malts at their backbone and lots of fruity ale yeast flavors in the foreground. Some are sweet and others are more hoppy and dry in the finish. They are made with barley and thus not usually overlapping with the equally golden Wheat Ale style. Semi-wheat Golden Ales do occur as do others with alternative grains.

The classic Strong Golden Ale has 6-8% ABV or even more and in the widely copied Belgian Wit style is often herb-spiced (other than by hops), bottle-conditioned, and full of yeast residue for complex flavors.

This review section excludes the Belgian golds or wits as well as wheats. They have their own sections and confusion of these is easy for the new beer fan.

Ballast Point Yellowtail Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

San Diego, California

I'm not sure what all the colorful fish stuff on beer labels of late is all about. Maybe the crazy canines, pissing young boys, hookers, pirates, mythological beasts, local fauna, prett Mayan chicks, and goofy white guys have become dull. After it all, I think I supposed to consume 18 of their best and go hump something wild and legal from my species. This label is made in the golden, German Kolsch style with malt and hops from that land. Color is mid gold, head slight but lasting, and for most Americans this will feel like a Golden Ale-Pils hybrid. The tale and brew are yellow and hops do not qualify it as a true Pale Ale in the usual sense. It is refreshing very chilled but not a perfect example of the Kolsch style nor something I will try again.

Blue Moon Honey Blonde

RATING: 4.0

Denver, Colorado/Utica, New York

This beer is made 'once in a blue moon' in either Denver or Utica NY. They use 'deep golden' honey and Perle hops for a 'soft bite'. Color is pale amber and the head is quite substantial and lasting. Carbonation is obvious and steady. We've been rather hard on the new crop (or perhaps swarm) of honey beers. This one seems different. One panelist said 'there are true and substantial flavor elements under the sweet honey addition that earn attention...this would be a good beer without honey.' Another said 'it held momentary interest with the even malt-hops balance...failed to deliver a complete experience.'. At \$6.99 most of us recommend a try. One final opinion from our gang: "you won't have a blue honey moon with this blonde".

Bison Farmhouse Organic Saison-style Ale (2007 Brewer's Reserve)

RATING: 4.5

Berkeley, California

You'd expect something from Berkeley to be smart and accomplished, even if a little radical. It could be a bit numb one or two days a week. First of all, the scripted word Farmhouse on the label is very hard to read and that's something enough to get your graphic designer terminated. It's certified organic by the California Crop Improvement Association - and probably by Fidel Castro and Kim Jong Il too. It an old Saison style and also won a Gold Medal in the 2006 Great American Beer Festival - those suggest a traditional and mainstream approach. Did they span the two dividis? Yes to be sure. Color is so bright a gold it's almost like a California sun in July. Lace is decent and as long as a Joan Baez tune. The head's ivory and moderate...um...I mean wildly liberal unless you're from Maine by which I mean "progressive"...or if you're from Florida I mean "we need change, any kind of change, even if status quo-like change". Sermon done. Flavor is complex, overall a citrus-hops ale, fruity but not too tart, spicy enough. very drinkable from those seven dollar (July 2008) tall bottles. They used Belgian yeasts and sour mash, leaving just the right amount of "acidity to liven the palate". There's a bit of haze from bottle sediment as it's conditioned in the glass. Their malt is organic but apparently not the hops? Do Bison roam the quads of Berkeley? Well, based on this label they should, even if in the liquid version.

Boddington's Pub Ale

RATING: 3.5

Manchester

Since 1778 Boddingtons has made great ales. Since ???? Labatts has imported it in 'Draughtflow System' (tm) cans and they are more widely known for their Guinness presentation. It came to us in four 14.9 oz. cans. It is pastuerized however. The 'Cream of Manchester' head is famous and with these pressurized cans you do have to let it settle - a curious show if you've not seen it before. Color is medium-pale yellow; most unusual for a Brit ale. That head has a Cappoccino-like appeal. The flavor is unfortunately a tad thin and it could pass for a better Aussie golden lager in fact. It is somewhat like a very good American cream ale (way above a Genny though), endlessly civilized, impossible to offend, agreeable, and consumable in mass quantities. It is very polite and gracious in the mannerly British way - quite opposite the upfront, potent approach of a Scottish Ale or IPA. First taste is more full than the finish which really ruins the experience. Most reviewers I used were not impressed except for the 'settling head' performance and the beauty of a correctly poured glass. Unless you thrive on British-priced lagers with a gimick in the can, the value is so so. Turn it up one notch or two and the price will

be worth it and I'd drink it very regularly. The makings are surely there.

Breckenridge Summer Bright Ale

RATING: 3.0

Denver, Colorado

I would not want to be in Denver CO these days if launching beers for the competition in them thar vales and snowy hills is a fierce thing. Breck's summer ale pours like an ultra-pale pils but with a short-lived head. Flavor is limited, clean, lean, only tolerable if very cold and even then with the most basic of background malts. It is on the sweeter side and has no hops to speak of. I would have named it Summer Dull but then I am a cruel, unfiltered, glib reviewer with no redeeming social graces or desire to charm any brewmasters anywhere. We don't need this in single or sixes or really at all. This is near-mass market in quality but going for lowish microbrew prices. In that price point, we have the worst consumer abuses. It's almost Michelob Plus, weakness and lacking of distinction but turned up in flavor/sugar one notch with the prices turned up 3-5 notches. Is there as book out there for microbrewers called HOW TO PAD YOUR PROFITS BY MAKING A CHEAP, CRAPPY SWEET GOLDEN ALE THAT COSTS NOTHING AND WITH A CUTE NAMES SELLS VERY WELL - ONCE (warning: your reputation will suffer even if you will get that second vacation home). If so, I know the guys who read it and inflicted their crapale on us for fun, cleverness, and profit. Taste some real ale would you please! It works but for me this trick only works once. I am offended. This ale does not need to exist and the kettles used for far finer stuff.

Broughton Merlin's Ale

RATING 3.0

Broughton, Peeblesshire

This dark golden ale has a dense, persistent near white head and modest aroma. The legendary Merlin is thought to have roamed near those Scottish hills near Broghton Scotland. Sadly there is little magic here and the brew is barely moderate in hops and malt intensity. With so many superb Scottish ales (Caledonian Golden Pale Ale comes to mind) from medium to rich style, we found this one impossible to recommend. Reviewers noted 'nice sweetish, hops start but it quickly trails off into a weak finish no brewer could be proud of' and 'very drinkable as they say but we have Miller here if one would ever want that sort of thin stuff!'. Pretty artistic label suitable collecting. The contents are not so memorable.

Casta Golden Ale

RATING: 3.5

Monterrey, Mexico

This a real fraud in the 4-pack, pricey for. Their Wheat Ale was okay in 4's but this is a downright rip-off in the reduced quantity. It's oddly Pilsoid in flavor, perhaps a weak fruity version of a Pils Ale. It's a faux premium and I don't mind calling out marketing gambits when they are so blatant and rude. \$8.00 for four weak, lamentable ales? I think not.

Castelain Ch'ti Blond Biere

RATING: 4.5

France

Like Trois Monts and Jenlain this comes in 750ml corked bottles for app. \$5. It is indeed 'Blond' in dark golden color bordering on very pale amber. The carbonation and head are much superior to all Jenlain bottles we have tried. It is fruity at mid-palate but finishes fairly thin and sweet. It is not a thing like American fruity ales - as California's Red Seal Ale. We felt it was better than Trois Monts and Jenlain if one wants a corked French beer.

Coniston Bluebird Bitter

RATING: 3.0

Coniston, Cumbria, England

This fine bottle-conditioned ale is only 4.2% ABV. After you remove the blue chromed cap and pour the "light golden" liquid (which to me is more medium golden), the lace rises long and slow to form a near white head of irregular geography. The first pour has a very fine-bubbled head of better quality. They proclaim the value of a strong "resinous and spicy" hop but I found it surprisingly thin for something using English Challenger hops. Maris Otter malt is used and evident more in the finish. I found the whole label thing false and curious both until

I read they welcome it serves at 58 degrees F. ! Holy mother of warm ales! "Soft fruitiness" and "a faint hint of scented geranium" is said to come out then. I've written articles and grown over 43 kinds of scented geraniums and I'm not sure I smelled one fit for any of my ales - or I'd have done it years ago. Not only did I let it sit but I bought a bottle from a long-warm shelf to give them another go. Never found a geranium note anywhere and as trained plant taxonomist I pretty much know all the chemicals that make Pelargoniums smell delightfully as they do.

At the high temps complexity improves a bit but this stuff remains ingredient-deficient and something of a weak scam. My 3.0 rating is generous and overall I think the bluebird has dumped on us, overcharged, and gone away with song to his bank. I like it slightly better cold and allowed to warm for some other notes to appear. Long, slow sipping ales have merit as they change from one thing to another. Still this does not change enough to impress. There's a difference between subtly with not enough yet still quality ingredients and subtly with real, spot-on moderation. This is just plain short in so many ways. I know half a dozen weekend microbrewers who can do very much better. I'm conditioned to their kinds of bottles and not import hype and the cult of pseudo-English ale mysticism.

Cooper's Black Crow

RATING: 3.0

Leabrook, South Australia

Leabrook Cooper's of Leabrook, South Australia produce this darkish golden 'ale' that for all the world is much like the better Australian pilsoid lagers. Let's get the pun out of the way. It is 'nothing to crow about'. It still can kick Foster's tail in the old head-to-head dual. Yet we expected so much more after first trying their magnificent Best Extra Stout. In it's favor is a nice aromatic first presentation and a big head. Carbonation and finish are too weak for us. Compared to any good UK or US ale this 'filtered ale' lacks true character. Judged as a golden lager-ale hybrid it tastes better if one does not consider the \$8.50 price tag. We simply cannot recommend it under any circumstances unless you must try EVERYTHING to sleep at night.

Cooper's Sparkling Ale (pre-2012)

RATING: 4.0

Leabrook, South Australia

The name SPARKLING ALE brings to mind the image of a super-carbonated bottle fermented beer in the German Weizenbier or French Brown Ale styles. This is neither. It is bottle fermented and top-fermenting but the lace is actually slow and sparse. The head is lasting. Cloudy yeast flavor combines with a nice non-bitter mild ale flavor for what is best described as a HEFE-ALE. It is not so rich as most HEFE-WEIZEN (wheat) beers from Europe but has the enchanting flavor that only yeast provides. The label says 'enhanced flavour'. This South Australian ale is a winner in the same way Cooper's Black Crow is such a shocking failure. \$8.50 a six is well spent this time. It should be served very cold unlike yeasty wheats which often do well at 45-50 deg. F.

Cooper's Sparkling Ale (2012)

RATING: 4.0

Regency Park, South Australia

The location has changed from Leabrook to Regency Park from the previous review above. The yeasty appears to be more cloudy and thus it seems to have earned a new review. Price is \$9.99 for six bottles in December 2012. It is bottle-conditioned and the "enhanced flavour" tag is gone. It is reasonably fruity with a pleasant but not ultra-delicious set of fruit esters, hops and malt being secondary to yeast flavors much of the way along. Carbonation remains clear as the sparkling ale theme is still part of the marketing. The lace is not always enduring. This 2012 variant is imported by Anchor Brewing of San Francisco so you know it gets a respectable recommendation from those skilled lads. Kudos for a "best after" date stamp instead of "best before" - the clear mark of a bottle-conditioned, better-with-aging ale as compared to mass market, crudely-brewed pisswater. While this appears to be a marginally better, more fruity offering of late, it is not quite a 4.5 yet. Having just came off a review of the world-beating Kasteel Cuvee du Chateau with it's true cherry-berry yeast-fruit notes in a potent golden ale, one is more prepared to rate this one as well down the scale of merit.

Cotleigh Golden Seahawk Premium Beer

RATING: 4.5

Wiveliscombe, Somerset, England

The 500ml brews are part of the Birds of Prey series with lovely ornithological artwork. The Golden Seahawk is probably better known as the Osprey in much of the US. Pale and crystal malts are supportive here in this bright golden pour, the hops coming from the Challenger, Goldings, and Styrian types. Honey and citrus are touted on the label and yet these require imagination and longish-sessioning. The head is Temperpedic smooth, finely textured, a very good presentation in all our glasses. Nose is light fruit of the ale type, tempting but not strong. First sip has citrus, yeasty fruit notes quickly dropping into malt later notes, surprising malty for the hue. So many ales fail and fail badly, soaring off the cliff into a finish so weak and watery I cannot help them a light ale! This one I am glad to say remains robust enough - make them semi-robust enough - to keep your attention and respect. The quality of this ale is remarkable though at one time it really wows - but very few golden ales will be attention-grabbing as might a complex porter, loaded barleywine, or layered Belgian wit. It's good competent ale, well made from first note to last, and far above most golden ales from this side of the pond.

Dergy's Golden Ale

RATING: 4.0

Wilmington, North Carolina

The Wilmington Brewing Company of North Carolina has released both Golden and Amber ales from their microbrewery. This Golden is actually more of a golden-amber or light amber with a nice head of fine texture. The lace is impressive. So much weak golden water is sold under the name Golden Ale these days that it is refreshing to find a Golden Ale with some flavor. Hops and malt are evident but it is surprisingly malty for a Golden anything kind of beer. Even with our understanding that Golden Ales are rarely rich or fruity we still think the \$7.99 price tag demands a retuning to make it truly stand out. It is pleasant but once again (like their Amber) the finish trails off into an undefined and shallow place that even a dry beer needs to avoid. Do try it.

Devil Mountain Railroad Gold Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cinti, Ohio

This GOLDEN ALE is deep golden with perhaps a touch of amber. The head is near white and long-lasting. It is semi-sweet with a nice balance of rather moderate hops and malt. The 'hearty' nature described on the label decides not to appear. Like so many golden ales it has a few 'off places'; notes of weakness and indecision and curious bitterness. Consuming a few in a row gives it a better light: carryover of hop strength on the tongue which becomes pleasant. Your first (and should it be only) bottle will seem somewhat less blessed in the noble vine fruit. Rogue Golden Ale and several other microbrews will run circles around this at any taste test. Some of us gave it a near perfect 4.5 so your own opinion should lead you. It is surely worth a taste trial.

Eumundi Laguna Bay Pale Ale

RATING: 2.5

Indooroopilly, Queensland

Billed as Australian microbrew and winner of the 1994 'Best Australian Microbrew' at the Australian Beer Festival, this brew is dark golden with a shallow short-lived head. As Pale Ales go it follows neither the UK nor the US model and is quite frankly hard to distinguish from a sweetish golden Aussie lager. There is no hops or ale yeast flavor we can note to let one know it is indeed an ale, pale or otherwise. While it is smooth and not awful it is neither interesting or memorable. The \$4.39 price for 1 pint 9.4 ounces is shockingly a ripoff unless one collects lovely labels - toothy shark hovering above a palmed beach. There is no merit to this even if rated against weak lagers. Even the biggest of American breweries made a line or two more tasty at 1/2-1/3 the price.

Fager's Island Blue Dog Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cambridge, Maryland

If the paw prints on the package don't attract you the artful label deliberately printed upside down will catch your eye. With careful reading you discover that this 'house beer' is made by the skilled Wild Goose Brewery of Cambridge Maryland for Fager's Restaurant in Ocean City. The color is very dark golden with strong carbonation and a head of large bubbles. The flavor is fairly moderate with a nice balance of sweetness and hops. It is quite palatable in some quantity (ideal for a house beer) and with the sweetness is tolerable at close to room temp (important for long casual meals). We are sure it performs that function well but for \$8.00 it is not really worth distributing. Drop it \$6.00 and add more hops and it could be a favorite.

Fish Tale Organic Winter Fish Seasonal Ale

RATING: 3.5

Olympia, Washington

Certified organic by the State of Washington and the USDA, this ale pours golden with a thrilling cream head. Flavor is nicely malty for the color, very high quality in this first note to appear. Later notes include a rich but very smooth hop dose, a sort of complexity where less-is-more but never in a weak or wanting way. We tend to describe such beers as subtle-good not subtle-weak. Reviewers here remarked "very reserved but pleasant when icy cold or nearly so...quite a nice change of pace" and "not a mere organic novelty and really very malty for a golden ale...loved it."

Flying Dog Days Golden Ale

RATING: 4.5

Denver and Aspen, Colorado

I guess technically the name is Flying Dog Dog Dales Ale but it looks silly. Made by Broadway Brewing of Denver for Flying Dog of Aspen we have some more nasty mutt graphics like their other products. You are admonished to 'kick up your paws' and 'mark your territory' with this Kolsch-style brew. They confess it has 'light body' but it is far better than we expected. Color is extremely pale yellow but the near white head is large. The flavor is hopped enough for most of us hop-loving snobs and it finishes semi-sweet. It has that refreshing summer beer quality so may attempt (and advertise) but so few achieve. It is light enough to gulp by the gallon but flavorful enough to impress. A nice nip in the hops is a fine touch though it could annoy your Bud Lite pals.

Fort Collins Summer Fling Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

This brightly labeled seasonal is available west to east in large bottles. Okay. Let's get this out of the way. I bought it the first time because of the gal in the bikini on the bottle and the fact my beer review budget only had another six bucks to go. Miracle of miracles, their website hype is mostly true! "A subtle sweet aroma preludes medium-light biscuity malt presence, discrete bitterness and a hint of warmth make this the perfect summer evening treat". Spot on, lads. The "big, bold, and refreshing" is only correct in the last word. It is not big nor bold. It seems to be an enigma for it's labeled an ale, colors up as amber-golden (almost too dark or light for either classification if based on intensity alone), and yet the Beer Advocate calls it a Weizenbock!

Anyway, the head is taller than Paul Bunyon and lace longer than expected. One gets a bit juice, grapefruit perhaps and certainly some pear and apple. Very faint mint and pepper come out but the fruity biscuit theme endures the most. There's a bit of spice anyone, nothing rich. I'd prefer the sweetness down a notch. Roasted malts and some wheat come out but it is no wheat beer in my opinion. I will never judge clear wheat blends ales in the Weizenbock group and neither should you. It could be tuned many ways and as for the gal on the bottle...what was I thinking? The next morning her face looked rather odd and only beer-goggle pretty; good curves and like this brew a rather mixed package neither adorable or ignorable either. (Okay, okay, stop the emails...here's apology #12 for comparing beer to women...we men compare and write from places and spaces we know and love and that will never stop).

Foster's Premium Ale

RATING: 3.0

Albany, Georgia/Fort Worth, Texas

Yes, they make it stateside so get over it. Shrimp on the barbie and all that non-sense is hype. The big green, gold, and red cans are 25.4 oz. with a bright red tab. It pours very dark gold with amber hues - amber hues augmented with caramel coloring added according to the label - and not the GOOD caramel coloring in the form of actual malts! The head is big, coarse and mid-ivory in tone. Nose weakly malty ale. Flavor is slightly strongly malt, about a 4 on a scale of 10, finishing hops not evident until you've downed a few. As for ale fruit notes, they are quite thin if there at all. Bitter notes intrude in some passages and this makes something very other than premium. I don't expect a canned offering to be microbrew-style premium but it's their choice of words. It's an upgrade for college students used to cheap ales, not as good as Yuenling Amber most of the time and far

from a Saranac Black and Tan.

Frederic Robinson Premium Ale (Unicorn)

RATING: 4.5

Stockport, Cheshire

Brewed from an all malt grist, this dark golden ale and aroma type hops. It is later dry hopped for additional flavor. They say it is 'minimally processed' prior to bottling to retain quality. If you met with this brew in a blind taste test you'd almost swear it's a full-bodied Pils with maybe a bit of extra hops for flavoring. Hops aroma is pleasant but not overwhelming. This is not your average British ale by any means - the color is the first clue. Reviewers noted 'a rare find...golden hoppy dry ales are not that common' and 'unique and pleasant but not as impressive as the grand label would suggest'. Another wrote 'Wonderfully appealing...nice change of pace...rich hops but not excessively so' See www.beerbritain.com (Boston Beer Brands) for more info.

French Broad Gateway Kolsch

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

The true Kolsch of Cologne Germany is easily mistaken for a Pils in appearance and sometimes the overt skunkiness as found here. It is technically an ale and usually has more fruit notes like an ale. A good fruity Kolsch could make one give up Pilseners forever if that is what one comes to adore. This stuff is refreshing cold but again what Pils and Kolsch isn't?!? For my money this was a moderate-strong Pils but having few other STRONG virtues. It is subtle in the added qualities for me yet it has a quality and aura of being very European in total flavors. Notes of faint citrus, supported hops (lightly presented), Pils depth, hints of sweetness, some supporting malts of quality style, and wispy Malus carry it on. I can think of few nicer rewards on a steamy hot day after a wide lawn mowed or a honey-do list "lost" in the leaf mulcher than these 22 ounces. It is clean, crisp, and drinkable in the good uses of those three words - not the Miller, Bud, nor Michelob abuses of those formerly meaningful beer words. (How about a Miller FMBW to restore their brand to formerly wonderful beer traits, earning respect from actual product instead of millions of purchased hype). I would have given the fruit esters another punch upward, favoring apple and citrus both.

Geary's Summer Ale

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Maine

This entry at 6% ABV is one bold and colorful item with label of contrasting dark red and yellow, showing a lobster of goodly size. Do people from Maine buy anything honoring the State Bird? When it comes to beer I surely won't let beasties, airborne or ocean-roaming or alien or nymphic, influence my buying decisions. There are better choices in the plump, succulent, mouth-watering, legs begging to be buttered category to allure men to your suds. That said, their website says they have a context to design their label from time to time. Not a bad idea. Color is rich gold, only amber under weak tavern illumination, lace slow and steady, head off white and irregular. Aroma suggests sweetness and faint malt. First taste is the same thought the malt gets rich and this label gets no more complex or inspiring than one's early nasal analysis.

How does this label survive and seem to do well? Sweet malt is the soda of the beer world and not a few (million) folks will always want this for hours and days on end. Kolsch is the general style. If you demand hops to any degrees in your ales, go elsewhere and quick. There's a nice buttery malt aspect and weak fruit. Among the golden, malty, very sweet ales there are few of better quality and in some ways this is the finest of a style not beloved by hop addicts or seriously demented beer lovers in general. I'll enjoy it but not really admire it. It is good for what is, but it could be so much more. It's easy to appreciate as a sweet, summer ale but there 450 choices we'd get more sophisticated, thrilling ale flavor from. Not a few reviewers told us it's an Americanized, less complex version of European legends which at the current time (7/2008) and exchange rate is not a bad thing - but at other times is unforgiveable to purists. Fun but corners were cut.

Genesee 12 Horse Ale

RATING: 4.0

Rochester, New York

This upstate product is a distinct improvement over the Cream Ale for about \$1.00-\$1.50 more in bottles. The

initial taste and aroma is pungent like a Canadian ale. The major flavor is moderately strong and the finish is fairly smooth. The price and nice gold foil label makes it compete directly with popular Canadians like Molson and Labatts. It is easily their equal but not quite exciting. It is lighter tasting than Miller Genuine Draft.

George Killian's Irish Honey Lager

RATING: 3.5

Golden, Colorado

While called a lager it may be a renamed Wilde Honey Ale as both proclaim use of honey and clover. Flavor is moderate with sweet notes and what one reviewer 'must be flavor from clover rather than hops'. One actually gets more of a positive opinion of the sweetness than the brewing art. We have paid as low as \$4.99 (on special) to re-review this. Under such a good price it certainly could have merit since it would thus compete with vastly inferior beers. But these days many microbrews (plus Saranac, Adams, or Pete's) can be had for as low as \$5.99. What disappoints us perhaps is that Coors/Unibev has shown they can do very much better. Another reviewer suggested 'it will not offend but neither will it impress...I'd look to the next cooler for something better...'

George Killian's Wilde Honey Ale

RATING: 3.5

Golden, Colorado

Unibev (aka Coors) of Golden Colorado makes this newest Killian product with an ale base. Honey and clover are brewed with it. It has a lovely golden color (pun fully intended) and the head is larger than many Coors items. Flavor is moderate and not as full as some honey beers like to be. The sweetest is fortunately restrained for best results. While it is drinkable it is neither memorable or particularly exciting. At the price you might do better. But like many Coors products it is available late at night in convenience shops when superior labels are not - so it could be the best around even if you have to pay \$8-9 or some similarly inflated price. One reviewer here noted 'it is a novelty and not a bad one though one finds nothing of true ale flavor holding it up.'



Golden Promise Ale

RATING: 5.0

Edinburgh Scotland

Caledonian Brewing Co. of Edinburgh produces this organic (Soil Association Organic Standard P903) ale. Since 1869 Caledonian has made superb ales of which MacAndrew's Scottish Ale is most famous. This very pale amber ale has a long-sustaining foamy head above rich carbonation. It is clearly aromatic and fills the tongue with a medley of bitter, sweet, herbal, medicinal, hops, and fruit flavors at once. A unique choice for a beer tasting. Truly great.

Harpoon Ale

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Massachusetts

Mass. Bay Brewing makes this Ale along with their Alt Ale (skip it) and India Pale Ale (respectable). It colors up deep golden (very pale amber) and as such is the lightest shaded of the three ales. The head is deep, lasting, and off white. Their 'rare and fiesty yeast' is lightly fruity and together with a medium hops dose is in fact 'crisp'. There are many stronger GOLDEN ALES and some much more fruitful but this strikes a nice summer if you want a tall cold summer refresher. There is enough flavor to thrill but not so much it drowns out any food in your immediate sight. That kind of balance we always respect. A few thought the finish was thin and uninteresting but most of us felt their judgment was near perfect. Whether it's crafted to \$8.00 standards was

up for debate

Highland Little Hump Spring Ale

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

Highland beers range from spectacular (Cold Mountain) to decent (most) to mediocre (Pale Ale). They're like the Gumpian box of chocolates although the chance of a really bad filling is fairly low. The pour here is surprising pale in color, a light straw yellow that is usually found only in the Pils domain. The head is short and thin. The nose is sweet hops, quite tempting in fact. This seasonal is an APA (American Pale Ale) and the label shows a curious ordinary scene from a part of the country with 12.4 million better images to be taken. I guess they wanted a little lump of a meadow and not a grand mountain. SIMCOE hops are used for bitterness while dry-hopping adds AMARILLO and Cascade varieties. First notes are subdued but with a calmness of a quality micro, much more subtle + quality than thin. There are some British "real" ales with pale golden color yet strong malts and a sort of gentle, brilliant hop essence. This is not malty but the overt hops is mild, well-judged, and just what we need for a seasonal, change-of-pace ale. Overall, I found it respectable, a very welcome surprise, and a very clean but substantial ale.

Hop Back Summer Lightning Golden Ale

RATING: 4.5

This "summer ale" is pale gold, favoring straw yellow with giant, an almost unmanageable snowy head if shaken around even to the least degree. East Kent Golding hops make an appearance but it's a rather sweet fluid for them to work in. Still it's no mono-dimensional "sweet gold" of formula-run bargain breweries. There are high quality notes throughout, including faint hop bitterness at first, giving more by the finish. There is much honey with your subtle caramel and vanilla and citrus too. Bits of grass and grain are not always pleasant for some reviewers and we found odder notes yet when the temperature was made too warm. Very warm (as room temp) it's much more crude and unappealing. Some even thought it had Pilsener notes and when thinking about that, you do find them. Summer ales by definition need to take lower temps well since they're bound to be out in the sun and placed on an outside table for some minutes. ABV is 5% and it's bottle-conditioned too. They proclaim it as a "trendsetter in the brewing industry". It is very drinkable and in this case that is a true compliment. One would not find an American brewery making this, whether gigantic or tiny. Giving the dollar exchange rate (July 2008) , it's pretty much a "one and done" experience for most of us.

Hook Norton Hooky Bitter

RATING: 4.0

Oxfordshire, England

I always delight in the opportunity to find a new British ale in thick, stodgy bottles with award seals all about the label. So was this \$6 experience going perfect until I saw it was just 3.6% ABV. Has the old country gone soft? "Where progress is measured in pints" and more progress was always better, I began to wonder. The ale pours rich golden, some amber tints but only in dark places, the head immense and frothy. This "golden bitter" is modest in flavor, very sufficient I think, rich and malty for it's pale color, and surely nothing any brewer this side-the-pond could or would attempt. "Eminently drinkable" is code language of course for it being a tad less than an top coin ESB. "The classic session beer" means you need to take it slow and savor it for you're plum out of 'bob for another!

I like it for even a British ale thinnish in flavor, crafted well, and low in ABV is better than half the fancy, formulaic trash being peddled in my neighborhood grocery store. For all the flying dogs, grinning cats, bicycle tires, surfboards, lime-drenched crap, brewing is brewing and marketing is something far aside - colorful packaging gets you one buy but the real measure of the liquid hidden inside gets them what they deserve. (Fat monks and gnomes on a bottle are usually good if you can afford them). I would buy this again, knowing it is not a great value but is a good experience all 'round. Speaking of rounds...buy the lads another round, right down to the wall there, including that pretty lass looking our way.

Humes Cavedale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Glen Ellen, California

This one is unique. It is made with organic ingredients but is bottle conditioned and put in thick, wine-like bottles like a French ale. It is also krausened - a second fermentation stage. The head is tall and everlasting like most bottle-conditioned brews. Color is light yellow and cloudy. It has a rich initial palate with moderate ale fruitiness. The finish has a strong hops bitterness that borders on being very tart; perhaps close to a Berliner Weisse. The sweet-fruity first part and the drier-bitter second are very marked contrasts. To control that balance (favoring the first) it must be served very cold. One reviewer noted 'an organic bottle conditioned ale is a very welcome thing...nice ale complexity but the finish is not so smooth'.

Knee Deep Beautiful Blonde

RATING: 3.5

Lincoln, California

The label shows a sweet young, golden-haired thing ready to obey, wear leather, and take you around the world. Pale rods will be unfurled and probe everything. She would be a young golden lab guide dog and Knee Deep gives a portion of the proceeds to Guide Dogs for the Blind. Blondes are a severely challenged, "special need" group aren't they? What were YOU thinking? The pour is pale yellow, Pilsoid in all colors, the flavors nicely of subtle fruit and lots of malt. For a bargain \$4 bomber this is not bad stuff and quite drinkable. Blend it with a cheap porter or stout and you have mass quantities of a fine hybrid for a mere song and 8 Lincolns. This is not premium golden ale rich nor ultra-complex but neither is it weak or disappointing. The value point is there for certain. Nice effort and it should put most of supermarket crappy golden ale sixpacks to shame.

Marston's Pedigree Bitter Ale

RATING: 3.5

Burton on Trent, England

Made by Marston, Thompson, and Evershed in the legendary Burton Union way. They still use oak casks. The color is medium yellow with a substantial off white head. Flavor is quite subtle on both the hops, yeast, and malt fronts. In fact a few testers felt is reminded them of a watery American lager before being advised. Others tuned in immediately to the quality of the flavors - a skill we must admit requires both experience and patience. One panelist went so far as to compare to a legendary British car which is more tradition than substance and performance. (Hey, weren't there several of those?). Anyhow the 'Imperial pints' set us back only about \$3.00 and for cap collectors that is a superb deal. For actual beer lovers we'd advise a blend with their stouts.

Newcastle = see Thomas Hardy Newcastle



North Coast Centennial (100) Ale

RATING: 5.0

Fort Bragg CA

BREWBASE AWARD: Best American Golden Ale 1996

This amber ale has a moderately enduring head and the immediate overflowing of hops. The hoppy flavor is never fruity as with their Christmas Ale and Scrimshaw Beer. It has a persistent American hops flavor that persists long on the tongue. Comparisons are best made with Sam Adams Boston Ale. If overpowering and unrelenting hops are your thrill (as with us) this ale is a genuine treat. It is one of true hoppy delights in this database. Retried now in 1996 the color is more gold than amber but the hops dose is unrelenting. The head is small but lasting. Reviewers noted 'all hops and little or no malt...I prefer more balance between the two' and

'wonderfully full and charming...nothing to fault here.' Finish has a pleasant bitter nip. Recommended!

North Coast Scrimshaw Beer

RATING: 4.0

Fort Bragg, California

The hazy and amber-gold presentation of this beer immediately suggests it will be flavorful - not another American Weak Pils. While labeled as Pils it is nearly as fruit-filled as North Coast's Christmas Ale 1992. While Pils elements can be detected the abundant fruitiness is stronger at first. It proves to be a PILS-ALE HYBRID to us. Unlike most ales the finish is dryish likes a Pilsner. The compromise is interesting but not quite outstanding.

Obolon Magnat Ale

RATING: 3.5

Kiev, Ukraine

Kiev? This textured, gold-trimmed label has more sophisticated printing than most fat German bottles - unless it was printed by the distributor in Brooklyn? Anyhow, the fluid is what matters. This stuff looks for all the world like a Pilsner lager; and I did rather enjoy their Premium aka Pils offering. This 5.4% is moderately flavored, nebulous at first, nice fruit quality in the finish, that weak and unclassifiable. It has some Pilsoid grain flavors and yet some fruit comes out though very thinly disguised and short-lived. It is surprisingly malty for the color and there's no hops bitterness to be found anywhere along the flavor train.

The beer is often called "delicate" and I always want to be careful with "low-moderate" flavored beers to be sure I am not dismissing them quickly without smelling the low-growing, miniature roses that others might miss. There is a quality here that defies an easy dismissal. It needs to be very cold and an earlier version of the product had to be cooled before the word Magnat would show up. I think Coors tried that with blue mountains or something. There may be some confusion as the Magnat name is apparently used for a lager of theirs too though this product has some lager-like qualities; appearance and graininess to name two. A friend of mine says all the "Magnat Ales" are really lagers, the brewery taking some liberty with the ale name here or perhaps actually doing a "Pils Ale". I am also told that one can use ale yeast to make a golden Pils and people sometimes do in the homebrew world. In any cases, it's decent, pleasant very cold, not exciting.

Old North State Plott Hound Muzzled

RATING: 4.0

Youngsville, North Carolina

Marketed as having 'all the bark without all the bite' this golden ale is indeed lightly hopped. Yet a very refined European-style malt flavor is richly infused to give one something to savor with delight. For an American microbrew is a rather unusual product and we'd consider it a 'must try' for those wanting to sample diversity. The sweetness is well tuned. It is named for the state dog of North Carolina.

Otter Creek Solstice Session Ale

RATING: 4.0

Middlebury, Vermont

When it comes to a "session" anything I do not think of 4% ABV as the usual starting point for a description - certainly not a promising one. Still, microbreweries today need to maximize their nationwide exposure and that means making lower ABV products for those states with a fear of something one-fifth the potency of a bottle of Scope® mouthwash! This bravely named ale pour rich gold with some amber tints, the head ivory and small but enduring. The nose of tantalizingly with good ingredients and sweetness I think. First note is thin so but with that "session tag" you expect to have to scout for subtle but worthy flavor notes and acquire them over time pleasure your buds. There are good quality, remote malt notes here and those I liked but only available to me as the glass warmed a bit. It is not very sweet for all the sticky mouthfeel and hops do not present themselves until the very late finish and then only with many, many sips under the belt. One can linger and explore this brew over time and at the various temps that the session will provide and come away a bit underwhelmed in the preliminary analysis. It is a bit like going through my aunt's closet and she offering me some things that might be neat and others so not much and others I politely accept "as is" but will be honest about later should they come to any use. The final tally of the gift value here and in that closet is not immediately clear and one is apt at different times to be severe and at others more kind. Should a "session ale"

require much thought, kindness, and deferred judgement to grade it? Probably not but possible so in a fairer world where everything now is Imperial and so accessible it clubs you just in the sniff. This is tribute to decent but very illusive beer flavors. Generally, I like their approach here and the name warns you that the first 10 sips will likely be inadequate and misleading. By 20 sips, I am curious but not so much impressed. By 30 sips I think they still need to deepen the layering and diversity of malts to make it accessible quicker and more solid over the variety of temperatures that it must handle. There is a place for anti-Imperial labels in the beer world but I am sure this one needs a tune up or two.

Brewbase Fives



Otter Creek Wolaver's Certified Organic Pat Leavy's All-American

Ale

RATING: 5.0

Middlebury, Vermont

The fine folks at Otter Creek were frustrated that they had to go as far as New Zealand to get good organic hops. Then they met Pat Leavy in 2006. He agreed to grow them Magnum, Fuggled, and Goldings hops in organic fashion along with a similarly pure malted barley. This stuff is not only certified in VT as organic but has that cute green and white USDA ORGANIC logo. The color is bright gold, the head near white, lasting low but low. This differs from your generic American golden ale for one thing in being dry and not sweetened like a soda. The hops flavors are real, graciously reserved, and augmenting this mildly fruited ale with non-bitter, savory hops of the highest worth. These hops agree with my senses, delight at every passage from early to late, and one must shout "substance" in this barren world full of shallow, vapid blonde ales. Breckenridge Summer Bright come to this bottle and learn. I found this label even better when warmish and near room temp.

Pike Naughty Nellie Golden Artisan Ale

RATING: 3.5

Seattle, Washington

Nellie is 5.5% and on this yellow, red, black, and white label is wearing a brasserie - so only a bit naughty we suppose. Still we'd bet a glass or twelve of this ale would change that for the better. Back to our supple, golden cups. The pour is rich gold, the head light cream, shortish. The flavor is modest, more malty than expected, the finish smooth and only faintly bitter at first; much more bitter later. It is not sweet either. It seems a little unfocused in the theme and this comes back to a concern of mine that there are not as many golden ales as golden lagers or darker ales. Why is that? You can get lots of fruity hops flavors without adding much malt and therefore color. Golden ales are by definition and tradition the palest of the literally pale ales. Some mimic a ESB in golden trim but do it more poorly than the Brits. I think golden ale seems a very difficult thing for American micros. Pat Leavy's ale noted above is one of very few exceptions to lack of exceptionality in US golden ales. This is just another cap in the Pike line and not worth too much attention.

Red Mountain Golden Ale

RATING: 3.0

Birmingham, Alabama

Birmingham Brewing Co. of the AL town proudly proclaims 'Since 1992'. The label describes this medium golden ale as 'lightly hopped' and 'full bodied'. Carbonation is moderate but the head fades fast. It is steam-brewed and has aromatic flavors not found in American golden lagers. While it has some elements of a bitter ale, their 'deep respect for British brewing traditions' might need some tuning. It has real potential but needs more complex flavor.

Red Pig Ale

RATING: 4.5

Chicago IL

The Cabo Brewing Group forces a red foiled pig to jump through a yellow hoop and makes us less suspicious of labels that say 'smooth rich taste'. This dark golden (barely amber perhaps) brew has a lasting near white head and a flavor very much on the sweet side; sweeter than 'glazed ham' as one reviewer put it. While we dislike sugar-corn syrup-honey formula beers this one derives a sweetness around a base of quality ale flavors and caramel malt. It is your basic CANDY-CARMEL MALT ALE but with a lighter color than often presented. Of course at the \$8.25 price (90% of microbrews are lower here) it had better show quality. Some felt it was a notch or two over-sweetened and almost all thought is worth buying again. It is way ahead of most 'Red [beast name]' beers.

RedHook Blonde Ale

RATING: 4.5

Seattle WA/Portsmouth NH

We suppose some marketing fellow figured guys are more likely to buy a brew named 'blonde' than one named simply 'golden'. This dark golden brew is semi-sweet and made with light roasted barley, faint hops, and some wheat. It is one of a very few of the so-called 'refreshing' or 'drinkable' ales that is NOT just plain washed out lager. It has more substance than most golden ales and is superior to many of Redhook's other products in many opinions we gathered for this review. The label invites comments and suggests some respondent or another might get featured in a future ad. The product is freshness dated, reasonably priced (in our survey), and as one reviewer put it 'a refined and rare balance of rich flavor and smoothness'. Though 'the epitome' claim is a ???

RedHook CopperHook Spring Ale

RATING: 4.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

One has a reasonable expectation of a brew called Copper Hook to have an amber, coppery color. Not so. I held this broth against everything type and style of light in my place and unless I held it against an amber stained glass lamp...it was gold as gold can be. It has a slightly thick mouthfeel and quickly you get a nice mixed blend of fruit, hops, and malt in a tremendously interesting balance. I'm not sure what a Spring Ale is supposed to taste like unless they have a Marzen in mind. Overall, this white-headed ale is very pleasant, neither too rich nor too simple nor favoring one style or ingredient above the other. I looked to their website for some guidance. Firstly, there is to be no space between the Copper and Hook. Fine. Malts are pale, carapils, and caramel. "Brilliant copper colored ale" still has we wondering what dank, dark bar they wrote that press release in. "Distinctive caramel notes and a clean refreshing finish". Good point. There are good caramels, restrained but very real, and yet without a syrup-laden, cloying finish. Good style there. "Light maltiness and pleasant noble hop aroma". Yes, again very balanced all about. The noble-caramel balance is nicely metered out and yet it refreshes in a refined, delicate manner. Like it a bunch but super-like and love are quite another emotion.

Ridgeway Bad Elf Winter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Oxfordshire, England

We had debated doing a category in this book called "Ale - Winter" for those post-Fest offerings meant to warm the winter, chilly cockles and other things. Unfortunately, the "winter ale" is almost anything warming (usually malty) that brewers want that phrase to mean. Some are bright yellows, others rich Fest-like malty feasts, and still others very red or amber with various malt-to-hop proportions. It is not a style - just a marketing theme. This UK stuff is on the palest side of the so-called "winter ales", bright gold, short-lived head for me. The label is a classic with a wicked, little fellow with long nose and ears dispensing 6.0% stuff.

Cute but does the winter ale deliver? It is mid strength, low hops, medium malt, very smooth and soft, more a docile elf than a bad one. The finish has minor bitter notes, all of them good to me in a chilly state; though one friend of mind found it faintly hostile and towards "bad bitter" when a bit warmed towards the ambient range. It's a very nicely made, chemically flawless, creamy, and mild. It is not a value. It's like importing your Lexus from Germany - it will be fine, fun, and remarkable but why bother with the extra expense? It like this brew but it's at least twice the price of a comparable American micro. And this raises a very valid point in the beer universe when it comes to cost vs. opportunity. Is the novelty of a fun label and the social fun of jokes from the "bad elf"

theme worth the extra few bucks? Maybe or not. You decide. Jokes and the occasion for risqué, spicy banter is sometimes worth the price of a curiously named but overpriced beer. Sometimes being or finding a "bad elf" is more than worth the bottled price of admission and twenty times that. Actually, it's better taking turns and making creative use of candy canes.

Rogue Chatoe Rogue First Growth Single Malt Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

These 650 ml bottles come with a brew made mainly from Revolution hops and the trademarked Dare malt. It pours hazy gold with a fat, foamy head though very little lace. They admit it being medium-bodied and that is fine with me for they make enough turbo-charged stuff already. It must be very, very chilly for I found it a bit dull when temps fall much below 40 in my glass. It has a nice hops tang along with citrus notes. It favors the hop side of the hops:malt potency wars despite a name emphasizing the word malt. If very cold it's ultra-crisp and very good - otherwise there are finer, less expensive choices. Single malt may be a good thing in a Scotch but the world is still out with golden ales.

Rogue's Dead Guy Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

This ale is of the golden amber hue and carries a deep microfoam head. Malt is the major flavor but one gets a nice rich hops bitterness in the finish. It is semi-sweet at first but not nearly so delicious as their Whale Ale. It has some of those same candy or honey qualities until the more bitter finish kicks in although the later is temperature sensitive. It has a more conspicuous nose than many of their other ales and the painted label even extols that virtue. One of our reviewers voted this 'the beer most likely to look right at a Grateful Dead concert' although perhaps a near relative of the hop is preferred there. Rogue makes so many good and excellent ales it is hard to pick a favorite. This was not one for most of us.

Rogue's Golden Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing makes this dark golden ale with a lasting head and slow lace. It has more malt than hops flavor and the finish is 'herbal'. When cold it is crisp and interesting but quite frankly most golden ales are not as interesting to most of us a good golden pils, a wheat, or golden lager. This is smooth and uncomplicated enough to go with a rich meal but on its own it may not please. It has no flaws or bitterness (even if a little warm) but simply is neither rich for hops, malt, or yeast taste. In one experiment we blended this 50:50 with their Smoke Rauch Ale and made a genuinely pleasant ale that was crisp with a perfect hint of malt and smoke.

Rogue's Mexicali Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

This golden ale carries a strong malt aroma and flavor but adds a tangy (maybe zippy) chili finish as if something called 'Mexicali' might come from Oregon. It is not so numbing and chilliful as the Cave Creek brew but in many ways is more of a real beer. Cave Creek is a light Pils that is quite dominated by the visual appearance of a tiny chili and the mild salsa-type finish. This is foremost a malty golden ale that has chili flavor (and no green vegetable gift) as a mere flavoring or spice. The approach is very different. Some of us thought this was a near perfect 5 bottle effort while to others it compromised both as malty ale and chili beer. Maybe that compro- mising blend is ideal for you. It is essential tasting for a true beer lover.

Brewbase Fives



Saint Peter's English Ale (Organic Ale)

RATING: 5.0

Suffolk, England

First thing you're amazed at is the ancient-looking, round-shouldered olive green glass bottles. They might just have been pulled up from the shipwreck so ancient is their style. Aroma hits you like a skunk driven a hops wagon. Color is hazy gold with long but distributed lace. They favor "lower carbonation" per their website and in fact the lace does end in time. Head is large, near white, and enduring. Flavor is very satisfying from start to finish. There's quite a flavor shift here, going from first pungent aroma through citrus and finally into a skunky-tart place; all of them pleasing and fun and more than little different. It is only 4.5% ABV so it goes down easy too. They use their own single strand yeast. Lightly malted barley comes from Norfolk and is organic like the hops. This is good summer bear when served very cold. It's a good as lemony wheat for this purpose.

Samuel Adams/Weihenstephan Infinium Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass./Hammondsport, New York

The idea of major brewers doing a special, limited edition collaborative brew for a suitably steep price is not new. It is generally a good idea, most of them rating well here and elsewhere. Boston Beer Co. aka Samuel Adams produced these \$19.99 corked things with lots of lace just in time to be a New Years champagne alternative. SA contributed their famous Noble hops and Weihenstephan their more famous yeast which was a great thing before the US even existed. The 10.3% formula pours with massive lace like that other golden beverage and has a pretty gold-painted label and orange foil as thick as anything from the Old World. But does it thrill and compete even with regular season golden ales? Sort of. It is pleasant, fruity but not as intensely as it a perfect golden ale should be. The yeast is not used to full advantage and perhaps the pairing with this hop variety is not so ideal? I like it okay and was delighted by many of the flavor profiles but even if cut down to \$10 a bottle, I'm not I'd get it again this year. It is timely and a way to turn on your friends to the sophistication of modern ales - but other than that gimmick, I'm not sure this is nailed down solid as a recipe. I trust they may do a variation next year that is more fruity, hop intense, and worth the price. I'll give them credit for a bottle so pretty I cannot bear to surrender it to the recycling truck dudes with their splashing and crashing of beer bottles, fine and common, up and down my street. It will probably sit around my kitchen until some woman insists I must part with such silly momentos and make room for a ceramic kitten-clad cookie jar of her choosing.

Brewbase Fives



[Matt] Saranac Big Moose Ale

Rating: 5.0

Utica, New York

Having grown up in Upstate NY (the real New York if truth be told) and visited Big Moose Lake more than once, I was delighted to see this label which once again brings an Upstate theme to a brew. The pour is amber-gold,

the head light cream, mid-deep, lasting awhile. This ale is said to be full strength due to triple dry-hopping with Amarillo, Cascade, and Centennial cultivars. "Vibrant citrus" is claimed and the first and second sips confirm their tart, citrus-themed approach. English pale and caramel malts round it out and one can tell from its slightly amber hues this is no low malt golden ale. It is nicely judged to keep a citrus bite and refreshing aspect without minimizing the malts too much. It is something we regularly achieve here by adding a dose of porter or stout to a golden ale that is not strong enough for us - after writing the review of course. There is rich, sharp snap here and supported with a little Old World malt to make it more bearable I think. "Deuce" the moose and his goose "Foose" are loose in the spruce with this juice. It will chase you and run you down for its never timid nor lumbering. Big Moose Ale is surprising limber, brawny but in some ways shy, and yet you dare not turn your back. This is one of Matt-Saranac's finest pale-toned ales in their three decades. There need be no talk of value in this discussion for in thick, fancy bottles with the moose turned into an ethereal fairy princess flying through gold-foiled clouds this ale would be as worthy and engaging as it came from the cardboard box today.

Scuttlebutt Homeport Blonde Ale

RATING: 3.0

Everett, Washington

This label has a nautical theme so a blonde ale automatically suggests a mermaid with long, flowing golden curls, a plaintive girlish face, and a curvaceous rainbow-scaled tail to the male brewing mind. The 4.6% ABV rating is a stoke against and there are surely lots of strokes to be had here. The pour is light, Pilsy pale yellow, the head very deep, off white, mixed foam sizes. The nose very weak, nothing much. First sip is very thin, tepid but moderate quality malts in a bath than finishes with a short passage of hops bitterness. The big, reckless head gets annoying in the search for flavor and its true nature. The finish gets more bitter in sips four through infinity. This is a bad story, that of a pseudo-micro really made so thin we have the price point of the newest Chinese mini-coupe among great cars. The Scuttlebutt on Scuttlebutt is not good so far and by not good I mean nearly bad for the money. It is budget microbrew but look to Saranac for giving us some tasty econos that do not offend or go on us. Big bottles, pretty labels, and very little in the broth to support the marketing - sound and fury signifying...you know the line...nothing.

Sea Dog Windjammer Blonde Ale

RATING: 4.0

Bangor, Maine

The color of this GOLDEN (okay BLONDE sounds better) ALE is deep golden with the smallest tinge of amber. The head is full, foamy, and cream-colored. One's first impression is that of quality bitter hops in some abundance. It is not much over-hopped as on the generous side of medium. The finish is a tad more sweet and candy-like but it is not really a sweet beer. Given the glorious gold ales from Rogue this one is in some tough competition. Most of us tended to favor a less strong central hops theme. As with their Brown Ale it might just be a notch too bitter. With fine-tuning it would be ideal. One reviewer noted 'overall like a well-hopped PALE ALE that happens to be golden'. To another it was 'brewed with skill and the right stuff but somehow missing the mark...'.
Brewbase Fives



Southern Tier Harvest Special Ale (Autumn Seasonal)

RATING: 5.0

Lakewood, New York

This brew pours a glowing gold, shading to amber in dank rooms, with active lace and a nose like a bowl of mixed, ripe fruit. It was an instant WOW on first sip, perhaps more of a whoa-wow hybrid exclamation. It was not expected though their other products have been mostly respectable. They aimed for a British ESB but this is

far more fruity than that style and the finish while semi-bitter is not of the usual ESB pucker. Their website says "deep ruby in color" which would be true if we were testing this in room with red lamps. Four hop varieties and two of malt were used - these not disclosed either on the bottle or website. We do know from the web page that an English variety was used for dry hopping. It rates out at 6.7% ABV and reviewers here said "rather sweet-estery for an ESB but more enjoyable than many of that genuine form". It is sumptuously lovely, a real autumnal joy, equivalent to a childhood leap into a vast pile of new leaves and having not a care in the world. This was a surprise, a true revelation, and surely one of the USA's golden ales over the last 20 years, maybe ever.

Brewbase Fives



Star Hop Gold Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Oregon

Star attributes the theme behind this ale to their original brewery of 1894. That is not so unusual. But as many of their modern masterpieces are things like cherry stouts and elfin ales, a little nod to a 'normal' style is in order. Color is golden amber (apricot juice shade). The head is mid-sized and near white. They used rye to 'lighten the body' and included Tettnanger and Cascade hops. This is as close as they get to a mid-strength beer and by no means it is less than flavorful enough. Reviewers found 'mellow hopping, slight honey, faint and mixed malts, and something odd but good - probably the rye'. You may swear you can taste a loaf of ryebread in there if you think about it long enough. Hop use is generous and like their other ales a good bitterness prevails.

Sweetwater Boat Trip Ale

RATING: 2.5

Atlanta, Georgia

The straw-pale ale has a large ivory head but that will be the best thing about it - the looks. While it has some malty backbone it is sickly sweet at times, oddly bitter and awkward at mid notes, and just plain undrinkable when a little less than freezing. It's unbearable quickly and I could not finish two bottles without blending in some of their yummy IPA for flavor correction. Clearly this brewery has talent but it is not well-distributed throughout their line. You get a 4.5 with 2.5 in the same box and that is going to intensify the unfavorable comparisons putting large boulders before the road trip. Tried again in April 2011, we found still insipid, bitter beyond reason with no redeeming flavors to compensate. This kind of micro gives people a reason not to go back to fancy shelf and go back to Bud.

Brewbase Fives



Thomas Point Light Golden Ale

RATING: 5.0

Cambridge, Maryland

The house is light not the beer. This product from Wild Goose Brewery of Cambridge MD is rich golden yellow with a long-duration head and high bubble activity. It is a hop-filled delight with crisp and clean flavor much the way that Samuel Adams Boston Ale will thrill the true beer enthusiast. We note that Michael Jackson called it 'mainstream' and gave it only one star. He must have had something else. This 1994 effort is superb and just right.

Uinta HooDoo Kolsch Style Ale

RATING: 3.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

The pour is mid-light gold, favoring a lightish Pilsy color, the head lasting but mid-height. The Kolschy flavors are real but it is no strong entry in terms of flavor density. Unita has many hits, some near greats, and a only a couple of misses. This favors the later to me for the Kolsch flavors while real are not German Kolsch lager strong and I would expect a similar strength in the ale iteration. They did not jazz it up with American hops, sugar, or crazy things and credit to due for that standard. However, it is not more than a line-filler to me versus being a go-to valuable member of their distinguished line. Needs a rethink or two.

ALE - INDIA PALE ALE (IPA)

The name India Pale Ale or IPA came from a style of ale brewed in England for export to their expats doing all sorts of administrative or unfriendly things over in a big colony called India since 1770 or so. The months it took for the journey by ship would make regular ale taste off. Instead, the used extra hops and perhaps malts as well to make the beer stronger, thus overcoming the lack of freshness - kind of like how chicken shops use the oldest chicken in the bin to make the spicy stuff. The name is used today for almost any very bitter, dry, very hoppy beer whose hops have a strong medicinal flavor but with pale ale yeast.

The original or British IPA was more malty and dark than today's American forms, higher in alcohol (7-9%) as it fermented in the barrels, and essentially a very strong Pale Ale. There is some doubt whether all the low-level folks (like privates in the army) got to drink it strong because there are records of it being watered down a bit like we do with soda concentrates. The modern British IPA import is not usually stronger in alcohol because of restrictive laws around the world and the lack of any bottle or barrel fermentation.

The so-called American IPA is the modern US microbrew version of the style: 1) probably less malty than the old style or at least how the Brits do it today (hops being our main boost), 2) often more citrusy than the Old Country (not always), 3) varying in color from light gold to dark amber-red (darker in the old stuff), 4) usually not fermented for months in barrels, and 5) using American grown hop varieties on occasion. These US hops like Centennial and Cascade tend to make the AIPA more full of pine, citrus, and floral aromas than the classic Brit version.

Both styles can be made extra strength and these are called Imperial IPA or Double IPA (DIPA) labels. Beware that because of trendy marketing and greed, some strong IPAs are really not so strong and seem to be marketed as such to command higher prices. Some are about as imperial as that wino on the corner who claims to be the Queen of England's cousin as he adjusts his aluminum foil cap to avoid the 2pm satellite scan of his fetid space. I have elected not to split this out as a separate section since the nomenclature and the strength are very much at odds, regulars quite potent and some with special names surprisingly less than potent or special.

Stemming from the DIPA trend is the more recent, late 2010's Double Black IPA or Black IPA, a sort porteroid IPA or IPA x Stout hybrid that is full of dank, dark malts to abundance and enough ethanol to make a pachyderm swoon. You get intense malts and intense hops without being a sweet or all-in barleywine. They tend to slaughter you with heavenly deep malts but retaining a proper dry, bitterish IPA finish.

The trend of late in 2010 and 2011 has been to take a DIPA and age it in oak. Oak-aged Double IPA are getting more common and affordable, though still maintaining premium prices in the US microbrew landscape. These

tend to be strongly hopped ale but are very mellow with whisky flavors or in some cases medicinal-hoppy PLUS barrel flavors.

The most recent variation is the Flavored IPA which incorporate coffee, herbs, spices, and fruit as with with subcategories in the files here. That section follows this.

Abita Jockamo IPA

RATING: 4.5

Abita Springs, Louisiana

Abita has always been a hit or miss with me, very little in the central grey zone. They have genius flashes, solid "go to" products, and also moments of "what were they thinking?". This label is named to honor the so-called "Mardi Gras Indians" famous for elaborate costumes drenched in feathers, beads, gold, and every ornate trapping known to human kind. The theme here was to make a beer that "stomps and shouts" as bolding as the Jockamo. Here I am glad to say is an genuine Abita hit. The aroma alone gets 5 bottles. wowee and hurray in a single sniff! Color is glorious medium amber with a rocky ivory head though little lace. The hop:malt balance clearly favors the vinous crop but the malt-load finish spells out TRUE BALANCE with a wild, engaging beat. It is the equal of any IPA I've tasted in two decades and that includes the enormously pleasing Breckenridge Small Batch 471 Double Hopped IPA and the luscious Grant's IPA. This is not a global thermonuclear hop bomb, it is a testimony to superb, stylous brewing. This Abita treasure is rare, heavenly hopped, flamboyant but well done to the smallest detail, bold but exquisite in the holding back, opulent yet a little bit aloof. There are many things in the Mardi Gras which are not what they appear but this is everything advertised, so much more than expected, and simply divine with a feather trim.



Allagash Hugh Malone Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Maine

Technically this is a Belgian-style IPA, a super hoppy beer in corked bottles made with two-row and pale crystal malts. Simcoe or Warrior hops are added three times in the brewing process. ABV in only 8.5% and it has a good deal more grapefruity ale flavor than most IPAs. The malt foundation is also very solid. The brewer says "pine and grapefruit" and believe it or not that's a good thing in the beer world. Yeast is very abundant in the bottle and on the tongue. This is a wonderful product, clearly a delightful and valuable to the beer vocabulary, and easily worth \$12 for that big 750ml bottle.



Avery duganA IPA

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

The very scantilly glad woman on the label is East Indian in appearance but not modesty - fact I suspect will find

some offensive and others of us, well, appealing. 99 IBU's and 8.9% ABV makes this bright amber ale a special find. The lace is limited but better than most US IPA copies. "Lupulin Rapture Incarnate!" proclaims the label, the word lupulin referring to the resin or resinous powder from the female hops flower cluster. There are a series of descriptions with such words as mantra, transcendental, divine, and unity but it's really the smooth fusion of piney hops that makes this a wonderful ale. "Now that's a real ale" I heard myself think about twice until I realized the ethanol must be getting to me. There is just enough sweetening and mitigating malt to temper the bitterness but not obstruct or erase it. The fluid is stalwart, strong yet very approachable and not the simple "more is always more" approach of some IPA brewers. Avery almost always has perfect discernment in the brewing of their special recipes and this is one that those shipping the original IPA decades ago would call "spot on". The duganA (and this is their chosen orthography of the name) is a hefty presentation of our beloved vine, one of the best from North America, and one of the finest from anywhere.

Aviator Hogwild India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina

The snarling wild hogs on the label could be found in the woods bear the brewery - but none being helpful carrying in bags of hops - we think. The pour is light gold, the head short-lived and off-white above a steady light lace. Pale ale, crystal, and Vienna malts were utilized along with Cascade, Chinook, and Columbus hops. Dry-hopping adds Magnum and Willamette varieties. ABV is 6.7% and first sip is semi-sweet quickly bittered up with complex hops. The balance of fruity yeast, pleasantly supportive background malts, and such a stellar mix of legendary hops provides for a very accomplished IPA. Not all panelists felt the balance was ideal but generally the hopheads did. It does err on the side of hops and being an IPA it pretty damn well should. If those early sweet notes and more fruit yeast could continue sip to sip, we'd have perfection here. If I were a wild, rogue hog in the woods I would volunteer to move bags in exchange for a few kegs accidentally spilled in the mud out back.

Ballast Point Big Eye India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

San Diego, California

This label got a Bronze in the World Beer Cup in 2002 for American-style IPA. They are using "American High Alpha" hops and this rich golden brew is controlled, pleasing but not overwhelming, very much an IPA but one of masses to be sure. Their approach is very easy on the tongue but I am neither shocked or thrilled with the brewing skills. It's a nice IPA but not a worldclass one.

Ballast Point Sculpin India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

San Diego, California

The 650 bombers test to 7% and have a veritable mini-book on the label. Here goes. "Light bodied...very hoppy" sounds good but makes one suspicious of things. Light is seldom right in brewdom. Apricot, peach, mango, and lemon are claimed. The 2010 World Beer Cup Gold removes most of our initial, pre-taste scepticism. Then there's a ramble about the Sculpin fish with it's poisonous spikes as somehow befitting this brew?!?! Is it mango-peachy death we are about to consume? Are the hops so punishing we have reason to shield the interiors of our over-hanging bellies with pink-dyed medicine? While I am now contemplating my next homebrew to be called the Box Jellyfish Porter or Lion's Mane Light (no sting, just attitude and pretty graphics), let's confront the Sculpin for real.

The pour is rich gold with nice lace, a cream head of low size but some duration, finely foamed at first. There is a sting of hops, medium so on my scale, not Imperial or stinging bitter really. Perhaps they just picked a random fish from Wikipedia to name what is a smooth, mid-powered IPA yet also one worth our time. Fruit esters are there in abundance but as to their particular name one might as well throw virtual darts at Wikipedia using the random article function. Fruity IPA brews are a favorite of ours as they tend to combine punchy flavors with hops bitterness and sometimes a bit of mediating sweetness. The esters are mostly bitter and tart, most of our panelists finding the lemon citrus notes clear on the absolute finish - more soft, tropical fruit notes early in the flavor passage. In other words, tart citrus hits last. It is not sweet by any means nor should be. We came to the conclusion this was a serious IPA on many accounts such as diversity of fun flavors, depth of ingredients, and

thanks to female influence our feelings. Had the brewery for some unknown reason consulted us, it might have been Cobia IPA which is also known as the Lemon Fish. Give it a whirl and while it's not Gold Medal material for us, the experience is a solid, memorable one.



Bear Republic Racer 5 India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Healdsburg and Cloverdale, California

"Independent since 1995", this brewery is apparently named for the fuzzy state beast of California. It's also a 7% ABV formula and that got my attention too. This "aggressive" IPA from Sonoma County is said to follow their motto of "Bigger is Better". I'm starting to like these dudes and dudettes. I do believe the "handmade" claim this time because all six of their labels were either badly glued or coarsely wrinkled. Drink up...they need a good label machine or a couple of thou for a good automation engineer or so I'm guessing. Labels are not what I'm about so the proof is in the fizzy fuel. Color is rich gold, on the darker side but not amber, long lace, big cream head of rocky form.

Aroma is a fest of fruit and something so pungent a hop-a-holic like myself could sniff it out blocks away. It tried it cold at first where it is potent yet highly crisp and refreshing - not sure how they managed that fine a balance. They recommend 45-50 deg. F. and it gets a bit more complex, malty and fruity, as it warms. Love every temp I tried. Their sense of balance at this level of potency is so well judged I am truly impressed and waiting now for my thesaurus.com to load. Forget that! Buy it and you can write your own joyous record, my friends. This nectar is so refined and pleasant one could never need another bright green Sierra Nevada fix - and for me that's saying a hoppy mouthful. Columbus and Cascade hops are used to a such perfection it make me think of a Bobby Flay chipotle mixed-grill kabob cooked and spiced to his lofty standards. Brewmaster Richard G. Norgrove is deservedly gaining much fame for his whole line of beers and to date this is my only experience. I'm not surprised this one got the Silver Medal in the 2004 World Beer...I mean Beer Cup and the Gold in the 2001 Real Ale Festival in San Diego; among many others. I am not getting hop-drunk by saying this is one of the new American standards for a fully-charged IPA or Imperial Pale Ale. I am frustrated yet that I cannot find all their line in NC this early 2009 but I understand they ship now; like their bottle labels the "Beer" link on their Gift Shop page takes you nowhere meaningful and needs work. And it's work well worth it. And for once this year I can say a \$13.99 sixpack was priced some dollars below it's educational value and excitement score.



Bell's Two-Hearted Ale

RATING: 5.0

Comstock, Michigan

They have a neat website where you can enter your batch number from the label and read more about the brew and get its bottling date. The OG is 1.058 with ABV at 7%. It pours in the most luminous gold imaginable with a cream head of much substance. The aroma is pure hoppy heaven. The flavor is rich in hops, bitter but very pleasant and manageable ones, a decent backbone of malt in the supporting orchestra pit. Their aim was a crisp product with floral hops quality and they've succeeded very nicely. I think it's easily one of the best American IPA if you prefer the floral side of things; or should I say not mind that choice of varieties. It is piquant to perfection, a snappy little recipe executed as well as it can be. I was very much stimulated by this very cold but mid cold (45-50 deg. F.) is acceptable too, meaning it can sit at the bar or during a long game and keep its edge. I've only found three of their many labels to date but plan on finding all I can in the coming months. As to the pretty (or ugly) green trout on the label I believe it refers to the Two Hearted River in Michigan where Hemingway used to vacation and in particular: drink and fish. It's a Short Hoppy Life, folks.

Blitz-Weinhard Woodland Pass IPA

RATING: 4.0

Hood River, Oregon/Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This is billed as full hops IPA with a hint of caramel sweetness. It pours dark gold under a white lumpy head and slow, occasional lace. The hopping is medium for an IPA, quite refined but subtle until your second and third saturations your bitter buds. There is tempering caramel but it is not a sweet ale either. Blitz-Weinhard has been around since 1856 and Henry Weinhard was the founding of the pioneering Northwest brewery. They have also become famous for gourmet sodas. Cascade hops is used in this modern Woodland Pass formula so it is very much an AIPA or American India Pale Ale, not harsh and medicinal like some Old World style material. You get the hint of a Sierra Nevada product here but some of the refinement is missing in the overall integration of the quality ingredients.

Blue Point Hoptical Illusion

RATING: 4.5

Patchogue/Rochester, New York

Patchogue NY is about 50 miles from Manhattan on the lower side of Long Island, a small and charming town which gave us such notable folks as Kevin Connolly of Entourage, yoga genius Chandra Om, and notorious killer (or not) Jeffrey MacDonald. The praiseworthy Navy Seal and Medal-of-Honor laureate Lt. Michael P. Murphy who lost his life in early Taliban wars in Afghanistan was also born there. Now, I suspect, it will be noted for Blue

Point Brewing Co. too. It's kind of town you enjoy because it is 12K people small, traditional, humble \$45K household income, 10% poor folks, and yet a short drive from big time, crazy culture should one ever need all that. Surely this brewery will need sales from all that. The label of this stuff looks like an artist's rendition of a dollar bill after the third day of a long acid trip with hop vines climbing like spirals of DNA.

Color is rich gold, the head large, foamy-lumpy, and the nose a bit thin. Flavor is mid strength, very agreeable, sharp in the hops style, well supported with malts (a surprise in fact though one of colleagues disagrees), notable for 6.8% ABV, and loaded full of interesting notes. Those notes include some grapefruit (usually in a long, fading aftertaste), weak but variable pine, quality bitterness all the time, no medicine except for hints of mint, not the least bit 'o sweetness, and overall a balance that bodes well for the young 1998 firm. They also say it includes some exclusive, "rare hop" from Oregon (not disclosed) of which they bought the entire crop. It is a beer to learn from and I believe that is compliment enough. And someone should tell them a main menu offered as a musical pop-up is not going to seen by a big portion of their intended audience.

Breckenridge India Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

LOCALE Denver Co\Breckenridge CO\Dallas TX\Buffalo NY

This IPA is more highly hopped than their regular Avalanche Ale yet the dark golden brew is not as authentic as we wished. There is usually a herbal or medicinal nip from a true IPA as exemplified by such standards as Star, Rock- ford, Tomcat, or Samuel Smith. It was certainly a decent experience and like any highly hopped beer it's flavor saturation on the tongue improves with the number of bottles! We used the first one or two for judging but some reviewers did confess a better feeling for it when compared directly with their Avalanche Ale. One recorded 'neither the price nor the availability would make me prefer this over a dozen or so other choices in the IPA field...!.



Breckenridge Small Batch 471 Double Hopped IPA

RATING: 5.0

Denver, Colorado

While their regular IPA failed to impress, this amazing product in 9.2% ABV trim. Color is bright amber-gold with a nose very strong and lovely. The head is big, strong ivory with short-lived lace. The flavor thrills at first note and while suitably drowned in Humulus, it is surprisingly fruity and rounded out with good malts. A rich IPA with fruit flavors as good and strong as the hops - what a lovely invention! May I have 12 more, please.



Brewbase Fives

Legends

Brewbase Fives



Burton Empire India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Burton-Upon-Trent, Staffordshire, England

This big-shouldered bottle has a very strange label for the "face" is a very narrow panel showing a military dude and a cricket player sipping it, bordered by much wider black panels with lots of information. After 6 months in the cask (a technique illustrated with a drawing) this stuff is served, following the old IPA (ie. colonial) policy of providing the British ruling establishment with highly hopped ales that would survive the long trip. Didn't those brilliant Brits figure it might just be easier to teach the Indian masses to brew them some fine ales for God knows that part of the world can grow hops and barley to something approaching real quality.

Anyhow, a slug of familiar Burton Ale was a welcome taste of home and it remains a classic today under the simple yellow cap. Color is faintly hazed golden-amber, the head as tall as a British Captain's helmet with carbonation enough to float several large boats. It is highly hopped to be sure but not in crude excess or wasteful abandon - at least in our modern, imported to the former colony America version. One is impressed as much with the fruit notes as the enveloping hops and that's the sign of quality brewing. Malt happens but only as a light spicing. These Burton Ales are hoppy-fruit to perfection, this one favoring the hops in the end. Squash Soup is not just about the squash but also the spices and butter and cream. India Pale Ale is not just doubling up on the hops per barrel nor should it ever be. It is about more hops to be sure but also getting a well-rounded flavor worth waiting for the next shipment from afar. God knows, if the Brits in India just wanted strong spicy drinks with alcohol they'd have done just as well to mix drinks with that country's fine array of spices. Burton Ale is something different and truly English and again...worth waiting for.

Brewbase Fives



Caldera Hoppportunity Knocks (Kettle

Series)

RATING: 5.0

Ashland, Oregon

This light-toned amber beer has a lasting cream head, mid-bore aroma of sweetish hops. Centennial hops are used in what the label calls a "@#!& pile". It is actually not sweet in this 6.8% trim, adding Munich, Crystal, and Premium 2-row malts. The finish is verrrrryyyyy smooth and this is a Centennial formula at it's very best. What little sweetness occurs early on is done by the finish. It is perfect to me and by this I mean Sierra Nevada hoppy perfect. Brewers tend to frown, cringe, or worse when reviewers compare them to other brew labels. However, making a SN comparison in the brewscape is kinda like saying your new Kia, Hyundai, or Dongfeng model is equal to Mercedes E300 or BMW 325i. There are many good IPA bombers of late (2011) but only a score of really able, amazing ones. If Colonel Bogey in New Delhi had tasted this stuff, he'd have placed his next order from Ashland, Oregon. This knock on the door of the microbrew world is deafening, especially if the value pricing can be maintained. Here is a formidable, delicious treasure, one refined at every flavor passage. This IPA is potent yet restrained, fulfilling but genteel, and among the best of new breed of American varietal accomplishments.



Clipper City Heavy Seas: The Big DIPA

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

Enhancing our inner Pyrate is full of loot and pillage in terms of a dried, golden treasure called hops. Five pounds per barrel of the treasure is used to make this Double IPA (DIPA) with 10.5% ABV and 75 IBUs. Heavy Seas pours a bright amber, not dark, but luminous to be sure. The head is large, creamy, and ruggedly foam-formed. I was quite shocked how this much hops and ABV was hidden in such an agreeable, suave presentation. It's a velvet hammer filled with hops - maybe the cutlass from behind you never feel until knocking on Davy Jone's locker. I had expected a strong IPA with raw potency, a hard punch, and perhaps not much subtlety in the delivery. Here we have real potency, an insidious approach with precise, well-judged brewing, brilliance from first note to last, and yet not oversweetened as would be any easy solution. In the final portage this brew is as fine, solid, and sublime as anything in the DIPA category known from the US to date (September 2009). Medals are surely on the way.



Coronado Idiot IPA (Imperial IPA)

RATING: 5.0

Coronado, California

Here is a so-called West Coast Style Imperial IPA is an "intelligent beer" using four hop varieties. The idea is to be intelligent enough to buy it and made yourself an idio afterwards due to the 8.5% blast. It is dry-hopped and includes whole cone Cascade. There are lots of nautical themes in beer these days but the lusty mermaid on the label is artistically drawn here, showing beer suds over the usual cleavage and with a long, wide sheet of red hair mimicing a red naval flag. This is part of their Crown Series.

It pours a rich amber, the head off white and lasting. The quality of the hops is remarkable, smooth at every turn except when joyfully bitter by last notes. You get your hops in meritorious doses, never overbearing or strong for the approach along, nicely judged in every passage. We have an elaborate approach to brewing here, one very admirable (or would that be Admiral?), and wisely complicated - that would be Monet and BMW complicated not the Target Chinese bicycle-from-hell complicated. A bit of crystal and caramel malt brings up the rear and one gets rich dark, fruits at most approaches; all these wonderfully interwoven with the earthy, piney, and bitter hops. Here we have a delightful tangle, made of many good things delivered with a bang of the strong intoxicant, intricate and sweet as the mermaid sometimes, and other times as thumping and rigorous as the waves at sea. It is a perfect storm of flavor (not of hops abuse or excessively-dosed danger), ready to charm, occasionally enigmatic in a brief note, and overall an upbeat, engaging beer-drinking experience. I would know less for not traversing from brainy to blabbering in a space of twenty sip-worthy minutes. (I had to backspace three times to get sip-worthy spelled right!)



Cottonwood Endo IPA

RATING: 5.0

Boone, North Carolina

Brewed with "altitude" this Blue Ridge mountain area product is overflowing with flowery hops and a smidgen of malt to round it out. The chose the name "endo" since the hops are added at the "end" of fermentation - though the prefix more correctly means "internal". They also note than "Endo" is a bicycling term for "over the handlebars" and they also wished to honor their mountain cycling team. Fortunately the brew itself is more clear. There is not the least hint of undesirable bitterness and just the slightest hint of sweetness in the finish. As such it is highly drinkable (and that means QUANTITY). One can hardly say that of most IPA products today. This is very pleasant treat for the hop addict and we only hope their distribution is expanded.

Diamond Knot India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Mukilteo, Washington

Unlike the following "Industrial" offering, this one with the aqua, mask-headed diver on the label is 6.2% ABV or 1.7% less jacked. Diamond Knot has been brewing since 1994 so they are not new kids but outside Wash state they are a unfamiliar. Color is rich gold, almost golden ale in look, had semi-lumpy, in dark cream. Nose is mid-hoppy for the style, about pale ale strong in this aromatic introduction. First sip is a tad thin, hops low-mid for an IPA. It has some brisk, uniform hops appeal as if a true hops ice tea even. The fluffy head overwhelmed my first glass when finishing it - a bit irregular in the presentration grade - should I or you care - and I do not worry about such things but do notice them. "IPA tea" rather than a full-blown IPA is my first reaction and that is not entirely a bad thing. Many IPA deliveries are very off-putting even undrinkable for some folks. This while a bit thin is not overtly weak nor thin. Care was sure taken, QA to the price point, a calculated mark. It could be a good compromise for those wishing more hops but not a dose of hostility or medicine? This is not my cup of tea (hoppy or otherwise) but it could fill a niche. Just maybe.

Diamond Knot Industrial India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Mukilteo, Washington

These \$3.99 bombers (December 2010) pour rich gold with amber highlights, head lumpy and long in cream.

The hoppy flavor is smooth-bitter, a very fine dosing for the cash. The 7.9% is above their regular IPA offering. It is superb value and one of several new ultra-high quality labels going for this market. Very enjoyable for what others would charge double this for.



Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Reviews

Dogfish Head Burton Baton Imperial IPA

RATING: 5.0

Milton, Delaware

One often purchases a pricey 4-pack these days with trepidation. Your nine to twenty dollars are about to be well-invested in either pretty piss-water or your buds will be taken on the nirvanic ride of their life. Here we clearly get the later experience, a fruity ale Shangri-La populated with abundant apricot trees in full ripeness, entwined with lush emerald hop vines, all being plucked by heavenly creatures filling gold baskets for the Guru Master Brewer. Yes, here is Apricot nectar richly hopped to perfection. Nuff said. Almost. This apricot-themed brew is hazy, the head ivory and lasting. The aroma of real yeasty fruit very apparent. It flows out a whopping 10% ABV, imperial to be sure there. It is a "two-thread blend of young and wood-aged Imperial I.P.A.". I really do love beers blended and made to standard as high as any scotch or premium hard liquor from a noble maker. It is smooth but deep, fruity nectars of apricot and some pear overloading it. Soon come the dense hoppy finish that tells you an IPA is planned and delivered with full force. Yet it remains smooth first note to last. The IPA purists among you will say the hops are too buried in the fruit and sweetness or malt or whatever. I say it is layered and you need to drink three bottles of more to really dig and gather the hop saturation on your buds. Let's call that the "delayed IPA effect" if the purist's must be given a way out. This sumptuous, lusty nectar of the beer gods, by way of Indian gods, is one of these hoppy ales in existence, IPA class or otherwise. Absolutely superior, memorable, mind-blowing, industry-changing stuff here. One of the best fruity ales on our planet.

Epic Armageddon I.P.A.

RATING: 4.5

Auckland, New Zealand

Before we go any further, let's clear up that this is the Epic firm of NZ and not the Salt Lake City company covered below. The New Zealands have a registered trademark after their Epic word but I'm guessing it must not carryover to the US market. It's a curious firm with a stout made from coffee and caramelized figs of all fun things. The 6.66% ABV is immediately curious for something named for the end of the world in a battle named for the Antichrist. Going out of the gate with \$9.49 for a small bomber (December 2011), this had better be some IPA good enough to be the last one before your final demise in a ball of nuclear fire. It pours as pale as a Pils with a similar large, bubble-laden head - so we guess malt is on the low side here. First taste confirms that colorimetric probability and we find a smooth but rich hops approach that suggests a single variety of the vinous product. The website says the named brew is barrel-aged but I have no proof from the bottle that this version is so treated. The photos shows a clearly dark amber thing so apparently this pale yellow import is a simpler concoction. Their webpage mentions a blend of the

aged Armageddon with "fresh" Armageddon some I'm we got the fresh gold stuff in our glasses here. It certainly has a fresh, alive hoppy flavor even if a smidge less sophisticated than recent Sierra Nevada labels.



Epic Spiral Jetty IPA

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

The "spiral jetty" is a famous piece of outdoor, very large scale art Robert Smithson - do take a few secs you Google it if you're inclined and unfamiliar - really neat thing and in Utah of all places. A piece of art that is 1500 feet long is not your everyday piece and this time it is actually quite admirable and artful unlike that guy who hangs his laundry from bridges and thinks he's an artist. This 6.6% IPA pours a faintly clouded gold, the head long and clumpy-looking. Epic offers three levels of intensity: Classic (this one), Elevated, and Exponential. The is mid-IPA in hops-power, clean in the mid notes, and joyously bitter in the finish - rather on the ESB-IPA side. The fruit notes are very pleasant so it is bona fide ale of the type we like best - as in a flavorful base against which the hops can be laid down in a bold...um...jetty of twirling flavors. A very enjoyable IPA if your tastes run toward the ESB-Fruity ale side of things - and that is most assuredly most of us here. A very pleasant and delectable find.

Evil Twin Katz Pis

RATING: 4.0

Bodegraven, The Netherlands

The pour on this cloudy, golden 6.5% IPA is with a massive cream, rocky head, the lace restrained and slow but going on for minutes. "Can you imagine a more strange and repulsive name for a beer?" says the label side panel. By that they mean "cat's piss". They used the special (at least in early 2013) Nelson Sauvignon hops which gives a pungent, white grape flavor in most cases. For it's Dutch origins the our packaging suggests an American microbrew and so far they seem to do well in getting attention at specialty wine and beer shops. Their website however has lots of dead links (1.12.2013) when one clicks on this name and most others. The IPA approach is mellow and moderately intense, like a Sierra Nevada at first with lots pine, lasting dirty grass, and with both mellow fruit and decent hops blending with some expertise. The Nelson Sauvignon unfortunately adds some unnecessary bitterness and there are some odd notes from the hopping that make it not really a Chico-class product. I think the Nelson hops are best in a paler, less intense ale where those flavors can excel and come to the front of the stage and are sweetened a bit like a Riesling wine. Here we have some very pleasing worldclass notes but there are also some excessively bitter, off-note, raw grapey, and frankly squirrely bits. This is a brew and formula so close to excellence but with such an eccentric, unique hop variety there is not much margin to get all the chemicals under control. More experiments and experience may help and wish them a hot copper kettle in doing so.

Fiddler's Green India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

I was confused with this label for some things are made in old Utica NY (Matt's) and this one in Portland. This IPA has been shipped from Utica too according to my research. Color is golden-amber, the head cream and medium-large, the aroma faintly hoppy. The hops intensify from the first to late notes, finishing a slightly sweet bitter, thus very "drinkable" and sure to more popular than the full bore, drier, more medicinal stuff. It's good, proficient and competent if you will, not terribly memorable nor clearly a "must drink again" label. The quality of US IPA's is certainly improving along with the sheer number of them. Hardcore IPA-heads will dismiss it for the slightly less than unrelentless hops attack they demand - it's more like a rough massage. There's a place for

IPA's of this lower strength but it is NOT IPA-Light by any means - don't get me wrong. One hop-headed friend said they "sugared it up" in the finish to keep pretty girls and Bud drinkers from spitting it out. Perhaps so but even the most lauded breweries have a couple "drinkable", sweetened offerings for the "no sweat" masses. I'm hard on breweries who over-sugar and make beer soda. This is a simple twist and a respectable compromise in my opinion - other opinions will vary.

Fish Tale Organic India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Olympia, Washington

This label has enough bright colors to qualify as the Deadhead concert souvenir. I like the anti-social label where you don't see a pretty fish but only it's flapping posterior - very different - and organic IPA is certainly that as that write this in 2011. Maybe organic IPA will be as common as Bud in 2021 but not yet. It carries that cute white and green USDA Organic seal. This 6.5% selection pours medium gold, mixed-textured off white head, and a nose as strong as a smouldering fire at three acres of hops warehouses - thought the thought of such brings shivers to me. Lace is small but lasting. First sip is very faintly sweet in some parts, quickly bitter-dry in others, smooth but rich, clearly involving a good set of varieties and not generic pellet junk. Reviewers here said "somewhat variable with the sip and glass...clean but strong enough...well, sometimes, just not always" and "an apricot-hops feast...nice nectar fruit notes. I'm not hung up on organic when ethanol is a toxin in the first place!". I must quickly add that ethanol is our favorite toxin if it has to organically delivered...bring us more. It is surely a fruit nectar-hoppy ale as the tastebuds get themselves on your brain catalog of beer chemistry on the same page. Very much appreciated and reward, have not found this style in some time.

Flying Dog Doggie Style Ale

RATING 4.5

Denver, Colorado/Aspen, Colorado

Broadway Brewing makes this for Flying Dog with dry hopping. While their Road Dog Ale is wild in graphics and text this is more brewpubby and artsy; even the bottle has a lovely leaping beast molded in for you collectors. Only the name implies a bit of mischief and wit. Available as both 22oz and sixpacks this brew is rich golden with a yellowish head. While their Scottish Road Dog Ale was a bit sugary-simple this is a HOPPY PALE ALE of the highest order. We have no hesitation to class it as INDIA PALE ALE due to the depth and flavor of the hops. Reviewers here noted "big head...good color..IPA like aroma" and also "herbal hop-drenched feast..\$3.19 was a steal for the big 22 ounce..I would surely drink it many times again". Good balance of sweetness and hops. Take it in long, hard, and assume the position.

Foothills Hoppyum IPA

RATING: 4.5

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Here's an IPA which pours medium gold, pushing up a cream head of some size and duration. The name is play on the word Opium it seems, another addicting plant-derived product. The hops are Simcoe, Centennial, Cascade, and Columbus. ABV is 6.3% with 70 IBU. This clearly of the American IPA style with this outstanding range of citrusy, piney, and floral hops, followed by a medium dry finish. It is nicely made but lacking a bit in terms of supporting malts; an entity which should be a clear scaffold not obstructing the beauty of the hops.

Founder's All Day IPA Session Ale

RATING: 4.0

Grand Rapids, Michigan

This happy, nostalgic labels show a maroon Jeep Wagoneer with wood-grain panels and a fine new shiny red canoe heading into the deep, vernal green woods for fun, the center of the dirt road a ribbon of vehicle-mown grasses and assorted weeds. The big 4.7% ABV tag is an early negative. That is a mite or twelve woods ticks short of session strength. The pour is Pilsy pale, the head a similar pile of ivory bubbles. Soft, mellow real hops fill the nasal cavities. Lace is mid-strength, decent. First sip is of a delightful American profile of vinous glory, a tad thinish by mid passage, and redeemingly dry and easy-drinking by the finish. Despite one reviewer saying "I'll need a 3 light-year session to get enough hops from this stuff" the approach here is generally of minimalist but solid quality hopping, lightish at times for a reason, and not light on quality nor thin on vision. It has a semi-sticky mouthfeel and by a bottle or more, one gets a good dose of piney perfection with a bit of mellow fruit,

more firm on the bitter conifers really. I would turn it up a notch or three but cold smoothness would suffer that way. We reward it with 4 bottles for the reason it serves a goodly role and is what it is; not a lavish nor Imperial-dense IPA but more on the gentile, golden side of the style - a newly respected, essentialist, deconstructed approach which does have a good following and not all of it female. Less is more if the quality beckons.

Brewbase Fives



Grant's India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 5.0

India Pale Ale or IPA is a subclass of Ale and this is surely one of the very finest. The style comes from 19th century British shipments to the lonely ruling class in India. Color is semi-cloudy dark golden. Head foamy and long. Flavor shows the 'extra hops' addition with a full complexity Bert Grant is known for. Starts hoppy and sweet but the finish is dry and can give rise to pleasant bitterness if warming up. Superior to McEwans Export IPA and that will be heresy to some but it is in fact truth to those honest and fair.

Brewbase Fives



Great Divide Hercules Double IPA

RATING: 5.0

Denver, Colorado

I rather frown on paying a full \$9.00 (January 2009) for a domestic 650ml bottle from anyone. The hue is bright amber when poured, the head a rocky cream of much quality. "Not for the faint of heart" is its motto and that prepared me...a little. The nose matches my ultimate IPA fantasy. The hops is generously applied, not so much piled or dumped, as expertly layered and woven with a strong malt foundation. I even got a couple of short choco-malt buzzes in two finishes and that is REALLY the stuff of sudsy dreams. It is sweet enough to keep the bitter bugs at bay but 9.1% of you-know-what keeps the finish a good deal more dry and bracing. The 85 IBU's are noted along with some Top 100 ratings in various beer challenges. I do hope the Surgeon General says we must all consume massive quantities of hops for our health - in which case these hoppy nectar is better than a trunkload of crisp apples to keep the HMO away. Great Divide got this one on-point and unerringly true to the Double IPA recipe held precious in our hophead heads and hearts. Better get a Herculean comment in here somewhere...how about...colossal, gargantuan, and mighty? This is a very impressive effort, all their Titan IPA is and two hundred pounds of sinew more.

Great Divide Titan IPA

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado

This "aggressively hopped" product joins an increasingly large and surprisingly high quality group of American IPA's that are flooding the market - and my throat. 6.8% ABV is nice but it's no boutique, limited edition IPA at that value. Color is a lightish amber, very nice with backlight, the head full cream and mid-length here. Traditional American hops aroma predominates but not especially yummy. It's on the dry, bitter of the style but the finish is not sharp nor offensive. It's one of the "easy bitter" finishes that marks the finest discharge of the

brewing arts. The malt support is barely sufficient and also of a higher grade; though only detectable in the very last finish notes if then. I'd have dialed the malt up at least one notch unless they have another that is supposed to do that - breweries have roles these days and lots of versions and subversions of every style! If you want your IPA moderate-high in vigor, dry, bitter, American varietal in flavor, low in malt, never sweet, and simply a hops celebration this is going to be a nice find for you. For me it's very, very good - not quite my first choice.

Great Lakes Commodore Perry IPA

RATING: 4.5

Cleveland, Ohio

The pour is medium gold, palish for the style, the head cream and short-lived, a nose of nice but faint hops. ABV is a strong 7.5% and the World Beer Championships gave them a Gold Medal. Their "Don't give up the Sip" is real for this one has a spicy hops dose, more on the peppery-spice than most any IPA we know or once knew. Since their Eliot Ness failed to impress and seemed much like a bad, forgettable, their tribute to Sir Perry is far more credible and memorable. The mid notes have some nice fruit to cut down on the spicy theme and after 10-20 sips one is rather impressed. We were not Award of Merit or 5.0 bottle impressed but it is recommended all any case - save you have a meagre budget only the very finest IPAs. Panelists noted "clearly a low-malt pale type IPA and that is a nice thing...lots of hops spice and we could more of that in our IPA...a real neat take on the style" and "it is more refreshing than I expected, lots of potent hops favoring pepper and herbal notes...this pairs well with so many foods in way no wine can match".

Green Flash West Coast India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

San Diego County, California

Here's another ISB in ardent amber trim, a big bubble-filled head of ivory, collapsing in fair time, and an aroma so full of hops you're almost drunk by a single sniff. If this were a movie it would be called *INVASION OF THE HOP VINES* and we'd all succumb gladly, happily, entwined in the glorious green towers, numbed into submission, and all the happier for it. We'd need to rely on the Doppelbockers with their resistance for the drug HOPS to rescue us. Some of us would refuse rescue and convert fully to the bitter, hop-clinging, cluster-loving, traditional, and old-fashioned religion of *Humulus*. This stuff is potent enough, rich enough, but not balanced enough. A little more malt would do it well and that need not take away from pungent blitzkrieg of our favorite vining crop.

Greenshields India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 2.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

This former product from RDU NC is bright golden with a hint of amber. The head is thin but of large bubbles. Like all their other 3 beers (Stout excluded) this one is also underpowered. It is one of those mass-market drinkable sort of ales but such are insulting when you pay \$8.99 per sixpack. IPA are supposed to be extra-hopped and this one is only moderately so. As a semi-sweet golden lager it is just okay but it is SEVERAL DOLLARS out of whack in value. At \$5.99 or \$4.99 it might pass muster for some part of the market. As a prestige microbrew it is absolutely out of the running. We recently thrilled at a true IPA from Sea Dog of Bangor ME. That was a buck cheaper and thrilling. As Stormin' Norman would say: it is neither an IPA, nor a pale ale, nor a good value, nor a...

Harpoon India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

Your first impression of this is the pleasant aroma. That's a good sign. Out comes a medium-light amber fluid with a deep, enduring, ivory head. It is very nicely hopped at first sip and the quality and complexity of the same is just right - then. The finish lets down a bit but not so badly as their Alt. We think a perfect IPA has enough maltiness to round it out. This is more of a single theme - hops and nothing more. If you are a hopaholic this is just fine. Overall and given the \$8.00 price we think some other choices are superior. In fairness two reviewers felt it was a perfect IPA to them. In any event it is head and shoulders above their Alt Ale. One reviewer

expressed the idea that "it is quite charming and refreshing...appropriately bitter but smooth enough."



Hoppin' Frog Mean Manalishi Double I.P.A.

RATING: 5.0

Akron, Ohio

First of all, these Hoppin' things are a tad expensive - some \$10 per 22oz. in a market where strong pales go for \$5-8 a bottle of similar size and strength. It pours light-bright amber, the head light brown and rocky-tallish. The ABV hops around at 8.2% and the label calls it "extreme" and "super-assertive". Hop potency is off the charts and surprising the finish is good bitter and not assertive turned ugly aggressive. The brewers have judged this very well and such is very wise for them at this price range! In the so-called Double IPA or Imperial IPA category it hangs with anyone I know and yet it doesn't have as much malty backbone as some might like. It's all about the viney thing and not much else. The whole "Mean Manalishi" thing is curious. It sounds Indian (the New Delhi kind not the rain dance kind) but "Manalishi" in American parlance tends to refer to a Fleetwood Mac and also a Judist Priest song. The "Green Manalishi" is one who flashes lots of green cash to attract partners and attention in general. There are rumors it also referred to a potent brand of LSD. One almost to be some kind fo Manalishi to buy this \$10 beer bottle with cash.

Their comments about "toasty, carmelized" flavors do not ring true for me. They might have made it a super strong hops tea (then end of work) but the finish is so refined and easy - even after two full glasses of the nectar. It is not sweetened much either. I would like the malt brought up into the finish a tad but I cannot fault them when the goal was a DIPA.

Lagunitas Hop Stoopid Ale

RATING: 4.0

Petaluma, California

The 22-bombers sold for just \$4.89 (July 2010), a relative bargain, rating a solid 8% ABV and 102 IBU. I swear this stuff must be made by sadistic lawyers because the tiny print story on the label requires a strong light and hand lens for even someone with 20-20 ability. The rant is fun and wise and sometimes clever but will anyone actually read it? It flows very rich gold, some amber tints, a decent ivory head, nose midway between APA and IPA. First sip is rich but sophisticated, the "cleaner hop flavors" of the label text realized to a high degree, and a finish sweetish for the style but not nicely metered out and a good bittersweet balance for my taste at least. Some IPA fans like things cough-drop simple and others like them ultra-intense like downing 8 shots of Absinthe. Mouthfeel is a tad sticky for the worldwide style, not uncommon for a US microbrew where IPA gets the nasty edge taken off them but allowing the hops to still rain down in true character.

Reviewers here said "nice balance at first, a bit too strong for me...a cheap double IPA is not a bad thing though" and "Nice price but not deep...you have to be a hop freak to love something this intense". For hop intensity per dollar, this is a value leader. To me that means one thing - blend it when it can be found. I do love topping off a pitcher of stout with an uber-hoppy ale. It's about the Economy Depth Stoopid. Here is one beer that needs some malty background layered into it like the multi-toned sparkles in your wifey's kinda cinnamon-brown haircolor-hairdo-permy thing that looks like a blonde to brown rainbow. This brew needs about three or four malts painted on with aluminum foil or copper kettle or something.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Laughing Dog Devil Dog Imperial IPA

RATING: 5.0

Ponderay, Utah

The pour here is bright golden tinged amber, the head rocky and lasting in a one rich cream tone. Nose is delicious laced with honey-hops. ABV is a chart-topping (not really) 10.85% and the "all out assault on the senses" is done with 5.2 pounds of hops per barrel. Triple dry-hopping is a key. Hops used include Northern Brewer, Columbus, Cascade, Simcoe, and Antanum. Pale, Munich, and Carmel malts are employed to full effect and with a result that makes this hop candy not overly sweet but just as charming as a candy store confection. The hops explode like diverse fireworks between thunder-claps of strong ethanol and subtle, quality malts. It is almost a time-released IPA with the flavor bursts over the course of a minute or three on the tongue. So spectacular and flawlessly crafted in the IPA that it easily earned our AM 2011.

One would think all this potency in many areas would make it a slow, session beer - and it can be - but icy cold I found it very pourable down the old pipe. It is both accessible AND impressive in the way a BMW M5 will thrill both the new driver and that much-jaded, experienced one. True greatness in any product is usually all-purpose great and everyman's choice. You don't need to develop a special taste, a critic's sense, or acquire anything here. Any brew this good is everywhere, any time a star. The balance, symmetry, and depth this Utah IPA achieves is equal or better than most things from Colorado, Calif, or Oregon. I'm very inclined to make a Tabernacle Choir Hallelujah! Hal-aaaa-lewwwww-yaaaaaa! reference here. Whether you praise God, god, dog, devil dogs, or the beer gods, this is one very clear, fine reason for jubilation.

Left Hand 400 Pound Monkey IPA

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

With a monkey-infested label that either charms or offends the British, Hindus, and Sikhs, this 6.7% English style IPA is amber-gold. The hops are a mixture of floral, pine, and citrus; the later most subdued. It comes off balanced even though fairly intense in some middle passages. It is not for the timid and if you can't handle 400 hop-wielding monkeys climbing up your back and on your head - look elsewhere for mild, tender IPAs. The finish has a lighter left hand. There can be some awkward middle notes where carmel, hops, and assorted other flavors trade positions and somethings a theme gets lost. Two reviewers told me "a pine cone resin grenade for those who like such things...some good sips but also a couple crude ones" and "hop-lovers delight and not entirely British style as advertised...more American eccentric IPA...the malt foundation is well crafted and I found quality fruit along with some caramel. Not for the faint-hearted since most strong IPAs come off like herbal tonics".

Left Hand/Terrapin Oxymoron Teutonic India Pale Lager

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

The Midnight Project Brew III of 2010 is a co-production of Terrapin and Left Hand. It is oxymoronic for it's an American IPA made with three German malts, 6 German hops, and German lager yeast. We don't yet have an IPL (India Pale Lager) category so it will get judged by this lot here. It flows bright gold, head medium-long, and old ivory in hue. Nose is hoppy but more interesting than most mono-thematic IPA's I know. First sip is rather timid, a good roasty toasty lager, later notes mix semi-bitter hops and lots of dryness. Following sips were more clever and accomplished, showing the contradiction here to best effect - a warming, gold later with a strong hops finish, hence something of a Hoppy Golden Lager - something not entirely new to the New World even if mostly the domain of the modern microbrews. One can "IPA-up" almost any style including Stouts and Porters and certainly the variable entity known as the Hoppy Barleywine. It's a nice change of pace, a bit irregularly in flavor when warmed for too long, precious and fun when very cold. It's another pick for your local, hidden-label brew testing - people will not get it right but probably think you blended it special.



Left Hand Twin Sisters Double IPA

RATING: 5.0

Longmont, Colorado

This double IPA has a very artistic label - kudos to start with there. It pours fine gold, head ivory and long-lasting, nose classic but maybe turned up one notch. It caresses one at first sip then you are treated to a long ride of smooth, rare bitter, quality hops than go on and on forever. This is far less malty, lagery than their Oxymoron IPL bought here at the same time (November 2010). The twins keep us amused in the way a double anything in brew world should. Okay, Larry...where's the sexist twin jokes. I'm behaving today so [insert your own here] and [into here] and [upper yours here]. There's just enough sweetness to smooth out the bitterness of the diverse hops and its various good ones were used. It reminds me of one of those new Sierra Nevada offerings of the Harvest series where fresh hops are used. This one is that much of a good hops tea. I found this stuff even drinkable near room temp and that is hard to say of most any IPA really. This is a remarkable accomplishment and better than a couple of their other offerings of late.

Left Hand Warrior IPA with Colorado fresh hops

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

The label is a work of art, showing a benevolent Cat Woman sort of character in a leather mask, the edges of which turn into angry cats, rams, elk, a raven, and a witch. The red spaces between these creatures cleverly reveal even more outlandish beasts, two of which are surely a rabid rat and a warthog. There may be up to 6 others and so if one is very smashed on this or any other handy brew, the game to find all the beasts can commence. It pours a dashing bright amber with a vast head not unlike the mountains near Longmont except for a darker, dirty snow color. It delivers with a mid IPA strength - I can hardly tell anymore with no many ultra, super, Imperial, double, triple IPA's served of late - and finishes dry and smooth. It is not tarted up, just a decent, clean, representative, solid as a mountain rendition of the style. I like it alot but if you're playing that stronger is always better game, you may find it less than shocking. Frankly I don't want nor need

to shocked and overwhelmed with every new IPA I try. Left Hand got this one right and used sharp, fresh hops to pull it off.

Legend Golden IPA

RATING: 3.5

Richmond, Virginia

The pour is light gold, head cream, mid-depth, slow sparse lace. Legend is central VA's oldest and largest microbrewery and work out of historic 7th street. The approach is classic English in style, weakish at first, later the hops bitterness saturating more as it balanced with semi-sweet Brit-type malts. At 7% ABV it's a tad potent in that category. It is much more fruity than an Old World treasure tends to be even today. We found the finish a bit off, bitter-off at times and overall far from the Burton-on-Trent sort of polish. The "clean hops" of their website was not accurate with what we acquired for a pleasant \$1.99 at Total Wine in Greensboro NC. They have a basic recipe on the right mark but the finish needs an industrial rethink and clean-up.

Lost Coast Indica India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Eureka, California

I'm not sure the good people from India will always appreciate their beloved god Ganesha on American beer label anymore than we'd like Mary or Jesus on a package of virgin rasagolla or holy kuzhl. Political correctness in the realm of beer nomenclature does not seem to exist yet and perhaps that is good thing. This unfiltered IPA reaches the glass in a medium amber shade, the head cream-colored, and ample in all directions. The saturation of hops is apparent in the "nose". First sip is that of a very refined, strong, but not crude hops. It is weaker than two of my IPA expert friends said they liked but they still respected this one. The ABV is higher than normal but not listed on my bottles. The "radical bittering" comes from Columbus hops with later dry-hopping from the Willamette and Centennial flowers. Sweetness is medium (5 of 10 points) to me. I don't like my IPA brands so strong they are just crude hop tea, mask everything I eat in the next three meals, and give me Listerine-strength breath until Saturday. This is what might be called "good restaurant-friendly IPA" (not overpowering good food but complimenting it) and this means a calculated moderation instead of a cheap, money-saving weakness. My two IPA expert friends thought it was a 4.0 at best but they like everything unbounded and hopped enough to sprout a vine from discarded bottles. I found this balance to be sensible, well-considered, and just right for a cold treat.



Maclay Wallace India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Alloa From Thistle Brewery of Maclay and Co. Ltd. comes this golden-amber pale with a lasting near white head. It is richly flavored with the high hopping that the labels admits to be India Pale Ale. It is named for the Scottish knight and patriot William Wallace who took on 'the usurper' Edward of England. The gold on black thistle cap is a collector's gem as well. It is rather dry and a genuinely superior product when you can find it. There are few other pale ales (richly hopped or not) that have such a refined balance with malt. Reviewers noted 'richer than I usually like an ale but undoubtedly a hallmark piece of brewing' and 'wonderfully hop-drenched, well-malted, and perfectly dry...a great find to add to my all time favorites'. Not to be missed.

Mad River Jamaica Brand Sunset India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Blue Lake, California

I'm the last guy on the block to want to stifle creativity but I'd almost favor a law limiting beer labels to just five or six words in the brand name! Do we really need two countries, madness, sunsets, and rivers in a single beer name? This 7% ABV product is slightly foggy amber, big tall irregular head, fruity hops coming to the olfactories in mere milliseconds. Hops are full, fruit a secondary note (not an equal partner), and the finish potent but smooth and with easy-bitterness. Easy-bitter should be someone's trademark. Can't find it but there is an Extra Easy Bitter beer recipe circulating about. Anyhow, back to point: This brew is good, floors above the usual hoppy microbrew and average IPA, and it would make any tourist anywhere happy to find it flowing from a found walnut bar. I'd down a half dozen or take a sixpack back to the my hotel room but if I other choices from a big beer shop, I'd go elsewhere. Nice stuff but not a new experience nor a special one.

Mad River Steelhead Extra Pale Ale

RATING: 3.0

Blue Lake, California

Mad River has a couple of labels, Jamaica Brand being one and Steelhead the other. A "steelhead" for the record is an ocean-traveling form of rainbow trout, named for the metallic appearance of it's body. The amount of iridescence and red striping varies and on this label it's maxed out. They started the basic Extra Pale line in 1989 and this current version is not so much extra in flavor as literally extra pale in color. It's unfiltered and very smooth, pouring out with Pilsner-like aesthetics. There is faint spice, low hops, and a moderate-high amount of dryness in the end. It is essentially a very drinkable American Pale Ale Light but done to a quality level at least. I'm not impressed and have no need for it - save a very pricey, subtle meal (like trout with truffles) and this is the only microbrew on the menu. It will not hopify your food or malt your dinner to death. It's extra pale and extra weak and it need not exist.

Magic Hat H.I.P.A.

RATING: 4.5

South Burlington, Vermont

This 5.8% IPA pours a cloudy gold with a big cream head lasting longer than Vermont maples drip syrup on a warm day. Lace is superbly long. This HIGH-P-A is called such for its HIGHLY hopped and is part of their "Season-ale" line for "vernal vitality". It is dry-hopped again for even more sweet punch. English Ale yeast is used with Columbus hops (a good piney-floral variety) and with a tad trace of Pale Ale malts. I shouted out "yes!!" a bit too loud in the Harris-Teeter when pulling out a bottle and spying the very generous swirl of goodness in the HUD light. There's a nice bitterness tempered by sweetish mid notes but the finish is more dry and bitter yet. I does that sweet-hops to dry-hops slide thing very, very neatly. It's high-big hops without the pucker and cringe. There's a bit of supporting yeast-fruit but I'd turn that up another notch and also crank up the background malts a hair. This is very near a perfect IPA but I like either solid fruit support or ample malt foundation and sometimes both before a perfect rating. I will accept super-ultra-floral hops lacking fruit or malt if and only if the effect is MOAB GBU-43/B jaw-dropping.

Marston's India Export Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.5

Burton on Trent, England

Well I guess this is an IEPA rather than a regular IPA. The brew is golden with a bit of an amber glow for good measure. The big cream head would last an entire passage from India we suppose. A quality hoppy-skunky aroma is apparent. The nip of the hops (quite expected in this style) is tempered by a dash more sweetness than one usually expects. But with Marston we are used to getting something a bit different after all. While some IPA enthusiasts are looking for a liquid strong enough to disinfect battle wounds, this one strikes a rather agreeable balance between potency and pleasantness. Reviewers were vocal on this one but some liked the label's description of it being 'well- attenuated'; probably because they'd enjoyed too much to find a dictionary.

McEwans Export

RATING 4.0

Edinburgh, Scotland

This is described as 'India Pale Ale' and is from Scottish Courage (formerly Scottish and Newcastle) of Edinburgh via the San Francisco importer. It is one of very few brews from Scotland that seems popular in most US markets. The color is fairly dark but clear amber with a substantial head. The herbal, quasi-medicinal flavor is difficult for

some people to like at first. Still others with an IPA passion say it may not be quite potent enough to suit their fancy. It is about as close to hop tea as one is likely to get in bottles. Smooth it is but with today's beer lover accustomed to even strong American pale ales McEwen's may not be as rewarding. Yet compared to most North American IPA's this label is still fairly unique. But we'd prefer to turn to Maclay, Monrell's, or Samuel Smith as more agreeable European standards for the style. This is one label where opinions will vary but on the whole many enthusiasts find it a tad underpowered.

Medocino White Hawk Original IPA

RATING: 4.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

Medocino in their old CA trim or in the new NY origin have always given us fine beers and artful labels with an ornithological or nature-inspired theme. It pours rich gold, the head creamy, lasting. The nose is hoppy but not as much as expected and recalled from past sips in dark rooms. As I do beer blending (often between and among 2-3 styles) I detect a bit of IPA x Scottish (Scotch) Ale in the DNA. There are some tart, medicinal, sweet, molasses-laden notes here than one is more often to find in a white hawk from say...Edinburgh. There's IPA bitterness but a sweetness envelops it or by some accounts ruins it. I like this bold hybrid and am not sure they always played it this way. The finish can get a bit ragged even if you're expecting a medicinal Scotch Ale zing. In the 2008 trim, it's fascinating, luscious, and fun - far from perfect.



Mercury Clown Shoes Hoppo Feet 1.5 Double Black India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Ipswich, Massachusetts

Whenever I see a new small bomber for \$5.99 it's likely to be weak and not so memorable. I tend to buy some of them later than others and a few I never get to. The 10% ABV on this seeming bargain got my eye as did the long, cleverish name. "One year of brutal work and abundant shenanigans" produced this dark-as-stout Black IPA. You get lovely rich malts here but a proper, respectable complex IPA finish (dry and not barleywine sweet), one simply loaded with licorice notes as if the real black thing was somehow melted into the vats using giant forklifts. Here is truly remarkable, exciting IPA and if you know me (us), the word exciting comes to our reviews as often as mile wide comets cause extinction of giant, short-armed, scaly lizards. Porter lovers will treasure as much as most addicted hophead who likes their homebrewed IPA raised to 43rd power. Why the hell would someone buy one of a hundred other mediocre or dreadful bombers when gems like this are in the stores? No clowning here, this is some serious skill, talent, producing joy with every long sip and a new appreciation of the IPA as a dynamic, changing concept. Wow and super-wow. This is really great stuff, memorable, and an exalted celebration of the brewing arts. The smoothness of this formula as executed here is jaw-dropping; pleasing even the most of our jaded, stodge brew gurus. There's some mighty fine, world-beating shenanigans and

from the glorious, nirvanic flavors, I would think some alien species might have been involved in those brutal deliberations - for this is a result far above our species' norm.

Mercury Clown Shoes Tramp Stamp Belgian Style IPA

RATING: 4.5

Ipswich, Massachusetts

With our already buzzed brains buzzing from the numerous concepts of slutty tattooed girls, Belgian ale, India-strong hops, clown footwear, peeling blue jeans, Mercury, and Ipswich Mass, we come down to test this bad girl. Having louded their Black IPA to the hilt, this 7% entity gal has a tall order; a bit like a fresh co-ed following a room full of porn stars at tonsil-popping arts. Is Pale Al from India going to be satisfied? "Soft but complex malts", Chambly yeast, sweet orange peel, and three varietal hops (Centennial, Continental, and Amarillo) were used to make this bright amber pour. I suppose Pale Al's date is with Amber then. We will avoid the big lasting head jokes - or maybe not. These hops are smoother than Amber Tramp's posterior after a week at a Belgian spa. This recipe is semi-sweet, decently judged and very pleasant. This trampy clown will do nicely and you get off but if you want the \$1200 an hour experience, go black with the Hoppy Feet Agency and get a room at the Beverly Wilshire. Her name is Licorice...

Middle Ages Grail Ale

RATING: 4.5

Syracuse, New York

'Fresh from our castle to yours' this reddish-amber ale easily tempts you with the grey-toned stone castle for a box. Rays of sunlight highlight a holy vessel inside holding a big foamy brew. The head is substantial and creamy white. There is some aroma for those with keen sensors for hops. It is very hoppy of a rather pungent (American we believe) sort with only a hint of malt. One might almost put this with an INDIA PALE ALE (IPA) given the herbal, bitter hop nature that charms you so quickly. If you are in search of a grail (holy or otherwise) full of very nicely hopped beer this is your find. It ranks among the best of the fully-hopped American microbrews from the East Coast in our book. A reviewer here noted: 'triple hopped hinting of mint and malt'.



Mikkeller Centennial Single Hop IPA

RATING: 5.0

Lochristi-hufte, Belgium

Wrap your head around this: "American Style India Pale Pale" made in Belgium. Is Genny Cream Ale about to be copied in Dortmund next week? Bud Light Lime wrapped in foil from Tadcaster? Let's deconstruct things here a bit. A noted brewery in Belgium making an American style ale that originally copied a British style ale for sale in India? The bottle is cute, a very simple black on grass green like it was photoshopped to be simple but effective. It got my attention among all the flying dogs, leaping snakes, and Versailles quality art labels in coolers. Less is more at times. Less better me more for \$5.99 (July 2010) for 11.2 oz. is a high bar to clear to get my plastic-driven, indentured-to-Visa-forever respect. ABV is 6.9%, coming out with a head so large and enthusiastic it's easy to overflow.

Color is near-clear amber shading with golden hues. The head lasts like an Indian dynasty; by which I mean curry long and NOT long-bow painted warrior long. Nose is about IPA classic, mid-potency. First sip confirmed my suspicions of it being rich upfront, more subtle later, smooth and mono-thematic as a single hop IPA should be. This Belgo-ameri-anglo-indian fare is pretty damn impressive, easy to drink and yet serving the hop-lover with strength that never fades into crude bitterness for it's own sake. The finish has a particularly grand ending in many notes, a sort of citrus-ladden zip combined with those soft-caressing hops that are zesty and warming

like a grapefruit-lemon glaze on a Talapia. IPA should not club you so much as a stun you with subtle acids and tender aromatic esters that seem out of this world. IPA can be easy to swallow and not inducing cringes from one's company and here is a supremely well made example that is accessible to all; nothing lost and everything gained.



Mikkeller Nelson Sauvín Single Hop IPA

RATING: 5.0

Lochristi-hufte, Belgium

The Warrior label (reviewed below) was in dark, rich magenta and this label is more bright violet-fuchsia - and if that sounds creepy or fruity or wrong let me consult the Pantone GoeGuide fan I carry in the trunk of my pearl blue, chrome-laden Chrysler 300 and give you the exact HEX codes. I am a plant taxonomist and colors matter to plant people and beer people both. Color classification tells us much about everything important in those and other domains. As with the Warrior we get a stingy 11.2 ounces for \$5.49 (January 2011), 6.9% ABV but real Belgian brewing even if copying an American IPA - the rare reverse of our 1200 copies of their ales!

It pours much as Warrior in golden-apricot, finely textured head but the nose is a bit more fruity, interesting, and promising. I totally confess I'd only heard of Nelson Sauvín hops once before and had no clue until my research began for this review. This smooth-cone hop cultivar is a triploid from New Zealand developed in 2000 with flavors variously described as "fresh crushed gooseberries" - read: lots of subtle but real fruit flavors. Comparison to Sauvín Blanc grapes was intended in the choice of name. My meters went off with super-wow spikes and I tasted luminous, ripe grapes without being told I should. My dad and grandpa grew up in the Finger Lakes of New York and did grape stuff for years for the local wineries. Grapes are in my early experiences as a kid and in my roots. In the final analysis, this is one of the most idiosyncratic but neither truly odd or offensive IPA's in my 4 decades of beer tasting and semi-buzzed analysis. Should an IPA but fruity-hoppy, loaded with white grape and gooseberry flavors, and only medium nippy in the long saturation notes after many, many sips. Abso-fuckalootly! Normally one gets fruit in an IPA from the selection of an estery yeast. This is a standard-breaking approach and a truly lucent, funky-righteous, and utterly newfangled way to think outside the bottle and four miles above the copper kettle.

Mikkeller Warrior Single Hop IPA

RATING: 4.5

Lochristi-hufte, Belgium

After our review of the Centennial variant of this single hop, Americanized IPA series, I found and eagerly grabbed these magenta-labeled 11.2 oz. bottles for \$5.49 each at Whole Foods (January 2011). That price is a

mighty rigorous climb on anybody's value meter. This skimpy 6.9% broth pours cloudy golden-apricot with a fine-meshed head of some duration. Nose is very subdued, not promising or tempting really. The hopping is not not double by any means, nor single in fact. It is very subtle, sort of pale ale subtle at times and never mainstream IPA potent. It might be unfair to call it a two-thirds strength IPA for while the hops intensity is 66% on my meter, the quality of the hops and malt make up for this lack of traditional medicinal, "bitter is the only way" presentation.

Warrior is all about the hops even if not dosed to a ridiculous extreme for the sake of pleasing masochistic hop fiends. This two-thirds back-off from IPA madness for it's own sake is brewing wisdom even if this is an "experience beer" and twelve light-years and a long ride-down-a-wormhole from a good supermarket kind of value. Sum: Well-judged, very enjoyable, simply oozing quality, pretty, pricey as all hell, and near-perfect on my wow and yummy meters - which sit side-by-side somewhere between my cerebral cortex with old-fashioned 40's style gauges, a sort of baked enameled finish, one red, one forest green with large golden, alarm-clock bells clanking loudly, and my normally hops-drenched or vodka-numbered tastebuds. Was that too much again, my editors? Ride down a wormhole and get over it.



Molson/Coors (UK) Worthington's White Shield IPA

RATING: 5.0

Burton-upon-Trent, UK

This is not a mistake. Molson/Coors UK is the technical brewery name for this 5.6% authentic, British-borne IPA with bottle conditioning. White Shield is a bench market for the IPA style and has won many awards. Sold as CLOSER TO CASK™, this fine offering has a rich golden pour, faintly hazy, thin but long lace, the head light cream and tall. This IPA is tea-like in the sense of a rich hops tea, tart, tangy, and very dry in approach, bitter only in a faint, admirable way. Some of panelists felt it a tad bitter in some passages, giving it more of a 4.5 rating, but most of us rated it 5.0 all the way down the bottle. And by the way we test full bottles or more per reviewer, no mini-cups or sips allowed. Panelists remarked "very authentic, true to type in all respects, retro even like it was brewed with sacks of hops in malty water just an hour ago and then chilled" and "it is all about the hops, some citrus, and not a lot of hype like American IPAs."



Monrells Oxford Castle Ale (IPA)

RATING: 5.0

Oxford, England

The English should be great at India Pale Ales (IPAs) since they invented them. This is a perfect gem. Even if not served at the recommended 50-55 degrees F. it is a tangy delight with immense hop-fulness. At \$3.29 per 1 pint 2.7 fl. oz. bottle it is a wondrous value. Color is bright copper amber with a lasting ivory head of some size. It has all the molasses-carmel charm of Old Peculiar but it finishes rather dry. It's a REAL ALE by any standard that a British ale fan might construct. Reviewers noted 'while other IPA are different there is none that is finer'

and 'simply a liquid candy...ideal for winning over your friends to superior beer'. There is no excuse not to try this unless you can't find it. The only bad thing: the 'best by' date was not marked. Brewbase 1996 award as the Best IPA found that year.

Mother Earth Sisters of the Moon IPA

RATING: 4.5

Kingston, North Carolina

I first discovered this brewery at a local Whole Foods, appropriately on Earth Day, and noticed the three chicks dancing around the fire on the label. These are apparently the sisters of the moon, though still clothed and not with any hint of being at the final destination of old style IPA. For the record, Kingston NC is a small town between Raleigh and the beach, known to some of you for the Kingston Indians minor league ball team, and named for King George III of England. Former UNC and Mavericks star Jerry Stackhouse is from there. Speaking of staked houses, My Name is Earl star Jaime Pressly is also from this town. She'd make a nice sister of the moon....(mind's eye, XXX mind's eye here). Getting back to the point of this review, this mostly golden-amber IPA has a rich near white head. I was jolted by the rich dose of hops so very nicely judged to caress more than thump you over the head - more Jaime and less Jerry in this regard. The finish is dry but not oversaturating in the chosen theme, very precisely gauged, and delightful in all the notes. There is nothing to dislike and everything to like - the whole package complete, well-rounded, and refreshing. IPA should not be a punishment as cod liver oil or needlessly strong, cleverly named cocktail. I am so used to southern, especially NC and SC, microbreweries coming up with "the full line" and lasting 2-4 years or less. Not much learned and not much lost. This product is arresting, noble, and made with true, international class right off the bat. Fresh hops are the key and this effort is rewarded manyfold but make an IPA that is actually ENJOYABLE and alluring. You'd believe it if I served it with a Rogue or Sierra Nevada label on it. Owners Stephen Hill and Trent Mooring have blended green brewing technology with a focus on research and education. This company is one to watch and I will be getting all their bottled stuff in short order.



Moylan's Hopsicle Imperial "Triple Hoppy" Ale

RATING: 4.5

Novato, California

These \$10 750ml bottles are killing my review budget but most of them are better than trunk full of crappy sixpacks. 9.2% ABV is strong but not overwhelming. Anthanum, Chinook, and Tomahawk hops are used in high doses - "pucker up!" as the label says. Before we go further note a 2009 Platinum Medal at the World Beer Championships and a 2007 Gold at the GABF. Frankly, all these events have 498 categories so that even Bud Light will win something bright and shiny! But this is as far from a light beer as a nuclear bomb from a firecracker. The head is mid-length, creamy, and aromatic to be sure. The color is rich amber. It has enough sweetness and faint malting to keep it from being overbearing. Still I'd sip it slow, just a bit at the time, and enjoy it in small, fun doses.

Napa Smith Brewery

RATING: 4.5

Napa, California

Napa CA is home of some of the world's finest adult beverages, many of them world-beating and most joyously...French-beating. And like so many Napa-borne things it is a bit pricey, ringing up at \$10.39 for just a quad of 12 oz. bottles (January 2011). It colors up a bright apricot-amber shade, the head large and creamy, lasting well. The nose is honeyed-hops but it finishes more medium-bitter. The 7.1% dose of goodness is about right as is the intensity of the smooth, Sierra Nevada-like hops. It is also organic, certified by CCOF. It's a very

agreeable, capably made, even engaging in the mid, less bitter notes. I would like a splash more malty backbone but two reviewers on our panel thought they'd cover that base and then some. It is near perfect as a dry, semi-bitter IPA of the 1.5x strength type - not quite a double but very potent and fully-loaded still.

Natty Greene's Cannonball Double IPA

RATING: 4.5

Greensboro, North Carolina

Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Greene was one of George Washington's most gifted and skilled officers and his likeness is on the cap of this very fine product brewed in Greensboro, North Carolina. Washington entrusted him with the managing the defense of no less important spot than Boston where that other heroic-looking, patriot, beer dude is from. This is a nice-looking, very collectible cap for those of you who note such things. The city is named after him and is famous for Guillard College and Greensboro College, a huge teacher-training school now called UNC-Greensboro. They are more recently famous for being home of the Atlantic Coast Conference and where Honda Jets are being built. Anyhow, this medium amber brew has an enticing aroma that is met with what I think is really 1.5X IPA. I say this mainly because I've had doubles stronger and the occasional single just about as hoppy. The quality of the bitterness rivals a fine British ale but the finish is a tad too simple and monotone to make it perfect. Their website states that Centennial and Antanum hops are used for just the right citrus and spice notes. ABV% is 8.0% and you notice it in a good way. I think I'd like more warm malt in the finish notes and that would earn 'em a trip to New Delhi.



New Belgium Ranger India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

This 70 IBU offering is made with Simcoe, Cascade, and Chinook hops - hardly the stuff of jolly old England or more jolly New Delhi. This label got my attention in the supermarket one day for few breweries use splitpea-soup lime green and dark brown on a label - that defies some kind of marketing rules I suppose. They "pop" because they don't pop and you almost know it's a microbrew thing for the curious look of it that stands out. Let this be a lesson to microbreweries who try to look too much like mass-market pisswater. These colors are yummy enough to me as the colors are close to malt and hops in fact. The 6.5% ABV beverage is dispensed in a bright, Pilsoid gold color with an antique white head of small size under which lace is thin but sure. The nose is very crisp of hops, clearly of those special varieties and not what a UK firm would or could send over. The hopping gives it a strong but very bright, light on it's feet flavor, exceedingly well judged and delivered. Aside from the worthless "American IPA" class of some competitions (which also accept very, very traditional recipes), we could use a class devoted only to American style hops which are a clear departure. This would give nearly all of them a run for their money up the hop trellis and down a hundred rows.

This is one of the best US takes on the IPA style and I really love it. The presentation is truly of a hops tea, trimmed with the requisite ethanol molecule, sprightly in all notes, nimble, never medicinal or harsh, and just what I need when craving an ample portion, a full share of the glimmering vertical vine. Their website breaks down the recipe well - Cascade (citrus), Chinook (floral, citrus), and Simcoe (fruity) and then a second dose of Cascade. Pale and caramel malts are used to harmonize the recipe top to bottom. The short of it is that here is a genuinely brilliant take on the IPA style with New World hops, heavenly notes coming to the fore in a brew so enjoyable it will delight, overwhelm in sexual way for your tastebuds, and make the Old World pharmaceutical, cod live oil view of IPA a thing to be recalled but found out of favor.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



New Holland Black Hatter Black IPA

RATING: 5.0

New Holland, Michigan

Their regular Mad Hatter is something of modern legend in American IPA, at least in terms of Midwest firms. This variant was tasted in July 2011 along with the Oak Age Hatter version. Balt malts and dry-hopping are added to good effect, the result only slightly less opaque than a porter, showing a glimmer of red light against my strong LED lamp. The head is uneven, long, and dark cream. The nose is hoppy with hints of licorice. The flavors are wonderfully complex, nippy to the standard of full-bore IPA, licorice and faint smoke added. The label recommends it be paired with "aged cheddars, arugula in vinaigrette, and portabella stir-fry" - how far has microbrew cuisine come!!!! If you like your malt well-roasted but not overwhelming along with hops that are nearly overwhelming, this is a fine pick. It is surprising clean and sharp in the finish, never heavy or stout-like. To say it's a porter-IPA hybrid is perhaps taking things too far but it favors that general corner of things from my blending experience of porter x IPA. Very different from the original and in some ways more surprising and entertaining - thus an award winner here. Simply one of the best dark hoppy ales we know. High praise from every taster here.

Brewbase Fives



New Holland Mad Hatter India Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

New Holland, Michigan

"Delicious beer delivered with painstaking consistency, that's our philosophy". From my experience this is absolutely true. The color is bright golden-amber, a more golden shade than often found in the IPA family. The lace lasts awhile and the head is large and surprising pale in color. It is bright, tart, and the hops seem more

alive than many IPA's and I believe the quality of the hops has to be accounted for on that note. Mad Hatter is a righteous, true-to-style, very enjoyable product, quite pleasant and yet drinkable in the best sense of that word. There's not a thing wrong, to be refined, replaced, corrected, etc. I would not change it except to make it more available in my part of the world. So popular is this fine, affordable IPA, there are variants, one roasty black and another oak-aged.



New Holland Oak-Aged Hatter IPA

RATING: 5.0

New Holland, Michigan

Hard on the heels of their Black Hatter, simply stunning black IPA, this variant aged in Kentucky [Bourbon?] barrels and comes out in a glowing amber-gold with a strong, tall head. Their Black Hatter manages to be fairly smooth and clean even if highly roasted and not oak-aged. This variant beside the paler color is sweeter, that sugar-bliss tinged with whisky flavors that will not please everyone - but should! There is a small amount of bitterness from that process and while it melds well with the hop bitterness, some tasters here preferred the original and Black variants for that distinction. The complexity of flavors is simply stirring, a real delight for us jaded, "seen everything" beer tasters. While I would not try to age any hats or hatters in barrels, the effect on a finely-formed IPA is simply Shangri-la to our oral buds.

New Knoxville India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Knoxville, Tennessee

This brewery makes 25-barrel batches using British methods. English 2-row malt, a 200-year-old English yeast, and a combination of UK and American hops are utilized. Open-top fermentation and brick-lined brew kettles are mentioned. The color is a bright golden amber with a lasting cream head. As IPA's go it's rather sweet but that rich hops bite is certainly there. They even confess to it being 'medium-bodied' within the IPA style but in this case that is no fault. There is enough hops to please most folks and the sweetish appeal is not overdone; assisted by a drier finish which reaffirms the traditional effect. It is overall a very delightful beer and every student of Southern craft brewing is advised to seek this out.

Olde Hickory Black Raven IPA

RATING: 4.5

Hickory, North Carolina

Here's a newish Black IPA (January 2012), giving a light-trapping, pitch-dark tube, the head mid-tan and mid-sized in that line. It is delightful and endearing from first sip, true to the cause and much more malty than it had to be. ABV is 7%. Instead of crying "Nevermore", this Raven makes us shout: Bring us more...on this drunken midnight so dreary. The malts are fitting, the radiant hops well-sitting, and on my chamber door, a shadow on the floor, we shall be lifted. Upon my velvet chair sinking...I'm drunk so stinking...so I betook myself to linking...our glasses were a glinkin'. Undaunted the beast burned her eyes on my bosom's core...it was my slut wife of yore...seeking yet money more...so I implored my lads to show her the door. Black Raven IPA...pour it out this dank hop-fest I adore....enchanted we be on the desert shore...tastebuds tickled on the tufted floor...respice...Oh Lord I implore....may Black Raven flow and be lifted evermore.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Olde Hickory Death by Hops IPA

RATING: 5.0

Hickory, North Carolina

In December 2011 this localish brewery came to the stores of the Raleigh-Durham area with lots of bright graphics and clever names like this one. This was the first one we paneled and it's akin to having your first driving lesson in a Twin-turbo Bentley. Alex Beurckholtz won the brewery's pro-am contest using 5 different western coast hops, 2 row malt, and two events of dry hopping. Here's a shout-out to his wbesite www.hopsandvines.net, a beer, wine, and homebrewing shop in Asheville NC and online too. It pours with a 7.0% content, a dark amber-gold (more amber under dark restaurant lights), and a smallish cream head. Nose is slightly sweet and as fruitful as the Greenwich Village farmer's market. The flavor is rich, very complex, supremely stratified in the finest of hops, more a like a death at the hand of 72 virgins - or Greenwich Village's farmer's market if you so inclined. These is never an off or excessively bitter moment. This IPA is as smooth as a 40 year old, single malt scotch. Everything is peachy and perfect. The biggest compliment I might pay the winner is that this might be bottled as Sierra Nevada Abundant Amber Harvest IPA and not one reviewer anywhere would detect the ruse. Sierra Nevada and then some comes from Hickory NC. The brew world is a'changin'...

Oregon India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 3.5

Portland, Oregon

Oregon Brewing of Portland makes this IPA style which originally was developed for British soldiers in India. It become famous since then as a strong and rather flavorful brew full of hops for an herbal or pleasantly medicinal effect. Color is medium amber with a short-lived head and extremely long carbonation. Strong hop aroma is evident. While some IPA finish dry and with the punch of a good British bitter ale this one is slightly sweetened. It has an almost an apricot fruit appeal not unlike some California amber ales. Review- ers noted 'delicious nectar-hop quality that is hard to put down' and 'perhaps not authentic by British IPA or US standards like Grant/Yakima.' It was a very pleasant drink but many of us had doubts if the name is fitting. They need to visit cross-town rivals Widmer Brothers and beg, borrow, or steal their IPA expertise.

Red Brick Double IPA

RATING: 3.5

Atlanta, Georgia

This recent offering in summer 2011 was pleasant but a disappointment. It was spicy and rich for sure but not a full DIPA in our opinion. The nose is better than the flavor but a small margin. It pours a hazy amber, the head

thin and not strong. Besides the spicy hops you get moderate-medium floral and fruit (mostly grapefruit) notes but nothing to write home about. The finish can have some harshness, not strong but resinous and too bitter. Ktrillionaire on Beer Advocate said "smells of the used hop sludge that is in the muslin bags after a boil" and at least two of our Brewbase panel found that spot on. It's a fairly good recipe but the execution and refinements are some way off. Even folks who liked it thought it was far from memorable or game-changing - the IPA in America in the 21st century is full of rear IPA treasures and world-beating stars.

Red Brick Hop Lanta

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

"Beer From Around Here" is a cool slogan unless of course you import it to other cities. Then it be beer dat ain't from 'round here, right boy? It is also supposed to be "hoppier than a bullfrog with a stubbed toe". We shall see. The pour is rich amber-gold, the head lasting, very finely textured, and pale cream in tone. The nose is hoppy but of mixed quality. There is enduring lace too. The flavor notes are immediate sticky, semi-sweet, medium hops yielding to a finish to deeper, more bitter hops. It is very drinkable, the hops clearly there and of good American sort but they were too muffled and disguised for some of our panel. It is not an imperial but does not pretend to be so I rate it higher for this reason. It is certainly no worse than a hoppy APA (American Pale Ale) though not quite refined as most Sierra Nevada of the ultra-APA variety. One can very much enjoy this sophisticated product on both a hotlanta and chilly Georgian day.



Rockford India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 5.0

Wilmington, Delaware

Back in 1996 BrewBase (then only on computer) gave this our BEST SWEET INDIA PALE nod. From flavor to color this is one of the finest ales from the East Coast. Color is glowing amber with an enduring ivory head of medium depth. Unlike so many microbrews who try the IPA game this one is fully hopped like the true British style. What is sets it apart is the addition of that wonderfully, tasty, carmel, candy maltiness we call Candy Ale. Several top Canadian ales have this high hops-candy theme. One reviewer thought dry bitter finishes are required for a truly authentic IPA. Maybe so (we're still researching) but in the meantime we'd prefer to think of it as a clever enhancement. The depth and sophisti- cation of the flavor will win over almost any enthusiast; and one even suggested this \$6.49 'microbrew bargain of the year' get an impossible 5.5 rating. Yummy!

Rogue Yellow Snow IPA

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

Have all the good beer names been taken? Was Golden Vomit not available? That would have been a more pleasant thought than this one. Given that's it the Rogue dudes I give them a good deal of slack for their products are uniformly superior if not brilliant and with fun names. The "Together We Can Do It" label shows a yellow-bearded dude in a red ski jacket holding a black Lab; looking for all the world like an older George Clooney c. 2020. By that time he might be wandering the remote slopes of Aspen reporting cases of yellow snow and warning the tourists who are frightened by his bleached blonde beard. "Isn't that that actor from that show, Madge?". "Why don't you think before you speak Harald! What would a famous actor being doing out here removing yellow snow spots?".

Let's sample the snow shall we? Their full-disclosure type painted labels reveal it uses two-row pale, Cara Foam, and Melanoiden malts together with Amarillo hops and Pacman yeast. The Cara Foam type of malt that is stewed

to produce rich dextrin chains and a full body to the brew. It pours a rich dark gold tinged amber, the head large and creamy. The aroma is far more fruity than typical of the style. It does not however carry much fruit in the main flavor notes. Big smooth hops come up early and it ends with a quality bitterness, fading in and out with many complex flavors. It finishes a bit strong and bitter to suit my taste for the style and I do like a tad more sweetness and fruit overall.

Ruckus Hoptimus Prime Double IPA

RATING: 5.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

The label shows a big green muscle-man that looks like a transformer fused with a hop vine. God help the dad whose kid thinks this is Transformer Soda when raiding the fridge. As a DIPA or double-dosed hoppy, this beer comes in at 9.0% ABV and that is at least 3 points above the usual single sort. Color is dark golden, shaded to amber, slightly hazy, the large, and golden-ivory. Flavor was an instant "oh my God" and "wow" around the Brewbase reviewers. This was an instant hit, a sure winner from first sip into last - and the last drop was worth fighting for.

There are rich caramel notes here so this is something of a Candy-IPA in the best sense of that term. You get alot of malty sweetness to make your hoppy medicine go down. That was thrilling to most but moderately offensive to our straight-laced, "it better be as bitter as gall" IPA fans. Nevertheless, the perfect 5.0 was achieved even if the few negatives for sugaring down kept it from earning our AM. Your Chief Editor proclaimed amid long sips "best sweet IPA in years, both approachable and admirable...this is fun beer and what else should beer be?". Others noted "interesting compromise...a steady, quality base set of flavors...too tarted up and sweet for me" and "Heaven on earth. It is NOT hops soda but has just the right amount of sweetness to give the very high hop-load and alcohol-load an effective and enjoyable thump. Yes, I meant that...a hoppy thump". JOY TO THE WORLD - GOOD WILL TOWARDS HOPS.

Rust Belt Old Man Hopper's IPA

RATING: 2.5

Youngstown, Ohio

This is not to say I do not appreciate the value of the "modern bargain bomber" in the microbrew trade. What I fail to appreciate is irregular, weak, or flawed stuff getting even that fraction of my beer money. To joke here with this with this non-IPA IPA is these folks are rusty on the definition of IPA. Not only is this brew far too thinly hopped to be an IPA it would not qualify among the faintest of American Pale Ales. The dark golden-amber color and robust head are thrilling but the delights end there with the eyes. It is faintly sweet in some mid-passages, never very hoppy in any notes, and quite feable at times in the manner of third world ales where the brewing hardware isn't quite right. Bigtime miss. Get your belts elsewhere.

Samuel Adams Latitude 48 IPA

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachussets and other cities

Jim Koch's latest concept found in October 2010 uses German, English, and US hops from the 48th latitude, blending full body IPA-style charm with some malt and a bit of sweetness. It pours bright amber, the head large and golden-beige, and the nose classic IPA but a rich depth. One can surely notice the multi-varietal dosing of the beloved flower. One would only expect SA to do a stellar job with the fine ingredients that always flow in generous and balanced drams at their places. This is a fine product but considering all the barrel-aged, imperial rich, and more complex offerings around today, these less complicated, mass market offerings prove less impressive than before. Still this beverage is worth is due for the intense, malty wine-like IPA's are not the only good recipes about. This is joyfully satisfying even if not spectacular or game-changing.

Samuel Adams Tasman Red IPA

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachussets

This curious creation uses Tasmanian hops of the Topaz and Galaxy varieties. A similarly curious assortment of 6 malts adds to the novelty and exotic feel. For the record, these are Two-row, Harrington, Metcalfe, Copeland Pale, Special B, Caramel 60, and roasted dehusked. "Bold, lively, and a bit rugged" is the main billboard line.

This is not a Tasmanian Devil as the tag and color might suggest. It pours a rich brownish-red as the name implies, the head an enchanting golden-cream shade. Grapefruit, pine, and earth are what this formula and these hops in particular are supposed to give us. The earth is background after some bud saturation. If there was pine it was two 1mm needles from a bonsai. The grapefruit is the most overt of these, not potent but quite effective and luminous to the taste buds. Grapefruity hops will change the beer world given more chances.

We got the promised "hints of toffee" too. It is hard to reconcile the big fat citrus species with toffee, earth notes, and malts but it all works. As expected this is a well-balanced, mellow liquid casserole of the finest flavors and ingredients. We would not expect less from the SA master brewers, especially when going off the reservation to a non-American, exotic theme. This is Batch No. 1 in this limited edition, worldly-wise series. We want and expect more. SA is branching out to a non-traditional, cultural diverse, not so narrowly patriotic paradigm and I for one embrace it with flags and fireworks of many colors.



Samuel Adams Third Voyage Double IPA

RATING: 5.0

Boston, Massachusetts

"Bright and intense with a vivid hop punch" is the label's tag line. This worldly, non-Mass Double IPA is said to take the style a step further using Cascade hops from various regions here to there - England, New Zealand, and NW US SIMCOE are pulled for this three part voyage. Malts are two-row, Harrington, Metcalfe, Copeland Pale, Caramalt, and Honey Malt. It pours a deep and potentially bright amber, the head fine-foamy and of medium cream color. The first notes are regular IPA, leading into more intense but very silky depths with added hops - so it's a solid, real DIPA by all opinions here even if not a crafted to be a jackhammer to the crotch. Here is a refined, gentle appeal that takes away nothing and gives a rewarding, mono-varietal oomph. The finish trails off into some lofty places that Jeff here compared to a teenage nerd being dropped into his first comic convention. Third Voyage is classy but punchy, overwhelming but not crude, and overall a righteous feast for the brew-wired brain. There are very fine supportive malts so here is a balanced DIPA for those who like the malt and hops about equal in thrust even if there is just one, very fine hops variety in the process. Cascade does well in the mono-hop recipe as few but Goldings could.

Samuel Smith's India Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.5

Tadcaster, N. Yorkshire, England

Smith's dark golden ale is top fermented in stone 'Yorkshire squares' using 'aroma and flavour from Britain's best hop gardens'. This flowery language is matched by the product's quality. It is wonderfully hop-saturated with just the perfect balance of sweetness and bitterness. Suitable malt notes create a truly flawless IPA that could hardly be improved. Other IPAs are perhaps more bitter or more herbal but this is one of the smoothest without being weak. The 550ml bottles have a fascinating label that looks more than a stock certificate. The \$3.99 price is simply remarkable. One reviewer here noted 'Excellent lasting head of some size...if you like your hops uncompromisingly full and semi-sweet there is no finer choice'. Another said 'A worthy standard to judge American IPAs'

[Matt] Saranac Red IPA

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

This is a take on their West Coast IPA but made red (actually a medium amber) due to generous amounts of European dark caramel malts. Calypso, Chinook, and Palisade hops give it a distinct aroma and taste on the American side of the style. The head is rich cream, medium deep, lasting. The hops are tart, spicier by the finish, and yes distinct for this curious blend of varieties. Yet it works and would never be mistaken for the Sierra Nevada AIPA style. Early notes have a little sweetness but the tangy finish, reminding one something of a very lightly sugared ice tea, is a delightful, creative approach. An expert panelist here said "quite the change of pace...a true subtle hops tea...medium strength...supporting malts decent but not complex...this odd choice of hops tells us we have much to learn in formulating yet more new, exciting New World IPAs". It proved a little too bitter for some but for many of us (you?) this is spot on.

Shmaltz HE'BREW Bittersweet Lenny's R.I.P.A.

RATING: 4.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

This 10% ABV "chosen brew" is a tribute to comedian Lenny Bruce and it carries the line from Dick Schaap: "Finally, one last four-letter word concerning Lenny Bruce. DEAD. At 40...that's obscene". A little neon-glow-style panel on the label says "Brewed with an OBSCENE AMOUNT of malts of hops" [their emphasis]. This is promoted as a DOUBLE IPA with a bit of rye which is something on order of saying it's only a category 10 hurricane, a quad-turbo Ferrari, or vacuum with the combined suction power of all the friendly ladies in downtown Reno. Oh wait, sorry! This is HE'BREW with a nod to Lenny...better make that enough potency to part the depths of the F*%king Red Sea.

It's the brightest amber possible in any liquid, good lace, and a solid aroma of hops that might be used to replace Ricola coughdrops. It is hops x 4 but in the IPA arena it is not much a double as a 1.5x. The softish, malt finish is decent but not as good a buffer as it might be. It is excessively bitter in my opinion and might have been mellowed a bit more. Harsh it is and that is perhaps intended but it does not make it an ultimate IPA. When you double the mint one must also double the pleasure. The very same is applicable to the similarly tangy, zippy, nipping thing we call hops. The bite must match the sugar group equivalents in whatever sweetening form is preferred. Here we have a bite, a little malt to assuage it, and not enough polish in the end. Their aged version in rye barrels is much superior so skip this version.



Shmaltz Hebrew R.I.P.A. (Rye Double India Pale Ale) on Rye

RATING: 5.0

Sarasota Springs, New York

Paying \$11.99 (August 2010) for a single 22 ounce of any beer had better lead to some burning

bush class revelations with all the miracles and fanfare possible from a liquid libation. Unlike their Lenny's Bittersweet RIPA, 6 Year Sazerac rye whiskey barrels were used to take this very complex recipe to 10% ABV and matching sophistication of flavors. Ten different malts, including some rye-based one were added to seven different hops, three of which were involved in dry-hopping later. It pours a nice bright amber, the head very deep at first, intermediate between beige and light tan. The nose is a stern blend of hops and fresh ryebread fresh from the bakery. Wow and superwow for aroma. All those flavors combine to make something of a sweet broth formed of rye flavors and malts, supported in the mid to late notes but zingy, spicy hops; of this in turn mellowed by the kind of oaky-whiskey finish you only get in these aged, rare beers. It would probably undrinkable and common-barleywine abusive if not aged as nicely as a it is. The refinement here is remarkable and everyone here was impressed beyond measure. We're delighted and shocked and wondering why we did not have aged brews from the US this noble 10 years ago. This is a pinnacle of American brewing, worth even more than charged, so above the fray you have to drink it long and lovingly to know. This is one of the most interesting beers I've discovered in a year or two, endlessly revealing and all of those surprise notes better than the last.



Sea Dog India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 5.0

Bangor, Maine

The label proclaims 'A Full Gale of Refreshment'. So it is. The color is a glowing amber with a big fluffy buff head. Flavor is rich and deep with a hint of sweetness. It is a hop-lovers delight and really would be classed as a PALE ALE by some folks. It is authentic enough for us to keep it with a INDIA PALE ALE or IPA subgroup. There is really nothing wrong with it and the \$7.99 price was appealing as well. Reviewers noted 'positively an overwhelming and welcome burst of hops with limited bitterness...all the refinement of the very best IPAs' and 'full...holding nothing back...completely irresistible'.

Shepherd Neame India Pale Ale

RATING: 2.5

Faversham, Kent

This ancient company is nearly 300 years old (1698) and makes some popular ales and a porter for export. The 16.9 ounce Scotch-shaped bottles are quite distinct. This IPA is dark golden (very pale amber) with a large white head. Alcohol content is just 4.5% (volume) compared to 5.2% for their Porter. The flavor is interesting and herbal as one expects from such a well-hopped style. Like the Kentish Ale we again feel it is not as rich and deep as some of the competition from either side of the Atlantic. One reviewers comment that this one is 'most surely IPA Light and God knows we don't need such a critter' sums up our thoughts. The purpose of IPA was strength of hops to endure a long journey in hot weather. This fails both the tradition and modern appeal test.

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Anniversary Ale (2008)

RATING: 5.0

Chico, CA USA

The somber forest green and grey-mint bottle is pretty enough and helps the usual grocery store SN devotee zero in on this treasure before it's up and all gone. Dive through the pimply and long-browsing masses before the cooler, dive, dive...come up with gold. Part the crowd of beer patrons and faux connisseurs and say "yes, I can afford anything for a sixpack" - out of my way you Bud-swilling idiots and couples who think Michelob with Orange and Grapefruit is still real beer. (If you need to buy citrus beer-coolers with your partner to get laid, ditch the bitch, and find one who likes real beer. Yes, they are out there and they're often pretty. And probably smart). We paid \$8.99 in August 2008 and have no regrets. Can we send them a couple of bucks for it should cost \$11-13 by import standards? How is this creation different from their world leading Pale Ale. First of all, it's here in the IPA section. It is hop turbocharged to the Nth degree and a general lack of malt for balance. It is all about hops but bitterness is managed in various ways these kinds of brewers do very well. The hops are Cascade in variety and this ale is to a waterfall of hoppy beer what Niagara Falls is to H2O. It's mass quantities, endless, non-stop, no mercy, no let up, delight in excess, so blessedly impossible to stop, and misty heaven for even form and face. If you like your IPA's sweetish and more "accessible" (ie. girly hop soda), look elsewhere. If you want a special treat from a master brewer and a collectible bottle...buy a cardboard box or three.

[PLEASE LINK TO WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM](http://WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM)

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Torpedo IPA

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

The approach was an American version of the old Brit style, flavors of pine, herbs, citrus, and American hop varieties making the difference. Color is bright golden-amber, light to medium in tint, the head huge and dark cream, some lace, and a nose full of SN Pale Ale. It is not quite as potent as their 2008 Anniversary Ale proved to be, a few notches down but not a bad compromise either. There is a faint amount of sweetness in the mid to finish notes, something SN often resists and used to perhaps differentiate this label from the more dry ones. It's very well balanced. It's perfect but in another way of achieving perfection than some of their other recipes - this is the safe, red Ferrari with autostick and not the purple Lamborghini; extreme enough but maybe a bit more accessible - and still just as fun.

Brewbase Fives



Smuttynose Big IPA

RATING: 5.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The old-timey label (like their old blonde chick floating in a pool on the Summer Weizen) has a 30's style boxer in smallish black trunks, his muscles not impressive by modern standards yet his gigantism apparent and effective as a marketing tool. He's the "Great White Hope" I suppose of India Pale Ales so maybe he's a British boxer of the time. The gold color and big head were expected but the yeasty haze was not. I put the bottle under a searchlight lamp and it oozed with a sediment of glory. The nose is yeasty-hops, big but I've sniffed hoppier stuff. First sip is Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, quickly turned to something as smooth but turned up one or two hoppy notches, the finish as dry as old bones in the desert. Mid notes have a little sweetness and I always like those middle passages being good preparation for the final assault. Good judgement all around here. I thought their Finestkind IPA was somewhat off the mark but they've atoned well here for this is a product worthy of any IPA brewer in this section. I would not be surprised to find any great, accomplished name on this product. One has rich substance without being too medicinal and abusive of our human tasting assembly and after all it's not about the style but about our enjoyment. Be faithful to a style if you can, but most of all be pleasant, rewarding, and marvelous. There's lots of butterfly with this hoppy bee. The sting has charm and poise and you are numbed to beg for more. It dances when it should and pounces when it must. IPA are hard things to judge right and Smuttynose has it spot-on right this time. I love the balance of classic style and new thinking here.

Smuttynose Finestkind IPA

RATING: 4.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

As one's eyes run across the wide, cold shelves of a good beer store this one catches your attention. There are two old, farmer-looking dudes sitting in the lawn chairs in front of a small, rather dirty, once white and red trailer. If they're the brewers, I sure hope they washed their hands twelve times before making the tested contents here. Actually the "Our Staff" dudes on their website page are more frightening than the smutty old farmers on the label although several of the gals and their Canine-American spokesmodel are rather pretty.

Smuttynose founded in 1994 is "the Granite State's leading craft brewery"; which I suppose is like being the best maker of alligator chile on my cul-de-sac. They're a bit different in that they're offering just 75 "subscriptions" which entitles you to full cases of their nine 2009 editions for \$495. That includes something called the Gravitation Belgian Quad. Guess we have a Belgian strength arms race going on folks. Their "full time beer" line includes the Finestkind IPA here which pours rich gold, long in carbonation, and near white in the good head. I found the flavor rather low to moderate in hoppiness for the style, more of a hoppy golden or pale ale to me. Still it's decent and pleasant. Their Big Beer variant on this is called Big A IPA and I wonder if they've held back too much on this regular "full time" product to make the other shine? The NY Times named their Big A IPA their top IPA but this product falls short of most things in the section. It is best very cold and nearly worthless when warmed up by the room.

Southern Tier Unearthly Imperial IPA

RATING: 4.0

Lakewood, New York

Having grown up in NY, the big, non-apple, we have cows and bears part, I had to Wiki them up. "Southern Tier" told me they are probably in an affluent, idyllic area. Noticed Chautauqua Co right away. Don't confuse that with Chappaqua way to the east near NYC where Bill and Hillary live in peaceful bliss 17.2 hours a year. Pop.3250, 97.5% white. Say no more. But is the per cap over there out of curiosity? \$24,500. Not what I was expecting for a place supporting a brewery and having a Cummins engine plant. Started in 2002, these folks currently make 30K barrels a year. They are supported by half the US, Japan, Denmark, and lots of other places that need to look up Lakewood NY just like me.

Billed as "an uninhibited infusion of hops" is described as their "most aggressive offering yet". The flow is a dark, rich amber bright at times, more dank in a dank room. Head is dark cream, semi-lasting. Nose is medium depth for hops, faintly of a good fruit ester. It is far less fruity than the nose, neither fruity or sweet in general subclass. It is full-bore, full-nitro bitter hops for those liking them "vigorous hopped" and not tempted by sugar or cute, delectable fruits. There are some pleasant underlying fruits to temper the insane dose of the viney cone but not a sissy or compromising manner. Well-judged is what I should have said instead there but I hate to back-space over my first instincts and ya'll love or me or just tolerate me for that way. It is worthy of the second "I" in IPA but a would like the fruit taken to a slightly more tender place, bold and bitter sure, but mellowed a bit. They are very close.

Star India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

We did note before that Star's Elfin Ale had the same British ale flavors found in a strong Brown Ale and some IPA's. This contrast would be fun. This one has a golder color and malt choices are less crystal-based. Hops are similar but here we have Columbus and no Perle. Color is deep gold (very pale amber) and the head is big and ivory-tinted. Like the Elfin there is one dynamic hop boost and all that herbal power such ingrediants provide. The Elfin just has a big malt dose added to it and the color is hence darker. The label accurately men- tions the 'citrus highlights' here and that is clear. Imagine a very good first rate lemon-herbal tea and you come close. If we had a class for this it would be GOLDEN CITRUS INDIA PALE ALE. Most IPA's are darker amber.



Stone14 (14th Anniversary) Imperial IPA

RATING: 5.0

Escondido, California

Get out your flashlight and magnifying lens to read the guy's micro-printed book painted on the

label. It's worth it. This stuff pours Pils pale and very few imperial things of any style are so light and yellow. The haze is real and the nose inviting and not simple. The head remains long in off white. The lads went to England as "self-styled IPA Hunters" to learn about the ancient history of the India Pale Ale style. They used imported white malt, "Burtonized" water, a rare yeast strain, and "highly intemperate" amounts of Target, Boadicea, and East Kent Goldings hops. There is therefore Old World originality with a bit of San Diego-license and a spicy, somewhat peppery, faintly funky IPA of different charm and character developed. You are not thumped with hops for their own sense of strength but they are very firm and spice-like in the finish. The early notes are not classic British or American IPA for they are surprising mild and supple and more honoring of malt qualities. In other words, this is not "all hops - all the time" but something very instructive while still being fun. If the old IPA were more like this (and I am sure their quality varied widely with shipping schedules and handling), I can understand their appeal even when one sipped them far from the east Asian territories. This is a distinguished beer, historically curious and likely more accurate than our status quo, and one that is singularly a great accomplishment for the already envied California microbrew community. I feel better for having sampled it (lavishly), learned from the label, and pushed my understanding - while still being entertained and thrilled by a fine, cold brew. Education without entertainment is not good in most product lines and 14 here brings one the whole package.



Stone Cali-Belgigue IPA

RATING: 5.0

North County, San Diego, California

Similar to their Gargoyle IPA offering, the ABV here is also 6.9%. It differs mainly in some California style hops and the use of a Belgian yeast strain. It certainly has a Belgian ale twang to it. The marriage of these two ingredients is a winner and it melds to perfection in this formula and production. I've always loved an IPA that was more about hops than harsh pharmaceutical flavors for it's own sake. The special yeast adds much fruitiness to the blend and the hops are toned to the point that they complement the fruit and not overwhelm or work against it. It is absolutely one of the finest American-made IPA's and since everyone nowadays has an IPA, the accomplishment is all the more impressive. Cali-Belgigue is an inspired, memorable, and lively brew and the bottle is pure, refined art. I am allowed to call this a Godsend. Yes, it is and I will go there.

Stone Gargoyle India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

North County, San Diego, California

this 6.9% ABV fluid is mid-dark gold with with very, very long beige head. This is "easy medicine" in the IPA department, a pleasant and good introduction to style in a lower malt form. I like it much but their more potent Ruination is more to my taste. Good painted label with beast from hades and a collector's dream as are most of their bottles. Get one, get six, get happy, and take your medicine!

Stone Sublimely Self-righteous Ale

RATING: 4.5

Escondido, California

Stone is getting a good rep for making some very righteous ales and this one is also self-righteous (justifiably so) and sublime. It is nearly as dark as porter, barely translucent in reddish-brown and quite near a black ale. It first came about in January 2009 and I tried to 2010 22 oz. version. The head lasts forever. Simcoe and Amarillo hops are used for flavor in both an early and dry-hopping process. Chinook is added for more bitterness and one would consider this a classic IPA if not seeing the color of it first - semi-imperial at least. The 8.7% ABV is lofty enough but I hardly noticed it. I found it scrumptuous, sufficiently bitter but in excess to prove some of point like "we have hops to burn". I could drink it for a session or so but not all day or for a whole game. Good sampling beer and very competent.

Sweetwater IPA (India Pale Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

From their Tacklebox of 4 varieties (420, Sch'wheat, IPA, and Extra Pale Ale), this IPA was clearly the best and the only one I'd seek out again. It was flavorful, fully-dosed, and rewarding in a way the others were not. No, it is not Sierra Nevada or Rogue hoppy ale but the price is very on some of these Sweetwater products, about \$1.30 a bottle. It is unfiltered and their secondary dry-hopping is not missed.



Terrapin Rye Squared Imperial Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Athens, Georgia/Frederick, Maryland

Those of us who live in the ACC (Atlantic Coast Conference) land know that a terrapin (a goofy green turtle) is the mascot of the University of Maryland. Somehow this brew is made deep in the city of University of Georgia in heart of the SEC (South Eastern Conference). I suppose the love of beer crosses many lines. The mad turtle scientist with Einsteinian hair on the label seems to be concocting a beverage that has 8.5% ABV (wowee and let the fun begin), rye in double abundance, and IPA hopping to the usual or greater excess. It's all relative but I do know that one solution to making great amber solutions is: Great Beer = (Rye + Ethanol + Malt + Hops) x 2. More rye, more ethanol, and more hops - what's not to love in theory. The name Imperial Pale Ale implies extra for very strong hops. Spike and John have made a product which fills a glass in strong amber elegance, a finely bubbled light tan head, and the aroma of half the hops that exist on earth. The result is very smooth, choice but different notes (Mr. Secale cereale I presume), an impressive overall constitution, and a dry hop finish that is very explemplary and classically well done. American microbreweries are making some of the top IPA's on the planet and this strong yet agreeable variation is as good as anything served in any city anywhere. This is worthy of enjoying over and over and I trust you will.

Terrapin Side Project Volume 10: Kapt'n Krunkles Black India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Athens, Georgia/Frederick, Maryland

By legend, Captain Krunkles was the most fearsome of the pirate shipmasters. This brew is similarly ruthless, forcing one to walk the plank of extreme hops and malt in one very dark liquid. It's porter opaque, the head finely-foamed and strong tan. Hops fill the nose while malt fills the eyes with lust for bounty. It is fine IPA, coming in early notes with a strong, herbal hop lobby of cannonballs following by a flurry of malt arrows. I'd always wondered why an IPA couldn't be made darker and this side project is my satisfying answer to that enquiry. It can be done very well and so should be often again! Be prepared for \$11 per 650ml but such potent,

high class offerings are frequently worth a chest full of shekels. I love this idea and most of the execution but there is a shade or two lack of depth that might have been added. There's a big hoppy sail and a long malty one, nothing small and subtle and specialized for fine control and shifty moves. Very fine experience and an ideal label for your local beer tasters.

Thornbridge Jaipur India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.0

Bakewell, England

Not ever' day does one see a British ale with a glossy label showing a violet-stained stone stature against an orange and green fern-infested wallpaper theme. Quite odd, not very artful yet curious and demanding attention as easily as pity. Their Russian Stout label is a much more effective version of the same motif. The words "Innovation * Passion * Knowledge" flower above this in a gold bar. They are motivated to "put art back into the science they were taught". The bottle-conditioned IPA is 5.9%, a very unusual straw yellow Pilsy color, the head foamy white, and the nose mid-hoppy. First sip is mid-strength IPA, more a Hoppy Golden Ale at middle impression, bitterness building up some, but still the HGA by several more lengthy sips. It is no weak golden ale nor is it a robust IPA with malt depth or strength from the beloved vine. It is clearly a low, malt golden ale infused well with hops for a more lean, straight-forward approach. I like it fairly much but those loving more malt, ambersness with their IPA hops will find it a bit unconventional and suspiciously uncomplicated. Uncomplicated is a both a good thing and bad thing in ethanol beverages - one approach is pure brilliance and weak and thin in another. One is on a sub-eccentric, wild fringe ride with these kinds of off-tradition things, people loving or hating them with equal passion. Jaipur to me is more minimalism with a moderately good result, neither great nor horrible and not what anyone will expect when tested.

Tolly Cobbold India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.0

Ipswich, Suffolk, England

The lovely artistic label features hometown Cardinal Wolsey outside the grand Wolsey's gate in Ipswich. The Cardinal has a sort of dull, contented grin like he's put down a few of these fine golden IPA's already. It is an atypical medium-light golden color (most IPAs malted to being amber) with a near white head of good substance. That tart and tangy hop flavor of the style is there is good abundance and a faint hops aroma will tempt you to drink again. While full enough to please most people it did get a few 'semi-light' comments from reviewers who like IPA's strong enough to clear their sinus cavities. Ratings on this varied from 3.0 to so it proved somewhat on the controversial side. It will likely please those who dislike medicinal IPAs.

Tomcat Bengal India Pale Ale (IPA)

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

Tomcat Brewing joins Greenshields and Old Raleigh as the new bottled micro- brew from our home city of Raleigh NC. They claim this pale amber IPA is the best made anywhere and that it's 'brewed to write 'awesome' all over your taste buds. And so it does. The head is off-white and of average duration. It is richly hopped but with more ale fruitiness than expected - tart cherries perhaps. Most of us felt it was by far the best of their three current products and the only one to be complex enough. Reviewers remarked on its 'authentic and worldclass quality...no faults' and 'well worth trying again but the finish proved a bit unever at some temperatures'. If you like your ales with fruit-filled nature AND generous hops this one will charm you.

Weyerbacher Hops Infusion IPA

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

This good stuff pours a glowing pumpkin-amber with a huge, persistent head that is the dream of brewery photographers everywhere. Hops grips the nasal passage before it soothes the throat like a swiss herbal cough drop - and I mean that in the most complimentary, Ricola way. The big giant hops blossom on the label signals what we get by buying the bottle. And I will buy a few more from time to time more when they can be found. I found the finish a tad to bitter and ragged than necessary but when a craving for the genus *Humulus* this is a nice choice, though not always the best one if everything was available at one's local shops.

Wild Goose India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Maryland

Maryland's Wild Goose Brewery makes this ice tea-colored IPA (India Pale Ale) with what they call 'long, aromatic hops finish'. It was more pleasant than their Amber and a equal thrill as their Sam Middleton's Pale Ale. By contrast with Grant's IPA (and few beers measure up to Grant's genius), it is a small mark below. But at \$6.69 (vs. \$11.00 for Grant) it is superb and practical daily choice. Still great at room temperature. Hop lover's delight.

World Brews Four In Hand IPA

RATING: 2.5

Rochester, New York

Technically, Four In Hand is a not a brewery but is a series or marketing line. In fact it looks like Four Hand on first look. They were or are in Novato CA but my label clearly shows a Rochester NY origin. Color is clear gold, the head large, mid-duration, and an dark cream tone. Nose is weak hops, pale ale-like and a bit skunky - skunk from an IPA? That's new and do stayed tune for why. The nose was an good indicator for this IPA is as weak as the style has ever been. It has enough hops to make it 300 feet off the coast of Britain before going bad. There are some assertive hops at mid passage but the forenotes and finish are absolutely suggestive of a faux-microbrew; the kind of thing the mega-breweries tried to bait us with in the mid 80's - all these worthless, insipid, pseudo-craft creations are blessedly long gone. (By the way, many of them are reviewed and catalogued here for the record; obituaries with little or no love). Four In Hand is a fraud and a despicable perversion of the brewing arts. Written, Certified-Return Receipt apologies are due to the both the British and Indian ambassadors for abusing their national history. Even if this paltry, insignificant effort was a bargain golden ale it would rate as a meaningless failure. We are almost inclined to create an Imposter Beer of the Year Award just for such wretched scams and golden swindles like this one. Their own label tag "crafty ale" is a tempting hint they knew it was hookwinkery and frothy artifice from the very beginning. One can make quick money in the brewing world from easy tries like this; and they all know 5 million beer fans will try anything ONCE. But to have a steady income and anything close to respect, these farces best not be repeated or redemption is sure and bankruptcy lawyers and repo Sheriffs will fill your brew house. I am being kind here for this IPA contrivance deserves all the four-letter words I have at hand and all the middle fingers from forty thousand hands. I am assuming the World Brew concept of an IPA is adding two whole hop flowers to the massive kettle instead of the usual one.

ALE - INDIA PALE (IPA) - FLAVORED OR FRUITED

Mikkeller Koppi Coffee IPA (Tomahawk x Guji Natural)

RATING: 4.5

Lochristi-Hufte, Belgium

The flavored IPA in our reviews, a new category and one I wonder why we did find very much earlier. The 6.9% offering pours dark amber, no coffee brown here. The hops are for real, very apparent, the high quality stuff that Mikkeller is known for. The coffee does not jump at you like a sticky, triple-expressed deal from Star Bucks but yet the coffee bitterness and faint roastiness compliments the hop. Roasted coffee and roasted malt are relatively close cousins in terms of general botany though their chemistry surely differs. It is interesting, curiously altered, and this will be a nice thing for beer testing. Guess the special ingredient? At \$11.49 for big, thick-as-a-prison wall bombers, you will not likely buy too many.

Brewbase Fives



Saranac White IPA

RATING: 5.0

Utica, New York

The Saranac label is something of the Hyundai and Kia of beers; some things are awesome, nearly impossible value and others fairly average, generic, and uninspiring. They have a couple of solid, unflinching Toyotas in the mix too. The classification here was difficult. Is this a Belgian ale (coriander and orange peel were used) flavored with mega-hops or an IPA flavored like spices? Both, of course, so we put it with our new flavored IPA group for a bit of differentiation and only a little comfort - arguments still flow. Big yeasty things float in the bottle and to our kind that is not a scary thing. The pale yellow haze for us is like mud to a pig and swamps to a Sasquatch. One reason we departed with the flavored ale or Golden Belgian classification is the use of Citra, super high alpha acid hops which impart rich lemon notes with actually adding juice or peel. Malts are both of oat and wheat, the later giving a mellower, softer edge. It is far more citrus-dosed than if you put half of Florida's orange crop in a swimming pool of golden ale. It is a wit or white because a pale yellow ale is traditionally known as such. Gold is gold and light yellow is white. So goes the brew world. The initial grapefruit flavors (and that is the main citrus style here) are tart but they are trimmed down by the mid notes and finish - no juicy acidity here. It is quite rich and mellow at once, one of Saranac's most enchanting and brilliant creations in years. It is satisfying, curious in the precise recipe, and in the final analysis not an experiment. It is effective, functional, and ready for hours of indulgence at dinner or facing the ocean. I turned to a friend who loves citrus drinks of the stronger variety and she was amazing how you get this much grapefruit glory without being tart, harsh, or over-sweetened. If there is a Nobel...I mean Noble Prize for new hops then the Citra creators should get maybe three or four of the medals. Reviewers "easy delight...more of grapefruit-Belgian ale than anything in the IPA family...though the finish is a bit hoppy for a Belgian clone" and "If you had hid the label from me I'd have said Sierra Nevada or Dogfish Head...The Utica crew has done it again and we're stunned at their price point...a real fan now". Another thought that Citra infusions was hardly proper for delivery of an IPA style which is notoriously bitter, medicinal, and herbal - sans fruit. Should we get a new term (besides the old American IPA tag) for things this super hop-fruity? Time will tell and we hope to be speaking loud.

ALE - INDIA PALE ALE (IPA) - IMPERIAL, DOUBLE, BLACK, OR STRONG

Brewbase Fives



Boulevard Double-Wide I.P.A. (Smokestack Series)

RATING: 5.0

Kansas City, Missouri

This potent 8.5% creation shows a moveable trailer which curiously has Corinthian columns at the door and a twister in the background: "Relax...it's twister proof". Other than Sanjib, your local, cheerful 7-11 Slurpie salesman ("woo you like a Slim Jim with dat-sir?") living in such a rolling place I don't much see a connection to IPA or India. Twisters do hop and with imperial, double intensity. The label provides the connection. This hoppy product like an IPA "travels well" and is something of a prairie schooner. Okay. Let's move on to reality. But first a joke. What does an East Carolina grad do when he wins the \$51 million dollar lottery?...triple-wide. The pour is bright, cloudy amber shaded toward orange juice tones, the head positively a rich golden-cream, quite aesthetic in tall glass. Limited, slow lace. The flavors are tea-like, hops tea of course, mellow but sufficiently sturdy to get our attention and respect. Sweetness is moderate and perfectly metered out. Panelists here said "Righteous and refined IPA...lovely dosing without offending...it is not overly bitter or harsh in any notes...nice, nice ale" and "Lots of American variety notes...full of citrus-hops charms in the AIPA style...very polished presentation...I just love it despite the odd marketing approach...nice fruit esters in addition to the citrus...I'd pick this to explain American citrus-hops to a skeptical European ale lover". Double-wide is a portable, efficient, and convenient argument for the AIPA, a paramount introduction to that style, and with ethanol to support it's stalwart yet soothing approach. This bottle-conditioned trailer park amber-haired lass made our day and it spun it us right 'round like a tornado on white and goldenrod metal siding. And then a perfect Mercedes S550 drops down and lands in pristine shape in their gravel driveway with keys on the seat, a cold cherry Slurpie and Slim Jim ready in the cupholders...Earlene!!!! You ain't gonna believe this...



Fort Collins The Incredible Hop Imperial IPA

RATING: 5.0

Fort Collins, Colorado

There are other Incredible Hop products of a similar label, redder or blacker. This one is an amber imperial IPA.

FCB offers this bright amber as an "irreverent beer" or as Brewmaster Adam Glasser says "go hoppy or go home". This 10% is strong enough on that account and a big bright green, almost glowing and bulging hop brings out the analogy of The Incredible Hulk. The brew is dangerous but on a path of goodness, righteous evangelism for our favorite vinous fruit, and both strong and friendly to our cause. I do sometimes get violent and hulky when dosed with hops and tend to tear off my clothes, hit friends in the face, and run naked into the....never mind. The whole approach is simply marvelous on first sip. There is a dry-sweet balance, the formula offering quite curiously some aspects of both, overall very rich, high sophisticated, and almost like a Sierra Nevada project made on another planet and lovingly transferred with small chromatic orbs to us by an alien spacecraft. Yes, it's that good. Kudos to the 32rd power. Many microbreweries could do two-thirds this well and charge far less. The bar is raised and the new FCB fans are sitting at it waiting for the others to measure up to this new northern CO standard. Benchmarks in Colorado have always been high (save the pure yet pisswater factory in Golden) and here is a fresh reminder to others what could and should be done on a regular and on similarly affordable basis.

These perfect 5 bottle creations just jump out at us and make themselves known for their amazing strengths, lack of flaws, and most importantly pure enjoyment on a nirvanic level. You get hints of fruit, some very intense and more than hinting, and we also get faint smoke, mellow fruit, earthy citrus, damp moose droppings (not really), and most importantly a very intense, highly refined, American hop blessing. Blessing is a wonderful word for this label. We do feel honored and to have known it and consumed it full. The high ABV puts some panelists off for a sec but Imperial does not mean subtle sips for the tame of heart and the lily-livered, pansy ass, malt freaks among us. You know your names...Sid. This is a manly and lady-strong hops-drenched beer and we do

know the ladies love hops as much as the lads. It does what it must and very superbly, no holds barred, no shirts or skirts left unturned, and no reasonable beer lover need be offended by it - indeed we are enlightened, made exceedingly happy, favored, more than content, pleased nicely in fact, and as I said before...blessed by this hulking green cone.

Great Divide 18th Anniversary Wood Aged Double IPA

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado

"GREAT MINDS DRINK ALIKE". With 10.0% ABV, this anniversary special is based on their famous Denver Pale Ale ramped up to emphasize everything they do best. English and American hops give a generally floral theme but the malts are kept strong here as evidenced by its dark copper-amber color. Both French and American oak is used to give many notes, vanilla being their chosen theme. It is said to pair with a bacon and blue cheese cheeseburger, barbecued ribs, and sticky toffee pudding - which for some of us vascularly-challenged IPA lovers would require a ride in a boxy orange, white, and blue vehicle with permission to run red lights. It pairs just fine with rice cakes and no fat yogurt too. The head is dark cream with a firm nose of sweet hops. The hops are full and smooth, not overtly imperial-strong or double at first approach. The sweetness of caramel is intense from sip one. Later passages are more hoppy and the malt only takes a slightly secondary role throughout, being a very important part of the balance here. I would not think this was oak-aged at first sip but eventually you decide this easy, slippery flavor profile cannot come from ingredient choice alone. Oak chips and not wine nor whiskey barrels were used and this accounts for the lack of strong scotch flavors. Our panelists came down with "smooth but a 1.5x IPA at best...there are far hoppier IPAs with or without this aging...the strong sugar-malt background is appreciated at my house" and "enjoyed it but the "wow" and "it" factors are missing. I can see us commoditizing the wood-aged IPA as generic in future but it's too soon...they used oak chips...I agree that full barrel aging has advantages."

Magic Hat Band Demo Black IPA (SIDE B)

RATING: 4.0

South Burlington, Vermont

The music analogies are everywhere on the label - "SIDE B", "Limited engagement", "IPA on Tour", "a performance in every bottle", etc. The tour will consist of four IPA-themed concerts and we think this is named SIDE B - not sure as we have yet to find the other three. It pours as black as an stout, the head a uniform, mid tan of some duration. The nose follows quality, dry malt themes. While malt makes this a double or stronger IPA, the 6% ABV is much lower than imperial or double variants of most beer styles. Usually big means big ethanol too. Not here. The hops are rich but not as much as expected. This is almost a Malty IPA of single variety and one panelist here felt it should go there. It is an impressive beer but Uinta Dubhe and Widmer Black are miles ahead of this label. Magic Hat normally makes very fine products and this one is fine without being worldclass - very competent like a cover band but not overwhelming among my all-time concert lists.

[Buzzard's Bay for] Narragansett Private Stock Imperial India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Westport, Mass. for Providence, Rhode Island

Buzzard's Bay Brewery makes this for the famous Narragansett folks who make one of the best canned lagers you will have for a mid-market price. The ABV is a potent 8.6%, imperial status in part confirmed, flowing out a dark amber-golden which will be a pale amber under dark bar lamps. The head is near white and irregular, lasting very well. The nose is of a sweet, very rich IPA. Having bought this brew on New Years Eve between 2012 and 2013, I'm a tad confused by 2009 reference on the web that Buzzard's Bay of Westport MA is out of business and replaced with Just Beer Brewing. This would appear to be a contract label from the Westport tanks in any case. It is reasonably sweet, just mellowed out enough in that mode to keep the ample hops from being too bitter and the malts give fine, firm support too. You could be forgiven for saying Sierra Nevada this or that from first sip to last. It is that good and refined. With more sips from this 650ml bottle you get a fuller and more lasting saturation on tongue and that always means hop intensify and linger. The ethanol and hops dosing support the imperial tag on all grounds and of course we realize these uber-Humulus things are not to everyone's taste. One glass is probably enough unless your brain shuts down without enough alpha acids. It is full, rich, skillfully made, not just an barrel dump product, and yet it was only admirable and super-yummy to some of us. There would be room for more depth here, yeasty fruit being one take, oak-aging another, and

fuller background malts a third approach.

Thornbridge Halcyon Imperial IPA

RATING: 4.0

Bakewill, England

Very pretty label, a golden Greek statue against a teal tapestry with an foiled bottle neck. Haycion since the 14th century refers to a Greek Kingfisher (they are mythical in effect but not existence) and since a dozen other things from businesses to games. Alcyone, a greek maiden apparently turned herself mythologically into this flying thing. The actual, modern bird (the zoological genus Halycion is real) was said to calm both the seas and skies, storms not occuring during those days. The word usually refers to comforting, golden, winter solstice times as when the bird was incubating; a happy, peaceful, prosperous, calm, and glorious time as in "Halcyon Days". Supposedly the Kingfishers calmed the seas for a week or more so they could lay their eggs on seaside places. One does not ordinarily expect a 7.4% imperial IPA in such a pale yellow, very clean trim with almost no lace and a large, Pils-like head. That proved to be a bad sign. Besides full-hopping they promise tropical fruit, mango, and summer berries. Pasteurization is eliminated. Caramel biscuity sweetness is said to augment the fruit. Imperial status might be claimed by the ethanol percentage but even after a full bottle, I do not get the fullness of the hopping as an American would judge the DIPA style. There is some background fruit, good quality but not spectacular nor particularly joyous. This DIPA is as clean and clear as a Pils and not the least bit hazy and yeasty - thus not possibly too tropical in fruits. It pleasant and well made enough but for serious hops or fruit one need look elsewhere. If there were mangoes and summer berries, the monkeys and bears, respectively, must have stolen them. They are not in this bottle. If this is imperiability it is the fourth cousin to the Queen twelve times removed. It would be 3.5 as a DIPA but as we judge beer for it really is and not claimed to be, 4.0 is justified here.

Uinta Detour Double India Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

This 9.7% amber-golden IPA with a rich golden-tan head is about blazing a new trail - hence a detour of sorts to a higher, more vistic road. Nose is of sugar-hops. First sip is mid-low sweet, smooth as the main road after the detour, slick and flat as [your foul analogy here]. The big corked bottles for \$12.99 are decent in some of the Uinta labels (especially the glorious Labyrinth) but less exciting, close to failing in other recipes. This is a very solid, enjoyable DIPA but I am not sure this bottle is equivalent to six regular bottles of the other potent stuff. I found it very uplifting, impressive without blowing me away. It's like test-driving a dozen cars and each driving as well as an MB S-series or Bimmer 5. There is some lack of excitement in predictable, high levels of competency, the boredom of perfection and near-perfection all about us, broadly distributed among many producers. But was this not our goal for micros 25 years back?



Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Classics

Uinta Dubhe Imperial Black IPA

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

While their forementioned Detour Double IPA came in corked bottles, this label came to us as four 12 oz. bottles for \$9.99 (February 2012). This offering is 9.2% ABV, flowing as a semi-transparent, dark brown with a lasting yellowish-cream head. It is also brewed with hemp seed so I hope my boss doesn't hand me a little plastic cup with lid tomorrow. Actually hemp and it's seed lacks the THC or buzz-chemistry of you-know-what. While on the topic of things high and far-out, Dubhe is the Utah State Star (aka Alpha Ursae Majoris) in the Great Bear constellation in front of the Big Dipper near the bowl....not that kind of bowl. And would you know it? Dubhe is pronounced quite conveniently as DOO-bee, another name for hemp's outlaw half-brothers wrapped in paper. The bros sang of Black Water makin' everything all right. Keep on shinin'n. Come dance with this pretty mama all night long.

The malts are shockingly efficacious for an IPA, loaded with toasted, roasted, semi-choco, and licorice flavors, the hops and hemp bringing up the rear with some sophisticated but sturdy notes; all of them pleasant and glorious. This is a malt-addict's IPA and one a hopaholic can share with them. I recommend a twelve step program or three 4-packs to verify your addiction and serve as a pre-screening tool. This forceful, dark IPA is not so much smooth as tastefully bold, powerful, never crude, surely herbal-malty on the IPA spectrum. Here the hemp seed proves it merit to give sharp differentiation in the recently trendy DIPA market. Alpha Ursae Majoris here is actor bear Gentle Ben, formidable and rare, approachable within limits, and sure to impress and give awe as the finest of it's species. Award of Merit 2012.

Weyerbacker Double Simcoe Double IPA

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

SIMCOE® is a registered trademark for a special cultivar of hops that is known for it's American-style properties, bittering and aroma-loading (dual purpose) but not harsh, high (12-14%) in alpha acids, infused with very tasty citrus and pine notes. You double it and you get double the pleasure, double the fun for the hops lover. This variety has only been around since 2000 so it could not have been made until recent years. This is one very lovely, strongly IPA, endlessly rewarding and just barely sweet enough to make it very accessible. First sips were perfect 5.0 bottle elements but with some saturation it could be a tad rich and annoying - so half a bottle had to be deducted by the final sips of any bottle was done. If barrel-aged and/or engaged with a touch of fruity yeast, the edge would be rounded some and perfection could result. If you like your hops full-bore, rich enough to kill any bug in it's path, and unrelenting, this might be your dream IPA.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Fives





Widmer Brothers Pitch Black IPA

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Oregon

"Always bet on black" says the label. "Smooth, dark, and hoppy" too. No, this is not the latest rap album promotion. Since 1984 the brothers and Rob have been been craft beer and are one of the largest around. Redhook has been their partner and distributor on the east coast, Anheuser-Busch remaining a partner with both firms. This stuff is not actually stout or porter black but something like an exceedingly dark cola, the head very rough, large, and pale tan. Flavor is overflowing with medium-complex malts of a high quality. It is best not too cold in our opinion. The hops are rich and their is a licorice-like, malty depth similar to some porter-IPA hybrids we have blended over the years. Those are affectively called PIPAs around here. While the \$8.99 four-pack price was far less than impressive, this is a finer feast and value than barrels of weaker IPA crap that passes for microbrews in some markets. This is a very enjoyable drink, quite rewarding at ever sip, more calming and pleasant that shocking. If it had been made double, we'd have lost something in the subtle, refined tones of this performance. Malt of this quality suit the IPA approach to perfection, and we are quite near IPA heaven here. Not just another "wow and super wow" dark ale - this will amaze some, dazzle others, and flat out leave others speechless and smiling.

ALE - PALE

In general, the Pale Ale is named for it's color imparted by paler malts. It is less malty than many red, amber, golden, and certainly brown ales. However, some modern pales turn up the malt more than would be done in Britain in past decades. It ranges from light golds to dark ambers which are hardly pale-toned at all! Warm fermentation is the traditional method. Crystal malts can be added as with other darker malts, creating the Amber Ale which overlaps much with this classification. Some of both styles are cold fermented as well.

The American Pale Ale or APA tends to differ because of the flavor of American hop varieties, these being more flowery, pine-infused, and citrus-like than Old World hops. The famous green-tagged Sierra Nevada Pale Ale of the 1980's is the benchmark and standard for the APA though some experts feel Anchor Steam Liberty Ale was earlier - those two labels taste very different. The Sierra Nevada favors the Cascade hop flavor and two-row malts. We would also like to highlight the American Citrus Pale Ale (ACPA) which favors hop varieties imparting lemon, orange, and usually grapefruit hop notes in a clear measure. Even Euro-micros are making the ACPA now - witness Celt Experience Beddyn 1075.

The much older British Pale Ale or European Pale Ale merely makes use of their hops such as Golding, Fuggle, and Hallertau. The famous UK Burton Pale Ale from the late 1800's came from Burton-up-Trent brewers of which Bass is most famous. Bass Pale Ale as sold in the US is something of a hollow, weak example in our opinion but gives one hints of the style. Burtonisation is a process of handling the water to give Burton ales a special, improved flavor. The classic English Bitter Ale and ESB (Extra Special Bitter) are related to pale ales but tends to have lower ABV (4.0-4.8%) and a fairly nippy, bitter finish to various degrees. A few of these are dark copper and more potent in ethanol. The world leading India Pale Ale (IPA) took hops intensity to higher levels and has become a class of stronger ale in it's own right. The Belgian ales are dealt with seperately here and in most beer guides because they often involve spicing, citrus peel, unique yeast, and certain processes quite different from US and UK pale ales.

While Golden Ales and Blonde Ales are a separate section here, some of them are hoppy enough to be pale ales as well. Categories always overlap in the brew world where recipe boundaries and old traditions are crossed on a regular basis. Because there are few brewing rules in the US and in non-German Euro-micros, classifications and overt hybrids are fairly common.

Anchor Steam Humming Ale

RATING: 4.0

San Francisco, California

Restarted way, way back in 1965, Anchor is one of the first great microbrew firms. Along with Sierra Nevada they form a big part of CA's legendary brewing core when it comes to craft, ultra-quality beers. This very hoppy ale was first tested with locals in 2009 and bottled in 2010, using 2-row barlet, 5.8% ethanol, and is a fall seasonal by design. It is the most hop-drenched of their popular, mass market ales and thus ore akin to Sierra Nevada in approach, though not is potent as SN limited editions. Pouring a haxy amber-orange, (amber-gold in strong light), the head is medium-long and ivory. The is far less floral hops than Sam Adams for one example but has some fruit though less than SN limited hoppy ales. It was too bitter for some tastes here and also not a good runner against basic SN Pale Ale, the de facto CA American Ale standard without any doubt. The diversity of opinions was remarkable but it was not everyone's favorite pale for certain but no one thought it bad or weak.

Arcadia Angler's Ale

RATING: 4.0

Michigan

This pale amber is a medium strength pale ale with equal attention to hops and malt elements. Hopping favors the floral type. It is pleasant but not exciting.

Arrowhead Red Feather Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

This pale ale overflows with hops aroma and flavor. Color is medium golden with a large cream-colored head of the highest quality. It is quite a 'hop tea' sort of intensity but it also malty enough for a superb balance. It is very nicely balanced and is never bitter. We had a few reviewers actually prefer it to Sierra Nevada's legendy Pale Ale which has served us for years as the standard of our American pale ale. While it has some vaguely sweet notes it is a very refined balance of bitterness and sugar. With scores of decent pale ales sold nationwide this is one of the very few it makes sense to keep stocked. It is easily one of the Top 10 among East Coast pale ales and so we recommend it for your our taste trials.

Bass Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Burton-on-Trent England

Since 1777 this Burton-on-Trent beermaker has been making one of the best British ales. The label confirms Her Majesty's approval but we can only give it a 4 out of 5 bottles. While the lingering taste is substantial and never bitter there is some lack of satisfaction. The flavor is authentic British ale but it is not full enough for many enthusiasts. Just for the record these folks at Bass once one owned Holiday Inn and Intercontinental hotels so they must have made a buck or two along the way.

Bear Republic XP Exceptional Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Heraldsville, California

Using the familiar golden-brown bear of California statehood, this company in the Sonoma group of breweries has named the XP for it being X-ceptional Pale. It pours bright amberish-gold, smashing in any glass, the head golden-cream and lasting. Centennial and Cascade hops combine with both American and English malts. Nose is sweet hops and it comes out with sweetness tempered by the bitter hops; overall a moderate, semi-sweet, 5.5% ABV presentation of an American Pale Ale (APA). It makes a nice cold summer drinking beer for the hops will not overpower and the sweetness gives one the same comfort as a yankee (non-southern) ice tea or lemonade. Think of it perhaps a hopade. I don't mean to diminish it as a soda-like brew but it reaches one at that basic, lower intensity, everyday level. Perfectionates (which I consulted) missed a malty balance, a greater diversity of hop styles, and lamented the sugaring which was anything from 1-3 notches too high. These being mostly Sierra Nevada APA fans can be dismissed or honored as you like now that you know their profile! One gentleman (or not) called it "a girl's pale ale...but better crafted than Saranac".

Berger Indégo Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Using special German yeast H.C. Berger makes this moderately strong pale ale. The color is very bright copper amber with a lasting cream head. It is one of the those brews that simply glows in any glass. Overall it is semi-sweet, nicely hopped, and quite drinkable without ever being thin. Refined, never bitter hops is much more predominant than the malt. There is a hint of sweet licorice in the finish. Reviewers remarked on it's "highly agreeable flavor...a good enough potency without being harsh" and "well made, nicely balanced. I'd recommend it among the top 30 out of hundreds of American pales". In fairness a couple of tasters gave it a perfect so you might find it perfectly suited to your tastes too. We paid \$7.69 per six (3/00) so it is medium-high on the domestic price scale. Tried first in March 2000 and not seen here since.

Big Rock Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Calgary Alberta Canada

This \$8.00 product of Calgary comes boxed like their superb XO Lager. The color is a medium bright gold with a semi-persistent head and little carbonation - unlike Buzzard's Breath and Warthog. Like those other Big Rock ales it has a candy-like sweetness in the finish but a greater flavor. It is somewhat different from McNally's but has a similar bitter-candy appeal. It is easily a Top 5 Canadian Ale. Beautiful, simple, and artistic label. This is a yummy and refined and fun. Some will want their Canadian Pale Ales more dry and bitter. I do not.

Blue Star Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Texas

This rich amber-red ale is moderate in hops and malt added together with ale fruitiness. It has a strong aroma that is sure to impress. Somehow it's not entirely a cohesive package of flavors and the reviews seen here were quite variable.

Boulder Igloo Ale

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

Rockies Brewing Co. was formed in 1979 but then under the name Boulder Brewing. Color here is glowing red amber with a lasting microfoam head of ivory color. The flavor is abundant with malt and hops in nice balance and a finish that is semi-sweet. It has enough bitter hop nature to be classed with PALE ALES but it could pass for a HOPPY AMBER ALE as well. The choice of the right amount of sweetness shows their superb skill. The finish is truly delightful and it is a joy to linger over each flavor element. Reviewers praised the 'very sophisticated blend of everything...nothing to fault' and 'I'd take this over Sierra Nevada Pale Ale...it's that perfect'. Very highly recommended selection.

Boulder Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Boulder, Colorado

This pale ale is a good deal fruity and sweet than the style normal implies for a western US brewer. It has a nice citrus appeal with a tremendous depth of character. It is not highly hopped and so not all reviewers gave it as high marks as others. Yet if this expression of ale (and it's quite a valid one) suits you it will surely get a perfect score.

Burning River Pale Ale (Great Lakes Brewing Co.)

RATING: 4.5

Ohio

This golden amber brew is mid strength favoring strong floral hops and a slightly bitter finish. A bit of caramel malt is added for good measure. It is too strong and spicy for some - others rated it a perfect

[The] Celt Experience Bleddyn 1075 Organic Crafted Ale

RATING: 4.5

Caerphilly, Wales, UK

One spies the big USDA Organic logo on the plastic-lined neck and figure it's some Celtic lads from the US or

their imported brewer making the stuff. This 5.6% pale ale is actually from Wales and has endeavored, doubtless with red-tape from here to Caerphilly to get USDA sanctioning. Bleddyn ap Cynfyn was the most powerful Welch King and he died in 1075. He loved this stuff - please visit his Facebook site - just kidding. The formula here is designed to be high gravity, loaded with with Atlantic and New Zealand hops, full-bodied, and loaded with citrus. It is 95% organic per the label. It's almost Pils-pale with a near white head and the grapefruit notes are evident from the very first, more nippy and fruit-real in the dryish finish. This ain't your Old World King's pale ale my friends but they make no secret of the international nature of the ingredients. The price is decent so that is not an issue competing with some American citrus pale ales which actually can cost more. The potency of modern grapefruity hop varieties can be misjudged and over-done. This is a skillfully judged recipe and execution - quite a delightful feast.

Clipper City Loose Cannon Hop3 Ale

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

This Hop (cubed) Ale is 7.25% ABV to start - not our average pale ale or IPA for sure. THREE POUNDS PER BARREL is the recipe and that shows through in a semi-sweet ale fruity pale style than a potent IPA. I have made many 2-3 brand blends of strong pales and IPAs and can now tell the difference when getting stuff like this. Marketing gimmicks be damned. The label goes on to talk about Davey Jones locker and protecting beer flavor...calling this an American IPA. Now I am confused. Actually, no. It is not a pure herbal IPA as they should be drier and very medicinally so; American or otherwise. (Indeed, if we were judge anything terms "American IPA" by the standard of "American Golden Lager" and "American cheese", this stuff would need to suck, be weak, and suck some more!). This has too much yeasty fruit and sweetness to be a true IPA. I might call it a hybrid but it clearly favors the strong pale side of the taxonomy. Regardless, this rich golden-amber fluid is lasting carbonation, a mid-sized pale head, and an aroma so fruity it would made Juicy Fruit feel like a phony. That fruity nose confirms my placement of it as a strong pale ale and away from that stuff once destined for New Delhi or Davey Jones old home. The extra alcohol smack is not noticed and is something one of you "3 beers max a day" sorts will enjoy; thinking you're getting one over on the wife by drinking three stronger things all the time. Would I buy it again? Highly affirmative. There's not a flaw to found here except in their IPA argument.

Corsendonk Monk's Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Belgium

This import from Belgium comes in regular sized bottles or large 750ml ones with a Champagne-style cork and wire. It is imported into the US by Phoenix Imports of Ellicott City MD. It is not a classic Belgian ale and belongs here.

Devil Mountain Tasmanian Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cincinnati, Ohio

Using amber malts and hops from Tasmania (note the Tasmanian-Devil connection here) they have produced a light yellow ale with a large, persistent head of very fine foam. It is moderately hopped, semi-sweet, and never bitter like a great male microbrewed AMERICAN PALE ALES. This is a very palatable, mass market sort of pale ale. And while it shows good quality it is not worldbeating by any standard. What it lacks in intense depth it could have overcome with a sophisticated blend of malts perhaps. In its middle premium price range (possibly lower premium in grocery stores) it does stand up well to many labels with a likely exception of some Saranac ales.

Diamond Knot Whip Ale (Pale Ale)

RATING: 4.0

Mukilteo, Washington

Named for Queensryche's Michael "Whip" Wilton, the labels says in gold letters on black: "Rich, bold, aromatic". This 6.0% ale pours a medium-light yellow, the head lasting, low, and off cream. The hops are delicious and assertive from the first sip, intensifying much despite the coloration. It is nearly amber-bold in terms of hops. It is supremely dry. The finish has some fruit but it trades mostly on the piney and medicinal notes, not straying too far from some golden IPA offerings. After all, what is rich, bold pale ale versus a lighter IPA these days? They form quite a continuum really. It would have liked more yeast fruit or citrus hops in the mix but it otherwise a

very refined and pleasant APA. Reviewers here said "too malty and faintly hopped for a true pale ale...a malty golden in my system" and "doughy malts...occasionally weak...hops do get more intense...strange grass notes". Hops were stronger in an earlier testing and so we have demoted it to 4.0 instead of 4.5 for the this inconsistency.

Dogwood Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

This Atlanta product has received widespread appeal in the Southeast and noted for its mid-strength hopping with an even balance to malt. It favors the fruity ale side over the bitter or malted. Color is bright golden amber with long-lasting carbonation. We remember sipping these without end in the plush, tropical lobby of Atlanta's Ravinia Crowne Plaza and being very impressed. (If you haven't been there they have love birds in cages signing into the lobby, a waterfall, really huge trees, an outdoor Japanese Garden, and concierges who speak French like natives. By the way, those love birds were of the feathery variety. If you want larger species of love birds in cages try to Bangkok Crowne Plaza. This stuff looks terrific in good glassware even though it lacks a trace of the complexity of other pales.

Epic Copper Cone Pale Ale (Elevated Series)

RATING: 4.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

We thoroughly sampled Release #1 which was 7.0% in a dark amber with a golden-hued ivory head. Their base malt is Ultra Premium Matis Otter, adding also Premium Weyermann Light Munich, CaraMunich II, CaraMunich I and a touch of Briess Carapils Malt. Columbus, Zeus, Centennial, and Amarilla hops mark the main boil followed by dry-hopping with Simcoe. Their website said Release #14 was 6.0% but received at Whole Foods in Raleigh NC our bottle was stamped 7.0%. Other releases, later and earlier, have slightly different hop variations. The APA bit is there but very smooth, layered, and refined. There is a clear nip at times, like a sting you don't get all at once. It's like being surgically bitten by a Great White and not realizing he has your leg until 2 minutes later. There is just the right hint of caramel malting, good ingredients without a doubt, to mellow down the potentially aggressive hops - after all this is no IPA. The nose of sweet hoppy caramel is luscious so it's good sessionator. It is clearly of APA reference with the newer American hops, meaning you get more pine, smooth bitterness, and heavy citrus that Old World pales - unless they use an APA approach as some Brit brewers are using now in 2012. Reviewers here noted "very solid product by this 14th execution...so hoppy it's intermediate between APA and AIPA...lots to like here" and "trying very hard to be a Sierra Nevada label but there is still a measure of refinement missing...still quite hoppy after your first 5 ounces..if you think of it as a mellower IPA that might help".



Flying Dog Double Dog Double Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Frederick, Maryland

The 11.5% ABV on the 12 oz. bottle got my attention. Are they frickin' serious? An American microbrew in a regular brown bottle that strong?!?! That will happen when...umm...dogs fly. This Canis Major Series contribution to brewing history is a marvelous example of what we have to look for in the next few years. For those of you of younger birth, a "Double Dog" was the most extreme form of dare two kids could put on another - kinda like swearing on Grannie's grave or your succulents in fact. You could refuse some dares but the "double dog" was serious and impossible to get out of. If you took a double dog dare to kiss Ms. Finster, the mole-laden, greasy haired, toothless, evil lunch lady OR cross the 200 foot high, rickety, timber train tressel 5 minutes before the

210 from Rochester was about to cross, you had better have lost big or done something really bad. Double dogs had to be very well considered by all parties. Fortunately the FD DD will leave you with better memories. Actually it's like winning three double dogs in a row, getting richers and humiliating both your best friends and worst enemies in the process. This bright amber pooch is muscular, barking up a storm, hops on his breath, unleashed, happy, rambuncuous, and running for you with glinting teeth. He nips just a little but in a loving way and you are welcomed well and warmly. Last dog reference: FD DD has all the AKC papers, true to breed down all the lines, and a pedigree to drool for.

These "full-frontal, power-hopped, bitter bombs" are designed to be relentless but yet hit the target all the time. This is carpet-bombing with hops cones but each cone is GPS equipt and hits the target; a calculated explosion of bitter joy, second upon second, concussions unrelenting. Precision with mass delivery is what they do best here. This is the real Shock-and-Awe of the Hoppy Pale Ale Wars c. 2008. We'll be finding lots of former US microbrew Pale Ale Dictators, unshaven with matted hair, crying in their spider holes in no time. The Flying Dog DD has searched them out. The near white head is domed, "rocky" as some say, mixed bubble sizes, lasting well. This is a hop lovers delight, refined with just the right amount of sweetness, notes all around balanced and confirmed. Here we have Shangri-La in a bottle for those of us who demand the bright green, conical strobile that comes from the Great Vine we adore. FD DD is a masterful, truly perfect presentation of the brewing arts and the matchless glory of the Hop Vine. There is no finer example of American Pale Ale to be found.

Flying Fish Extra Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Their logo takes a bit of mental processing time the first time you see it. It's basically a fish skeleton with a airplane wing and busy propellers grafted onto it. The flavor is mild at first but hops quickly saturate and it earns some character thereafter. Yet it the medley of hops and bitterness is off a tad.

Full Sail Very Special Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Hood River, Oregon

This golden ale is a feast of herbal hop flavors with enough malt in the tank to round it out well. The finish is fairly bitter and that is what most reviewers found to be negative. With some tuning this might prove to be a world beater.



Fuller's London Pride

RATING: 5.0

This 'Traditional English beer' is brighter, clearer amber than their superb ESB and both have long-lived heads.

While less sweet and hoppy than ESB the flavor is very satisfying. Your tongue and brain must work a bit harder to find the complex details. Both finish dry and semi-bitter. While it has no flaws it is not distinct like ESB. Being less sweet and potent it is perhaps a better beer than ESB with a big feast. For pure drinking pleasure ESB is our choice. Officially it is a PALE ALE but not our North American (ie. Sierra Nevada and McAuslan) concept. Panalists referred to 'good sweet-bitter balance...the later winning out in the final moments' and 'one of the more noteworthy British ales but not as eccentric as some'. Try blending 5-20% stout in it.

Geary's Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Maine

This microbrewery in the 'other Portland' is one of the oldest micros in this country; and likely the first west of the Rockies. This PALE ALE is bright glowing amber with a long-lasting ivory head. It is full of hoppy aroma and the taste is well developed with loads of that vining crop. There is a sweet malt component but greatly favors the pale side. Other classics like Sierra Nevada are richer and some think this is about right. It did prove a shade too bitter for a few folks in the early palate so a perfect rating was missed. Our reviewers noted 'clearly one of America's top pales ales...too pricey for me at \$8.00-9.00' and 'not too sweet and not too rich...an ideal hop-laden treat'. Highly recommended for your comprehensive pale ale summits.

Goose Island Lamar Street Organic Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Chicago, Illinois

There are two Lamar Street labels, one brewed by Goose Island and the other by Whole Foods of Texas. Oddly enough, I purchased the Goose form at the Whole Foods Store in Raleigh, North Carolina. First off, this is one of the most poorly designed labels in beer history. The railroad scene is neat but hardly visible even under bright lights. The name of the product is tiny, overshadowed, and lost in the tree line! What were they thinking? Photoshop gone wrong? Color is a smart tangerine-gold with a large head of old ivory coloration. Cereal malt comes to foreground quickly and one is amazed at the seeming lack of bitter hopping OF ANY KIND. Where are the usual pale ale hops? It often rates low in magazines and the web for this reason. I'm sure they knew (duh!) and planned for the response. It is almost liquid Wheaties with a dash of sugar. When the politically sweet "organic" name, verified by some Oregon group, is paired to a non-traditional pale ale, the organic, nature, PC aspect of it will be brought up the gun-holding, Bible-clinging, like me and my beer bitter crowd. Some say the hops are brought into the background in a more British style of golden ale and there's a point there to be considered. Others in my circle praise the satisfaction and high drinkability as reasons to fly in the face of generic, from-a-kit pale ales. I might never buy it again but I would put it before a visiting beer friend or two from the UK - just to get another view.

Great Divide Denver Pale Ale (DPA)

RATING: 4.0

Denver, Colorado

Mason Thomas, Senior Brewer notes this is a unique American ale just like the Denver skyline is a unique expression. We suppose that was made for hometown consumption but in one respect this is right. This pale has a American hops flowery quality one associated with Sam Adams for example. This brew is dark golden (barely amber) with a small near white head. Hopping is flowery and moderate with milder hops. It will not come close to Sierra Nevada for strength but then not every one likes that much fire. One reviewer summed it up for most of us: 'it is very good, full of the right things, nicely balanced, yet somehow it lacks something the great pale ales give you.' It is certainly not worth \$8 a six but seen at \$6 it's a better value. Revisted in 2010 it went up to \$8.99 per six and I noticed they added "English Style" to the label and may have increased the bitterness of the finish. It is nearly IPA strong but DPA/APA drinkable. Despite two gold medals, my rating of 4 bottles remains.

Brewbase Fives



Harpoon Glacier Harvest '08 Wet Hop Beer (100 Barrel Series)

RATING: 5.0

Boston, MA/Windsor, Vermont

Version number 24 in this series is a richly flavored pale ale, very rich amber in color. The head is dark tan and very long-lasting. Wet hopping, a last minute addition of the good stuff is used to boost the flavor - as opposed to dry hopping using the ingredient in dried form earlier on. They claim on their website that these fresh hops are not dried but "picked just hours before being tossed into the brew". Wow! Not many breweries can claim or even manage that. Fresh hops are about 60% moisture and their distinct flavors have yet to degrade. The volatile compounds and rich oils remain. Ray Dobens of the Harpoon staff created this stuff and personally picked the Glacier hops in Seneca, New York and drove them immediately to Boston for inclusion in this product. The result? Not your average grocery store pale ale for sure. You really feel this is "hops tea" in every good sense of that phrase yet it is not overpowering. Malt is clearly in the backseat and rounds it out though in a very reserved manner. Fresh hopping or wet hopping should be done more and we know why it is not done - inconvenience, travel/shipment money, lack of access to fresh *Humulus*, and the fact most people accept the dry stuff in most any dose given to them. Sad that is. Here's effort that is rewarded in the beverage itself. Highest marks. Let's have more hop teas and with all the variations we can think of!

Highland Little Hump Spring Ale

RATING:

Asheville, North Carolina

This seasonal first seen by us in March 2012 uses Simcoe, Amarillo, and Cascade hops for that true American Pale Ale effect. Hops needs to be nailed down at Highland because the boys from Chico CA just picked their 'hood for their massive, first ever East Coast location. The ride they got from St. Terese's Pale is long over and the benchmark has moved six feet up the old plank. The pour is light-mid gold, the head near white, low and lean, the nose of mild grains. First sip is smooth but moderate hopped, generically so, semi-light for some of us, but a more potent citrus approach quickly appears in the mid passages and never relents 'til the last drop. Malts continue to intensify as the saturation of taste buds continues but the citrus-hop fullness never grows into a grand or grandfather mountain. We have good things in the boil but semi-light and faintly ragged finishes are no long meeting the state exam. Leave no Pale Ale behind. This is a refresher to be sure but their declared goal of a "session beer" is not met. I love the citrus explosions even if tiny pops and bursa at times. Today's bright B+ will become tomorrow's drowsy D grade. I hate to say it...but the new School Master is 'a comin' to town. They call me Mr. Hops.

Highland St. Terese's Pale Ale

RATING: 3.0

Asheville, North Carolina

One is immediately struck by the nun on the label holding out a big stein. If that is not enough to ruffle some feathers the nun actually turns out to be considerably less than drinking age. It is all good fun we suppose unless you don't have a sense of humor to begin with. This American style PALE ALE is bright golden-amber with a substantial creamy head. It has a fruity-hops balance but is remarkably mild and tame for this brewery; one normally distinguished by rugged, full-bodied product. This is not to say there is no room for a smooth, sweetish pale ale - a summer refresher for one thing - but on principle this one disappoints. With so many microbrew failures we only hope Highland is not going too mainstream.

Brewbase Fives



Humes Jaipur Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Glen Ellen, California

This elegantly bottled ale is rich amberish gold with a large, lasting ivory head. It is in short a FRUITY BITTER PALE ALE, being more nectar-like and with more of a bitter finish than some. Though sweetish at first the finish has many rich bitter hop elements so it may be described as well balanced in that respect. Indeed some sips will prove more sweet than others. It is very well crafted. Reviewers noted 'rich abundant fruit, hops, and ale yeast flavors... finish can be a bit ragged...overall very pleasant' and 'nice essence of apricots, cherries, and hops throughout...faint skunky (the good kind) aroma at first...very distinct from Sierra Nevada style of pale ale.'

Brewbase Fives



Ipswich Ale (Original)

RATING: 5.0

Ipswich, Massachusetts

Let's be clear from the start here. This is not made in Ipswich, Suffolk, England and so is not an Ipswich Ale in that sense like the Tolly label. It is billed as "The Original American Ale" so that point should be clear until you sip it. It tastes like it was made in the Old Country for it's Britishy malts, cloudy amber color, and highly refined but subtle hopping. It is not Sam Adams in that sense of an alledged, old style New England pale ale. It would not be mistaken for an American microbrew by 9 out of 10 experts on this side the pond. It's a Top Ten Ale per the Wine Spectator which is something of an endorsement; but akin to Bait and Tackle magazine saying you've just bought the best SLR digital camera because they say so and are quite justifiably famous for something very different. Wineheads usually-hardly know a good beer but perhaps the irresistible quality and pleasantness of this formula was enough to let them wander into truth in the sudsy world. To me a good, solid Cab is something I take from one pub to another.

The Ipswichians of Mass have been around since 1991 so this is a revival of an old stle from a rather young brewery. Happily, they've done it very well though I'm afraid none of us were around those realms in 1772 to testify to it's authenticity. Doubtless it's adherence to a British theme makes it believable and that is all we can say on the point of likely authenticity. If you are new to this Original product, you will be delighted to add it to your diverse mental-oral memory of good brews and expanding your knowledge of modern New England ales. It will not disappoint though we would like to get a British voice on this sometime or maybe have some real old Yankee or Bostonian alehead come back in time. Should the later occur you'll doubtless see us on CNN Headline News which by the time it happens will be called Fox Headline News.

Brewbase Fives



King and Barnes Festive Ale

RATING: 5.0

Sussex, England

This reddish-amber ale is among the best the British Isles has ever produced. The full fruit flavors of a rich ale blend with roasted malt flavors for a simply breathtaking result. It is bottle conditioned and that contributes much to its superiority over regular microbrews from these shores. The sophistication and complexity here are simply remarkable. A must try - I hate that phrase - just do it - I that one too. Get some...

Brewbase Fives



Lagunitas 2009 Correction Ale

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

To say the rich, pale ale standard in the state of California is high is like saying there are one or two people in Paris and New York who care about fashion and if pushed might render an opinion or two. "We're all Bozos on this bus" and the dog make the label cute as did the sermonette about "Made-off" and Sopranos in fine print. The label also has references to Mardi Gras and a familiar quote from Animal House, the movie. Were any of the folks there sober when this label was approved? I sure hope not. Just be sure one guy is sober when the stuff is measured. So does the "This is NOT a double IPA...It's just a good American ale". Is this oddly measured 6.33% ABV brew giving us a hint we might have something loaded with hops here. IPA? No. I like to go with the brain's first instincts sometimes and these are "fruit and pine"; piney, resinous rich hops with elements of fruit esters to be specific. That suits my ale-is-my-pal sensibilities to a big freakin' T. I sipped the entire bottle (and yes it was over two distinct periods to avoid blurred judgement) and found it utterly perfect from first nose to last cleansing of the back tongue. This is a very amazing stuff, shocking at \$5 for a big bottle. It makes the trendy Fat Tire look like a 50's Rambler stranded flat on the highway with three others goin' soft. If you're into that "Fruit and Pine" thing which Sierra Nevada does so well, this one will hold a candle to it and then some. I'm simple delighted to find another rare label that can be called Humulus-euphorbia, a fine value, and inspiration in the single breath. This is rapture for those who like their hops thick but not overpowering; nicely blessed with the passionate esters of nature. There is good sorcery in this bottle. I now consider myself Corrected by Ale.

Latrobe American Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Latrobe, Pennsylvania

This budget craft brew (\$5.99) is deep golden with a lasting ivory head. Aroma is light and sweet. Flavor is not your ordinary assault of hops and malt; most favoring the hops team. Cascade hops are used but in moderate strength. The malt balance is rather sweet and is joined with a very fruity ale base. It is surprisingly refreshing and well made for this price range though not one of us thought it was really a world-beater. It is the kind of brew you'd buy when you have to get beer and snacks out of a mangled \$10 bill in your wallet. Some of us do beer cap displays and the green cap here stands out very well. Reviewers noted 'sure to give Saranac Pale Ale a

run for this niche' and 'respectable sweet fruity ale with just enough hops to keep me engaged'.

Left Hand Stranger American Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

One does not much see "American Pale Ale" in a beer name but this tag signifying US-style hops is not a bad product differentiator but also a patriotic thing too. Still the APA moniker does imply a lack of Old World tradition. Rye is the formula if you read the label ingredient list. The pour is a butterscotch-haze which to us is yummy-gorgeous to the apex. Head is near white, the nose of caramel malt, lace slow but enduring. Flavor is intend on the candy-caramel side of the APA stle but the yeasty blur indicates their is yeast-fruit in the mix to. Reviewers here noted "a lovely product...crafted to please...sweet but done the right way" and "delicious...butterscotch in liquid form....a tad too rich for me...I know others adore it". I would add this is an American Candy-makers Pale Ale and not the austere, bitter hoppy fare that so many APA's tend to be. Stranger is not strange but it surely anti-Sierra Nevada and yet it will have following of a type for a certain period.

Little Kings Bruin Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cincinnati, Ohio

Little Kings is best known for a more upscale Cream Ale and this new Pale Ale from Schoenling of Cincinnati is also a classy product. The 22oz bottles sell here for just \$1.59 and this amber ale is absolutely overflowing with hops and malt quality. It is not up to the standard bearer of Sierra Nevada but is thoroughly enjoyable at every sip. It is more malt-saturated than many pale ales (particularly in the finish) but a tangy hops flavor is present at the first palate. The label is simply stunning with silvery blue mountains and grizzly bears and gold-shadowed letters. The top of the label is cut to fit the contour of the peaks. MOST ARTISTIC LABEL SPRING 1995 beyond any and all doubt. America needs this kind of bargain pale ale.

Lonerider Peacemaker Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

This offering from the Triangle area brewer is....It pours rich golden-amber, the head micro-bubbly and lasting. The nose is sweet-toasty malt. It is no formulaic, general American Pale Ale by any sense and I was cheered to see that in my latest hometown brewery; at least three former ones having bit the humid dust. "Several hop varieties" are used to make a "unique and bountiful hop aroma" - I'm shocked they are accurate here. A blend of American and European malts is used for well-rounded, character. True again! Marketing based on truth and reality? Very unique concept and very rare these days. The warm, earthy malts remind me of some German lagers and yet the fruit of an ale comes through as do semi-floral hops, toned down to favor malt. It needs to be very cold as it's unique flavors fad in some conditions. I liked their ingredients and their result. Very nice effort for a newish firm.

Lost Coast Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

This pale ale is deep golden in color and carries a persistent head. The carbonation is strong and vastly greater than their Amber Ale. It starts rather thin but finishes with rich American-style hop flavor to make it very pleasant. It is not so full as the Sierra Nevada Pale Ale but if SN is too strong for you this may be a perfect match. The finish has some fruity elements to balance the hops but we'd prefer a touch more depth.

Magic Hat Lucky Kat

RATING: 4.5

Burlington, Vermont

The label bursts into your face as a grinning Cheshire feline in bright magenta with teeth to spell out Lucky Kat. Here's the website spiel: "Lucky Kat purrs as he pours with a grin on his mangy face and a grin in his searching eye. He sits on the fence he calls home, dividing up from down. Is he an imperial beast or a pale soul from the east? Only he knows and we know only this: if you reach out to pet him he'll bite back with a big, hoppy kiss". Their malt picks are Pale, Munich, and Crystal while the hopping is Amarillo and Crystal. The BAV is 5.8% or just

a smidge above common micros. It pours out a lovely, bright amber, the cream head very enduring, and nose faintly of the sacred vine. The hopping is very sophisticated, not bitter but not overly sweet either, a very refined middle choice, a very happy and convenient presentation in the American Fruity Pale Ale style. It is a highable enjoyable, likable beverage, more fruity and less bitter than many in our APA or Near-IPA formulas of a two hundred different names in the US market. The bitterness in the finish is there but it does not present itself as a monolithic dry hops approach of the usual and standard characters in this category. It's a pretty kitty with more purr than claw.

Mendocino Blue Heron Pale Ale

RATING: 3.0 (Hopland CA 1996)/ 4.5 (Saratoga Springs, NY 2008)

From my 1996 review: Anything from a town called Hopland (CA) would almost have to have this much hops character. Created in 1985 this PALE ALE is surprisingly light yellow for something of that name. The head is very deep, foamy, and ivory in shade. Flavor is very tart and full of citrusy hops bitterness. It is sure to be controversial in the same way a Berliner Weiss beer will be. Our reviewers made comments ranging from 'horrible...hard to drink' to 'unique and sophisticated...sharp refreshment of the best quality'. As a majority most of us felt it would have been better with some kind of fruit theme (ie. real apricot or real raspberry). Berliner Weiss does recommend fruit syrups and this would be better with such mixing. Straight it will win few fans. I tried it again in February 2009, this time from their NY brewery and found it vastly morphed, executed as finely as it was lacking before. It might as well be a good copy of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale in it's current trim; and perhaps a buck or two cheaper. It is a hops first kind of pale and very refreshing at all times. The refinement over this decade is well worth the effort. Beers can be revived and made whole.

Michelob Pale Ale

RATING: 3.0

St. Louis, Missouri

Following up on the Amber Bock, Michelob has launched a number of beers that some have described as 'microbrewoid'. They are surely an improvement overly watery lagers of the past and might by some opinions here be considered a compromise of style, price, and quality. For \$5.99 or so this Pale Ale gives a real Saaz hop flavor. Color is medium gold with a big near white head and a faint hops aroma. Saaz, Hallertau, and Tettnang hops were not nearly waved about this brew though it is might correctly be described as moderately flavored. It is SEMI-LIGHT PALE ALE to some of us and it was noted that in this price range the Saranac products (for one example) are perhaps more pleasing. Still it does represent new sophistication and we gladly welcome it.

Mikkeller All Others Pale (Pale Ale)

RATING: 4.0

Orbeck, Denmark

Do the others pale in comparison? This "cheeky take on an American tradition" comes from Denmark, make it a European homage to American Pale Ale. A Danish touch was added. The 6.0% APA is described as "light-bodied...refreshing". Damn. That makes me nervous. It pours glorious amber, the head semi-rough, golden-cream, and lasting well. Nose is faint of sweet hops. It is smooth and "light-bodied" but the finish continues to give nice, layered Euro-class malts. Smoooooth...never weak is the Scandinavian take on what is often a head-banging, hops-at-all-costs approach of domestic APA makers. Panelists here said "shows a quality made pale does not have to be harsh and bitter...still not worth the \$9.99 [September 2011] for a small 350ml" and "more malty than expected...both the hops and malts are well done, even if turned down a bit". This is one of those clearly less-is-more beers. Those who felt it under-hopped need only consume the full bottle - tastebud saturation gives it more bitterness with spectacular varietal flavors if you wait. Once again, I must harp on the fact a little plastic cup, even one big cup, is never enough to fairly evaluate a beer; certainly not one this subtle-moderate in approach. I would think it might be quite fun to all this to an all-Pale Ale tasting, matching it to harsher material and getting remarks.

Morland Old Speckled Hen Ale

RATING: 3.5

Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Since 1711 the Morland PLC folks have been making 'strong fine ale' with their own unique yeast. This current

brew dates from 1896. Color is bright copper amber with a white, finely-bubbled head of long persistence. Described by Morland as a PALE ALE it has moderate malt by American standards. The hopping is more full and it finishes nicely dry. This is no malty-caramel-toffee-molasses ale of STRONG REAL ALE appeal of late. Most reviewers felt it was far from strong enough for the \$10.50 price and 'strong fine ale' letters on the label. While it has enough depth to set it apart from a \$5.99 American mass-brew amber it is not THAT much better. There are dozens of better UK ales - Newcastle, Monrell's Oxford Castle, and Adnam's Nut Brown to name just three. Collect bottles?

Naked Aspen Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

Cold Spring, Minnesota

This MN beer has a cheerful amberish golden color with a small head but loads of carbonation. By now we've had enough experience with PALE ALES to spot winners right quick. Sierra Nevada and St. Ambrose (McAuslan) are our winner standards of 5 bottle bliss. While this one has nice hops (and a little malt flavor) it is not as flavorful as it should be. The main palate is slightly weak and so can be the finish. We say can be. After the first full bottle one's mouth retains enough hop aftertaste so things get better in the finish. Thus one's first few sips are more accurate although the total experience can improve. Reviewers said 'average pale ale quality...does not really impress me' and 'for the ale drinker who longs for mellow hopping'.



New Holland Existential Ale

RATING: 5.0

Holland, Michigan

This stunning beverage is rich, dark amber in color with a medium-sized head. This high gravity (25.5 Plato) entry has a whopping 10.5% ABV but one's more likely to drunk from all hops! Two hundred pounds of malted barley per barrel testifies to it's formulaic quality. There are also 37 ounces of American-grown hops per barrel. The result is very balanced, yet a classic rich pale, lacking in nothing, and excelling in everything. I'd never think the Sierra Nevada Pale would have a major rival for America's best but here we have one perhaps a hair or two even more enjoyable. By one report it's a limited production c. April 2008 but they'd be insane not to a VERY CLOSE recipe cousin every day of the year. The giant green, stylized hop on the bottle will thrill bottle collectors who like the inked on (tampo) style of brewing art.

North Coast Acme California Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Fort Bragg, California

This product from North Coast golden with amber tints under lower light. The head is off white and very persistent. Flavor is on the fruity side of the AMERICAN PALE ALE spectrum. There are surely many more brews with a stronger malt and hop dose from western microbreweries. Reviewers thought it was very pleasant but for the price very close to \$9.00 it did not have the complex and sophisticated depth we have come to require. It was a tad to simple and weak in the finish for some of us. Others felt it was a smoother drinking compromise of some merit. No one was very thrilled we must honestly report. There is just something not 'devoted enough' about whether it be for fruit or hops taste. Perhaps the very ordinary 'Acme' name is more fitting than planned.

Olde Hickory Table Rock Pale Ale

RATING: 3.0

Hickory, North Carolina

The color photo on the label shows the massive table-shaped mountain that sticks up above a rare woodland in

western NC. Legendary botanists Andrew Michaux and John Fraser (of Fraser Christmas tree fame) marveled at the unique fauna and flora there. Jules Verne even wrote of the remarkable sights there. Thousands come from around the country and world each year for a unique climbing experience. The Cherokee called it Attacoa and used it as a mystic alter for their most holy ceremonies. Using 2-row malt and Cascade hops, Old Hickory make their flagship beer with a decidedly floral aroma. The fluid is rich gold, the head golden-tinged ivory and lasting. The Cascade hops notes are there but regrettably too weak to ever recommend this ale or it to ever be in the nationwide mix of Pale Ale champions. Great name and unfortunately a tepid, timid ale not worthy of the legendary name. It is hardly more than a well-hopped golden ale. Give it just a hint of warmth while sitting at a meal and it goes bad-bitter in no time, unrecoverable and close to undrinkable. The recipe and execution fell off the mountain somewhere along the line. And we hope and beg they have a survival line to keep heart and truth alive for a stronger climb next trip 'round the wood. It is merely what our friend Rich calls a "curiosity, cute label buy", all about new things and aesthetics-based marketing, and not supportable on it's own internal, real merit. We know from their Death by Hops offering their kettles and staff are capable of very remarkable, laudable things. Hope is alive.

Oskar Blues Dale's Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon/Longmont, Colorado

This is unquestionably the best pale ale in the can, at least among those available in the mass market from east to west in the US. I normally don't review canned beers but having being thrilled to find their potent 8% Old Chub in my local Harris Teeter one night, I just had to trust and try this one. The cashier at the small store where I bought this checked the three price labels several times and yes...they all said \$9.99 - "it's a very special beer" I remarked, cutting the long fumbling silence, to which the reply was "must be". This label is just 6.5% and that is decent enough for the hops and background malts lead me to brewery nirvana without out any extra bite being necessary. I am not alone in giving it high marks for the NY Times called it their Top US Pale Ale and it also won the coveted World Beer Championship Gold Medal in 2010. I'd pass up most other pale ales in my grocery store (save the eternally good Sierra Nevada) and head for this one. Really great stuff and very portable.

Pacific Hop Exchange Gaslight Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Emeryville, California

A lovely 19th century style label greets us first and the \$3.39 price (for a generous 1 pint 6 oz.) also impressed. Color is rich golden amber with a mid- sized ivory head. It is fully hopped but less harsh than so many popular AMERICAN PALE ALES. A semi-sweet, carmel flavor seems to take out SOME of the bitterness you either love or hate about the style. It is certainly a good value and very refreshing in most opinions. Reviewers note 'too much like hops soda for me' and 'easy drinking, totally enjoyable...nothing at all to complain about (and I rarely say that)'.

Pennington Classic English Pale Ale

RATING: 3.5

Kernersville, North Carolina

Woodhouse Brewing adds their name to the growing rank of excellent Southeastern microbreweries that distinguish themselves with ale. Label collectors take note of the finely printed copper cabin that is a nice emblem. Color is light amber (unusually pale for a PALE) with a big head of cream color; faint hops in the aroma. Flavor is moderate with it improving with a nippy flood of hops on the tongue. However about 60% of our reviewers (almost all ale lovers) felt it was too mild and needed a turbo charge with more hops. Malting was about right for most. As is 'it runs way back in the pack' among pale ales according to one reviewer. One said 'ideal hops-malt balance...not harsh like so many today'. If you like your PALES mild this is nice. Otherwise skip it.

Perry's Majestic Ploughman's Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Brooklyn, New York

Judging from the organic message and the skillful rendering of a plowman on the label you'd expect this to be from Iowa or even North Dakota. No its just good old Brooklyn (where plowing has other meanings) under

license from Hoboken Brewing Co. of New Jersey. It is golden amber with a short-lived near white head. It is rich and hoppy and lacks the sweetness of the Majestic we tried before and concluded must be a SWEET GOLDEN LAGER. This has enough sweetness to offset much of the full, bitter hops and the balance seems about perfect. It is quite well made but frankly there are probably 50 decent microbrewed AMERICAN PALE ALES of similar worth. It is great but will not really stand out unless organic ingredients are very important to you.

Pete's Wicked Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

St. Paul, Minnesota

This bright and pale amber brew has a small but lasting head. It is 'intensely hopped' with fruity ale bass unlike their famous regular Wicked Ale. There is enough hops for most folks but if you're a big Sierra Nevada Pale Ale fan you'll find Pete a big less strong. The fruit ale yeast flavor is there but it has to be sensed carefully. Hops is the main theme. The color is one of those radiant glowing shades of amber that looks terrific in any class. Reviewers here noted 'good balance of hops bitterness and ale sweetness...so complete it is hard to find a single flaw' and 'quality ale certain to be popular at this price (\$5.99) and wide distribution...I prefer more distinct products by Rogue'. Most felt it was equal or better than the 'regular ale'.

Pike Ale Heirloom Amber Ale (Pale Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Seattle, Washington

First of all, this is not Pike Place Pale Ale from Vermont but from Pike Brewing of Seattle. These 5.0% 650ml gems were just \$3.99 at Total Wine (July 2010) and poured dark amber, a head of light tan and medium duration. It is surprisingly malty in the early notes for Pale Ale, rounding out to tangy, tart hops in the later notes. This is a remarkable value for the money and I think gives the better Saranac ales a run for their short stack of bills. It's expertly made from a proven recipe, always rich in ingredients and will not as complex as some formulae proves of great enjoyment any time and any place.

Pike Place Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

White River Junction, Vermont

From White River Junction Vermont this microbrewery (and one in Seattle) comes a rich medium amber ale with full carbonation. Hops and much malt are apparent and enduring on the palate. It lacks the herbal strength of the more famous Sierra Nevada Pale Ale but works well as a more dry alternative. It has some fruit-flavored elements for a short transition but they are minor to other tastes. Well made but not as exciting as some other amber ales. Pleasant. Bronze Medal in 1993 GABF in Classic English Pale Ale group.

Post Road Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

This well-made pale is rather hoppy and possesses that "flowery" flavor similar to the better known Sam Adams product. It is of exceptional quality and recommended for all your taste comparisons.



Riverside Pullman Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Riverside, California

This one the Silver Medal in the 1994 Great American Beer Festival for BRITISH ALE ALE - but remember again

Miller Lite has received GABF medals too. Color is medium golden-amber with a lasting ivory head of average size. Nice aroma of sweet hops. Flavor is overflowing with ale fruitiness and enough hop spicing to really thrill folks who've tasted hundreds of pale ales this year. Malting is moderate and secondary (or perhaps supporting) to the hops. It is far fruitier and semi-sweet than our American standard of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. We paid \$5.99 on sale (a cheerful bargain) but we'd pay as high as \$8.49 we've seen. One reviewer remarked on its 'expert delivery of rich flavor elements without being filling or assaulting your tastebuds...perfect balance'.

Rogue (Chatoe Rogue) First Growth OREgasmic Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

This latest (June 2010) "Grow the Revolution" label from the genius partners at Rogue logs in at 6% ABV with intensely hazy amber presentation below a strictly beige head of strong firmness and long duration. Rogue's Oregon-raised Revolution hops with RISK™ and DARE™ malts make something non-euro and non-traditional in name. The nose is odd, earthy, far from classic APA. First sip is dark, malty vegetable juice, not the bit of sharp hops to be found except in the last screams of the finish and these very enigmatic and reserved. I almost felt I was drinking malty celery juice at one or two early places. Another time I think I spasmed with basil-cantelope juice in my head. (That in the sane, scientific world would suggest spicy hops plus very aromatic fruit esters). Here is something flowing from basic veggie smoothness and as far from traditional APA as grape Koolaid from a much decorated Cal-Cab - though this favors the quality of the noble valley Cab. As sips develop and notes lay down, there is more hoppy fine layered on grapefruit, melon, the mild veggie themes getting stronger as the tasting grows. There are weak caramels and faint fig in the background, never as real as they could be, and always with hops shouting out the finish and overwhelming them as the sips grow to 10 or more.

My buds at the tasting party said "nice twist on the pale ale, more flavors to decipher than usual...good in a taste test challenge" and "this thing is all over the map and also off all known maps...Rogue does this three times a year...this is a puzzle...it's too bit crazy to rate it very high.". This micro-oddity is either an eccentric, flawed yet brilliant brew or a world-worthy one. I've settled at 4.5 until I can decide. Enigmas like this either prove to be fun or annoying when the year is done and the last bottle finished. Is this a trend-setting ale, perhaps the pioneering, standard-setting Oregon Pale Ale and thought masterful for the next two centuries? It might be far less if Rogue wanders or flounders and if these trademarked varieties are not widely available to many other breweries. OREgasmic is kinda like a velvet atomic bomb delivering lots of grain, hops, and malt flavors at the speed of light but yet you feel caressed for all the strong wind and noise. Perhaps their -gasmic suffix is the key to the knowledge here. Something that is mind-blowing to one partner is perhaps tepid, confusing, and non-terminal to another in the sweaty pile. For me it's an effective handjob from a pretty but ambiguous new friend who is a bit hard to classify.

Rowdy's Perfect Pale Ale (Water Street)

RATING: 4.0

Chicago, Illinois/Dubuque, Iowa

This microbrew is light-medium yellow with a deep, persistent near white head. Their Perfect Ale is decidedly more amber and this one has the black, white, and grey packaging. Flavor is overflowing with nice fresh American hops (or so we suspect) and some minor malt notes balance it out. For most reviewers it was moderate in strength but a few stoutheads felt it was too lightweight for them. Certainly a few lean flavor passages can creep in on occasion. It has only a hint of sweetness to charm the bitter vine and it finishes rather dry. But with so many good pale ales out there would most our tasters get again at given prices? Probably not. Yet it did have some strong advocates which is how beer reviewing should be.

Brewbase Fives



Royal Oak Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Dorchester, England

Eldridge, Pope, and Co. of Dorchester UK made one of the finest pales ales in the world. It is rich without being powerful but strong enough to be called a dark or dark amber. The enduring molasses-like taste is clearly British and wonderful. It should be compared to Old Peculier for a similar taste. At about \$3 per bottle it is not inexpensive. It is a true treat and one fitting the finest of meals. While not very common it is work of brewing art.

Samuel Adams Longshot American Pale Ale '96

RATING: 4.5

Cincinnati, Ohio

This is a copy of an award-winning brew out of 1680 entries in the World Homebrew Contest. Sponsored by Boston Beer, this APA category was won by James Simpson of Ridgewood NY. Original Gravity is 12.6 and some 31 Hopping Units were measured. Color is medium-light amber and very bright in a glass. The head is ivory, microfoamed, and lasting. The label correctly describes the main flavor elements as hops, fruit, and spice. If you like your pale ale with more of fruitiness of ale yeast this is a nice choice. It was a shade controversial in that some panelists felt it was too herbal or had a resin-like note - some hops do remind one of Christmas trees! The dry bitter finish is cleaner. As a FRUITY PALE ALE it is one of the best in this subclass. Highly praised by most.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Middleton's Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Cambridge, Maryland

This ale traces its roots to 1750 and Sam Middleton's brewery in Annapolis MD. It is now made in Cambridge MD. It is dark gold to pale amber and had a nice head for us. Flavor is initially light but it finishes more sweet and hoppy than expected. It is nothing like Sierra Nevada nor Anchor pale ales and must be judged on its own merits. It is quite aromatic and strikes an excellent balance in full flavor vs. drinkability. A worthwhile experience.

Saranac Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

F.X. Matt's Utica operation makes this nice PALE ALE in red amber beauty with a lasting foamy head and nice carbonation. Six malts are used with East Kent Goldings and Cascade hops for a rich hoppy bouquet. Finishes dry. The label makes a good point: 'distinctive yet drinkable'. While not as complex as Sierra Nevada's Pale this one goes down easier and is dry enough to leave the taste buds uncompromised for good dining. We paid a

comfortable \$6.00 on sale and it never has those microbrew prices in most stores.



Sierra Nevada Estate Brewer's Harvest™ Ale

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

As one of a few estate-bottled ales that uses hops and barley from their own farm, the SN brand has come to full maturation and sophistication as a brand. The lush produce of the Central Valley in California makes this 6.7% amber APA (American Pale Ale) a better thing than ever before; even compared to their stock label and recent Imperial or double IPA offerings. The hops are strong, not quite IPA strong but marginally close, and yet I think a neighboring farmer with a tank of grapefruit juice may have snuck in some of his best product. This stuff positively exudes grapefruit and other citrus flavors - so much so I'm writing Indian River to thank them for years of good product but that I will be drinking SN Estate for breakfast in the future. The hopping is never bitter but steady, quality, full-measured and undivided focus. Malt supports a tad but one cannot describe its traits other than as scaffolding for a great hops tower. The freshness of these hops is apparent and so is the skill with which they were utilized at every step. Make no mistake and get it clear - this is one of the finest APA's ever offered and if you like the grapefruit-hops side of things your heaven will be just a little sunnier.



Sierra Nevada Estate Homegrown Ale (Organic)

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

SN has gone all California on us. I saw these fat bottles at Total Wine drenched in three hives worth of green wax with a farm scene on the label, butterflies and hop vines a'floatin in symmetry. Then I saw a "wet hops ale" medallion, then much later the Sierra Nevada banner at the very bottom - a departure in art and position for them. The 6.7% brew pours with a vivaceous head of tan, a sparking tangerine-amber color known from other Chico masterpieces and a nose as hoppy-fruity as well....any great Sierra Nevada specialty ale. Their farm product which I believe is the reason for the new Estate nameplate uses homegrown barley and and free-range hops...actually the hops are kinda tied down and held hard like a veal calf...lousy joke. Grapefruit-hop notes and "layered spicy aroma" is claimed, the fomer a big part of their evil, unkind, earth-killing Brewer's Harvest product - just kidding again. The citrus is there, far less prominent than in the Brewer's Harvest, the hops surprising tame for SN but never weak nor wanting at any time. It's a hop-rich ale for sure but soothing, smooth, and no where near the IPA-potent zap that models their other specialty, up-market labels. You get spice and grapefruit and a malt support system but it's mellow and homemade, easy downing like grandma's chicken soup and mom's special cheesy mash potatoes. This is not a stereotype of their other offerings but a new, very good one to fill up the spectrum and take us to organic places. If you like things over-the-top and off-the-chain get the Brewer's Harvest. But if you wish to sip yourself into hoppy, responsible bliss...slowly...joyfully...here's a great pick.

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Northern Hemisphere Harvest Ale

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

As with their other Harvest Series releases, this very bright amber beer has a rocky, aromatic head made with wet, fresh Cascade and Centennial hops. They are shipped to the brewery the same day as harvested nearby. The flavors of this resinous, rich hops are wonderful and surprising never sharp nor sprucey. ABV is 6.5% with caramel and two-row pale malts rounding out the formula. I could easily give up their regular, "year round" pale ale if this stuff was available all the time and in suitable volume for friends and family. This is another superb winner, heaven on hoppy earth whether one likes hops strong or not. I'm about ready to declare fresh, wet hops to be the new standard in pale ales. There is no doubt the bar has been raised by a couple of feet and not all the jumpers are ready to hop, skip, and jump to these lofty heights.

Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

This handmade ale in those famous green packs from Chico CA is a no additive formula using the Kraeusening Process and top-fermenting yeast. It is complex and mysterious like a fine wine with transitional flavors and a very persistent aftertaste. Although called Pale it is really a cloudy amber beer and not as golden as some in this section. That means more malt folks! We think Sierra Nevada and Portland Lager may be the very TOP Americans. It is easily worth \$8 per six pack of bottles. We know of no other label that is more satisfying. For all it's fans around the world, the stuff is a bit dense with flavor for some times of the day or season. SNPA is to American ales is beyond being a legend; it's a standard by which all nation's pale ales are and should be judged. It set a new bar for quality, fascinating flavor, and refreshing briskness. It was the first super-hoppy beer I tried when I first got to love good beer. You never forget your first amazing, hoppy ale.

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Southern Hemisphere Harvest

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

Every time I spot a new, fancy-labeled SN product in a large bottle in my local shop, I nearly go into apoplectic fits and if I see just bottles I move fast and get possessive real quickly. The Harvest Series uses fresh hops and this one is named for their selection of Pacific Hallertau, Motueka, and Southern Cross - all from New Zealand. The fresh heads are packed quickly and flown to Chico for immediate use at the peak of aroma and flavor. The hops are flown! Like the earlier Estate Harvest label using CA product, this one screams quality from first sniff to last drop. It is amber gorgeous and large of head, a bit too much foam for my taste, however. I was expecting a punch like their strong pale ales or IPA-like products but here is something more elusive, neither thin or indistinct, but based on the character of the hops themselves. It is "alcoholic hops tea" in the very best sense of that concept. And it is a very clever concept, so obvious that few do it. One might think of it as architecturally deconstructive of beer itself - hops is key and bring that ingredient to a new level of dominance, clarity, and accessibility! Brilliant batch and delectable. Hops shine, hops rule, hops shine.

SLO Brickhouse Extra Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

New Ulm MN via SLO, CA

This is indeed EXTRA pale - barely different from pale yellow Pils. The head is big, near white, and lasting. Pleasant light scent of fruit. The aroma is a true indication of things to come. The flavor is mainly of fruity ale yeast with hops and malt being secondary themes well in the balanced background. Review- ers noted the 'sweet appeal of apple together with tart citrus...enough hops to please me but probably not everyone' and 'elegant fruit flavor with some hops bitterness...[I] would prefer a formula less pale and more complex'. As a FRUITY GOLDEN ALE is proved perfect for some of us and too tart for some others. It is certainly not to be compared to richer PALE ALES (Sierra Nevada to name our eternal standard). For what niche it fills there are not many better.

Brewbase Fives



Snake River Pale Ale

RATING: 5.0

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Jackson Hole WY Miracle of miracles! There is a beer that brags about 'pure mountain water' that doesn't taste like only pure mountain water! color is a cloudy golden amber on the mid to pale side. The head is lasting, deep, white, and made of fine foam. Flavor is your basic rich hops with more sweetness than say Sierra Nevada for example. For those who think the Sierra Nevada and maybe a few others are just too 'over the top' in hop overdosing, this is a nice alternative. It is rich and fully hopped but never excessively so. Reviewers noted 'perfect bal- ance on all flavor notes...truly one of the best pale ales around' and 'I prefer a little more maltiness but for a SWEET HOPS ALE there are few better.' This is highly recommended for any pale ale competition. Last

reviewed in Spring 1996.

Spanish Peaks Yellowstone Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

The Spanish Peaks 'Black Dog' line has at least 3 formulae - Ale, Yellowstone Pale Ale, and Sweetwater Wheat. All have such similar labels that one can visually 'merge' them and miss them. This one is golden lightly tinted amber with a lasting head. Flavor is richly hopped and more fruity than Sierra Nevada Pale or Adams Stock Ale for example. At first palate it is sweet and almost a hop-filled nectar. Pleasing but not complex enough.



St. Ambroise Pale Ale (Biere Blonde)

RATING: 5.0

Montreal Quebec

McAuslan of Montreal produces this wonderful pale ale ('bierre blonde' to Quebecites) in a light copper amber color. The head is large, rocky, and eternal. It is complex with bitter to herbal hop notes and a finish that is a touch sweet and fruity. The overall balance is very nice and so it should be for a \$10.00 sixpack or \$3-4 more than Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. The gold-colored box and that price tells one to expect a terrific beer and this time we were simply surprised. It is certainly one of Canada's finest beers in any classification and not easy to find in most US states. Michael Jackson described it as 'hoppy-fruity and tasty all the way through' and as usual he gets it right. Highly-recommended treat. A worldclass pale ale.

St. Stan's Whistle Stop Ale

RATING: 4.5

Modesto, California

This bright amber ale has a full, enduring head and cost us a full \$8.99 for the sixpack. Flavor is a balanced blend of ale fruitiness and abundant hops. As with some California ales this is subclassed as a FRUITY AMERICAN PALE ALE. Reviewers remarked 'very drinkable yet holding little back...lacks a certain nature of sophistication in the finish...could become perfect with some work.' Given the highish price (for our area at least) we would hope they do that extra step to improve things a bit.

Sweetwater 420 Extra Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Atlanta, Georgia

A lower-priced beer won the Silver at the World Beer Cup in this class but I found it only bearable and not very deep or thrilling. Perhaps I should have compared to something less noble than their IPA, which was flavorful and very pleasant.



Terrapin So Fresh, So Green, Green Fresh Hops Beer

RATING: 5.0

Athens, Georgia

Sierra Nevada is both on an organic and fresh hops kick and now Terrapin offers this golden-amber, 6.6% pale ale of remarkable complexity and general yumminess. Or is that yummy-ness? The head is large, off white, the nose straight from hoppy heaven - should your idea of God and heaven involve hops as mine surely does. The fresh hops flavors as with the SN products is remarkable and one wonders if modern transportation could not have pulled off long before now. Field to brewery. Brewery to tank. Not exactly rocket surgery. I find this iteration of the basic pale ale recipe to be slightly more minty than the SN products so far this November 2010. You get the same sweet spruce but this is a bit less bitter than the SN recipe too. I find nothing wrong with it and everything right about it. I really think the new benchmark in hoppy ales, IPA or Pale, will now shift to the fresh, wet style for the quality is vastly superior. It's the difference between the raisins and juicy plump grapes. If you grow fresh herbs in your garden or kitchen (I do both), you know the difference when making any sauce or herbed bread from jar stuff versus live stuff. Suppose we made wine from raisins. Here's the future and it's very yummy.

Thomas Creek Kind Beers Amber Ale

RATING: 4.5

Greenville, South Carolina

I found this stuff at Total Wines warehouse and looking all minimalist and languid with its simple earth-toned label with a cute fern peaking from a circular white window. 7.3% ABV. Well at these folks aren't trying to preserve livers! Thomas Creek Brewery does not preach on the bottle, filling every last space with some political, pseudo-scientific hype as I had expected. I misjudged them. And no web link. It was kindbeers.com of course and when you click on their pictures you get an email TO: fill and not much more. They are small and they don't want to preach. Cool. Let's let the beer preach. Color is rich amber and nose very hoppy. The stuff gives must more malt than expects and their balance is very, very solid, a well chosen position in that age old "hops:malt" balance decision. Here were are blessed with malty pale ale that is neither hops soup with ethanol nor a real malt ale that is weak and therefore more amber than brown. They have spicy hops (giving IPA flashes), very good fruit notes, succulent notes all around from many genera, and something must different from the usual microbrew "I got my recipe and ingredients on the internet" approach. If you've ever felt like a hoppy pale and also the comfort and joy of a brown ale, this is a good compromise. I'm not saying it's a hybrid of pale and brown but some people might with further consideration. I like their kind approach and will gladly go here again.

Thomas Hardy Newcastle Founders' Ale

RATING: 4.5

Burtonwood, United Kingdom

This dark golden ale, amberish-gold in pub corners, has a bright, deep, rumpled cream head. "To our Fivefathers", first seen in NC in late January 2012, is designed to honor their Newcastle star brewers with a nicely dry hoppy and aromatic ale. I wish regular Newcastle, offered year round, was this stellar and punchy-good in ultra-cold pints. The hops and malt flavors are exalted above many US micros and like driving a old E-type or Morgan you just feel the old Brit class that nearly defies definition and analysis. It exudes class and refinement in a way that leaves modern replicas and johnny-brew-lately recipe collectors feeling hollow and lifeless. It is not as thick-hoppy potent as Sierra Nevada Pale and the myriad of liquid Xeroxes therefrom, but in the original Old World Pale style it honors to old master well. Founders Ale will surely charm many a beer lover who thinks US micros are still missing some good flavor profiles and do not fully exploit the Old Country knowledge to full effect. Reviewers noted "holy hell..\$8.49 to \$8.99 a six...does it come with a commemorative plate?...solid in every way" and "Bright and full at the same time, light and rich at once...clearly a superior recipe from a really superior brewhouse".

Thornbridge Kipling South Pacific Style Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Bakewell, United Kingdom

Here's a pale ale that appears to require a degree from Oxford in art history and literature to understand. Let's do our best Google impression of having such a degree. Firstly, "south pacific pale ale" does not seem to

resonate with any experts or subject authorities (same thing) except when used by this brewery. Folks in the S.P. (sp_izzle) tend to buy watered down or occasionally stronger golden, Pilsoid lagers. As to Kipling I have always loved those little canned fishes but I don't get the connection..what?...oh, okay, nevermind...those are kippers...sorry...let's start on point #2. Kipling is known for writing on south pacific themes, maybe, in regard to his famous works *The Jungle Book* and *Captains Courageous*. The top of the main label here has the words "Innovation * Passion * Knowledge". Innovation equals an old south pacific style? Then there is a statue of some old Greek(?) goddess. Pretty sure it ain't Kipling as he had no curls and was generally mpore flat-chested. Pretty but no context I guess so very hard to figure this out. The rest is clearer and better news. This is what you get in a brew when you scale malts way down and accentuate the hops in all their glory. This is literally a golden ale, paler than male American pales and not nearly so hoppy as an ESB or IPA. The prominent hop which makes this lovely and wonderful is the Nelson Sauvin variety which supposedly emulates the white Sauvignon type grapes and in a strange way those chemical effects are true. Thornbridge is the first UK brewery to use this special, rare NZ hop variety. This is one of those new "single hop" treasures, faintly in the same theme as the single malt scotch. I am impressed, hoping strongly we get more on this style (Mikkell does some single hop ales well), and very happy to have this curious presentation which is better than it's curious, multi-themed presentation. Great stuff with some confusion.



Tolly Cobbold Suffolk Ale

RATING: 5.0

Ipswich, Suffolk, England

This amber colored ale has a lasting ivory and only under weak incandescent lamps did the announced 'rich ruby colour' appear. It's just plain amber in a strong light of any kind. Fruity hops flavor immediately strikes you and it is semi-sweet with no bitterness of note. It is nothing like any AMERICAN PALE ALE but if you 'real ale' tastes run to the sweet-fruit-filled side this will be a perfectly charming find. Label collectors may note the 'Suffolk Punch' horse is particularly well done artwork. Reviewers noted 'rich malty aroma becoming a feast of malt, licorice, apple, and citrus flavors of great dis- tinction' and 'superby fine ale...4.6% alcohol [by volume]...surely a must try for British ale fans...'. Highly recommended by all.

Tommyknocker Pick Axe Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

Here is a classic American Fruity Pale Ale (AFPA) which "dances on your tongue and titillates your palatte". I think that phrase is banned in 18 southern states - not sure. Sounds nasty and yet good. Why I picturing myself enjoying a tall class of this with Monica Lewinsky at the bar in the Watergate complex. It pours an appealing amber, a fat, long head in pale tan, and a nose that is more more fruit-estery than I would have dreamed. Where Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and the other classic hopi-centric ales emphasize potency and bitterness, this is on the fruity side with just a bit of sweetness. Many ale officienados think a fruity-sweet pale ale is not real ale, useful, worthy, or even likely of quality. The bitter-dry road is just one of the pale ale avenues and this passage is just as impressive, even if an easier less bumpy surface. I find it very pleasant, neither rapturous nor amazing, just very competent and honorable. After one bottle, the finish gets more nippy and that is from a combination of hops and bitter fruit notes. Here is a very tempting orchard and the hop vine is part of the farm.

Uinta Wyld Extra Pale Ale

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

We have a pour here the color of a Pils in fluid and head, the palest of the pale approaches. It is also Organic (certified by the Utah Dept. of Agriculture) and brewed with renewable energy. Flavors are subtle hops, quite

simply and mild in the finish, a tad sweet in the later notes in truth. It might have named it Myld instead of Wyld. While a notch or two thinner than the usual pale fan will want, it is not watered down nor shallow. If you pair it with strongly-flavored or spicy foods this just may be the hoppy-malt depth you require. As a pure sipping beere we will go elsewhere. Tasted again in June 2012, our rating is much the same though we do see a need for a thinner APA for some markets and food pairings. It just not our cup of hops tea.

Williamsburg American Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Williamsburg, Virginia

We guess the folks in Williamsburg have been doing more than powdering their wigs and skinning rabbits after work these days. This superb ale - not to be confused with the equally fine WilliamsVILLE Pale Ale - is a powerful, richly batched product of the highest quality. It is golden amber with a full ivory head of good duration and enough hops to knock you out of your hand-wrought cane chair. Yet it is not excessively spiked and in the dry finish there is a wonderful smoothness. A good dollop of sweet carmel malt flavor is added to round out the flavor. Two-row pale malt, American produced hops, and you gusted it - real American pale ale yeast - are used in generous but prudent amounts. And did we forget to mention it is also a hefe-pale ale with those lovely clouds of yeast in every big bottle. The only thing it lacks is one of those stunning southern belles on the label.



Williamsville CABO Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Fernandina Beach FL/Doswell VA

When the label says 'spot on' they are not just rehearsing the agency lines here. This is truly one of the finest SWEET MALTY PALE ALES in the microbrew- ing business. Color is brownish-amber (red amber under lower light) and the persistant head is of good size. One might even classify it as a BROWN ALE but it had more hops than most brews of that style. Still malt predominates the style - crystal malt to be exact. The label also describe it as 'less overwhelming' and that is true - but not at the expense of full, quality flavor. Reviewers noted 'malt lovers ecstasy...deep, interesting, but maybe just a tad too sweet' and 'crystal red malt delight...one of the more rewarding East Coast brews I've tried this year...top recommendation'

Young's Ramrod Pale Ale

RATING 4.0

This clear amber beer has a full foamy head and the most mild flavor of those tried in the Young's line. It is flavorful but finishes quite clean. Tasted head to head we thought Young's Winter Ale was much more rewarding as were most other amber PALE ALES. Some transitional bitterness was detected and at times the taste proved simple and short-lived. We feel that Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and Anchor Liberty Ale are easily better ales.

Ale - Red

The distinction between a red ale and an amber one is mostly in the shade of the fluid, this being more near to red and the other to orange and copper tones. Lots of stuff is reddish-amber to me or amberish-red to another person. Flavors can be very similar; some favoring hops but most quite malty. Some are balance hops:malt but

many are mostly malty sodas, soups, or earthy-grainy treats. They range from bone dry to a level of sweetness that would gag a honeybee. Still, many breweries offer reds and ambers separately. It's handy to separate out the labels this way.

Many of the cheap red ales (and everyone has one these days) are Sweet Red Ales made sugared up so the malt is malt soda. My preference is this group is the Fruity Red Ale which gives fruit esters up front and only malt in the dryer finish. Cherry notes work well with malt. Most of these creatures are creations in the Malt-forward Red Ale class where one is drinking a richly colored ale that is mid-sweet to dry, hops varying, with malt from start to finish on the trek. Blend a good golden ale to a porter and you get something like these better, stronger malty red ales - though sometimes I like my blends better than famous labels.

Brits are more apt to have a pale ale in gold and everything else is brown to them. Some reviewers merge them but I felt the self-termed description should be respected to this degree. There is a true red ale called Irish Red Ale which gains this color from loads of of roasted barley; often the crystal form of malt. Irish Red's are now traditional seasonals for St. Patrick's Day but some are offered all year. Flanders Red Ales are from Belgium and these are found in our Ale - Belgian - Brown, Red, or Amber category. It should be noted that some brewers artificially color their red ales to look pretty in a glass; the flavor so weak there's nothing red or brown in the plant parts to make the coloring real.

The Imperial Red Ale (and for this I recommend Rogue XS as your standard) is strong in everything, fierce and rewarding at the same time.

Abita Turbo Dog

RATING: 3.5

Louisiana

It won't blow your turbo and neither is it a dog. This Louisiana brew is a reddish-amber with ample carbonation and a variable head. It is only moderately flavored and immediately strikes you as being more sweet than hop-filled. If you like Coors Winterfest and other American sweet ambers this Bayou brew is sure to please. While it could be called a Soda-beer it is flavorful enough to please. We'd like a bit more turbo boost.

[Bierra] Amarcord Nero's Red Ale

RATING: 3.5

Apecchio, Italy

This dark amber ale is not technically red unless you're in dark beer with scarlet stained glass lamps and even then...These hardware-capped pints are 6.5% with a last mid-cream head and slight but large lace. The malt's are Old Worldie, medium strong, a bit thinner in some passages with a surprising dry, semi-bitter finish. It is very smooth, never rough nor raw, quite a polish approach really. I like it very cold, less so at warmer temps so grab it icy chilled and do it down quickly. I will probalby not try it again in bottle or draft form, the later being very unlikelyy in the US. As the saturation increases, the roasted malt develop some more fruit, vaguely banana and mixed tropicals.

Billy Goat Bock

RATING: 4.0

Portland OR/Baltimore MD/LaCross WI/San Antonio TX

This dark red amber beer arrives in 22 oz. bottles for around \$2.50 and originates in La Crosse WI, San Antonio, Portland, or Baltimore. It's a decent economy amber but little more. The label is of a cute billy goat raising high the hem of an even cuter young lady and has different effects on the sexes. It is made by Brewski and made a better effect on every last reviewer who tried them before. It has a touch more hops than malt and only a medium potency of either. We have consumed gallons of fest beers lately and so the restrained semi-sweetness was refreshing. This is no worldbeater but many of us felt 'there is hardly a better 22 ounce amber for under \$3.00...above that Rhinochasers comes to mind.' Outside mixed company most guys felt the label was non-sexist and a welcome trend!!! It's a decent economy amber but little more. Last tasted in 1995.

Bolten Alt

RATING: 4.5

Korschenbroich, Germany

How many breweries started in the year 1266 have marketing people sitting around at an 800 number in the US to get comments? Back in 1266 if they didn't like your beer most folks would just put your head on a pole and set fire to the town. We also suspect the neat package that hangs bottles by the caps in a cardboard frame is recent too. It actually works but the idea of dangling \$14 worth of bottles in front of 50 people at a checkout is most unnerving. Color is a rich red amber; the head is medium long. This oldest of Altbier makers is entitled to define the style. It is mostly malty but a refined hops finish also presents itself. 'Dry, balanced and satisfying' is a typical comment. Price and comparison to sugary sweet O-fest beers will influence some.

Brewski Bar Room Ale

RATING: 3.5

Portland OR/La Crosse WI/Baltimore MD/San Antonio TX

Described as a 'Premium AMERICAN BROWN ALE' this latest introduction carries a trademark (tm). Color is very bright red under light and only a big imagination sees any brown or amber. The head is mid-sized. We all preferred the Billy Goat Goat from Brewski to this Bar Room Ale - both are ambers. Most similar in our trial was Naked Aspen Brown Ale as both share sweet carmel malt quality. Reviewers we polled noted "delightful sweet CANDY BEER in the first taste but disappointing in a thinner final performance" and "barely enough malt under the syrupy palate to be tolerated...needs more hops to provide layers of flavo". We could classify it as AMERICAN OKTOBERFEST CARMEL ALE. The monotone honey theme needs true beer flavors to round it out.

Chicago's Legacy Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago Brewing Co. is making a revival of an 1800's 'heathful and exhilarating ale'. Color is a bright red amber with respectable head and lace. The hop-based aromatic character is intentional and separates it from your ordinary microbrewed red ale. Malt flavors slightly dominate the hops but the balance is refined. The finish is clean and dry but for us the overall complexity does suffer. This is surely a unique beer as we cannot find any (of 474 tested to date) that has the same palate transitions and aroma. It is satisfying and yet hard to describe. The aroma, dry finish, bright color, and drinkability at near room temp. make it a fine 'table beer'.

Coronado Mermaid's Red Premium Ale

RATING: 4.5

Coronado, California

The same orange-haired beauty (a real looker from the waist up anyhow...no, no...I said LOOKER) adorns this bottle as the others, IPA and Islander etc. It pours rich amber-red, the head bit too eager and easy to overpour for my taste, tinted in mid beige. It is said to be loaded to the gills (or whatever mermaids have under their ample lungs) with Cascade hops for "bittersweet" notes and a "chocolatey finish". I was highly sceptical of the last, given this was not a stout, brown, or porter but yes choco-malts do come into bud range. What leaped up from the deep was a curious vegetable...make that celery flavor that annoying early on but soothing as the malt kick in. It has a good hops character and this interweaves with the quality malts to make a very enjoyable, somewhat unique product. It is above many reds and where it impresses less than a few, it surely departs from regular models and formulae enough to satisfy one's "new beer curiosity factor". This is a must try if not rated to the highest level of brewing attainment. You haven't lived 'til you've had full taste of a red mermaid.

Dixie Crimson Voodoo Ale (Red Ale)

RATING: 4.5

New Orleans, Louisiana

This NOLA brewer dazzled us with their Blackened Voodoo Lager. This newer red ale is up to that standard. In truth we thought it outranked the St. Stan's Red Sky Ale which the respected Malt Advocate once voted as #1 in this class. This master work of brewing is indeed quite red and its pale and roasted malts show to nice effect. Actually these two red ales are very different with Red Sky being more hoppy/fruity and this distinctly a malt overdose. This is not to say all of you readers will believe the Voodoo magic but most of us did. Your own test panel is recommended as both are very excellent and unique products. If you don't like your amber ales to have much more malt than hops this could displease. To most folks it is a true joy.

Fish (Reel Ales) Starfish Imperial Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Olympia, Washington

The pour is reddish-amber with a yellowish-cream head of some foamy duration. The 7.5% formula has 63 IBUs and a delightful fruity-sweet nose tempered with good malt. The sips are indeed very fruit-malt, quite a yummy, fine product, delectable and charming, even more fruity with bud saturation and late in the finish. There is a slight carbonation nip that will please or detract depending on one's preference here. It is a tad imperial-overwhelming if you try to down it in a quick-session manner. Slow sips work best here as with most imperial-double products these days - although most imperial-double pils can be downed more quickly. Panelists here noted "just a superior product in every way...thorough enjoyment is assured except for the most, extreme non-malt fan...dreamy....I'm thrilled, bordering on stunned" and "easy the best imperial red I know...5 bottles with me...the fruity complexity is startling in good way...if heaven were made of malt (and perhaps it should be) this would be 7th heaven". While perfection is nigh, we felt a dose of extra malt complexity and more intense fruit would serve it well. Of course, wood-aging could get it higher and higher on everyone's list.

Fort Collins Retro Red Ale

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

The label features a "retro" red wagon on our youthful days - actually my dad's time - I had a red banana-seat bike from Sears with a giant 3-speed shifter instead. Anyhow, "This banshee of a red ale is a looker and a taster" with "assertive" hops and rich malt. "You will be transported in time when the griffin ruled". The brew pours rich amber-red, very dark for a red ale and with a huge beige head. The first sip is weakish and unfocused but a density of nice but moderate malt notes come to the foreground in seconds. The finish is dry and sometimes ragged if kept on the bar or table until a bit warm. It found it interesting but neither memorable nor special in any manner. Move on.

Goose Island Kilgubbin Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Chicago, Illinois

The next time you need your Kilgubbin goosed you can call 1-800-GOOSE-ME. Really. They'll send you a newsletter anyhow. You'll notice first that this has a very enthusiastic (make that dangerous) head. It fills a glass with the speed of a shaken German Weiss or bottle-fermented Belgian white. Color is bright copper amber but that qualifies as red by red ale standards. Flavor is a very tangy and biting hops with subtle malt notes added for balance. That nip in the dryish finish is just right for some folks - slightly disconcerting for others. All agree it is well made even if not always your idea of perfect ale. Review-ers noted the 'the bite almost gives the feel of stronger alcohol content...distinct and superior to your average sweet American red ale'.



Grant's Celtic Ale

RATING: 5.0

Yakima, Washington

AWARD: BEST CELTIC ALE 1994

This American masterpiece from Yakima WA is described on the artful label as "mild ale styled after the lighter brews of Ireland". Color is dark red amber. Head is long and foamy. Flavor is PURE HEAVEN from a sweet complexity of rare yeast and Cascade hops. The good news: 99 calories. The bad: \$9-10 a six. Bert Grant's claim of "one of the world's great ales" is true and that is why he should be at least as famous nationwide as

Adolf Coors and Jim Koch. This liquid Celtic candy was our top American amber ale up to 1994 and it's hard to overthrow it since. It will thrill and delight you.



Green Flash Hop Head Red Ale

RATING: 5.0

Vista, California

This 6% ABV brew is reddish-brown with a goodly head that is more than long. Steady and vigorous hops flavors infuse our experience and this dosing is restrained to near perfection. It's a fizzy, full-blown, never exorbitant hops delight that might replace Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and their similar concoctions in one's mind. Availability is of course a problem with that later thought but the quality warrants a preference for this label over a great many others in the red, amber, and pale ale classes. I am impressed and this month in testings I find myself rarely as stirred as on this occasion. This gratifying label should be better known and not just among hopophiles known for such hop preferences. Most beer lovers are all hopheads in the final analysis even if we like balance with malt, wheat grain, and yeast to offset some known extremes. It was not until I wrote the above about this delectable potion that I learned it had won the 2008 World Beer Cup for American-style Amber/Red Ale and the 2007 GABF Silver for the same category. Those are high marks indeed and I've yet to find a hophead or any beer lover who did not admire this label to lofty degrees.



Harvey's Christmas Ale (2008)

RATING: 5.0

Lewes, Sussex, England

The bright red and white St. Nick on the label gets your attention in any season. The 8.1% ABV will also grab you by the sack. It pours dark amberish-red, a big light brown head as a treat. First flavor notes are that of tart, half-citrusy malt. Sweetness fills various subsequent places to different degrees but the finish is more dry/smooth than I had expected. It is not too sweet for me but opinions vary in the review community. In the Winter Warmer Ale traditional the beer is ultra smooth in the mid to late notes, densing loaded with ample, comforting malts of the most nirvanic beauty. It's very rich for an ale but so smooth you never mind. Harvey's is one of the those old British brewers who skill from 1790 is shown not just on the label but inside as well. This Harvey's is not the one of Bristol Cream sherry fame which is John Harvey's Inc. but in the ale world this firm in Lewes has a similar strongly and ancient rep. I find this ale perfect, flawless, and in need of nothing but being consumed full and long on a cold night. This is one of those benchmark ales every new American micro house (or those from other lands as well) might well consult when trying to brew "big but smooth" for a seasonal theme. This is a liquid textbook.

Henry Weinhard's Boar's Head Red

RATING: 3.0

Portland, Oregon

Color is very bright amber and the head is quick. Carbonation is prolonged. Identified on the label as a 'red lager' this brew has some interesting malt and faint hop notes at first taste. Sadly it finishes thinly flavored and mild. The lack of deep lager or hops flavor is explained by the \$5.99 price. At that price something from Saranac is a better value. As their private reserve it is drinkable with rich meals and has classy packaging but on its own the flavor is sorely wanting. Given the tendency of brewers to hide a weak red brew with sugary sweetness this non-sweet red is worth some praise. It simply needs EITHER a hops punch OR a malty character.



Highland Cold Mountain Winter Ale

RATING: 5.0

Asheville, North Carolina

I remember when the Oscar-winning movie Cold Mountain came out, a Jude Law and Nicole Kidman romance centered around the Civil War in North Carolina and Virginia. It's still a fav of mine late at night or on a leisurely Sunday afternoon. Renee Zellweger (won Oscar for best-supporting actress), Natalie Portman, Kathy Baker, and Donald Sutherland add to the context and quality; great performances all. It was available on pay-per-view one night in my Richmond hotel and gave it a view. The battle that took place in Petersburg VA was only 20 minutes down the interstate from my hotel. Whoops...I'm a southerner now...it was just 'a piece up the road. The next morning I drove 20 minutes and learned about the battle from the displays and real, original earth mounds that are carefully preserved. Anyhow, Cold Mountain is a good name for a western NC beer because of the real place of that name in the Pisgah National Forest in Asheville. Curiously, the movie was not filmed there, supposedly because Romania had better, older, more majestic virgin forests to match the Cold Mountain novel by Charles Frazier. Odd how The Last of the Mohicans was filmed in the real Cold Mt. area and they had plenty of lovely woodlands, waterfalls, rocky outcrops, and stunning nature scenes; or could it just be that Romania has film crews willing to work for 12 cents a week?.

This very bright red beer has a very strong, lasting lace and a huge brownish head. The sumptuous, rather full flavor is comforting malt cubed. It begins a bit tart, very lightly hopped, and finishes with those warming barley flavors that capture one's heart and head. This wonderful brew is inspiring, consoling, and nourishing in all ways. It is soft enough, full enough, and refined enough to get another buy, especially in their larger seasonal bottles which went for \$10 in Winter 2008. I would never change this recipe and execution ever for any reason. I'm tempting to say this brew is as comforting and savory as sharing a bunk with Nicole Kidman on a Cold Mountain winter night - but some female around here might punch me.

Humboldt Red Nectar Ale

RATING: 4.5

Arcata, California

AWARD: BEST RED ALE SPRING 1996

Humboldt Brewing of the like-named county started in 1854 but was only re-vitalized in 1987. Their brewpub includes the "largest historical beer glass" collection and Oakland Raiders Superbowl memorabilia. This brew is well named. It's so orangey red you'd expect to be a raspberry something beer. In fact it's a SWEET WELL-HOPPED ALE with too much of either syrup or product of the vine. Almost everyone in our informed pool of tasters (100+ years of hepatic abuse among us) was enthusiastic about the hummingbird label art. The exciting color, generous but restrained hopping, and smooth sweetness made this an ideal RED ALE for most of our panalists - both experienced experts and newer eager hobbyists. At \$8.00 a sixpack it was a decent value. We highly recommend as one of the best microbrew red ales seen in some time.

Brewbase Fives



J.W. Lees Moonraker Award-Winning Strong Beer

RATING: 5.0

Manchester, England

First I find it curious they don't proclaim it as "Strong Ale", a term Manchester and most UK brewers wield like an medieval 30-pound sword. The announce it as dry and fruity so ale is a strong possibility, yes? Their website and beer review websites confirm it to be an ale - tastebuds can be confused with this much fruitiness. It's 7.5% ABV and that makes it strong in one sense at least. Their's is a curious website with no product descriptions but clickable headings called Recruitment, Vacancies, Tenancies, and "Our Pubs". No product reviews, hype, games, or where to buy our stuff links. Rather odd all that.

It pours in a color of garnet-amber, more a ruby-brown in fact, quite dark and somber, flavor being very sweet malt in the first three passages of flavor. The finish is slightly more dry than early notes but that's like saying the deck of a fishing vessel at full gale is drier than the bottom of the sea; hardly a useful point in general! It's a nice pick for those who like their malty things high in ethanol, very sweet and loaded with simple fruit notes. It could be made more complex. I am told by those who know fruits well there are raisins, figs, and dates among those zings which to me a merely generic fruit esters. Wait...wait now. If I drink it all day and enough of it, I'd bet every other fruit known to pomology would come to the fore. As someone with a Masters Degree in Horticulture and having gotten an "A" at Cornell in a surprising hard course called Fruit and Vegetable Types and Identification my first thought was pineapple. (For those of you laughing: why don't you try sitting down with a basket of Sharpie-numbered potatoes and name the precise cultivated variety on your exam paper from morphological memory. They take their potato ID very seriously in the Ivy League at Ithaca. Ditto for Pineapple.). As a regular consumer of figs - take that one off the list.

Killian's Irish Red

RATING 3.5

In the tradition of George Killian Lett of Enniscorthy Ireland (since 1864) we get a made-in-America amber Irish lager. One must read carefully to note that Coors is the US brewer of this superb product. It is ice tea colored but less rich than many amber beers. It has a quick fading head and a rather sweet flavor. Served very cold its flavor proves unique and with sophisticated substance. If you wish Coors made a more potent, darker beer - this is it. This stuff has stayed around for years, partially because of the name I am sure and partly because many of it's fan have never tasted anything better no care to go beyond the local grocery store. A sad story of success really.

Brewbase Fives



Lagunitas Lucky 13 Mondo Large Red Ale

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

Lagunitas is celebrating their 13th anniversary with a 76 IBU, 8.2%, dark amber beer with a nice beige head of long duration and medium depth. The "mondo" 22 oz. bottles were released on June 2009. I love their motto of "beer speaks...people mumble". I began to mumble after this one for the ABV sneaks up on you like a lucky horseshoe coming out the sky and clanking one on the noggin. This label is wonderfully complex, poetic with bright notes of many types, overloaded with fruit and hops and malt like a grand cornucopia for the ages! I was not expecting such rich citrus/floral depth from something not showing me yeast in the bottom. This is a truly outstanding, "raise the bar high", and lofty liquid proof that American microbrews can not only keep up but actually stun us. I've never been so sure of a 5 bottle rating as anywhere in this large record of reviews. I really don't know what the preoccupation of recent years with mono-dimensional double and imperial IPAs - especially when something of this quality with lavish fruit and malt infrastructure proves so much more interesting. SO MUCH MORE INTERESTING.

I know that every brewer thinks they need 21 named styles but some of the modern amber crap is just boring excess for it's own sake and because they can. Lucky 13 is contrary to the Excess is Better Theory for it's own sake - it is fruitful, fruity, elegance because that is what the brewing art should be and what informed, suds-minded consumers will always crave. There is more than horsepower (hops) in a car (beer) - there is also heated leather portage, interface, acceleration, and corner handling. Any idiot can dump six barrels of dried green buds into a tank anywhere on earth anytime. When copious hops, malt, and fruity yeast come into absolute harmony, we have performance of a credible nature. Lucky 13 is planned excellence, carefully crafted, nothing left to chance, and worthy of your dollars while it lasts.

Lakefront Fixed Gear American Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"It's red, it's bold, and it tastes damn good". That is rarely said of anything out of Milwaukee in liquid form. The brew is dark reddish-chestnut brown, a chestnut tone with extra red hues in it. The head is semi-long and a very rich cream color; no lace to speak of. A "fixed gear" is a type of bicycle with just one gear or "one speed" on the order of a track bike. The art of the label shows this off to good effect. Flavor notes are that of a tart, hoppy pale ale, definitely tending to IPA strength at times; the approach being very dry and bitter in the finish. Bold it is. It is so tart and hoppy the hopaholic will adore but it but the casual beer lover may not. It is not your 10-speed, jump on, get going immediately ale. You have to peddle all the time or you fall and there is no coasting here. There are other approaches to this sort of hoppy red ale which are less abrupt, tempered with sweet malts perhaps and a more diverse hopping. This is a fine product, fairly sophisticated in mid passages but the potent finish saturates one quickly and you need a bit of food to break up the boldness.

Mad River Jamaica Brand Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Blue Lake, California

This label is brewed for the annual Reggae Festival in Humboldt Co. and manages to get to the rest of us in small portions. Officially It pairs with Jamaican jerk chicken and pretty much anything else from a pot, pan, kettle, grill, or oven. This dark reddish-amber beer is 6.5% ABV (a tad embellished in that good way) with a persistent cream head. It is more moderately flavored than the color suggests, medium sweet hops drenched with more malt than the vinous thing. The balance at first sip is respectable. The finish tosses out endless monochromatic tawny rainbows of malt; some very good malts I suspect. There is enough spicy hops to give a nip - not an equilibrium so much as a workable peace treaty. I'd give it another notch of hops and layer the malts even more but I think they are close to a medal winner. The ale is very inviting, superficially simple perhaps, but there is more to be had with repeated sips and variable temp trials. There is a very strong, perfectable core to this concoction. They should explore it's upside unless it's about passing it off for the dumb and numb festival crowd who neither know about or care for great beer. I suspect they have higher motives and a brighter future will come from the recipe. But if it's a reggae festival I suspect hops is not the most popular bit of aromatic vegetation on their minds. One has to consider all the pairings...

McSorley's Irish Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Okay. It's an Irish style ale made in NYC, McSorleys est. 1854 on 7th Street. No? Okay. It's made in Wilkes-Barre, PA. Will it be Bangalore next week? Actually the master brewer is Lions Brewery. Confused yet? This "Ale is Well" label turns out to be a nicer product than I'd expected for the price and pitch. It's a nice amber-gold, technically an Irish Red Ale in fact, immediately loaded with what I like to call "butterscotch malt" flavors of the most divine quality. Yummy stuff! The hops is there but not until you've gotten comforted to death with smothering, warming malts of much character. It is sensibility sweet, never to excess, nicely balanced in all the notes from small to large. It also warms gracefully with some ease and has a nice bright style of carbonation.

Mendocino Red Tail Ale

RATING: 3.5

Hopland, California

What better name for a brewery town than Hopland, California? This pale amber classic among RED ALES is notably zesty with pale and carmel malts and moderate hopping. The finish is dry and crisp as claimed on the label. The reason some reviewers, with us and published elsewhere, fail to rate it highly is a sometimes thinnish finish. It reminded one reviewer here of "another near but off-the-mark Coors seasonal". At a \$7.99 price that is hard to understand. When you think of the top American microbrew ales we think Mendocino needs to stop relying on old laurels and boost the complexity and depth. Very well chilled it is quite refreshing for summer but most beer enthusiasts will find it wanting.

Mercury/Three Heads Clown Shoes Third Party Candidate Imperial Amber Ale

RATING: 4.0

Ipswich, Mass.

While called an Imperial Amber it is blended from 50% "Eagle Claw Fist" Imperial Amber and 50% "Loopy" Oatmeal Red Ale, favoring the reddish-brown or chestnut hues under a medium cream head of some duration. Amber plus red makes it red to me. Offered in November 2012 it was a timely release for the much heralded Obama-Romney Presidential battle and a good many other important ones around the nation. The ale honors Geoff Dale, "Man child, mother bird, Minister of Mayhem, future President of the United States". ABV is imperial rich at 10%. The flavors are zippy-strong and supremely brawny, favoring hops but more malty than two-thirds of the brews in this file. I always want my imperial ales to be fruit-loaded, turning up the hops fruit or yeast fruit notes to a good level. This does it fairly well at times but the dry hops finishes quickly curtails those middle notes. There is good substance here but refinement seems a bit lacking. Imperial ales can caress you like a velvet sledgehammer wrapped in bubble-wrap and some do this better than others. This one is on the medium-sophisticated side and is decidedly too bold to serve with most any foods unless very highly spiced. Imperial doubleness for it's own sake is often a double-edged sword and that is why some of the better ones need to be mellowed with wood-aging. This one would benefit from that approach in our humble, drenched opinion. This is a fascinating product, and Geoff is far from impeachable, but fine-tuning for that big brew debate on national TV would be nice.



Nutfield Auburn Ale (Irish Red)

RATING: 5.0

Derry, New Hampshire

AWARD: BEST RED ALE FROM THE USA 1996

This IRISH RED ALE uses no pasteurization nor preservatives in a quest to produce an authentic beer. It is a tribute to those who left Derry, Ireland in 1719 to settle in Derry, New Hampshire. The Nutfield Colony there gave rise to the microbrewery's modern name. Color is rich reddish-amber with a lasting ivory head. It has a wonderful tangy hops theme over a strong malt base. The finish is wonderfully dry and bitter. The head is very persistent in our tests. Reviewers described a "genuinely full-powered ale with quality of flavor and appearance...a shade too strong for me" and "one of the best RED ALES from an American brewery". Collectors of labels will want the lovely artwork with slick graphics. Recommended if you demand authentic rich ale that holds nothing back.

Old Devil Beer (Wychwood)

RATING: 4.5

Witney, Oxfordshire

Wychwood Brewery makes this reddish-amber ale with a very attractive but fierce devil on the label. His pitchfork actually stabs a bloody angel if you look close enough! The brew has a semi-persistent cream and a moderate dose of amber malts. Worcestershire hops are used to good effect in what is rather unique product. There is nice herbal hops notes, slightly fruitiness, and a skilled malting to round them out. Judged by any standard, this is a true British ale and while there are richer and more sophisticated this is one purchase few will regret. Besides the label is enough to reassure your mother-in-law you've gone totally to ruin.

Old Milwaukee Red

RATING: 2.5

Detroit, Michigan

The name 'Old Milwaukee Red' is the beer world's equivalent of a Yugo Twin Turbo GT - it's hard to believe a bland product could be made potent. In fact our skepticism was realized. The addition of "Drum Roasted Carmel Malt" was hardly noticed - so familiar this brewing word: words but no results. The color sure is red; and there is no real head. Ditto for flavor. One reviewer suggested it earn an award for "innovative brewing by adding color without changing flavor". Actually the flavor does appear to be minimally superior - a touch sweeter and with only the occasional hint of malt. Another suggested it "is neither a bad beer nor a good one...simply a red beer". By the way it is officially a lager but there is not enough flavor clues to call it ale or lager really. Just red. Just a beer.

Oregon Honey Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

This microbrew out of Portland uses natural Oregon wildflower honey to a base of ale made with dark roasted malts. Color is reddish-amber but not a cherry red as some red ales. The head is large and made of fine off-white foam. Carbonation is weak to moderate. Slight aroma. First taste is sweet with a nice hops and malt balance. The finish tends to favor the roasted malt side. Not a few of us noted that the sweetening is "clearly with honey and not the soda-corn syrup approach of many honey beers". Any tea drinker will tell you that honey imparts a far different flavor than white sucrose or fructose. The difference is clear here and we feel that makes this one a good standard for judging other honey beers. There is nothing to fault in flavor or character.



Orkney Red MacGregor Orcadian Ale

RATING: 5.0

Quoyloo, Scotland

Never seen an ale that recommended it be paired with "casseroles, pies, and smoked cheese". I guess that makes Pabst a companion for "Cheesy puffs, yesterday's 2 for \$5 large pizza left out all night, pretzels soft and greenish from being open an entire week, and your ex-girlfriend's curiously aromatic, furry Chinese food from the back of the fridge". This stuff has a remarkably classy and glossy label for a UK import - nice work to bring them up to domestic microbrew appeal. This "ruby ale" was "5000 years in the making" but is a shocking 4.0% ABV. They say the nose is "delicate, floral, and fruity with notes of VIOLETS, cherries, coffee, and caramel". Never heard of no violet-scented beer that goes down easy like with casseroles and pie! Wonder if that applies to pungent, crusty tuna casserole and 900 calorie pecan pie slices from down South he'are. This must be amazing nectar. As to the palate they proclaim "fruits", "juicy malt character", roasted and biscuit malt, and a "spicy hop finish". It has won things in casks but I must be a bottle reviewer and leave the other realm alone.

Now for the reality and my take: red means dark amber in the pour. Head is stiff, finely bubbled, dark ivory, lasting into the next millenium in an irregular dome with many subdomes. Nose is like biscuits from the best bakery in town at 5AM; if they rubbed some hop blossoms on 'em. The claimed "robust...but delicate" thing bothers me for I know of no car or beer with high horsepower but low torque in the green light rallies. They have the nippy, spicy hops finish down for this is nearly an ESB to my moderately informed, average, American beer-drinker tastebuds. To say the malts are sophisticated is like saying that Italian guy Enzo from Maranello made some acceptable, middling engines. I doubt any big American microbrew could copy this and I don't know why. It screams Scotland and the vast sensibility that permeates that land to the benefit of all of us in so many liquid, pourable forms. Yes - it is factually "robust but delicate" and I'd better not give an analogy on that point aside from some cute, anthropomorphic, Hippo ballerinas I saw on on the Disney Channel last week for reasons I don't recall. This is an ale so sensible, magical, absolutely astounding, and transcendant I better stop writing and open another.

Otro Mundo Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

San Carlos, Santa Fe, Argentina

An Argentinian beer is rare in our world let alone a red ale. It pours more amber than red (those real red ales based on color tending to be brownish-red) and the short cream head is of moderate duration. The nose is of nice fruit and malt. Having been around since 1884, Otro Mundo is no new kid on the block. ABV is 7.5% and the pretty red-foiled import bottles are quite modern and nice.

Their malts are very European, even German in their warm, brothy feeling but this adds nice fruit esters which are more apt to be found in the British ale. The amount of sweetness was a point of question among our reviewers and overall we thought it was a notch or two too sweet. Hops and bitterness being absent in the finish will not please many red ale fans but neither should one subvariant of red ale be considered false for going down a less bitter, hoppy road. "Sweetened to sell" said one panelist here "but the fruits are solid enough for 4 bottles". Re-trialed in January 2012, the rating stands, and additional comments include "alive with fruit...so much so you'll think it's part juice" and "nicely supportive malts for the mainly fruit-yeast theme but I want more malt". Their own label says "touch of malt" so this possible deficiency is both intended and real.

Pyramid Fall Seasonal Juggernaut Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Seattle, Washington/Berkeley, California/Portland, Oregon

"Life is what you pour into it". That makes me a hefe-weizen with breath accented with Belgian spices, I suppose. My past experiences with Pyramid vary but I've like their adventurous side in the old days - at times anyhow. This Godly nectar is dark amber-red, not as photogenic bright and pale as some shown in this section, the head forthy, irregular, and dirty ivory. Nose is of light cherry malt. First sip missed for the flavors crumbled and rose before I was ready, the finish nicely malty even if mid-quality. Sips two and three settled down to get some of those fruit notes that shouted cherry in the first sniff. Red ales ought to have fruit notes and this is one that does it very well. I would rather have fruit fading to malt than malt fading to yet more malt in a red ale - anyday, anytime, all week. If there is any criticism it's in the bitter hops which lingers too long by your second or third bottles. I would strive for fruit and malt and not round it out with hops just because you can, should, or might! There is quality here and good thought, solid ingredients, and a brewing process better than some of their stuff a decade ago. Nice product. Fruity Red Ale to be sure.

Red Mountain Red Ale

RATING: 3.0

This amber ale out of Birmingham is perhaps their most disappointing ale. Color is bright but pale amber with a lasting foamy head. While it has some immediate fruit notes and a trace of hop flavor it proves rather light and weak. It might be an AMBER LIGHT in fact. The label's claim of "robust flavor" is not correct by any stretch - and we tried 12 bottles at varying temps. It can't compare even closely with Miller Reserve Amber which is richly hopped.

Rockford Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Wilmington, Delaware

This microbrew is bright copper amber with a lasting head of off white. Flavor is very well hopped combined with a nice ale fruitiness and slight sweetness. This is the kind of ale fruit flavor so lacking in many American beers and certainly in most under the RED ALE name. At \$6.49 this was an exceptional value and rewarding experience most of us would repeat again and again. It is one of the best values in American microbrews as we found with their IPA. Reviewers noted "very complete product...nothing to fault" and "rich American hops, cherry, and slight citrus in full semi-sweet doses of the best quality we can describe". One of the better red ales from any land.

Rogue's Brewer's Festival Ale 1998

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

Like several of Rogue's superb ales this one appears to be a rerun or close analog of the previously issued Santa's Private Reserve. The ingredient list is similar and so is the color and recorded flavors. They both are billed as having a "sprucy finish" - a phrase one is hard placed to forget. Few breweries could get away with such relabeling perhaps but Maier is generally forgiving since they always come with a lovely new painted bottle. Besides the supply of the previously labeled batches are probably gone anyhow. This one is dedicated to a Renaissance in the South - among whose microbrewers this festival occurred. That is certainly a nice tribute since some of his best East Coast competitors were around. And few of them had anything to even come close!

Rogue XS Imperial Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

The Rogue XS line are just 7 ounces but you get a lot of everything fine in this style. It pours rather brown for a red ale but let's call it brownish-red or burgundy-leather and move on. The malts include Hugh Baird Crystal, Black, Munich, Chocolate, Great Western Harrington, Klages, and rolled oats - so they are clearly going with big, special ammo here. The hops are Willamette, Cascade, and Chinock, wrapped around their Rogue Pacman yeast. The head is big, rocky, and light cream in color. First sip was thinnish, bringing a frown. Then some bursts of dark fruit, very high quality but subtle hops, and spice came up. Next sip and a deeper one, more swirl. Same notes but stronger now, chewy as they warned us, and lingering in bitter hops and spice in the finish. More sips of course and more of these interesting malts which hold up the nippy hops and go at playful war with them. This is very hard to pin down product and Rogue is famous for that kind of measured experimentation. It is an ideal beer tasting club subject for no one will say the same thing. In the final analysis, I found it fascinating but a bit wanting on the fun meter; perhaps a touch too medicinal and hoppy for me though the malt recipe is shockingly good and rare.

Brewbase Fives



Rogue's Red Fox Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

These 12 oz. bottles are mostly labeled in Japanese and show a map tracing the route from Newport to Hokkaido. It is certainly a decent idea to send over the West Coast's Lexus of beers. It is a cloudy amber-red with a yellowish-ivory head. The hop aroma is remarkable. The flavor is even more impressive and no doubt these small bottles could command a very high price if so desired. There is quite simply no American red ale that would be any better. This is surely a nice bottle for collectors of that container but many of us will stick with the VERY LARGE bottles to satisfy our cravings. A very sound product made with principals and class.

Rogue's St. Rogue Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing Co. makes this reddish amber ale with a head more bubbly (and less foamy) than the Ashland Amber Ale. They describe the finish as "hoppy sprucy". It has more of a spicy bite than the either the Mogul or Ashland Amber. The finish is not as smooth and that 'sprucy' aftertaste persists for some time. In that respect it is not compatible with most meals. As ales go this is unique and is surely worth the tiny \$4.00 price.

Brewbase Fives



Rubens Red (Rouge)

RATING: 5.0

Corsendonk

Yes, yes, perhaps this should be in our Belgian dark group but functionally it's more like a strong red ale of the US variety. Having tried the Gold or Oro version this more flavorful brew came as a surprise indeed. Color is cloudy amber with carbonation but little head. Flavor is distinctly apricot fruity with what they call a "pleasant spicy aroma". It is more fruitful aromatic than spicy to us. It is almost a nectar beer and we created a similar effect with vodka and apricot nectar. For \$1.75 a bottle (or in four packs) it was a fine deal and a wonderful summer treat. This is no wine cooler - it is real brewing accomplishment.

Brewbase Fives



Ruedrich's Red Seal Ale

RATING: 5.0

AWARD: BEST FRUITY ALE 1993

This fine ale comes from North Coast of Mendocino Co. Color is medium amber and the head is semi-enduring. Red Seal is decidedly sweeter (less acidic) and more fruity in flavor than a Belgian red. It has the kind of charm that will turn a wine lover into a lover of great beer. It is far more alive and fruity than their Christmas Ale but both are very worthwhile. It is one of the most smooth and drinkable ales from the US. It is very close to being a legend and perhaps I'll go with that award in coming months.

Samuel Adams Irish Red (Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

The style is based on one they say developed in Ireland about 1710 and uses rich caramel and pale maltings to give it flavor and sweetness. East Kent Goldings hops add some earthy, resourceful notes. The color is a bright reddish-amber that will make a tumbler from the dollar store look like Waterford. The head is large, lasting, and a dark cream. Jim Koch recommends it with pork chops and I recommend it for making a rich, reduced glaze for said chopped porcine medallions. First sip approaches easily but it soon turns very tart, perhaps a minor flaw, then you are drenched with caramel sugars and finally malt foundations in the moderate to strong range for ales of this color. There are more robust, ornate, and imposing red ales available and several are reviewed in this section. This product is available with some regularity of late and for a price that shouts value and consistently all over town. I found a couple of rough, uneven notes in some finishes (not most) and think it might best be served a few degrees below Frigidaire-ville so those malts are more expressed and not chilled to silence. I would love to have more fruit dialed up but they could have and decided not to. Many of these of these mass-produced SA labels are very satisfactory without exploding one's socks, tastebuds, brains, or other wowable features to fanciful places. These are a solid run, a very long run now, of good solid ales, not always worldbeaters nor Maybachs on Rodeo Drive, but good enjoyable, consistently fine products. Dinner with friends is a perfect time to ask for their full SA line and keep them coming cold and tall. Beer tasting with well-informed, brew-savvy lads and lasses at a higher level will require something more top shelf and higher grade. Here is a daily utility red ale and not your special nor noble sipping stuff. It's a worthy ale when it's more about the conversation than the brew in everyone's hand.

Saranac Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

The Irish flag and giant green shamrock on the label together with it's February 2009 release suggest this is a St. Patty's day treat. It pours dark reddish-amber, some lace, and a shortish cream head. It's perhaps a 4 on the dry:sweet scale of 10, far more dry than I'd expected from Saranac. It is tart overall, nice toffee notes, these always more tart than sugary, and yet in some places a hint of the Scotch ale flavorings. Scotch-Irish Ale? If tain't Irish...it's crap! (with apologies to SNL). I think of this label more as a crystal malt tea at times, not as ale-like as it might be in terms of supporting hops and fruit flavors. It's a tad ragged warmed to near room temp so serve it chilled and drink it promptly. This is a good value (\$6.99 per six in 2009) and I respect it as such but if you want a treat and can pick just one...pick from the 's described here.

Scuttlebutt 10° Below Ale

RATING: 3.5

Everett, Washington

This ale has no monologue, biography of the three bearded founders, or treatise on some new organic variety of hop. This is just a bottle, a polar bear label, address, and the usual government stuff. Pouring it is much more impressive, showing a rich cherry red color hued with bits of amber under strong LED lamp. Head is solid cream, thinnish, but the lace is long and cheerful. It is moderately fruity, not impressive at first or second sip, but it creeps up on you with a malty base that increases with time. It is average quality for a micro, priced like a value bomber, and not so impressive as another cap for lifelong total. Malt is pleasant but the fruit ale quality needs to be turned up two or more notches on the dial.

Smoky Mountain India Red Ale

RATING: 4.5

Waynesville, North Carolina

The brewery in Waynesville NC has done work as fine or better than any of Virginia's finest breweries. This cloudy (!) amber is overflowing in flavor but it not so potent as expected. The hops and malt balance is nigh perfect and finishes in a delightful smoothness. It is most distinct from Rhino Chasers and Red Mountain Red Ale with which it was tested. It is flavorful and truly enjoyable without calling attention to any one component.



St. Andrew's Ale

RATING: 5.0

Dunbar Scotland

The folks at Belhaven of Dunbar Scotland also make Belhaven Scottish Ale and MacAndrew's but we could not find either of those to compare to it. The slick foiled bottle with its nicely painted castle ruin is most appealing. We liked \$3.00 price for a full 18 ounces. The color is reddish amber but is more dark than bright. The head is very large and foamy and lasts for a few millenia - although could not wait more than 2 minutes to guzzle down the last drop. Real aroma is clear and unlike most British ales it has the potent thrust of Scottish brew - Old Peculiar being one exception. There is no medicinal or funny bitterness that we reviewers tolerate as 'necessary character'. Instead it is forceful yet polished; an enthusiast's evening sipping beer.

St. Stan's Red Sky Ale

RATING: 4.5

Modesto, California

St. Stan's was started around 1973 when Garith Helm and Romy Angle became impressed with German beers on a trip to that land. They produce two Alt styles (Amber and Dark) plus this Red (more British). Color is bright red amber with a small but lasting head and abundant carbonation. It is rich with hops but not nearly as rich as premium Pale Ales like Sierra Nevada. Nor is quite as fruity like other CA micros such as North Coast or Anderson. Malt Advocate rated it their #1 Red Ale and the Wine Enthusiast said it was #2 worldwide. For us it was very excellent but red amber ales out of North Coast and Rogue are more complex and rewarding in the long run. At some drinking temperatures there were 'unkempt flavors' and vague bitterness.



Terrapin Big Hoppy Monster Imperial Red Ale

RATING: 5.0

Frederick, Maryland

I'm worried about a brewing nomenclature arms race with the word "imperial" the equivalent of "MIV" or "neutron emission capable" or "stealth-cruise ready". The rich hopping is said to be compliment by a "massive malt backbone". This monster pours in a rich brownish-ruby shade that stands up to strong light very nicely. The large beige head is mountainous and lasting. Hops dominates in a sub-IPA way with malt quickly coming to the midground and rounding it out very well. It is a strong beer but not a cloying, honey-drenched, or overwhelming one; and such is usually the sign of great brewmasters who know their process and ingredients to a high level of skill. I give it the perfect because it is hardy, husky, hoppy, and yet balanced with quality malt and silk. The steady flow of flavors leaves nothing in the unused barrel and yet the high doses are modulated, layered, and developed in a very luxurious way. Here is a velvet hammer to full advantage to all parties, strength without bluntness, benevolent might, and satisfaction to the hilt. The Big Hoppy Monster caresses you with surprising kindness and light tenderness; King Kong and Fay Wray on the good days. We're captives here and happy for it. This is one of my favorite American red ales in recent years (12/2008).

Thomas Creek Bottle Tree Imperial Red Ale

RATING: 4.0

Greenville, South Carolina (for Bottle Tree of Tryon, North Carolina)

The "Drink No Evil" slogan is cute and we hope the brew does it justice. It's imperial nature is initially heralded by the more potent 7.5% ABV scoring. The color is spot on for it is more red than amber. The head is medium beige to light tan, lasting well, very finely foamed. The nose is of very faint malts, not impressive. First sip is pleasantly tart following by a 797 Caterpillar full of Old World sweetish malts - that would be that giant yellow dump truck with 30 ft. high tires favored by open pit mines. This stuff is delightful rich in the three aspects of sweetness, malt, and ethanol but hardly a unique formula even though better executed than some other places. A small glass is frankly enough without food and in that respect it fails as a stand-alone red sipper. With a crazy, fancy, complex meal all this sweetness may be more welcome. But we judges brew unpaired and that is really the only way to be clear and fair. One cannot rate a red ale if it is only perfect with a particular cheese from left side of a particular French alp with milk harvested with only mottled 3-year goats between May 5th and April 30th. That would be fun but not so workable really. There is quality here but also the annoyance of too much sweetness.

Weeping Radish Spring Bock

RATING: 4.5

Manteo NC/Durham NC

Weeping Radish of both Manteo and Durham NC issued this Spring Bock in early April 1995. It is more allied to red ales than a true dark German bock in my opinion. Color is amber red with a short duration head and no lace. The flavor is most impressive with abundant tart hops coming quickly to play and a semi-sweet malty finish soon thereafter. While we found their specialty Fest Beer to be wanting and a touch thin this Spring Bock is uncompromisingly fully loaded and tasty. The \$3.39 price we paid for 22 ounces is a solid value with many other rich ambers being \$1.00 higher. If one is more fond of a malty amber the "abrupt tangy hops" (one reviewer's comment) may not be ideal. Otherwise the majority of us found it quite ideal and a nice treat. The color photo label with 2 blondes, a ram and a big clock is unique.

ALE - SCOTTISH (SCOTCH)

As many of you know, Scotch is a drink and Scottish is a adjective about something from Scotland. Thus we should have Scottish Ale, Scottish pines, and Scottish Shortbread. The media and many companies are happy in their errors and by now it is more than wee bit traditional.

We think this style came from Edinburgh in the 1800's and is based on pale ales in general. The strongest Scotch Ales are called Wee Heavy Ales and these tend to have a darker color, higher alcohol, and more of all the flavors. An extreme Wee Heavy or Scottish is often called a Barleywine with very extreme flavors and the highest ABV levels. Everything in this category tends to have carmelized rich malt flavors, sometimes rich molasses, toffee and medicinal flavors, the later in a good sense. There is much less hops and chocolate malt than some other ales; well, sometimes. There are also Whiskey Ales related to this group where the malt are dried by peat flames and have a bit of that flavor - not to be confused with ales fermented in whiskey barrels. Not everything with the Scotch Ale label will be traditional or true to the style.

The Imperial Scottish Ale is stronger in ABV and richer in the sticky ingredients, very drenched in molasses but hopefully not too herbal or mediciney. It is essentially a nippy, super carmelized, molasses-drenched barleywine as some people would group them. The Imperial Scottish Ale with Rye perfected by Hoppin' Frog Outta Kilter is a very nice divergence and one I hope to get more of.



Belhaven Scottish Ale

RATING: 5.0

Dunbar, Scotland

The wonderfully painted label tells us of monastic traditions before their 1719 founding and that naturalist John Muir was born in their small harbour- town of Dunbar. The head is long-lived and the color a dark clear amber. It begs comparison to more widely distributed and equally authentic McEwans Scottish Ale. Both had a spicy, nearly medicinal flavor that is unique and refined. We felt Belhaven was smoother-creamier but with a shorter finish. I have found it one of the best ales in this class since the 90's though I like to try anything new.

Caledonian Golden Pale Ale

RATING: 4.5

Edinburgh, Scotland

From the Edinburgh makers of famous MacAndrews Scottish Ale and the also organic Golden Promise Ale is this new package. We could not find a bottle of Golden Promise to compare and see if they're similar. Color is dark golden tinged pale amber. The head is near white, micro-foamed, and lasting. It certainly has the quality of their other labels. Kent hops and organic Scottish barley are used. Though the big print says PALE ALE the fine print and our taste buds scream SCOTTISH ALE. That aroma, tangy herbalness, and candy-like malt are in full presentation. Reviewers noted 'rich and rewarding...every ingredient brought out to perfection' and 'good SCOTTISH type ALE...MacAndrews is richer overall and still my choice'. Recommended for your taste testing sessions.

Founder's Dirty Bastard Scotch Style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Grand Rapids, Michigan

I was amazing when this stuff poured a dark brownish-amber and produced an enthusiastic light brown head too. The aroma is tangy malt. It starts nicely tart, then into sweetish molasses-malt, not as full as I'd hoped and surprising fruity in the finish. One also gets hints of smoke, bread, nutty malts, and perhaps even some rye. The finish gets more bitter-hoppy as the glass empties. Before I forget, kudos for their artistic labels with everything so superbly done and with much class. The drawings, the choice of colors and shadows, the lovely Scottish plaid here, are remarkable. In other words, pay your graphics artist whatever she or he demands guys because you have a very fine one. It was more fruity-sweet than molasses-medicinal that I've come to love in the style. In this respect it might be more of an "old ale" or "wee heavy" than a general Scottish ale. They might even have passed it off as a barleywine and it's lack of molasses and medicinal flavors makes me feel it's either mis-classified or a real deviation from the "breed standard". They do go out of their way to excel, using ten varieties of imported malt. It clocks in at 8.5% ABV and 50 IBU. It is not perhaps cold or icy but needs to be warmer in my opinion, having tried it at various ranges. It warms and welcomes as it gets less chilly. I like it's class, smoothness, and supportive notes but found it lacking in plaid firepower. The ABV is mostly hard to detect but it comes up bolder after 20 sips and finishes and you get a vodka-ladden tap from time to time; though never early and not often. I checked some online reviews of experts I respect and several said it was smoother than expected for the style - my thoughts exactly. Maybe it's just an "Old Ale Scottish Heavy Hoppy Barleywine", a new hybrid, and just exactly what they wanted it to be. "As is" it's a 4.5 but I held it to rigid, ancient standard it would rate lower.

French Broad Wee-Heavy-er Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

"Wee Heavy" is the traditional Scottish name for a stronger ale over in that land and this North Carolina copy shows a kilted lad carrying the world on his back. As a local beer, I tried the 22oz. on sale at Whole Foods of Raleigh for a stunning \$4.99. It's 7% ABV and 24 IBU, pouring dark brownish-amber, the head cream and finely textured. Malt, faintly sweet hits the nose. The first sip is delicious caramel, a bit more heavy molasses later, a few thin moments on occasion, but the whole finish a syrup-drenched fanfare of much quality. It tastes more smoked and resinously-hopped as the mouth is saturated. The malts are good but often subtle, even if warmed to what I think is an optimum temp for brews of this color and style. The malts favor earthy styles with traditional, firm molasses and "stiff medicine" (as I call it) flashing only on occasion. It is more toasted, nutty in some sips, losing the style for a moment perhaps. It's pleasant, somewhat representative of the style (drifting to more earthy-nutty malt zones at times), and very smooth all around. To claim the higher, wee heavy badge this stuff should have had more molasses or toffee punch, and come to the table without the occasional thin and nutty note.



Grant's Scottish Ale

RATING: 5.0

Bert Grant's liquid art could be considered the best ale from American soil. His label has all the boldness of Rush Limbaugh - its the best because I like it, I said it, and I know what's best. Ditto Bert. This bright amber has a smaller head than Celtic Ale but is nearly as sweet. It has a rich hoppy complexity but not the herbal medicine flavor of MacAndrew's or Belhaven. It is far more drinkable and sugary. Worldclass reward for deserving tastebuds. This is probably the first of the American Scottish Ales on par with Europe's finest.

Harpoon Steve Stewart's Firth of Forth Ale (100 Barrel Series)

RATING: 4.0

Boston, MA

The great house of the Harpoon are making limited supply ales of special quality, many of them with specific Session number. This is Session 22. This one is just 5.4% ABV employs Scottish malts and American hops. A young Scottish brewer named Steve Stewart in 1998 came to Boston as part of an intern program, earned honors, and later returned to his nature land to open a microbrewery. Harpoon invited him back as a Guest Brewer to create their 100 Barrel Series, combining the best of the two land's ingredients and styles. Color is dark brownish-amber, favoring a brown ale in bar light. Lace is limited but the head a rich tan. You immediately get the nip of a Scotch Ale, a refined tartness, the expected carmel coating of the tonque, and very clean never strong malt and hops throughout the presentation. It is a quality beer, not a overdose in any one thing, competent and very drinkable in quantity. It's a very fine brew but I'd turn it up a notch in flavor...one notch and no more.



Hoppin' Frog Outta Kilter Wee Heavy Scotch-style Red Ale

RATING: 5.0

Akron, Ohio

This very heavy brew a kilt lifting...make that kilt tearing off and running nude down the street 8.2% ethanol. 86 OG and 23 IBU come to the naked plaid party. It pours a goodly bright amber, tinged with some red, head rugged, small, and lasting in beige. Nose special with sweet malts and real fresh ryebread. Caramelized and toasty malts are added with a bit of rye malt for the nose I just got. First sip gives the nip of a fine, Old World Scottish ale but where some labels give you only molasses and bitter medicine, we get sweet, densely layered caramel and deep, warming ryebread in this version. It is rich and sticky enough to deserve the name - no doubt. One gets a strap or two of the molasses whip here but with the extra ABV and rye, they take the style to a level worthy of this price range and what microbreweries are marketing as TRADITION PLUS - real genuine styles and flavors with extra options - in this case the ethanol and alternative grain.

I give this high marks for a sweet finish that is pleasing without being sickly and crude. As with more TRADITION PLUS micros this one has balance and sensibly judged recipe tweaks to impress even the most jaded brew fan. This is a brave new place for the Scottish Ale - Americanized yes - authentic and remarkable - yes twelve times. More to the core, to essence and why we give it two awards is this beer takes an old style new places, very very lofty places, and advances the industry beyond any doubt. The kilt is off and the fun begins down the wild rambling road. I'd do the nude running thing for an oak-aged 10% ABV version of this but this bottle is glory and zing enough for today. One reviewer here is very vocal that the Scottish Ale is not strictly improved here but merely spun into an alternative offering, twisted a couple of degrees, brilliantly so in fact, and more properly called a "style divergence". Style divergence? I would like to say it is perhaps a new sub-style Imperial Scottish Ale with Rye.

Loch Ness Scotch Brand Ale

RATING: 3.0

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Made by Brasserie Le Cheval Blanc (White Horse Brewery) since 1987 this bottle-fermented Scotch Ale is medium amber with a dense, fine-textured head. First flavor notes of characteristic of the style but it seems to fade

somewhat to a moderate potency. Many of our experienced Scotch ale lovers were disappointed and worse. One wrote 'I think the flavor is the only lurking mystery here'. Another 'certainly a noble effort but far too thin and offbeat to be tried again'. On the counterpoint one said 'a more approachable version of the style...it's not like medicine'. A few could not finish their samples due to 'weak yet offending notes'. This is a hard one to judge but the majority here kept the rating rather low.



MacAndrew's Scotch Ale

RATING: 5.0

Edinburgh, Scotland

The Caledonian Brewery of Edinburgh sends over wonderful 17 oz. bottles that retail for a mere \$4.00 or so. Color is bright amber and head is thin. The carbonation is overwhelming. Flavor is potent with that same medicinal-herbal palate as McEwan's Export and Belhaven Scottish Ale. We'd give a slight nod to Belhaven as being smoother but this is equally flavorful. In the Southeast the McEwan's is MUCH easier to find in shops. Lovely collectible bottle. This is one of the top standards worldwide for the style.

Ommegang Cup O Kyndnes Traditional Belgian-Style Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cooperstown, New York

Parsing the name I see the word "traditional" just before the phrase "Belgian-style Scotch Ale", followed yet again by "Ale Brewed with Spices (Heather)". Say what? This all is analogous to saying "traditional Pakistani-style Brie flavored with curry". The big corked bottles run you \$12 buck or more (December 2010), pour bright amber with an annoyingly persistent, massive head. I can't wait as long as this thing needs to settle down. ABV is 6.6%. Flavor is not impressive at first or at last really. It has a bit of a Scotchie nip but far less pronounced or quality than the better microbrew copies from the US. The heather adds something a tad rough, wild, and herbal but not impressive other than the ancient association of that plant with Scotland. It is a bit interesting and only a bit so, not great nor memorable by my final analysis.

Orkney Skull Splitter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Orkney, Scotland

The name made me grab, seeking a fourth bottle on one quick trip to Total Wine. So many modern beers are all about crazy, insane creatures of our species and many others. Guess image still sells the suds. Around 1000 AD, the 7th Earl of Orkney was a noted Viking or someone generally along that line. He was named Thorfinn Hausakluif, the "Skullsplitter" - kinda looks like a cut-throat sales exec I know for work. Curiously, the armed warrior on the label is carrying a spear - wouldn't an axe split more skulls and fit the theme better? It pours a

very dark amber, favoring a brown ale in a dark setting. The tall head is light tan, lasting long. Flavor is rather sweet, less herbal/medicinal than many of the style (hence more "accessible"), the 8.5% ABV only apparent after several sips. There are fruit esters in moderation and I found raisin the easiest one to name. It is more of a "wee heavy" by expert opinions (and those arguments will last until 3AM) and surely one rarely sees a Scottish Ale this full of caramel in the finish. One friend suggested he might cook with it, making a nice glaze or beer-amended something - this much flavor and sweetness usually makes for a fine recipe beer. It will offend the soul who likes a Scottish Ale strong, dry, and bitter. One gets nice caramel of immense strength and dominance, hominy/corn, and something that has been described as "dangerous drinkability" - so satiny, sleek, sweet, and easy-going-down it lets the 8.5 hit you like...well...a Viking axe. This fine label won Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain in 2001 (CAMRA) and that is a very competitive race.

Pike Kilt Lifter Scotch Style Ruby Ale

RATING: 4.0

Seattle, Washington

While terms "ruby" it is ordinary amber and not as red as some ales of true rouge tint will always pour. ABV is 6.5% and these Pike bombers always go for affordable prices, delighting or not with little risk. First sip is harmless, genetic but good red ale, soon finishing a bit nippy with hints of hop-filled molasses in something like the style in some places. The more you consume, the stronger the zippy caramel gets and one even finds a bit of smoke in the notes too. It is respectable, interesting, and a superb value in a style that is not as widely tried in the micro world as it might be. It is a nice change of pace beer in the mid-price market though is no style standard by any means. It is a welcome addition to the market at this price point.

Pinehurst Village Double Eagle Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.5

Aberdeen, North Carolina

The nice greyed blue-green label with an asymmetrical torn-parchment style is quite appealing. Golf fans will also want to collect this cap. You would expect an authentic Scotch Ale from Aberdeen (North Carolina or otherwise) and they do not disappoint. 100-year old yeast, oatmeal, 4 malts, barley, and 3 different hops are used and it shows. Those rich toffee and chocolate tones are there but the 'undertones of berry jam...cedar...whiskey-like aroma' may not appear unless you drink a case. It is fairly smoky as well and perhaps too roasted for a few ale lovers among our gang. Not even those who preferred it leaning a different way declined to give it a perfect score. It is easily a match for Grant's version of the same style. We'd recommend you compare them too.

Rikenjaks Old Hardhead Scottish Ale

RATING: 4.5

Jackson, Louisiana

The label is plaid with a bright woodpecker. That same label also lists a precise starting and finishing gravity to three decimal places. Is that nice or what? It is made in Jackson which is just 30 minutes from Baton Rouge. Color is brownish amber tinged red under strong light. The head is large, long-lived, and beige. It is rich and malty and broadly suggests the Scottish Style but is not so strongly herbal-medicinal as the real thing. That is not so bad as it is very drinkable and probably more appealing if one intends to consume mass quantities. A sweet candy-caramel finish is provided. Goldings hops are used for a finish effect. One reviewer noted 'very good quality if a little weaker than some SCOTS...wonderful treat if you favor a well made sweet malty beverage'.

Samuel Adams Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Massachusetts

Adam's latest ale is made from peat-smoked and roasted malt in what the label called 'Triple Malt'. Color is dark amber with a moderate length head. The 'smoky undertones' are admittedly 'an acquired taste' as James Koch says but the strong character of a native product seems missing. As a nice deep amber malty ale this is very enjoyable - as a Scotch Ale it is not yet to our best standards. Among US brewers the SA from Grant (Yakima) was more enjoyable. The finish proves very smooth with a touch of sweetness and hops. The maltiness is really quite complex and the smoky elements are rather subtle compared to some. Perhaps Koch made a good choice as this smoother less medicinal Scotch Ale would less offend a popular market. But that's not us. You?

Brewbase Fives



Silly Scotch Scottish Style Ale

RATING: 5.0

Silly, Belgium

Brasserie de Silly is serious beer but yes it is fun and silly too. (One of their bottled creations is called Pink Killer made in that color with grapefruit juice in the general spiced Belgian White style). The ancient name for the local river is actually Sylle. I found this big, black-foiled, corked bottle for \$9.99 at my local beer shop and could not believe this style came in Belgian or French ale form. I guess the Belgians bottle things in a way they are familiar and this was the right choice here. The bubbles in the head are rich tan and very fine in texture, color being dark amber brown. It's 7.5% ABV and 17.2 Plato. I have expected a long, Belgianesque lace but did not find it. So far so true. I let this sweet malty soup just heal my throat and mind and found it just what I needed after reviewing some rather shady, canned malt lagers and one overpriced micro-crap label. It's outstanding, smooth but never weak, just the right amount of molasses at mid note and tartness in the finish.

An 1850 brewery does not cross the seas to do another style without much trial and study. Their work shows when in 1947 they revived their Grisette, Saison, and Scottish styles; the time and effort shows in the product. Their website says it offers "a finely wooded nose hinting at hazelnut, and is therefore distinct from traditional British scotches". Now that they mention it - yes. The "more rounded taste" will "naturally seduce you". True and triple true. But claiming to improve a long-held, traditional style is the stuff of ancient wars and these days European Community legal battles. I rather like that Bordeaux-style wine from Kosovo, much smoother and fruity and improved over the ancient, traditional style. How would that work? Anyway, I'm loving my big bottle Silly SCOTTISH ale and that's enough to sooth everything tonight.

Stone Highway 78 Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.5

San Diego, California

This 8.8% rich ale is a collaboration of Stone, Green, and Pizza Port Brewing Companies. There's a long Q&A style interview on the back of the bottle in very very fine gold paint - haul out your reading glasses or mag lens even if you're 21. The read is a bit silly and not terribly worth one's time, however. The fluid contents are far more worthy of our attention. The pour is a lovely darkest amber, the head a golden-beige. The first sip is shallow but quickly some luscious, supremely indulgent sweet caramel flavors come to the fore, giving a very nice impression, more of caramel-beer than medicine beer - which a Scotch ale can be in either vein. It is a very sweet beer, tempered by notes of ethanol as you get to more sips and yet more. It is very hard to put down, I must say. It is not simply planned "candy beer" for the flavors are complex enough for the style, the malt being what it should be and the hops very much in the background. I found it winning me over even if very commercialized and Americanized to an extent that will offend a Scotsman. But no beer should be overbearing and medicinal for it's own sake to be true to a style. This has the best things about a Scottish Ale and few of the odd flaws - but is that authentic enough for you?

Terrapin Reunion '10 "A Beer for Hope" Belgian Style Scotch Ale

RATING: 4.0

Athens, Georgia

The pretty intense blue label has equally bright green lettering and purple crocus and finch-like bird in glowing scarlet-orange tones holding lime hops in her beak. Sales benefit and Institute for Myeloma & Bone Cancer Research. It is brewed for this second year in 2010 to honor the brewery's friend Virginia MacLean who lost her battle with bone cancer in 2007 - her battle on earth lost but she is presumably cured elsewhere as we write today. OG 1078 takes the Belgian yeast to new places, a homage to Virginia's Scottish heritage. The pour is very

dark brownish-amber, the head massive, rich beige, tall, and various formed. The nose is hard to decipher but good notes of caramel and malt come up. First sip is mild, deceptively so, the 8.5% ABV stroking one fiercely by mid note, and subtle, smooth Scottish ale flavors more towards the back end. The hops support is well-judged, coming out occasionally when the semi-sweet molasses, deep malt, and other potent notes subside for a second or fraction thereof. You have alot in the broth to figure out but most of it fairly unified. I found some off notes mid-passage as did one reviewer here: "takes a break from excellence now and again...sweetness subsiding to dull maltiness and no hops". My phrase "fairly unified" seems more apt by the moment for it's more a potpourri of good things at times than a harmonious ale playing from the same sheet music. It was tried chilled, fairly cold, and even near room temp and the comments remained about the same about some awkward moments interspersed with both brilliant and average-competant ones. I have blended Scottish Ales to both brown and golden Belgian ales and come up with far finer combinations, even if now as sticky and dense as this one.

Tomcat Lionheart Scottish Ale

RATING: 3.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

Brewer Thom Tomlinson of Tomcat Brewing tells us on each label that 'I'll gladly burn my kilt' if he hasn't made the best Scottish Ale around. Sorry Thom but you should have offered to burn your Indian hunting jacket instead; and put the offer on your IPA. The color is dark copper amber (darker than the IPA and Pale Ale) and the head is enduring. The flavor has the correct tangy carmel notes and nippy hops but its about 'two notches' too thin on our scale of correct flavor. That means the potential is there. I suppose if you would like your Scottish Ales less potent this might just hit the spot. We still prefer Grant's or MacAndrews as ideals in this style. High marks go for the lovely lion photo on the label. Easy drinking ale but still needs work.



Traquar 2020 Ale

RATING: 5.0

Peeblesshire, Scotland

This dark reddish-brown ale has a mid-duration off white head, a yummy Scottish Ale nose. It was brewed in 2010 for consumption before the end of 2020. Pluses all around for the 10% but one demerit for just 11.2 oz. at \$5.99. It is medium sticky-sweet, just enough to take some of the edge off the ethanol and hops. The piercing Scottish-style malting is classic and done to near perfection. Some felt the might ABV punch was a shade too overwhelming and gave it lower grades.

Younger's Tartan Special

RATING: 4.5

Edinburgh, Scotland

This product of Edinburgh has all the flavor and charm of good Scotch Ale. It is a nice carmel-hops nips that no other style can imitate. Color is golden amber with a moderately large off white head. It quite pleasant but perhaps not as deep or complex as other of this style. At the \$8.77 price we were a bit disappointed now that respectable American-made Scotch or Scottish Ales exist. Grant's and Pinehurst Village would too such choices. MacAndrew's is another though perhaps without the American's price advantage.

LAGER - AMBER

What exactly is an amber lager? They are many things, most of them more heavily malted with dark malts than a classic golden, Pils, or Kolsch type lager. They are transitional to a full-fledged dark lager and some are in fact thinner Pale Bocks that are paler and less roasty than others. Some of them will be Vienna Lagers who claimed to be such at least. This later style came from Anton Dreher in Vienna about 1841 and involves a three step decoction boiling arrangement. The VL tends to be reddish-brown or rich copper in color, 3.5-6% ABV, medium sweet, very limited or no lager fruit, toasty in malt focus, hops only clean and never bitter. Austrians are said to have brought this style of Mexico in the late 1800's from which today's Negra Modelo (too dark to be an amber today) was developed.

We have the lovely strong lagers such as the Terrapin Boom Shakalager known as an Imperial Lager. Others are Sweet Malty Lagers that border on an Ockoberfest style. We have included the Smoky Lagers or Rauchbier style here in many cases.

Anchor Steam Beer

RATING: 4.0

San Francisco CA

This San Francisco beer uses a process "like no other in the world" but fashion a medium amber beer with a full 'creamy' head. This "all barley malt" taste is complex but is more crisp and less heavy than most other ambers. While this limited production beer is quite pleasant at \$9 a pack we found a semi-bitter aftertaste to be unacceptable. Lager flavor is most apparent and it was surprisingly like Simpatico Lager in fact. Northern Brewer hops are used. Carbonation is steady. Reviewers noted "wonderful process but the proof is in the flavor...I found it second rate though acceptable" and "lager yeast flavor with mere hints of citrus fruit and a dry finish". The label is one of the best every designed. Unique but still deficient.

Anheuser-Busch Special Winter Brew 1996

RATING: 3.5

St. Louis, Missouri

This amber beverage is A-B's attempt once more to reach microbrewish respectability under their own name; and what WAS genuinely a reputable for fine brews AT ONE TIME. This seasonal is dark amber and is best described as being a SEMI-SWEET MALTY LAGER in the holiday traditions. The label is lovely artwork with both color and detail near to perfection. The brew sadly is far less sophisticated though there is some hops to balance things. Had diverse malts (or even more of those chosen) been used and perhaps brewed longer it might have been a classic. Potential exists still. Unfortunately the Christmas (or more correctly Holiday) brews are numerous and provide vastly superior competition. For the price it is okay but as a seasonal treat you might check others.

Blue Point Toasted Lager

RATING: 4.5

Patchogue, New York

The name did not impress me a first but less than half a bottle into these golden-amber lager I became engrossed and alert. There is a lightness at first sip, a bit of nutty malt and not a hop to wrap around a single tastebud. But as sip followed sip and gulp above gulp, the roasty, toasty malt flavors came to me in full excellence. The Long Island lager is very drinkable and one of my trusted friends still that was a big flaw. I felt the subtle toasted flavors were intentional and defined well enough for this rating. It is horrible warm so make it cold and have at least two so the malt saturates to full value. In a very crowded world of American amber lagers, this one is very European in tone and a pleasant experience.

Blue Ridge Amber Lager

RATING: 3.5

Frederick, Maryland

Using "all American" ingredients including two kinds of Noble hops, they have set out to make a Vienna style of lager. They have the "soft malt" down about right but the alledged "spicy hops" never appear for any of us. The beer clearly has the correct ingredients in mind but fails to deliver on strength and complexity. It is quite drinkable and smooth but the finish is too thin for most beer lovers with any degree of discernment. It is not

bad but neither is it enough of a very good thing - hops. If marketed as an AMBER LIGHT it would reign with some of the best but in the defined class it fails. Reviewers noted "was stopped abruptly with a weak perhaps sour finish...[the] experience was ruined" and "good smooth malt with subtle hops...missed a chance to excel...needs more depth". Hard to recommend at \$8.00.



Brasal Special Amber Lager

RATING: 5.0

Lasalle, Montreal, Canada

AWARDI BEST AMBER LAGER FALL 1996

This lager starts out with a big handicap: drinker's attitude. One pays at least \$7-8 for just FOUR bottles; less generous 11.5 oz. ones to be precise. In its favor you see the 1994 Brewmaster's Best Award seal. The brewery is known as Brasserie Brasal and prefers to name their town as Lasalle. A friendlier pup than usual (a well-painted Husky) graces the pleasing label. A rich sweet aroma confirms one's investment may be solid. Flavor is simply wonderful with caramel and roasted malt notes exploding like a wild symphony. A sweet caramel nature is similar to some Big Rock products from the same land; they also carry a hefty price down here. It is truly sumptuous CANDY BEER (aka Sweet Amber Lager) of the finest kind and made to ideal standards. It is worth the price and more. A true classic.

Calgary Amber Lager

RATING: 3.0

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

This Molson product uses 'world famous Bonanza Barley Malt' for its flavor. It is very bubbly and has a nice amber color (very dark golden). It has a sharp bite that is merely a transitional tartness on the tongue. The taste is more unique than highly pleasant but it does not offend in any way. It is complex but not the kind of complexity that greatly impresses. We have seen it in large 740ml cans and bottles. Stampede Brand since 1892.

Cuahtomic Moctezuma Dos Equis Amber Lager

RATING: 3.0

This is not usually the same as their "Special Lager" and not their regular gold, Pilsoid thing by any means. It is poor vestigial product from when Austrian brewers brought the Vienna Lager style to Mexico around 1880. The rich amber-copper tones are the best things about it for the malt, faint caramel, and modest sweetness are too weak to impress. It is commonly reviewed as being overcarbonated and I agree with that every time I've been obliged to down some. It is priced and themed for mass consumption and that is not what a true Vienna lager ought to be from any place or time.

Dark Horse Amber Lager

RATING: 4.5

This product of VA and VA Brewing Co is mostly sold around that state but is a choice of DC and MD beer lovers. The work of German-born Wolfgang Roth won solid gold at the Great American Beer Festival and it meets 1516 purity laws too! As amber lagers go it is complex and earns high marks for aroma and malt qualities. It might be regarded as the best of Old World traditional and New World ingredients. We hope they make enough for the whole country.

El Toro Amber Lager

RATING: 4.5

Durham, North Carolina

The label proclaims 'there's a little bull in every bottle'. That is better than bull ON the label we figure. This is made by Weeping Radish for the minor league baseball team of 'Bull Durham' movie fame. It also has local Southeast distribution. Color is dark red amber with a tan head. Nose is sweet malt. Flavor is a fest-like sweet and deep treat of malt with a modest hops balance. Reviewers noted 'substantial and wonderful...could easily be called a BROWN ALE for all its richness' and 'nothing wrong with it all...surely one of the best beers served in any ballpark anywhere'. This wonderful product follows their pleasant Christmas 1995 brew of equal excellence. Their regular Fest did not impress us as well in several tastings. This one is a sure winner.

First Reserve Lager

RATING: 4.5

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Winston-Salem has long been the home of addicting products of the smokable sort. The Flagstone Brewery of that city now wants a liquid of equal appeal - although much more healthy. An 1860's southern recipe is used. Unusually it contains dark cane mill molasses, caramel malt, and Liberty hops. Color is bright amber and the head is large and ivory-tinted. Your first sip (if not sniff) rings out with a central and powerful theme: H O P S. Big hops. Liberty hops can do that. As the molasses portion suggests it is a bit sweet but never sugary like holiday lagers of similar color. It is so fruity-hoppy one is tempted to judge it with pale and amber ales. It is certainly a good match for Adam's Boston Lager in your taste tests. Collectible photo cap. Highly recommended. Good price so far.

Fort Collins Z Lager

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

This is one of the brightest ambers on record here, some tints of red adding much to it under the creamy substantial head. Brewed as a "rauchbier" of the 1550's Bamberg style from Germany, smoke flavors come from malt dried over beechwood fires. The smoke is reserved enough to be appealing but the finish has some odd notes that need to be cleaned up. Slight caramel malts come in the background and it finishes nice, dry, and hoppy. It is strong enough to please most beer lovers but will not overwhelm a subtle sauce at dinner. That said, no chef on earth wants his patrons sipping smoke, hops, and malt before his perfect dish - although somehow they accept the 912 chemicals known in the wine world! I found it a couple notches short of where it needs to be to stand on its own. A good fettucine would save it but that's not the point here. I rate beer on its own and this one needs some tuning.

Great Lakes Eliot Ness Amber Lager

RATING: 3.0

Cleveland, Ohio

I was pretty much suspicious of this line of brews named for famous folks until I read that Mr. Ness used to frequent the same bar they now own at the brewpub. Cool. Actually not for Mr. Ness was not really coming to sample the lagers in the usual way. He loved using axes and sledge-hammers to bring out the hops and whisky aromas - so to speak. GL Brewery apparently have a "Fatty Wagon" delivery truck sans criminals running on vegetable oil...[sermon here][and here]...all deleted for your protection. Good for them. The "faint hop nose...slightly sweet finish" also set us off for those are words generally leading to disappointment. ABV is 6.2% while the pour is jubilant amber with a goldish-tan head. Nose is indeed quite reserved. First sip is curious, shockingly fruity for a lager with malts coming to foreground next. The sweetish hints are bareable and decent but I suspect the real Mr. Ness would spare the hammer - and leave this alone for it would go away of its own shallow reputation. I would not say it is untouchable but I doubt any lad or lass here will touch it again. It has some good notes but reviewers here said "all over the place...some good malts, some odd tastes, some sweet, some hop bitterness, and other things just not interesting" and "why bother? There are 30 labels in all our shops which trounce this stuff...and to bring up Eliot Ness this way is like putting Jerry Falwell's fat, self-righteous face on a brand of flavored condoms...dumb...repulsive...next brew please..."

Harpoon Pott's Landbier Session 32 (100 Barrel Series)

RATING: 3.5

Boston, Massachusetts/Windsor, Vermont/collaboration
with Oelde, Germany

Here is a Euro-American collaboration, working between Harpoon and Pott's Brauerei of Germany. Color is bright amber, the head ivory and short-lived. ABV is just 4.8% and it is of mellow flavor from the get go. It has the earthy, malt-drenched flavor of some bocks but considerably paler in color and yet more flavor than some of them. While it was pleasant, I found it a bit too thick in mouthfeel. The finish is not sweet but moderately hops bitter, though at times (and only rarely) some awkward notes came out. When I spend microbrew-bomber money I would like more ABV and certainly something more special in terms of flavor sophistication or strength. It seems like a collaboration and marketing opportunity wasted though I know both can do more and do it finer next time.

Harpoon Spring Maibock

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

This spring bock or maibock is richly amber colored with a substantial cream-colored head. Flavor is a rounded balance of lightly bitter American hops and roasted malts. Indeed there is enough assertiveness in the hops department to make this resemble many AMERICAN PALE ALES. There is also enough of fruit-like flavor to place this with the ale category though traditionally a bock is strong lager. Regardless of flavor this is certainly a strong brew and likely to please many a hop addict. However some reduction in rating occurs due to some flat, dry notes in the finish and what some reviewers called 'excessive bitterness'. In truth, a few perfect scores were recorded. Recommended unless you expect the German maibock theme.

Herman Joseph's Premium Beer (Coors)

RATING: 3.0

Golden, Colorado

This Coor's 'premium' comes in 650ml bottles for about \$1.29 or so. Color is very pale amber or dark amber-gold if you will. The head is ivory and lasting. Chinook hops and slow-roasted Moravian malt is used. It has more flavor than a regular Coors but compared to their Winterfest it is very thin. At this bargain price range it is a decent alternative to malt liquors if one like that sort of thing - or one is short of cash. It comes off as a vaguely hopped beer with a semi-sweet finish. There's a unique nip to it and that may be the Chinook hops which are new to us. Reviewers noted 'I'd describe as a value but not something I'd try regularly' and 'less flavor than the color would suggest but at this price any flavor is welcome...'. Budget recommendation only.

Jack Daniels Amber Lager

RATING: 3.5

Cincinnati OH/Lynchburg TN

Although known for much stronger amber beverages, the Daniel's people are once again renewing the family tradition of an amber lager that started back in 1866. You'll get a batch from either Cincinnati or Lynchburg TN under a familiar black, gold, and white style of packaging. The 'slow brew' and 'small batch' beer uses Cluster and Tettnang hops with a lager yeast for 'peak flavor and clarity'. The first taste suggests a rather ordinary 3 bottle amber that we see too much of these days. The finish is better with some curious hops detail to perk up the tastebuds. We doubt this brew will win many awards and at a \$7.00 price there are better values in amber ales. If very cold it can please but below 45 it becomes dull and mediocre.

Leinenkugel's Bock

RATING: 4.5

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

This version of the popular Leinie's uses roasted caramel malt for the flavor and color of the German BOCK style; essentially a MALTY LAGER. It is moderate malt (ie. a SINGLE BOCK) and has a full-sweet finish. It is overall like

a mid-strength Oktoberfest beer. The head is foamy and lasting. It is so overwhelmingly sweet it might also pass for a Christmas or Holiday beer too. Our reviewers noted 'mid malt (and I prefer that to overdoses unless a full stout)...a tad too syrupy for my taste' and 'nice carmel malt notes...clearly the very best of their several [lines] I've tried to date'. Most of us agreed it was their best effort so. It is miles ahead of their WINTER LAGER might have otherwise had a similar name.

Lienenkugel's Classic Amber

RATING: 4.0

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

After I got by the distracting gold foil with twelve ways to log into stuff and WIN A LODGE ADVENTURE!!, I got to the label in all it's 4.9%, ultra-amber glory. The pour is rich golden-amber, the head rich old ivory and mid-density but can be large if skill is used. The nose is toasty, earthy malt but not strongly so. Roasted caramel and other fundamental bready malts, dark fruits, occasional bright mint, clear coffee-shop hazelnut, and hops are there but only the malt and nuts are dominant. The occasional unclassifiable, awkward metallic flavor is out there if you go 2-3 bottles deep with it. The finish gets more hoppy with saturation. I think they aimed for a creamy, very non-controversial beer as they often do but we have a mediocre compromise in the final analysis. They go lightish and refreshing all all costs and in this case the cost is quality and rating. If I was out of town and the convenient near my hotel had this and the basic mass-market junk I'd be all over this - but only in such an austere, deprived situation. Reviewers here said "hazelnut mouthwash interspersed with decent but awkwardly assembled malts" and "too crazy and fragmented to grasp it...and I will not grab one again". I like that "hazelnut mouthwash" line...need to remember that one.

Magic Hat Vinyl Lager

RATING: 4.0

South Burlington, Vermont

I've gone out of my way to avoid humping websites in this book but here is a noble exception. The movie at <http://www.magichat.net/vinyl/> is so horrible it's actually a bit fun. There's even a YouTube version. This curious 5.1% amber fluid has a stiff golden-ivory head, nose being faintly sweet and of malt in general. Vinyl, a wiggled doll made of green vinyl, "sails in on her shining wings...a season-shifter, bursting from her cocoon to sing the ancient song of vernal yearning and to summon spring's sweet green return". Sounds like action figure lust to me. "Her thirsts are shared by all". Yea, I'll bet she's popular for her spring yearning, spreading wings, and long flexible limbs among the G.I. Joes and those pro wrestling plastic characters. She is quite the shiny, innocent blonde nymph after all; kinda of a barely legal-looking lass my young Obi-wan Issue 4.2 advised me. Him, Vinyl, and Clegg Holdfast one night...let's just say things lots of bits melted and colors were exchanged. Back to the beverage: Malts used are pale, crystal, Munich, and Victory. Hops are Northern Brewer. They aimed for some sweetness with a hoppy touch, "fermented at the low end of ale fermentation temperatures" but using lager yeast. The brew comes down to whether you like a semi-sweet malt (and not a overly punched Fest lager) with a dose of hops that is subtle but still appreciated. I like it some, still it's very Ok-festy and for all the jokes, the marketing is still just a gimmick and will never affect my ratings.

Mendocino Bock Beer (Seasonal)

RATING: 3.5

Saratoga Springs, New York

The name is all Californian and German but the home brewery is in scenic, northern Yankee land. Bocks were once fairly dark but today thje dark stuff is usually sold as a doppel or double bock. This sort of formula is more on the order of a maibock. This one flows in a pale amber shade with a beige, mid-duration head. ABV is a standard range 6.0% for the style, the nose of mild malt. The bready-corny and earthy malts are purely European in type. This might easily have come in a foiled German bottle or be sold as an Scanadinvian amber ale. The main flavor layers are clear and slightly dimensioned but not overly complex. Unless served very, very icy, it does have a few ragged, uneven finish notes - but then will many Old World creations fail there. Reviewers said "authentic bockish, breaded malts...and from NY of all unlikely places...just a bit of honey, toffee, and grass...a few strange notes need urgent repair" and "Euro-malt theme, a bit of honey-pome, not much and well-judged there...then you get a bit of pine and metallic oddness...not worth it to me". Frankly, most of us have limited brew dollars and do not want to be bock-swiling lab rats testing a semi-rough, unrefined, experimental euro-clone bock.

Pete's Gold Coast Lager

RATING: 4.5

This superb light amber lager is smooth and abundantly flavorful. It satisfies like a rich and smooth sherry with endless flavor and style. It is quite distinct from the more widely sold Wicked Ale. A pioneering, rich American later, not gone.

Portland Lager

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

Like Dock Street Philadelphia this amber darkish lager is 'lively' and licensed for Utica NY production. Not no ports near Utica as I recall from childhood but they did find this great recipe. One's first impression it that it is unusually fruity for a lager - a characteristic more common with ale yeast. At one time the label read: "a great solution to the beer doldrums" and that is true. Reviewers commented that "it is clearly one of the best lagers in the world, American or otherwise" and "there are few beers as satisfying and genuinely flawless". A panelist remarked that the only imperfection was in image: "Lighthouse Preservation Society" logo and photo from a beer made hundreds of miles from lighthouses in rural upstate New York; never mind the distance from Portland. Very seductive beer and a pleasure to yield.



Red Oak Amber Lager

RATING: 5.0

Whitsett, North Carolina

I must confess this brewery sitting out on the open on I-40/85 in North Carolina has intrigued me for some time but I never stopped. Finally in 2010 the bottled stuff has come east to Raleigh and I feel silly and lazy having waited for this amazing stuff so long. I think I assumed the worst from their kettles and large windows out on the highway. These folks follow Duke Wilhelm IV's purity thing from 1516 and that certainly makes an American microbrewery both exalted and vulnerable in the modern market. They only due unfiltered and unpasteurized brews too. Wow, double wow. Using four 22-ton silos, a genuine four roller Kuenzel mill, a elaborate water purification system, a Bavarian-made Rolec brewing system, and some amazingly beautiful stuff, they are doing it right and doing it here. Their website is worth viewing for their 30 slides of the brewing process. It pours a dark amber, head rocky but lasting.

I was astonished at the early notes. Mellow caramel malts, so subtle but very inviting. Delights all around. It is rather fruity for a lager but not boldly so. They clearly did not get their recipe off some website and all that pricey hardware shows in the actual glass. Purity and passion shows in the brew. Can't more for a firm than that. Mouthfeel is dense, not sweet nor sticky but good. Hops are faint at best, perhaps even not necessary to this

approach. The finish is rather nutty and more mild. I hate their website's floating description of beers (very annoying) but they use Munich Malt and Spalt Noble hops imported from Bavaria...wait...Urtyp (Old Style) lagering...have to maximize their window and get the hovering window to center...and they use Weihenstephan yeast. Not your average "we have a glowing lager too" business plan. Lack of carbonation in bottled from and the occasional off note (none big or long) are mentionable. Malt depth could be improved as more than one caramel-biscuit, nutty theme is expected these days - but they were trying to be Old Style so perhaps simplicity was planned. I think they are close to oaken majesty.

Rhino Chasers Dark Roasted Lager

RATING: 4.0

St. Paul, Minnesota

This companion to the Peach Honey Wheat is a dark reddish-amber with a lasting beige head of fine-textured foam. You first notice the full malty dose but it's no double bock to be certain! We prefer to class it with AMBER LAGERS rather than as a SINGLE BOCK or GERMAN DARK; though a few so-called GERMAN DARKS are no more rich. There is enough hops bitterness (the good kind) to add complexity and class. Reviewers remarked 'malt lovers delight...but never overbearing' and 'superb presentation [color and head]'. Mid-strength maltiness is well made to be smooth yet substantial'. If you like malt but refrain from potent stouts and double/triple bocks this may be your match. We certainly think it's as well crafted as many of Europe's malty lagers. Weak for some - ideal for others.

Roanoke Roadhouse (RR) Track 1 Amber Lager

RATING: 4.0

Roanoke, Virginia

"True session beer" and "drinkable, yet robust" are tempting introductions found on the label. I have been hoodwinked with such self-praising, formulaic beer writing before. German malts and hops were used. It pours a fiesty amber-red with brown elements in a darkish room. Head is dark cream, mid-dimensions, and lumpy. It definately has the sparkle of European malts, these both overt and subtle at once, blending nicely and showing the uncommon quality of it's ingredients. It tings and tangs a bit like many darker brown lagers. Finish is malt-lover's ease though not as deep as many German or Austrians of darker hue. There are semi-sweet, thick patches but other times it seems more bright and nimble on the tongue. It needs to be very cold as a slightened warm glass was much less impressive. It is malty smooth beyond everything else and that gives it much appeal for an American product; a place where this combination of flavors is rather rare. Like but don't love it and would try it again.

Saint Michaelsberg Kellerbier

RATING: 4.0

Bamberg, Germany

Kellerbiers are unfiltered German lagers that are very old and clouded with yeast. You get some of the deep, rich, earthy malts of a German dark but not the full-blown thump of a traditional German dark lager. The 4.9% ABV is surely nothing special. I liked the malt, must, faint caramels receding to a dry finish, and yet it presented some shaky, wavering and weak themes from mid to late notes. Perle and Hallertauer Magnum hops are used with Pilsener and Vienna Malts for this effect. As malty liquid feasts go, I'd favor it served rather cold and close to 40 deg. F.

[Matt] Saranac Black Bear Bock (Dark Lager)

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

The black bear on the label is holding skies and wearing goggles. He is dark but his lager is not. There are golden black bears in the wild and this must be one of them. The pour is not any shade of brown and is barely golden-amber as we received it. Head is mid-cream, mid-height, enduring. German malts and hops are cold-fermented (lagered) for smooth flavors. The malt is very smooth, not overtly bread-like or biscuit style as one might expect in a Euro-Xerox approach. We let it warm a bit and more of those earthy German flavors came out

but "authentic" was one word we could not quite pen here. The approach is medium-dry and many brewers dealing with Saranac's price point would sugar the thing up as a girlie lager (akin to an O-fest soda) and ruin it. Their restraint is a plus. One panelist wrote "one of the smoothest, silky, satisfying malt lagers we sipped of late...dark in effect without the visual match...very mixed opinion...would like them [to] reevaluate the recipe while keeping the graceful, non-bitter notes".

[Matt] Saranac Chocolate Lager

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

The pour is rich amber (no brown lager here), the head rich cream, rocky-deep, lasting. They use a carefully selected Belize Cacao with caramel malts and German Hallertau hops. The chocolate flavors are clearly there, very surprising for such a palish, amber brew - these intense real cocoa notes almost exclusive to dank, dark porters and stouts. The long-established Euro-hopping works well and gives this amber lager quite the special nip. Chocolate or cocoa always pair well with chili peppers, herbs, and other spicy things such hops. This is a wonderful, enlivened, frisky, gourmet-grade take on the amber lager that other brewers could learn from. That said, our panelists felt it needs more cacao (which probably a larger bottle and prices to match) to get a perfect 5.0 bottle rating. Let it be said this November 2012 that Saranac really needs a pricier, upscale line which they will fill very nicely with fine things given their skill at the current level. Their High Peak Series is a start but we need a notch or two higher yet. The Matt organization has been doing American brews since 1853 which makes Sierra and Adams relative late-coming Sams. This would be a great recipe to ramp up, do over the top, make cacao-drenched, and suitably hyper-delicious and pale.

Sierra Nevada Pale Bock 1992

RATING: 4.5

This bottom-fermented beer is of the 'maibock' type (top quality flavorful beer made in Germany to celebrate May/Spring). It is bright semi-cloudy gold with hints of amber and a very bubbly head. It is smooth with rich hops flavor that is 1/2 the 'floweriness' of Sam Adams Boston Lager. It arrives in most stores in June and quickly sells out. This limited edition beer is much to be prized. There is nothing quite like it in stores. Very finely crafted.

Simpatico Amber

RATING: 4.0

Dubuque, Iowa

There has to be something wrong with NAFTA when a decent Mexican brand beer is now made in Dubuque Iowa! This bright amber has nice carbonation and a head with some duration. Unlike some ambers which have a rich hop punch this one has major malt elements and only faint hops authority. There are some much darker American and German darks with a similar flavor. Like some malty amber beers (the LIGHT DARKS if you will) this has a nice aroma that hits you a second or two before the first sip. We must give very high marks to the black painted label with ornate orange and gold artwork - in the style of some pricey Champagne brands. There aren't too many UPC barcodes done in orange paint! Overall the flavor is decent but not deep enough for \$6-7.

Smuttnose S'muttonator Double Bock

RATING: 4.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The shows the familiar ram, a sort of 18th century style painting of such a beast, hence explaining the "S'mutton" pun. From their Big Beer Series, this double bock actually is not a dark brown lager but is a dark reddish-amber, the cream head large and some duration. Nose is of earthy malts and teasing grains. It takes a total of 30 hours of human effort to make this recipe, the label tells us. First sip is malty, quite dry, and next it launches into heavy malts as if it were as dark brown as a chocolate bar. Some of the malt notes in the mid passage are sweet, others pass into faintly bitter hops, still others are very earthy and suggestive of a traditional German DB. It is a tad more hoppy than a German formula but such is usual for Americans takes unless they go with the super-sweet malt syrup approach. This is a sophisticated amber lager, lacking no strength despite the color, pleasing, and charming to the last drop. It lacks a wow feeling but you would not be ashamed to serve it to a German guest should they be so silly to sample their own styles while here. It is "big" like their series, a

good copy of a long-loved European style with a bit of hoppy spin but not overly a new substyle. Agreeable and then some.

Stegmaier Amber Lager

RATING: 3.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Founded in 1857, Stegmaier is one of the oldest intact brewing firms in the US. Like Yuengling (dating from 1829), they occupy the mid price range and claim at times a faux-microbrew. This AL was just \$7.65 for six (August 2010) and barely worth that in fact. It pours golden-amber, the head ivory and short duration. It is on the sweetish side, full of simple malts and not much hops bitterness at all. The finish is weak and disappointing. There's a nice zip due to carbonation but one can sip it long all day and not find an Bock-quality malting of any appreciable strength or character. I rather have a couple of these than Michelob dark but almost anything from Saranac will still be superior and close in price.

Stoudt Smooth Hoperator

RATING: 5.0

Adamstown, Pennsylvania

This is an American Pale Ale by most quick opinions but it's actually a bottom-fermented lager loaded with American hops and German malts. The color is APA-like amber, the hops rich but very smooth presented. The website calls it an "American-style Doppelbock" which amounts to a hoppy take on the old style but no rich, dark brown malt colors. They believe it to be "the first high gravity lager brewed with German malts and American hops", the later being Summit and Amarillo. ABV is 7.2% and there is something else unique about it. Name me another beer with an anthropomorphic goat on the label, dressed up with dark shades, lavender shirt, and a dark jacket winking at us like bar tarts at 1:59 AM. He's not only horny (literally) but has a bad toupee patch. In the final analysis, I think this style is worth exploring and developing moe. I'm getting my beloved American Pale Ale fix but with something lagery, delicate, and more relaxed and gentle in the finish. I've blended APA and IPA beers to lagers many times and not gotten exactly this approach - though I've come close. Beer blending is easier perhaps but having a official name, place, and time for the product that is easily reproduced is better yet. This is no novelty but a substyle or new style we need to learn more about. I will sign up for every class this prof puts in the catalog!

Wainwright's Black Jack

RATING: 3.5

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The 1891 legend tells how J.J. Wainwright won an old family recipe for a BLACK AND TAN in a card game. Today the Pittsburgh company uses a dark porter and a light Pils to make the brew. Color is bright amber red; actually one of the brightest red lagers around. Head is lasting and off white. It tastes a bit odd but not so strange after two or three! The exact malt flavor we note is similar to one tasted with several Aass brews. It is a very earthy, corn-tasting malt that reminds more of soup than beer; some dark beers are known as 'brothy' in the literature. If very cold it is nice but unlike a pure porter this one is poor tasting if room temperature. At \$6.75 a pack it is on the lower side of things. Reviews were mixed. You love it or you hate it.

Terrapin Boom Shakalager Bavarian Style Imperial Lager (Side Project Volume 11)

RATING: 5.0

Athens, Georgia

Brewed in Athens GA who are rivals to Maryland's Terrapins, we have a curious convergence of names and cities. The label has a German-dressed tuba player and what used to be a called a beer wench - I believe that is "brewery retail distribution assistant" in today's proper terminology. This ultra-strong or Imperial Lager pours amber instead of the usual Pils gold. It is made with German hops, malt, and lager yeast for true authenticity. For all the world you'd want to classify this as a fruity amber ale because of the exploding pomological esters in the soup. Hops are well developed by mid to late notes. It is delightfully deep, easily the fruit-filled lager I've sampled from hundreds on offer of the last few decades. That is not a bad thing because imperial status demands lots of lager yeast and yeast does make fruitiness in big doses. It is a bright and exciting beer and has

me waiting for Side Projects 12 through 1012 with empty glass.

Tommyknocker Ornerly Amber Lager

RATING: 5.0

Idaho Springs, Colorado

The crazy tommyknockers are at work on the label tying boot laces and getting up to other kinds of mischief. A blend of European hops and lightly roasted malts are used to produce this tea-colored beverage of superior quality and appeal. It is moderately-full sweet (6-7 on a scale of 10) and is an absolutely delightful and invigorating. The choices of hops are completely on target for this hop tea is smooth but with a firm nip in the finish, especially after the first bottle. The well-judged sweetness approximates a mild tea in fact and one gets parallels between the two brewed beverages. I think this is the finest of their products I've tried to date (February 2010) and I one I must seek out again. This is one very superior recipe and the execution counts of course and is delivered to perfection. I am not usually fond of the world terrific but it seems to fit better than anything else before me at thesaurus.com

LAGER - DARK

Eisbocks and doppelbocks (double bocks) tend to dominate this group. Bocks or Single Bocks tend to be gold to amber in color while a true Double Bock or Doppelbock is usually some shade of dark red to rich brown. The world standard these days seem to be Ayinger's Celebrator, Samichalaus, and Spaten's Opimator. Paulaner monks from Munich are credited with the invention and today their Salvator product is popular even It American hits include the Samuel Adams DB and Bell's Consecrator. The Germans often use the -ator suffix to denote the stronger double style and it's copied by microbreweries around the world. Roasty, toasty, and chocolate notes are common, fruity ones possible but not so much as with the dark wheat dunkel-weizen style. It was considered a "liquid bread", a portable meal that might be carried in long mountain treks just as well might carry a protein sport bar or drink today. The Paulaner named Salvator literally means "saviour" because having a supply for a long trip or when snowed in could be life-saving - though today we know that hypothermia is actually made worse by higher ethanol drinks despite an initial warming effect.

The Eisbock of Kulmbach district is made by freezing some of the water and removing the ice (eis) from a doppelbock to strengthen it. This makes it concentrated, the process of beverage concentration usually involving distillation, boiling, or ice removal in all drink types. Flavors are made fuller (notably malt) and alcohol content is increased per ounce. Some are very potent and like malt syrup. They can border on barleywines in some potent examples, the notes of chocolate, raisin, and plum being rich and full - though a barleywine is traditionally based on ale recipes in England. Eisbocks tend to have higher ABV than some DB's, often being 9.0-15.0% vs. 5.0-9.0%. Extreme eisbocks up to 25% ABV have existed and claims to 43% exist as well.

While Oktoberfest and beers were usually Marzen type darks, the boundaries today between a Sweet Doppelbock and a microbrewed, non-German fest beer are often blurred. Sweet, darker, malty lagers fit all sorts of marketing positions and names in the world today.

The Schwarzbier or black lager is an extreme bock or dark lager, often blackish-brown and as opaque as a porter or dense stout. It tends to be richer in coffee and chocolate malt flavors than the run of the mill reddish to light brown bocks. Traditionally they are lagers and not ales, though in old times top-fermentation was more common. The style is very old and is from Thuringia and Saxony. If the style dates to 1390 as some brew historians claim, it actually predates the doppelbock under that name at least. There is not much dispute that Kostritzer in Thuringia had the style in 1543. American black lagers are getting more common, offered by Sam Adam, Saranac, and in a weaker form Shiner.

Acrobräu Dark Lager

RATING: 4.0

Germany

I'm not sure who The Count's Brewery is but it's all around this neat navy, gold, and black label. Great

presentation marks to start. For a Bavarian dark it pours more on the dark amber side that I'd expected. No lace, large head for a time. It is nicely tart when cold and sips a very clean blend of malt and hops, favoring the former of course. More sips and then more left us wondering if any sophistication and special notes might appear. Zero. It's simply a clean rendition of a dark lager, not clever or indulgent or idiosyncratic in any way. If Coors made a genuinely flavorful amber they might go with this very direct approach to flavor. You get one blended hop-malt note - take it or leave it. I'm not saying it should sit with the bargain darks in the supermarket but one is very close in terms of quality.

Brewbase Fives



Aktienbrauerei Kaufbeuren Buronator Doppelbock

RATING: 5.0

Germany

At 7.5% ABV this immediately distinguishes its label from other good doubles of dark style. I found the \$3.99 price (July 2010) for a full, thick bottle to be amazing. It pours amber-brown under a pale tan head of short duration but decent size. Nose is yummy dark oatmeal. First sip is drenched in somber, earthy malts of the highest quality and a near perfect dosing. Hops is faint in the finish but the ethanol comes in there as well so it is hard to separate them. Mouthfeel is dense, semi-sticky, but not dark fest thick. While I am personally partial to a dark wheat for this sort of flavor profile, this is a very solid, wonderfully luscious malty lager. I like a bit of fruity yeast and lace to bring up the presentation but as a doppelbock there are few better than this label. There are few if any American d-bocks of this quality and here would be a highly suitable model for our best brewmasters to study.

Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Fives



Augustiner Maximator Munchner Beer

RATING: 5.0

Munich, Germany

If their golden Edelstoff lager gets a silver foil cap and this one gets gold...good sign. The Edelstoff or regular is

5.7% ABV and here we gather to a greatness with 7.5%. Any well-read sudshead knows that the -ator suffix on is like the AMG badge on a Mercedes. The reddish-brown pour, favoring amber-red at times, testified to more malt yet. "Since 1328 AD" makes Mercedes look like a new kid on the iron block. Head is variable in color, light tan to dark cream, mid-height, and fairly regular in outline. Here is Dark Munich Lager to the finest execution I've had in years. I get same warmth, depth, and gracious comfort as when I sip a homemade soup broth. Brothy is what I and many of you like in an Ethanol Malt Soup. No noodles, no poodles, and no hops or flying creatures to confuse the issue.

There is a tinge of sweetness, just enough, no hops of any firm or bitter nature, mostly background and just "supporting cast" I suspect. As with their Edelstoff, I wonder over and over why such a superb beverage is not copied well in the New World. Most micros here would get this too sweet, too full of their latest hop find, and most of them too thin. This is a festival of malt, max to the max for it's own sake. Celebrate the malt and be monothematic if you must - worship of malt is not about what hops will add to malt. It's all about the malt so single it out, devote every tastebud to celebrating it, and copy this stuff if you're smarter than a barley flake. This is Euro-malt beer...no...make that Munich malt perfection in it's very highest form. Here's a legend. Let the worship begin.

Ayinger Altbairisch Dunkel (Dark)

RATING: 4.5

Aying, Germany

This beer has that reddish-brown glow and big foamy head that marks so many fine German dark brews. One's first sip of this label gives a very deep and complex malt effect. It will impress the dark beer lover unless you demand the most full and densely opaque stouts on earth. It has enough of a red glow to be showy in a glass and when the flavor quality is there, one cannot go wrong. Reviewers remarked 'rich classic German Alt style and very well made' and 'very recommendable but serving temperature seems very important'; many dark beers seem best when not very cold nor luke warm. 50 deg. F. is often right. Once again: Ayinger has the best looking cap around - it's a cute little painting. Nice for blending with their Jahrhundert-Helles (Pils). This is a lower ABV version of Celebrator suited for "max 5%" regions.

Ayinger Celebrator Doppelbock

RATING: 4.5

Aying, Germany

The two dancing rams on the label seem to be fighting over a tall 100 gallon glass of this dark, lusty beverage. The 6.7% is nice but again the small 330ml bottle disturbs my sense of worth. Color is cola dark with a giant khaki-toned head and long lace. It is a medium-sweet malty treat trailing off with drier notes. This is some dark drinkers absolute gold standard, the benchmark against which other things are judged. Others turn to Spaten Optimator while I tend to like Weinstephaner Dark. Flavor is crisp, clean, non-muddy, and unmuddled. For the style it is nearly perfect but I find a lack of complex finish worthy of a single half bottle deduction. Many of you would like to string me up from the nearest tree for saying so. Let's fight over one of the those giant 100 gallon glasses instead.



Becks Dark

RATING: 5.0

While we felt regular Beck's was not as good as some regular German beers this dark variant is worldclass in every respect. The taste is full with a rich broth-like substance. The color is a light rootbeer brown. It is a finer dark in our opinion than either DAB or Dortmunder Union darks - with the later is shares a brothy aftertaste.

Bell's Consecrator Doppelbock

RATING: 4.0

Comstock, Michigan

The very simple, artfully speckled brown and white label shows two rams about to give each a head butt. Actually, it's probably just a mirror image from a very skilled artist. ABV is 8% and that's no normal dark microbrew from the US or anywhere speaking funny with long words. Old-world yeast is used. The stuff is bottle-conditioned but that's not code for yeasty clouds as in the dark Belgian styles of ale. Thus their "decant to serve" is a bit curious. What are we carefully decanting here? Malty, slightly hopped, nicely fermented water? Consecrator pours bright brownish-amber to reddish-amber, very strong lace, creamy head, and a nose of sweet malt. It's worse cold and needs to approach 45-50 deg. F. in my not so humble opinion. It's a thursday after all...I'm more humble on Sundays with all that preacher talk, parting with cash passed in plates hauled by millionaire car dealer-deacons, and the dumb brown suit my wife bought me. I'm more comfortable with the Lord's good blessings in my own domain and !in terms of the FOUR COMMANDMENTS: barley, hops, yeast, and water. Damn! That lace still hasn't stopped and that impresses. \$11.95 a six is looking a bit better now. It starts tart, surprisingly weak, faint hops, and a complex but still moderate concentration of malty goodness. There is little of the rightfully expected -ATOR suffix potency in terms of comforting, earthy malts or powerful roasted flavors. This beer is subtle. The question comes to bear: is this weak, phony subtle or gentle, magical moderation? I'm inclined to think this tenuous and very pleasant brew is a single bock though supercharged with extra ethanol. I would rather have more malt and more blended varieties of such than this particular take. It's good cool (not cold) and warmed a bit but it's not a double by any means by any standard in this country or the old one. It's a fine beer and I know I claim judge without reference to name to claimed style - but we need more thrusting horn and less marketing here. By the name or any other standard, we need bigger or more horns made of malt.

Birradamare 'Na Biretta Rossa Bock

RATING: 4.5

Rome, Italy

Despite the name "rossa" (Italian for red) and it's dark, hazy amber color, this brew is an Italian spin on classic German bocks according to the label. The malts are fairly subtle, very pleasant under the mid-cream, lasting head. It actually has a sort of comforting set of flavors, very pleasant toasted malts with a hint of tartness. It is very compatible with many foods and will not overwhelm subtle flavors. This is a very welcome introduction and we frankly like this 6.5% offering. The 11.1 ounces and its limited availability in the US (so far) are limitations on employing it as it might be. I would love to find a six of this and get it out there for more widespread opinions.

Clipper City Heavy Seas Mutiny Fleet Plank II (2012)

RATING: 4.0

Baltimore, Maryland

Tabbed as a Doppelbock, this latest iteration uses barrel-aging or wood-aging (hence the "plank") which here are specially treated Poplar and Eucalyptus woods. These are hardly the famous oaks of whiskey or port aging so poplar...errr...popular elsewhere. ABV% of this dark reddish-brown fluid is 8.5%, the head light tan, short, but lasting. The malts are mostly Old World (bready, hominy, earthy) and fairly intermediate between a single and double bock. There is "something more", twings or hints of other flavors and likely the gum-tree woods are the mostly thinny spicy-tangy here. The finish can get a bit unkempt and has a few light fruit flavors and a hint of sweetness. "There is no reason to buy this" said one expert here. I am not overly convinced they walked the planks long enough and so the novelty is more in name than reality. Something more is never something special in this case. It's a rethink like maybe a year on a desert island. A dessert island would work too.

Crystal Diplomat Dark

RATING: 4.0

Ceske Budejovice

This Budejovice is for you. Sampson Brewery of the Czech Republic has a real winner here. The ample carbonation and thick pint bottles make it resemble a German dark wheat until you taste it. It is really more of a dark amber in than a true brown beer. It is rather sweet and malty with a nice degree of complexity. It is broadly in the style of a sugary Oktoberfest beer. One wonders why Coors could not do as well in our country with so much more resources and peace than the Czech Republic. In fact it is as fine as any Holiday/Christmas beer

we've tried this December 1994 with the exception of Anchor Our Special Ale and Sierra Nevada Celebration. It is smooth and flavorful with no compromise in either department.

DAB Traditional Dark

RATING: 4.0

Dortmund, Germany

Dortmunder Actien-Brauerei (DAB) is made in Dortmund and should not be confused with Dortmunder Union brand of the same city. This dark is really a dark amber or light stout in both color and flavor. It is very flavorful but not rich and potent like true stouts or extra stouts. We found it more flavorful when not too cold. It is perhaps better than Heineken Dark and a near tie to St. Pauli Dark. It might get 5 bottles but is a touch bitter.

Dinkel Acker Dark

RATING: 4.0

Stuttgart, Germany

This product of Stuttgart is actually dark amber and forms a head of very large but short-lived bubbles. It is pleasant and potent at first but the flavor trails off to a semi-dry finish. It is just a small margin from being a 5 bottle beer but there are so many that are better. Like Heineken Dark it is really SEMI-DARK at best and may not satisfy one's taste for a dark beer as will so many other labels. Competent but less satisfying.

Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager

RATING: 4.5

New Orleans, Louisiana

This product of history-drenched NOLO is dark reddish brown and of medium-duration head. Using 5 malts and cypress tanks for aging this beer overflows with malt flavor. It finishes clean and dry when cold but we felt the malt flavor came out best when around 50-52 degrees F. If available we'd prefer the richer Samuel Adam's Double Bock in this AMERICAN DARK MALT LAGER subclass. If your tastes run towards a very malty beer with a crisp finish this one could be perfect.

Dock Street Illuminator Bock

RATING: 4.5

Utica, NY/Philadelphia, PA

Out of Philly and Utica comes this bright and refreshing beer with dark amber color and never-ending carbonation. It is lively and sweet with a full depth hops. Unlike many premium SWEET AMBER BOCKS the sweetness is not used to cover weak flavor - Hallertau & Tettnang are so abundant. Bottom-fermented in the Einbeck style this beer stands out in a crowded amber field. 'Luscious' as the label suggests is an apt adjective. It is unique and to be treasured. One of the more interesting and refined American bocks though not always easy to find.

Dock Street Philadelphia

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

This amber beer is made in Utica NY and uses a 17th century process perfected in Philadelphia and still served at Dock Street Brewery. This 'hand crafted' beer uses Cascade hops but sells for about \$7/6 bottles. We found it very pungent and flavorful. While amber colored (not brown) it has a stout taste without any doubt. It is stronger than John Courage Amber but the two clearly intermediate to dark beer. Portland Lager is similar but the better of the two.

Dortmunder Union Dark

RATING: 4.0

Dortmund, Germany

The almost glowing GREEN foil label with bright red letters grabs ones attention as does the gold crest. This dark variant of a truly worldclass label is a deep reddish brown color and an enthusiastic full head of bubbles. Served very cold it proved a touch sharp and heavy while very flavorful. But given a mere chill or just above room temperature it proved more drinkable. It is quite satisfying but the aftertaste is almost like a full beefy broth.

Brewbase Fives



Epic Double Skull Doppelbock Lager (Exponential Series)

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

This was Release #4 at 9.0% ABV. As I write this in January 2013 they are now into Release #9. As with Epic's Exponentials the formula is unique and complex, not so some of their cheaper fare. Malts here are...catch this mix...Muntons Maris Otter, Weyermann Pils, Bonlander Munich Malt Briess, Briesse Aromatic, Weyermann CaraMunich II, and Carafa III. Hops are Premiant, Tettnang, and Perle. Release #3 was similar but only 8.5%. Release #9 is 8.8% and the same stuff. The pour is dark, glowing amber and far from the rich brown we expected, the head mid-sized and an antique cream in tone. The nose is moderate malt, fairly hard to judge as might be expected from their ingredient choices. First sip is alive, bright Old World malts, later more intense, ethanol joining the chorus, and the finish very dry and uniformly malty. There are passages of light sweetness before the dry finish and that is a nice compromise that makes this double bock a very agreeable experience. As you consume more the sweetness seems to build and stick on your tonque.

The approach is very gratifying, complicated by recipe design, and very nicely structured to challenge and get the attention of experienced brew testers. I cannot think of a finer, high alcohol American dark lager at this minute and with further review of our files cannot overturn that impression. Panelists said "when Epic are on their game...and this is mostly in the Exponential Series...they are hard to beat..." "fascinating" is the best compliment I can think of..." and "I loved Double Skull from first sniff...the high, overt alcohol put me off for a second or two but here is a righteous, insane creation that deserves every beer lovers' attention. They have a special mastery of the form and to do so with such a pale-toned color is remarkable...". Epic gets it right, does it right, markets it right, and makes something even those of us with 1200-2000 labels under our wide belts and bulbous bellies will find...FASCINATING.

Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Fives



[Klosterbrauei Ettal] Ettaler Dunkler Doppelbock

RATING: 5.0

Ettal, Germany

Using a Benedictine monk-designed recipe from 1609 doesn't exactly make this new dark lager of the week - but it could be. The pour is dark brown, only translucent enough to allow a few scattered rays of red from our LED photonic probings. The head is rich cream and the lace perpetual and steady. Then you spot the wonderful 9.0% ABV stamp! The malt-fest is uniform, rich, and unremitting from first gulp to last sip. These notes are augmented by a finish which is loaded with sweet caramel notes in a manner far superior to any other German d-bock we know. Two panelists here thought it to Oktoberfest-rich and sweet for the style but someone sitting in Peoria or Raleigh can hardly argue with history from the year 1609! Suffice it to say it transitions to the O-fest style and is a lovely, rewarding treat under any name. Coming late to our review panel, Ettaler was named to the Brewbase Legends group on the basis on it's inexhaustible, strong malt flavors, worthiness as benchmark for the style, and long, noble history. Ettaler can become a lifelong favorite and trusted choice whenever those thick, brown bottles can be found on these shores.

Flying Dog Schwarz Smoked Double Lager

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

I'd not expected FD to do high-falutin' champagne-corked bottles with foiled labels and Belgium-style prices. I guess they should and this is proof. The label lost me when they compared David Hasselhof to the popularity of Schwarz beer and something about Thuringia. It pours a truly opaque dark brown, head small but medium brown, malty, and as pungent as a house freshly reduced to charcoal and chimneys with the dude winding up their hoses before us. It is surprising easy drinking for a smoked, dark lager, not overwhelming as some Rauschbiers and certainly darker than some of those. It's 7.8% ABV and for smoothness you almost think they added liquid smoke to a weak German dark - and I mean that in the kindest sense not suggesting their formula! Smoke and malt. Malt and smoke. No hops to speak of though there are faint bitter finish notes by the last glass of three or more. A little late sweetness keeps it from being too dry and dull.

This is a good blending beer if you want to add a primo smoky quality to something else and only need 1/3 to 1/2 a glass to get that effect. I'm sure blending was not their goal but more than a single glass of this gem is hard to beer; and I mean that kindly. I like it very much, though I am suspicious the smoke comes from a bottle and not fresh alder branches, and like Hasselhof and talking Trans-Ams a little goes a VERY LONG WAY. As far as Bay Watch scenes with a different type of full-bodied, robust, smokin' character...mass quantities are justified. Their "no shit" website sucks (as of April 2009) and it crashed on three computers I tried, varying from typical user to one with every update Microsoft can toss down the daily upgrade pipe. A word to brew webmasters: we don't want flying stuff, heads that bubble before us (we might have that effect in real life!), and other fancy expensive programming crap. Just give us beer data for every known label they offer, cool merchandise, and a nice history of the company - and the faster the better. No one has ever purchased a beer because of a cool script on their website. Sorry dudes. Drink less and deliver data with no fuss and worldclass speed. Form must always FOLLOW function and convenience - sorry you missed that design class due to wicked bad 'shrums. Just take our word for it.

Fort Collins The Kidd Lager

RATING: 4.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

This "dark and intriguing" dark lager is made with chocolate and carmel malts added to Tettnang hops from the old country. It pours out very dark reddish-brown, a degree or two from opaque. The head is large-bubbled, falling to moderate levels, and a rich tan. The malt aroma is very pleasant and sweetness is medium-high (7 of 10 sugar points). The label calls the hop-altered finish "reminiscent of a smoking gun" and I suppose it could be if I had more imagination and they sent me 14 more bottles. It's got a sophisticated appeal, well rounded, a balance that never tips toward excess, and needs to be a bit cold for best effect.

Full Sail Session Black Dark Lager

RATING: 3.5

Hood River, Oregon

The tiny, barrel-shaped, brown bottles are cute until you determine you're being screwed out of brew in the 11 ounce shape. This 5.4% fare pours a dark reddish-brown with nice, short-lived lace under a frothy cream head. Malt notes are mid-powered, fairly monothematic but of quality form. It is very smooth for a brown and one might prefer it for smoothness over some cloying, too earthy Euro-bocks. Still it is wanting on several fronts including complexity and malt depth.

Gordon Biersch Märzen Auburn Lager

RATING: 4.5

San Jose, California

I immediately came to like Gordon when I first read the package: "Never trust a skinny brewer". That's a very apt, inciteful variant of "never trust a skinny chef"; unless of course they're all marathon runners in their 20 hours of spare time each time each day or highly functional meth addicts-geniuses. The name "auburn lager" is a nice touch too, usually being dark or amber with the more predictable tank factories. It's 5.7% ABV, a tad above some popular offerings, it pours mid-amber, close enough to auburn to count. I'm troubled by their claim of "smooth" - which in brewerspeak is often code for we can't afford to give you too much malt, hops, or at least the best forms of such.

For me it's a very yummy, earthy feast of malts, corny if very warm, brighter and butterscotched when cold, gentle and smooth actually without the painful finish of so many "smooth" dark lagers which are horrid, thin, and mediocre. The malts are moderate (not too full), augmented with various temp-dependent corn/butter/grain flavors, semi-sweet, some caramel (not alot), never a dropout in any flavor passage, and lovely and buttery at times. "Smooth" and "drinkable" are not an admission of weakness in this bottle. It delivers! It's best a tad warm and you will get ten different ratings with 10 different temps. It is very slick, creamy, never offending or metallic. In a strange way it's very highly admirable and competent for being a layered malty beer with nothing too special nor ever wrong about it. It might be the Honda of amber lagers - nothing to write home about, nothing startling, as reliable as the sun, no flaws, no faults, steady, yet neither creative or really new, generically perfect in boring formulaic ways; evaluation solid but not breathtaking. There is a feeble case for a low rating (too dry, too weak, no hops, not sweet enough) but for an American brewer going stealthy and under the "dark-lager radar" might in fact be a very generous compliment in the finish analysis. I'd bet in a blind taste test many Europeans would place it with one of several German firms of some note and laud it as such. I enjoy it, it's a very solid Xerox of a German dark lager, better than most US copies. If you should hate the product and this authentic style then email your complaint 500 years ago to my 19th Great-Grandfather and CC: your mom with the subject line: "Verpiss Dich".

Gosser Dark (Stiftbrau)

RATING: 4.0

Steirische Brauindustrie AG provides 'Austria's Famous Dark Beer' that has a dark reddish-brown color. The first taste is sweet and rich - almost like pleasant prune juice. The mid and later flavors are more like a lighter dark of German origin. It is very pleasant but lacks the complexity and depth of flavor one expects in a European dark. The lasting brown head is perfect.

Great Divide Wolfgang Doppelbock Lager

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado

The label has the words Sacred and Saintly before and after the phrase "Doppelbock Lager" but we figure the different colors suggest they are not part of the formal name. Odd still. Pour is very reddish for a D-Bock, not classically dank and dark at all. But hue these days means much less than before. The old school red foil suggests the color and the European influence. "Great Minds Drink Alike" - like that slogan. Head is light-medium tan and a bit lasting. The label talks about the original Doppels got monks through periods of penitent fasting. Hell! Sorry...heck. I would join a frugal order if I got this liquid bread instead of fast food and frozen dinners day and night. It would like drowning on sweetbreads and malt candy in place of bitter brussel sprouts and other healthy terrors. ABV is a nice 8% so I'm guessing any monks so blessed to get this portion would have some very vivid dreams of all things heavenly and malty. The malts here are full enough, "semi-Euro" as one panelist judged the style, and the sweetness mid-strong but clearly there with some stickiness. Dry bock lovers

on the panel were annoyed by the sugar level here as was I Master Bastard Panelist and Czar of Nothing - save this feeble PDF. The extra ethanol helps make it relevant and a bit special. It's a good, solid try but not perfect. There are some very fine satisfying finish notes that are akin to a real rootbeer to me, deep, old-fashioned, nostalgic, and noble.

Grolsch Premium Dark

RATING: 4.0

This dark amber beer takes the excellence of a top beer and adds a richer stronger taste. It is not extra or triple stout nor is it really 'ruby' as described on the label. It is somewhat like DAB Dark but far less bitter. It is one of the top dark ambers or light stouts available. Very sadly we find that few stores carrying Grolsch offer this refined variant. Either cold or near room temperature it is rich but never overpowering. When I was young, this was one of the first quality darks on our young, brew-innocent lips - also getting nods were Grolsch Dark and Beck's Dark.

Heineken Special Dark

RATING: 3.0

This is one of the best known darks in American grocery stores (or at was in 80's and 90's) and is the only dark one finds in some smaller stores. It is full and potent in its red-tinted rootbeer color. While satisfying we found a half dozen other darks that are more pleasant. It is unquestionably a high quality product but like most darks it can be too heavy with some meals. While strong it lacks the complexity and wine-like detail of nearly all other darks.

Hirschbrau Hoss Holzar-Bier

RATING: 4.5

Sonthofen, Germany

This is the dark stuff with the big green man chopping wood on the label - the following similar product has the two beasties locking horns. Background on this suggests this is from an old Allgau recipe and made into the Holzar style drank primarily in the winter; hence the snowy scene on the label. It pours dark amber and the nose is sugary malt on the order of pancake syrup. Head is dark cream, small but lasting. Gladly the flavor is not so sweet! Those earthy or "corny" malt flavors are wonderfully rich and the sweetness is perhaps 7-8 on a 10 scale. ABV is 5.2% and that is different from their Doppel-hirsch described below. This is the sweeter of the two, also. It is fairly simplistic in hitting the strong sweet, toasty malt theme like a electronic drum machine. There is some hops to elevate the complexity but not much. There is a bit of fruit, dark fruit including raisins or figs if one demands name for them.



Hirschbrau Hoss Doppel-hirsch Bavarian Doppelbock

RATING: 5.0

Sonthofen, Germany

Der Hirschbrau dates back more than 350 years (1657) and utilizes male deer or elk as their logo. This double dose shows too large males dueling with horns locked on the lovely golden and purple label. It comes with recloseable, Grolsch-like "recap" hardware, adding to the price and keeping it fresh I suppose. Flavor is a very smooth, toasty malt, moderately sweet at some points, more so at others, very satisfying but stealthfully gentle on the way down. It is much fuller a beer than it appears; which is often a sign of a very high attainment in brewing arts. For a 7.2% ABV product, the soothing and fluent dispensation of flavors is remarkable advanced. The color is surprising pale, a dark amber-brown and not typical of usually dant, dark German products of any style. The easy carmel delights are not met with hops to balance it as far as I can tell. Once the reasonably

sweetened malt subsides, there is ample dry bitterness in the finish but I believe the high ethanol content is mostly the factor there. This beer is exquisitely delicious, a real treat, a tad expensive but well worth the experience as many times as one can find it. I do not find it around enough and always grab one or two for beer tastings and parties. Some friends of mine felt is too strong in the ABV, others just a LITTLE too syrupy, and others found some thin, odd notes at mid palate or later; even the worst placed it 4.5 and I being the editor get to put down my opinion and it's fiver to me.

Brewbase Fives



Hofbrau Bavaria Dark Reserve

RATING: 5.0

Germany

From Ernste Kulmbacher comes this very dark amber brew with an enthusiastic head of moderate duration. It carries some of the brothy depth one expects in German darks but finishes more light than many. It is best compared to darks from Becks, Kropf, DAB, Dortmunder, St. Pauli, and Dinkel Acker. It is smoother and thinner than Becks but still has sufficient flavor to charm. As a good compromise it earns 5 bottles but understand it is no potent dark.

Hofstetten Granitboch

RATING: 4.5

St. Martin, Austria

I spent about ten minutes with 5x and 10x hand lens trying to figure out the faint purple script on the label and whether I was reading English or German or something else. It turns out this dark amber-brown bier is fermented in a 200 year old trough - not my idea of a marketing point but European are different perhaps in their love of old troughs. The 7.3% ABV is nice, the head light beige, and lasting. Flavor is a malt-lovers wet dream, simmering and glowing from first note to last with bread, caramel, hominy, and tangy hops. It is semi-sweet overall and no generic European dark lager. I could drink it all day and almost did but I'd still consider it an "experience beer" rather than a regular purchase - even if one can find it after next month - which I doubt! Something about "Seit 1229" defies my explanation.

Isenbeck Premium Dark Lager

RATING: 3.5

Paderborn, Germany

Since 1769 this firm (not to be confused with the Becks) has made beer in Germany. Color is medium amber brown with a deep beige head. It is not rich and brothy like some German Darks (Becks for example) nor is it sweet and malty like Fest selections. We might describe it simply as a richer lager - and if you were not allowed to see the color you'd say just that. It is not as roasted in malt flavors as the color might suggest. It is very drinkable and refined but for the beer enthusiast there is not much to prefer it over so many other choices from that land or ours. One reviewer said "there is nothing wrong with it...nor is there anything VERY right either!". Many people who tried it expressed such indifference. It is not typical of the German dark styles.

Brewbase Fives



Kaiserdorn Alt Rubin (Dark)

RATING: 5.0

Bamberg, Germany

The Burgerbrau Brewery of Bamberg produces this hard-to-find beer of medium clear brown color and a full creamy head. The Rubin (Ruby) label comes from red tints when it is held up to a light. It is quite UNLIKE common German darks in being rather sweet and fruity. It is thin enough to be compatible with food but flavorful enough to please on its own. You have no overpowering and brothy flavors like some darks. You can enjoy it like a table wine. Good balance.

Brewbase Fives



Konings Hoeven Bock

RATING: 5.0

Tilburg, The Netherlands

This Dutch treat pours a hazy reddish-brown with a head the size of Vaalserberg (that would be the highest point in Holland), rocky, and strong tan. I had expected a simple doppelbock but this product is so much more charming and inviting from the very start. It has a licorice-like tartness (and I REALLY mean natural licorice) and then come waves of malts, complex at times, monothematic are others and caressing one like Niagara Falls from a safe distance - all you handle in theory but can be gauged up and down to what you can and want to enjoy. Hello. Here is new experience and I am not sure if I am speechless from lack of fitting words or my excessive gulping with foam up my nose. Augmenting the licorice is pleasant molasses, sweet fruit (honeyed raisins and fig preserves perhaps), yeasty glory, dark spices, and then a dose of Hallterttau hops.

I am a lover of good port and I find the flavors here almost as engaging as any port under 15 years and so rewarding at every sip, modest or bold. Some experts suspect Belgian yeasts here and I suspect that is a clue to the unique glory of this label. I feel like sending a bottle or two of this to every American micro-factory claiming to make a dark lager of any consequence. All but a few should go running for the lab and months of experiments until something as important, substantial, and enchanting as Konings Hoeven Bock comes down their pipes and into their vessels. This is a Fruit Bock so elite and transcending the dark-bottled, foiled masses from every corner of the earth, I fear I almost missed it in my local crowded shop of 500 labels. This is a not a beer that deserves a mere gold medal or platinum one but only a ribboned decoration of .999 rhodium adorned with moon dust and a test tube with a few molecules of unuxium wrapped in 20 locks of Elvis' hair with a flawless 100ct blue diamond on the reverse, all wrapped in a outer swatch from the Shroud of Turin and encased in a long, lost Danish Silver Jubilee Faberge egg. Truly and without question one of the finest dark beers ever made.

Brewbase Fives



Kostritzer Schwarzbier (Black Lager)

RATING: 5.0

Thuringen, Germany

Schwarzbier means 'dark' or 'black' bier. It is not as dark as a thick stout but only a little light gets through to show reddish-brown. The head is large and foamy. Most people are familiar with a GERMAN DARK like a Becks or St. Pauli and this DARK LAGER is well within that flavor group. It has that brothy maltiness that makes a German dark known around the world. It is fully rewarding from first taste to finish by never overloads the tastebuds as may some DARK WHEATS from that same land. Given that we paid just \$1.99 for a 500ml bottle is out-valued even some American microbrews that are just formula trash. This uncommon beer is worth seeking out for your taste trials against more familiar dark brews. It is at the pinnacle of its class.

Brewbase Fives



Kropf Dark

RATING: 5.0

This dark draft is unpasteurized and free of additives and preservatives. It is a dark reddish amber with a very enduring head. It is rich and flavorful yet without the molasses tones found in some dark amber beers of British origin. There is really nothing wrong with it but is no better than super-market darks like Grolsch Dark or St. Pauli Girl Dark. Like its Genuine German Draft cousin it can be a little tart unlike the sweeter darks.

Kulmbacher Eku 28

RATING: 4.5

Germany

This amber eisbock is a whopping 11% ABV and is the first time this year I got that much ethanol for under 3 bucks a bottle. Eku 28 has a very thick, almost syrup-like mouth feel, then the alcohol hits you but with more charm than abruptness. Malt, malt, malt is all around. It's a bottled treatise and homage to malt and with an acceptable sugar approach. I found the head large at first but it sank more quickly than imagined - guess it's not loaded full of those light beer additives for "head integrity management". It has a creamy, sweet, malted goodness and yet the sweetness is never overdone or offensive. Caramel of the highest quality is presented and one must put this on top of any list of well-brewed sweet malty beers - from anywhere. I'll get letters for this: guys, this is a fine bomb-the-chick-who-loves-dark-beer label - she'll never guess it's 2x more potent and then some. Okay, try it on your male buddies too while you're drinking a lower ABV dark.

Lammsbrau Organic Dunkel

RATING: 4.0

Nuremberg, Germany

"Organic Dunkel"? The next you know Mercedes will be making ugly, cheap, miniature cars...never mind.

Lammsbrau claims to be the "world's largest organic craft brewery" and they bothered to get USDA organic

certification too. Noble hops and "deep well mineral water" are employed in their process. I don't usually give good ratings when people brag about their water. It just usually works out that way. This Bavarian dark pours more amber than opaque brown; pretty in a class for sure. The head is wild bubble-based and rapidly creeps downward. Sweet malt is the aroma. Classic German dark malt comes to the foreground and the finish is rather clean. Sweetness is metered just right. They resisted the "malt soda trap". It's mid strength on my meter and that may be a problem. I think many organic beers are deliberately marketed to a specific audience and they dare not go "full bore" with either hops or malt for this reason. Turn up the malt two notches and you have something trendy and healthy without being a bit of a compromise. Dare to do it! Say yes! They can. They should.

Lao Beerlao Dark Lager

RATING: 4.0

Laos

Their regular lager is something of a cult hit in Asia and widely praised from the Asian beer media to the NY Times. The 6.5% ABV is pale amber in tone, small soft lace, and a giant amber-ivory head. It is crisp and clean, malty by midnote, reasonably dry by the lasting impressions. It will be too unambitious for addicts of uber-malty German fare but it will not offend nor be called "dark light". Even with the 11.2 oz. mini-bottle, it is a reasonable offering in the price range and for their intended worldwide market. I will not necessarily seek it out but I'd grab one long before downing a Michelob Dark for example.

Latrobe Bavarian Black

RATING: 3.5

Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Packaged like a microbrew but priced as \$5.99 or less, this BLACK LAGER is dark brown with a big, lasting beige head. Chocolate and roasted malts are used to create something that is surely not stout. It is perhaps the least malty of any dark beer we have seen but it is not really weak either. It has a semi-sweet slightly citrus finish with just enough malt to please. For a \$5.99 beer it is certainly recommendable but for \$1-2 more there is a vast list of superior darks. Some of the Saranac darks can be had for just \$6.99. Reviewers noted 'a quality fitting the [price] niche...good but not very interesting' and 'competant, pleasant, very drinkable...not world-beating'. A few felt the finish was unbearable but then again stout-aholics are that way.

Longshot Black Lager '96

RATING: 4.5

Cincinnati, Ohio

This is a copy of any award-winning brew out of 1680 entries in the World Homebrew Contest. Sponsored by Boston Beer, this dark category was won by Jeffrey Grisold of Victoria, BC, Canada. It is actually more reddish-brown than black. The head is light tan and very long lasting. It is what we would call a DOUBLE BOCK or TRIPLE BOCK though with more hops than the usual German style. Original Gravity is 14.6 and 33 Hopping Units are employed. While a malt-lover's feast there are enough hops to give it some genuine balance. Reviewers remarked on it 'very rich malt power with nothing held back...finish a bit more bitter than I'd prefer but overall well worth your dollar' and 'very full maltiness...a true feast'.

Lowenbrau Dark Special

RATING 3.0

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

When Miller of Milwaukee makes this Munich formula something gets lost. It is physically darker (actually amber) but there is none of the rich complex flavor one expects even in the lightest of the darks. It is competant and pleasant but not different enough from regular Lowenbrau to get special notice. Like Michelob Dark this 'special' cannot pretend to offer the abundant flavor of a true dark beer. It is good and crisp but clearly mis-labeled. This is a faux Bock is such a style needs to exist - it surely needs to be named and the matching labels called out.

Lowenbrau Zurich Export Dark (1995)

RATING: 4.5

Zurich, Switzerland

Why do we need Lowenbrau Dark from Zurich when it's already made in the good ole USA? Simple. Taste them both. The Zurich one actually tastes like a dark beer. Color is dark reddish-brown with a lasting but low head. It

is HIGHLY aromatic with all sorts of malty temptations. Overall it reminds one of a decent single bock German dark like a Becks or DAB. It has a full measure of sweetness too so its not unlike some Oktoberfest beers tried lately. The only fatal flaw was a \$9.99 price tag that we could not seem to beat in most Southern states. Reviewers noted 'full well-rounded malt depth with syrup-laden body' and 'first rate among European dark beers but too pricey to recommend.'

Magic Hat HOWL Winter Seasonal Lager

RATING: 3.5

South Burlington, Vermont

I rarely find it useful or important to quote a passage from an beer label but this one is a notable exception: "Our mysterious melange of time-honored ingredients harmonize with chaotic chemistry, humble patience, and blind faith to create unique beers to share in the rousing company of kindred spirits". Good stuff if proves out. (and with that quote I rest my case about my writings being too pithy, dense, unreadable, and long-winded). It pours a shade or two from pure opacity (absolute thick in any dank bar), the head rich tan and lasting. It sips surprising light and nimble for the color, almost if the malts were stealthy and required some kind of password for one to actually taste what you clearly see. The 4.6% will impress no one except drinkers in markets keeping things under the silly 5% standard. It has a bitter finish but by the entire bottle that bitterness proved annoying and without the quality this brewery is usually known for. It's a clear miss in all respects save for a thought-out, artful label. The above quote applies more to their other products.

Michelob Classic Dark

RATING: 2.0

While stronger and darker than ordinary Michelob this is not a dark or stout by European standards. It is more like a Potent American. It has Michelob clarity but not the strong basic scents of a Heineken Dark or St. Pauli Dark. We found it had a sweet aftertaste at times - something not unpleasant with a meal. It might be called the weakest and clearest of the darks or a Semi-Dark. Some Dark fans have been disappointed. In their defense, Michelob has made a few malty, dark beers in recent years but few of them (even for their mid-micro prices) still fail to impress.

Mother Earth Dark Cloud Munich-style Dunkel Lager

RATING: 4.5

Kingston, North Carolina

I found their fresh hops IPA to be stunning and their Endless River Kolsch as mediocre as the IPA was laudable. Thus this third major release in 2010 will tell me alot about this new eastern NC brewery. It empties a dark rootbeer-brown, the end large, dark tan, and lasting. The nose is a field of malty delights. First sip drenched my buds in quality but diverse malts, roasted long and chocolatey but very smooth in the finish for lack of hops. The dark beer market in the US not as crowded because the Germans and even some Mexicans do a very nice job with mellow, malty brown lagers - and many for a fair price point that microbrews would find challenging to match. This third label tells me we do indeed have a serious company, ready to challenge the biggest among the small and the largest among the giants. If you love malts and this label is available to you, give it s try and savor more than one. Dark cloud rain on me! And be sure to get alot in my nearly empty glass.

Negra Modelo

RATING: 4.5

Mexico

This is the only Mexican dark with any major popularity over time - we think. The short wide bottles look like giant chemical vials and fit the hand nicely. We'd like to see more companies use a similar bottle design. The dark brown color is more orange than red. The taste is more flavorful than potent. It is substantial without being strong. It is one of the VERY few dark/stout labels that are fine with a large meal. NM has a wine-like detail. In our database version we rated this our BEST MEXICAN BEER IN 1993. It is based on the amber Vienna Lager style brought to Mexico about 1880 by Austrian brewers. The style today is far to malty and dark to be called a VL.

North Coast Traditional Bock

RATING: 4.5

Color is rich amber. The head is fine-textured foam in such abundance that it may last 15 minutes! This brew is so heavenly in its malty depth that head duration (and bottle duration) is a few seconds for us. Sam Adams

Double Bock (Doppelbock) is the logical comparison. We could not find fresh samples of both at once but our notes suggest Adams is stronger and darker. Refrigeration must be constant. Simply superb. Thoroughly worldclass.

Brewbase Fives



Otter Creek Mud Bock Spring Ale

RATING: 5.0

Middlebury VT

The dark reddish-brown ale is immensely malty - "deep and broad maltiness" as they put it. Hopping is light. The head is small but enduring. They don't use preservatives or pasteurization. The name "mud" derives from their celebration of "the arrival of Vermont's sloppy spring". The winter scene on the label of harvesting and hauling maple syrup gives it a very wholesome sort of appeal. Indeed it is as rich and hearty as an American beer short of a stout can be. There is also a faint smokiness (very slight) so one is inclined to group it with the porters on taste alone. It has a slight hoppy nip in the finish and lots of dry appeal. This is one the better dark American ales you're likely to find anywhere.

Pinkus Jubilate Organic Lager

RATING: 4.5

Germany

This dark at 5.5% is certified organic by ABCERT AG, the German standard in organic agricultural products. The USDA also adds their stamp. As ever the label in white, gold, and forest green ornatons is lovely and proud of the heritage. It is dark brownish-amber with a thin cream head, perhaps long in a tall glass. The nose is subtle euro-malt. The toasty bread notes of the old Munich dark standards come to the fore quickly but the finish is slightly tart, faintly citrus at first. The sweetness is mild-medium and well-judged not to offend. The more complex, subtle notes of hazelnut, weak citrus, generic punch-fruit, and toasty grains are wonderful. You also get faint spice and some tame molasses according to other panelists - I think they are daft to be honest with you. Unlike some dark lagers of substance this serves well very cold. You do get more thick raisin, fruit, and honey if served warm. A couple folks (not most) felt it too sweet and annoying by the second bottle. One bottle is more than enjoyable so don't go tempting fate! A wonderful dark lager, rewarding and complex with lots of things to discover and love.

Puntigamer Panther Dark

RATING: 4.5

This 'Genuine Draft' has one of those terrific creamy and full heads that makes a great show. The color is very dark amber that casts red lights around your crystal. The flavor is of the smoky type such that Anchor Porter would prove to be an interesting comparison. Sam Adams Double Bock is very different. It is dark and rich enough to please but not heavy nor with a long finish. A rather ordinary meal will be improved with Panther Dark Malt at the table.

Reichelbrau Frankisches Urbier

RATING: 4.5

Kulmbach, Germany

This product of Kulmbach must be compared to Hofbrau Bavaria Dark which is from the same brewery and has the same taste. Color is dark amber and head is foamy and persistant. It is not strong but is brothy and full enough to be quite satisfying. One must mention that the multi-tone brown and gold label is one of the most attractive for any collection and carries Old World charm. It is smooth enough to serve with a fairly rich meal.

(Chatoe) Rogue First Growth - Grow the Revolution - Dirtoir Black Lager

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

The label is a proud presentation of a dark fist which seems to be half 60's "Black Power" and half old Soviet labor poster - all while clutching wheat and hops stems. Risk(tm) malts are used along with Independent and Revolution hops, together with German yeast. Not sure a crushing fist with German ingredients and "purity" is a comforting or compatible theme here dudes. There's a "first growth" thing going on too as well as a GYO (Grow Your Own) theme that makes the presentation ever more confusing. How about a rule we promote just one charity or pious theme per label guys? Can a Haitian Earthquake - Save the Polar Bears - Let's Go Back to the Moon - Support Arlo Guthrie's Ranch - Buy Twisty Lightbulbs - Neuter Yer Kitty - Never Squish a Spider - Organic ale made with free range hop vines (not tied down and allowed to creep) and harvested only by homeless, transgendered Union workers wearing recycled Birkenstocks and carried by their 3-legged, canine-American companions in carts on roads created by native tribes and Bison be coming soon? Damn! Let most of it go for sud's sake - I just want a decent beer and you can decide what to do with any freakin', tainted profits on the backside, downlow and unknown to me or any other Republican aleheads or Tea Party maltaholics who happen to buy your capped, overpriced fluids.

Rogue has a generally accurate way of describing their products and so I repeat "jet black in color with a tan head, full bodied, deftly balanced, seamless dark roasted malt flavors with smooth bitterness, lingering long finish". It is uber-porter dark, the head tanned like a drunk striper using a faulty bed timer, deep malty nose - porter or stout aroma for sure. These are so luscious...smmmm... ooooooth malts to be sure. Hops are a bit on the low scale for this brewery and some people think that's a flaw here. I was skeptical but Rogue has a way of making me a believer - they have evangelistic skills like Billy Graham or Billy Sunday on their very best day - a believer at least in the broth even if not the trendy, PC baggage on the labels. The hops are well-infused, a malt-hops balance that suits me to the point of adoration. It is just 5% ABV and so very marketable around the world. It gets a Schwarzbier classification from most online experts and I'd meekly agree in the strict sense. It will serve functionally as a very smooth stout to the average beer guy. Now that I've consumed most of it, the black fist is now luminous Latino or drunk striper amber by the lamps and isn't that a potent lesson for all of us - or not?



Samichlaus Bier

RATING: 5.0

Eggenberg, Austria

In this fraudulent marketing era when "fresh beer" is said to be the only acceptable beer, I'm glad people are being told otherwise. This label proudly proclaims it was bottled in 2007. As "the world's most extraordinary beer", we get a tactical nuclear weapon of the dark beer world with a true 14.0% ABV - that's aged port territory my friends. If \$0 for 11.2 ounces was ever a good deal, this is the example to cite over and over. Color is glowing amber, on the darker side, lace very long, and the head big at first but short-lived. They brew this stuff only once a year on December 6 and it takes a full year to get the flavor and ABV they require. Here is no 30-day and out, light, weak-as-water, additive-drenched, chemically-managed, flavor-augmented brew in a can folks! This is real quality, connoiseur, craft to the highest levels beer if ever it existed.

You can accuse them of making a simple malt syrup and following basic laws of science to boost the ethanol to massive levels. But if so, why don't others do this and charge the propoortant, lofty sums for the experience! The reason is because this formulation is tuned just right and any simple attempt at hyper-sugar, rich malt, and high ABV would be a crude disaster until years of smart tinkering. There's a lovely tartness to compliment the sweetness, cream with your candy, enough carmel to drown a bushel of apples, and the spice of raisins. Some beer snobs says it needs aging, more refinement and to that I saw...what's stopping you?!? Age it like a Tom

Hardy ale and get what you like in a year or five. "Fresh" (at one year or more) or aged, this is one of the finest achievements in the brewing world and you don't have to be a snob to appreciate the flavors.

Samuel Adams Dark Lager

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

Let's start with the label claims as I usually do: "traditional lager...medium in body...deep roasted character...rich malty flaovr from specially roasted caramel and chocolate malts...lightly hopped [Bavarian Noble]....soft spiciness...smooth clean finish". Thank you, James. The label also says "21 and counting", noting the number of their regular labels; no small feat considering the size of the market they must wrangle. It pours a very dark reddish-brown, a couple clicks from opaque, the head mix brown and beige, and lasting well in tiny bubble form. Like many SA products, you are smitten with tartness early on and then the flavors come at you in waves, in this case big malty but not multi-dimensional waves. After a bottle or two, the hops cling to you and those become better, adding depth. You do need two bottles min to really get this one. I always laugh at those tiny sampling cups at beer festivals for no one learns much from that and you're never qualified to be a guru or review anything by collecting an hundred of those puny samples.

One can't swill or sniff or rinse your gums with beer to know beer. You must drink beer and lots of it; always doing your reviews before the EtoH clouds the judgement. I very seldom review more than 4-6 beers at any setting and yes I do drink them full and long. This brew is very nice, I would even call it a "near porter" perhaps on account of the tartness, roundness, and big malty bath in the later notes. The finish is never stout rich nor smooth but one gets a big of comfort in those tall, tart malty punches; a style of abuse most beer lovers come to adore, demand, and crave. It might have been ruined by more sweetness and it's sufficiently dry to be smooth without offending. It is burnt and roasted like old coffee from the Bunn pot in the office break room at 9pm while working late on Jones account or tommorow's "bad news is really good news" presentation. There's something nice about all that sticky, harsh stuff. It's odd how we love burned malts and sugars whether craving caffeine to boost or ethanol of sooth. I think our Creator hard-wired malt and tannins into our human program to really be fascinated and needy of them in so many forms.



Samuel Adams Double Bock

RATING: 5.0

This DARK LAGER is made using lager yeast, Bavarian hops, and four (yes 4) times the malt of normal beers. It is dark reddish amber with a very solid head of creamy color. It is unique among all American beers and without the import costs one finds it very affordable as a six pack - unlike many German and British labels. While rich and flavorful it finishes with silky smoothness and a sweet malted taste to linger on the tonque. Unique and memorable.

Samuel Adams Imperial Double Bock

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

This 2009 release is made with nearly a half pound of roasted malt per bottle and German Noble hops. It pours "mahogany" in color (rich brownish-red). It is more syrupy and thick that the more familiar Double Bock offering of previous years. This 9/5% variant is offered in 4-bottle packs for just a bit under \$10 - no bargain compared to the usual stuff. Imperial White and Imperial Porter were release in similar trim at this same time. While their regular Double Bock is potent, it is also smoother and less heavy in mouthfeel. Sweetness is medium-high, perhaps a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. Malt is full but not so complex as a monolithic, supercharged single theme. There are passages of hops bitterness but they are mostly "sugared out" by the finish. I found it a bit hard to

drink after the first wonderful bottle. It's for slow sipping in low quantities for sure. I blended it with a decent Pils and found it 90:10 in that formula more appealing. This label shows the subtle difference between glorious excess with no regrets and respectable "over the top" brewing. This is perhaps over-the-top for it's own sake. There are slight regrets here though not all you will agree with me. The difference is like 600 horsepower in a carbon-fiber Ferrari trim vs. the same in grand steel Mustang. Potency needs a certain degree of care, an elite package, and a suitable framework to be called perfection. This one is a tad simple, too thick, too sweet, and underhopped to get my perfect score.

San Miquel Dark

RATING: 4.5

This Philippine masterpiece is colored dark reddish brown with a long-lived foamy head of the highest quality. It is endlessly rich and rewarding in addition to an alcohol content from 3.2 to 4.1 (by weight and depending on the source). The phrase 'nectar of the Gods' came quickly to mind. It is every bit as fine as any Samuel Smith or Young's stout but not quite so rich. We rate is slightly better than St. Pauli Dark and Negra Modelo. Top notch!

Saranac Black Forest Bavarian Black Beer

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

Slow-kilned and two-row malts are used with five varieties of both imported and domestic hops to make this bargain thriller. While very dark brown it is not really a porter and as the label says it shows 'medium body'. The head is tall and creamy. The hops-malt balance is quite exceptional for this or any other price range though it is not quite worldclass. Reviewers noted 'a smooth, comfortable flavor that is pleasing without being harsh or bitter'. Another wrote that 'while it would not replace Becks Dark or a host of other brown German labels it is nice to know America can produce this quality for under \$6-7'.

Saxer Three Finger Jack HefeDunkel

RATING: 4.5

Lake Oswego, Oregon

This microbrew from outside of Portland has trademarked (unregistered) the name 'Hefedunkel'. That name ALWAYS means a DARK WHEAT in commerce so it is surprising this beer is neither cloudy nor described as a wheat beer; though very dark it is. It is crystal clear reddish-brown with a lasting beige head. It won the 1994 Great American Beer Festival Gold Medal for Dark Lager. Overall it is not unlike a very fine dryer OKTOBERFEST beer in terms of malty depth and faintly sweet finish. There was shade too much bitterness in the hops for some reviewers though most were pleased it was not sugary sweet. If you are partial to full blast hops-and-malt (like many potent Pale Ales) this is sure to be please. You'll want much more than three fingers worth.

Schloss-Privat Export Dunkel

RATING: 4.0

Mickhausen/Bayern

This brewery like many of Germany's finest dates from centuries ago - 1613 in this case. And unlike lots of old German breweries they now use a freshness date marking system. It is one of the lighter colored of German export darks, being amber and not the least bit brown. The head is full and semi-persistent. Flavor is malty but moderate for the style. The finish is a tad sharp and bitter. It was considered a flaw by a few of our reviewers. Sweetness is very slight. The 500ml bottles are filled with 4.5% alcohol by volume - up to a full percentage less than some darks of American origin. Reviewers noted 'a fair amount of roasted malt charm but it failed to impress me' and 'very average...Optimater and Becks [Dark] to say nothing about several great dark wheats...really beat it by miles'.

Shiner 100 Commemorator

RATING: 4.0

Shiner, Texas

Up front I must confess to never having liked or admired any Shiner product;

nothing in their 100 years of brewing and my 30+ years in sampling. That changes here but only a little. I like it but not much more can be said. The 100th Anniversary of the Spoetzl Brewery is marked with this very dark, doppelbock that weighs in at 6.7% ABV. Color is rich amber-brown, not so dark as expected, the head near white and of average duration. Flavor is richer than their usual stuff, moderate malt and very faint hopping. When a real beer lover sees that -ator suffix one expects a rich, dark feast and all the stops pulled out in the brewing concert. It is pleasant and nice but not remarkable nor on the class of readily available doppelbocks in the US market; many very close in price now. It is drinkable and accessible in the popular sense and that sense my friends disguises a good deal of lost opportunities and things just a notch or to about mediocrity. Anniversary beers are special occasions and this was largely squandered though no one at your party will spit it out. It is no Optimator and that should be clear.

Shiner Bock

RATING: 2.0

Shiner, Texas

The Spoetzl Brewery of Shiner TX has since 1909 made this beverage in the style of their Bavarian founder Kosmos Spoetzl. Color is rich reddish amber. Head is persistent and carbonation long. Flavor was shockingly limited for a darkish brew labeled 'Bock'. The dry finish emphasizes the rather thin hops and malt taste. At \$5.49 Rolling Rock Bock is a vastly better selection. We see Michael Jackson gave it 1.5 of 4.0 stars. Not recommended.

Shmaltz Coney Island Human Blockhead

RATING: 4.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

Where else will you see a dude wearing a purple bow tie pounding a nail into his nasal cavity with a hammer?

Some of these bold "sideshow" labels from Shmaltz are novelties and some of them are fairly good. It won as Grand Champion in the US Beer Tasting Championship for Alternative Lagers. It pours amber dark, decent mid-strength lace, and a small ivory head. Mouthfeel starts syrupy and one soon gets the expected sticky candy malt flavors on a level that many famous amber ales have perfected. Hopping is light but at least it exists. It is warming, tempting, easily likable, and what I have in the past called Candy Lager. ABV is a full 10% so it's thermonuclear liquid candy. I would like to have seen more hops but perhaps they got lost in the tangy ethanol as often happens in this stratum of the universe. Reminds me of "a spoon full of sugar (or twenty)...makes the medicine go down.."



Spaten Optimator (Special Dark)

RATING: 5.0

This Special Dark is of the DoppelBock or Double Bock type - which is true of most Bavarian beers ending in the

suffix -ator. It is dark reddish brown (like a cherry coke) and with a short-lived but distinctly brown head. It proved endlessly flavorful and refreshing. Compared to the more available St. Pauli Dark and it proved less brothy and smoother. As a seasonal spring beer it is often rare in the US. Very memorable and worth waiting for. Optimator is a classic, a standard from the old country, and one should be regularly acquainted with it to judge the new beers. The Optimator name is a legend in Europe and among informed North Americans. It's a standard, a big standard, so honor and enjoy it.

St. Pauli Girl Dark

RATING: 4.0

Bremen, Germany

This popular quality German also comes in quality stout/dark variant from the Bremen brewery. Poured into a glass it could pass for a cola - remember that. While visually dark it is mild among the darks in flavor. It is never bitter nor potent like some darks. It does lack a complexity that we so admire in Whitbread Ale among some others. Among common grocery store darks we'd prefer DAB Dark or Grolsch Dark.

St. Stan's Alt (Dark)

RATING: 4.5

Modesto, California

The slogan 'conceived in heaven...brewed in California' is cute. And most accurate. This German alt style is not always what American's come to expect of a dark beer. While not as potent and brothy as some true alt beers this one is never weak nor thin like a few German export darks. It is a very nice balance in what we might call a SMOOTH DARK - a beer that is wonderfully malty and deep but does not monopolize your tastebuds for the next 5 hours. Not a few of us considered it to be one of the finest California darks and certainly one of the best of the style from these shores at least. The \$9 price (1990's) might set a few people off but this time it is worth it. Well crafted and a nice change of pace for most dark drinkers.

Tommyknockers Butthead Doppelbock Lager

RATING: 4.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

Two mischievous lads (tommyknockers are akin to leprechauns) are riding on huge rams but are butting heads on the label. This wonderful beer pours a faintly clouded amber-brown with a mid-sized tan head. The crystal malt notes are wonderfully rich, supported by ample but not excessive sweetness. There is some hops bitterness in the background but faintly so. Finish is more dry than early to mid sugary-malt peaks. It is not so brothy or earthy as most European double bocks and in this respect is more Americanized than traditional. But don't knock a bock until you've sipped it long. It is approach an O-fest beer in the overall theme and the label states their goal was "big, rich mouthfeel". It is very convincing as a sweet, double-dosed dark, robust but approachable, friendly but not as deep as it might be.



Tucher Bajuvator Doppelbock

RATING: 5.0

Nurnberg, Germany

Brewbase Award: BEST DOUBLE BOCK SPRING 1997

This rich dark German double bock is richly malty as expected and on the sweet side. It is not overly sugary and as one reviewer phrased it: 'I'd much prefer this to the average Oktoberfest beers'. Color is dark amber and the beige head is very long lasting. The malt aroma is one of the most sumptuous imaginable. It is a thoroughly well-

made and refined beer and frankly we know of no US microbrewery bottling anything like it; even Sam Adams is a very different flavor and effect. Panalists here remarked it was 'a malty delight...something about it makes you just think 'now this is true beer' and 'pungent, earthy, sophisticated...full without being filling'. For the newer beer lover we have a general rule to pass on: if you see an -ator suffix, buy it!

Uerige Doppelsticke

RATING: 4.5

Germany

The last time I bought a bottle of this shape it cleaned my Dodge Intrepid's fuel injectors. The brown glass ultra-long neck is 6 inches or so and the molded named base a narrow, tapered thing. Add in the swinging hardward and you're not sure this will be a good deal for price or volume - flavor decisions will come later. It's alot of fuss for just 11.2 ounces of anything - perfume included. THIS BOTTLE IS HIGHLY COLLECTIBLE ON TWO LEVELS - UNIQUENESS AND QUALITY OF THE CONTENTS. This classic altbier is medium brown with a huge head in beige. ABV is 8.5% and there's a faint haze to the it under strong light. Big, fat malt jumps and thumps you at once, following by nice, polite carmel sweetness in the finish. You need to consume a couple or four to get the hops bitterness they've built in for balance. It is a very pleasant beer but you definately need two or three to appreciate it fully. There are definately stout moments for some of us and yet you get some crisp fruit jumping up and demanding attention. This might well be a Five Bottler but it's not easily "accessible" unless one lingers long over several bottles. One experienced taster considers it a hybrid of alt, doppelbock, and an fruity English bitter ale. Wow, wow, very wow. Is that good or a brewing flaw? Is this a curious, odd mistake or planned brilliance? You decide. The history of this recipe deserves some study. You will like very much I am sure - love may grow as long the neck?

Weeping Radish Black Radish

RATING: 4.0

Durham, North Carolina

This product of Durham NC is now bottled for the South. Color is dark reddish brown with a very brown head of limited duration. Flavor is much like a good German dark but carries some rich malty notes of a lighter Stout. It is equally fine at 50 degrees or at room temperature and provides a nice depth of flavor. It is full enough to satisfy but not very rich like many stout and porter labels. A good comparison for Anderson and North Coast darks.



Weihenstephaner Korbinian Doppelbock

RATING: 5.0

Weihenstephan, Germany

The world's oldest brewery gets our attention with their (mainly three) labels of worldclass, standard-setting wheat brews. This Double Bock comes in the same bullet-shaped bottles, pours very dark and without the expected lace of their more famous offerings. Malt drenches the senses at first sniff and sip. Hops is a distant thing if they even needed to bother with such stuff. The 7.4% ABV is higher than their other labels I believe and that's something of a strength we did not have permission to buy in North Carolina until a few years ago. This "Dunkels Starkbier" is a feast fit for the Malt Gods and I suppose somewhere they must or should exist. Comparisons to Spaten Optimator are obvious and I at least find that label more avalable that this recently discovered (July 2008) offering. This label as with Optimater is drinkable with a slight chill though it benefits from the aromatic release of a lower temp. 46 to 52 deg. F. is the desired storage temp and is perhaps just about right for consumption too - though one can easily go way south of those numbers in summer. While

mono-dimensional it is so solid, so refined, and so delicious in that malty dimension, you want it again and again.

It is earthy, raw, and roasty without fault, dry, clean, and with this simple mission statement: DRY MALTY GOODNESS TO THE MAX. They resisted the temptation of US micros to produce shallow malt soda for the 100K bars that now embrace microbrews. Yet this label is still accessible and fun. Korbinian is truly an overdose of malt that will send some hop-a-holics running for the door. If you love TOO MUCH malt for your own good, go here, otherwise keep your money in the mainstream microbrews. Put it on your "you need to try this" list for friends you're trying to teach about amazing, worldclass beer. It's a worthwhile education from sip one.

Wiehenstephan is accomplished in both their pale and dark products, one reason so many breweries around the world use their famous, ancient yeast. I see from websites that WEIHENSTEPHAN WEIZEN™ is trademarked as a yeast product (Wyeast 3068), noted for rich fruit phenols, banana flavors, some tartness, vanilla notes, clove-like flavors, and also compatible when used with lager yeasts. The yeast's proven ability over centuries to make a fruity-spicy wheat is unmatched by any known strain. There are actually several numbered strains of the style but not all make a wheat style.



Westheimer Graf Stolberg Dunkel

RATING: 5.0

Westheimer, Germany

The black, white, and gold-foiled label with old time font makes it look very Teutonic from first view. "One of the best German beers" at the crown of the main label is curious. Guess they did our reviewing for us? Unpasteurized or non-pasteurized status is prominently mentioned twice as is "full-flavored, live dark beer". If you Google "Westheimer Germany" you get hundreds of websites on the famous Dr. Ruth but "Westheim Germany" is more on target regarding this old town. Curiously, a Dr. Ruth conference will vastly beat the 1,150 population of the Bavarian town itself. And should you visit www.westheimer.de click on "Uber 16 Jahre" to get in. The 150 year old firm is also known for a popular Radler (lemonade beer). This 5.1% bock is dark amber-brown with some reddish hues, the head rich cream-toned and bit short. The nose is those yummy, transcendent Old World malts, bready and warming, glorious and comforting at once. Panelists here said "absolute right...one of the best German beers dark or not...simply spectacular. Can't think of one aspect to improve" and "Wish this would replace most of the supermarket German Darks as it's richer and more rewarding". This is a nice choice as benchmark for your dark lager trials. Highly recommended by all.

Wurzbürger Hofbrau Bavarian Dark

RATING: 3.0

Bavaria, Germany

Wurzbürger dates from 1643 with informal traditions back to 1434 or so. This Bavarian Dark is called Burkardus in the native land. It is clear and orange-brown with sparse carbonation and a short-lived head. By our standard of good grocery store German darks it is thin and watery. Finish is semi-dry and smooth. Like some other reviewers we are profoundly disappointed. If there could be a class called DARK LITE this is it. Beck's Dark has it beat on all fronts.

Wurzbürger Hofbrau May Bok (Bock)

RATING: 4.0

Bavaria, Germany

This golden to amber spring brew has a short head but some carbonation. The flavor is pleasant and semi-sweet with medium depth of hops and malt. For \$ 9.00 a sixpack we would expect more. Like their Bavarian

Dark it just was not flavorful nor complex enough. Our May 1994 trial was disappointing. Considering their Julius Echter and 3 century's experience we are sure they can do better. This is a VW Jetta at a Mercedes price. Delete foil - add flavor. W

Xinggu Black Beer

RATING: 4.5

Brazil

Brewbase Award: BEST CENTRAL AMERICAN BEER IN US

This dark Brazilian beauty has a name pronounced Shin-goo and is named for a tributary of her sister the Amazon. While quite opaque and with a medium brown head it is not full like a stout or porter. It is fairly aromatic and provides a rich flavor only in the aftertaste. The potency simply explodes with pleasure and is quite rewarding. The primitive-style diamond shaped label is very collectible although Michael Jackson says the tribal connection is 'spurious'.

Yuengling Bock

RATING: 3.5

Pottsville, Pennsylvania

America's oldest brewery has another one, this \$6.99 hitting the bottom of the micro-market if not even lower. Before I forget, I reminded by the story that President Obama had a bet with the Canadian Prime Minister about the Olympic hockey finals in 2010. The head guy up north was offering up a case of Molson. The US lost and Prez BarryO gave a case of Yuengling to the PM. This gesture was not lost on the Union supporters of the US leader who consider the union-busting Yuengling about as highly as Hitler and Bernie Madoff. A President who won with lots of union help representing his country with...you get the idea. Brings new meaning to State of the Union, I suppose. My objection is different for I would rather our great land be represented by something with actual flavor and representative of highest brewing accomplishments.

Anywho, this bock pours medium amber-brown, the head large and tan. The nose is malty in a earthy way, tempting in fact. It quickly became my favorite Yuengling, miles ahead of their omnipresent Black and Tan which is tons weaker. It is only very slightly sweet, very nicely judged, and the malts while simple and straight-forward are ample and elegantly delivered. Not sure I've loved a \$6.99 sixpack this much since 1983 when my flimsy vinyl wallet only had 8 single bills in it on average. We are told this 2010 bock re-issue, billed as a "late winter seasonal classic", is in time for their 180th anniversary. They have not done a bock in about 40 years. Sadly, it will last only 10-12 weeks of production and this fine brew using 1941 label artwork will go away, in favor of doubtless cheaper beers in their recipe file. I wish they'd ask Detroit how smart it is to offer a great, popular product once every 20-40 years and go long periods by selling, cheaper crap? That thinking doesn't work in any industry or in any world known to me, folks.

Zötler Korbinian Dunkel Classic Bavarian Dark Lager

RATING: 5.0

Rettenberg, Germany

"Germany's Oldest Family-Owned Brewery" goes back to 1447 and now brewing in their 20th generation. Cool! Their operation is set at the "vacation paradise and ski resort in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps" and I can almost see a necessary tasting trip coming up; assuming my publisher will kick over a 3 grand advance for "research". The four-pack of punny 11.2 ounces and 4.7% ABV was initially a big negative. The \$6.99 (March 2009) price tempered that feeling but it was the flavor that made me find this of supreme value in the final analysis. This "authentic rendition" of the old style is spot on to my slightly informed American taste. I've tried 99% of the dark lagers they send over and that is my only qualification to say this is pure and ultra-authentic. Yes, yes, I know "ultra-authentic" is a bad writing because something is either authentic or not. I just liked how it sounded, okay?!?! (Note to self: trademark the phrase "ultra authentic" and get rich). It pours a very dark amber-brown, as dark as few porters I've tried of late, good cream head but neither tall or lasting in my crystal. It's loaded full of those comforting German-grade malts, bits of corn, bread, and earthy malt in the mix but never crude as some darks banished here to lower scores. It is wonderful at 40, the recommended 45 deg. F. and even much warmer.

Sweetness is moderate but calming and the finish is as smooth as the \$495K, 617 horsepower Mercedes SLK McClaren on a quiet Sunday drive down an empty Autobahn. (That means worldclass smooth beyond most of

our comprehension and second to nothing anywhere). There is faint hoppy bitterness in one's finishes after the first bottle or two - the basic hops carryover effect from a saturated tongue. They have recipe tuned in well and that is surprising actually. Lots of families in Germany and Belgium with 3-5 centuries under their belt don't always deliver as I'd expected. These folks get it, kept it, and continue with it. This is truly one of the finest German darks and will be among my new standards in future taste panels.

LAGER - DARK - FRUITED OR FLAVORED

This category includes true flavors to the dark lager, usually bock or double bock base, except those sold as Christmas/Winter or Oktoberfest/Fall creations. Our "Lager - Fruited and Flavored" group is now reserved for paler, more golden and amber lagers.



Samuel Adams Chocolate Bock

RATING: 5.0

Boston, Massachusetts

The very attractive bottle in shades of metallic brown, chocolate, and silver is work of art even for this accomplished firm. It pours a bit more opaque a brown than their Holiday Porter. They used premium, real cocoa nibs from Ecuador and wow does that ingredient convey ultra-real cocoa flavors! Remember that chocolate malts are not the same as chocolate bock and this one separates the two sets of terminology into the deserved degree of clarity. I would rather have one of these than most of the chocolate-infused porters and stouts on the market - Clipper City Heavy Seas Mutiny Fleet Siren Noire Imperial Chocolate Stout and Southern Tier Imperial Mokah Stout (Blackwater Series) are exceptions for these A.M. winners are quite spectacular and a notch or so above this SA product. Those two labels along with the much more affordable SA Chocolate Bock are wonderful examples of integrating the Cacao flavors into the brewing arts. Here is a spiffy product, thoroughly engaging, and a worthless experience.

Samuel Adams The Vixen Chocolate Chili Bock

RATING: 3.5

Boston, Massachusetts and other cities

There are not many fruited or flavored lagers and most of them involve weak fruit flavoring or chilis on a Pilsoid base. This one is dark, from the master brewers at Sam Adams, and involves Mexican chilis, cocoa nibs from Ecuador, and cinnamon from SE Asia. Hallertau Mittelfruh and Noble are used along with 2-row, Harrington, Metalfe, Copeland, Munich, Caramel 60, and roasted dehusked malts. That is likely to be one heavenly kitchen sink and in the hands of SA we think it can be pulled off. ABV is 8.5%, showing a dark brown, opaque fluid with a short-lived rich tan head.

First sip is a bitter tangy and bitter, some cocoa notes coming out, and a rather sloppy finish for this brewery. Kitchen sink was more right than we knew when writing the pre-taste prediction. The chili ramps up a bit with tastebud saturation and that aspect gets better. Curiously the label says "ale brewed with..." but it's proclaimed to be a bock and by all appearances a very dark and double one. Most reviewers here thought it was interesting but needed some serious tuning, big time rethinking in fact. Is SA doing crazy new stuff because everyone else is and flowery lagers are everywhere? Not sure but they had better hire somebody from Dogfish to name just one firm doing creative things very, very well. We even found a fan of chili-infused chocolate candy (this pepper-cocoa theme apparently having a very limited fan base) AND knowledgeable about great suds. The fan said "the

chili was just right but the cocoa and hops became too bitter...falls flat with me". In short, The Vixen is a confusing, conflicted, witch from hades (or the other version) and not worth the dimes and drama.

LAGER - FRUITED AND FLAVORED

Michelob Ultra Lime Cactus

Michelob Ultra Pomegranate Raspberry

Michelob Ultra Tuscan Orange Grapefruit

RATING: 3.0

St. Louis, Missouri

I'm taking the liberty to review these as a group as they are essentially the same light Pils flavored with the things mentioned in what is said to be natural form. (I'm picturing big white buckets or shovel trucks full of powdered "natural" something here). I'd pick the Tuscan Orange above the rest but for review purposes they grade out the same. There is no beer flavor of any kinds and they are not overly sweetened wine coolers or "malt beverages" either. They are beery enough when very cold for some folks; mostly the type who cares about feelings, fashion, and the position of toilet seats. I'll confess to having consumed 5 of the Lime Cactus one night in the Holiday Inn Select Hotel because the only store open was a gas station and I could not suffer the other unflavored, watery crap on offer that icy night in Raleigh. I was as not offended by the experience as I was unimpressed. No harm, no foul, no repeat experience unless iced in again. After three, you go with the flow, get your thrills from television and plan for real beer the next night to sooth your guilt. 107 calcs each and a pathetic 4.2% ABV.

New Holland El Mole Ocho Beer

RATING: 4.0

Holland, Michigan

Hey! You got chocolate in my vegetable juice! Actually it's supposed to be beer but first sip gives one all the dark, dank, earthy comfort of a brownish V-8 tomato cocktail. "In our exploration into the flavors of mole..." says their website. A bit off the radar there. If you know something of this adventurous company they really do some nice work and also some work in progress to extends the envelope all the way to Galaxy A1689-zD1 and a couple of billion l.y.'s more for good measure. When this veggie-choco drink (a lager perhaps?) gets onto your buds, there is one more surprise. A bit of measured chili in the finish. This sure isn't my dads beer...closer to his homemade salsa actually. You'll either love or hate this experiment or pretend like so online beer gurus to keep an open mind for the sake of coolness. If everyone agrees to hate it next week, then they'll mark it down to a C+. I know that type of person and never cease to be different.

I don't know much about mole and apparently real historians say that no one does for sure. Whether it traces from Puebla or Oaxaca is disputed but forms come from both today. The very word derives from mulli or "concoction". Circa the 1550's, some folks (many nuns) ground up a bunch of chocolate, nuts, bread, chiles, misc. spices, and most anything they had to made a sauce - the kind of sauce you make from the pantry when it's very low and nothing seems to go together. The Archbishop had come to visit without warning and they did what they could and succeeded to his satisfaction and so this cobbled together sauce was invented. We also know that the Aztecs experimented with chiles and chocolate so the mole in one form or another is probably much older than the Mexican stories. There's another story about Archbishop visiting and spices got blown by the wind in to the cooking, the result being accidental but praiseworthy once again. Other popular additives to modern mole include left over tacos, crackers, lard, plaintains, peanuts, almuds, fried bread, tomatillos, onion, sesame seeds, oregano, garlic, cloves, and cinnamon - some have their own names if one ingredient is featured.

I have had chili lagers in the 80's and most of them were either too strong or too faint. The chili dose here is just right for my Upstate New York bred tastes. I like the idea of this beer but would have toned it down to be vegetable-juicy and perhaps made it a chocolate stout instead using the benefits of real chocolate. This is surely a cooking beer for batters in any event but as a drinking beer, I find it excessive for the sake of name. Coffee was added to this concoction and that too makes me wonder why a stout or porter style was not employed here. It is best very cold and roomed to ambient temps in your house, it will get a bit like something the Juice Man

would hand out.

Samuel Adams Alpine Spring

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Massachusetts and other cities

Showing up in January 2011, this Helles-based lager is a seasonal named in part for Tettnang hops grown in the alps. Citrus notes overlay the lager flavors, making it a bit like a summer cooler. Malts are of the honey and 2-row varieties. It is unfiltered, hazy, goldier-than-gold and thus quite flavorful, carrying a fine-textured head and very firm lace. After the citrus notes one becomes slowly aware of good hops and malts. It is respectable, substantial, crisp, yet not earth-movinmg for anyone here; a decent "fill up the line" offering and attention getter on the oft boring supermarket shelves. The finish carries a zap of both dry hops and carbonation.

Samuel Adams Porch Rocker™

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts and other cities

This summer brew is very pale yellow under a lasting off-white head. It was inspired by the Radler Lager which is often a 50:50 or 60:40 blend of lager with soda or lemonade. Thus this is a higher level concept of the lemon-wedge augmented Corona. As an effective thirst quencher, SA has blended a traditional Bavarian lager with fresh lemons. We do not think the fruit is anywhere near 40-50%, nor does it resemble any lager-lemonade blends we have tested. The authentic, reasonably tart lemon flavors are quite abundant, perhaps like one squeezing 2-3 wedges into the pour though the work is done for us. As with an established, award-drenched brewery Koch and company's sense of balance between the lemon and hops is spot on and cannot be questioned. It must have been difficult as 2-3 wedges is hard to translate into a bottled, transported, and stored product. Ours was tasted on July 1, 2012 and it was labeled to last until Nov. 2012. While this product did not really rock our porch it was pleasant on this 100+ degree day in Raleigh NC - just after having 106 and 105 degree records. Not being bothered to cut and squeeze on such a day is a blessing and frankly we like this more than other citrus lagers. A citrus-wheat would have been a little too potent and cloying on a 100+ day. This was a rewarding and welcome find at Harris Teeter.

LAGER - LIGHT

We can be sure that Light Beer, whether lager (Light Pilsener Lager) or ale, originated when breweries and public houses needed to make more money and watered down the formula - or alternatively, put less hops and malt in the formula. During wartime, especially the last two great World Wars, there was a thinning of the ingredients as one had to make due with less. A thinner beer became patriotic. It is said that when soldiers returned from WWII they were already used to thinner, lighter Pilsoid flavors and went on to prefer these when returning back to the US. Many of these lads never had a real Pils or strong beer unless they found a place in Europe still making the authentic stuff.

The Amber Light is a marketing ploy, getting one to imagine real flavor due to the associaiton of amber colors with malty flavors. The most favorable lights can in fact be very golden and even pale yellow. The amber lights can have some malt but very little hops. Each must be judged on actual taste and not whether food coloring or a little malt was used to tint it up.

Miller coined the Lite Beer name to set their brand apart in terms of name, surely not in terms of superior quality.

There is some overlap between light beer and Low-alcohol Lagers because these beers tend to have 2.6-4.5% ABV. In some US states, a license to sell "low point" (that is low-cal, low ABV beer), often 3.2% or below, is easier to obtain and is the only recourse that some stores will have. This means the average drinker will consume more to get the desired level of buzz, increasing profits. Overall, light beers are made with less grains to have few calories. Whether are physicalled "watered down" after brewing is a closely guarded secret though both lower ingredient density and water thinning are likely. The Calorie count per 16 oz. varies widely from 54 to 160, so

perception and label reading is important.

The best of the light beers are those which have lots of hops flavor but go low on the malts and other grains to reduce the calories.

The worst of the lights are those which have 140-160 calories and pretend to be as healthy as those in 55-70 range. A few are so bold as to sell their lights as 11.2 smaller bottles. Some breweries add fungal enzymes to break down unfermented dextrans, reducing the carbo load. Others play with fermenting temps, mashing methods, and clever computer-moderated recipes which minimize the caloric count. Some breweries maximize sugar breakdown which of course products a stronger alcohol. They can water this down and flavor it artificially (unfortunately not often with expensive hops) to make a low-cal, low ABV product.

Most real beer lovers with a waist to worry about (mine being very far gone) consider consuming less of really, really great beers instead of mass-consuming crappy, low cal pisswater. Miraculously such logic also works with pasta, ice cream, pie, pizza, soda, potato chips, and wine - anything you want to give you fewer calories can be scaled down to smaller portions - satisfying yourself with high quality instead of hideous quantity. Not a difficult concept.

Amstel Light

RATING: 2.0

Holland

This light from Holland is imported by Van Munching of NYC is what we might call a hyper-light. Flavor is very thin so it is ideal with Mexican or other spicy foods. It is too weak by itself and at a mere 95 calories it must contain a good deal of water. Amstel Light is almost an invisible stealth type of beer. It tastes like a flavored water but with enough alcohol to provide a pleasant edge. This extreme was a disappointment.

Anderson Valley Poleeko Gold Light

RATING: 4.0

This 'Light' ale is bright honey gold with a full head and hint of haze under a strong light. It is by far the thinnest and least impression of AV's major 750ml offerings. It has a nice hops flavor and lacks the fruity palate of most other AV products. We cannot confirm it is light in calories but if so it is surely one of America's few flavorful light ales. Boston Lightship was a better choice but this is worth trying. Can have bitterness if too warm.

Becks Light

RATING: 4.5

The label proclaims that BL is 96 calories and is 100% German. While crisp and clean tasting when cold it retains a very substantial Pilsner taste that is lacking in most lights. It is tied with Boston Lightship as the best lights and it stands alone as the world's best Pils-type light. These two beers will please those of us who normally hate light beers. This beer is highly compatible and pleasant with spicy or heavy meals of many types.

Boston Lightship

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

BREWBASE AWARD: BEST AMERICAN LIGHT BEER 1992

Tied as the top sub-100 calorie (98) light in the world. From Boston Beer Co. is this superb light that 'is the only light beer known to us in the world without artificial enzymes, adjuncts, or diluting water.' according to James Koch. It shows the uses of named hops but MUST be served VERY cold to keep the flavor tasting complex. If you do not like lights this is one to try anyway. As the cap says: Serious Light Beer.

Brewski Brew Pub Light

RATING: 2.0

Portland, Oregon

This microbrewed 'batch by batch' beer from Portland is reasonably priced at \$5.49 but not for its actual flavor. Color is medium yellow and the head is more lasting than popular 'American Light Pils' types. Sadly it lacks any of the hops charm that made their regular Brew Pub Classic a very good (but not great) beer. This has no merit given the other decent lights available - Cardinal Light and Boston Lightship come quickly to mind. Skip it.

Bronze Medal in 1993 GABF in American Light Lager.

Budweiser Light (Bud Light)

RATING: 3.0

With all the marketing and frequent sales this is very popular. It is certainly one of the top selling of all time. We think that Michelob Light and Coors Light are slightly better - all three score 3 bottles. It is perhaps too acidic for some tastes. We feel that Bud Dry is a much superior product although a bit heavier in taste. It will not disappoint (as some cheap lights will) but it is not memorable.

Busch Light Draft

RATING: 2.0

This budget 110 calorie light is a bit of a beer cooler or alcoholic water type of product. In its favor we found Amstel Light and Kirin Light of about equal merit at more than TWICE the price. This cold-filtered light is far more compatible with food or football snacks than its regular Busch cousin. It is less bubble-bound and comes off being cleaning and more palatable with food. Although pale it is a shade darker and more gold than regular Busch.

Cardinal Amber Light

RATING: 4.5

Switzerland

BREWBASE AWARD: BEST LIGHT AMBER BEER 1997

Cardinal breweries of Switzerland (1788) makes this TRUE LIGHT in lovely gold and forest green recycled packaging and 90% recycled glass. It is a mere 95 calories. C.A.L. is intended amber; something very rare for light beers. The head is initially full and taste 'hearty' as the label declares. It is well hopped and with malted notes. It is unlike all other lights in this database. We paid a shocking \$3.45 for 6 bottles but it seems quite hard to locate. I have not seen it in years and presume it gone.

Colders 29 Light

RATING: 1.0

This Miller product is 'cold aged at 29 degrees'. Unlike the regular version it is almost without any redeeming flavor or character. Like Miller Reserve 100% Barley Malt Light they have taken a decent bargain beer and given it a bargain basement taste. Perhaps the low price (app. \$2.75 in cans) and 'light' labels gives people freedom to enjoy another 400 calorie slice of pizza with no guilt. Perhaps it is a rare treat for the Busch Light crowd. Who knows?

Coors Light

RATING: 2.5

Golden, Colorado

Smooth and low acid light that is perhaps the best POPULAR American light for ease in drinking and compatibility with any food. Europeans and some Americans will call it a low-calorie alcoholic water. It could become one's table beer but it lacks complexity and emotion. It is invisible in taste and on the wasteline. It is a silver bullet tossed and not fired. Boston Lightship is the best American Light but is harder to find and \$2-3 more per six.

Coors Red Light

RATING: 2.0

Golden, Colorado

The old Silver Bullet ('Golden Light' we suppose) is now the old stuff. This new 1995 issue has redder color and just a bit more malty flavor than the old light. We stress the phrase 'just a bit'. There is really no merit in picking this beer in our opinion. Becks Light, Cardinal Amber Light, and Moosehead Light are our best light choices if and when you would ever want such a kind a beer - and most of don't and never will. The very lovely packaging here does nothing to make up for what is a miserable and taste-free product. Killian's Irish Brown seems to be the only Coors with any flavor on shelves these days. As reviewer put it: 'Coors should think of this as a red light for their image - stop and reevaluate their wrong direction.'

Corona Light

RATING: 3.0

Mexico

This lighter version of the popular Corona is not particularly stunning among light beers for a general lack of taste. While it is very drinkable with spicy and heavy meals there are several other low-cal and smooth lights of better quality. In its favor are some fairly low prices when placed on sale and its availability when other light beers are not. We think Coors Light and Mich Light are better values in this price range.

Darryl's Pig Light

RATING: 2.0

Dubuque, Iowa

dubuque Brewing of Iowa produces this very pale yellow brew that is lighter than their regular Pig Pounder Lager but ends up with a larger head. It is your basic flavorfree beer that gives no clue that a hop or particle of yeast ever came close.

Dixie Jazz (1990's)

RATING: 4.0

New Orleans, Louisiana

This LIGHT AMBER from New Orleans is perhaps not as good as Cardinal Amber Light but both are about equally as rare in shops. Color is amber but the head is fairly short-lived. It has enough flavor to charm and some sweetness to raise it far about your basic American LIGHTS PILS. The black, gold, red, and lavender label has raised texture and is artistic enough to be a Broadway sign. A weak finish is expected for its 92 calories.

Dixie Jazz Amber Lights by Joseph Huber Brewing

RATING: 4.5

Monroe, Michigan

The review above was an old incarnation from the Big Easy but this is a 2009 contract brewed variant from the Joseph Huber organization. Katrina destroyed their original old brewery and they've conquered and survived. It's a thin 4.13% ABV but the flavor of real Pils occurs in a nice malty way I found surprisingly adequate and pleasing. It is no basic "American LIGHT PILS" as described a decade or so ago. Calories still tap out at 92. It is rich gold but amber it is not unless you're sitting in a very dark bar with orange-tinted lamps. Their goal of retaining genuine Pils flavor in this lower cal form has been reached and I think they deserve kudos for this successful effort.

Foster's Light

RATING: 3.0

Australia

While regular Foster's is very fine this light does nothing for the beer lover. It is crisp and clean but with too little flavor compared to other fine lights. In fact some folks consider the regular Foster's to be a Semi-Light anyhow. Having less taste is the wrong direction to go and is in our opinion an unnecessary product. It is easily recognized by the mostly white packaging. It was not widely seen in NC until mid 1991.

Genesee Light

RATING: 2.0

New York

These blue cans just become available this far down South. Like most popular lights this has no real charm for serious beer lovers. It is smooth and clean and lacks the semi-bitter aftertaste of lights we rated as a single bottle. I suppose they can make a few million \$\$\$ just by average beer fans that'll try anything new and cheap enough. If they'd do a SLIGHTLY lighter version of their Cream Ale I suspect this would have a larger following.

Heineken Premium Light Lager Beer

RATING: 3.5

Holland

At 99 calories this is mid-high in that score a light beer. We wonder if we'd get a baby skunk from this newer

version of the time-tried classic. It pours ultra-pale yellow, the head large and near white. Skunks abound. Instead of Pilsoid saturation one finds bright fruit flavors which suggests they cut down on the sugars and malts and added alot of yeast. That is not a bad tactic at all! I actually liked this marginally better than the vaunted Sam Adams Light which uses Noble hops to give flavor. The Baby Skunk is very drinkable but for me beer will always be about maximum enjoyment and not doing without - the waistline was shot years ago and ain't going back down unless a blonde-from-my-dream Pilates chick shows up at my door and willing to work on me for free. I had two of these in my initial review and while graving more Pils flavor, do respect this as one of the more decent attempts in the category.

Hofbrau Bavaria Light Reserve

RATING: 4.5

Ernste, Kulmbacher, Germany

produces this somewhat uncommon 'Light Reserve' that is light straw yellow with a head of large bubbles. It is refined with nice flavor containing Pils and fruit components of the best kind. There is no disclosure as to caloric content so we cannot be sure it is really light in that sense. This is a first rate beer that one should try regardless of classification. It is nice choice with or after a rich meal.

I.C. Light (Iron City Light)

RATING: 4.0

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I.C. stands for Iron City and naturally it is made in Pittsburgh. Since 1861 Pittsburgh Brewing has made beers under the I.C. name. This light is very pale yellow and has a short-lived head. Flavor was indeed surprising in that it had some; a weak but actually discernable Pils taste along the authentic style lines. Becks has accomplished this as have a few others. One does not expect this accurate result from a mass market American label. Even at the verified 96 calories per bottle it is amazingly sweet and lightly hopped. Re-reviewed in 2008 the label now says 96 cal with 2.8gw carbs. Most importantly the finish does not go weak or thin. This is a very good choice with heavy sauces or spicy dishes. We'd drink it again.

Keystone Amber Light

RATING: 2.5

Golden, Colorado

Coors is so full of surprises. An Amber beer from Coors at a price of a whole \$1.99 for 6 cans. That has to be the fantasy a few million people. \$1.99 is what we paid on special at a Food Lion. The bright pumpkin-amber beer has little carbonation but there is actually enough malt flavor to let you know it has color before seeing it. This is no Cardinal Amber Light nor it is VERY LIGHT at 120 calories (many are 95-110) but the effort is promising. Even at a regular price of a whole \$4.00 (gasp!) this is a really decent American value. There are many ambers we love better but this is a truly excellent alternative for the malt liquor and bargain brew college set. It is more interesting than all the Coors products except the recent Fests.

Keystone Light

RATING: 2.5

This is an economy version of Coors Light in our opinion. The lined cans may not acheive bottle quality taste but it is sure better than most economy lights and nearly all the malt liquors. Your author cannot see any reason not to buy this over Coors Light UNLESS one wants bottles OR the only store open is small and does not carry this. In 12 packs this is a fine value for the waist-conscious drinker.

Kirin Light

Vancouver, Canada

RATING: 2.0

This the beer world equivalent of making Hondas in Ohio. This Japanese Kirin product is made by Molson in Vancouver - you have to study the lovely Japanese art label to tell. Unfortunately this is not a good light. This Nipponadian hybrid might please some light fans if served SUPER cold. Its first taste is very bland but when one hopes for a pleasant lingering flavor there is nothing but a faint medicinal hint. Stick to real Molson!

Labatt's Blue Light Pilsner

RATING: 2.0

186 We found this light Pils to be truly lightweight. The regular Labatt's Blue Pilsner was deficient in depth and this is even more so. When one matches this with a true Light Pils (namely Beck's Light) this is shown to be a very inferior beer. Although Canadian beers enjoy a good overall reputation some of their lights (including Kirin Light) are really meritless. The Light Beer field is full of competition and this one does not cut it.

Lowenbrau Light

RATING: 2.0

If regular Lowenbrau of the US is boring this light version is triple dull. It gets two bottles only because it lacks the bitter watery substance of bargain lights in those thin little cans. We see no reason to try this Light more than once - as an experience. Write us if you disagree.

Michael Shea's Irish Amber

RATING: 3.0

Rochester, New York

This product from western NY is described as "pub style lager". Color is on the pale amber side and the head expires quickly. Both hops and malt flavors are quite modest at first but the finish is more hoppy. We felt that both Dark Horse and New Amsterdam Amber products were more flavorful and complex. Were it called a LIGHT AMBER and put against Cardinal Amber Light it might rate 4 bottles. As a true pub-type amber it lacks depth we expect.

Michelob Light

RATING: 3.0

This and Coors Light may be the better American lights - although neither can come close to Boston Lightship as the Top American Light. But at 134 calories one can wonder if it should be classed as a True Light. Perhaps at 134 it is Semi-Light or Near-Light. Anheuser-Busch has a clear and wonderful product but not quite a clean a taste as Coors Light. It is never bitter and is agreeable with many foods. Best if VERY cold and for me their best is not good enough.

Miller Genuine Draft Light

RATING: 3.0

The Genuine Draft product has gained popularity for its high ranking among American beers. This 98 cal light version retains much of the cold-filtered flavor and charm of the original full cal brew. It is one of the very few lights (another is Boston Lightship) that actually has character and depth of lingering flavor. We feel there is no other light with this exact taste and so it gets higher marks than expected. The color is a nice gold too. They tried to make the "MGD" acronym a household or regular word but no one would be so silly or pompous to assume anyone knew what it meant.

Miller Lite (Lite)

RATING: 2.0

This is usually known by its large dark blue letters proclaiming L i t e and 'A FINE PILSNER BEER'. By European standards there really is no Pils taste left after the lightening process. It is crisp and very smooth when served very cold. While far from interesting one can say that costly Amstel Light is no better. Thus if one wants a crisp watery light this is a fine value. Miller Genuine Draft Light and Boston Lightship are much better choices.

Miller Lite Ice

RATING: 2.5

The modern 1994 version of the popular Lite is now ice-brewed into a light yellow beer with foamy head. The 125 calories is not light by our standards - others are 90-110. It jumps from 2 to 3 bottles here as it is quite clean and doesn't add annoying flavor additives like some other cheap \$3.50 ices. It is for now the only light with 5.5% alcohol - as of 3/94. While there is no hops or malt to charm it is no worse than tonic water with 5.5% vodka.

Miller Reserve Light

RATING: 2.0

While Regular Reserve is the best Miller or mainstream American you might want, this light version has no purpose in our opinion. When you finally manage to find real flavor why take it away? It must be some knee-jerk marketing philosophy that every new beer must have a light counterpart. This makes as much sense as marketing a 4-cylinder Corvette. Stick with the strength and never dilute it! Cheaper lights are just as appealing.

Milwaukee's Best Light

RATING: 2.0

Perhaps the finest light econo-brew. Available in can or tons of cans this cheap-lite is neither costly nor complicated. Miller Light is more costly but this Miller product delivers punch to the brain for a minimum of greenbacks. In this age of super cheap malt beverages this is a good alternative with some quality in the price range for those of us with significant waistlines. I've actually enjoyed this brew in a tall, cold pitcher in which was poured a tallboy of Guinness to flavor it up - such a beer blending on a budget. By itself, this stuff is pure crap and piss water.

Molson Light

RATING: 3.5

232 This beer must be classed as a SEMI-LIGHT since it has 116 calories or about 6-18 more than other well known lights. As such we would expect more flavor and in fact we do find it pleasantly mild and semi-pungent like regular Molsons. While well-crafted and clean it lacks the flavor that make Boston Lightship and Beck's Light so refreshing. It is however much superior to Kirin Light - the other light than Molson sends to us.

Moosehead Light

RATING: 2.0

We'd place this alongside Kirin Light and Amstel Light as products which have no reason to be imported. There are plenty of watery lights from America if one wants to be completely bored - and save a few bucks in the process. On those busy football weekends it seems to be in plentiful supply when other imports sell out to the bare walls. It has some flavor and is crisp. It might be a good choice for a Jalapeno eating contest.

Natural Light

RATING: 3.0

This Anheuser-Busch is promoted as all natural and 'smooth, clean, re-freshing'. It is vastly better than A-B's budget Busch Light. At 20 calories below Michelob Light it is more of a TRUE LIGHT. NL is not a weak watery type of light but has a nice tinge of roasted smoky flavor. We put this 110 cal against Miller Genuine Draft Light and liked GDL with its import-like pungent flavor. They are very different but compete directly by price.

Nordic Wolf Light

RATING: 3.0

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

The name implies a Northern European origin but it comes from a sophisticated Guelph Ontario firm called Silver Creek. It is a 110 calorie light with Canadian quality and lingering after-taste of some refined complexity. The marketing niche is that of a richer and more flavorful light. It is noteworthy as a light but average among Canadians. The square-shoulder bottle is art and the linen-textured label is refined.

O'Keefe Light

RATING: 3.0

AWARD: BEST CANADIAN LIGHT BEER 1993

This and Boston Lightship were the best lights we knew of North American origin until Sam Adams and Kim Koch entered the fray. In one phrase it is a PILS SEMI-LIGHT. The semi- comes from 109 calories which is 10% more than some lights. The pils taste is clear and reasonably deep. It will please most Pils lovers. It is very much on par with Beck's Light which carries a similar flavor. It is actually more rare than Beck's Light in our area stores. We paid \$5.29 a six pack in 1993 and not a penny for it since!

Old Milwaukee Light

RATING: 1.0

This thin and light econobrew was once consumed in mass quantities by college students and us ordinary working class. Today many people seem to find Milwaukee's Best Light and other budget labels to be more flavorful. I suspect a malt with more alcohol and perhaps a lower price would be more pleasant - although perhaps having 80% more calories. It is hard to review this as there is very little to analyze. One cannot review a Chardonnay if one is served a bottle of golden water instead!

Old Raleigh Light Amber Ale

RATING: 3.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

Described as "'mellow, light-bodied and subtly sweet" this dark golden ale has a lasting head of average size. Pale and 'German-style brumalt' is used to create a moderately malted ale with weaker themes of hops bitterness and sweet-ness. This is surely miles ahead of your average American light; amber or other-wise. However judged against the Cardinal Amber Light standard (unfortunately hard to find) this is perhaps too simple a beer. The malt dosing surely makes for a smooth, easy drinking beer. Reviewers noted 'clearly quality in the malts ...somehow failing to satisfy...why pay \$7 when I can cut down \$7 beer with a \$3 bargain and get the same result for less?' and 'not for the enthusiast...my light-loving neighbor thought it taste funny...not sure who this is for?'

Olympia Light

RATING: 2.0

Like the regular version this is usually found in 12 packs and can be rather hard to find. It is really no better nor no worse than most econolights. We see no real reason for this label except to compete with Busch Light and Milwaukee's Best Light. We'd suggest Miller Genuine Draft Light or Michelob Light for a few dimes more or perhaps Coors Light on special if a budget must be keep. If affordable and available Boston Lightship is a top US light.

Pete's Pacific Dry

RATING: 3.0

This is really Pete's Light, Wicked Light, Lightly Wicked or something. Even with some of the most artistic labeling in the business it was not up to taste standards of Boston Lightship. If one wants a true dry beer but with lots of flavor (non-light dry) we'd recommend the splendid Asahi Draft Dry. If one wants a good light try Becks Light or Boston Lightship or Coors. This proved to be a real disappointment and should be re-crafted for more flavor.

Red Stripe Light

RATING: 3.0

Kingston, Jamaica

First of all, these are just 11.2 oz. bottles which any moron could create to save calories. Big downer here. And yet it still weighs in at 120 calories! Shame, shame. Doing some not-so-higher match that equates to 129 calories for a standard 12 ounce serving. This stuff is surely a lighter Pils, never skunky as the skinny Heineken product nor as a fruity as their regular offering - far less hoppy than Sam Adams Lights - but then again everything on this blue marble is. I found genuine Pils flavors here, especially with the saturation of the second bottle on my buds. The finish had some off notes and I am not sure why as it was fresh enough. The whole smaller bottle thing bothers me but I only deducted (or failed to award bottles) based on actual flavor. Gotta be fair even if they WERE NOT FAIR.

Rolling Rock Light

RATING: 2.0

As much as we liked regular RR this Light variant is almost totally without merit. At 104 calories it should have some flavor for at least a second or two on the tongue. Sadly it does not. It is absolutely without any distinct flavor to separate it from watery 'beer coolers'. One would be better off with Busch Light except for the nice green bottle. This and Amstel Light show that solid companies can fail at the light game.

Samuel Adams Light

RATING: 3.5

Boston, Mass. and other places

If we can believe the warmed hype on the TV commercials, it took the good folks at SA 2 whole years of development to be happy with something called a light with their name on it. Unlike most lights this one has flavor and color. They claim it is the only light beer made with Noble hops and 2-row malts. It has the Big Four, German-approved ingredients and no adjuncts like rice or corn. It is 119 calories and 9.6g of carbs per bottle - not exactly a super-light MGD 64 calories. Miller admits this ultra-light MGD is just 2.8% alcohol so it's not what I want to evaluate here in general. SA Light is the Rolls Royce...umm Rolex...no Samuel Adams of light beers. It's dark amber-gold and looks terrific in any clear drinking vessel. The head is big, lasting, and off-white. It is strong enough for the Noble hops to be apparent; though in a dose too puny to lift my spirits at least. (I need more hops than New Guinea tree frog on crack). It is not frail, "weak as water", or devoid of all beer-like qualities as so many in section. There is a purpose for light beers (skinny girlfriends comes to mind) but I cannot think of any that apply to my consumption. Overall: A very good, solid run at a goal that I understood more than I respect. Everyone needs a light (the omniscient marketing gods and all) and I will forgive them, then sip at another SA shrine.

Sapphoro Light

RATING: 4.0

This is probably the best known of Japanese lights in the West. It has a German quality and moderate strength not unlike the Japanese fascination with German autos. The mouth of the bottles are amongst the finest available as they are well-crafted and easy on the lips. This is clearly a distinct product in packaging but the flavor can be compared to several other lights.

Schaefer Light

RATING: 1.0

There is not much worse than a beer that is flavorless and bitter at the same time. Even Busch Light proved to be less offensive. What taste remains is largely unpleasant. If there is such a group as the Beer Police they ought to close down this part of the factory.

Southpaw Light

RATING: 3.0

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Plank Road describes this light as 'double-hopped' which does not seem to fit a 'light' image. The package assures one that it is 'one-of-a-kind' and 'full flavored'. Color is very pale yellow. The head is thin and short-lived. Good news and bad news. The good news is that it's drinkable. The flavor is more semi-sweet than hoppy but it's no damn awful Pabst Light; we did pay \$3.99 on an intro special. Bad news is that it should have been hopped to the 12th power if this is double hopping. We did like the two kangeroos (double hopping kind). If the price holds it would be great but we doubt it. Reviewers noted 'light look though 123 calories...only decent because its sweet...no real hops theme' and 'pleasant, refreshing, but too weak to excite anyone'.

Stroh's Light

RATING: 2.5

This light in bottles or cans shows some promise. While it is not flavorful like those we rated higher it does not have any bad aftertastes like the very cheap lights. If one is on a budget and wants a light this might be a fine choice. We would however suspect that something like Keystone Dry would be a better choice if one wanted a nice crisp econobeer. Miller Genuine Draft Light in cans is a good value with lots of nice flavor.

Watney's Light

RATING: 3.0

London, England

AWARD: BEST BRITISH LIGHT BEER 1993

The Stag Brewery of London has produced one of the top light beers and done so on only 96 calories. The \$7 price tag and its relative rarity in our NC stores are problems. This is a Pils Light with a subtle but still enjoyable flavor of great refinement. Far from a water-downed Pils (which we tried for comparison) this product retains an interesting pungency and moderately long aftertaste. Beck's Light is different but is the closest comparison we know.

Wurzburger Hofbrau Light

RATING: 3.0

We doubt they've been making a light beer since 1643 but at least SOME age- old skill shows through in this product. Color is pale pilsy yellow with a full head and eager carbonation. The first taste is light, sweetish, and fruity but not overwhelmingly a LIGHT PILS. Finish is dry and weak. To us Becks Light offers much more flavor in a LIGHT PILS. At \$8.49 a six pack we had hoped for more pleasure. A case of Keystone Dry would give more joy.

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LAGER - PILSNER, KOLSCH AND OTHER GOLDEN STYLES

For convenience I have grouped a number of golden styles in one section and you purists will hate me for it. They serve most markets as one entity and compete like a Mustang to a Camaro and a BMW to a Mercedes.

But let's take a second to them some justice. First of all, the styles overlap much in the American micro-world as they are not as bound by history, convention, law, etc. as the European. Most of these straw yellow beers are similar but traditionally the Kölsch from Cologne (Köln), Germany differs from the Czech Pilsner in being 1) less bitter, 2) being top-fermented at warm temps, 3) sometimes more fruity and sweet than a Pils but not very sweet like cheap Pils, 4) light to medium body, delicate and bright and refreshing by intention, and 5) sometimes with rich malts for a biscuity note. Sünner from Cologne for one is rather malty to me while others like Gilden are more hoppy. They are governed by the Kölsch-Konvention when produced in the original county.

In our golden lager group here we also include the Zwickelbier, a subvariant of Kellerbier (meaning "cellar beer") that is traditionally more carbonated, thinner, less hoppy, creamier large head, and about 5% ABV. Some experts merge them as the line are a bit blurred today, even in the old country. In truth, Kellerbiers are made in various strengths and levels of sweetness and malt, some being richer, sweeter Oktoberfest Lagers.

The Imperial Pils or IP is richer in most respects, often golden in color but some are more malty, dark and are found with amber lagers in this book. The Imperial Lager is similar and can be gold to amber as well, varying in the type and depth of malting. The mostly American creation known as the Hoppy Pils is one where strong, bitter hops are added to a classic Pils formula producing something like a hoppy golden lager but tasting at times close to a pale ale. The hoppy pils crosses some lines that most purists don't like to see blurred - kinda as disconcerting as a 98 horsepower Porsche with woodgrain trim or a really ugly, flabby Tropicana bikini girl.

Hybrids are things Americans do very well (or at least claim to in fancy ads) and one of late is the so-called Weizen-Pils or Hefe-Pils which uses both Pils and Wheat malts and hops them in a similarly subtle way. They tend to be most toasty, fruity versions of a Pils if made strong enough. No German firm would dare cross these boundaries and whether this cross wins over the beer world is still open to debate. I can always blend my own - and do - always using strong variants of the two styles. In fact, my hybrids are usually one very highly rated German Hefe-Weizen and an equally Pils from that part of Europe.

3 Horses

RATING: 4.5

Breda Bierbrouweij de Hoeflizers has been making lager since 1628 and the color and head are your basic Pils. Flavor is moderate-full with a very nice dry fruity character not found in some of the more famous lagers from this land. Notes of malt are nicely apparent and it makes for a rather fine choice for your next Pils taste test. It could beat a few of the German names if you try it unlabeled. One reviewer noted 'it has a light, clean feel but yet is fully flavored...stands out for me'.

Abita Andygator Helles Doppelbock

RATING: 4.5

Abita Springs, Louisiana

A double-bock being in the golden section? Even the weaker doppelbocks of commerce are at least amber and these malty from first sniff. This is golden and nothing darker. The key to understanding it is the Helles part of the name. This is a stronger Helles at 8.0% and frankly I'd have named it the Doppelhelles and left out the confusing bock reference. The lace here is good but the head did not last long for me. The flavor is rich and the higher ABV actually lets you know you about the experience something special - even if the ornately painted bottle with a modern art version of a golden gator jaw did not get your attention. At \$6 per 650ml (May 2009), the value is tremendous. It is a "sticky" (ie. high gravity) brew, slightly sweet at times, other times given off hominy malt flavors of a real bock, good cereal flavors, strong almond, faint fruit tending towards vanilla and grape knee-high, then reaching down to snap you with some toothy hops. Hints of caramel come out from mid note to back. Watch those soft taste buds and fingers! The finish grips a bit more firmly into the second glass with bitter hops. I rather like Abita experimenting the big bottle, special product market. They've done well in the microbrew market and going premium should be easy for them. It offended some friends of mine, badly confused even a couple of very experienced tasters, and delighted the majority. This brew is different, controversial for sure, worth them doing (ABSOLUTELY AND FOR CERTAIN), too "all over the map" for some purists, and about as easy to classify as a digital collage of Dennis Rodman images set to a 0.5 second interval. It is mislabeled as a "Doppelbock" with or without the Helles prefix. I judge beers as they are for what they happen to be. Andygator is a fun rollercoaster and just as disturbing at times. In Louisiana where Gumbo is improvised 12 million ways all this crazy stew of a brew passes for sanity.

Abita Save Our Shores (SOS) A Charitable Pilsner

RATING: 4.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

In this case BP does not mean Belgian Pale. It means that green-colored conglomerate than showed it's greenness by spraying 100 million or more gallons of oil into the Louisiana gulf, where the folks at Abita hail from. They give 75 cents of every bottle to restoration of the environment. It is technically a Weizen-Pils or WP as those two styles of malts are used along dry-hopping with Sterling and German Perle hops. The 7% limited edition pours very light yellow, head pure and lasting, nose weakish. They might have chosen a BP-black porter but that might have been less appetizing - ya think? It is pleasant enough but only well-chilled, moderate in strength and not what I'd call in incentive to donate by more purchases. It is more fruity than a regular American Pils but not by too much. Good cause - a bit too simple and weak an effort when it comes to the golden fluid.

Acadian Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

New Orleans, LA

Made by a Brasserie D'Acadie the label emphasizes a pure ingredient formula using only pale malt and Saaz hops. Color is light-medium yellow with a pale Pils-type head of some duration. Flavor is on the lighter side of moderate though occasional notes of fruit and hops assert themselves. Since they take the liberty to compare themselves to pure, original Pilsner Pils we can only rate this attempt as weak. Nothing from Czechoslovakia (since WWII at least) has been this thin. If one is used to Bud and Michelob claiming to be Pils styles then this product might tempt. But no true Pils fan is going to buy this.

Aldaris Luksus Lager

RATING: 3.5

Aldaris, Latvia

A classic Pils in all appearance, the bottle strikes one as very different. The embossed bottle does not a label in the center (neither front nor back) but the complex logo is allowed to shine and glow as it should. High marks for presentation. The label is partly a small decal on the bottom and the large, asymmetrical cream foil on the top but not covering the cap. The ABV is 5.2% and they've been around since 1865. It is a moderate Pils in strength, not to my full-blown Pils preference but I'll grade it on the moderate theme for what is happens to be. It is a must serve very cold as one bottle near ambient (and I usually test some of all of the a product at higher temps) gives some rough, unkind notes but nothing really hideous. Coldness is a must - that's not too much to ask for a Pils. I was trying to find out more about this brewing and Googling "Luksus lager" produced a small

paid aid for Lexus vehicles. (Who says the Google folks are always brilliant!? Maybe the word lager would have been a clue I didn't want a faux German car, guys). It's an okay product but nothing to write home or go shopping about.

Anyhow, I finally got to their website and found out they're the largest brewery in Latvia and one of the the largest in all the Baltic region. I really dig their old, original building which would be a delight for any town. They produce 48 beverages that including bottled waters, mineral waters, cocktails, and energy drinks. The Carlsberg beer line is part of this same company now. I liked best their statement of Business Principles which I may borrow from some day if ever called upon to write the same - very nicely thought out and brief.

Aldaris Zeltus Premium Lager

RATING: 4.5

Aldaris, Latvia

I love this product for the glowing embossed bottle with a label that just plain gets out of the way of real bottle art. They have oak leaves, grain sheaves, dates, names, and much more detail. Hold this bottle up to a bright light and any artist or photography amongst you will be impressed. Kudos once again. While I thought their Luksus Lager had some rough, crude bits it had a decent basic recipe with potential. Is this a true premium version which makes the Luksus Lager something they should have left at home? I'm going to say yes on this and not with too much emphasis because I know how marketing goes. Everyone in American and Europe will try BOTH labels (all their labels in fact) at least once and in that is three fortunes for somebody. I once had a marketing guru tell me to "get 10,000 people to buy anything once a year" and you'll get rich. Make them happy? Not important. Just get people to try you once and not complain. If I stuck to the Aldaris website Business Principles I'd leave the Luksus Lager home and go with the stronger Premium Lager product. One label of anything really great is enough and this is a superb, refined product on par with many Germans and better than some of them. I suspect someone wanted to move with a full, wide import line and see what happened. For my tastes, this is the one ready for Western World primetime but fortunes are made with other logic and marketing fun. You can't prove me wrong with money but a corporation is known not for their average quality but their weakest products. Go with quality and the rest (including the money) takes care of itself. I'm jumping off the Pils Box...preaching over...for a page or two.

Altenmunster Premium

RATING: 4.5

Marktoberorf, Germany

This Bavarian Pils is made by Sailer and we would have liked to have a sample of their Sailer Pils to compare with it. Unfortunately no one found any. The ceramic and rubber capped bottles and labels were not up to usual German quality - the cap was badly painted and the label ink rather pale. However it is the contents that really count and it was quite enjoyable. This is one beer which does better compared to other Pils than tasted by itself. Its qualities are more apparent this way. Flavor is moderate-rich Pils from a pale yellow color with big white head. Some nice earthy, malt notes are apparent when contrasted to other European Pils. It may not be favored over the standards (Urquell, Spatan, Gambrinus) but is a very respectable alternative.

Amarcord Prima Donna Italian Lager Beer

RATING: 3.5

Romagna and San Marino, Italy

The bottle's cream and electric blue are a different approach and the 4.7% ABV was surprising too. The pale-faced movie star chick on the label is appealing though no Sophia Loren. It is made from the Big Four ingredients and I'll assume that get's it some respect in Germany. This "Oscar-winning beer" (did that copyright deal get checked out before coming to America?) is named in honor the great director of film Federico Fellini who grew in the region where this brewery exists between Romagna and San Marino, between the splendid hills and the wonderful sea. Amarcord is one of his most praised works and I must say they could have used much more graphic, man-baiting images on their beer label. Google "Amarcord" with the family safe filter off and you'll get my point.

The color and head are classic, aroma faint but solid. Flavor is low-mid Pils in strength, best very cold as one of those "golden summer refresher" classes of beer that is quite worse at room temp. In this crowded market I like

their graphics, their approach, the truly great man they honor, etc. but in the final analysis it's only about the beer.

Ambar Dos Especial

RATING: 3.0

Zaragoza, Spain

We saw the word Cerveza and the red label with 'Ambar'. Sounds like an amber Mexican beer? Good idea. No. This rare Spanish brew is not amber but is a nice dark gold with eternal carbonation. First aroma and Pils taste are sharply a 4 bottle Pils. Unfortunately the finish trails off into a watery dry place that is really a shame. This beer has so much potential with an authentic Pils theme. It just stops a bit too short like a great racecar exploding 300 feet from the checked flag or a grand symphony missing the last 100 notes. The first Pils notes are most refreshing when very cold but the finish is muddy and weak. Perhaps our standards have gotten too high with a few hundred Pils in the databank. This one needs a polished finish.

Andes Pilsner

RATING: 4.0

Venezuela

This Pils is from Caracas-Barquisimeto in Venezuela and is in our experience harder to find than Venezuelan Polar beer. Carbonation is strong and color more medium gold than most German Pils. Flavor is rather sweet for a Pils and decidedly more fruity than typical Mexican Pils. The finish is dryish but not as crisp and clean as it might be. It is a better choice than Corona but just a bit inferior to Red Stripe. Starts sweet and finishes dry.

Arctic Bay

RATING: 3.0

Canada

By all accounts this blue and white box of Canadian ale is the same as Glacier Bay in an otherwise identical box. We have seen 12 bottles for as low as \$6.25. It is good without being really special. As Canadian beers go it is very affordable. Some will disagree but we think Keystone Dry and perhaps Stroh's are better econobrews for your 12 pack purchase. We'd like to hear what you users feel about this one.

Asahi Super Dry

RATING: 4.5

Japan

BEST JAPANESE DRY BEER We found the best description of this on the label - 'stain smoothness'. While many dry beers are a bit light or less flavorful this is outstand- ingly complex. There is nothing quite like it. One tastes hints of Pilsner flavor but it is more crisp and smooth than most Pils. The slim brown long- neck has a smooth mouth that like Kirin is one of the best designs for human mouths. It is probably the best Japanese beer in US supermarkets.

Astra Pilsener

RATING: 4.0

25 Made the same people who brew St. Pauli this German Pils has typical color and short-lived head. The 11.2 oz. bottles sold for just \$5.99 per six - a buck or two less than some less common Germans at our source. It proved very aromatic and pleasantly flavored. While very enjoyable in early palate the finish was a bit ragged and off. At times there were metallic notes but nothing too bad. It must be served very cold to keep it on track.

Athenian

RATING: 4.0

Athens, Greece

This Greek product has a delightful Pils flavor on par with most of the mass market German Pils rated at 4 bottles. Unlike so many European Pils this is true to the original tradition standardized by Urquell and Gambrinus of Pilsen. The color and head are average but the flavor is quite refined. It earned just 4 bottles as we feel the flavor is just one small notch down from the Urquell standard. Otherwise it is a real treat. The main role of this brand in the US is to give Greek restaurants something authentic to serve without bringing in German stuff.

Brewbase Fives



Augustiner Edelstoff Munchner Beer

RATING: 5.0

Munich, Germany

It's usually a good sign if your beer says Germany on it. There are extra promising marks such as an old-style foil cap. A wise-looking dude enshrined in a golden hop vine bearing lots of gold medals is a further indication of promising fluid within. "Since 1328 AD" is a mixed sign. Things might have changed a tad. The color is Pils pale but brighter, something one can see described as "chrome yellow". The nose is skunky, not Heinecken raw but better. It is thick, sticky almost in the pour, loaded with Munich-style lager goodness, 5.7%, the finish sweet but full-bore wonderful and complex. This be some 5 bottle nectar we have 'har.

Every time I try a stalwart, magical, and uber-righteous German bottle of golden goodness I think to myself....what a wonderful world...no, no, no. Why can't the rest of the brewing world copy these German and Austrian bottles of shimmering, truly well-flavored, and grainy flasks of joy. We can barely get a decent hefe-weizen from these 50 micro-states but this is something far beyond and above EVERYONE so far. Copy this mother is my holy grail for greatness in euro-simulated brews. Give me a bottle two-thirds as fine and like this and I'll be impressed. Has anyone on this side the pond got a Munich drinkable head-to-head (literally) with Augustiner in any variety? Bring it on...

Ba M'ba Bien Export

RATING: 3.5

This has been one of the most controversial beers we've had our panel review. It's origin in Vietnam is explanation #1. Secondly, it is third world sort of brew selling for \$10.99 or more per sixpack of SMALLER 11.2 oz bottles. Issue #3 is that it's not a very polished Pils and that average place is one really crowded field. Bgi Tien Giang's label name of Ba M'ba is pronounced 'Ba Me Ba' according to them. The local meaning is prosperity and happiness. One reviewer thought that sounded a bit like 'Bomb Me Bob'. Enough on that. This Pils does have flavor and the finish could be a 4 bottle with changes. The first flavor notes and occasional hints thereafter have offensive crude elements that remind one of some Chinese and old Soviet beers. Please write.

Bavaria Claro Beer

RATING: 3.5

Lieshout, The Netherlands

Their website deals with my first reaction up front and quickly: "Dutch brewery. Spanish name? Huh?". Yes. Claro means "clear" is the name of a popular cell phone company for example. The Brewery is called Bavaria N.V. Now add German to the confusing pile. For the record, this is not "Rio Claro", a light lager from El Salvador. The \$6.99 price (July 2010) suggests this is not going to be a Grolsch-class brew or will it? The aesthetics of the pour are classic Pils with a skunky-as-all-Holland aroma that does not linger much. Some nice fruit notes and faint malt comes to the fore, following by a very fruity sweetness in the later notes. Sweet Fruity Pils is the final subclassification and that is a tactic taken by now a few Mexican and Asian Pils makers to gain appeal. But is there enough depth and reward for the serious Pils lover? No. The appeal is fairly straight-forward, the fruit flavors somewhat simple and not yeast-derived in my opinion. With two or three bottles for a session, you get a bit of meritorious malt saturation but by the second bottle I was shouting for more depth on the order of any bottle label here. The price is right and I am as certain as Pils is golden that this recent introduction will gain a following. To say it should be admired is much different from saying it will be successful. Kias will always outsell Lamborghinis but the respect and awe factors are something altogether different. I would not call this Pils

uncomplicated but in it's self-named clarity it is also too manifest and easily understood - something I only find acceptable in a Triple Imperial Pale Ale where monothematic excess is expected. It's not a bad beer but neither is a creative or really distinct one.

Becks

RATING: 4.0

Bremen, Germany

This top German import has out-gained the other brands in recent years. It is not much better but that is like saying Mercedes is not much better than BMW ;or vice versa if you prefer!. Perhaps the foiled bottles show more prestige for some buyers. The flavor is rich but not overpowering. Even sampled 9 months before the marked freshness date is still has the Heineken style stunkiness that some love and some love to hate. Bottles of 21.6 ounces sell in 1995 for as low as \$2.59 so clearly they are not aiming for that pricey Pils market that Spaten, Warsteiner, and Paulaner need. Reviewers note 'surprising pale in color but mid-strength on my Pils Scale' and 'wonderful big German suds...flavor is a bit too crude (bitter, aromatic) for everyone'.

Bitburger Pils

RATING: 4.0

The six generations of Simons in Bitburg Germany have since 1817 refined this 'most famous of German premium Pils'. Using spring water from the Eifel mountains, summer barley, and cold fermentation they have acheived a very fine and smooth Pils product. The bottle carefully notes that 45 degrees F. is ideal - much colder it can be less smooth and bitter. Large foamy bubbles become a pale yellow color. It is a touch bitter or it would be 5 bottles.

Bohemia Beer

RATING: 4.0

Monterrey, Mexico

This product from Cerverceria Cuauhtemoc of Monterrey is one of the harder Mexican labels to find in our area. It is pale straw yellow with a quite persistant and foamy head. The taste was a pleasant surprise with a semi-light and fruity quality. The aftertaste was a touch unrefined so it got a 1 bottle deduction. Carta Blanca is made by the same company and we found it to be superior although the flavor is quite unrelated.

Budweiser

RATING: 2.5

By many opinions this belongs with our Lager - Light group but one has to go with official classifications from time to time. People either love it or hate it. Among college age males there are often strong opinions one way or another. A little of the dislike may come from the mid-range price which is often very high at convenience stores. It is classic American and more acidic and potent than Coors products for example. Bud Dry or Bud Light are probably a better choices for serious meals. I personally find it too acidic unless a two boxes of Roloids are handy.

Busch Beer

RATING: 1.0

Anheuser-Busch proclaims the all natural carbonation and ingrediants in this budget brew. It is in fact very bubbly and a newly poured class can look like Alka Seltzer. That makes it intolerable with serious meals but as a slow drinking glass it can be enjoyed. It is very pale with a ginger ale color. It is smooth tasting but the bubbles can render it feeling more heavy and crude. It is not for the serious beer fan.

Cardinal Lager (Helles/Pale Beer)

RATING: 4.0

Switzerland

This product of Switzerland comes in nice easy-open boxes and is one of very few imports to have a screw-off cap. Color is pale yellow, head very foamy, and carbonation long. Flavor is medium-flavored Pils at first taste but it gives a mid palate of real quality lager and a dryish finish. The six 11.1 oz. bottles cost us \$9.00. If you're more PC than your PC the 90% recycled glass and recycled box will please too. A good solid Pils if price is no factor.

Caribe

RATING: 3.0

This Trinidad West Indies brew has a dry German quality with an aftertaste that is bitter but barely unpleasant. It is best served supercold and with food. The clear bottles have plastic multicolor sleeves that are unique and well formed. Quality is clear but the bright plastic package may not appeal to all. It must be tried. The bulbous and ribbed neck reminds one of a mold for condoms! This could be a very fine beer with some finely tuned flavor.

Carlsberg

RATING: 4.0

This product of Copenhagen Denmark is imported by Anheuser-Busch. The later fact arose our curiosity. Was A-B admitting someone else might make a beer as good or better - or was this just a money-making use of gold 'Imported' marketing. Color and head were typical Pils but flavor was a bit temperature sensitive with a range from bitter to pleasant. The finish had a few rough notes on the metallic side for a single bottle deduction.

Carlsberg Elephant

RATING: 3.5

Denmark

This Danish product arrives courtesy of Anheuser-Busch. It is a typical Pilsy golden with prolific carbonation. First taste proves a bit nippy or even spicy. Flavor is pleasant at mid palate and sweetness gives way to a dry finish. It is superior to regular Carlsberg according to all our panel. It is labeled a malt liquor due to higher (5.7%) alcohol content. We'd still prefer a Spaten or Urquell Pils but this will surely please.

Carta Blanca

RATING: 3.5

Monteray, Mexico

This Mexican beer from Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc of Monteray is one of those flavorful smooth beers of the highest quality. It compares favorably with Red Stripe and several premium American labels. Chihuahua is from the same brewery but this more costly (\$6.50 vs. \$4.40) product is far more satisfactory when cost is no object. It is very compatible with spicy foods. Like many flavorful beers it is also excellent when barely cool.

Castlemain XXXX Export Lager

RATING: 3.0

Golden, Colorado

This beer is 'Aussie Style' with hops grown down under. It is made by UniBev in Golden CO - the hometown of Coors. Color is pale yellow and the carbonation is fairly strong. Flavor is weak and not ever worth the \$6.29 price for a brew shipped from Colorado. First flavor is sweet and faintly hopped but it will clearly disappoint a true beer enthusiast. It is no better or worse than Fosters but that is not saying much. Many \$5 Mexican lagers are superior.

Chihuahua

RATING: 3.0

From Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc of Mexico is this very popular beer. In our small informal survey people usually prefer Corona but Chihuahua is often less costly. We have seen it for as low as \$3.99 per six pack. It is quality but lacks any memorable appeal or detail in aftertaste. You might call it a 'house beer' in that it goes well with dinner but is not a treat in itself. The name has inspired half a dozen good jokes.

Brewbase Fives



Clipper City Heavy Seas Small Craft Warning Uber Pils

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

Once again, we have too much going on nomenclature wise. Cut it down folks! The world "uber" goes a long way. This brew is designed to be a strong Pils, American in take, and yet long of finish and profound. Aesthetics are classic but the head seems a bit larger and durable than most Ameri-Pils offerings. Nose is clean, sweetish, and weak. First sip is not uber but the middle notes get stronger and much to my surprise loaded with caramel malts. Big shock. Later notes are uberly uber or super-uber or something like that. I guess technically uber is uber enough and there is nothing more or highly uberaceous to be named by pure definition. How about Imperial Uber Malty Pils. That would make no sense except in Sudsworld and after downing a couple of these babes. The color of the beverage would not indicate such malty-cultural charm. There is surely a battleship headed your way with guns a' blazing' and she's a firin' malt balls like the survival of the realm depended on it! Malty gold doubloons for every lad holding his own! The malt mafia will tell you this stuff is too sweet and and the Pils Praisers will say it's perhaps too great a departure. Both are full of crap because this is a bold style well-crafted, hybridized from the finest ingredients, and ultimately a functional curiosity of high aim and execution. [insert here your wild, X-rated, Clipper Captain's mixed-race, exotic lady fantasy here, her malty tones luscious under ample golden curls, loaded with obvious treasure to go, and everything about her sweeter and more inspiring than gold itself]. I frankly like it alot and think it something of a new benchmark for those sitting far out of the bench and an itch for the newest grand thing. Very cool, a special surprise and these days in the boring world of brew sampling, I really like tasty surprises more than usual. Uberific.

Cold Spring Export Beer

RATING: 3.0

Cold Springs, Minnesota

This lager comes from Cold Spring Minnesota but is apparently exported as the name and large PRODUCT OF USA labels would indicate. As lagers go it is not strong yet it has a malt flavor unlike others in this database. That very pleasant taste nearly defies description but has strong elements of chocolate (really) and exotic fruits. The color is a medium semi-clear golden with a semi-persistent head. While not rich it is a very nice chance of pace.

Colders

RATING: 3.0

This Miller product is 'cold aged at 29 degrees' (hence the name) and is said to have a smooth and distinctive taste. As an econobrew (we paid \$2.59) it is better than most. The very bright straw yellow color yielded a dry and smooth taste with some fruit hints. It reminded us of Keystone Dry and among budget beers few others are as clean and interesting. It could win over a few Coors and Coors Light lovers who have an eye on the their beer budget.

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Coors u rlp 3.0 76 This is a first rate American product. It is too thin and crisp for some folks but that effect is more of clarity than thinness. The aftertaste is where the quality and complexity and satisfaction derives. Coors gets high marks if only for their insistance the product be refrigerated for every single minute without exception. Rumor has it that \$1 million in Coors family cash went to Ollie and the Contras. Thanks for your support! Strangely the Coors name by 2007 has become pretty equal to Coors Light and less associated with their slightly flavorful offerings. It's a case of a company so obsessed with quality control, computers, automation, post-production environmental standards, and money they forgot what they were making. A Ford

Focus with 0.004% defects is not a great Ford. A great Ford is a Mustang GT, and Expedition, and Ford GT. Coors has lost their identity and we can only imagine what all that money and talent could do if they decided to explore real beer and something known as "flavor".

Coors Extra Gold

RATING: 3.0

Golden, Colorado

This gold-labeled Coors is marketed as 'full-bodied, robust' draft beer. It retains the crisp clarity one associates with Golden Colorado but has more depth - but it not robust - a term we think belongs to stout and amber beer. It has been one of America's best mass-market premium beers but we think that Miller Genuine Draft has a more interesting and complex taste. If one wants a truly robust Coors product then Killian's or Winterfest are better choices.

Corona Extra

RATING: 3.0

Mexico

As the first and major Mexican beer to gain fame this became a Yuppie choice and ordinary-guy choice at the same time. The quality is clear even if the packaging is simple. The well-formed bottles are pleasant. A name identical to the apical portion of crucial male anatomy may have helped its appeal. It is widely offered and frequently on sale for very reasonable rates. Tecate and Carta Blanca are better Mexican beers but cost around 50% more.

As an aside, if you need to add a slice of a lime to a Pils, that is pretty much your sign that the beer itself is too weak. I've added lime and lemon the real Czech Pils and it is not a improvement by any means. Here's your sign...

Craggie Toubab Brewe Bavarian-style Zwickel Beer

RATING: 3.5

Asheville, North Carolina

I'm feeling a bit like Jed Clampett today swigging down my adult beverage in mass quantities from a brown jug. Jed would not know what a Zwickel Lager is nor should he. This Craggie firm in Asheville is making some curious and decent beers for \$12.99-\$15.00 a half gallon jug - sometimes with a bottle deposit included. It pours a bright gold (not pale Pilsy thing here), the head near white, and the immediate flavor profile quite malty for a golden lager. It's crisp, bitter after some few sips, quite malty, and unfiltered - ABV is just 5.2%. If you're inclined to like your golden lagers a bit malty this style is desirable. Unfortunately, unlike most Craggie brews tried here, we found this one bitter than necessary and not as pleasant as some German offerings. Organic Munich and Pilsen malts are made bitterish with Hallertau hops. This product is named for the local Toubab Krewe, a group whose instrumentality combines Mali and southern US styles, using cool things like the 21-string harp-lute and African percussion. 5% of this label's profits go to the band's charities, of late including a fund Instruments-4-African supporting preservation those arts in Africa. We had fun with this one, especially the off-beat style for an American jug but it was more bitter than I needed to be in my opinion. "Hallertau hell after awhile...can't bear it very long" said our most severe reviewer, another saying "finally someone not loading us up with 'unique' Pilsener...which never are...this is a special treat, offbeat, and bitter". I did not find it Hallertau hell but neither was it bitter hops nirvana either. This is a very good take, strong in concept, just requiring some tuning I think.

Crystal Lager

RATING: 4.0

Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic

Sampson Brewery in the Czech Republic makes this lightly flavored Pils in pint German-style bottles that make it appear to be a wheat beer. It is not. The carbonation is so furious that the bottles are a nightmare to open - and we tried using all the usual forms of care and caution. It is aromatic and nothing like a good Urquell or Gambrinus Pils with their rich flavors. Still it is not as thin a Pils as the excellent Becks Light. There is a note or two of flavor we cannot really pin down but it makes the taste slightly unique. At \$1.69 per pint it is a superb value and we recommend you try it. If your Pils interests run on the light yet flavorful side this may please.

DAB Original g rlp 91 Dortmunder Actien-Brauerei (DAB) should not be confused with cross-town competitor Dortmund Union. This Dortmund product lacks the Pilsner taste of DU and is a good deal more like Heineken in taste. DU and DAB compete in very distinct taste groups. All Heineken lovers owe themselves a taste of this more rare and slightly more costly label. It remains one of the best European labels with pungent lively flavor and a clean crisp aftertaste.

Darryl's Original Pig Pounder Lager

RATING: 2.5

Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque is getting to be a curious place. Besides this Pig Pounder that city also gives us the Simpatico Amber and Wild Boar. This product from Dubuque Brewing Co. came to us in 473ml bottles and had a medium-dark golden color. The head was a bit thin. Flavor was almost like a bargain rack Pilsoid brew but it had enough of a lively finish to get a half bottle extra confidence. While we can't recommend it (stick with Wild Boar if any pig theme is appealing) our \$1.89 expenditure did produce a cute little collectible; most guys know girls who collect 'pig stuff'.

Dinkel Acker Pils (CD) g rlp 97 From the same city that gives us Mercedes and Porsche comes a high performance pils of the most elegant craftsmanship. It is the typical light yellow of a Pils but slightly cloudy. It is strong for a Pils and only Gambrinus would be comparable in our test here. It is a touch sweet but not with quite the same lager aura of Gambrinus. It might be subclassed as a SWEET RICH PILS as it is nothing like Dortmund or Pilsner Urquell. Stuttgart's best.

Dock Street Bohemian Pilsner u rlp 101 This is perhaps the most orange of any cloudy Pils we have tried. Carbonation is long and moderate. In the original Bohemian or Czech style this beer is a true delight of taste equal to any Czech or German effort. It demands a try with Gambrinus and Spaten's finest. It is even rich enough to lure away a fan of rich Hefe-Weisen beers. For authentic taste it is certainly at the top of American bottled Pils. Superbly sweet and with some ale-style fruit notes.

Dogfish Head My Antonia Imperial Pilsener

RATING: 4.0

Milton, Delaware

Only the Dogfishians would contemplate something called "a continually hopped imperial Pils", call it "My Antonia", and put genuine remarkable artwork on the label. This hired girl is the kind of class in both contents and presentation we in the US can be proud of when showing off our best to European and Asian guests. They call this a "lagerific departure for our ale-central brewery" and yet you would not know they are on new ground. Pils malt is blended over and again with Noble and West Coast hops for this effect. It pour light Pils yellow with an ample head of very minute bubbles - quite photogenic really. Being a beer blender of some two decades now, I will recognize a Pils filled 30-50% with an IPA when I smell and taste one! I often do this to make bad purchases useful instead of a way to line by drainpipes with my last twenty dollars. The Pils is very subdued here for the quality, deep hops take over the project. To me a real Imperial Pils would be the Czech brands turned up a notch or two. There are Pilsoid passages here but none that a Pils nut will appreciate enough unless he or she is also a hop-hound. When I say this tastes like a Pils blended with IPA, I mean in practice we get a Pils Pale Ale.

Since Pils is supposed to be low in hop potency we almost have a nomenclature puzzle here. Is a Ford fitted with a Chevy bigblock really a Ford still? I've pledged over and over despite some complaints to rate beer "as it is" and "not for what it is called", while stilling calling out misclassifications and bad names as they occur. This is not really a Pils to me but I will keep it here for now - a placement as a Hoppy Golden Lager in future is possible. There are a few other Hopped-up Pils out there and perhaps if this is a trend it will be a new category soon. Purists hate these blurred old style lines but beer drinkers are often better for lines crossed and re-crossed and double-crossed with two loops around and back. As is - for what it is - and is not - I like it. I'm inclined to think the subtle beauty of Pils malt is wasted here and we get something that is a pretty darn good pale ale or near-IPA without the need for disguise or confusion. "Why bother?" said a reviewer here. Another made the analogy of the "Chardonnay continually infused with Cabernet" until it became rosy Cab. Again, why bother? Yet Antonia is in some ways a fascinating, deliberately obscure, strangely illegit, and yet a rich Bohemian creature. Bother if you care and wish a pioneering, unpredictable experience. I will not usually put motives onto anybody's label but Antonia the character and Ms. Cather are curious at times and at other times

strongly go the uneasy, contrarian way. A hop-adoring pale ale in the closet as a Pils lager is something of a stretch perhaps but here the lines of classification are deliberately made unclear and perhaps for some subtle point. Naming a beer for a classic lesbian novel is not exactly an everyday, easy to analyze event either.

Dortmunder Union

RATING: 4.5

Dortmund, Germany

This Pilsner style is easily one of the best of its class. While not every- one may enjoy the cereal taste of a pils, this is a very high quality beer. Flavor is very complex with smooth, sweet, bitter, cereal, and pungent tastes available to the tastebuds. While there is some transitional bitterness that is rarely unpleasant and overall this beer is compatible with all types of meals. This is one beer that proves the merits of complex German flavor.

Dos Equis Beer

RATING: 4.0

Mexico

This premium Mexican is a clear amber of the color of ice tea. The head is surprisingly short-lived at all temps we tried. Like an ice tea it is also quite sweet. While clean tasting and sweet it also lacks a certain amount of complexity. At about \$5 per 6 bottles it is better than some Canadian imports at \$5. It is very compatible with spicy foods like most sweet beers are. A touch more flavor and a longer head would give it 5 bottles for us.

Dos Equis Special Lager

RATING: 4.0

Mexico

Dos Equis is one of the finest Mexican beers and this version is even finer. The green and gold foil label are as fine as most Europeans and not crude like some Mexican brands. Brewed and bottled by Cerveceria Moctezuma this lager has a complex and pleasantly bitter aftertaste. It is neither too bold not too weak and is suitable for drinking alone or with meals. It is not a traditional European lager and lacks that level of satisfaction.



Efes Pilsener

RATING: 5.0

Istanbul, Turkey

Many third-world, even NATA-cool Pils flow onto our US shores and very few get much chance to dent the market let alone impress real reviewers with 1000+ brands under their belt. This Istanbul product is 5% with all the head and body colors spot on. The lace is small, lasting. Skunks are everywhere and cuddly overall. It is mid to high strength, rather grainy and desirable. The finish is semi-sweet, never excessive, quite First World clean, and a very wholesome effect in the final analysis.

Our gang said "puts alot of pricey Germans and half the American non-micro Pilsoid crap to shame...yeasty, flavorful, authentic...you have to love it" and "I'd almost pick a Czech city for it's origin...it shines". If the idiots who make Michelob and Miller want to ever earn the respect of informed drinkers (and by earn we do not mean slick commercials meaning zip), claiming to be an Old World Pils when they are merely Pils-tinged water now, they'd better go this Efes route - but then they'd need to use real ingredients in bulk which might mean paying your union goons a reasonable, market wage instead of f*\$king and duping the consumer with your insipid piss water. Efes managers can live with themselves day and night for they do godly, solid work, crafting a

righteous Pils; while Michelob, Coors, and Miller union posers should not get a second of REM sleep until they remedy and atone deeply for the Pils scam so cleverly imposed on the North American beer drinker. Repent and sin no more. Wake up you posers. Istsabul can out-brew Milwaukee and Golden with a skunk tied behind their back. Wake up and learn. Efes wins.

Einbecker Brauherren Premium Pils

RATING: 4.0

Einbeck, Germany

This 4.9% ABV Pils comes in shortish, square-shouldered bottles of 11.2 oz. - and to me that is one afront that's hard for even the finest tasting Pils to get past. Big, bubbly head, long lasting, very pale straw yellow glow - all the classic signs are there of excellence. Flavor is mid strength with some very interesting grain flavors, tending towards a fuller strength in the finish and after a couple of them have stuck to your tastebuds. Premium it is even if distributed without any generosity. It is very well made and the various notes generally agree with each other, passing from flavor to flavor, never ragged but at some seconds or another a little dull. One friend of mine found some medicinal notes that were troubling but they quickly subside into the finish. Colder temps seem to eliminate those problems. Given the number of quality Pils on the market, the less-than-icy flavor flaws (though slight) and the smaller portions give this one a lower value than I suspect it might pour over in the Germany from a tap.

Estrella Galicia Especial

RATING: 4.5

La Coruna, Spain

This Pils from Spain is the typical light yellow with a very white head of outstanding length. Flavor is moderate to full Pils type with a nature that is semi-sweet and a finish a slight bit dryer. It is easily on par with any major German Pils for us the price was very competitive (\$1.59 for 11.15 fl. oz). Reviewers declared it was 'authentic to the style...highly refreshing...no real problems other than being rare' and 'sweet and fully lagered...welcome import though the Germans will probably out advertise them'. BEST SPANISH IMPORT TO USA 1996



Fiedlers Pils

RATING: 5.0

This unpasteurized Pils comes in a wonderful stoneware crock (stein-like jug) with resealable hardware like Grolsch. Color & head are typical German pils. The label describes it accurately as AROMATIC PILS and indeed it has a higher aroma and flavor than ordinary Becks or DAB. It is equal to Urquell but less full than Gambrinus. While you only get 1 pint for nearly \$0 the stoneware is collectible and worth \$0 itself. Perfect Pils and perfect container.

Flying Horse Royal Lager

RATING: 4.5

Bangalore, India

This Indian lager arrives in very thick, brown tinted 350ml bottles with a nice gold foiled flying horse label. This UB or United Breweries product clear, light-medium yellow with a lasting near white head. Flavor is full and rather smoky for a Pils. In fact it reminds us something of Golden Eagle Lager, another smoky, Pils-like lager from India.

Foothills Torch Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

'Saazer' hops (popularly and 'Saaz' in English) from Czech Republic form the basis of this "well-structured, highly drinkable Pilsner experience". The artful label appears to show a Viking with a glowing beard of flames. ABV is 5.5% and the colors about average for our style here. Head is shorter and less enduring than some. Pils taste is initially full and authentic but variable in strength throughout our carefully metered passages. The spicy nature of 'Saazer' is evident and they get high marks for going to this trouble for a more spicy, clearly authentic approach. Still the finish is wanting and of "mixed quality...sometimes too bitter...other times decent but other times harsh.". Drinkability is much in question here. "Unsettling" came from James our Pilso-phile who sipped it long tonight. He also said "A bit like my first two or three tries at a Czech Pils...but I wouldn't have dared to bottle them and ask for money". It is more intense, abrupt, and awkwardly potent than it need be for Pils brews from CZ are apt to be rich AND ALSO COMFORTING. There is no comfort here as to structure we think it's a bit old world stone wrapped oddly with plastic and modern painted metal for no apparently reason. This formula is neither coherent or friendly. I suppose there could be a market for overtly bitter-rough Pils flavors as there are tastes everywhere for anything but torch only smoldered here. One reviewer thought it "utterly undrinkable" even though begged to try it super icy, 40 deg. F., and slightly warmer like a table glass. Foothills tried for sure and while the hops varietal choice is perfect (and doubtless more expensive), the execution is too uneven and uncontrolled. There are fine hops notes in rare seconds but not providing overall a fine nor fun nor enjoyable result. I can brew Saazer hops tea and cringe from now until nightfall - but that is not a recreational beverage nor an rewarding one. Torch needs a super-long rethink but keeping the Saazer theme. They can do it from what we love of their other products.

Foster's

RATING: 3.0

Melbourne, Australia

Those super tough blue-gold-white-red cans could serve as industrial drums. Any guy who can crush one on his head must be rock-headed jock. Flavor is imported quality with smoothness and worldclass enjoyment. It has a light-like body and shares nothing with Australia's British heritage. This Melbourne wonder has top marketing at auto races. The convenient \$1.50-\$2.50 25 oz. can has become a niche classic. Like Bud in the US and Corona to Mexico, this label has become popular and "magical" beyond any reason or anything about actual flavor. The power of marketing, my friends must never be underestimated!

Furstenberg

RATING: 3.5

Germany

The traditional script on the label and package leads one to think the name begins with a well known 4-letter word. This Germany Pils is highly aromatic and very flavorful. The head is large, white foamy, and most persistent. A beer in this classification has hundreds of competitors and so our reviewers opinions and comparisons vary widely. To one it was 'crisp quality but not very interesting' while to another it was simply 'not necessary'. A third felt it was 'one of the best in the mid-strength Pils group but to me far less desirable than a true Czech Pils'. Another noted 'an idiosyncratic finish with some uncomfortable flavor notes'. The head and color gave nearly universal perfect marks for presentation. Not recommended at the \$8 price.

Gaffel Kölsch

RATING: 4.0

Köln, Germany

Just like Champagne, the Kölsch name in a so-called Appellation Controlee that's protected by Euro law. Only stuff from and near Köln (Cologne) Germany can be called by the name. Cologne as another product is quite another thing by law altogether. Most beer fans consider it a sub-style of the basic ancient European Pilsner style. While the style usually comes in a stronger, sweeter, fruitier, less bitter version of the general Pils style, this Gaffel product is more bitter than many German Pils products on the market. It is lightly sweet, moderate to full in flavor, moderately fruity, and very rewarding served quite cold. It is lagered in the modern variant. Color and head are standard, classic Pils. It has more crude bitterness and roughness in the finish than one need tolerate at any price. I doubt they will change for me or you but I will state what is obvious to me and leave it at that.

Brewbase Fives



Gambrinus

RATING: 4.5

Pilsen, Czech Republic

This Czech beer is a true Pilsner as it comes from Pilsen Czechoslovakia and as such it invites comparison with cross-town rival Pilsner Urquell. The 'Gam' label is our experience much harder to find. It is richer and fuller than Urquell as perhaps the color would indicate. It is closer to a typical German lager than Urquell. It is darker yellow than Urquell and much more cloudy (read: flavorful). First brewed in 1869. Not to be missed. It is more full-bodied and richly flavored than most under this category - but then again, don't they get to decide what is the true, original style? This is one of the genuine Pils benchmarks.

Gayant La Goudale Beer

RATING: 4.0

Douai, France

This huge corked bottle would seem to be another golden Belgian upon purchase and the lack of English language on the bottle (big surprise there) does not give the average American consumer much to work with. I'm sorry Pierre there! I'm not spending \$399 for Rosette Stone DVD's just to read your freakin' bottle. Yes, I did learn French in High School. NO! I forgot your language in the last twenty years because my training and your language have been pretty much...how do you say...sans valeur. The one thing I understood was 7.8% ABV and that translates well to all tongues. Pop the cork and you get skunky sweetness and no Belgian monk would do that to us would they? The color is medium yellow, darker than German Pils, the lace sparse but undying. Fans of French beer known this style as Bière de Garde where malt can be surprisingly strong though not always evident in the color. The name comes from the historical name where this very recipe was found. Flanders hops, "special malts", and such go into the rather expensive product - figure about \$4-5 a mug. It is top fermented unlike most blonde lagers. I was not as impressed with the fruitiness as some people are and think the ABV overpowered them when it does not need to.

At first sip, the ethanol bowled me over more than a giant beer bong full of Orval. The carbonation mellowed it all out in a strange way like a high carbonated soft drink does with the acid of a citrus drink. A hard drink becomes a soft drink - rather odd experience all this though not entirely new I must admit. There are some nice fruit notes, banana being a central one

Genesee Beer

RATING: 3.0

New York (various)

"Genny", an Upstate New York favorite should not be confused with the green-labeled Cream Ale which more stores outside NY seem to stock. It is less creamy than the Cream Ale and less refined than the more costly 12 Horse Ale. As a bargain beer of about \$3.50 a six pack of cans it is middle in quality. We would suggest the 12 Horse Ale for 75 cents to \$1 more. This regular is not very exciting and one can certainly find smoother tastes in the price range.

Goldhorn Club

RATING 4.5

Pivovarna Lasko Yugoslavia

From Yugosland comes this nice beer dressed in black foil with beautiful and ornate gold foil crests. This 150 year tradition is bright golden with a large full head. It is very hard to place its flavor but at the same time it has no flaws. There are some hoppy and spicy elements that finish with long and determined smoothness - yet it is

not a lager. Like several Yugoslavian cabernets they are MUCH better than most Westerners will expect. BEST BEER FROM EASTERN EUROPE 1994.

Greenshields Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Raleigh NC

Although we are fond of our hometown brewery not a full mile from where this review originates, this product is not up to snuff and we must say so. Color is classic Pils. There is virtually no carbonation in bottled form. The head is pure white of very minute foamy bubbles. The flavor, whether very icy or getter warmed at dinner is quite deficient in depth and carries a few off notes for most of our panel. One said it was 'clearly not authentic to the style as advertised and in fact was not as well made as the premium Mexican Pils'. When the price (even close to origin) is \$9.49 per six we can find no merit to try it. Their draft is nicer and that is the best we can say. Even a first rate German Pils is \$1-2 less. Wild Boar is a very fine US-made Pils. This brewery is no longer with us but the newer central NC micros seem to be making a better product today in 2010.

Grolsch Premium Lager

RATING: 4.5

A favorite of serious beer lovers at least in the early years of their taste trek. Experienced drinkers like it but not always would give it our bottles. It has the quality 'rich full bodied' flavor of a good European but more so than most German or Dutch brands. The distinct 'skunky' aroma and unpasteurized taste are never unpleasant. Expect to pay at least \$1 a bottle in stores and up to \$3 for those special bottles with lots of hardware. A process dating from 1615 and 10 week aging shows to good advantage. It might be called Premium Premium. One can argue this belongs in the European Pale Lager category instead of a genuine Pils. The same is oft said of Heineken but on the whole they compete very closely with the more traditional, grainy Pils labels.

Growlin' Gator Lager

RATING: 4.0

Florida

If the 'beer with a bite' taste was not enough the gold/red painted label with an alligator in sunglasses, disclosure of 4.5% alcohol content, a best before date, and address of the UK importer would do the trick. This Sunshine State brew has a distinct aftertaste that is pleasant and very smooth - some spice we'd suspect. It is available in selected markets and we find it rather infrequently. Unique and a superb change of pace.

Guinness Gold Lager

RATING: 4.0

This bright gold lager has a zippy initial taste but it disappoints somewhat in the lack of rich flavor. The lingering taste is smooth but we would like to have found a bit more depth. This could almost pass for a premium American beer and people will usually give different ones if asked to name it! There is no bitterness and the head is moderately short-lived. The dark forest green label and signature bottles are classy. At \$7.50 per 6 in the 1990's it was not a good buy. Seems to be gone in the 2000's.

Hacker-Pschorr Munich Edelhell

RATING: 4.5

Munich, Germany

To the German beer lover the phrase 'tastes like hell' is something positive. Hell or Helles is German for 'pale' or your everyday golden drinking beer. 'Edel' is an adjective meaning precious or noble. Translation: Premium Pils. Hacker and Pschorr used to be two different brewers. After their merger they were bought by Paulaner. That's three good names dating from at least 1417. The Pils flavor is as robust as the young lady on the label - we'll end the analogy there. Our Pils experts say 'remarkably well-flavored and dry' and 'often intruding into bitter moments'. To another: 'perfection if you like a Pils authentic, acidic, and felt deep in glands' and also 'enjoyed it with a multi-course meal but proved harsh and earthy to drink on its own.'

Harpoon Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Boston, Mass.

This beantown brew is dark golden yellow with a lasting near white head. This is one schizophrenic beer. It has crude places of flavor interspersed with notes of carmel brilliance. You get nice Pils flavors and then suddenly a low watery place. We checked the batch and its fresh and properly refrigerated from a very reputable vendor and wholesaler. Overall it is sweeter than many Pils but it never acheives a complete, rounded flavor profile capable of recommendation. This situation often occurs when a recipe is mismade or not refined - we have no idea which. There is potential as a GOLDEN LAGER but it seems too malty and sweet to be a very authentic PILS by European standards. A few reviewers enjoyed it and one said 'smooth, crisp, and refreshing...fair price'.

Hayward's 5000 Indian Premium Beer

RATING: 4.5

India

This is a India's most popular beer and not be confused with an Indian Pale Ale which in old times WENT to India from England instead of the the reverse. This "Crown Jewel" of Indian beers is said to be rich with lingering flavors from carefully blended ingredients - I wonder if anyone doesn't claim all this?!? Give'm a chance Larry, will ya! Lace is very long. Color, nose, and head are about Pils-typical thought I think the head is a tad larger than non-European Pils efforts. My taste buds and nose were given orders to be United Nations objective - make that really objective without politics. I was duly impressed. This is better stuff that about two-thirds of American micro Pils though no Gambrinus by any means. It is medium-strong, a hair below the potent stuff and yet richer and grainier than the middle-of-the-road approaches will clutter than market in all price ranges. It is refined without being spectacular. At \$4.95 for a 650ml (November 2008) it was a decent deal but not a stunning value. If they could get economical kegs over here they might have something that would impress even the fraternity crowd. It has a sweetish finish, not overly done, and with the good grainy, Pils flavor you have a very drinkable brew here. Unlike some Pils from China, Russia, or India we tried in the 90's there are never odd, metallic, and unkempt notes in the finish. It is worthy of the Pils name (and I must say 50% of the stuff on the US market is not) and while being commendable it is not a penultimate, world class product. If this is India's most popular beer then that entire land is blessed for we in American tolerate lakes worth of pseudo-Pils, fake lager under so many familiar names. We might need to start outsourcing our mid-price Pils beer to India if they can keep their price point down.

Heileman's Old Style

RATING: 2.0

Heileman of LaCrosse WI

Colt 45 and Mickey's Big Mouth also makes a budget brew at below \$3 per six. Using 'pure Artesian spring water' this is good at the price but far from the exciting. We like it better than Busch and Pabst but it does have an unpleasant edge to the taste. It is perhaps more accurate to say it is less unpleasant. Although called 'a premium lager beer' it has much room for refinement. At this price we doubt they can do it.

Heineken

RATING: 4.0

This is the best known import to many Americans. It potent aromatic taste is matched with quality lingering flavor. In fact the word 'Heineken' is almost a synonym of quality beer itself - as in 'Joe - buy some chips and Heineken's'. Recently available in more affordable six packs of cans it is both top quality and affordable. That initial skunky taste has been many American's first introduction to the world of quality beer.

Henninger Kaiser Pilsner g rlp 4.0 155 This light yellow Pils from Germany's second largest brewery (Dortmunder Union is #1) proves immediately spicy and well-flavored. It finishes very sweet and is similar to Spartan which Henninger licenses for Greek brewing. The tiny 11.2 ounce bottles are disappointing in volume and design. It is highly drinkable but the short-lived head and tiny bottles earn it the loss of one bottle. Worth trying but Spartan offers better price and volume. The Ole Skunkster has lost some of it's charm from college days though occasionally I will succomb to one of the readily available mini-kegs, usually blending it with Guinness or something else dark and flavor-amending. I also like their 18 packs of mini-keg cans - very easy to carry and handle.

Henry Weinhard's Private Reserve

RATING: 3.0

Portland, Oregon

Since 1856 the Blitz-Weinhard brewery of Portland has made bottled brews. Henry is said to be the 'West's first

brewer of premium beer'. Even with the \$6.00 price this pale golden brew lacked enough flavor to please. We joked that the flavor must have been privately reserved somewhere other than in their bottles. The crested label is one of the most classy of any American beer but the proof is in the drinking. The long lace is superb for effect but the 'superior to any other' claim is ridiculous. We might class this as a SEMI-LIGHT as both malt and hops taste are very limited.

Holstein Pils

RATING: 4.5

Hamburg, Germany

Holstein markets their 'Premium Beer' which to our American tastebuds is a type of Hamburg Pils. Like many German breweries they call SOME Pils a Pils and others Premium Beer Helles or some regional name. The whole lot vary in dryness/sweetness and flavor intensity. Here we reviewed the one in 4-packs in a yellow main label and with green neck label. This one is immediately recognized as Pils with that authentic Urquell earthy nature'. Color and head are stereotypical but the aroma is better than average. Our panel have consumed a city reservoir worth of Pils among them and comment: 'Sharp and well-defined flavor from the first go' and 'Very assertive Pils, punch with comfortable acidity and a semi-dry finish'. Grades varied a bit.

Iron City (IC) Premium Lager

RATING: 4.5

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

My first experience with IC products was the shock of finding their IC Light to be a light beer that had some real Pils flavor. This "Official Beer of the Pittsburgh Nation" (is that code language for The Steelers?) is typical of the style and is very much like their light product though a faint bit fuller and with more carbo mouth feel. It is heads and tails and any number better than classic Northeastern in that it's a real Pils and not some Michelob copy with a fancy label and motto. It's solid as iron in fact, not a world-leading Pils but a very respectable one in the mid-flavor subgroup. I'd probably rather drink it all day than some of Sam Adams products for they would be too taste-drenching and intense for all day sporting events. Like an iron worker, it's serious, stable, dependable, and not perhaps a fancy specialist. One goes elsewhere for specialized, clever, custom metals. If you want to pay 2-3 times more and get absolute perfection look in another place. This is the product of careful, arduous, clearly caring brew masters who give a damn about flavor and let the profits come after that standard is met. You taste the pride here; an unwillingness to compromise that makes the big boys both big and VERY BAD. This is an unassuming, regular guy of the Pils world but a very solid, certain, and true pick. You'll like it, admire it, and come back because of value (quality to price ratio). I'm happy you didn't take a lower road. Well done IC, well done.

Jever Original Friesland Pilsener

RATING: 4.5

Friesland, Germany

I'm not sure what "original friesland pilsener" means given the style came from another country. Perhaps it like Original Peoria Champagne or Original Albuquerque Salami? The color is light yellow with a tall ivory head with large ours. Lace is long and better than average in duration. Aroma is faint but it actually exists unlike many in this section with a watery, faux-Pils reality. I'll take their word that Friesland has made authentic Pilseners for 150 years but if not they've clear got the formula down to near perfection. Near. Germans are so good at some many things that Mercedes is now a near-Maybach and some BMW's a near-Ferrari. How we quibble over minor points when it's literally all good, all impressive, and all a real value. I'll still prefer a Gambrinus but this is a solid, reliable choice in any case. I will take a case, in fact. Skunkalicious Rules!

Johnson's Springfest Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Charlotte, North Carolina

This 'Honest Pilsner' is brewed for an arts and music festival in the Queen City of Charlotte North Carolina. One buys it in 8-pack boxes for about \$9.00. Color is medium but very glowing bright yellow. The head is tall and lasting. The flavor is Pilsoidal but not authentic in our combined opinions. It is rather bitter and crude at first but shows more sophistication in the late palate with saturation effects on the same. Most reviewers felt it needed much work and was far from microbrew standards for a Pils; let alone a very strict European standard.

Reviewers noted 'ragged and uneven flavor qualities...some nice and others less pleasant' and 'authentic it is not...judged by the merits of their BROWN ALE this is a disappointing.'. Far from being a contender.

KB Lager

RATING: 3.0

Sydney, Australia

KB is from Carlton & United Breweries of Sydney. In 740ml cans it is far harder to find than Fosters - we find a few cans at larger Kroger stores. It is rich gold with a full bubble-filled head and has an almost sweet flavor. It is quite smooth but is always flavorful. KB is nothing like Fosters and deserves to be bought by an serious beer lover since nothing else is exactly like it. Some of you are sure to like its smooth sweetness.

Konig Pilsener

RATING: 4.0

Duisburg-Beeck, Germany

This product shows up as 4 tallboy cans shrink-wrapped in a local Lowes grocery store. The can is mostly white with gold trim and accents, a silver, outlined name section, gold crown, and three gold medals. They have been around since 1858 and this has a very traditional German approach with just a hint of famous Heineken skunk. It has always had a premium market niche and it famous for more bitter hoppy flavors than many pils. Konig means King so this is the King of Beers and more so than that other brand claiming the title. Konig was acquired by the Cadsberg group of Denmark in 2004 who later sold it to Bitburger along with the Licher brewery. Besides this label they make a beer-lemonade mix called the Konig Pilsener Radler. After you'd had a few cans of this fine Pils, you realize the flavor is mid-strength but the hops bitterness is real and special. I even detected some malt notes while you generally don't get from US micros unless the Pils is a double or imperial. The beer is pleasant, complex in the details but it does not prove as memorable as something ultra-premium like Gambrinus or Urquell. Panelists here found "crisp, dry in finish and very clean but not simple...notes of peppery hops are special...pale malts can be enjoyed" and "at first zip a classic premium German take but was surprised later with some stiff hops and faint malts...clearly a proven old recipe...in the final analysis did not excite me". This beer is an interesting twist of the pure, old theme but it did not startle or amaze anyone. If you need a good, solid, imported, utility Pils this is a nice pick. The beer world is so vast now with thousands of labels we find our money better spent on new finds.

Jones Brewing Stoney's Beer

RATING: 4.0

Smithon/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I have no idea how this copper-colored can of "all grain beer" showed up in the make-your-own-sixpack of my local Whole Foods store. I only review canned beer when it cannot be found in bottle form and seems to have something of a microbrew or premium aura to it. I had no idea it was Stoney's 100th Anniversary this year so I guess I here to gulp and learn. It looks Pilsoid but the head is a bit too thin for my taste. Flavor is actually present, moderate in the class, and best very cold. I now suspect it showed up at the North Carolina Whole Foods shop to passify the PA invaders in the area - just as Genny Cream Ale was asked to do a decade ago for we rough-housing, conquering New Yorkers. (I can feel the emails coming down the wire or is that the sound of me not giving a flying f*%\$). It is far above Rolling Rock if one is forced to made a comparison. It is not a bad Pils and frankly I would be happy with it if the quantities and prices were right on a certain set of tailgating dates. It is no worldbeater but gives a true presentation of the style with enough flavor to keep one engaged. They have not sold out like the majority of northeastern breweries, brewed with a slower process, got a smooth mid-strength result, and I applaude them loudly for that. Some say the bottled stuff (white and red label) is a mess and this newer copper-canned stuff is much better. Your experience will probably vary with the form and date presented.

Their website is full of half-dressed women and even features a Stoney's Girl of the week or month or something - curiously she was very heavily clothed in winter gear and would be covered enough for most Arab countries in fact. They have a cool online store that even sells Stoney's Christmas ornaments which must be very collectible as they are too ugly for anyone to buy and therefore will prove very rare by 2045. Their glassware is rather appealing actually.

Kentucky Hemp Beer (Lexington Brewing Co)

RATING: 4.0

Lexington, Kentucky

Unlike the Frederick Hempen products which also employ legal hemp seeds to good effect, this Lexington product has an American Pils base. Color is pale yellow with a big, enduring white head. A happy red horse on

the label holds up a foamy mug and shows his Cannabis leaf/horseshoe insignia. We might note that the Frederick folks have chosen a less explicit foliar motif which is more resemblant of garden ivies. There is certainly something different about the flavorings here but quite frankly most reviewers felt an earthy malt taste was the most apparent. We will leave room for the possibility that reviewing hemp beers is not yet an acquired art and that with time we will better appreciate this subtle chemistry at work. In the meantime: try it.

Keystone

RATING: 3.0

This Coors product might be called Econo-Coors. It is promoted as having bottle quality taste due to specially lined cans. In this it succeeds and it becomes one of the finest budget beers made in America. It is clear and mild like any fine Coors product. The catch is that many stores only carry 12 packs and 6 packs seem to be hard to find - at least in our experience in the Southeast. It is easily one a Top 5 economy brew. Their Light label seems to be outselling in the early 2000's and that is a shame for it much flavor still.

Kirin

RATING: 4.0

Vancouver, BC, Canada

177 Molson of Vancouver brews and bottles this under supervision of the Japanese brewery. While we found Kirin Light to be bland and worthless this Nippo- nadian co-effort is much more pleasing. This beer is quite sweet and is nothing like other Molson beers. It is always crisp and refreshing but lacks some character found in other imports. Suntory made across Vancouver by Labatt is a finer product. It has no real flaws but neither is it really exciting.

Kirin Ichiban

RATING: 3.0

Molson produces this 'prime brew' under Kirin license using the 'first wort'. Color is very pale yellow with foamy head and strong carbonation. While marketed as premium only the lovely label earns that epithet. It is smooth and clean but such qualities without substantial flavor is meaningless. The finish turns sweeter but provides no lasting enjoyment. If one wants this kind of experience Keystone Dry or Molson's own Ice are better values.



Konig Pilsener

RATING: 5.0

Duisburg, Germany

This product of Duisburg is called 'one of the most exclusive beers of Germany'. We certainly had some trouble finding it! The green shoulder-less bottle carries a typically light yellow beer with many large bubbles to each head. As Pils go it is medium to highly flavored - just a touch less than Puntigamer Panther. It is every bit the equal of the more common Pilsner Urquell. The flavor components are quite deep and interesting. First class.

Krakus Export Lager

RATING: 4.0

Zywiec, Poland

Since 1856 the spring waters of Zywiec Poland have made this beer that only in post Cold War times (we think) has reached North American shores. The initial taste is smooth and pleasantly sweet but the lingering flavors are a bit too flat and simple to earn a higher rating. While the concept of a Polish beer may cause some Americans to laugh, Krakus is easily a better product than MOST American beers. At \$5.47 it proved to be a fine value.

Kronenbourg

RATING: 4.0

Strasbourg, France

182 Kronenbourg made in Strasbourg sounds like another great German beer unless you know that Strasbourg is now in history a French city. The flavor is dry and crisp with hints of Pils flavor but it could not be classed as a true full-flavored Pilsner. In fact it is somewhat like Beck's Light which is a Light Pils. The lingering taste is a bit flat and less satisfying than Beck's Light. This needs a bit more flavor and depth to earn our 5 bottles.

Kropf Genuine German Draft

RATNG: 4.0

This product from Kassel is brewed in a tradition dating to 1859. The bottle shows the majestic cathedral near the brewery. It colors light straw yellow with a short-lived but nice head. It proved to be quite bitter yet finishing fairly dry unlike cheap bitter bears. We'd compare it to Fischer d'Alsace Bitter in this respect. That tartness is pleasant with certain foods such as gourmet cheeses. We do not recommend it for drinkling alone. A bit different.



Kulmbacher Monchshof Kellerbrau Unfiltered German

Lager

RATING: 5.0

Kulmbach, Germany

This ornately capped bottle (with that Grolsh sort of hardware that always defies the physics of drunken hands) arrived with a bit of a question mark. "Unfiltered" has been good to me. So it must be a Hefe-weizen? Nein, nein, nein! Color is amber-gold, aroma clearly of Pilsen style, and the lace long and swift. Now we have real Pilsener flavor, big lace, unfiltered production, AND a rich amber color. That sounds like a recipe for...beer paradise. The reality is very close for the Pils flavor is rich, endless, and very true to form, immensely pleasant and rewarding. There are actually stronger, fuller Pils with more golden (less amber) color but this is a real gem. It is luscious, vastly satisfying, and a true uncompromising lager of the very highest order. Highest marks may not be enough. I cannot imagine why the pricey hardware is needed because any fool will want to swallow the entire pint in 30 seconds flat. If I need serious hardware for this label, it would be to hide and lock behind big steel gates and fences my entire (imagined) stash of 400 bottles that I begged the local wholesaler to give me and to no one else in the entire state. It is rich enough to impress (fully) and yet clean enough at crispy, chilly temps to suggest administration of a large dose. If I could part with my stash, I'd be tempted to send a case to each of the CEO's of the major and mediocre US breweries and include a note that says: "You're the Chevy and selling like it...here's the Mercedes of Beers...how about using real benchmarks guys...and making America proud of you". Try it at once and revisit it often...if I let you have any.

Brewbase Fives



Kumburak Pils

RATING: 5.0

Nova Paka, Czech Republic

The country that invented Pils sends us out great classics like Gambrinus and Urquell. This Pils has come from the 'Golden Belt of the Czech Republic' since 1872. The label's picture of their brewery is both artful and worth collecting. The color is classic Pils golden with an enduring head. The flavor is Pilsy but not as rich as Gambrinus. It seems to possess a semi-sweet subtle flavor that while not weak is not overwhelming either. The hop 'nose' is most obvious and adds much to its appeal. One reviewer said it has 'earthy and quite authentic Pils character'. That earthy aroma is not going to come off anything from Miller or Beck's for that matter. It is thoroughly pleasant and with no flaws. We surely hope some mega-corp doesn't come over and ruin it.

La Tropical Pilsener La Primera Cerveza Cubana (Cerveza La Tropical Pilsener)

RATING: 4.5

Tampa FL/Havana Cubana (origin)

Here we enjoy another Florida-Cuban complication. The current brewers trace themselves to a Havana Cuba brewery started in 1888 as "Cuba's First Beer". They cite impressive awards from 1896 to 1901 on the label. The current incarnation of La Tropical is made in Tampa with the "same quality standards and finest ingredients". Is this a transplanted tradition necessitated by the evils of communism or is it a stolen heritage born of modern marketing? A look at their website might be a good place to start in formulating your conclusion. Right now we leave the question open. Your comments are welcome on both sides. This beer is certainly good enough to warrant the scrutiny.

The light yellow color, persistent white head are what a biologist would call "species typical". The flavor is what we'd call three-fourths strong on the known Pils Scale of our collective memory. It is fairly sweet and with a potent than usual flavor makes it pleasant to many. It is heads and shoulders ahead of some of the Pilsoid junk coming out of Florida. Reviewers say 'surprisingly decent...too sweet for me' and 'Not many Pils from this side of the pond are as pleasing'. One reviewer noted that the SWEET PILS is not authentic when the style demands more dryness. Perhaps Florida or Cuba demand more flair and originality, taking something good and making it their own - as they have done in so many other areas. Somebody raised the question on whether it was as good a beer as a Cuban cigar is to cigars. That was tough since most of us are too busy drinking to even consider smoking. Whatever the origin and whatever your Pils standard this is one of the better SWEET PILS from a non-European country.

Labatt Ice Beer

RATING: 2.5

Yet again we have an 'exclusive process' to make ice brewed beer that claims to be smooth yet full-flavored. This product of London Ontario is light yellow with a big, short-lived head, and prolific carbonation. First taste is very lightly flavored in the same weak manner that makes Labatt's one of our last choices among Canadian brews. Finish is in fact 'extraordinarily smooth' as claimed. For all we can tell any 'full flavor' left with the ice crystals.

Labatts 50 Canadian Ale

RATING: 4.0

Like most imported Canadians this is top quality and priced below most Mexican and European beers. We thought it superior to many premium Americans and its own Pilsner variant due to more complexity and a sweet clean after-taste. On sale from \$3.49 per 6 bottles there is hardly a lower-priced beer in its class. It is not fancy

nor rich - just competent and pleasant. The flavor is enjoyed when both cool and very cold. Short green bottles.

Labatt's Blue Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Labatt's has both ale and Pilsner variations. This is far less cereal tasting and rich than the true European Pils. While it is crisp and clear it is not very distinct from many good American dry beers. We think Miller Genuine Draft and Light are very similar and less expensive. At \$5-6 this should have more of rich German Pils taste. Now that American brands are producing flavorful dry and light beers this product is out of a market niche at this price.

Lao Beerlao Lager

RATING: 4.5

Vientiane, Laos

Collectors alert: very cool tiger cap. You know you have something from a distinct place in the world by viewing their label. Wikipedia says the beer includes jasmine rice from the local market. It has medium flavor on the worldwide Pils scale, short-lived but nice head, and flavor shift that goes from sweet to dry in a flash - the finish is more smooth and dry than early notes. The more you drink the sweeter it remains. The flavors are a bit unkempt for a Pils, going all over the map - which accounts for it being called "a very unique beer" in the world press.

The NY Times has quoted Time Magazine as calling this "Asia's best local beer" and sales in many parts of that part of the planet confirm it's popularity. Carlsberg of Denmark owns about half the company and has lended their brewing and marketing expertise - the Laotian government providing the remainder. The very fact the NYT wrote an article about this beer tells one something. In the case of this label, odd and unique are not a bad thing. It's no surprise to American beer buyers that the addition of rice makes this beer very crisp and smooth. Yet our friends in Lao do not scrimp on the main Pils yeast flavors as do 90% of the cheap American golden piss waters on our grocery shelves. The brewers also say they use a careful amount of malt - again outpacing the common, cheap rice beer crap from North American and Mexico. The NYT articles says BeerLao sells easily for the same price as Heineken in Hong Kong; which at the time was \$6 a bottle. It's almost gaining fame in 2009 as the Asian version of Corona in big Asian cities, London, and soon parts of the US - and yet it has real flavor. I applaude them all. Jasmine rice smoothing out a rich, true Pils? We might have thought of that in forty other Pils-making countries.

Laverstoke Park Farm Organic Real Lager

RATING: 4.0

Overton, England

This linen-textured label really got my attention. The label looks like a child's art rendition of Larry King visiting a hops farm. 4.5% - disappointing but organic...well hellfire and all glory. Then the bright green mantra on the bottom: "Good soil = good grass = good animals = good meat and milk = great people". Deduction for commune, organic farm, smug speech, signifying much but saying nothing new. Did they transport the hops only in Hybrid Prius cars made with fenders of recycled sunflower seed husks and wear heal-free, soil-friendly booties too? Now that would be new and noteworthy. You had me at "good grass", stop there. They do eat meat. Half the deduction removed. Then there's a spiel by someone named Jody about starting a precious farm with biodiversity....gees has anyone done that before? My grandfather called it "having lots of different animals and plants"...and using manure from one to make the other...but if "biodiverse organic farming" makes you feel special compared to the last 50 centuries of human agriculture...go ahead and rant on. I'm sure Wikipedia will credit ya'll with inventing sustainable farming any day now. Frankly, I'm a bit tired of folks sermonizing on their personal Green Acres revelation as if their orations on ancient farming methods were somehow new to the world and me in particular. Oh yes and they have a lab which tests their soils...big freakin' deal. You'd be a Mongolian, yak-hearding imbecile if you didn't test soils at your place instead of someone charging \$7 for a large bottle of lager. Every good farmer does that and many them use very expensive university soil labs. My spiel and rant is over so now for the beer itself.

The flavor is mild-mid strength, Pilsy but not rich, not impressive for this \$6.99 per 16.9 oz. which is actually a shockingly bad deal. It a bit of an extra earthy quality that is pleasant and some finish notes are surprisingly sharp and uniquely bitter. The bottle conditioning helps but this is surely a BOUTIQUE BEER for the politically

correct crowd for whom beer can be bought at any price. It's an organic, biodiverse, earth-friendly, praise-the-daisy, enlightening experience for me - and if you believe that I have a biodiverse pile of hand-selected bovine physiological byproduct to sell you at \$5 a shovel load. I'll actually hand deliver it to the massive cargo bay of your literally green Prius if you like. Economics and unsufferable haranguing aside, this brew is actually not bad but if it was a well-foiled Austrian import for \$2.99 a bottle I'd consider giving it another go. I'd even go as high as \$3.99 since they threw in the lovely, textured Larry Kingoid drawing which is I suppose primitive British folk art from our century and collectible. I hope something about this bottle is memorable?!?

Left Hand Polestar Pilsner

RATING: 3.0

Longmont, Colorado

I've said this over and over the head, the color, and aroma here are so classic. The only thing different I know about this is the use of Noble hops. It is mid-flavored, surprising bitter and not always with a pleasant velvety touch. It abuses one more than a Pils should and the hops bitter finish is not well done. In fairness, the stuff was brewed 4.30.2008 and this taste/review was written 11.19.2008 - my associates differ on whether a micro-pils in the "real world" should be good that far out or not. It is what we tend to get and many other micros are much older when tested here. I noted other reviewers on the web reported unclear notes and unidentified things that set them back to render B- and C ratings. My problems is purely in the ragged, thumping bitterness of the sample.

Lightning Elemental Pilsner

RATING: 3.5

Poway, California

Made in San Diego County CA, this brew comes in a bottle with more chrome than all the land-yachts coming out of 1950's Detroit put together. "Better Beer Through Science(tm)" is a nice slogan too. German yeast plus Noble hops and Pils-type malts. This 5.6% offering is true to the German Rickelsbrewswillenhasselhoffen rules or whatever they are called. Head and hue are classic with the head coarsely bubbled and lasting well. The nose is very tempting. The flavor is immediately different and far from German tradition. There is some spice, vaguely mint or coriander, making it slightly Belgoid. This could come from the hops but usually does not. There is yeasty fruit - nice touch but not clever or fruity-pils enough to thrill. "Bitter-strange" said one panelist here who later came to appreciate it better after a second class. Another said "odd...if the Reinheitsgebot were not claimed I might think this was contrived and dreamed up in an Anheuser-Busch chemistry lab" and a third "Good quality...the whole 'elemental' thing indicates they planned it to be a novelty...not sure it works...not bad but I see no reason to buy it again". It is like bitter tropical fruit - something to treasure perhaps but only likable just because it's new, odd, and rare. There is no wow factor or "damn they beat the German at their own game" by any means. It is really a California "out there" experience, one time being enough to get the theme, and no reason (unlike other CA magic acts) to go there again.

Lion Lev Pale Double Bock

RATING: 4.0

Havlickuv Brod, Czech Republic

This dark golden beer won the Silver Award in a recent Beer World Cup in the Bohemian Pils group. It is mid-strength Pils by European standards (and potent by North American), a surprising fruity variant. There is a touch of sweetness but a faintly bitter hops finish to cancel out what could have made it unmemorable at the start. The head is large, ivory, fluffy, and full.

Lomza Premium Beer (Wyborowe)

RATING: 4.5

Poland

I was expecting yet another (formerly) third world, Eastern European copy of Czech or German brilliance in the Pils field. It might be too weak, have odd metallic notes, or no redeeming grainy notes at all. We poured and an aroma from the beer heaven arose and it was not allowed to go unmolested for more than 5 seconds after that. The aesthetics are classic but sipping it reveals a rich, authentic Pils infusion so wonderful and legit I am without words. More sips. I would pick Gambrinus or Urquell if given a choice but this Polish Pils is very nearly in their league on any day at any temperature. There are dozens of American and German products far inferior. Lomza

is lightly and flawlessly sweetened, a good malt backbone in place. It's 6% in the trim I bought but others report 5.75%. I have read reviews online of it being poor and perhaps in some bottles or form I may be. One cannot however deny it's Bronze Medal at the World Beer Championships in this ultra-competitive category. Tastings.com of the Beverage Tasting Institute rated it 85 points (High Recommended) in October 2008 but all their chat about "peach marmalade on toasted cornbread" and "light artichoke" is utter elitist tripe - that's because I am certain it possesses more of a light Chilean anchovy paste on Norwegian flatbread accented with Bolivian capers from Spring 1968 supported by faint notes of 1972 Belgian malted milk balls from 1207 Onvangerstraat in Brugges Belgium sprinkled with rare albino truffles from batch #901.

Tried again in October 2010, the rating remains but my first reaction is good-earthly flavors with a surprising lightness in the dry finish. Having scanned and drowned a few more third world and old old world pils under the belt, this is a respectable find and certainly a good value for larger bottles. The label with a dancing green, red, and white couple and traditional costumes is decent beer art. Since our mega-breweries in the US with all the computer and engineering power on the planet care not to do true Pils flavors in sufficient intensity - I say it's time to outsource mainstream brewing to Lomza and thoughtful brewers like them.

Lone Star

RATING: 2.0

San Antonio, Texas

Things are big in the Long Star State of Texas. That is why we might expect a brew bearing that name to be big on flavor or charm. It was not. If one has been swilling Budweiser since age 12 this Lone Star beer with a bright sweeter-than-Bud taste might be the best thing since cowboy boots. In the world of good American beers and even bad import beers this label is just a label with a nice name. Once again our theory about beer that brags about the 'Artesian water' rather than the taste is reinforced. There is no reason to drink this beer unless your only alternatives are Light or Ice trash. Our reviewers sent the usual sort of puns - 'Leave it a Lone' and 'Perhaps it should be named for its ingredient...Lone Hop'.

Lowenbrau Special (American-made)

RATING: 2.0

An American-made low cost 'German' beer is appealing. Unfortunately this is an acidic crude beer with German PACKAGING and no German class or Pils taste. Miller can do much better. There are a growing number of less expensive Amer- icans (like Stroh's) and several Mexicans which are better values. One can only wonder if the folks in Munich know how far from worldclass this effort has become? If Mexicans can do great European style beers why can't Miller?

Lowenbrau Zurich

RATING: 4.0

Zurich, Switzerland

Zurich Lowenbrau is made at breweries around the world. Unlike the very inferior American variant this Swiss Beer from Zurich actually has flavor. Comparing the two is most educational. This bright golden lager is broadly in the Heineken class with pungent aroma and smooth finish. It is however a bit more sweet unless extremely cold. While we'd prefer a good German pils this beer is interesting. It loses 1 bottle because the dry finish is a bit weak.

Maccabee is rlp 4.0 472 Netanya Maccabee from T.B.I. of Netanya Israel has 3 Monde Selection Gold Medals since 1987. This typically colored Pils has nice aromatic values and a traditional color. The flavor is pleasing like some of the lighter German Pils but in the competitive world of Pils-making it is not complex nor flavorful enough for us. While so many Israeli exports reflect superb quality and hardy work this product is disappointing. While it will crush any mass-market American Pils and many Mexicans for flavor interest it cannot match true European Pils like Urquell or Becks. A Heineken drinker will consider it magic but not if you've sampled the world's very best.

Maes Pils

RATING: 4.0

Warloos, Belgium

This product of Warloos is typical Pils color but has a lasting foamy head. Flavor is medium strength for a Pils

and the finish is rather dry. It is best when very cold. For our money there are many Pils just as fine with no steep \$9.00 sixpack price. Like so many other European Pils it is solid and reliable for flavor and presentation but price takes away any value. A Becks or DAB is likely to cost much less and taste as fine. It's a "try once for fun...then move on" label in my book.

Magic Hat Participation Lager

RATING: 3.5 South Burlington, Vermont

This stuff was intended for the 2008 US Prez election. The % bright gold lager promises no tax cuts or free health care though I would like everyone involved to cut beer taxes one of the freakin' days. (and Lord knows if the IRS would let me deduct six hundred 6-packs because I wrote this beer book, I'd really be one happy, hop-numbed, malt-silly, participatin' fool. But then again if they did we'd have 12 million beer books and 38 million guides to local street vice on the market). Head is large, off white, and the it's mid-Pils strength overall. The "GET OUT and VOTE 11.04.08" on the label put it on my collectible shelf for that label is surely gone forever. I rather like their incarnation of Uncle Sam pointing while holding a lager bottle between his other fingers. There's a website to learn about registering to vote and as someone who voted after having 7 beers the night beer, I will testify that beer drinkers can and do bother to vote. Okay, okay. I called in sick and voted about 4pm two blocks from my house and had more beers after heading back. I celebrate what should be a national holiday in style and if that means back-to-back hangovers to drown out the policy nerds on TV - so be it and I thoroughly enjoyed my day. It's medium-dry, slightly but acceptably bitter in the finish, low-mid Pils flavor, and like the 2008 not exactly what I was looking for on any of the major two or three party positions. I'm tempted to say it tasted old, erratic on one hand and lacked substance on the other. And yes I gave one to a homeless dude to "spread the wealth" around; that would be unfair to a decent beer though it's not the Magic Hat's best effort.

Melanie Evil Eye (Ojo Malo) High Gravity Lager

RATING: 2.5

Cincinnati, Ohio

I bought this 24 oz. tallboy along with the potent Steel Reserve 2 but this can does not give ABV anywhere at all. My research says it has a potent 10%, making it more buzz-inducing than an 40 oz. with 4.9% ABV. It is called "a strong malt lager" by some classification systems I consulted. The lofty ABV measure is rather well disguised and such a bad thing in the hands of teens, college students, and adults like I used to be in a former "there is no such thing as too much beer" life. It is medium yellow in the pour with long lace. It is finer than Bud and Pabst and most of those silly big forty creations with fun marketing names but that is not saying much. The Steel Reserve 2 proved superior with at least a pretense of giving some Pils flavor. Where the Reserve 2 has a bit of grain this product gives one light sweet malt, phenols, and feeling they have added everything but the kitchen sink - because those are expensive and this stuff is not. It is high gravity but low in seriousness. It is common, crass, and undistinguished except as a pretty golden delivery vehicle for lots of ethanol. That will be enough for millions but not me nor I suspect you either. There are worse gas station beers but these days one can find a Becks Dark and Sam Adams Boston Lager even in the the most remote counties in the US - so pick your cheap poison or savor quality over two or three nights and be the better man or woman for it.

Menabrea Pils i rlp 4.0 535 Biella Menabrea of Biella Italy is one of the country's smallest breweries. Since 1846 they have produced a 'Birra' that is in the European Pils tradition in color and flavor. It is no better nor worse than Moretti but lacks that profound depth and charisma of an Urquell or Spaten. It is a good new experience and the gold-foiled and crested label is worthy of your displays. Other than that is just one of a few hundred very good but not perfect Pils that comes in small 11.2 ounce bottles to this country.

Messina t rlp 3.0 208 Birra Messina of Milano dates to 1923 and produces a Pils in shoulderless bottles shaped like artillery shells. Color is typical German Pils but the carbonation is better than most. Flavor is moderate from start to mid-palate but finishes quite dry. Moretti, a major competitor is superior to our taste. At all temperatures this had some slightly thin and off flavors in separate purchases. There are too many fine richly flavored Pils to recommend it.

Michelob (Lager)

RATING: 2.0

This popular American from Anheuser-Busch is well made but not up the flavor detail of the new elite Americans and most European imports. We give the uniquely shaped bottle high marks for handle-ability and its convenient light weight. We do think that its Light variant is a better choice - which at 134 calories does not

possess the real negatives of most lights. Best in bottles or kegs and very best not consumed at all.

Michelob Golden Pilsner u rlp 3.0 867 St. Louis, MO So far this is one of the least improved Michelob products in the new line. One reviewer suspected 'one must be a bloodhound to detect the reported 'SPICY FLORAL AROMA'. Noble and Cascade hops are used to produce this \$5.99 pale gold brew with a tall off white head. They describe it as DEEP golden and that too required a real hallucination or two. Flavor is better than the regular Michelob golden brews but then again we could name 400 Pils (100 easily found) that are absolutely finer. Even at this \$5.99 price they need a much bigger punch to win over beer lovers who have tried what we might call the REAL PILS. Since a few of them come down at just \$7.99 one must truly value the 2 dollars to settle near this. Please reformulate.

Miller Genuine Draft u rlp 3.0 218 This is one of the more flavorful premium American beers. As a cold- filtered product it retains rich flavor lost with pasteurization and other harsh processes. Available in shortneck and longneck bottles as well as cans this is sure to become very popular. The taste is unique and it is perhaps the most enjoyable American offered in cans. The light variant is almost as flavorful. This is a much needed product.

Miller High Life u rlp 2.0 220 This is Miller's basic beer. It is competent and smooth but not exciting. It is hard to imagine anyone preferring this to their newer Genuine Draft. While the tastes are distinct this High Life lacks depth and flavor.

Miller Reserve 100% Barley Draft u rlp 3.0 224 This bright bubbly golden new Miller product dates from Fall 1992. Made from 100% barley malt it is said to harken back to Frederick Miller's draft lager dating from 1855. First taste had us saying 'premium American' due a pleasant pungency and delightful maltiness. While better than Miller Genuine Draft it is not on level with a top microbrew or premium bottled American. Yet it is easily THE BEST GROCERY STORE AMERICAN UNDER \$4.25. A worthy new product.

Milwaukee's Best regular u rlp 2.0 227 Marketed at the top of econo-brews this beer has pleased millions of Americans when the cheaper brands could not. It is a smart compromise in price and quality available in can and bottle. It is not exciting but neither bitter nor crude like its cheaper competitors. While is surely not Milwaukee's very best it is a certainly a profitable and consumer-prompted win for Miller.

MOA Original Premium Lager

RATING: 4.0

Marlborough, New Zealand

Here's a decent Pils wrapped in in the strong green bottle, a cork as thick as my head, and a pretty cherry-lacquered wire cage top. Josh Scott started making these "boutique beers" in 2003 for a discerning market. My discernment is that the flavor is authentic, deep at times, a bit bitter and wayward at others, and surprisingly bitter overall and very much so with a whole bottle down the ole emu. I'd trade this most any day for six of something made in the old Czech town but one has to try new things whether grand, magnificent, or mere posers. If you like your Pilseners on the dry, stiff, bitter side this might earn a "grand" rating. If you like Pils very dense with flavor and only a tad sweet MOA is a tad harsh and average; not bad nor a poser at any time. I doubt anyone will give it magnificent honors except for packaging and we all know where that goes. I would not sugar it up to make pretty chicks in American bars love it - as there will always be Champagne and tarted up Coronas to win that battle. However, it's a bit too acidic and briefly unkempt for the price. Package and product do not match though I am not offended nor feel cheated. Quality was attempted for certsain and MOA Original is only a missed opportunity requiring a short rethink.

At 5.5% we see very little advantage in all the trappings though the head is above most Pilsy stuff for substance and lace.

Molson Export Ale

4.0 229 This refined Canadian is best compared to the Molson Golden which may or may not be more available in your stores. It is a bit less pungent and has a tendency to be mildly bitter when tried head to head with the Golden label. Although both get a 4 bottle rating we'd almost prefer Molson's Kirin (regular only) as it is sweeter. All these 4 bottle Molson products are competent but lack a depth of refined flavors. How 'bout a dark version?

Molson Golden c rlp 4.0 230 Although very common and quite affordable this Canadian is always satisfying with a meal or on its own. There are so many other beers to try that people often forget about this familiar favorite. We will forgive the company for the disastrous bland Kirin Light and give them 4 bottles for this finest effort. It seems to sell well when on sale or not. It is the first import than many Americans have tried.

Molson XXX Super Premium Beer

RATING: 2.5

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

This is the ultra-potent 7.3% that many US states don't get or know about. But is "super premium" related to super-ABV or not? The pour is yellow, somewhat golden but not too bright, the head off-white and as rough and peaky as anything. The nose is Pilsy with a hint of tartness. It lets one down immediately and by this I mean in 1.3 seconds with notes so weak there is nothing to latch onto in the brain. Pils, lager yeast, and fruit notes are barely perceivable and the hops must have been left in Vancouver with the you-know-what. I really detest a beer high in ethanol but low in flavor. It's like a car with 400 horsepower but 70's thin tires and a bouncy Caddy suspension or a girl...nevermind. Here is potency without passion, strength without substance, and zip without a trip. XXX is xxx to me. Look elsewhere and if that means another Molson label you'll still do some better.

Moosehead Lager c rlp 3.0 235 This aromatic Canadian lager is not unlike the more popular Molson but is perhaps thinner and less pungent. It has a crisp clean taste that could pass as a flavorful light. It is well-crafted but lacks some of the depth and character that mark a perfect lager. It is good but not great. We think Molson is a better pick for that pungent Canadian taste. If one drinks enough of this most of the jokes about the name become truly funny.



Moretti t 5.0 rlp 237 Since 1859 Birra Moretti of Udine Italy has made this superior Pilsner-type beverage. It is about equal in quality to Dortmunder Union and less bitter than Bitburger to our tastes. The long tapered green bottle is like a miniature Italian wine bottle in shape. Curiously the bottle opening of is narrowest we've seen. Like most REAL Pils beers this is best very cold. If you like a worldclass Pils this is easily worth the \$7-8 for 6 bottles.

Mother Earth Endless River Kolsch-style Ale

RATING: 4.5

Kingston, North Carolina

Kolsch comes from Cologne, Germany which is also known for another very fragrant fluid. Why is this ale in the golden lager section? This is because most of them are top-fermented (thus a basic ale) and yet lagered or cold-conditioned. There is very little ale style in flavor of this beer and it clearly belong with the other golden lagers. No big surprise except to the nomenclatural strict of my readers. We are pleased in this 2010 in North Carolina to have two relatively new breweries making fine products, Mother Earth in Kingston and Palerider in Raleigh. My hopes for both were vastly exceeded by their actual, creative offerings. Unlike the old micro days it is no longer enough to have something gold, something dark, something red, and something yummy inbetween; the names more clever and the labels more artful than the contents. This golden Kolsch is pale and Pils-like in the pour and there is a like fruit in the presentation, a faint hops tang in the finish. Possible citrus is found - added? Sweetness is 3 on a scale of 10, strength maybe 6 on the 10 scale. It is more bitter than longer you drink it so pairing with food is important if this much bitterness bothers you. The price of this new firm is strictly \$10 and up in NC so they need to rise to a very strong standard at that price point. Their fresh-hopped IPA is so far better than the other labels and this is not as amazing or stunning but I am not sure how a Kolsch could be really mind-blowing anyhow for a hops worshiper like myself - bias alert. I might like it better if the bitterness was pushed down a notch and fruit up one.

Mythos Aris Greek Lager

RATING: 4.5

Thessaloniki, Greece

"I'll bet this stuff is skunky as all hell" I shouted in our beer tasting. Before I could take my colleagues for yet more beer money they cracked the cap and we all came to the same conclusion. My mind turned to another place. Sunday School. Thessalonians chapter four, verse 33. I could almost hear Mrs. Eastman in her soft high-

pitched, nasal voice asking us to repeat the scripture contained therein. Now I'm repeating with the skunky Pilsoid beer repeated therein and therefrom. I Thes. 5:8 "be sober". 5:21: "hold fast to that which is good". 5:26: "Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss". How about the Brewbase Revised Standard Version: "be as sober as possible...hold fast to that which is good (including your hometown Thessalonian golden lager)...and greet all the [pretty] sisters with a holy kiss or two...until the Lord returns or they scream your name, whichever cometh first". (My apologies to St. Pauli but I did resist the obvious "holey kiss" joke). Aris is a pretty Pils all around, traditional and skunky in form/color, moderate in flavor, good solid mouth of foam, rewarding when cold and quality still high even if a bit warm. One taster (let's call him Bill the Idiot) here thought it was a perfect but I felt some complexity and one notch of strength was lacking. A great beer, a great old town, and this big Greek skunk will kick your Heineken skunk's heinie all the way down the forest trail to Thessaloniki.

Narragansett Lager

RATING: 3.5

Rochester, New York

"MADE ON HONOR...SOLD ON MERIT" and "Since 1890" brings this Upstate lager to places around the US and world. We found 6-packs of tallboys in Raleigh NC in October 2011 and had not seen in the South before. Their history is interesting, being the first beer brewed by "The Original Six" in 1890 and being the best-selling lager in New England from 1930 to about 1970. Despite the current Rochester NY location (Bock and Porter labels come from RI and CT), the firm is based on the original Narragansett, Mass. operation, around 1914 the largest lager-maker in all of New England. It was in fact the Official Beer of the Boston Red Sox from 1944 to 1975. John H. Fehberg, their principle founder used \$150K in raised funds and his profits from Butterine, his own margarine-like product to fund the brewing operation. They had a barn, stable, blacksmith for the 75 hauling horses, 45 wagons, and later 45 gas-powered trucks and even some "green" electric trucks. They even survived the Prohibition days with permission of the IRS to brew small amounts of beer for medicinal purposes! Today their approach is: "it's got more flavor than other premium lagers, yet it's one of the most drinkable beers in the world". Awards include 2008 World Beer Cup Bronze Medal 2009, Gold Medal 2010 in Lager. They had a slightly curious recipe that involves six row malts, seedless hops, Iowa corn, and a very old pre-Prohibition lager yeast strain.

It pours a pale but rich enough yellow with a mid-duration head. I poured one glass and was interrupted. Lace was moving up a good 8 minutes later. Nice. It is maybe two notches more flavorful than a common "premium lager" (not to be confused with a microbrew, super-premium lager), a vast improvement on Michelob and Corona to name two so-calle premium lagers - which to most informed lager-lovers are barely sub-premium if worthy of any nearly lofty adjective at all. True Pils flavor is there (plus a grainy finish) but it's no Gambrinus or Becks by any means. The big, affordable sixes of tallboys prove to be a decent value with at least a nice dose of authentic flavors. Reviewers here said "I had expected much worse...mid-strength Pils flavors, a modicum of sweetness, and even a curious bit of peppery-spice in some finishes" and "nothing to write home about...now that some great lagers and ales come in cans this is not as special as it might have been years ago...there are nice lager notes but not everything is premium...I would consider it again if my store had it on special". The current (October 2011) Beer Advocate rating is B- with B+ from The Bros which is remarkably high for an "American Adjunct Lager". They might be about as high and good as non-microbrew golden lager can score.

[PLEASE LINK TO WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM](http://WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM)

Obolon Lager

RATING: 4.5

Kiev, Ukraine

I tried their Premium on the same day as this and their curious "Magnat Ale" which might in fact may be (or not) an Ale-based Pilsner. This is the one in the forest green, white, and red label. For one thing, it's a darker gold than the Premium and has a distinct, Heineken skunky aroma on uncapping. It is the more traditional of the two Pils editions. It is also slightly stronger than the Premium and like it quickly moves on to a tartish finish. Of the two, I like a bit better but not so much as to differentiate their ratings. It is made with cold lagering and according to their website is "deeply fermented". Like the premium a simple sip or tiny cup will not do. Give it as full bottle or two to saturate the buds. If you want to award your own Ph.D. in Pils beers, run a taste taste of Obolon's Lager, Premium, and Magnat products and have the candidate describe the differences in detail. This

will be very fascinating.

Obolon Premium

RATING: 4.5

Kiev, Ukraine

Brewed from "old recipes" this Pils is very aromatic and also one of the palest gold beers that is not a watery light. The make up for the lack of color with the deep gold, black, and red label - three colors that look great together. The website says "it's a highly stable beer with special freshness and saturation"; think they should fire their English translator. It's 5.2% ABV and slams you with good grainy Pils but soon comes a very tart, much weaker finish close on it's heels. Rice is used in the process. One's first few sips can always been deceiving so I made many more - anything in the cause of journalism and book-crafting. Not long ago one would be a "commie" for even hinting at like or love for a beer from Kiev - I guess chicken Kiev was somehow okay during the Cold War as I had it fairly often. Back to the more and more sips. It does have some of those "off" notes one finds in Russia and Chinese beers but only in the finish and mostly when warmed on the table a bit. There is something rich and refined to their recipe and if served very cold (ONLY!) it will impress. Pils is one style which must saturate both the tongue and the mind for some minutes to get the full and accurate measure of it. I wish half our American microbrews had this recipe and the courage to brew things this long.

Old Milwaukee

RATING: 2.0

This American econobeer has loads of competition at the end of the price spectrum. It is drinkable but after tasting the world's finest (and often 3 times more costly) labels we find no merit in its unpleasantness. However we suspect that OM's real competition comes from the plethora of new Malt Liquor labels which are cheap in their towering glass bottles and generally have a more desirable taste. Not all stores even carry this now.

Olympia u rlp 3.0 262 This budget American label is one of the better low cost brews. It is almost always seen in 12-packs so not everyone will stock it. It is reasonably crisp and about the equal of Keystone in quality. If you can get Stroh's at a similar price that may be more satisfying as would a few others on sale. We do not believe it comes in bottles. It is overall better than Milwaukee's Best if served very cold - when cool none of the econobrews are drinkable.

Orion Premium Draft Beer

RATING: 2.5

Urasoe City, Okinawa, Japan

This "Okinawa Original" is heralded as being "clear" and "mild". Color and head are classic Pils even if the later is limited. The lace is longer than many brands. It is medium flavored overall, light by German and Czech standards perhaps, but sporting enough graininess so as to be medium in our world-influenced American market. I think it has potential (for the Japanese are masters of everything with computer and quality control and can fix this), but there are some loose, empty, and vaguely "off topic" notes to keep this one from being much above a weak, mass market "American Pils". The price is well above them and so we can demand more regularness if not more strength. There is a place for a mid-potency Pils enjoyed in the heat of summer (with a lemon or lime) but price and perfection on not meeting in this bottle.

Pabst Blue Ribbon

RATING: 1.0

Even budget conscious college students joke about Pabst but many of them do buy it. It had the low-priced market nailed down until the bargain malts hit the scene. If they came up with a 'Pabst Dry' and put it in large bottles it probably would compete better. It is sometimes bitter and acidic and has no complexity of flavor. If there's an earthquake and inferno encircling your town and it's the last sixpack getting warm at the pilfered, looted corner store...and you may have hours to live...leave it. If this stuff has ever been near a real blue ribbon, someone must have stolen it.

Pacifico m rlp 267 Cerveceria del Pacifico makes a truly first rate and affordable (\$5) beer with medium straw yellow color and a head with abundant bubbles. It is very refined and smooth at all times. It must be considered moderate in flavor or somewhat subtle and dry. It is not overly sweet like some Mexican labels yet it has a clean fruity taste that is pleasant at any fine meal. Much to our surprise it is very close to a more flavorful Keystone

Dry.

Paulaner Premium Pils

RATING: 3.0

Munich, Germany

Paulaner is responsible for two other Pils - Paulaner Munich Pils and Hacker- Pschorr Munich Edelhell. The gold letters 'Extra Dry' on the label give a clue about this one. Color is extremely pale yellow and the head is large with pristine white micro-foam. It is EXTREMELY DRY in fact. There are nice yeasty and 'grainy' Pils flavors to note and that dry finish can have bitter notes - something a DRY PILS lover will expect and cherish.

Unfortunately in that dry finish is some ambiguous flatness or 'flavor deficits' as one re- viewer calls it. Or as Brits would say 'a touch untidy'. For this reason it was clearly our less favorite of their three Pils. Paying over \$8.00 for a sixpack with raw, unpolished aftertastes is assuredly a big THUMBS DOWN.

Pennsylvania Penn Gold

RATING: 4.0

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The bottle proclaims it a Munich-style Helles using Hallertau hops. Color is a very pale straw with a bright white head of some duration, slight but persistent lace. It very much carries off the depth, somberness, malty tonic, and subdued approach of the style. While "Helles" means bright, the style to me is less bright than a Pils; though approaches will vary. There are spicy hops but the malt wins out if winning is what we want in the first place. Corn and grain jump up and dance. It's tastes too healthy a golden brew to classified as anything other than a delicious yellow vegetable. How much would 4 servings a day be? They certainly have deviated from most American golden lagers, Pils pretenders or not. Not many American firms attempt the style and very few dare to compare across the pond; least of all with the Helles Fatherland. It may be one of the most malty beers of such pale yellow color on earth. It has a faint tartness, no citrus really. I tend to like it a bit warm for trying it icy cold left some of the notes out. The Beer Advocate averaged it a solid B over hundreds of mainly American tasters, coming out above many famous German labels and equal several very famous ones like Hacker-Pschorr Edelhell, Paulaner Original Munchner, and Spaten Munchner Hell. Very good company that!

Pennsylvania Penn Pilsner

RATING: 4.0

Smithton PA (1996), Pittsburgh, PA (2008)

We first tried this pleasant item first in 1996, noting is the PA's first modern microbrewery of the era. Then we tabbed it a light amber but today it favors rich gold; either way rather dark for the style It was initially based on a very memorable brew the founder Tom Pastorius tried in Heidelberg many years back and met the German Purity Law. Using Hallertau hops plus 2-row and caramel malt this beer is moderately flavored, much sweeter than most pils and exceedingly malty in the foreground. The caramel malt gives a nice semi-sweet balance though the finish is drier. Having just compared it with the Penn Gold Lager, a Helles sort, the two are very different though neither is a true Pils in my opinion. Unfortunately the finish can be a tad irregular and not uniform in places; weak sometimes, overly bitter next, and perhaps again near perfect. In 2008 they proclaim an advantage over the European Pils-makers for this is a sure to be a fresher product. If one wants the sharp, crisp, chilly delight of a Pils, this is not your label. It's a good beer but wrongly named unless one wishes to announce the Malty-Pils class and have competitions on that darker, less grainy approach. It is a good golden lager but the yeast may be wrong and the malt too pronounced to earn my respect. If scored on Pils standards it would be a 2.0 but it earns 4.0 only on the merits outside the class.

Peroni

RATING: 4.5

Rome, Italy

This Italian beer has an initial pungent taste not unlike Heineken. There-after the taste is more Pilsner type and complex. This product of Rome is a touch sweet and never bitter. Since 1846 this beer has been an Italian favorite. At about \$7 it is an alternative to other costly Europeans for those liking a non-bitter pungent Pils taste. It is a medium straw gold with a short-lived head. It could easily pass for a premium German type beer. Initially given a perfect 5 bottle rating, our more refined, knowledgeable tastebuds place it 4.5 today.

Peter's Brand

RATING: 3.0

Holland

This Dutch Pilsener has the same pungency found in Heineken and most Pils from that country. Color is pale yellow and head is moderately persistent. While it is more flavorful than Heineken it had some bitter elements unless perfectly freezing cold. The finish was a bit crude for something priced as \$7.00 per six pack. There is no merit in this beer or the bottle as far as we can see. This brew of Breda is best to overlook.

Pete's Bohemian Pilsner

RATING: 4.0

St. Paul, Minnesota

This latest wickedness is medium golden with a lasting of limited size. It is a moderately hopped, semi-sweet Pils of some distinction. There are certainly richer golden, hoppy lagers but as \$5.99 microbrews run this is one of the best. It should be served very chilly but has enough sweetness and hops to be tolerable somewhat near room temperature. Reviewers noted 'high quality hops bitterness but just the right amount of sweet Pils flavor...good value though not worldclass' and 'easy to drink and enjoy...I'd still prefer their Lager and Pale Ale if given a choice'. Don't see it around today.



Pilsner Urquell

RATING: 5.0

Pilsen, Czech Republic

This is called 'the only genuine Pilsner' since it is the only worldwide distribution of a beer from Pilsen Czechoslovakia. It is very superior in its class and is to many the absolute standard by which a European (that is true and traditional) Pils be judged. Others prefer Spaten labels or Dinkel Acker CD-Pils as reliable standards. You'll not go wrong serving any of them. There are fuller or darker Pils and if you want one from Pilsen the harder to find one called Gambrinus is perfect. Reviewers remarked on 'ideal aroma, flavor, and big head...wonderful earthy flavor' and 'a little more strong hopping than some of the mass-produced German ones'. We note that quality may vary and some bottles we've tried were old or bitter or both. When fresh it's the finest made. If you want to do a comprehensive Pils tast testing this should be one of the standards. It's hard to find in some parts of the US and in certain seasons but I always grab a few when available. It's the Bible of Pils, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights all rolled up into one sacred, revered bottle. Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Urquell...

Brewbase Fives



Pinkus Ur Pils

RATING: 5.0

Muenster, Germany

From the town that gave us Munster cheese is this Ur (or true) Pils. The head large and long. Carbonation is forever and color is typical. Even at the requested 55 degrees serving temp. (warm by US custom) it proved extremely flavorful and delicious beyond words. It is also rather aromatic and has a perfect Hallertau hops complexity. Organic barley and 90 day lagering are used. Possibly bitter if too warm. ONE OF THE BEST PILS. Absolutely a 'must try'.

Pinkus Ur Organic Pils

RATING: 4.0

Muenster, Germany

The regular Pinkus Ur Pils has used organic barley but apparently this blue labeled product is organic in all the ingredients from top to bottom. Color is slightly cloudy yellow being unfiltered. The head is typical of the style though perhaps deeper than many. Reviewed first by us in 2000 this sample is considerably more bitter than our notes indicate for the above review of a few years before. While full flavored it does have a more uncomfortable, uneven finish than one should have to endure. Whether the organic farming process is to blame we cannot be sure. The previously reviewed label made no mention of cloudiness or being unfiltered so perhaps that explains the flavor change. Our recommendation as an elite pils unfortunately cannot extend to this version of the product. 5.2% alcohol by volume.

Polar

RATING: 4.5

Venezuela

We'd assumed this work of Cerveceria Polar Del Centro was another fine Mexican beer with painted label. It is in fact from Venezuela but the connection to polar bears still escapes us. Polar Bear...err...Polar Beer is a Pilsner type and is the equal of any European Pils. It is much sweeter and less bitter than most Euro-Pils and as such is a distinct label. We'd class it as Sweet Pils. If you like Carta Blanca this will please too.

Brewbase Fives



Port Royal Export

RATING: 5.0

San Pedro Sula, Honduras

Brewmaster Helmut Lutz makes this truly worldclass Pilsner in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in the style of his native Bavaria. Initial aroma was like Heineken but the first taste is that of a full sweet Pils on par with ANYTHING from Europe. Color is bright but faintly clouded gold with an enduring foamy head. Finish is semi-sweet. Like many of the sweeter Pils it is quite drinkable near room temp. Hard for us to find. Absolutely delightful!

Portland Lager

RATING: 4.5

Like Dock Street Philadelphia this amber darkish lager is 'lively' and licensed for Utica NY production. However this lager compares more readily to Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and Pete's Gold Coast Lager - too other worldclass Americans. With Sierra it shares floating sediment that may worry the un- educated beer drinker. It is visually darker than Sierra but both are equally satisfying. As the label says: a great solution to the beer doldrums.

Presidente Cerveza Pilsener Type Beer

RATING: 4.5

Santa Domingo, Dominican Republic

I found this gem in green 22 ounce bottles in my neighborhood grocery store for about \$2.75 in August 2008. I expected one of the those week Mexican Pils creations and was delighted to discover something far better than most of them. Color and head are classic, perhaps a tad larger than average in bubble department. It's very faintly "skunky" (and no Pils lover ever minds that sign of authenticity and strength) and yet it's not a rich Czech or German. Somewhere back in my formative Pils-tasting years I called these "Mid-Pils", neither watery trash like Corona nor a standard as a find in Gabrinus or Urquell. If you want a Pils and don't want to spend \$13 on an imported sixpack, a couple of these beauties will please when served very cold.

Middle Strength Pilsener (MSP) would be a good category for anyone doing an All-Pils tasting. We have low strength, mid strength, high strength, and the forgettable, no strength, pseudo-Pils, computer-generated PISS WATER from you-know-who. The value here is very nice as the price is right and the strength good for a cold day when mass quantities in big bottles are in order. Presidente may not be President of the Pils but he's at least chairman of their political party. It's quite sad so many once great American brewers find this sliver of sales going to the Dominican Republic only for their lack of quality and faithfulness to THEIR OWN...I repeat...THEIR OWN European tradition. How sad. How glad I found this nice value that is pleasant, affordable, and a very good pour over the hours.



Puntigamer Panther

RATING: 5.0

Brauerei Puntigam Graz has been brewing since 1838 and most of their works are of the German type. The Panther label is a 'Genuine Draft' and colors medium straw yellow with a large bubble-bound head. While they also sell a Pils beer (reviewed in our next issue) this might be called a super flavorful Pils or POTENT PILS. Put against Dortmunder Union or Pilsner Urquell this proves notably stronger. It is never bitter and is a fine choice with meals.

Rattlesnake Premium Beer

RATING: 3.0

New Orleans, Louisiana

The color is exceedingly pale yellow and the head of medium lifespan. It is 'handmade' by Kershenstine's Diamond of New Orleans. The beautifully painted bottle has a snake in red and black encircling old Pappy Kershenstine. The flavor is of the thin American Pils sort with more of a light fruity finish than cheap brands. The package says 'Get Bit'- at \$8.49 we were bit real good. Big let down like Guinness Gold. Recommendation: buy one bottle to collect.

Red Dog u rl
p 3.0
459 Milwaukee WI

Plank Road of Milwaukee is promoting this new 'uncommonly smooth' beer in 6 or 12 packs. Color is light yellow and the head disappears quickly. Six bottles for \$3.99 is the catch. If you are in a Busch Light budget this beer may hold appeal. Otherwise stick with Black Dog or Red Bull if you like a bull-dog theme on your labels. Here is proof that the word 'smooth' is brewer-speak for no flavor and a deficiency of hops. Still we find that for 4 portraits of George W. one does avoid odd flavors in Schiltz and the weakness of a malt liquor. It is Union Made but they wisely decided not to identify themselves. Red Dog gets A+ in marketing but C- in brewing art. It appears to be gone forever.

Redhook Rope Swing Summer Pilsner

RATING: 4.0

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Since 1982 Redhook has made some solid beers and are couple really great ones. Released to celebrate Tax Day in the US (April 15), this refreshing classic Pils is intended to honor the arrival of summer at a time when spring has yet to begin? Confused they may be on that marketing theme but I like the beer. The hops are better than most US micro-Pils and the malts well defined also. I like it but did not love it. The \$10 price was not to my liking really as one can do as well for less. I get nearly the real Pilsen products for that sum.

Red Mountain Golden Lager

RATING: 4.0

This product of Birmingham Brewing Co. is bright golden yellow with a very substantial head. Carbonation is strong. We almost didn't try this one since their Golden Ale had been tried. They are not the same. This steam-brewed lager is superior to RM's Golden Ale. It has real Pils flavor and compares well to all but the elite 5-bottle Pils like Urquell. The finish is more sweet than dry and is a bit fruity. Decent value but not really exciting.

Red Stripe

RATING: 4.5

Jamaica

293 The brown barrel-shaped bottles have a narrow mouth and the largest govern- ment warning imaginable - 1.2 inches high. The plain red and white package caused us to ignor this Jamaican brew from Desnoes & Geddes. Expecting little we were stunned by the detailed and truly worldclass taste. It is easily a top 10 Pils in the world. Easily. We'd like to suggest a new government warning: Red Stripe can be very addicting. About \$7 a pack and well worth it when crusing convenience store shelves for something, anything tolerable. a friend of mine said quite aptly (and with atypical wisdom): "it's a more sweet and flavorful version of Corona".

Reichelbrau

RATING: 4.5

Kulmbach, Germany

This non-pasteurized Pils is from the same town (Kulmbach) that produces the Hofbrau Bavaria label at another firm. They must be honest since our labels were blacked out replacing 12 oz. with 11.2 oz.! The color and head are the expected Pils sort. The taste is moderate as Pils go and while very pleasant it was less strong than Dinkel Acker Pils that was compared to it. It is of the Dortmunder Union class and it would be hard to pick the best of the two.

Rembrant Masterpiece

RATING: 3.0

Breda, Holland

Brouwerij de Dissel of Breda Holland export this bright gold lager in bottles bearing one of the master's portraits from The Hague. The first aroma was of 'skunky' Heineken type and unfortunately the flavor was no better. If anything it is a bit thinner in the finish. Tried alongside the pungent Golden Eagle lager of India it was downright boring. In our opinion it one of those 'get it for the lovely label' lagers. This is one canvas they should paint

over.

Rinkuskiai Lobster Lover's Beer

RATING: 4.0

Lithuania

Recent I tried their 8.2% Werewolf Lager with a very fetching label - both the girl and the canine to be precise. Is this just a old world, hungry-for-dollars marketing ploy to make American's want a fancy crude eastern European label for an inflated price? Probably not. Both have substance and curious appeal. The Lobster Lover's lager also features a pretty girl, this time naked and from the rear but with a lobster on her back - his tail covering hers. This formula is a whopping 9.5% ABV. It pours dark gold, perhaps with an amber tint, head Pilsoid but short-lived. No lace to report. It's surprisingly malty and even with some spicing of the mint variety - I suspect that to be coriander for this traditional beer spice can mimic a weak peppermint flavor. There's ample caramel sugar, corn/hominy, banana, and smoke too. The alcohol is finely balanced, not too strong nor too weak and the single flavor elements perform and merge well with it. It will prove too sugary for classic gold lager lovers. I do not love this beer so much as feel better for trying it once - something which can be said about many objects, places, and creatures in our broad world. This is an ideal experiential beer around which tastings can be arranged and late night, drunken arguments held. Reviews on Beer Advocate by the guru ranged from A to D - and that tells one something about whether it's hype or not. It is never simple nor weak nor boring and for me that merits a 4.0. It's too "liquid bread" for many beer lovers but once again, I would not have missed it for the world. I'll bargain for a 4.5 if that lobster's tail is shortened by 20%.

Riverside Golden Spike Pilsner

RATING: 3.5

Riverside, California

Winner of the 1995 World Championships we expected more than this lovely golden drink could deliver. While nicely hopped and reasonably 'lagery' it had some strong (ie. semi-offensive) bitter elements to the finish. The first pal- ate has semi-sweet fruit notes (though moderate) and the mid to later effects are much more hopped, bitter, and dry. It is NOT a weak golden lager as so many are. Instead it's strength and character are of the wrong sort; power without effectiveness; substance without satisfaction. Given the quality of their other beverages surely they have the talent to fix this and find a version worthy of the \$7.50-8.00 microbrew price. It is vastly ahead of your mass market gold lagers but Chicago Legacy, Portland, and Big Rock XO Lager are superior.

Rogue Kells Irish Style Lager

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Most anything from Rogue will be a fine beer and often a great, memorable, standard-for-the-style one. Some have classified this with the European Pale Lagers but the label clearly informs us that Pils yeast is used. Great Western Pale, Crystal-15, Wheat, and Acidulated malts are used. Sterling hops are used in a nice but moderate dose. The golden fluid has a large but non-enduring head. Aroma is sweet but faint. It is smooth, not overly rich, a good summer server for putting out in near-freezing temps. The "apple crisp" finish is there and pleasant enough though it is by no means a fruity lager. One has hints of malt, sweetness, fruit, and grain but never anything to saturate the tonque or even to linger more than a second. It earns 4 bottles for being what it is but might score higher as a representative of the style. This is not a dog show so confirmity to style or breed is not our judging measure. This a hot day, serve-near-icy brew when you want something smooth and not for leisuring slow sipping.

Rolling Rock

RATING: 3.0

The 1980's big market push got many Americans to try this fine product. It was and in some is probably the best American economy brand in bottles. The formerly pub-only painted logo bottles are now available more widely. The packages have delightful photography that is among the finest. Your local store may even have a nice waterfall and if laws permit - real goldfish. The movie Deer Hunter plugs it about 99 times!

Rushki rlp 2.0 305 MOST COLLECTIBLE BOTTLE (USSR!) 1993 Oboken Brewery of Kiev makes this beer for about \$2 in 500ml large bottles. The beautiful foil label in black, red, and gold is very un-Soviet. It is probably a good collector's item as the red stars and 'Product of USSR' are gone forever now. The initial taste is really very nice but the finish is clearly crude and metallic. While it is neither good nor horrible we now know why everyone over there likes Vodka. For \$2 it is worth the experience.

Samuel Adams Golden Pilsner (Special Pilsner) u rlp 4.0 725 Boston MA? Known more for their rich dark and flowering lagers and ales, SA has now produced the common ordinary Pils. They note it has 'lively hops character' and mention the use of potent Bohemian Saaz and German Spalt to prove it. Color is bright golden yellow with a very white, thin, but lasting head. Pils flavor is in the moderate strength. Finish is semi-sweet. As to the lively thing that is somewhat toned down compared to what we know as a Saaz brew. It is a decent Pils but at \$7.00 we would expect something more first rate. After all SA's other labels are equal to Europe's best. This is sadly not. It is good but it should have been great. Reviewers remarked on 'credible hop flavor but not exciting for me' and 'very smooth, well-balanced, and sweetish'. Mixed opinions.

Samuel Adams Hallertau Imperial Pilsner

RATING: 3.5

Latrobe, PA/Boston, MA

Had a good month and am headed to the car dealer to treat myself. Let me test drive that Rolls Royce Quad-Turbo, cross-over SUV with 45 miles per gallon. I like Rolls Royces, SUVs, turbos x 4, and cars with 45mpg. Do I want them in one package? Big no, fat no. I love Sam Adams, I lust for Hallertau, and I crave Pilsner. Should they be combined? Jim Koch admits "Yes, we're a little obsessed with hops" and he's gone to Bavaria to pick the prime of Noble Hallertau-Mittelfreuh crop for over two decades. They've used "reckless" quantities here in this very limited offering that's golden-amber, long-laced, and ivory in the medium-length head. The question comes to the forefront: does this much hops allow one of keep the subtle brilliance of the Pils style. The here is emphatically a big NO. Pils flavor is no where available or detectable. Is this an interesting hoppy lager with reckless NHM dosing? Yes. As is my motto, I judge beer but what it tastes like to me and not what style or approach is claimed - in other words, no judging a breed by it's boring, formal, book-based standard. This is carbonated hop tea, imperial or otherwise, an easy thing to do I suppose and nothing brilliant nor hard to accomplish. I like truckload of hops in every bottle so grading on my hop-biased curve they squeek by with this rating; coming close to what any weekend brewer might well give me. Keep a Pils a Pils and an hoppy lager what they are and should always be.



Samuel Adams Noble Pils

RATING: 5.0

Boston, MA

Just when I thought all the tricks had been unfurled for producing a novel microbrew Pils, this superb produce comes to the market. It is Pilsy enough but differs in a more grapefruit flavor base over the more familiar notes. All five Noble hops are used to make this product. The four major nobles are Hallertau (a big SA favorite), Saaz (the classic Pilsner Urquell or Bohemia type), Spalt (delicate, spicy), and Tettnang (bitter, mild). I do not know what their fifth variety is but some people consider the Kent Goldings from the UK in the Noble family. As pils go, this one is very citrusy, grapefruit very noticable, and yet full-powered enough to charm any Pils guru. Another delightful Adams product, earning my highest recommendation.

Samuel Smiths Pure Brewed Beer

RATING: 4.0

Yorkshire, England

327 From t

he 1758 Tadcaster brewery of Yorkshire UK. This light yellow lager is nothing like the Taddy and Oatmeal brews. It is crisp, dry, and very smooth. While worldclass is every respect that \$13-14 pricetag is way out of line. In a lager one does not need to pay quite so much. Many lagers are darker amber beers (eg. Portland, Gold Coast) and cannot be compared to this one. amuel Adams, Asahi Super Dry, and DAB Original are equal for less cash.

San Miguel Pale Pilsen

RATING: 4.5

From Metro Manila Philippines comes this relatively new import to the US market. San Miguel has been a brewery since 1890 and the refinement is so evident. The elegant brown-glass longnecks have a nice white 'painted' label. We find this Pilsen to be both rich in aroma and lingering flavor. All scents and tastes are crisp and with abundant sophistication. At \$6.50-\$7 it is a fine value. While pale it is NOT light. This is not to be missed.

Sapporo Draft

RATING: 4.0

Sapporo, Japan

The cans and bottles are works of functional art as the Japanese do so well. The elegant formed and colored can is THE BEST can commonly sold. We also love the bottle 'grip' and mouth the highest praise. Even without the atmo- sphere of great cans or bottles this beer impresses. It is not perfect but like many Japanese products it is highly competant for its price and good enough to keep German and American brands on the run. Nice crisp taste.

Saranac Golden Pilsener

RATING: 4.0

This golden Pils is quite different from a standard Germans Pils. The light golden brew is much sweeter and hoppier than the name implies. It is dry- hopped with Cascade and Tettnanger hops and as such as rather American in style. The malt is also wheat so flavor is special. It is a fine hop-filled beer but the finish is a tiny bit thin and lacking in some sophistication. But at \$6.00 a sixpack it remains a fine value. Very good not excellent.

Schaefer Beer

RATING: 2.0

This econobrew is not much better or worse than the vast host of other bargain labels that flow from plants all over the country. One is better off with more malt liquers if one wants lots of alcohol for little cash. This too is a benchmark; one very, very far down the bench.

Schlenkerla/Heller-Trum Helles Lagerbier

RATING: 4.5

Bamburg, Germany

Since 1678 the folks at Schlenkerla have made beer. Checking their website, the Tavern Schlenkela under the shadow of the massive Cathedral dates from 1405 in fact. The Schlenkerla name and Bamburg in part are also

known for their smoky Rauschbier which is reviewed elsewhere. This stout brown bottle is done in blue and white colors more suggestive in the US of an O-Fest theme; notably in the blue and white diamond-board background. Color, head, and lace all say Pils but the lace is much longer than most. The sweetish-smoke of their other Rauschbiers is carried over into this style and since it lacked the R-word on the label, I'd expected it to be free of the town's famous, smoldering twist. Smoke is a spice in effect as it is with meats, cheese, and most anything else suitable for our downward tubes.

I would be the first to slam their butts into the frothy river if the smoke was a cheap ploy to mask the lack of other flavors. The earthy grains are sufficient to please, a mid strength of sweetness added to keep the smoke from being dry and annoying. Smoke is properly used here, the basic quality not in any doubt. That said, if I had to put away 12 of these mugs I'd be hankering to join the local volunteer fire department or buy a Dalmatian with a nasty temper. A couple of "smokes" is nice. If the occasion demands mass quantities this all is far from my ability to cope. (Here's a chance to beer blend: 2 parts of this and 1 part of a mellow, cheap beer to raise both the value and smoothness). Helles means "bright" and the Helles Lager version of the old Czech-style Pilsener Lager is usually more malty, mellow, and in this case smoky. Given that malts are toasted and roasted, the whole burnt theme kind of comes to together I suppose. This brewery make fume-drenched versions of many basic styles - Helles, Urbock, Marzen, Wheat, and Pils among them. Thus these become something of a substyle, this one being a Smoked Helles Lager.

Schlitz Beer

RATING: 2.0

This US budget brew has been rather hard to find in comparison to Schlitz Malt Liquor which at similar prices is a superior beverage. We see no real need for the serious beer lover to try this label. It does not have some of the horrid bitter tastes that cheaper beers have but is by no means smooth nor refined.

Shenyang Snowflake

RATING: 4.0

Shenyang, China

Shenyang Brewery from the People's Republic makes this aromatic Pils that has a Heineken-like first appeal. The bottles are sometimes mis-formed and the labels a bit abused. If anything it is a bit more 'skunky' than Heineken. There is virtually no head regardless of our vigorous efforts to force one. Such is the bad news. The thrill is something called Pils flavor that makes this even better than many of Japan's more famous beers. It was truly a surprise. If Miller and Budweiser wish to serve as models of great Western capitalism they'd better sip a few of these. This Emperor of Beers is very pleasant. We'd drink it again. Better send a few bottles to Heineken too.

Shingha

RATING: 2.0

Thailand

This Thai product is typical pale yellow Pils in color with a long lasting head. Flavor is moderate but not a classic European Pils style. The finish is slightly bitter and was not utterly pleasant to all of us - even to those who like a good bitter German Pils. There is really no reason to try or buy this brew except as to add another country to your personal experience total. It is clearly one of those Third World golden lagers and not unlike something from the old Soviet Union.

Shingha Gold th rlp 3.5 989 Boon Rawd Brewery Co. Ltd. produces this fragrant Pils which does not seem to be similar to the Shingha (no Gold) we reviewed under that simpler name. It is Pils like for color, head, and aroma. Flavor is moderate, nicely fruity, and semi-sweet; certainly the equal or better of many Mexican Pils. There is a nice rich lager flavor to hang onto though it is not overly deep nor complex. Yet it makes a major improvement over their product we reviewed about two years back and for that we give them solid praise. One reviewer noted that this beer mainly serves to be served in Thai eating establishments and that being a tad sweet cuts some of those lovely spices. For pure country loyalty we see a point but a serious beer lover will move on.

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Glissade (Golden Bock)

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

One normally thinks of SN making fine, hop-drenched alls but they enter the golden lager (full on bock) market with Glissada in this their 30th glorious year. It is not weak (need I even mention that given the brewer!) and is surprisingly bready-malty for such a pale-toned product. Spicy and floral hops are not wanting either but they have restrained themselves from the usual 12 truckloads per vessel of their elite products. It is refreshing cold and yet very drinkable at room temp too - I often save a bottle for lower temp testing. The sweetness is there but restrained, focused, and well-judged. Like a good Italian exotic sports car, the power is surely there but refined and harmless at low speed. ABV at 6.4 is highest for a regular 6-pack, seasonal issue but judged well. They used German malts and unusual for them...European hops. It's taken 30 years for SN to branch out in this direction and if anyone should branch out it would be the Chico gang.

Skol Royal Challenge Lager

RATING: 4.0

Mararashtra, India

"Taste the difference that extra time makes" is a good slogan for a lager as is "brewed longer - brewed better". These 650ml bottles come foiled for our protection - when the hell are they going to stop doing that!?! The result is pale pils color with a short-lived head and a moderately strong flavor for the Pils style. There is a nice malty backbone but nothing too special. Served very cold, as the style usually demands, it is a pleasant brew even not memorable in particular. There are so many countries sending over their best Pils one gets lost in all the names, cities, and histories.

Silva Ro

RATING: 3.0

Reghin, Transylvania

Silva roughly means woods or forest. The fall of Communism is bringing more and more Eastern European wines and beers to our shelves. This one carries the novelty of being from Transylvania. A whimsical drawing of a knight whose helmet is crowned with a stein will interest bottle collectors. Color is light to medium yellow with a persistant foamy head. As expected it carries a Pils type flavor and reminds one of an improved Rushki (Soviet) brew. While it is not endowed with the kind of flavor a Pils lover will treasure the main theme is semi-sweet without too many off flavors. It can be be a tad bitter in the end and would be a good candidate for ICING. The whole sum of \$2.29 we paid for a 500ml bottle is worth the acquisition of the label alone. An experience.

Sol Special

RATING: 3.0

Mexico

This Mexican from Cerveceria Moctezuma is apparently the company's budget line - Dos Equis being more costly and more ornately packaged. Flavor is very smooth and it tends toward a light beer sort of depth. The aroma and initial taste are slightly pungent but the lingering taste is less strong. It is a competant beer but hardly noteworthy. We have seen it for as little as \$4.00 per six pack (1990's) - it is not a good value at much higher prices.

Southern Tier Eurotrash Pils

RATING: 3.5

Lakewood, New York

I had intended to launch into a vaguely humorous description of eurotrash, something like Hans and Gerta in their metal mobile home with three G-wagons up on blocks in the front yard. When I read a couple of trendy definitions, I realized that most of the women I've ever dated fit the same eurotrash description - overly tight clothes, too much jewelry, too many blonde highlights, greeting with air kisses, disproportional sweater topography, anorexia, spending \$42 for a breakfast coffee and danish just to be seen, and plastic surgery so bad it hurts. This beer is nothing completely like that, not trash, euro- or trailerpark- or of any other genus. But it is eurotrash's wanna-be young cousin, with potential but already at twelve headed toward the same faux-beauty choices. The lace is good, the pour and head of familiar tones, but the head a bit short and quick. The flavors are real, crisp, and yet a bit light from first to last flavor passage. Remember that first truly classy blonde you dated with vs. the local euro-trash, Jersey Shore gals that got everything they were via plastic, pills, or bottles. This is Jersey Shore Pils and not Ms. Urquell from a very good, exotic European family means.

St. Paul Blond

RATING: 4.0

Belgium

Two points: 1) This is St.Paul of Belgium and not St.Pauli of Germany. 2) Blond is fancy way of saying plain old golden...yellow beer. It's not a Belgian white nor Belgian red. The top-fermented ABBEY ALE uses Oregon hops - odd as many Western US breweries use German hops. They also add 'finest spices' and charge about \$2.50-3.00 for just 11.2 ounces. Oregon hops is one thing but the Japanese characters on the label suggests a very international world. Color is mid gold. Head is fragile bubbles and the lace is long and elegant. The bottle is tall, skinny, and sleek like some wines. Opinions varied but saying '[a] thoughtful lightly spiced Pils' sums it up. To others: 'lacks the magic of real Abbey Ales' and 'faint mint finish doesn't justify price'.

St. Pauli Girl g rlp 4.0 371 While it has no real flaws (like most German exports) we felt other European beers were a more complex and flavorful. We think it safe to say that the popular Grolsch is favored by serious beer lovers - and at a similar price and availability. Its dark variant is often just as available and we'd take that given a choice. The commercials that speak of 'having your first girl' have not hurt its popularity among college age males!

Stack Smooth Lager

RATING: 3.0

La Crosse, Wisconsin

The fancy, 24 ounce tallboys are ornated designed in gold and black. As near as I can tell they are aimed at the 40 ounce drinker who just got a paycheck and is looking to upgrade his life a bit. High gravity, cheap lagers and malt beverages have gotten big since the 90's and show no signs of stopping. Only the names change. This one from United Beverage is a whopping 12% so it cannot be sold everyone and surprising it does not slam you with ethanol for all the sugar they apparently added to it - I seriously doubt it's clover honey. The malt smooth but it's really a high gravity, high ethanol beer-soda. It will serve that market very well but I'd sooner drink most anything else. There is some redeeming fruit, likly apple but the sugaring and some odd finish tastes end any chance of this being a good, bargain 7-11 brew. I would not blame a poor college student for finding it appealing so long as they know it is not a true lager by any stretch of the term.

Steel Reserve 2 II

RATING: 3.5

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This stuff is marketed as a premium "slow brewed" tallboy (24 oz.) canned beer for about four bucks a snap. It is called a "Triple Export" which when applied to a Milwaukee brewery must mean they plan to sell it overseas somewhere. The 8.1% ABV is prominently located on the front and that provides one going for a weak-as-water "forty" with a math problem. The answer is yes - they are about equal. A 40 oz. at 4.9% is 1.96 oz. of the good stuff while this stuff carries 1.94 oz. per can. The color is very dark golden and the lace survives for minutes on end. The head can last very long or not. It is vaguely Pils like on the low-moderate intensity. It's "exceptionally smooth" as labeled and that is a double-edged switch blade when it comes to beer - such things are usually at the poles - very good or very bad. This one is perhaps a mid quality exception. I kid you not when I say it is just

as good as mass market stuff like Corona Extra or Fosters though it does not compete with the Euro-Pils and US micro-Pils group. Still, when you need a can of something decent and cheap on the fly at the convenience shop - it is not a bad alternative.

Stoudt's Gold Lager (Munich Style Helles)

RATING: 3.5

Adamstown, Pennsylvania

A big dude is standing on their brewery roof on this label and holding up a massive gold and white mug, head overflowing. The head is indeed very tall but more a rapid show than something enduring. Color is light-mid yellow, Pils-like. Overall I find it a mid-potency golden lager, not clearly a Pils in flavor elements but very close to the style in the North American sense. Their Pils is a horrible entity (and overpriced as the final insult) but this is a nicer creation. I find it good, serviceable, and a nice "utility microbrew" when it might be found in a place that serves it colder than cold. It is not a great beer but compared to their filthy, toxic Pils this is a true improvement.

Stoudt's Pils

RATING: 2.0

Adamstown, Pennsylvania

This brand hit our NC grocery stores in a big way in summer 2009 and for the most part they hit a nice price point. Color, head, and lace are about average for a North American copy. Flavor is mid strength and it comes out surprisingly bitter. A friend of mine said "German style...maybe REALLY ANGRY GERMAN STYLE!". Our bottles for the very least are severely flawed. While many Pils fail for having no Pils flavor, over-sweetened, or just weak-as-water, this one fails for offensive strength. There is nothing redeeming or even tolerable in this approach. If I'd paid for the sixpack I'd seriously think about returning it for it being undrinkable. There is nothing stale, old, or chemically identifiable in the flaws that would lead us to think we got a bad batch. We'll try it again...someday...in the interim stay away...unless you enjoy consuming raw brussel-sprouts instead of candy.

Stroh's

RATING: 3.5

In dark bottled form this is one of the better mid-priced American beers. The handsome navy and red package is one of the most classy US-made efforts. It has more substance than many domestics but lacks some of interesting complex taste of upscale specialty brands. We find that this is less commonly seen in long-neck dark bottles so it is not as widely bought as Michelob and Coors for example.

Southern Tier Imperial Farmer's Tan Pale Lager

RATING: 2.5

Lakewood, New York

From the name alone one is hard-pressed to classify this brew with a prancing rooster on the crowded label. I am told it is an American Double/Imperial Pilsner whatever that means. 8.6% ABV got my attention but never else would. There was bitterness without pleasant and it managed somehow to be weak in some notes and far to harsh in others. It was hoppy but about as imperial as that wino in Piccadilly who proclaims he's the Queen's long-lost brother banished for his intimate knowledge of their royal secrets. This is a pretender as both a Pils and Imperial anything, not imperial not noble. It is a pretender with the adornment and price of a contender. "What a boring rip-off" said one of our panel and "self-righteous failure" said another. The self-proclaimed "Hallmark of hard work" fails on every account and the sermonette on "neolithic humans" and "nomadic hunters" helps it not one bit. Big failure, big mistake.

Sun Lik

RATING: 4.5

Hong Kong, China

AWARD: BEST CHINESE BEER 1993

The Hong Kong Brewery produces this very fine beer 'expertly brewed to complement exotic cuisines' according to the dragon-bearing foil label. Since many bitterish European beers are unpleasant after consuming sweet Asian sauces this claim is certainly valid. The sweetish crisp flavor has nice detail but it is not as heavy as some

sweet beers. It proved a bit sharp when very cold but when moderately cool the taste was very pleasant and refined. In database versions, BrewBase gave this our "Best Chinese Beer 1993" award.



Sünner Kolsch

RATING: 5.0

Cologne, Germany

You taste the six generations of brewing mastery since 1830 and the true Kolsch-Convention compliance in this fine golden beer. You might mistake it for a fruity Pils but the finish also flashes loudly with malty depths. Yummy at ever temps from cold to cool! It is a good standard for the style if one likes something not converging too much with a Pils - that is, the less malty, weaker Kolsch. I particularly like it to compare to so-called Kolsch-style lagers from American microbrews - and frankly most of our domestic US stuff ends up looking like a Kia with bald ties racing a BMW M5 - not even a copy to be technical and pathetically out-classed. The malty notes here and fruit esters are intoxicating to me and even a Hefe-weizen lover like myself finds enough flavor and depth in this label. The fruits are blended, suggesting white grape, some pear, and a very mild apple variety. The finish gets a remotely spicy as the mouth is saturated though it remains medium-dry. This beer gets better as the session develops and it has become one of my new favorite German labels - like these brilliant brewmasters from 1830 need my admiration or yours. But they do need our admiration to the point we turn on a wider US market to them and help them grow here and get a North American rep like the big Pils makers have enjoyed for decades. On every level, this is one accomplished, engaging golden brew. Miss it, and a piece of you will stay uninformed.

Suntory Draft

RATING: 4.0

Vancouver, BC, Canada

One must read the label very carefully to determine this a brewed and bottled by Labatt of Vancouver. This beer is much more successful than the other Nipponadian label from Vancouver (Kirin Light). Taste is semi-sweet with an almost herbal tea sort of charm. We'd almost swear it had a bit of mint flavor in it. While pleasant and flavorful it lacks some depth. A richer amber version of this would likely earn our very highest praise.

Super Bock

RATING: 3.5

Leca Do Balia, Portugal

Skunk on the highway! As kids we yell this out while on the road when the first notes of a striated beast were detected. The cap here gives good skunk but I for one love the skunky beers for they are often decent Pils lagers. This product of Portugal is classic for appearance, mid-strength in the style, carrying some of those not-ready-for-primetime flavors that are usually cleaned up in larger counties. I will kick but on the cheap faux Pils

from this country but the odd notes are shocking and frankly uncalled for in this age of affordable computer automation. Now, this is a country that has raised the Port wine to exalted, heavenly places but not yet this beer. The 330ml small bottles also upset my attitude for if there is anything worse than a mediocre beer it's getting too little of it for my dollar.

Sweetwater Dank Tank Magnum IP (Imperial Pilsner)

RATING: 4.0

Atlanta, Georgia

The blue and white painted label is hard to describe but basically has a 60's psychedelic spinning circle with a bear-like man wearing bright Hawaiian style gear. The "hairy chested" all out presentation of this 9% and 100 IBU golden lager. There's something about "bikini poppin'" on the speech and I somehow find that image more compelling than the beer graphics for the moment. The Dank Tank is Sweetwater's experimental brewing area just for the record. Two pounds per barrel of Cascade and Sterling hops were made but they went for a "medium bodied" approach which surprised me at the first sip. Imperial but a tad mild? Regal and czar-like power with restraint? This label puts in the imp back into IMPERIAL. As you might expect from the hop choices, it is not a traditional Pils flavor in the mild but faintly nippy finish. Pils yeast is apparent however. I say mild and not weak for this is subtle in the British mild ale way and not the weak-as-water Bud and Michelob sense of being mild.

I did pay \$9.99 for this 650ml bomber so expectations should be high. There are good Pils notes here and some choice morsels of finishing hops but in the overall presentation it does not work well for me. It is experimental for sure but for me like one of my beer blends gone somewhat awry and needing something else. I'd have turned down the hops some and the Pils yeast up a bit as well as good German malts. The American-made Hoppy Pils is okay when done well but the flavor notes were all over the map here, some delicious, and others quite "off message" as consultant would say. I hope the Dank Tank cranks up again (and regularly) but perhaps a panel of fans and non-employee reviewers should decide what floats and what sinks.

Tecate

RATING: 4.0 (cans=3.5)

Monterrey, Mexico

Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc of Monterrey makes this very fine crisp beer with a clean Pilsner taste. It is equal to virtually every European Pils-type and is distinct from every Mexican we have reported in this file. It is at least as fine as Bitburger but Dortmunder Union is superior in richness and complexity. Anyone who supposes Mexican beers are not a diverse group has not tried this beer. Generally I only buy this one on sale and then use it for blending with more interesting stuff. One can pure is enough for the day. I've had it in cans and found them less impressive.

Thomas Creek Orange Blossom Pilsener (OBP)

RATING: 4.5

Greenville, South Carolina

Thomas Creek makes this for OBP of Orlando and yet it somehow remains "Florida's Honey Beer". Orange blossom honey is used in place of sugar to give this Pils a crisp but sweet flavor of some quality. Some. I said: some. Anywhere below 40 deg. F. I would find it undrinkable and sickly sweet but very cold and nearly frozen it has a refreshing approach of some merit. Color is classic Pils, the head more creamy in hue than most, finely textured with good duration overall. I do like the fact they kept a grainy Pils excellence and did not let the "OB" component overwhelm it. More warm it is too sweet and contrived to me. Very, very chilly the result is very different and worthy of our respect.

Thomas Creek Orange Blossom Pilsener² (OBP²)

RATING: 4.5

Greenville, South Carolina

The Squared version of OBP is made with half the water, giving them twice the flavor. The 11% ABV is a clue they really ramped up this product to appeal to another audience. They use no refined sugar but twice the amount of the special honey gives a similar cane-sugar effect. It dispenses in a bright gold with hint of amber, foamy light tan head of medium duration. Remember the 11% ethanol which takes us into honey wine territory.

First sip is fizzy, as nippy as a weak mouthwash and far more interesting, a delicate balance of malt and honey. There's a couple of sting jokes here but I'm currently too drenched to compose a good one. The ethanol takes the sting off the hyper-honey and the comb juice mitigates the sting of the lofty EtOH. Sorry, that wasn't funny. It's a brew as subtle, elegant, and yet compelling as John Belushi in a bee suit. The Pilsner theme is long removed when one gets this much ethanol, hive product, and malt into any bottle. Where an ordinary honey Pils would become sickly sweet, we get a decent, saving punch of malt and "the good stuff" to bring us around. I think one could cook with this stuff as well as drink it. OBP2 chicken tenders or alligator nuggets?

I like it but am still not convinced in the total package. It needs something more like yeast or wheat. How about orange peel - that would fit in with the source of the honey? It is what it is, an extreme indulgence that is partly delightful but not totally persuasive on the potency alone. Blend at your own risk for this is "beer concentrate" in the best sense of that phrase. This bee(r) roars at us with a 3 foot stinger as fat and determined as the mythical Texas mosquito, hefty, wicked, robust, vital, and snappy-sweet at every turn. Yet she comes flying, diving with candied charm, leaving us impressed but sloppy, and only half-smitten.

Tommyknocker Alpine Glacier Lager

RATING: 3.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

Here is a golden lager with a very big beige head of long duration. The goal was to use fresh ingredients for a crisp, alpine-like icy appeal. It is clearly not a classic Pils and I think the majority of guides and websites classify it as the curious, polymorphic thing known as American Pale Lager. There is very little of merit in this APL class over the entire market and this label is better than most - but far inferior to most of their other products. I first thought I was not cooling it enough and use a freezer to get it super-cold - still not much better. There is some wheat flavor, a touch of grass and orange, weak generic fruit esters, some sweetness with also a bit of bitterness in the finish that saturates more after a session. Crispness does not have to diminish potency and satisfaction and here that margin is crossed. I do believe the finish gets worse after the first half bottle and that is never a good sign. I think this will rate a 4.0 or more with some drinkers but in general I think it needs some tuning without losing the crispness. Their Jack Hammer wheat with lemon grass should impress more if one wants a tasty summer cooler. Sometimes a brewery wants to be super diverse with a plethora of labels and some like this one get lost and bring down the breed's average.

Toohey's Export Lager

RATING: 2.5

Sydney/Thebarton, Australia

Like Swan Lager (reviewed above) this is licenced to South Australian Brewing of Thebarton and exported to the States in cans for about \$7.00. The Toohey's name is famous in Sydney but it is mostly their darker or amber brews that get high international marks. Color is basic Australian lager golden but the head seems taller and more finely foamy than many others. All but one reviewer felt it was inferior to the Swans and was 'no better than a mid-price American Lager' (ie. Michelob). Lacking even the most basic hops or Pils yeast flavors it is 'one of the worst \$7.00 beers inflicted on the market...it would appeal to the Corona or Foster's drinker but surely not at this price.'. Another panalist summarized her thoughts: 'I'd drink it if free but never buy it.'

Top of the Hill Leaderboard Trophy Lager

RATING: 4.5

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

These pretty pea-green cans come with a nice brown and cream shot of old golfers doing their thing with old clubs. The bright metallic lime green tab is a nice touch - great look. "We love golf. We love beer. And we know from experience that most beers consumed on the course are water hazards". Well said! This solution to that problem is unpasteurized and unfiltered. It pours Pils straw yellow, enduring white head, nice nose with perhaps a hint of fruit. It is not a classic potent pils but it has more fruit and malt than I'd have expected. Yet it is a nice major improvement on the style. The grain flavors are hominy-like, earthy, rich but not potent. Faint generic fruit esters come to the fore. Sadly if warmed too much, it gets a few odd, metallic, rough places - and that is going to happen on the course where fridges are still a rarity. Still it's a superb canned beer and accomplishes it's mission. Good choice when you're making the rounds in Chapel Hill.

Tsingtao

RATING: 3.5

China

This product of Qingdao is pronounced ching-dow. This medium light golden beer has a rich bubbly head. The initial appeal is not unlike some Canadian golds. There are semi-sweet flavors but unfortunately the lingering aftertaste degrades into occasional metallic hints that must be considered a flaw. The finishing taste was best when nearly freezing cold. It is mostly pleasant and sells for only about 50 cents more than a good Canadian sixpack of bottles. Get the freshest stuff you can.

Uinta Tilted Smile Imperial Pilsner [Crooked Line]

RATING: 3.5

Salt Lake City, Utah

When was the last time you got a Pils in a corked, champagnesque bottle from America with a head as deep as a Mesozoic glacier. The two teenage boys oggling the pretty girl with the tilted smile makes this even more unique. It pours at 9%, \$12.95 per 750ml, and the colors are straight-from-Old-Europe classic. Saaz hops and 100% Pilsen malt were employed to produce a result than is with a thickness but limited sweetness, moderate to low in flavor intensity in early sips. Later sips give one more character but not enough to justify this price and level of presentation. Later sips get decidedly more bitter but not unnervingly so. Reviewers here said "crooked as in fraud...not quite but nearly?" and "clearly they tried and should try again...substance and packaging fails to overcome a disappointing thin base...just not ready for this price point". If your Pils tastes run towards a high quality but mild flavor profile, this may be an option. I found it too weak and also a bit sticky-dense as well. Ms. Tilted Smile gets just one date with me. Her old sister Gambrinus is good for...well much more substance and style. (Be proud of me for resisting the obvious crooked smile jokes).

United Taj Mahal

RATING: 4.5

Kalyani, West Bengal

This Indian-made pils comes in brown 1 pint 6 oz. bottles with a lovely illustration of the famous shrine. Sadly the labels always seem to arrive in beat up shape - we've yet to find a unscratched one. It is your basic skunky-Pils in aroma, color, and head. Flavor is quite lively, very refined, semi-sweet, and finishing with all good notes. Indeed there are some light fruit notes that set it apart from many of this style. A few reviewers did the odd displeasing flavor element but the majority of us felt it was certainly worthy competition for Europe's best. Some felt it was in fact a bit too fruity-sweet for their tastes though this was decidedly a minority opinion. We recommend it highly for your next Pils taste test.

Utica Club XX Pure Pilsener Lager

RATING: 2.5

Utica, New York

Tagged as the "first beer to be sold in the US after the prohibition" this label is classic Pils for color and head. It is decidedly light on the Pils Potency Scale and not a satisfying experience overall. It is intermediate between a light Pils and a regular Light Beer with no real Pils identity. It may be clean, pure, pristine and all that Coorsoid stuff but I'd rather have some impurity if that meant giving it flavor of any real depth. There are slight sweet fruity notes but not enough of them to please. The finish is slightly off at some temps, something that needs to be worked out from a spectrum of temperature tests.

Warsteiner

RATING: 4.0

The white and gold package proclaims 'the best', 'the premium', and 'first class'. Since 1753 the Cramers of Warstein Germany have made this traditional recipe using Kaiserspring water. The Pilsner taste is less pronounced than some other Germans. We thought Dortmunder Union was superior overall. Like Bitburger a semi-bitter aftertaste could be slightly unpleasant unless accompanied with suitable foods. This label can be hard to find in stores.

Weihenstephan Original

g rlp 3.0 399 The full name of this company is Bayerische Staatsbrauerei Weihenstephan. They date from the year 1040 and claim to be the world's oldest brewery. Yes. This Original is pale yellow with an ambitious head. It is a medium bodied Pils and quite unlike the Kristal Weizenbier that is also exported. The finish is dry and can be a bit bitter. The flavor fades quickly at mid-palate and we found it disappointing. There are so many Pils that will excite you. Don't let this low rating deter you from trying their other products. Their wheats are heavenly perfection.

Yanjing Beer

RATING: 3.0

Beijing, China

Whether this is "China's #1 selling beer" by command, controlled demand, or reasonably market-driven fact, we cannot say. The foiled label with gold-trimmed red letters, white, lime and jade, and a silver Great Wall is appealing. The 600ml bottles pour very classic for a Pils, the nose faintly skunky and rather indicative of a strong Pils theme. The first notes are mixed, strong pils for a time, then more moderate, mid passage notes being rather sweet, and the finish oddly bitter and more dry. One has to have a few sips or a full bottle to get some of these imports down hard and clear. The core of Pils is decently strong but it fades into odd places with curious notes, likely familiar to billions but not those from this shore or acquainted with original Czech stuff. There does not seem to be a lack of ingredients in so-called Pils from the big US mega-brewers but the intruding bitter moments here are rather irregularly distributed and what the British call "off putting". Unsettling to me, this is a nice idea but executed in a manner that makes it awkward, raw, and unkempt in terms of a unified flavor theme. You get some nice notes, a few very good, but the other stuff is defect and clutter augmented with enough sweetness to calm the masses. I suspect some good German brewing technology would clean this label up right good. Among Chinese beers the zu-Nan impressed us more.

Zatec Bright Lager Beer

RATING: 4.5

Zatec, Czech Republic

Before I go on, this stuff has a very artistic, fancy collector's type cap for those of you into that form of breweriana. Curiously the Zatec Pilsner name is applied to a beer from Drake's in California and as yet I know of no connection between these two unless they are claiming to use the city's old style. The company reviewed here dates back to 1004 when I suppose folks in California were making mud bricks and monochromatic blankets. The modern brewery dates from 1801. The brand was much revitalized in terms of production and distribution in 2001 by Rolf Munding, who replaced the Communist's neglect of the firm with steady financing and research. Their website says that Tomas Lejsek, one of the nation's leading brewmasters "masterminded the changes, bringing together new technology, old brewing processes, and pure ingredients."

The name "Bright Lager Beer" is appropriate for the color is glowing yellow and not the weak straw shade of others. It has a firm malt backing but the finish is a tad rough like so many Eastern European and Russian labels; more grainy and grassy than I usually like but clearly after 1000 years they like it! Weak spicy notes occur amidst the grains and the three stages of hopping must account for some of these stronger, curious flavors not found in the computer-controlled German brands. It is smooth except in the very finish and that is one I can live with if served ultra-cold. They use a two-mash procedure, cooling the brew in their cellars to give it the good lace it offers. Open fermentation vats they claim "allow the taste to stay with the beer". Zatec hops are used with Moravian malts. Carbonation is 100% natural. In 2005, they won the "Beer of the Czech Republic"

zu-Nan Chinese Pilsner * rlp 4.0 382 This superb Pils is made in Gaungdong in China and is a much superior beer to China's Tsingtao. It is both flavorful and sweet at first palate. The color is pale yellow and the head foamy-rocky with strong persistence. It ss clearly in the SWEET PILS subclass and one of the best of that type. It does lack the depth of some dry German Pils but is quite pleasant. Finish is drier than expected. The 640ml bottle with dragon-clad label is decorative.

Zywiec po rlp 4.0 1299 Zywiec This product of Poland is a moderately full flavored Pilsner with good earthy flavorings that let you know its of European origin. One wonders why American breweries a thousand times wealthier could not make something gold as good. Perhaps its in the yeast.

Peru Gold Peru rlp 3.5 Arequipa This Peruvian brew is a basic mid-strength Pils with % alcohol and not much good or bad to say about it. It has a pretty cap with a gold ancient diety against black. Other than the cap and novelty of trying a Peruvian beer it has little notable about it.

LAGER - SPICED AND HERBED

Schmaltz Coney Island Albino Python

RATING: 4.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

Designed with a bottle to make an old time carnival show proud (ie. "arouse your liquid curiosities"), this unusual "white lager" is spiced but is not a rip-off of a spiced Belgian White Ale by any means. Profits help the historical preservation of the old Coney Island region of NYC which is as much about beer as hotdogs and rides if you go back far enough. Color is straw yellow, cloudy to be sure, floating with yeast in the bottle - a nice thing for \$6.00 per 22 oz. Lace is decent, the head mid length. It starts a nice citrus tart, perhaps overly so for my tastes, spice invading next but not the traditional Belgian formula per se. I think coriander is still a possibility but ginger and anise/licorice appears to be in the atypical mix. It's even a bit sour at some notes in the near-lambic style. It's fizzy in the sip, some Pils notes rounding it out, a few notes undistinguished and weaker, hops sometimes faintly bitter in later themes. It is all over the map in flavor notes and one gets different things even at the same temperature. The pour of ample yeast makes it fruitier, of course. I think they meant well but claims of it as an American Wheat are much exaggerated and do not match the contents in my opinion. It may do better with warming to say 45-50 degrees F. but even then I had some muddled, varied feelings; as mingled and heterogenous as the flavors.

LAMBIC

Belle-Vue Framboise b 9 4.5 641 Brussels Framboise is a type of LAMBIC that uses raspberries in a long process that takes 3-3.5 years or longer. This is no popular honey raspberry lageroid thing nor a watery wine cooler. In fact it takes more time and art than many wines. By volume it is priced like an \$8-9 750ml wine. A well-charged cork reminds you that European magic is about to hit your glass. The sparkling aura of a classic champagne is obvious. You could even serve it as 'a new raspberry champagne from Belgium' and get away with it 9 times out of 10. Color is red tinged orange. It is more tart than their Kriek (Cherry) and by far less sugary than popular raspberry beers from the US. Reviewers said 'well-matured but an everyday drink' and 'true berry power... flavor is not intrusive'.

Belle-Vue Gueuze b 9 642 Brussels GUEUZE is a style of Belgian LAMBIC that blends young and old barrels for a clever combination of respective characteristics. Color is pale-medium amber and the rocky head is white and fine-textured. The label claims 'clear golden color' so perhaps their color analyst had a few too many. Production takes up to 3 years so the \$3.50-4.50 price for just 12.67 ounces is actually acceptable. A Gueuze can age for another 1-2 years as a good red wine. It has a nice tart fruity flavor but a quality mellowness that shows a wheat base. Reviewers said 'quite an interesting beer that never seems to taste the same at each sip...there is something new to discover each time.' and 'wonderful blend of citrus, malt, peach, and a tart apple'.

Belle-Vue Kriek Lambic b 9 4.0 640 Brussels Kriek or Cherry Lambic is one of the favorite versions of that broad ale style. Color is a glowing cherry red with a big head and carbonation that lasts until you consume it. Some kriek lambics favor the sweet cherry side while others are notably tart. This one is nice compromise so you never think you're consuming an flavored pop. Reviewers did however disagree somewhat: 'real fruit flavor is a plus but Lindeman's [Kriek] is a far more sophisticated'. Another said 'extremely palatable and could replace wine on numerous social occasions'.

Boon Faro Partotale b 9 42 BEST BEER TO REPLACE WINE 1994 Brouwerij Boon ('Bone') is a revivalist brewer from Lembeek Belgium. Faro is a type of lambic sweetened with candy sugars. This costly (\$4 per 12 oz.) product spends 2 years in oak casks and is blended with a wheat beer. Color is clouded amber and carbonation is lavish. Flavor is extremely rich and fruit-filled with spice, hop, and wheat notes in perfect harmony. Finish is drier than many lambics. High recommended. Beer drinker's champagne.

Castle St. Louis Framboise Lambic

RATING: 5.0

van Honesbrouck, Belgium

Bottled on 090708, my test bottle came wrapped in black foil and the useful champagne-style hardware. It pours the most splendid amber-raspberry color, akin to a paler cherry coke - and you far more refined and pricey a beverage. The head was ivory-pink, hinting to the flavors to come. "Oh...delightful...delightful...heaven" was my first unscripted exclamation and those words are none to be uttered for a Bud Light even the hottest of days.

The raspberry juice is true and authentic and would rival an raspberry smoothie blended to Grey Goose on any day of the year - though this lambic is more sour and less syrupy than the forementioned mixed fresh drink. No seeds either. In my shops, the Framboise is the best known of their labels and is a fine place to begin. My trusted reviewers here said "berry perfection...more juice than ale but I understand and appreciate that" and "farthest thing from a crap berry wheat of so many microbrewies...lambic or not this should be THE standard for fruit ales".

Chapeau Fraises Lambic

b 9 4.0 506 Wambeek This strawberry lambic is surprisingly sweet and aromatic if you consider many strawberry lambics are rather lactic and bitter. This appears to be a young one and reminds one more of a good strawberry 'girl drink'. It lost a bottle rating in our book for a flowery taste that was a bit disconcerting and hard to describe. One had the odd sense of 'drinking perfume' in the words of one person. This is nothing like the Lindemans Framboise lambic and if you can get these both the comparison is most educational. The color of this is a neat reddish-orange that is more beautiful than most amber beers and makes a terrific presentation. The color is so cheery that one of our friends thought it was a skidrow fruit wine until he tasted it. Unique.

Chapeau Gueuze b 9 505 Wambeek A GUEUZE LAMBIC is one blended from both old (expensive) and young (cheaper) age beers. Therefore it may sell for a buck or so less than other Chapeau labels. The rapid lace and big head also distinguish it at first view. The label also has no single fruit theme (ie. strawberry or banana) but is still sweet and fruity with nice depth. The character and sophistication are equal to many lambics but it is quite sweet. It is possibly more recognizable as a 'beer' than many lambics which have acidic or wine-like flavors. Still the lack of a theme may disappoint a fruit lambic devotee. A Gueuze is simply a Gueuze and nothing much more. For what it should be this one is perfect.

Chapeau Mirabelle Lambic b 9 686 BEST LAMBIC BEER 1995 Wambeek Chapeau is known for a wide range of lambics including tropical fruits and the wonderful banana one. This MIRABELLA LAMBIC is made with special plums although at first glance the label fruit resembles a green apple. Expect to pay \$4-6 for this long-fermented treat. Like many Chapeau lambics it is cloudy. The basic color is a glowing whitish amber. The head is very tall, enduring, and of minute white foam units. It is quite sweet at first sip but the finish is slightly drier. Reviewers remarked it was 'the very best lambic I have tried...excellent marriage of fruit and wheat beer' and 'not tart like most cherry or berry lambics'. We tried a lovely little blend with amber and stout brews and came up with luscious combinations like Plum Porter.

Chapeau Pineapple Lambic

RATING: 5.0

Wambeek

If they made beer in Honolulu this would be it. Wheat beer and pineapple juice are fermented in oak barrels and without filtering is transferred to bottle for conditioning. This is perhaps the easiest to drink lambic you could imagine as it is sweet and has no acidic elements that make some a bit strong. On the other hand it could be called a pineapple wine cooler although the flavor elements are clearly deeper and more alluring. It is 'better than the best Pina Colada' according to one reviewer. But \$4.50 for a glass and a half is not everyone's idea of a

good deal. This is a taste treat but be expected to pay a handsome price if you wish to share it with a few friends. It get's our praise as the best lambic tasted this in some time.

Chapeau Tropical Lambic b l 4.5 645 Wambeek Call it 'Chapeau Tropical' if you like but in truth it is really good old ordinary BANANA BEER. Maybe it's not so ordinary as any taster or observer will remark. A store clerk flipped it upside down and remarked on the big floating yellow sediment. Fear and an offer to replace it were in her eyes until we replied with a stranger look: 'it's more flavorful that way'. Okay. One German beer fan liked the name 'Hefe-Bunchen'. Color is foggy mid gold. The head is big, pure white, and finely bubbled. You can guess what fruit the aroma was like. The flavor is somewhat like their pineapple lambic as 2-3 years in oak barrels tends to mellow out the old chemistry and bring out fruit sugars. This is one classy beer but not everyone likes a fruit beer.

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Diamondback Gueuze Lambic 9

Lindemans Kriek Lambic b 9 4.0 189 BEST LAMBIC 1992 This ale from Vlezenbeek Belgium is of the Lambic class meaning that fruit it added for a secondary fermentation. Barley-malt and wheat are fermented and then aged in oak barrels. Fresh cherries are added in the second process. Like American Champale it is VERY bubbly but it is much superior ale. The cork in the bottles and \$6 price for one 12 oz. tells you that. It is a cloudy reddish brown. It is exceedingly tart so some may not care for it.

Mikkeller Spotanwildstrawberry

RATING: 3.5
Lochristi-Hijfte, Belgium

At 12.7 ounces this lambic is the smallest bottle I've seen. Strawberries are added to this 7.7% bright amber creation and it is further aged in wine barrels. It is suitably tart but for the bottle aging it is no more subtle or non-tart than a stand framboise lambic. Mikkeller beers are always fine but they are seldom values, generally a very high price per ounce among everything in this book. This formula to us as a bit too bitter after half a glass and the finish has some odd, musky, earthy, veggie, very wild notes - perhaps intended from the name? Still, pleasant is as pleasant does. No fun here.

Samuel Adams Cranberry Lambic u 9 3.0 313 This unique holiday Lambic (fruit beer) is made from a wheat beer flavored with cranberries. The bright cranberry red label sold for just \$2.29 - a good deal under the \$5-7 for Belgium Lambics with cherry flavoring. While interestingly tart and with nice 'lace', it lacks the rich fruitful punch of the Belgian masters. In mildness and price it is clearly mass market. If you want a cranberry buzz go with Ocean Spray and Vodka. Nice but disappointing.

Timmerman's Framboise

RATING: 4.0
Itterbeek, Belgium

"Belgium's Finest Lambic Beer" in razzleberry trim now comes with fuchsia-hot pink foil top - hard to miss. It is only 4% ABV and the 11.2 oz. bottles sold for \$5.99 (March 2011). Color is classic "red and tan", effectively a tawny orange but far bolder than amber. The head has a curious rose-cream color but that is typical for the style. Nose is Strawberry Pebbles or some similar berry cereal for the the young, sugar-loaded masses of our time. Flavors are genuine, ample in the true red berry vein - though the photo shows the fruit used in strange straight rows like a short ear of red corn. Rubus-type berries are never so regular. It is a bit carbonated, not overly, and a nice quality fruit beer for those likely more fruit flavors than fruit added to a malty beer. It is very drinkable but one can always get a similar, oft superior effect from fresh fruit juice (or some made for flash-

frozen berries in any grocery store) with a bit of Belgian gold beer or vodka. Pleasant and berri-licious but hardly world-beating in any class.

OKTOBERFEST/ FALL/ AUTUMN/ HALLOWEEN/ PUMPKIN - ALE AND LAGER

I realize this is a rather artificial classification and includes beers of various styles, both ales and lagers. Still the marketing fascinates me and based on nomenclature alone this group has earned a life of its own. Some of these in the broad Marzen style and others a merely dark, more malty and sweet versions of another product line; some dark lagers and Doppelbocks. Others are Pumpkiny-spiced ales and others just about anything for the end-of-year marketing campaign.

Abita Fall Fest (1994)

RATING: 4.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

Abita has made some decent beers that are most drinkable due to a fair price. Their Christmas 1994 effort was perhaps not the ultimate Holiday beer but then we did not pay \$11 for the sixpack either. This Fall Fest beer is more interesting. It is one of the brightest amber beers on the planet and the carbonation is long but finely textured. It is sweet and candy-like in a style that is perfected by Big Rock of Alberta Canada. The hops and malt balance are satisfying but if you've tried some of the Big Rock labels you'll find this a tad underpowered. It will not disappoint if tasted with the usual assortment of store beers as very few ambers are as pleasant and easy going down.

Abita Fall Fest 1995 [u r f 4.5 703](#) Abita Springs LA The 1995 product differs markedly from our notes on the 1994 effort. The same bright amber color is there and red tints are evident. Flavor seems less sweet and a strong malt theme predominates. Minor hop notes round it out some. The candy-like caramel nature of the 1994 is missing. 1995 rates 0.5 bottle higher. This year the price was \$7.50 so it is no bargain either. Reviewers noted 'a clear attention to quality with the maltiness of some German darks' and 'one of the better American ambers under \$8 though a few Brown Ales are more interesting for me...'. It is certainly one of the best Abita beers.

Aktien-Brauerei Oktoberfest [g r f 3.0 894](#) This was a real surprise. Imagine an Oktoberfest beer with the pale straw yellow color and big white heads of a Pils. This would be that reality. Flavor is on the fuller side of the Pils theme at first palate but it quickly becomes thinner and drier. The finish is slightly 'irregular' as one experienced German beer put it; even though it had just arrived in September and had to be fresh. It is overall a very schizophrenic sort of brew and surely not what one expects behind such a label. A few folks rated it as high as 4.0 bottles but most folks went lower. We didn't find anyone who would highly recommend it either a Pils or O-fest brew. At \$2.89 per large bottle there are many superior choices around.

Avery The Kaiser

RATING: 4.5

Avery, Colorado

Avery products are generally very fine, some remarkable, and others quite mid quality in the crowded industry today. This is a one of the higher level presentations. Color is dark amber-bronze, the head thinish and short. Sweet caramel hits one as does faint fruit and faint bitter and spicy hops. The 10% ABV is fairly well hidden and may in fact prevent it from coming to your local grocery store. This is a global thermonuclear malt attack and some of these big boomers are done well and others not so much. It might have been overbearing in the hands of other people but they pulled off an approachable thick, malty invasion with much class. The dry, high alcohol approach here and the refined hops saves this one from average, even above average status. They have this one just about right but I want a little more tuning. I regret I cannot say what or how this might be done. One friend said they need to bring the malt down once notch, the spice down half a notch, and the ABV down to 7-8%.

Aviator OktoberBeast

RATING: 4.0

Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina

If I explained to the our worldwide readership than Fuquay-Varina NC was akin to South Raleigh, I'd probably get clunked on the head some night by a big brown jug from Aviator. It is a nice community, proud and historically rich, non-Raleigh in the good sense; though as I type this Raleigh is still rated as the best US city to live in 2011 by Business Week. Fuquay-Varina might be a better, more small-town spin on the whole New South living thing without giving up your shopping at nearby Macys, Saks Fifth Avenue, Brooks Brothers, and Nordstroms. Small, country-living town with nearby big city perks like a decent symphony, ballet company, and off-off Broadway theatre. As to this Marzen-style, fest brew, it pours a rich copper, nicely punchy at 7.2% ABV, and far hoppier than many fest offerings "cause we like hops". They got this one right and put it in huge brown jugs (Jed Clampett style) to give very nice value. I actually liked it better than Becks O-fest and by a wide mile there.

Ayinger Oktober Fest-Marzen

RATING: 4.5

Aying, Germany

Here's a real German fest product in the usual 500ml brown bottles with a lovely cap painted with a pretty picture. Color is rich gold, only tinged amber is low light, the high spacious and dark ivory. It was expecting the lavish sugar sweetness of some Teutonic imports but this is a surprising dry approach, loaded with bread-like malts with clean flavor and not bitter hopping by my detection. The clean earthiness of this all-malt approach is wonderful very cold, refreshing, and one that lends itself to mass consumption - which can be said of stronger, spicier, or sweeter fest offerings. It is principled, very cleanly and crisped brewed, and yet never weak or discomforting. This is a single-minded approach and done with clarity and a simple but impressive theme. I found occasional Pils-oid notes but it was a good marzen style even if not like all others. Very fine work.

Beck's Oktoberfest

RATING: 3.0

Germany

I've always gone with Becks late at night when only the local mini-mart was open and sampled either their decent Pils or when possible the Dark stuff. I'll pay \$11.00 for a six at that hour if thirsty enough. You normally expect a fest beer from a German standard, legendary firm to be either sweeter, maltier, hoppier, or all three - usually the first two anyhow. I don't know if their 2008 importaton is created for a perceived as undemanding American market but this stuff is very disappointing, perhaps the weakest and most simple German special label around in years. It's not strong, not sweet (okay), hardly spiced (okay maybe), and the malt is simple, direct, and very underpowered. I consumed 6 over several days at various temps and despite my initial low rating, I found it no better with other day's opinions or varied serving temperatures. Very sad.

Bell's Oktoberfest

RATING: 3.5 (2009, 2010), 4.0 (2011)

Comstock, Michigan

This 5.5% ABV item an interesting label graphic, a bit different and fun, mostly in pumpkin orange, dark gold, and black. If you look really close you see the orange background is actually an autumnal leaf, likely a sugar maple. Color is light amber and the head of mid-duration in medium-large bubbles. It pours with little apparent carbonation. Overall it's on the thinner side, fairly equal malt and hops balance (some will disagree with me), and yet not a weak marzen either.

Malt is surely more prominent at the first taste. This is perhaps the idea of the faux-simple beer, weak and an average malt-hops creation on one level, but yet there is MORE to be discovered. Some folks think that more is metal and ragged bitter hops but I suspect it's a diversity of malts that is not easy to pin down. To be fair (and I am known for that, almost to an expensive fault), we tried it again in 2010 and found the same weak-ass aspect mentioned before. Dry-malt flavors that could and should be expressive and pleasing are merely EXISTANT. In this year's analysis I suspect it is over-hopped, ruining the potentially fine malts with a premature, insipid finish. I found the last half of my glass nearly undrinkable this time. It is festival medicine and not for any good

purpose. Fine brewery - horrible entry.

Tested again in 2011, it seemed thin again on first sip but later on we feel there is more artful design in this year's execution. The malts seems better though still shockingly subtle. The hops require a full bottle (two is better) to get much sensory saturation and then it is sometimes oddly bitter. It was more drinkable but only if very cold. Give it some room temps (which are possible in toasty warm pub or home) and the quality goes way down. It is not our first pick for a Fest by any means and one reviewer here remarked "still not convinced...the veiled malts are tempting but need pushing up to the forefront. This is one Fest I would sweeten up as they not much to lose".

Blue Moon Harvest Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.0

Cincinnati OH

This beer is well...pumpkin colored with a lasting head of medium size. Flavors are 'natural' but we are unclear if the real pie flavor is more the product of authentic spicing or some real melon fruit. (By the way most canned pumpkin pie comes from commercial squash rather than pumpkins which are too stringy to process). In any case the flavor is pleasant and good with enough malt base to remind you this is real beer. Like most Blue Moon products it has a bit of a thin finish and could use some sound refinement to become a true gourmet microbrew beer of top quality. Since spicing beer is no easy exercise we were largely pleased with the effort. But better pumpkin ales can be made

Boulder Fall Fest Ale u rf 4.5 841 BEST FEST BEER PACKAGING 1996 Boulder CO This fest brew is light amber in color under an ivory head of fine duration. Flavor is true to style with a sweet malty theme supported by quality hopping. It worth the \$7.99 price though even some German seasonals get imported for less cash. The label and package win a new award we had to create to recognize this effort. Reviewers noted 'refreshing, smooth, flavorful...more hop-filled than traditional Germans and that is a great thing!' and 'very fine beer either cool or at room temperature during a long meal...superb with a big Thanksgiving or other holiday feast.'

Brew Moon Oktoberfest Autumn Amber rf

Buffalo Bill's Pumpkin Ale u raa 4.5 650 Dubuque IA/Hayward CA Buffalo Bill's Brewery is actually in Hayward CA but the brew is made in the town of Dubuque Iowa. Color is very bright....you guessed it...pumpkin orange. It tends to arrive just before Halloween. Taste is most unique and to most of us quite pleasant. Reviewers said 'harmonious pumpkin pie and malt combo is surprising good' and 'very drinkable...not sure if it is spices or actual pumpkin flavor I am finding attractive.'. If you close your eyes and asked someone about it without giving the name a few may guess a spiced ale. It comes off being slightly sweet but not overly so. There is just a hint of bitterness at some places and one expert thought it was 'slightly overspiced but perhaps that is needed to keep the novelty image going'. Recommended.

Carolina Cottonwood Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Mooresville, North Carolina

This dark brownish-amber offering from Carolina Brewery for fall is authentically spiced in good balance. The bitter:sweet balance is ideal or nearly so. It's very drinkable, quite pleasant, not a novelty, nor some oversaturated fest. The product is 6% ABV and has won several awards including a 1999 Bronze in the American Beer Festival, 2000 Silver in the World Beer Cup, and 2001 Gold in the US Beer Championship as Best in the Southeast.

Coors Oktoberbest (Marzan)(1995)

RATING: 3.5

Golden, Colorado

Following a nice non-Bavarian Weizenbier in Fall 1994 is this improved offering from previous year's efforts. The hops complexity is almost right and is surprisingly fine. Given what Miller Special Reserve and Rock Bock have shown of late there is some hop for major US brewers. Still this brew is no match for a Spaten or Adams fest product which cost a dollar more or perhaps the same on sale. If you match this with the hideous new Coors

Artic (sic) Ice one can see Coors at both spectrums of the flavor spectrum - true beer and buzz water. Like the Weizenbier this label has superb artwork. It is long gone but Coors seems to be bent on acquisition as their best mode of developing real beer.

Clipper City Heavy Seas Prosit Imperial Octoberfest Lager

RATING: 3.0

Baltimore, Maryland

Not sure I know what an Imperial Oktoberfest is supposed to be. Is an Imperial Light Beer next? We have nearly every other combination of lofty term to styles, after all. A strong 9% ABV is achieved with "malt focused" brewing and "ridiculous amounts of Vienna and Munich malts". While out looting and pillaging, there is no finer product for the famous month of beers. The pour is medium amber, the head good-sized in a yellowish-beige. First sip disappoints as does the second. It is a dry, thinnish product in the early passages, filling up the treasure chest of malts as one gets saturated on the taste buds, the finish faintly of bitter hops and also a bit fragile. The alcohol is surely there but the malt is lost somewhere in the journey. I'm really perplexed here and am not sure what went wrong. Did they use only subtle malts which when "imperialized" do not give a strong or deep enough dosing? I suspect the lack of a defined hops theme is partly to blame too. Odd notes and all sorts of disharmonies appear as the sips increase. If not for the ethanol punch, I'd almost think this was another failed Michelobian attempt at rich seasonal beer. "nearly undrinkable...an affront to the style" says a friend here. Another thought "a malt lover might like it but love and admiration are out of the question...a recipe run up onto the corals". I see no reason to try it unless you must try everything and want to exercise your most angry vocabulary.

Cottonwood Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Mooresville, North Carolina

This bright pumpkin-amber brew has a surprisingly strong lace. The flavor proves very authentic - almost "liquid pie" real. Ginger, cinnamon, and allspice are used along with the real fruit...actually commercial pumpkin pie filling is a commercial squash. Frankly, I thought this brew was more refreshing and true-to-dessert flavor than one slice of grocery store pie I compared it to. I could not want or expect a finer pumpkin ale anywhere anytime. Kudos on this level of accomplishment when some big breweries are still working on getting their Punkin' fest stuff right.

Count Arco's Festbeer g rf 87 Arcobrau of Bavaria makes this Pils beer with typical color and an above average abundance of carbonation. Though called a Festbeer and released here just before October one might expect it to be other than a golden Pils. It is merely a fine ordinary Pils that starts pleasantly bitter and ends up with a sweet smoothness. At \$8.00 a sixpack there are probably better values in the Pils field. Still it is highly competant and well worth a many tastes.

Dinkel Acker Oktoberfest g rf 96 This D-A import is a superb dark beer with more darkness than the majority of German fests. While sweeter than normal continental darks it has the same overall virtue as a good German dark. It is superior to their regular issue Dark. I've enjoyed it off and on since 1993 and always find it a good purchase.

Fish Leavenworth Oktoberfest Celebration Ale

RATING: 4.0

Olympia, Washington

The pour is a hazy amber, the head yellowish-cream, short but lasting. ABV is 5.5%. The preparation is medium-sweet, muted but nice hops by mid passage, and quite a nice malty semi-sweet finish. There tartness of the brew intensifies with each sip. It is quite refreshing, good and ample but not too rich for restaurant food service. It is quite pleasant and a good value overall. It will not rock your world but it will improve a meal.

Flying Dog Dogtoberfest

RATING: 3.5

Denver, Colorado, often brewed in Frederick, Maryland

This Marzen is just 5.1% ABV and one gets nice doses of caramel, sugar, malt, and faint grains. It is rich amber-red with a weak head. It is weaker than many marzens and certainly that low ABV value will put it in a different

subclass than the bigger, stronger, throat-scorching stuff offered in this season. It is somewhat hard to evaluate for the mixed qualities and yet it goes with many foods. Perhaps we should judge fest beers in terms of the strong, sip-worthy, connoisseur stuff and the restaurant-loving, "our seasonal beers include...", food friendly stuff. Good food fixes this one but it shouldn't have too. It is too weak for me and yet if I'm eating a lemon-butter linguine in some overpriced palace on October 20th, I just might give this one a better score. Flying Dog has and continues to do better on other bold labels and I think this one bears a "rethink".

Flying Fish Oktober Fish (German Style Ale)

RATING: 3.0

Somerdale, New Jersey

The supposed "reddish color" did not appear in any of our 3 styles of lamps (incandescent, LED, and fluorescent) and in fact it's barely amber in a dark room, typically a dark gold only in a bright well-illuminated room. ABV% is 6.0%, the head near white, large, lasting, and rocky. Very long-spaced, slight lace. I found the flavors too weak to even justify hauling it to my car and I wonder what traditional German fest ales they used when most of them are in fact lagers! The Euro-malts are there, the traditional sweetness added, and yet there is no depth or hops or any reason to call this either wonderful or true-to-fest-form. Flying Fish can be Dogfish at times, Flying Dog at others, and something frankly without merit the next. This is sadly the later. I expect they wanted folks to buy it once and that kind of "fool me once in October" scam is not missed on our panel who will remember this offense. It is not crap but it is more of what A-B would put in a far more pretty Festy package and call it microbrew glory with a million in commercials to back it up. There is no value in these kinds of hollow, weak offerings, void of much brewing skill and clearly scant on ingredients. Fly away...fly, fly...

Foothills Oktoberfest Lager

RATING: 4.5

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

The label shows a bearded fellow with cane in hand and a multi-colored crown riding a long barrel of brew. This 6.4% formula is said to be like a German amber in that fall season, favoring caramel and toffee sweetness with some toasty bread and notes of cashews and almonds. The pour is a dark, lovely amber, very appealing, the head rich cream, and mid-sized. First sip is malty, following by a more bitter malty-hop balance, and ending with a very crisp, dry, bitter nip. The dry nut flavors are decent and commendable in fact, almonds, being very real for the first time. This beer is a nutty as the Trump Tower for Squirrels, housing all of Central Park's Sciuridae and all their haul in fact, very eccentric, and yet approachable for its special qualities. The toffee and caramel are there but these are very bitter versions of the said candies and not the least bit sugary or candy-like. Panelists said "here is stern Fest beer...not the usual candy treat...very refined...a dry nut brown lager for the season and one of the finest of that stripe I know" and "Serious O-fest theme...sweet only in early notes but very sweet in effort...the finish sometimes bitter and always dry...satisfying and very, very well made...I consider it a serious brown lager...there's no 'holiday only' stigma with this brew...it's a major contender at any time of the year and with any name you pick."

French Broad Zepptemberfest Ale

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

This brew arrived in Raleigh NC in February 2012 so it is hardly brewed in March, being a Marzen in style, and it is way too early for an October fest or feast. As I write this, both French Broad and Highland Breweries of Asheville NC are getting a new cross-county competitor...some guys called Sierra Nevada whom we here are brewers of some mighty tasty beverages in them thar yonder hills. We know SN better than French Broad and Highland in fact and while they do not overlap in much of the style range, one will need more than pretty pictures of orange and fuchsia blimps (yes, yes I know there's a difference) to thump the maestros from California. The glass sits in glowing amber, fitting a fest or marzen, the head light cream and lasting well. Nose is rich in malt, faintly sweet. Flavor is rich in Old Euro-malt, bready and corny deep, monothematic to be sure but clearly with all the turbos at full flow and throttle. These are smooth, double Porsche-type turbos with refinement and subtle pounding ability. Sweetness is limited and nicely metered out. I thought it had an almost iced tea quality, hops as the tea leaf and sugar more in the limited northern range - very yummy. Many Marzens overload with malt-power for its own sake (the consumer need not love it), too much sugar, or lots of bittering finish hops which muddle and confuse the theme. This one is very nicely graded out and with a sensible, logical,

gentile approach that their forthcoming rivals just might admire.

Geary's Autumn Ale

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Maine

Geary is a legend among genuine, fanatic-class beer enthusiasts, the real suds-heads if you will. He does not disappoint here with something of a subtle, smooth, scotch-like approach to brewing. The dark, very dank reddish-brown brew has a fat head in domed, rocky tan mass. Flavor is mid-dry/sweet, a drench of malt but kind of like getting "bombed by love" instead of being carpet-bombed by malt. This is subtle yet very rewarding sipping brew and only folks on Geary's level are capable of this. This is one to share with your European visitors to knock their lederhosen and Argyles clean off into space. This is just as refined as a triple-distilled scotch, so addicting in it's directness you wonder "what the @\$&* are those other brewers doing" and why aren't more microbrews at this elite level? Get a mass spec machine, analyze the heck out of this stuff and clone it up ya'll. I brought out the thesaurus for the worthy occasion of nipping this nectar. This stuff is spiffy, swanky, enlightened, sublime, and *sauve* and twenty very good things more. I love this stuff. Get me kegs to stake upon other kegs. I can sleep standing up and park my car on the street.

Hacker-Pschorr Original Oktoberfest (Amber Marzen)

RATING: 4.0

Munich, Germany

Since 1417 Hacker-Pschorr of Munich has made traditional German brew. If you get by the name (which in English sounds like a skin disease of computer nerds) you'll enjoy a full-bodied and colorful beverage. It has one of the most delightful amber colors but the head can be short-lived. Malt and hops (more of the former) are not held back and unlike many Oktoberfest beers this one does not hide behind food coloring and sweetness. As Beck's 1995 Fest sold for \$2-3 below this one's \$7.29 price they already start with one disadvantage compared to larger importers. While this beer has all the color and flavor one could want not all of our reviewers were in love. The lack of sweetness yielded some 'bitter' comments. Dry Malt lovers were best pleased.

Sampled again ("retrialed") in 2010 the label shows 5.8%, the rating holds but I would note that while not overly sweet it does have sticky, viscous mouth-feel. One must adore malt and again the very mellow, bass note German variety to be impressed here.

Hofbrau Bavaria Oktoberfest

RATING: 5.0

Kulmbach, Germany

TIE: BEST FEST BEER 1993

This light amber-colored seasonal brew from Kulmbach has lively carbonation. Like many festival products it is moderately flavorful and with a sugary finish - Count Arco Festbeer being one German exception. This is what Coors Winterfest should be like if it would attract serious beer devotees. Every sip satisfies; either alone or with food. As of this writing in October 1993 this label and North Coast Oktoberfest were our two best fests of the year.

Hoppin' Frog Frog's Hollow Double Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Akron, Ohio

This here 8.4% ale spiced with cloves, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and allspice showed in our shops in March 2012 so perhaps it's the Marzen of all Marzens. They do use real punkin'. Actually I do miss the comfort of spicy beers in the spring so this one is warmly welcomed. By their website their place is "with cauldrons afire in Fall, and they only speak in whispers of the name". Thus it's made IN the fall fest nor FOR it. The pour is light amber with a slightly dirty beige head. This particular spice blend is very tasty and dosed to perfection. The lattice of malts makes this work. The sweetness is tempered by the higher ABV and spices and frankly we find it hard to sort out what contribution hops makes to the bitter moments. We're beer tasters not freakin' human mass spec machines. This flavored ale is very agreeable, the quality additives judged to near perfection, and overall experience fun and fresh. Their timing is good and everything else is very, very good but just a short measure from the best.

Johnson's Das Oktoberfest Bier

RATING: 3.5

Charlotte, North Carolina

Given the praise we had for their Brown Ale we thought this seasonal might, just might, prove equally refined. Unfortunately it was not. Color is rich amber brown with a lasting cream head of reasonable duration. Flavor is malty as mandatory for the style and more dry than is often the case. It meets the Reinheitsgebot which few American fest beers can say. But when even larger German Oktoberfests are priced close to this one we see reason for going with something so mono-dimensional in flavor. While this company does show admirable skill (and we know they can do wonderful things) this is not one of the most polished products. The 'busy' label with mixed old and new graphics got mostly low marks. How 'bout doing a version of your Brown Ale next year guys?!?

Jolly Pumpkin La Parcela No. 1 Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.0

Dextor, Michigan

This brew has it all. Pumpkin fruit with a trace of traditional pie AND Belgian spicing. Then add cacao "to liven the soul" - that would be chocolate to you folks from Little Rock. Then it's aged in oak. It is bottle conditioned for a big carbonation. The color is golden-amber with a lasting cream head. It managed to be just 5.9% ABV. It starts a bit thin but more of subtle-thin than weak-thin as to flavor. The spices saturate later and the cocoa adds some warming depth. There is a Belgian sort of tartness too along with spices that are partly pie and partly Belgian we think. It needs to be very cold or it's strange to bear. The result is quite different or as one reviewer here remarked "far from the ordinary...not sure that's a great thing but it's novelty value is high...great for tasting sessions". Another said "tartness and spicing well judged...I think the cocoa detracts instead of adding quality". The tart nature, spice choices, and most of all the cocoa proved controversial here. The low ABV and unclear value of the oak aging (which must be 11.2 microseconds) were negatives all around. We'd like to see other variants of this, fine-tuned a bit - keep the tartness if you ask some of us.

Left Hand Oktoberfest Marzen Lager

RATING: 3.5

Longmont, Colorado

The pale amber fluid has a strong cream and 6% ABV is a tad above the common trade material. The rich scintillating malts are warm, earthy, and teutonic - unless the later word is now or has become as offensive as saying beer-swilling, kraut-slurping nazi bastards; in which case I retract it being of German origin myself and able to blame it on self-hatred or something else trendy. It is not a full bore fest beer, too weak for most folks, but I do not like O-fest stuff over-malted or over-sweetened to insane levels. A fest can be weaker if complex and layered enough but this is simple, simplistic, and simple-minded in one bottle. I got a "B" on Beer Advocate and while I often disagree with them, those 161 folks got it right. I know these folks can do better work and they should try. A fest is not a marketing opportunity - it's a rare chance to impress within a style whose accomplished examples should not be too hard to copy or twist a bit. Twisting or copying, they can and should do better work but in the meantime it's a "no try".

New Belgium/Elysian Kick (Lips of Faith Series)

RATING: 4.0

Fort Collins, Colorado (Elysian hales from Seattle, Washington)

This lovely Halloween-themed medium bomber comes with a 8.5% fluid and the glowing faces of sinister, fierce, and otherwise spooky carved jack-o-lanterns. These mouths are lipless and don't appear to be faithful to anything except mischief. 75% of this curious offering is ale blended with pumpkin and cranberry juice - this being my first cranberry beer but far from my first cranberry adult beverage. The remaining 25% is blended to a barrel-aged ale. We are seeing far more oak-aged ales for sure this early part of the 2010's but also more blends with precious aged ales in order to add flavor at a far lower price point. This collaboration (which is recent trend like oak-aging) is from Elysian of Seattle but brewed and bottled with their Fort Collins partner. This stuff pours medium-rich gold, a couple of orange tints from the fruit under weaker light, the lace very energetic and long, the head near white and ragged. The nose is tart fruit, lambic-like in fact. Flavor is indeed mildly lambic-like, a tad sour thanks to the glorious red round cranberry. There are some mid notes which are sweet,

tempering the juice, ambiguously fruity, and the finish is dryish in fact. I would challenge any biochemist to list all the hundreds of chemicals that beer + pumpkin + cranberry + barrel w/ residue flavors produces in any fluid. There is a chance that number of named molecules is over a thousand in fact. That my friend is complexity. We liked it, found the joy of a new surprising thing and are still unsure if the 25% aged ale made a difference or not. The fruit-faint sourness here is well-judged, never offensive nor puckering, judged with care and love, and giving a gentle kick of loved one and not an fierce-toothed enemy or evil lantern hiding in your closet as your read this...

New Holland Ichabod Ale Brewed with Pumpkin

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan

The dark gray and black label is ringed in a very somber shade of pumpkin orange, a headless horseman holding the head of a evil-looking pumpkin in his hand. I'll assume this fruit-headed version of Ichabod Crane of Headless Horseman legend and thus this is mostly a Halloween beer - though I purchased it in December at Total Wine. We might have expected this brew to be pumpkin colored but in fact it is a medium golden-yellow with a large whitish head. I got a few Pils notes on first sip and perhaps like so many brewers today they use German Pils malt or yeast to get thing going. The fruit notes come to the fore soon but are moderate and in balance. What does pumpkin taste like? Anyone know? Actually, we all know what spiced pumpkin pie is supposed to taste like but pumpkin has a very different flavor in reality. In fact, most commercial pumpkin pie filling is actually made from a variety of squash called Hubbard - don't tell the kids - and is highly sugared and spiced before we get a slice. Hubbard is an ugly grayish, football-shaped thing with ugly blisters and bumps on it but it's flesh has a better flavor, less fiber, and good orange color than the real pretty pumpkin's of the market. If Ichabod was carrying a Hubbard squash we'd all be very upset for it they look like giant tumors or the Elephant Man's face. This is a nice ale, best very cold, finely contrived and formulated, and a delightful drink.

North Coast Oktoberfest 1993 u rf 251 TIE: BEST FEST BEER 1993 This seasonal amber has one of the best heads of any 'Fest' beer we've had this fall. Color is bright reddish amber. The flavor is more full and appealing than even many German fests and provides a wonderful menu of hops and malt. The sweet hop flavor is delightful and when compared to Adam's Oktoberfest it is a clear favorite. This charming brew is a fine choice to convince your friends that Bud is not the best American beer.

Ohio Fest Beer rf

Paulaner Oktoberfest g rf 269 This Munich product is technically a malt liquor but it is dark amber and with a full taste like many winter beers and amber beers. The head is very long in duration and creamy in color. It has a strong malt taste that intensifies after a second but finishes smooth and clean. There are hints of transitional bitterness but these are never offensive. This DARK MALT is a must try but the \$10.50 six pack price we paid is high. It is very fine at room temp. as well.

Paulaner Oktoberfest

RATING: 4.5

Munich, Germany

While Paulaner dates to 1516 they are first to admit that Oktoberfest is only as old as 1810. This Munich Marzen style brew is true to national form with bright amber color, ample malt and hops flavor, and a rather syrupy sweetness. The head seems are bit smaller than many other fests from Munich. Reviewers noted such factors as "a shade more malty than hoppy and overall a very well-rounded beverage for any season" and "it is only in the sophisticated finish one finds a refined hops bitterness". Most of us thought it was very competently brewed and flavored enough but some found a lack of something intangible that separates an excellent Marzen from a perfect one. To another it was "sickly sweet by my third bottle". Comical label picture.

Penn Oktoberfest Lager Beer 2007

RATING: 4.0

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The "Penn" name is usually associated with the noted Ivy League University which exists in Philadelphia, founded by some clever dude named Ben Franklin. The folks at PennBrew.com are actually from the rival city of Pittsburgh and were founded in 1986 by Tom Pastorius to make authentic German beers. They're in the historic

(what old things good or bad are not historic by the way?) region of Deutschtown on the north side of the Steel City in what was the 18438 Eberhardt and Ober Brewery. This large bottle came wrapped in white foil with a simple, strong cap. The label has that blue and white checkboard pattern used by some other brewers, the script generally "European" in style, and the picture of a brew garden facilitator (ie. smoking hot beer wench) and some guy in traditional garb holding a stein aloft. Blonde Beer Wench is holding six large mugs and stop at my table regularly on the hour and then a hour after closing time. The color is dark color, a very light amber perhaps, with a cream head of some duration.

It was very affordable (\$6.00 for 750ml) and that made me quite suspicious. ABV is 4.5% and they're website description of "exceptionally smooth and mellow" add up to weak on two accouts. It has a nice malty balance, a Marzen on the moderate side, with some sweet notes but the finish dry in general. It is hideous (weak, metallic, watery) at room temp and I'd not want to serve this with any dinner where it might sit awhile. Very cold it's nicer with the hops and malt racing for favor, the later winning out in the end. I find it weaker than the style usually requires but as I've stated before, I judge beer on it's flavor merits regardless of name or claimed style. It is a solid, decent product but it doesn't wow anyone. They can do much better work and thus I'm surprised a seasonal from them is not Ivy League slick or Pittsburgh strong. Have they sold out to BRD (Bar Room Drinkability)? I suspect not since this is a seasonal and not a year-long product that affects profits in a huge way. I enjoyed the Wench but I did not respect her in the end.

Pete's Wicked Oktoberfest

RATING: 4.0

St. Paul, Minnesota

This arrived in our shops in very early September, beating the more famous fest brews by many weeks. Color is bright amber with a lasting ivory head. We did notice in faint gold letters (against a brown background) the letters 'malt liquor'. No it's not some cheap ML but in some states that is required for a brew with a bit higher alcohol content; though still very low by German standards. First of all it is surprisingly dry for a fest beer; most are usually amber bocks drenched in sugar. It almost has a sophisticated grain taste like their Multi-grain beer. The malt and hops bite are profound but not satisfying to all of us. There were also clear fruit notes (cherry) not unlike an ale. It is different and controversial; hard to rate. Great taste test beer.



Pike Harlot's Harvest™ Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 5.0

Seattle, Washington

The showy blue and orange-striped label is immediately appealing as is the topless young lady juggling two ample melons in her hands...of the pumpkin variety I must add. The ABV is a lofty 8.5% so we are already stimulated on two accounts or is that three? The pour is a dark amber, tinged brown, the head a rough mid-cream of long duration. Moderate thin lace. Pumpkin traits blend harmoniously with velvety malts and pleasant tart flavors akin to molasses and strong caramel. This is no simple, sugared up halloween brew which happens to taste a bit like punkin' pie. No. This is a serious ale first and foremost and those molasses-fruit flavors are refinements to the already fine base flavor profile. There is a complex, very refined blend of both tartness and molasses delights, notes going back and forth in a delightful, reasonably uniform manner. Here is solid, 5-bottle performer and not a seasonal gimmick as one oft receives up and down the supermarket beer case these days. Panelists here remarked "a well-formed ale, very strong in the ethanol, caramel malts, and yet gentle in the pumpkin and spices for a superb balance" and "geniune halloween ale without the hollowness of so many other creations with fancy labels...this harlot is more enticing than all the goblins, ghosts, and evil pumpkins on all the other labels...this is one fall seasonal you can be proud to serve to most expert guest". This is one classy working lady, admirable, wise, and built well for the purpose - enjoyable from first taste to last. (Everybody

hates my beer-female analogies so I'll stop here. Maybe not...) Ms. Pike is an ample gal, limber and firm, sweet and gentle but robust, eager, and durable when the time comes for getting down to the business of pleasure. Her escapades are always joyous, proficient and effective, tinged with molasses and full lusty fruit. Our luscious harvest gal is smooth and savvy, loud enough, well-versed in wicked arts, profane when required and yet decent when necessary. She is spiced and perfumed mischievously without being crude or cruel. And you'll require many rounds, over and over, uncompromisingly depraved, hedonistic for sure, and yet incorrigibly delicious. There is value and virtue in this deviation and I wish other breweries would provide us with similar class and overwhelming charm.

Samuel Adams Double Jack Double Pumpkin Ale (Batch No. 1)

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

Over 28 pounds of the orange melon are used per barrel in this 8.5% fest feast which pours an exceedingly dark ruby-amber. First sip is mellow but soon the loads of sweet, pumpkin-pie type flavor comes out along with a generous wallop of quality spicing. It is liquid pie in the best sense. There is scarcely a finer pumpkin product on the market but it is not for the faint of heart. The Great Pumpkin rises to greet us with rumped, knarled frown and deeply set, dark, nearly evil eyes. There are some nice malty notes that occasionally escape above the vegetal and spicy themes though not very much hops. The smoked, roasted malts need to be strong to show up at all - and happily, so happily they do! Spice is hops here and so is the fruit. The supportive ale malts help make this a notch (or half bottle) above other efforts. It is a doubled effort and well worth seeking out. We found it first on September 11, 2012 of all hallowed times. Double Jack is sumptuous in a glass, looking for all the world like a dark whiskey. Panelists proclaimed "festive indeed!...a very fine beer...strong while still refreshing and giving a bright outlook" and "Sam Adams has turned their skill into yet another glorious niche, singularly special brew...and they have succeeded like many times before". Far above the novelty Halloween beers and also more pricey. Well worth seeking out in the tangled patch even if you must wait up all night for it to arise.



Samuel Adams Octoberfest

RATING: 5.0

The brown and red-labeled special is bright clear amber with pale cream head of some staying power. The side lace is better than for most Adam's products but one usually wants a show to justify fest beer prices. The flavor was a surprise. It is sweet (as expected) plus fruitful and a tad bitter. Sam Smith Nut Brown Ale has similar flavors. While it is not a fruity ale like North Coast or Anderson the Saaz and Hallertau hops are apparent. It is drinkable either cold or at room temp while waiting for the feast.

Saranac Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

This is technically Matt Saranac Pumpkin Ale but Saranac is the legal name by some accounts. Matt, in their "third century of brewing", is known under this name at least for overachieving products that have more quality, depth, and buzz than the price commonly buys - 4 bottles beers for 2-3 bottle prices. This light amber brew has a beige head of duration but limited size, made of pumpkin and augmented with cinnamon, allspice, cloves, and vanilla. The actual use of the squash which pumpkin really is gives this a distinct, earthy vegetable background framework on which the moderate spices and flavors work their magic. This can be very appealing very cold, less so with some warmth, and strangely very good as warm as your room. I'm hard on spiced beers for it makes it easy to disguise flaws and overcome weak brewing skills. Here we have a delicate presentation of all the required arts and this demands a solid 4.5 bottles. The evil, toothy pumpkin head on the label gets the

idea - and so will any of us happy to pay so little for a wonderful festy brew.

Shipyard Pumpkinhead Ale

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Maine

The label immediately draws attention for the bronze statue in green patina riding a great horse and having his head replaced by an evil but slightly smiling orange fruit. This may be the first GOLDEN "pumpkin" ale in my inventory for usually they match the color of the brew to something approaching a rich pumpkin orange or at least a respectable amber. Good for them, so far. I like this approach. It's a golden ale, not overly malted as the season often demands, but yet it is infused with delightful spices of finest order. They're giving me the pumpkin pie spice without the heavy, cloying thud of a chunky, oversweetened pulp.

You know how you chew granny's perfect, flacky crust and get a little piece of spicy flesh with it - that experience describes the understated, discreet, refined delivery we have here from the Shipyard. Super fun trip, dreamy and inviting at any temp. Holding back the excessive malt and wicked sugar is something others should copy. Fest beer is not a time to roll out beer soda and these folks have the opposite just right. It's almost like a Belgian vessel for delivering pumpkin pie spice with a wit beer shell - good concept with an even better realization in luscious liquid form. I wonder if they'd make a stronger ABV, yeast-in-the-bottle version for us sometime...heaven's angels would be asking for Oktoberfest passes by the millions.

Shipyard Smashed Pumpkin

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Maine

Pugsley's Signature Series is what this 9.0% weenie ale "with natural flavor" gives us at first show of the fake gold signature. That Alan Pugsley, Brewer, in case you thought we had a spooky connection of Pugsley Addams, spawn of Gomez and Morticia. Its pours deep gold shaded in amber, light amber under dark light, the head golden-cream, finely foamed. It's pretty rich, medium sweet, and spicy like a punkin' pie. Pale Ale, Wheat, and Light Munich malts are used along with Willamette and Hallertau hops. Pumpkin with it's natural tannins seems to add some bit of good. The mention of it pairing well with flan and stew is strange - I usually ignor those pretentious, pretty much made up recommendations. It is not a mass market pumpkin ale, richer ethanol and better ingredients for sure but still something of a popular, soda-like affair in the final analysis. Fun but maybe too fun to take seriously. I'll understand if you and your crew rate it higher or lower than we did.



Spaten Ur-Marzen (Oktoberfestbier)

RATING: 5.0

Ur- means 'original' and -Marzen means 'March'. How is a March beer a true October beer? Marzen is brewed in March, put in summer barrels, and then enjoyed for Oktoberfest. This bright amber with brownish head is moderately flavorful and quite malty. Michael Jackson gave it a rare 4 stars and we must agree. It is not sweet like some fall and winter brews. While not potent like Spaten Optimator it is equally satisfying and finely crafted. it remains among the elite of the teutonic fest brews.

Starr Hill Festie Oktoberfest Lager

RATING: 3.0

Crozet, Virginia

"Life is a carnival" says the label originating from Charlottesville, VA; showing off a fantastically neat ferris wheel

with a block-wide, star-shaped red center. This "gift of great beer" is curious. Charlottesville for all the Jeffersonian architecture and "southern Ivy" charm is hardly a party town or remotely festive - unless the local team with a round or ovoid ball just beat Duke or North Carolina in the most humiliating fashion. Perhaps enough of these fine golden-amber concoctions will improve the somber tone of the place and lead them to a sudsy, hopalicious, swinging and jovial time - the kind of time you forget yet sorta of remember for being so good. Hold the press. This beer is unique and funny beer - funny odd not funny festive. There is a nice malty frame and what might be called a vegetable lager theme going on. What? Sip again. Yes. True. There is strange bitter hopping but more dominant is a very earthy, vegan, grainy approach here - more approach than real appeal so far. This is a formula gone astray for it has neither bright notes, spices, extra sweetness, more hops, or ample malt. It is nearly anti-festive. One friend with experience said "what the hell are they thinking...is this Oktoberbest tonic for our winter health?". Then I think of Charlottesville and wonder...yes, this may be festive for the place in the context and for the right audience. Fortunately I live in Raleigh and know better.

Brewbase Fives



Stoudt's Fest (Marzen)

RATING: 5.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Stoudt Brewery of Wilkes-Barre was founded in 1987 as the first microbrewery in Penn's state since prohibition. In 1991 and 1992 this product won the Gold in the Great American Beer Festival (the US Academy Awards for Beer) in the Marzen group. This is one short and distinguished history. This clearly earns our top 5 bottles with any out of Germany or California. Color is bright but palish amber with a lasting thin head. While sweet that is secondary to the rich malt flavor coming from 5 varieties. It is then 'medium to aggressively hopped' with best from Germany and the US. Even better it is that they brew it ALL YEAR. Carol Stoudt uses the phrase 'superb mouthfeel'. We are finicky and skeptical when it comes to sweet fests. This is a treasure.

Timmerman's Pumpkin Lambicus

RATING: 4.0

Itterbeek, Belgium

While technically a labic, this corked production is sweeter and less sour than we expected. The pumpkin flavors are nice in early passages, faintly spices and more strongly sweet at moment. The our is amber-gold (no punkin' orange) below a pale cream head. There is little or no lace. The ABV is just 4% and with the extra sweetness, this is one lambic that goes down very easy and appears to be young in maturation. It is much tarter and dry than most spicy pumpkin offerings but it is never lambic-tart to the full effect. It is thus very approachable, focusing on the seasonal fun above following a tradition as with their other lambic offerings.

Victory Festbier

RATING: 4.5

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

Using German malts, the boys from PA here have made an amber lager that is special in the truest sense of that overused word. The enormous golden-tan head shows off well in a glass - just what a festival demands. The depth of earthy, hominy, Euro-style malts is there, very true to Old World flavors but actually deeper than some hailing from the fatherland. It is sweet enough - something almost requisite for a fest bier these days - and yet balanced and not overdone with annoying sugars. Still it is sticky to the tastebuds ("mouthfeel") and yet malt comes through for all the O-fest trickery. It is "full-bodied" and with "a depth of character" as the label text affirms - a promise well kept. Here's malt-lovers delight, medium complexity, nicely made, brothy like a charming clear soup, and better warmish than cold for me. Reviewers here note "Thankfully not another malt-

soda...superb boullion-malt character...can't get enough...5 bottles to me" and "only the scantest bit of hops...no problem for the malt is layered and developed with skill...these guys know their stuff".

Weeping Radish Fest Beer

RATING: 3.0

Durham, North Carolina

This product of Durham NC in the 90's is one of few of their products to be available in bottles. While their brewery products are normally superior this bottled product was a profound disappointment. Light amber in color it has a very substantial head and high carbonation. Flavor is a bit sweet but it never yields the hop and malt flavor one expects from a micro-brewed beer. It is simply weak and boring. It is more malt than hops. Purity Law ingredients.

Weeping Radish Oktoberfest

RATING: 3.5

Jarvisburg, NC

Weeping Radish once had breweries on both the coast of North Carolina (Manteo) and in the more urban scene at the Durham, favoring the college (ie. preppy, affluent Duke) crowd. They are the state's oldest real microbrewery having begun in 1986. This 2008 version is from Farmbrew LLC of Jarvisburg NC (the brewery opened in 2006), an outerbanks area not far from Elizabeth City and Norfolk, Virginia. Curiously, they offer their own 35 cent credit on returned bottles toward their other products - and that's not a government program. "Private Beer Labels are Available" too. The newest version has a simple label with a photo of a busty beer maiden on the label with four pints in hand. The brew is darker amber than before (according to our notes), the lace strong and lasting, and the head ivory with medium size. It is surprising tart for a fest beer and buttery malt arrives strong but only the the very final finish notes.

There is some hops but not very much and the product is moderate to weak malt overall, a flaw we found in the older recipe. The sweetness seems to have been tempered. The malts given some comforting warmth and there are very pleasing notes but it does not match the quality of most thing domestic or foreign under a fest-like name. I have idea what they are doing here and perhaps they do not either though a Marzen tyle is claimed on the website. The Beer Advocate website gives it an average of "C" (many top reviewers using the D and D+ ratings) and they end up with "B" and "B+" for many things I think are quite inferior. Many reviewers there and in my tasting were confused and wondered again what was intended here. Is this a real attempt at Marzen or something else. Is the recipe old and revered and no one dared to challenge or refine it? I do not know but since I like their Black Radish I somehow care. Please do better and someone nice do help them.

Weyerbacher Imperial Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

This is a new meaning to "IPA". The royalty comes in part from the potent 8% ABV. The spices are cinnamon, cloves, cardamon, and nutmeg - a slightly different take than some others. Color is medium-dark amber, a shade or so darker than other pumpkin ales I've tried this season (2009). Head is ivory, lasting somewhat. Flavor is not "pie authentic" (see Cottonwood Pumpkin Ale for one that is) but it's still very pleasant. I don't get strong clove flavors with any dessert pie but yet it works very well in this context. At \$11 for four 12 ounce, one has a right to expect great things - and we get it. The ethanol is toasty and warming and the spices unique too. I feel it deserves a great rating but it's not my idea of perfect refreshment, comfort, or festival feel. Retried in 2010, I ditto the non-pie spicing and think they deliberately made it more dark, raisiny because punkin' pie is frankly a weak vegetable-based flavor in the round, crusty examples. Head is long-lasting in the 2010 incarnation. This year I bought a single bottle at Total Wine and saved a small fortune to spend on other festy treasures.

Weissenhohe Monk's Fest

RATING: 4.0

Weissenhohe, Germany

The Weissenhohe Benedictine Monastery is located the hills of northern Bavaria (Franconia) and the fat, jolly monk on the label is fun, good marketing to be sure. \$4.99 in November 2008 got me a 1 pint 9 oz. bottle with Grolsch-style hardware called "Traditional Marzen Fest Beer". Color is a bright pale amber, favoring golden-

amber tints overall. The head is violent and rapidly towering. Lace is low to moderate but long. The nose is very malty. As fest beers go it is surprisingly dry and only moderate in flavor. There are good bitter finish notes unmitigated by any sugar at all. It's very smooth and very good despite the deviation from the usual US supermarket offerings which include the big Germany breweries these days. It is not a "value beer" by any means but German fests in fancy bottles rarely are with the current exchange rate. It's a competent malt broth but is not assertive, memorable, and really special in any flavor note. It's a bit like the old dark wood cabinet at the back of the room that cost someone four days salary in the past. It does it's job calmly and without decoration or charm - you rarely have reason to notice it but it's solid and well made. It is true to Marzen style (minus the sweet interpretations seen of late) and supposedly they actually brew it in March. This is a beer where the question boils down to this: Is less MORE or is less a flaw? Simple vs. simplistic. Some consider it balanced, smooth, and a testimony to malty minimalism. Others find it a gear or two slow, too clean, direct without complexity, and far too uncomplicated and non-yummy for the price and style of presentation.

Weyerbacher Imperial Pumpkin Ale

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Pennsylvania

Not your average punkin' ale, this stuff glows like few others in bright but dark orange shade. Lace remains longer than you can bear to ignor downing it though I could never form a big head on it. First sip was revealing. Maybe that "imperial" thing is justified. First sip vaguely sweet malt and only a second or two later does some authentic pumpkin and very restrained spice come to the fore. It is well done - not overdone. Their website calls it "The mother of all Pumpkin Ales" and while most of such statements are overhyped spin wrapped in bologna and falsehood, they're quite justified in their confidence. The 8.0% ABV is a good starting point for proving it's superiority. The restrained spicing with cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamon, and cloves is very refined though their claim is "spicier" is not true from my survey of crude pumpkin stuff on sale in 2008. The caramel-spice one gets in mid notes ends a bit drier than I expected and so it's never tongue-clogging, cloying, or tastebud-drowning. As punkin' ales go this is a good standard and a very admirable product. I tried it again later in the year and that batch was spiced much more strongly but still earns the 5 Bottle Rating.



Wurzburger Oktoberfest

RATING: 5.0

Germany

This treat comes in light orange and white packages resembling the colors of the Tennessee football team - a beacon to beer lovers to 'buy me now before I am sold out this week'. Color is between dark and amber but flavor is closer to German dark. It's a pleasant compromise between NEAR DARK and a sweet winter beer. The finish is surprisingly short. Unlike most darks it is smooth enough to enjoy with rich Oktoberfest foods. Rewarding without being heavy.

PORTER - REGULAR

Quoting the great beer guru Michael Jackson on porter: "no style is so shadowy and elusive. It is not a spirit, but it is a recurrent ghost among beers. No style of beer inspires so many questions when I give talks".

Related in origin with the stout, these two dark beers are generally thought to have come from England. In fact, the "stout porter" was sold in early years and only later shortened to become another style. The name dates to

the 1720's when this dark, highly malted ale was popular among the river porters in London and surrounding areas. We are fairly sure that Ralph Harwood of the Bellin Shoreditch pub in London served a porter in 1730.

There is some dispute whether the true stout came from the literal stoutness or strength of the porter or from Henry Stout, a British malt maker who used lots of roasted brown malts since the 1670's. Pale and patent black malts were substituted over the years as supplies required breweries to adapt. The famous Guinness stout (started in 1776) was labeled as Extra Superior Porter at one time. Arthur Guinness used some unmalted roasted barley in his formula and thus the Dry Irish Stout style was created. Later in the 1800's, porter was aged longer and sometimes put in casks for a year or more. Guinness had three strengths, X, XX, and an export XXX for some years. The Mild Porter became a name for the early, younger material though it became popular in later years to blend both new and aged porters for best effect. The so-called amber Mild Ale today is a descendent of the Mild Porter according to some experts. The amount of hopping varied over time too and by 1860 to about 1920, hops were limited to save money. World War I made both hops and malts short in supply and non-English brewers like Guinness were able to capture more market share due to fewer restrictions of their production. The style declined much before WWII and it was not until Fuller's London Porter became popular in the 1990's that the style surged again.

There is another theory that porter came from a formula called Three Threads or Entire which mixed a pint each of ale, beer, and twopenny strong beer; it has three diverse components and was thus whole or entire. Another expression of this formula was a blend of brown ale, pale ale, and mature ale. Beer blending had begun. In any event, porter became a very dark malty ale even though most of the early ones were not aged and sold young.

Brettanomyces was also used to create British-style porter in Germany and that resultant funky flavor was associated at there with a true UK style.

In terms of color, porters tend to be more translucent than stouts though both overlap much in the extremes. A porter is often dark amber-brown or reddish-brown, letting some light through while many strong stouts are positively blackish-brown and opaque.

The very strong versions were called Extra Porter, Double Porter (often called Imperial Porter today), and Stout Porter. Early porters that were not too young had about 6.0-6.5% ABV but a good, older stout could be 7-8%.

Porter came to the US in the 1700's before there was a USA in fact. It was brewed here first in New England and PA, sometimes using molasses, sugar, and licorice because barley and malt were hard to get. Some early American porters were made with lager yeast as with the Baltic style. American porters were first made popular by Ballantine, Yuengling, and Stegmaier; the later using the name "Pennsylvania Porter". The first microbrewed porter I ever tried was Sierra Nevada, soon followed by the fantastic Anchor in the 1980's.

The Baltic Porter is another thing altogether and comes from Finland, Estonia, Poland, Russia, and even Germany. It has a higher ABV and began with ale-style top fermentation. Today they are most bottom-fermented with lager yeast and thus have a distinct flavor not like British or Irish porters.

Today we have Fruit Porters and Flavored Porters which are reviewed in a separate section here. Porters and Stouts which are made ultra-strong (9-14% ABV), double or triple the hops/malt, and aged are sometimes called Barleywines and are reviewed in that section; though not all barleywines are ale-based, have dark color, and can be pale and more amber.

Modern porters usually have a stronger hops component than in times past when hops were scarce and they are not so creamy or milky as many stouts. Most have a nice hops dry finish. There are Smoked Porters too. As with any stout, sweetness varies and some like the Samuel Smith's Taddy Porter and Fuller's London Porter are usually classed as Sweet Porters. Honey Porters are sweeter still. Most of the American formulas like Sierra Nevada and Anchor are less sweet, drier, more sharp.

Avery's New World Porter is a Hoppy Porter - what they call a Black India Pale Ale or BIPA. Very strongly hop-drenched porter seem to be a new fad of late (2011) and we look forward to more competition in this.

Brewbase Fives



Anchor Porter

RATING: 5.0

San Francisco, California

Unlike the Liberty Ale and Beer this Anchor product from San Francisco is not likely to be found in grocery stores. The full light brown head gives way to a nearly opaque blackish drink that is only slightly lighter than Mackeson XXX and Sheaf Stout. The main component of the rich full taste is more smoky than most stouts or porters. Samuel Smith's Taddy Porter is crisper and more herbal but this rich smoky taste is done with equal refinement and detail.

Brewbase Fives



Anderson Valley Deep Enders Dark Porter

RATING: 5.0

BREWBASE AWARD: Best Porter 1997.

For about \$4 per 750ml bottle you are treated to a superb porter that is both chocolate in color and flavor. The creamy brown head is large and lasting. While rich and inviting it finishes more dry than expected - a virtue that makes it compatible with full meals. The secondary flavors are slightly herbal but less pronounced than most British porters in this database. It is less smoky than Anchor Porter. It is a delight that does not overburden the taste.

Avery New World Porter (Black IPA)

RATING: 4.0

Boulder, Colorado

This righteously bold porter is very dank and opaque with a roughish tan head. It glows faintly with red under strongly LED light analysis. It is very smooth, almost milk stout easy on the buds, the hops overt only in the early notes, fading more by the finish - I would have predicted the opposite. "Expanding the porter category" and "A pioneer black IPA" suggest they intended to create a new dry-hopped malty liquid meal. The 6.7% brew is very pleasant but not as deep or sophisticated in the malts as most of us wanted in the test trials here. After all, any fool can pour a DIPA (double IPA) into a glass of Guinness or decent micro-stout and arrive at nearly as fine results - if not occasionally better. I hope to see more racy, nippy dry-hopped porters and stouts in the future. Try it very cold or not.

Back Alley Sugardaddy Porter

RATING: 4.0

Colorado

Color is dark, opaque brown with a tan head. Flavor notes include coffee and roasted malts with a slight smoke finish. Hops are very much in the background.

Bell's Porter

RATING: 4.0

Comstock, Michigan

Their labels are artful, sometimes minimalist, and this one is both and curious. Some dude in a brown suit is holding a giant stalk of wheat (barley perhaps) and a sprig of hops vine with the heads as big as melons in his scale. The ABV is 5.6%, nothing special there, color dark reddish-brown, head light brown and largish. Flavor is said to be "robust" but it has very little hops bitterness, no citrus tartness, and is in fact a very smooth, creamy stout in my opinion. Calling it "American Porter" as some do is worthless in my opinion. Why do we accept the American prefix, our righteous land's precious name, as a case for something being weak or "off style" or not what it's supposed to be!!!!?????!!!! I for one, will not be doing that bullshit. It is simply misnamed and yet I judge a beer on it's own "unclassified" merits. Some finish moments were off, most right on and warming in stoutish malts. It needs more work and their panel needs to put it against the industry standards of PORTER...get it right next time...please.

Big Rock Cold Cock Winter Porter

RATING: 4.0

Calgary Alberta, Canada

Be sure to get it right when telling your friends. It is NOT Big VC... We've loved many of these Calgary microbrews but this is no porter nor stout nor really a dark of any kind. It is bright red amber. 'Winter Amber' would have fit the flavor and color with more precision. The first flavor assault does have a rich malty theme some porters have but it so quickly becomes a very nice hop-drenched amber with a dry finish. Some of us suggested that it be evaluated not as a porter but as a Winter or Holiday brew. Even as such it proved a bit off focus when compared to works of Sierra Nevada, Anchor, Grant, and other masters. Perhaps we were just pissed at the \$8.49 price and the complete lack of any description or holiday message. Try it anyhow.

Boss Browar BLACK BOSS Porter

RATING: 4.5

Poland

Here is a [Baltic Style Porter](#) in 9.4% ABV trim that is remarkable on many levels. It pours a shade less than opaque (surprising clear in fact), big tan head, toasty malt nose. Carbonation is limited. It is roasted well, moderate to full molasses, vaguely bitter in the finish after a few sips, favoring a semi-smoked flavor at times but not going fully to smoke for the intervening citrus and hops flavors. A little dark fruit (raisins in particular) and choco-vanilla extract comes to the buds here and there in the mid notes. It is smooth for the ABV and only improves as the bottle(s) get more empty. Okay, I had two over two days...well it seemed like two days...coulda been 10 hours. If you can love a beer more by the sip, you normally have the mark of a winner before you. I have seen some reviewers classify it as a hybrid of barley wine and stout but most of us westerners are far from experts on the variations in the Baltic Porter class. There are finer porters but few as interesting and different from the usual UK offering. Bossy Boss is a fine, informing experience and I will seek it again.

Boulder Planet Porter

RATING: 4.0

Boulder, Colorado

Colorado's first microbrewery makes this thick, blackish brew with a mottled tan head and light malty aroma. Flavor is nice malt, semi-rich but not too deep, smooth and yet not impressive. I wish it had a bit more hoppy depth in mid notes at least. "Easy porters" are easy to make and even easier to consume and the world has 312 of these the last time I checked. This porter is generic microbrew, decent, acceptable, and in the process not deserving much attention after the recycling truck leaves. It's competent like a Honda Civic and I desire to rent much more for the weekend...

Brewery Hill Caramel Porter

RATING: 4.5

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

This nicely named brew comes from caramel and chocolate malts with East Goldings hops for that true British style. It dark reddish-brown with a big brown head. Flavor is sweet and malty but with enough hops to round it out fairly well. Still most reviewers felt the \$6.99 product was not as fine as some other American-made porters for depth and complexity. It will not offend we are sure but neither is it very memorable. Reviewers noted 'smooth, rich, sugary, malty nice aroma...goes down easier than many of this style.'. A few folks felt it was

oversweetened but at least the name should drive off any who dislike that form of porter.

Carnegie Stark-Porter

RATING: 4.5

Sundsvall

From D. Carnegie and Co. (AB PRIPPS BRYGGERIER) comes this year dated porter in 8.82 ounce bottles - we paid \$1.99 each. It is dark reddish-brown with a lingering tan head and rich malt nose. It is dryish and somewhat to the thinner side of Guinness Extra Stout. It is certainly very satisfying from its many coffee notes to the cleanish finish. It is quite difficult to find in most areas (we believe) and in fact this is the first published review we've found of it yet. Reviewers noted 'satisfying as the style should be but never overwhelming and raw...highest grade' and 'lacking a bit in a sophisticated finish but easily one of the more smooth dark brews I've had in some time.'

Catamount Porter

RATING: 4.0

Vermont

This product of Vermont has a mountain lion (hence cat-a-mount) on the label and a very dark porter taste. It has been highly rated but failed to delivery in it recent form. As strong malted flavors go it is pleasant but it lacks true complexity of the truly great porters.

Chicago's Big Shoulders Porter u rlp 4.0 476 Chicago IL Chicago Brewing Co. describes the goal as 'brilliancy of color and richness of flavor' in a English tradition. Color is rootbeer red-brown with a beige head of strong duration. So far. So good. First sip is very thick and with chocolate roasted malt detail. Sadly the finish unravels a bit into less depth and some curious flavor that is hard to place. Perhaps it is just a bit too tart and not smooth enough. We've just filled our expanding bellies with much Perfect Porter from Grant. With those high standards these Big Shoulders are a bit too narrow. It is certainly more pleasant than most German or US mass-market darks and is a good value. As Porter is a just good.

Crested Butte Espresso Porter

RATING: 4.0

Colorado

Color is very dark, blackish-brown with flavor elements with roasted coffee notes. The finish shows more of the mild hopping. Opinions on this one vary.

Crooked River Cool Mule Porter

RATING: 3.5

Ohio

Reviewers note a very unique and not always pleasant style here that combines roasted malt, chocolate, and a whole range of other flavors. The lack of a strong malt character and some odd notes resulted in some lower ratings.

Dergy's Porter

RATING: 4.0

Wilmington NC

Wilmington Brewing Company of NC produce a series of ales (golden, amber, and porter) in small batches. Color is very dark (nearly opaque) brown with a tan head of some duration. A malty aroma is evident and the first palate is roasted and malty. The finish is surprisingly dry for a porter. We might put this in the group of the so-called MILD PORTERS which are clearly dark beers but are not as rich as the majority. This beer is very satisfying but one is not overdrenched with a heavy finish, making this porter more suit- able for meal time. There are none of the superb chocolate and carmel notes one finds in a Grant's Perfect Porter or Sierra Nevada Porter but this style does have merit. Well worth a try.

Devil Mountain Black Honey Ale

RATING: 4.5

"Cinti. OH"/is this Cinccinati OH?

Chocolate and black malts together with 'exotic African black honey' are used to make this very dark ale. It is opaque brown with reddish highlights and last- ing tan head. For our purposes a classification as SWEET PORTER seems in order. It is supremely malty and rich from first sniff to the last sip. Only at mid palate did we find anything of a let down on flavor. While a very cheerful and sweet drink it did not have the complex flavor of some of the better porters and stouts. It is close mind you. A few reviewers thought the honey was overdone but

others felt it was perfect. Reviewers noted 'simply overflowing with dark flavors and color...an ideal after dinner dessert drink' and 'potent malt temp- ered by a quality honey taste...a candy sweet treat'.

The Duck-Rabbit Porter

RATING: 4.0

Farmville, North Carolina

This fine product pours dark yet translucent brown with a light brown head of moderate length. Choco malts were used as well as oats for what they call "subtle round silkiness to the mouthfeel". It is tart enough to be recognizable in this style but I found it a shade too simple compared to others in this category. It is well made but still average for a American craft brewery.

Fish Tale Ales Mudshark Porter

RATING: 4.0

Washington

Color is opaque dark brown with a good full head. Flavors include moderate to full roasted malts and a very clear smoky theme. Hops are light but can be spicy in the finish after having a few.

Flag Porter

RATING: 3.0

Wisbech

Made for Woodstock Beer of Vermont this product from Elgood of Wisbech UK uses an original 1825 yeast 'salvaged from a sunken vessel in the English Channel'. The recipe dates to 1850. This is one of the palest porters we know with a color like a mass-market dark beer. The head lasts well but it similarly light. It has that British molasses flavor like Old Peculiar or a Scotch Ale but unfortunately tastes like it's watered down by half. While this is clearly a dark beer in flavor and color it is not a porter by either UK or US standards. And when paying \$0 for a 22 ounce bottle you might expect a bit more. Even judged as a mainstream dark the dry tame finish places it with only mediocre brands. Stick with a true dark ale or porter.



Flying Dog Gonzo Imperial Porter

RATING: 5.0

Frederick, Maryland

This Canis Major offering is a whopping 9.2% ABV (shocking for an American 12-ouncer) and has a label I cannot quite describe. It is unforgettable to be sure. Let's try. Picture a slightly deformed white dude with oversized arms and too much chest hair with an 18 inch long neck that ends in a giant skull with four rows of teeth and capped off with the an undersized cowboy hat. This stuff won the 2008 World Beer Cup for American Style Imperial Stout so once again we have that stout:porter definition thing going on here. After two sips I'd call it a porter for while it ends very warm and stouty, it has a ale-like sharpness and clean allure that makes that style a good deal more refreshing than stout-soothing. Countless hybrids can and do exist so call it that if that helps keep your universe in scope and symmetry. If it were a real stout it would be a Bitter Stout or more precisely a Citrus-Bitter Stout. The head is very dark brown for any beer style, enduring long. The world "gonzo" tells us this is intended to be unconventional and perhaps wierd. The "imperial" says it is strong and worthy of a King. In fact it is fairly conventional on all the flavor notes and it is surely fit for a King. Gonzo Imperial Porter is immensely enjoyable, never harsh or hard at any point, sprightly, and chock full of likable, yummy flavors. The barrel-aged version discussed below is a margin finer yet.

Foothills People's Porter

RATING: 4.0

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

With a label reminiscent of a old Soviet motivational poster we'd expect this brew to come from Chapel Hill instead of Winston-Salem. 43 IBU's and 6.25% ABV round out this drink which is reddish-brown with a mid-dark tan head. Malts inflict caramel, chocolate, toffee, and roasty-toasty flavors from first sip to late, the finish quite dry. The hops in the finish only appear after your first glass. This is a desirable product, fine and fun but as told many times before.....nothing write home about.

French Broad Anvil Porter

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

This rich ale shows a near opaque fluid with just the hint of escaping ruby light. The head is big, a very dark tan. Caramel and choco malts reign supreme and with a moderate hand, making it satisfying and quite traditional. It has more carbonation than the mainstream US micro-porter and its competant all around without shocking. The carbonation together with refreshing finishing hops makes it a margin above the 4.0 bottle domestic bombers. It was surprisingly good very cold - and not all porters will be.

Frontwaters Port Clinton Porter

RATING: 4.0

Ohio

Color is dark reddish-brown with a full cream head. Flavors include moderate to full roasted malt with a distinctly smoky finish and very like crisp hopping with good dryness.



Full Sail Imperial Porter

RATING: 5.0

Hood River, Oregon

Color is dark brown and flavor is turbo-charged as the Imperial adjective usually implies. Indeed it is almost stout rich. A full dose of hops counterbalances the rich roasted and coffee malt appeal. It is already earning a name as one of America's finer porters and the strength is certainly 'full sail' in any beer lover's book. Sadly it is not widely available in the East.

Brewbase Fives



Fuller's London Porter

RATING: 5.0

This well known British porter emphasizes chocolate and carmel malt flavors with just a bit of bitter hops to complete it's wonderful formula. This porter has the kind of balance and refinement that could serve most of the others in the section with some good advice. This one gets our very highest rating in the style. 'Out of this world delicious' and 'they pretty much have this style nailed' said two friends of mine I trust to the last bubble.

Brewbase Fives



Grant's Perfect Porter

RATING: 5.0

Yakima, Washington

It's dangerous to anything perfect unless you are Ralph Lauren or Bert Grant. Under the name Yakima Brewing and Malting Company, the master Bert Grant has created another masterpiece and future classic. Even Lexus or Mercedes would not introduce a car called the 'Perfect Coupe'. Introducing a 'Perfect Porter' takes far more courage as dark beer appreciation is so subjection. This VERY opaque brew has a dark brown head. The package describes the quality in detail - roasted, carmelized, and hi-dried malts with dry hopped late English varieties. These with oak aging and special mashing provide the best drink ever with a chocolate-like flavor. This is no chocolate-flavored liquor. It is deep and complex and mysterious.

Great Divide Saint Bridget's Porter (Robust Porter)

RATING: 4.0

Denver, Colorado

Using the name of the patron Saint of Ireland, This well-loved Denver brewery makes a vaguely translucent, very dark reddish-brown porter with a medium-long tan head. It has wonderful coffee and chocolate notes, a fine balance, and enough hops bitterness in the finish to thrill. It is not a sweet porter yet it is smooth enough. The tartness is about right but I would never call it truly robust.

Great Lakes Edmund Fitzgerald Porter

RATING: 4.5

Cleveland, Ohio

Drink enough of this and you'll start singing the famous song about the famous ship - that is, if anyone can recall the right words. This very dark brown porter is full tonnage with chocolate, coffee, and roasted malts in ample supply. The hopping is sufficient to come through and provides a true measure of added quality. When fresh the carbonation is rather stiff and that promotes a more satisfying presentation. This certainly ranks among the great or near-great American porters and should not be missed.

Haandt Bryggeriet Norse Porter

Rating: 4.5

Norway

This Norse porter is 6.5% alc. by volume but has a punch from other sources. It is fairly acidic and has a depth of cherry in the finish. It is made only from the Big Four ingredients. Malt is moderate and far stronger than hops at the start. It is too tart for my taste though I do acknowledge the value in the more tart style of porter.

Highland Big Butte Smoked Porter

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

Winner of the brewery's Highland Cup 2009, Alex Buerckholtz's winner recipe comes with earth Fuggles hops and smoked German malts. It is only sold in NC. They recommend it be cellared for improvement so it might just turn up anywhere. The smoked flavor is moderate to full, not quite Rauschbier potency but sometimes close. Color and head are typical porter. ABV is 7% so it's very sippable without cringing - not much worse than a porter with too much exposed ethanol and enough smoke to choke a Dalmatian. This one is balanced and fun and better than the regular oatmeal version of porter. I tried it chilled a bit and also much warmer and never found it as thrilling as it might be with more diverse malty dimensions.

Highland Oatmeal Porter

RATING: 4.0

Asheville, North Carolina

Highland Brewing Asheville NC makes a nice Celtic Ale and this porter like it did not measure to worldclass standards for the style. Still the brew was very pleasant and has potential to be stunning. Color is nearly opaque and under bright illumination shows some red color. It is a very fine dark but not 'robust' in our idea of a porter. Being an Oatmeal Porter is it rather sweet and some remarkable fruit-filled notes are apparent. There is no big malt punch but though malt flavors are evident as one tastes it at various temperatures. Our \$3.50 750ml bottle was a decent value for a dark beer. In a porter we hope for more complexity at all temps. If they can keep the sweet fruitiness and turn up the depth two notches it will be a winner.

Hoppin' Frog Silk Porter

Rating: 4.5

Akron, Ohio

The 22 oz. bottles are under \$8 (March 2010) and the ABV shines moderately at 6.2%. Color and head are stereotypical, the nose a bit dryer and weak than some. The first flavor notes are more robust, roasted and toasted to full degree, the final smooth as silk as advertised. It is quite dry, a faint nip from hops - as there is little extra ethanol to bite back. As for complexity, that is sacrificed somewhat for the overall smoothness. I found no off or shallow flavor passages but some have. One reviewer said "it was perfect but the finish trails off into a dry desert with interesting qualities" and another "competent but in some ways too micro-generic for me". People seems to find chocolate but I found far little than in some other labels. Coffee is stronger for me. It might be tricked up a bit with some aging and more ethanol.

King and Barnes Old Porter (Strong Dark Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Horsham, Sussex, England

This bottle-conditioned porter has good sediment and a dark brown color. The head is beige and endures a long while. It has a hops nip and malt overdose but is not overly rich like a few porters from England. It reminds one of Old Peculiar for all its molasses-malt zip and charm. Yet the finish has some awkward moments one can identify but finds difficult to pin down into coherent words. (Like the ugly sentence you just read). It is certainly a nice rich real ale but there are just a couple of finer ones we'll bring home instead. We played around with the yeast-pouring strat- egies, serving temperature, etc. and nothing improved it too much. It is what it is and that is rather good.

Laboratory Coal Porter

RATING: 3.0

Texas

This should not be confused with SLO's Cole Porter. Color is rich blackish brown which a rich brownish head. It is disappointly weak on the malts with the hops doing most of the work here. It might actually be considered a LIGHT PORTER if such a thing could or should exist - and most of us think it shouldn't - though others advise that a Black and Tan is much the same concept. Overall it is hard to find a solid recommendation here.

Lonerider Deadeye Jack

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

This 6.0% ABV porter presents in traditional colors, aromas, and mojo. It is perhaps more chocolate in the aromatics than most. I tend to hold my stouts and porters up to some big wattage and this one stays opaque but just a bit of amber glow on the edges. There are some tall ingredients here but the finish is semi-dry and smooth. Their goal was strong malt, good roasted chocolate, subtle sweetness, and low hop bitterness. For a first year brewery or really any other this is a very refined product and one I truly enjoy - and I am usually very hard on my home town breweries for they never get a pass, special or otherwise from me. All the progressing notes of flavor are just right and I rather favor chocolate malts in this style. I would prefer a little more ABV and background complexity for this price range - almost \$11.00 per bottled six.

Marston's Albion Porter

RATING: 4.0

Burton on Trent, England

The reddish-brown color of this Marston, Thompson, and Evershed beer is much paler than typical for the style. The head is creamy-tan and enduring. As with their Oyster Stout one is treated to a good dosing of hops that so many other stouts and porters do not bring to the forefront. In may be the least malt- dominated porter we can think of. It is very much like a ale-porter blend; the fun thing some of us do to customize an ale with just the right amount of hops and malt for personal taste. Given the weakness of their Pedigree Bitter Ale (by most opinions we requested) this might be considered the best 'real ale' they have bottled for the US. True porter snobs are prone to dislike it by any name. Taken 'as is' without class it's a comfortable, dry, balanced ale.

Meantime Coffee Porter

RATING: 3.5

London, England

First of all, this is one of the best looking bottles I've seen in over 1400 bottled beer tastings over the last 30 years. Pretty is tiny here and that 11.2 approach is still offensive. The wide-based, Champagne-like bottle has a low-slung label with high graphics values that include subtle back-wording, foiling, font differentials, and centered elegant allignment. The 6.0% ABV fluid is nearly opaque reddish-brown, a rocky head in light tan, and a fair malty sniff. There is much stronger porters and frankly I'm not a fan of porters which are essentially over-malted, acidic stouts - which this is not. This stuff is drier than a Bob Newhart Marathon playing on a Range Rover DVD in the middle of the Sahara Desert. There's a curious straight-forwardness here that is not a lightness nor a weakness. It is a uniqueness. Coffee is expressed though not overtly or strongly. It would have been easy to make an espresso porter and ruin the beer world with a crude hybrid. I love rich coffee liquor copiously dumped into my ice cream but not in my beer. The approach here is more restrained but I think too reservedly so in that way some British things are two notches too conservative for American tastes. Those "water biscuits" (cookies) with no flavor and nearly no sugar - you get the point. Here's a water biscuit of the porter world, a porter but no enough coffee to be meaningful and not enough anything else to make the pretty, mini-bottles a worthy purchase. The ABV is higher than expected and it's a stealthy thing in that respect. Their IPA is so highly rated, I think this covert label suffers by comparison. Regrettably I found the unique approach here to fumble into odd metallic moments in the longest bits of the finish. Smooth goes a tad wrong if you will. It earned the 2006 World Beer Cup Gold Medal but was that based on a bottled item? Not impressed but it's unique enough to try just once.

Brewbase Fives



Meantime London Porter

RATING: 5.0

London, England

Once again we get the full British treatment with ornate graphics, shiny medals, crests, and such. Very elegant and classy stuff but can they deliver? They are a mixed bag in the beer-reviewing community, best marks for ales perhaps and porters no so much. They note George Washington was a big fan of imported British porters; among other rare treats dark and sassy. It pours dark brownish-amber, hardly the stout-like color of many porters, the head beige and long-lasting. Still for the lack of color and other cues, it pleases well with complex malts in quality and quantity; both. It is not overly or overtly tart as some porters and yet has some deep comforts of a stout while retaining the sharpness and zip of this style. I am told it is very faithful to the style in London and it surely competes well with other respected UK offerings. Fuller's and Sam Smith's are good comparisons (real standards in fact) and this one stands up very well to both. Fuggles hops blend with black and choco malts for true excellence here. I am sometimes curious and checked the purely statistically section of the Beer Advocate where where either skill or mob-rule tends to dominate. Smith's, Fuller's, and Meantime all average A- in hundreds of reports as of February 2009. There are no higher rated porters to date. It should also be noted that this label is 6.5% ABV compared to and 5.4 for the others.

New Knoxville Porter

RATING: 4.0

Knoxville, Tennessee

This London style porter harkens back to the brewery's efforts back in the 1890's. Described as 'deep ruby' it is actually a bit more amber brown unless you use unnatural incandescent bulbs. The head is large, light tan, and persistent. It is moderately malty with 'a hint of chocolate' and what is accurately described as a bittersweet finish. It is certainly an effective compromise for smoothness though some reviewers decidedly preferred a stronger product. Respectable but not exceptional.

Nor'Wester Blacksmith Porter

RATING: 5.0

Portland OR

The label advertises it as a PORTER that 'doesn't bite'. Color is barely translucent reddish-brown with a light brown head of good duration. Malt and chocolate aromas are clean. While some porters are dry-bitter and do in fact 'bite' this one is semi-sweet with a wonderfully smooth finish. The smoothness of finish is as NO cost to the flavor. As an easy drinking porter there are few better. Now if you want a super chocolate porter this is NOT it. Chocolate is there but only on medium strength. Try this with a DRY IRISH STOUT like a Guinness and you'll easily see how the two styles were once very distant. Review- ers noted 'wonderful balance between full malt depth and a clean finish' and 'Still more proof that Americas now make the world's best porters'.

Okocim Porter

RATING: 4.5

Poland

Okocim has made beer since 1845. I clicked the English flag at www.okocimmocne.pl/ and got a banner that said "Welcome to Strong Website of Okocim Beer". I think they meant "Strong Okocim Beer". Then I got some strange little movies with clues about the beer and strange chirps and clicks that annoyed my cat. The label proclaims "Traditional Polish Taste" and mentions a 2005 First Place in the Orlando Beer Festival - how's that for confirmation of 19th century Polish values! It's reddish-brown, medium opaque so a bit of light shines through, the head massive and tan. It is 8.3% ABV but you don't sense that immediately. Sniffing one a sweet malty feel

and tasting a positively stout theme, drenched in warm malts. Are the critics right and the market has merged stout and porter for real - or do some of us not note the subtle differences? I note many differences in the real things but this has no tartness, fizziness, and no caramel density to linger over. Upon further review I am told these Polish porters tend to be bottom-fermented, lagers and made differently than their UK ale-based counterparts. I found an article on the web comparing this label to Guinness Stout, suggesting I am not losing my mind as much as some people around here think. I did more digging and found that baltic porters are cousins to imperial stouts and always have been, often very hard to tell apart. I'm about 1500 beer labels into this hobby and should have learned something (even if by dumb numb osmosis) I hope. The name throws us off (until now) but I judge beer for what it is and not what it's called. This is a warming, rich product, very sophisticated, and inviting. Well made.



Old Growler Special Porter

RATING: 5.0

Suffolk, England

What is this obsession with nasty dogs or wolves on beer labels? In this case the bulldog is the British national pup and they can be forgiven. The Nethergate Brewery of Suffolk now sends out these 500ml bottles of porter that are a \$3.00 bargain. The color is a dark amber brown (clearer than many thick brothy kinds) and the carbonation is stronger than most. The head is less brown and foamy than typical of style. Expecting a decent dark the flavor just bite us. It's rather malty with molasses and smoke notes as Old Peculiar and some Scotch ales. Given our recent affection for Grant's chocolate-drunk Perfect Porter and Sierra Nevada Porter this one startled us. It earned a full 5 rating using a dark molasses seduction that requires total surrender.

Redhook Blackhook Porter

RATING: 4.5

Seattle, Washington

From Redhook Brewery this fine is smooth and rich in its deep brown color. It has a roasted to smoky taste but is not as heavy as some other porters. The lingering taste is on the smooth and dry side - some enthusiasts like a porter with more lingering zing. Since 1981 it has been brewed in Seattle. It has made it to Eastern US supermarkets so it should be readily available in many states.

Rogue's Mocha Porter

RATING: 4.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing Co. or Newport Oregon produces this stunning opaque porter with one of the darkest heads we've ever seen. Although it is 'for the choc-olate lover in each of us' there are some Porters with more chocolate appeal. This one is on the semi-sweet side and uses Perle and Centennial hops plus Harrington Kleges, Munich, Chocolate, Carastan, and 3 Crystal malts. That is a fine combo but we're still in favor of Grant's Perfect Porter keeping our 5 bottle standard. It is quite satisfying and complex yet the 'bitter-sweet balance of malt and hops' leaves room for improvement. Their phrase of 'light and refreshing' is perhaps correct since we've come to judge a porter as potent and unrelenting in flavor. Definately worth a try.

Samuel Adams Honey Porter

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Mass.

We first tried this in spring 1994 and found it not quite up to 4.5 and bottle ratings of their main line. Under strong light it shines dark cherry coke red under a full foamy head. It is was not nearly as sweet as the name implies and in fact it has a bit of a bite. Malted components are nicely blended but yet it lacks the full satisfying nature of a porter found elsewhere. Tried at 3 temps it remained just shy of full joy. Sam and Co. have traded quality and depth for sweetness but then that is not unexpected anything with "honey" or "caramel" in the name. It's a lighter porter (but not very thin) which is more drinkable for the sweetness, dosed up with their usual genius dose of roasted and chocolate malts. Porters tends to be less sweet than many stouts in general and this one bends the porter away from tartness to another place. Creating wormholes that fuse one style beer into another is risky and this time it works...sort of. One expert old me that sweet beers often have a traditional function of being holiday beers that appeal to the entire range of family drinkers. Good point. Maybe we can take the malt and the sugar for one or two days a year. The cream head is impeccable.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Smiths Taddy Porter

RATING: 5.0

Tadcaster, N. Yorkshire, England

This very opaque porter resembles Mackeson XXX in color but is actually much crisper and thinner like a dark herbal tea. It is pungent and transitionally bitter but the lingering taste is smooth and deep. It is heavenly with endless complexity but never brothy like many dark labels. The clear square-shouldered bottle with a tall ornate label resembles the trim of a silky worldclass Scotch. This is a true classic and it will be enjoyed. Reviewers noted "largely a SWEET PORTER but ends a bit drier...satisfying from beginning to end" and "I enjoyed it more than their Oatmeal". You cannot find any real flaws in this one. It's a true classic and worthy standard to use for judging SWEET PORTERS.

[Matt] Saranac 4059' Porter

Rating: 4.0

Utica, New York

This opaque reddish-brown porter has a mid-beige head of large size and long endurance. The label is named for Porter Mountain in the NY Adirondacks which is 4059' in elevation - a pretty darn good height for a northeastern US peak but a mere bump in the road in Rockies terms. Their desire was a roasty malt flavor using English choco-malts and hops. This was part of a Winter 2012 12-pack box with 5 brews I'd never seen offered as sixes before. The flavor is a good balance of Old World malts, chocolate and caramel and coffee being obvious, nicely balanced, fairly complex, and augmented but with nearly the right amount of bitterness - slightly too bittered up for some of us. There are few dark beers in this price range so well made. There is no gimmick like real Belgian chocolate, chili flakes, some exotic gourmet coffee brand, or wood-aging - it is simply a decent, competent porter that will not disappoint most porter lovers. It is maybe the Honda of porters, very competent and reliable but there's no Ferrari or 'Vette thrill to be had in any turn. It narrowly missed the 4.5 ranking from our panel. A touch more depth and less bitterness might have done the trick and could next year...

Saranac Caramel Porter

Rating: 3.5

Saranac, NY and elsewhere

I think the Saranac family of brews are among the best values in the beer world if one uses the "Quality Flavor / Price" method of determining value. That said, they have both hits and misses, budgets in mind or not. This one is sweet and full of carmel, lacking hops that a rounded porter will have, and quite simply overwhelms with sugary malt appeal. Notes of pine, butterscotch, faint smoke, and decently roasted malt come up. There are

"soda beers" and in the dark realm this is one of them. Two of our reviewers called it "very drinkable" and that translates to mean a simple, very straight forward appeal. Girls will like it. (Apologies to those 22 ladies worldwide who really know and love beer). It was too thin for most devotees of the original European style but therein lies some of Saranacs genius. They do a range of beers, some pleasing the insane hop-ophile and others being simple and more approachable. Most of us think it needs a sugar reduction program but then would the Caramel name need to go away? Should the world even have a carmel porter from anyone.

Shepherd Neame Original Porter

RATING: 4.5

Faversham, Kent, England

Britain's oldest breweries (nearly 300 years old - 1698) make this porter of surprising light red translucent color. The head is mid-sized, rocky, and of beige foam. While the less than opaque or brown color led us to anticipate moderate flavor, it hits the tastebuds with 'overflowing malt passion' and 'potency not unlike a DARK SCOTCH ALE'. It really does have that Scotch ale and molasses-like nip although it is never very sweet. Yet it is much sweeter than a good UK Stout such as Guinness or Murphy's Irish. Some panelists here felt the finish while dry could have added a bit more refinement. The first and mid palate 'flavours' had no faults. While we felt some of their products were lacking this one will not disappoint and is highly recommended.



Sierra Nevada Porter

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

This Chico CA product in blue label is equally as impressive as it's green label Pale Ale cousin. Using hops and yeast of 'Old World' type this is currently our best dark beer of US origin. While more herbal than heavy it is endlessly complex and refined. It is as good as any European dark we know. It is clearly related in taste to Pale Ale. It can be bitter when warm so serve it when quite cold. SNP has one of the longest lasting heads we have seen. One of the most available porters in the US in terms of numbers of stores, the SN Porter never fails to get it done for me.

Sinebrychoff Porter IV

Rating: 3.5

Kerava, Finland

The 7.2% is promising but the 11.2 ounces is almost a bit of let down. The pour is as opaque, thick as possible, the head a rich tan but small. The nose is richly of good malts, about typical for the style. First sips are average but mid and later notes are surprising for their vegetal, earthy flavors which are hard to pin down at first. The Finnish origin strikes a cord in my mind. Is this then a Baltic Porter, a thing of different species? Yes it is and that explains the curious things cropping up for our brains to analyze. Utenos Porter has been our standard to this point and remains a better choice. Panelists said "a bit thin for a porter, even of Baltic extraction...notes of faint caramel, ashes (faint smoke), vegetable broth, and then fading oddly into some sour notes" and "not the best porter around by some length and the style is taking into account when I say this...too musty, ashy, sweet for my taste". Oddness even if somewhat true to style is no excuse for not providing higher levels of comfort and pleasure. Those inexperienced in baltic porters may find it insipid and not worth finishing...err...finishing.

SKA Nefarious Imperial Porter

Rating: 4.5

Durango, Colorado

This is 8% alc. by volume porter is best served a tad cold in my opinion, having tried both approaches. It is

abundantly tart, drenched more in malt at the start but the hops finish comes to bear in seconds. One instantly recognizes this product for it's blue wax coated upper third, a process no doubt done by hand and adding something to the cost of production. It's decent, interesting, but not great. If you want a sharp, less potent porter on a hot day - try this one from the fridge. Yes, really.

Brewbase Fives



SLO Brewing Cole Porter

RATING: 5.0

San Luis Obispo, California

BREWBASE AWARD: Best Porter 1998

San Luis Obispo is abbreviated SLO and so they formed a clever name on the concept that slow-brewing makes better beer. Then they added the Cole to the usual Porter to be extra funny. Fortunately this is not a gimmicky beer but with its opaque dark brown nature and tan head it conveys rich flavor. As porters go this is surely on the more chocolate-coffee side of things. It is mostly dry though never a bad bitter. Reviewers remarked 'easily as good as anything from Anderson Valley, Rogue, or Sierra Nevada...sumptuous delight' and 'truly full-bodied but never harsh...smooth...great sipping beer for late at night with a favorite book'. No one really had anything clearcut to say against it; even the porter-freaks among us. It is truly one of the top US porters.

Spanish Peaks Porter

RATING: 4.5

Montana

This porter immediately drenches you in coffee and roasted malt flavors. There are subtle herbal hoppings to round it out and give it a very intense, full effect. A few reported that some bitterness put them off when it came to a rating.

Thirsty Dog Old Legthumper Robust Porter

RATING: 4.5

Akron, Ohio

"So many legs....so little time" proclaims the pooch before three chicks in short mini-dresses. Lots of guys will buy this only for the conversation opportunities alone - one among other dudes and clearly one among those of the female persuasion. Curiously, the central girl is wearing white high heels on the package but they're bright red on the bottle label. Roasted and chocolate malts are used to make this a dark amber-brownish brew with a mid-length head in beige. It won the 2002 Gold and 2000 Bronze in the World Beer Cup. It is robust enough for me but then again I like my porters more like malty, strong ales than dry, creamy stouts. This 6.5% ABV formula is 24 IBU and best when warmed a bit. It thrills and tantalizes more than it comforts, again being more true porter than porteroid-stout. Chocolate notes are abundant and nicely developed, it is never very sweet but neither does the bitterness of the hops dry it much. The balance is solid, favoring dryness. Should like your dark ales and porters a bit cold, this is one that handles that well enough.

Tomcat Panther Paw Porter

RATING 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

The name and snarling dark beast on the lovely photo label suggests a ready market for Carolina Panthers fans. This firm is no more but this label was offered circa 2000. Actually any dark beer lover is going to want to get a pawful of this opaque treat. The label proclaims 'one of the best examples of the classic style on this or any other planet. Any questions? I think not'. Arrogant perhaps but 3 out of 4 times Thom Tomlinson has made

good on the words. Color is nearly opaque with just the slightest ruby glow under strong light. The head is big and tan. It is immediately notable for a molasses-carmel flavor but it not overly sweet. Some reviewers thought it tart and medicinal and would like a more malty broth; though perhaps they really want a stout. Most of us were thrilled and felt it true to the style.

Usher's Dark Horse Porter

RATING: 4.5

Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Since 1890 (Wiltshire's oldest brewery) they have bottled fine brews at Ushers of Trowbridge. Their exclusive 330ml bottle originated in the 1940's and the modern bottle is a distinctive thing with a square shoulder and narrow neck. (To one reviewer it looked all too much like Chevron's Fuel Injector Cleaner). We paid \$11.99 in our first taste test which put it above almost all other UK porters in price. Color is dark opaque brown with a light brown head. Flavor is drenched in chocolate malt and more like some SWEET STOUTS overall. It is thoroughly satisfying and worth ever extra dime though many American stouts and porters are surely its equal. It was perfect for many folks but there were enough minor comments about depth to keep it from our highest rating.

Utenos Porter

RATING: 4.5

Lithuania

Not sure I had a Lithuanian beer before but all the geopolitics is hard to keep track of. Pilsener beer originated in...there's twelve answers, three of them correct, and the rest subject to historical reanalysis and such. This 500ml big brown bottle has a showy gold, shield-shaped label and a very different flesh-colored and black cap. The small print is hard to read. There's the word "indulgence" somewhere. It pours dark brownish-amber, cloudy in fact, and clearly not my English's ancestors idea of a porter color. ABV is 6.8%. It tastes sweet malt, almost a doppelbock with some tartness in fact. I knew almost instantly not to judge it by UK standards for this is a true Baltic Porter; which transmutes the word porter into something very different than most Americans know. They date older than our country (not by much) and are essentially a stronger, smoky, bitter, higher ethanol version of a dark brown ale used for importing over long distances. This version at just 6.8% is weak for most of them are 7-10%. This one is sweeter than I'd expect for this style. I found it to be a caramel-raisin brother of nice quality, very likely too sugared up for most tastes in this respect not true to Baltic style. As "true to type" it would rate a 3.0 but on its own merits (and this has always been my approach) it's considerably more interesting and virtuous. I am a sucker for a rich, complex, sweet malt beer that transcends easy brewing techniques and also gives us noble candy delights. Here's a very fun beer, not a porter by ANYONE'S DEFINITION, and I like it just as it is behind that glowing gold shield.

Victory Baltic Thunder Porter

RATING: 4.5

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

As much as I admire the art behind the superb brewing of beer, here is a good opportunity to applaud the art that goes into beer labels. The label in grey, silver, and red stands out in a crowded store cooler and like dozens of other American microbrews shows that graphic arts do much to get our attention and our money in the final analysis. There are many brews here with common, ugly-trendy, and even lousy labels. Some of them I avoided until trying to try everything. They simply put me off or did not catch my eye. Victory here has a fine, fun, and nicely crafted product - liquid and paper alike.

As "Truly a worldly beer" the Baltic Thunder is designed to give us the "enticing, toffee roast" of 18th century British porters merged with today's "subtle fruit nuance". It also celebrates baltic dark lagers or so we are told. Having not lived in the 18th century and sampled British porters and never been to the baltics, I'll take their word at this point. When did beer label text get so preachy and wine-like? I'd jack them up but good if the stuff in their bottle was not so impressive and stands up so well to the fancy language. Ball-ticks (I would have said if they failed)! So many porters today might as well be "drinkable" stouts or smooth cream stouts. This one has nice tartness and you actually enjoy a bit of good hopping in every sip. It is tangy, satisfying, and very lovely in an glass or crystal. It has zing with a bit of "comfort", overall a real elegance, and clearly the product of caring to be good, very good.

Brewbase Fives



Wellington Iron Duke Porter

RATING: 5.0

Guelph ON

BREWBASE AWARD: BEST CANADIAN PORTER 1997

This Ontario product is translucent brown with a big tan head and a wonderful scent of sweet malt. It is indeed what one might call a CARMEL PORTER - richly sweet, malty, and aromatic. It is too sweet for some people's idea of a porter but it a fine choice for wooing someone to 'real beer'. Black, choc- olate, roasted, and crystal malts are all used to good effect. It is truly a remarkable 'inspiration' - matching the label hype for once. We paid as low as \$2.69 a pint bottle making it a superb value. It contains no adjuncts and no preservatives. It is also the first label we've seen to have BOTH the web URL and e-mail addresses. (We're still waiting for a Java applet that lets one actually taste the stuff). Of the highest standards. Top recommendation.

Wild Goose Porter

RATING: 4.0

Cambridge, Maryland

From Cambridge Maryland comes this porter which is surprisingly translucent in reddish-brown shades. The head is small but enduring. Excellent lace. This is a very MALTY PORTER with less chocolate than Grant's Perfect Porter but still with nice depth of character. It COULD be perfect with a little fine tuning; but then we say that often. The finish is a little too bitter and uninteresting but the first malt-encrusted punch is worth the low \$6 ticket. If we had to pick an ECONOMY PORTER this wouldbe it. It is certainly more pleasant than many pricey German darks and mixes well. As a lower cost blending beer it works as well as Guinness Stout.

Williams Brothers Scottish Midnight Sun Dark Porter Ale

RATING: 4.5

Kelliebank, Alloa, Scotland

From the old country comes these 500ml at 5.6% ABV and pouring as dark as expected. It is brewed to handle the bruttle Scottish winters with ease. Malted barley and oats are both included. It has the nose of a good malty stout but not surprising the finishing caramel, molasses-style nip of a Scottish Ale. It is surprising easy going down and then the malts and nippy notes come flowing over you like a gentle wave. Very yummy stuff even if not overly complex nor "Imperial" strong. I find it appealing, spun by a couple of degrees (the smooth, clean grains and Scottish Ale zip), but not overly complex nor deep. I would love to dry an aged, higher ABV version of this. Tried again in 2011, I think it's still easy going down, almost black and tan slippery. Reviewers here note "a good porter, great the more it grows on you...very different from a dense stout" and "I love a dark beer giving up it's flavors when very cold. This is a gem". At \$5.99 a pop (March 2011) this 500ml is a decent value by my current scale of fairness and joy.

Williamsville Border Porter

RATING: 4.5

Fernandina Beach FL

The label says this one is 'as complex as it is simple'. That had even our fully sober heads puzzled. Color is the darkest of light-banning shades of brown with a light tan head of usual size for the style. English hops and chocolate malt are the only things they'll confess to using. It is (as the color foretells) a very full porter but it is not overwhelming either. It is very smooth with a semi-sweet appeal many stouts lack. While a bit tart it is not offending in that way. The chocolate coffee flavor really comes out in a way that can be enjoyed with shivering or holding back. It could be consumed in some quantity with ease but still would not disappoint the lover of rich

dark beers. Not perfect but very close.

Yellow Rose Vigilante Porter

RATING: 3.5

Texas

This light brown porter is less strong than many (that is putting it kindly perhaps). There are some herbal-medicinal flavors that either please or annoy you together with the malt and hops. While there is plenty of room for porters that are not as heavy and rich as stouts this one is quite tame. It will please some of you - but we feel sure that most beer lovers will move elsewhere.

Young's Porter

RATING: 4.0

England

This recipe was compiled from old brewing records dated in the 1800's that include top fermentation, East Kent Golding hops, and dark roasted malt. It is clear dark reddish amber (unlike Smith and Anchor porters) with a semi-persistent creamy head. It overflows with wonderful molasses tastes and proves sweeter than most stouts or porters. It finishes with a delightful smoothness. It is a good choice to turn someone on to truly flavorful beer.

PORTER - BARREL-AGED OR WOOD-AGED

Foothills People's BBL Aged Porter

RATING: 4.5

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

While a tad underpowered at just 6% ABV, this porter is a hazy dark brown, close to opaque under a small but lumpy tan head. The old Soviet-style poster-label is charming but Americanized for fun. Even the Soviet General Secretary could not get a beer this good on the day his election was proclaimed. Twenty year old bourbon barrels were used to make this more complex, those oak, vanilla, and 300 other chemicals coming to good effect here. The whiskey...err...bourbon notes fill the nose so the first sip is quite of a sweetened KY product with the malt and caramel charms of a fine porter. Fine, fine, fine all around. The mid passage is clearly porter and not stout thick, the malts cascading back and forth with a fairly assertive barrel presence. On the barrel intensity this is 9 out of 10 and it roughly works in this case where it does not in a barrel-aged, weaker beer. This is enough malt-candy whiskey (not quite a Southern Comfort mix) to please and enough true, sassy porter to come out as a good intermediate hybrid. And all for \$6.99 in January 2013. Panelists remarked "while there is some nice work done here...oak vanillas and esters lavishly flowing between malt notes...there is more work to be done on this process" and "The People never had it so good...this is a porter to remember...this stuff is as complex as 5-dimensional chess played while alternating between eight extinct languages while simultaneously juggling medicine balls on a tramoline". Here is a very laudible work, an experimental revelation in fact yet one or two notches overly bourbon-filled for some of us. They are very close to perfection.



Flying Dog Gonzo Imperial Porter (Barrel-Aged 2012)

RATING: 5.0

Frederick, Maryland

A smiling, smoking, and sipping skeleton on the label says "OK! Let's Party" from under his small winged hat. Hunter S. Thompson is quoted as "it never got wierd enough for me". The ABV is 9.5%, a shade more potent than the non-aged 9.2% Gonzo covered above. Whiskey barrels make this super-dark brown porter more nuanced for flavor and smoother in the finish. The brown bottles are corked and wired for superb aging potential. Most panelists here felt the whiskey notes exceeded the malt and hops at times and so it was not a contestant for Award of Merit....yet. It is perfect enough, memorable, and as deep as a Faulkner novel, great enough to register much respect - but not in the very upper group of our all time or legendary fives. One panelist felt it was a solid 4.5 but she is notorious for hating whiskey tastes of this strength - and we do mean these are about as strong as this style can get. We actually think a half-barrel version blending the aged and underaged might be the best blend or treat of all. That will have to wait for a store to carry both at the same time.

PORTER - FLAVORED OR FRUITED

The main additions to this lot are coffee, chocolate/cocoa, vanilla, fruits, maple syrup, chili peppers, and pretty much any and everything you'd used to flavor coffee or ice cream.

Atwater Block Vanilla Java Porter

Rating: 3.0

Detroit, Michigan

Vanilla bean extract and coffee at added to make a "robust porter" made with chocolate and coffee malts. The beverage pours reddish-brown, nearly opaque with a low, lasting head of beige hue. Coffee-malt is the nose but not overwhelmingly so. Being a devoted "beer blender", I have added coffee of various grades and types to beer for fun. This tastes like a recipe where a medium-strong porter is made richer with two ingredients that could be integrated well but in this case leave one clear that it's a deliberate blend. There's some sweet smoke in the presentation and not much vanilla in fact. Robust it is but it also full of strong bitter passages which get more annoying as the sips increase. There is some porter in the mix but one is more possessed with the coffee added and in the overall analysis the amalgum is awkward, much too tart, and frankly close to a blend I could make at home were I so inclined to mix Guinness with yesterday's Bunn residue.

Breckenridge Vanilla Porter

Rating: 4.0

Breckenridge, Colorado

One thinks of chocolate malt when one thinks of porter (at times) so vanilla is a bit of a curious marketing approach. This one is on the light side of porters for that vanilla-toasted aroma to come out. It's smooth enough, sweetish, and fairly complex. It was too sweet for some so perhaps it might have been a brown or stout in a better incarnation. Faint coffee and spice adds to the mix. The vanilla was overdone for a couple of our panel of tasters but not doubt we'd have gotten complaints if it was a barely discernable note! The concept is good but needs just a slight toning down we think, overall. The lack of a large head is one fault often reported. Someone remarked it was a new style, that is, a "Porter-flavored Vanilla Beer". It is a "try it once" beer for most of us - in other words, "try it once...unless someone gives you one or two or twelve for free".

8 (Eight) Wired The Big Smoke Smoked Porter

Rating: 4.0

Marlsborough, New Zealand

This NZ porter lays down a tall column of rich tan foam in a Pils glass, the fluid surprisingly transparent in dark reddish-amber, the lace long amid unclear haze. The head is monoumental, bordering on annoyingly vast. As the color suggests, the malt is medium for a porter, subtle-light even at times, and the smoke is fortunately subdued and not overdone. It's more Little Smoke-Little Malt at this point in the our tasting. It is nicely judged unless you want an imperial porter smelling like a freshly burned out building. This will not challenge or offend

one on the malt, hops, or smoke fronts. That makes a very agreeable porter that is easy on the buds compared to many in their flavored and fruited section. It will called light but not weak but many porter lovers. I think there is room for this more subtle side of the smoke porter concept and I did enough this well enough to recommend it.

Highland Thunderstruck Coffee Porter

Rating: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

The pour is opaque brown, allowing only the stray bit oif red light to pass through. The head is rich tan, a bit large for easy drinking at times, lasting forever and a sip. Choco malts and Midnight wheat are employed in this robust, hefty formula. Mild Noble hops are used, these only much evident until a dozen or so sips. Organic coffee is very apparent, the coffee part that is, this sourced from Dynamite Roasting Co. Coffee porters always give one more than a regular malt porter but some of them are harsh; as if a barrel of old ground from the brewery office Mr. Coffee were saved and added to kettle. Here the bitterness is tempered and virtually missing, the coffee being Starbucks® good without being Starbucks® sugary. It augments and improves the formula and only stands out in the good, bold way. One of the better coffee porters in the lower to mid price range. As I write this in February 2012, Highlands new cross-town rival may have something to say about their future success and even survival. That new Asheville firm will be none other than Sierra Nevada in their new eastern branch. Highland has a good start but the stakes having just gotten as high as the Whale Room at The Wynn in Vegas. Highland has the chops and surely the right recipes to give 'em a fair shot.

Harpoon El Truinfo Coffee Porter (100 Barrel Series)

Rating: 4.5

Boston, Mass./Windsor, Vermont

The IBU is a low 28 in this 6% porter that is light reddish-brown, a sort of rootbeer hue under a large, rough foam head of light tan. Coffee is from Equal Exchange and "special malts" are from somewhere we suppose. In this era when a coffee porter and coffee stout is apt to be a similar thing, this is clearly more on the true porter theme as indicated by it's less than coffee, opaque color. It was decent with a bit chill on it. The coffee is real and comes out with richness but not excessive strength. It is pleasant and rewarding and again I must reinforce this one needs to be served fairly well-chilled, maybe 45 deg. F. for best effect.

Knee Deep Tanilla Porter

Rating: 4.5

San Jose, California

Grade-A Tahitian vanilla beans and an unspecified natural flavor (boooooo!) are used in this reddish-brown porter with a mid-toned tan head. Those are some mighty fine beans (actually vanilla is an orchid pod) for the flavor is the most intense vanilla we have yet found in any beer of any style. It is not like a bottle of supermarket artificial vanilla poured into a glass - and yes we blendaholics have tried that. It is intense but refined and more like a good vanilla-nut coffee than shear, mindless excess. ABV is 6.3% and this porter is so refreshing and luminous it really came as a real shock. Hops are EKG which is merely a source of 'Golding' and not a true variety. Malts are Pale, Munich, Crystal 45, Black, and Chocolate. If the malts were more layered (and with five kinds they should have been!) and perhaps with some barrel-aging this is well on it's way to super-elite, A.M. status with us. Panelists said "this sort of vanilla is what everyone should use...amazingly rich but still holding something back" and "very, very nice...I've never had anything like it...it is alive with flavors and while these are just one malt and vanilla...this is quite enough...a real breath of fresh air in our stuffy, "downloiad a recipe" porter world". One panelist thought it was more about the beans that the hops and malt but most of thought their judgment was better than that.

Oregon Blackberry Porter

RATING: 5.0

Portland, Oregon

This brew takes a very dark opaque porter with a medium brown head and gives it a natural blackberry flavor. That is not easy and in fact other FRUIT PORTERS we've tried left something to be desired. This one fortunately succeeds very nicely. There is a fully deep malty dark satisfaction but a very decent tarkness and fruit theme is added. The combination is very effective and we must say it is the best dark fruit-flavored beer tested here to

date. Reviewers noted 'nice sweet-tart treat with quality through and through' and 'my idea of a fruit flavored beer...I'd prefer it to most lambics for complexity anytime.' BREWBASE AWARD: BEST DARK FRUIT-FLAVORED BEER 1996

Otter Creek Wolaver's Certified Organic Alta Gracia Coffee Porter

RATING: 4.0

Middlebury, Vermont

This nearly opaque ale from Vermont is accented with coffee and vanilla beans. For once, this is a coffee-flavored beer that actually tastes like coffee was added to any real degree. The chocolate malts are used to full advance, blending nicely with the coffee after the first few sips - initially the flavor is a bit more fragmented. No preservatives and no pasteurization are a plus in my book and likely yours. The vanilla makes the finish "cakey" but never sweet nor abrasive. It is not soothing as would be a traditional coffee-infused stout but it's rather assertive in some notes, the coffee and vanilla being quite real and occasionally popping up into overt passages. Reviewers here said "more a theme than a uniformed sum of it's flavors...a bit too awkward and 'flavored up' for me" and "very nice...a bit like a coffee shop version of beer but dry instead of their usual sweet approach". A third was less kind: "like last night's black coffee dumped into a generic porter for no reason at all". I would like the coffee turned down once notch and some only tweaks that defy clarification right now. I'd like to see a panel of porter nuts put several variations through the paces and pick something different next year.

Pete's Wicker Maple Porter

RATING: 4.5

St. Paul, Minnesota

We believe this is the first dark beer we've reviewed from the Wicked folks. It is a winner. Color is dark reddish-brown (far redder than any other porter we know) with a lasting tan head of good size. It is colored with carmel and flavored with maple. It is a sweet, smooth sort of PORTER rather than the thick, brothy sort that borders on a stout. The only other porter we know with a similar maple-molasses-carmel zip is Shepherd Neame - doubtless there are many others of UK origin. That flavor usually costs a bundle in Old World form so this decent \$5.99 American sixpack is most welcome. One reviewer noted the 'immediate likeability...smooth yet substantial.' Some felt it was too close to the soda-"liquid candy" sort of brewing and objected. Unique for a US brewer.

Roth Forgotten Hollow Cinnamon Porter

RATING: 4.0

Raleigh, North Carolina

With all the traditional spicing of Belgian and holiday ales, I often wonder why just a single spice should not be singled out and featured? Here is one solution - the adoration of the exalted cinnamon stick. This 6% pour is very dark, near opaque, the head mid-duration in a dark cream. The cinnamon pops from the first sip and settles down into a more malty-cinnamon balance by mid note, finishing dry, sometimes tangy-bitter, and with lingering flavors of the beloved bark. The porter strength is on the low-medium size of thing, no imperial base here, and so the cinnamon must carry much of the show. It is best about 52 deg. F. as the label states. While fun and interesting, the lack of the porter base's fundamental quality and something of an overcarbination for this style, made us wish for a stronger, more complex variant of it.

[Matt] Saranac High Peaks Chocolate Orange Robust Porter

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

Blood orange peel and real cacao nibs are used to form this 9% strong porter, including five hop varieties and four malts. The pour is nigh to black, the head a light brown and medium in duration. The nose is heavily laden in malts, all of them spectacular and fine. First sip is faintly of orange, rich in chocolate malts but not real chocolate in the sense of the Belgian chocolate-infused porters. The finish is surprising dry and tart with more zippy orange notes of high quality. Panalest said "robust is right... a very dense, thick porter...nicely crafted...I would get more" and "\$8.99 for a bomber is high for Saranac but it remains a bargain...I was delighted at every sip...still it did not excite us at some level". Had we not fallen head-over-hops for Southern Tier Imperial Mokah Stout we might not have known what a dark, real chocolate ale can be. Most things suffer in it's impressive, lofty

shadow and this is one. Pretty much everything a half-rancid, dollar store Easter chocolate bunny compared to one fresh-molded from choice Godiva flakes. The blood orange and tart, citrus finish is a good touch here but it will not carry it to 5 bottle or A.M. status. One panelist felt the tart finish kept it from being perfect and thought a slightly sweeter iteration with a little barrel time might make this a superstar. I would love to try that. Barrels are a place Saranac needs to go.

Sea Dog Riverdriver Hazelnut Porter

RATING: 4.5

Banger, Maine

Four types of malted barley, Williamette hops, and real hazelnut are utilized to create a dark brown brew that is close to opaque. The head is deep, tan, and persistent. The scent of hazelnut (more ice cream than coffee-like in fact) is very apparent. In terms of flavor the hazelnut is tuned to be equal to the malts - certainly much stronger than Rogue's Hazelnut Brown Nectar Ale. Few will dispute the comment that it is not as malt rich and potent as most traditional porters. Together with the assertive natural nut flavor it proved a bit controversial. One wrote 'Starbucks could not have done it better...high quality but not for me' while another wrote 'Bravo! Complex, amply flavored, well-blended, and expertly crafted...one cannot ask for more'. Distinct. A must try.

Tommyknocker Cocoa Porter (Winter Warmer)

RATING: 4.0

Idaho Springs, Colorado

Ordinarily cocoa powder would be an alternative to chocolate malts in a porter but this one also adds honey and so fully qualifies as a flavored porter for certain. From the land near Vail and Breckenridge (roughly) comes this product of a Colorado gold rush town from a brewery quickly earning high marks about the country. It pours very dark brown, amber hints by strong illumination, the head tall and dark. Cocoa predominates the nose. First sip is of tartness, malts coming to the fore, then a blast of authentic cocoa flavor, a variety of taste quite different from anything in choco malt family of flavors. It is surprising dry so the honey dose must be slight and used to tame the tartness a smidge. We all associate cocoa as a cold season warming drink and so this flavor fits what we learned in kindergarden or well before.

I enjoy this brew very much but found one or two odd notes in some finishes, suggesting we have a slight way to go to get this where it might be. It's 5.7% ABV (says the website but never the packaging) so it's more about flavor than aging or other forms of potency. Brewheads are always suspicious of flavored beers and this one never seems to rate very well. I found it substantially more interesting, clever, and useful than the C+ that 99 people on Beer Advocate averaged to date. The whole "liquid Toosie Roll" charge was unfair and I think it has other qualities though not as much complexity as it might. I would bring out richer malts and maybe a bitter twang of hops in the finish. It's a pleasant beer but is not rounded enough to escape all claims of being a tarted up and contrived. Strengthening the traditional supportive notes (that is, malt and hops only) would be a good choice for Winter 2010's batch. It needs to develop beyond the thin, highly altered, low on traditional flavors, and gimmicky rep it has among experienced tasters. The potential is there. I do hope they take advantage and turn the simple Hershey's appeal into Godiva-class, worthy brilliance.

RAUCHBIER/SMOKED BEER -

VARIOUS STYLES

BrewDog Storm

RATING: 4.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

This is going to be one of the most controversial beers you try when you see it and sip it down. Stormy for sure. The teal blue letter on the black label while challenge one's sight for one thing. The "malt beverage" tag

partnered with barrel aging is quite new - a cheap thing together with a premium thing. The color is hazy gold and not exactly the expected aging material that normally is loaded with dark malts. It is almost smokey enough to be a rauchbier and has a harsh, medicinal finish that is either "dripping with oak, lurid, and challenging to love" or "wow...new and crazy...just what I needed today, something well made and creative" to quote two of my trusted advisers who drink too much beer and call their mothers far too seldom for their hobby. For me it is big, eccentric, hard to love in some ways, maybe like a bad girl who want to like very much but know better. Storm as smokey as three block of burned out warehouses with three companies still hosing it down to embers and Sal grinning from his white Cadillac four blocks down. There are thing here I do not identify as beverage or food flavors. Hops are there but musty fungus is three notches above that mess. The whiskey barrel nip is there and that makes things probably about another compounds far more complex. Many folks are neutral on this. Being a beer blending, I look as this one as an opportunity to make other beers more odd and this one improved with certain things like sweetness and more malt.

8 Wired (Eight Wired) The Big Smoke (Smoked Porter)

RATING: 4.0

Marlborough, New Zealand

The small bomber has a pretty, subtle smokey gray and black and silver theme. We don't get alot of NZ brews in the States so when a wired smoked porter arrives, we give it wide-eyed interest. One of the brewers is from Denmark. The annoying label-book written by the Shelton Brothers (it ends with "Cheers!") advises you and I to Google the alledged fact that all beers 250 years back were smoked. That is not true by any means and the Bros apparently thought "near univaler" roasting of malts meant all brews were smoked. I will not insinuate that the importers were smoking anything besides facts and beer; but perhaps a checkup with an eye doctor, their Google-abstracting assistant, or a credible beer historian in is order. Rauchbier have always been as rare as a spit-roasted hen's tooth unless you resided in Bamberg, Germany on a brewery-chicken ranch.

This porter is stout opaque, the head mid-duration and colored as dark cream. Nose is like a burnt out old house and authentically judged. The smoke is not the "be all and end all" of this formula for hops are evident among the nasty-good malts that makes this ink alternative a joy for a time. It's a decent, tidy, well-crafted porter even if not earth-shattering. Smoked beers tend to get annoying after a single glass or bottle and even smoked cheddar melted over smoked fish tacos will not save the culinary experience to follow. I would rather blend these smoked things than spend a long time with them. Blends with fainter smoke, richer hops and fruit yeast always prove better for me. You can make a lovely amber ale with things like this and very fruity, yeasty ale or Hefe-weizen. A fine, custom-blended Rauche-weizen will take me to higher places.

Flying Dog Schwarz Smoked Double Lager

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

I'd not expected FD to do high-falutin' champagne-corked bottles with foiled labels and Belgium-style prices. I guess they should and this is proof. The label lost me when they compared David Hasselhof to the popularity of Schwarz beer and something about Thuringia. It pours a truly opaque dark brown, head small but medium brown, malty, and as pungent as a house freshly reduced to charcoal and chimneys with the dude winding up their hoses before us. It is surprising easy drinking for a smoked, dark lager, not overwhelming as some Rauschbiers and certainly darker than some of those. It's 7.8% ABV and for smoothness you almost think they added liquid smoke to a weak German dark - and I mean that in the kindest sense not suggesting their formula! Smoke and malt. Malt and smoke. No hops to speak of though there are faint bitter finish notes by the last glass of three or more. A little late sweetness keeps if from being too dry and dull.

This is a good blending beer if you want to add a primo smoky quality to something else and only need 1/3 to 1/2 a glass to get that effect. I'm sure blending was not their goal but more than a single glass of this gem is hard to beer; and I mean that kindly. I like it very much, though I am suspicious the smoke comes from a bottle and not fresh alder branches, and like Hasselhof and talking Trans-Ams a little goes a VERY LONG WAY. As far as Bay Watch scenes with a different type of full-bodied, robust, smokin' character...mass quantities are justified. Their "no shit" website sucks (as of April 2009) and it crashed on three computers I tried, varying from typical user to one with every update Microsoft can toss down the daily upgrade pipe. A word to brew webmasters: we don't want flying stuff, heads that bubble before us (we might have that effect in real life!), and other fancy expensive programming crap. Just give us beer data for every known label they offer, cool

merchandise, and a nice history of the company - and the faster the better. No one has ever purchased a beer because of a cool script on their website. Sorry dudes. Drink less and deliver data with no fuss and worldclass speed. Form must always FOLLOW function and convenience - sorry you missed that design class due to wicked bad 'shrooms. Just take our word for it.

Fort Collins Z Lager

RATING: 3.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

This is one of the brightest ambers on record here, some tints of red adding much to it under the creamy substantial head. Brewed as a "rauchbier" of the 1550's Bamberg style from Germany, smoke flavors come from malt dried over beechwood fires. The smoke is reserved enough to be appealing but the finish has some odd notes that need to be cleaned up. Slight caramel malts come in the background and it finishes nice, dry, and hoppy. It is strong enough to please most beer lovers but will not overwhelm a subtle sauce at dinner. That said, no chef on earth wants his patrons sipping smoke, hops, and malt before his perfect dish - although somehow they accept the 912 chemicals known in the wine world! I found it a couple notches short of where it needs to be to stand on it's own. A good fettucine would save it but that's not the point here. I rate beer on it's own and this one needs some tuning.



Gordash Holy Mackerel "Mack in Black" Imperial Black Ale

with Pomegranite Juice

RATING: 5.0

Melbourne, Florida

Brewed at Florida Beer Co. for Gordash this is one unique beer. Its' from Florida, porter-dark, flavored with Punica, 8% ABV, made with Belgian yeast, and features a yellow and black singing fish-lounge singer on the label. That's not going to be confused with much else! Let's cut to the chase. The Gimmick or The Goods? The fact you're reading this in the Stout- Flavored section shows it's no weak fruit ale or a fancy brown one. Nose is all stout with faint fruit esters. The chocolate malt notes reign supreme and delight the mouth and nose in every good way, fully and with complex notes popping all around. Yet there's something more to this warming, welcome, consoling brew that gives it the real goods and makes it a unique delight. Smoke is everywhere and if you like

a smoky stout with divergent themes - this is your nirvana for the weekend. I would not have guessed pomegranite (a fruit I often cherish) and perhaps that is good thing. That fruit adds much to it but doesn't make it tart and awkward as in tries by other brewers with less skill. I am truly dazzled with their sensibilities here; not only in the nerve to conceive and launch it but to deliver the fully-integrated fluid so well. It's not so much Holy Mackerel as Holy you-know-what! I had not expected such a lofty mark from yet another cute bottle with an anthropomorphic creature in rich colors. Neither labels nor covers tell the true tale! You could put this in a fancy British bottle for \$6.00 a clip and it would impress as cleanly. It's tasty, well bred (despite the singing smoked mackerel with spiked hair), and the kind of thing that makes beer reviews a constant set of new delights and thrills. This is THE Flavored Fruit Stout to make us believe in the style or the cause or the passion or whatever it is or should become in future years. Sip long and believe.

Heller Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier Weizen

RATING: 3.5

Bamburg, Germany

This city is known for smoke beers and as the modern world unfolds they of course own the URL www.smokebeer.com. There are Weizen and Marzen variants of this brown-bottled 8.2% product. It pours a hazy amber, slightly a dark as a dark wheat but not quite as malty. The smoke surrounds one from first sip to last, not a liquid smoke of cheap food products but a very overt, authentic one. One lad here said it reminded him of salmon for the nature of woody-derived flavors and his brain's historical reference to this general theme. Frankly, this bold a smoked beer is not for everyone and some will suggest it not for anyone who is not in Bamburg or for some social reason being polite. One can in fact use this as a joke to show off your new home brew to friends - only the most informed of them will get the humor. At the certain risk of offending all the fine folks from Bamburg and the Rauchbier groupies in the US, this should be used as a bottle of smoke for blending with other beers. It adds much to many IPA and Scottish ales and pretty much makes anything bad somewhat bearable as will a tin of Guinness. I do enjoy a small glass of this but can never manage a full bottle and always end up using it for blending to my other daily selections.

Highland Big Butte Smoked Porter

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

Winner of the brewery's Highland Cup 2009, Alex Buerckholtz's winner recipe comes with earth Fuggles hops and smoked German malts. It is only sold in NC. They recommend it be cellared for improvement so it might just turn up anywhere. The smoked flavor is moderate to full, not quite Rauschbier potency but sometimes close. Color and head are typical porter. ABV is 7% so it's very sippable without cringing - not much worse than a porter with too much exposed ethanol and enough smoke to choke a Dalmatian. This one is balanced and fun and better than the regular oatmeal version of porter. I tried it chilled a bit and also much warmer and never found it as thrilling as it might be with more diverse malty dimensions.

Magic Hat Burnpile Smoked Porter (Humdinger Series)

RATING: 4.0

South Burlington, Vermont

The corked, foiled, and dark bottles did not ring up at my local Total Wine. They are normally well on top of new brews and their prices. The pretty checkout gal handed my bottle to the balding manager and he did some rapid typing. The price as \$5.99 for the fancy package. I had no complaints. This 7.5% presentation pours as dark as used motor oil down on city sewer grate on a starless night when no one is looking. I always figured my generic oil finely aged to crusty, sticky 18,000 miles would probably kill some alligators flushed down a nearby toilet. Burnpile is considerably more useful. The smoke is moderate, restrained, and more an asset than an overpowering annoyance like so many Raushbiers from Germany and the US. Smoke is best as a spicing agent and not an enveloping theme in my opinion; though Old World traditionalists seem to think otherwise. I use that nasty, strong stuff for blending for it is often impossible to drink an entire bottle without running from your domicile and dialing 9-1-1. As a porter these malts are deep, not overly complex but soothing. I always think a porter or stout should be soothing to some degree. These are dark comfort beers and the refined smoke here does nothing to upset our state of mind. The finish here is bright, slightly acidic and not overcome by smoke so the porter notes are still the star of the show. This is a nice take even if not too startling.

New Holland Charkoota Rye Smoked Doppelbock

RATING: 4.0

Holland, Michigan

The lovely flying pig label (not really that lovely) is immediately noticable as are the smokey notes of this rye brew. Sweetish smoke is evident but it is never overpowering, dank or dry as many rauchbiers". The pour is dark reddish-brown. Rye adds interesting notes but these are fairly average in quality for an alternative grain bock. Cherrywood smoke and some molasses notes bring up the quality.

Old Raleigh Smoked Porter

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

One sniff of this very dark brown beer and you know you have a unique dark beer. The head is tan and long lasting. It is truly blessed with smoked malts but having enough carmel sweetness to tempt. SMOKED BEERS are known as Rauchbiers and in that class the German Schlenkerla is our perfect standard. Rogue's Smoked beer was also good but rated a 4.0. This product is much darker and maltier than either and proved refined. Smoke flavor is easy to over-emphasize but we like the limits they chose here. A few reviewers felt it was best if blended 2/3 to a sweeter porter or stout for smoother drinking in quantity. Smoked beers are per- haps best presented like a port wine; served in small glasses after a meal when other flavors will not be conquered. This beer has dessert beer quality. Sadly this fine brew is no longer made...

Schlenkerla Rauchbier Marzen

RATING: 4.0

Bamburg, Germany

Bamburg Schlenkerla of Bamburg makes this SMOKY or RAUCHBIER using kilned malt to add that flavor. The beechwood process dates from 1678 or before. It is also a Marzen style which in German means 'March'. Marzen beers are usually started in March, very red, malty, medium strength, and a Vienna style that is typical of your average German Oktoberfest beer. Unlike a fest this is smoky and not sweet (so dry). The American smoky brew by Rogue is an most suitable comparison although this must be considered the traditional style. One reviewer said he 'preferred the smoke flavor in my German sausage' while to another 'unique and wonderful character almost like a quality old Scotch' (another smoked malt drink). The finish is long so match food with care!

Uinta BABA Black Lager

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

This brew is organic and brewed using renewable energy. The Baba or Baa, Baa Black Sheep story is based on the old English nursery rhyme. A dark fuzzy beast appears starkly on this label against a tan line paperstock. The English tale is sung to Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, a variation on a French tune from 1761. BABA Black Lager have you any malt? Yes sir, yes sir, three vats full. Like most black lagers, this is a thinner version of a porter but this one adds the charm of smoke! The alwe down the line is apparently on fire. This is no super-smoker but easily assigned here and no doppel bock of the regular stripe.

RYE, RICE, SORGHUM, MILLET, SPELT, BUCKWHEAT (SOBA), OATS, NO GRAIN, AND ALTERNATIVE GRAIN BEERS

Brewbase Fives



Avery Eighteen, a Dry-hopped Rye Saison Ale

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

This curious thing called a "rye saison" pours a rich amber-gold, faintly cloudy, sticky and semi-sweet, a head low but lasting. Fruit flavors are everywhere and the rye flavors are minor components adding to the overall fine presentation. Dry-hopping is subtle. This is a worthy ale, superbly planned and crafted, for this elite brewery. It is yummy and a nice value too with the \$6 price we paid for a small bomber. At 8.12% it is well-dosed on that account but with the sweet-fruit elements I would not have judged it above a 6%. The OG of 1.069 is easy to guess.

Bard's Gold: The Original Sorghum Malt Beer

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

It pours a dark, rich gold, perhaps a bit amber in a darkish room, head frothy like a Pils, and no lace. I would describe the curious aroma as "sweet and earthy" if pressed. The bottle's motto is "discuss it over a Bard's" and one is more likely to discuss the beer before any other subject on earth. The forthright, dominant malt flavors remind one of an old whiskey and one gets sticky molasses through the mid and late notes. To gain entrance to their website you must scroll down (often wayyyyyyy down) for your birth date which curiously goes up to the year 1791. The finish is a bit weaker than their Dragon's Gold and I recommend both labels to anyone. I am not sure the gluten-free market is as large as the "let's try every beer at least once" market of millions in the US alone. Their site also has links to gluten-free cooking expos, gluten intolerance groups, and things about Celiac Disease. I really love the way they've used Google Maps to help one find a retail vendor. Very interesting beer whether your body or brain needs it more.

Brewbase Fives



Bard's Tale Dragon's Gold (Sorghum Ale)

RATING: 5.0

San Jose, California

The label proudly proclaims: "Contains no wheat, barley, rye, or oats". Well then. Count out the German purists on this one. What they do use is malted sorghum in the whole grain form and that with hops is what you get. Color pours a luminescent amber-gold, slow but decent lace, rocky ivory head. Aroma to me said cheese at one point or two, later more hops and earthy grains came to bear. The flow of flavors and notes is quite unfamiliar ground for me. There was lightness, weakness, then tart, then some citrus, then a very rich malt of unknown sort (sorghum to be sure), followed by still more alien things. They claim innovation and inspiration and for my money this is what they got. The first few sips were frankly uncomfortable.

I'm now 1400 different beers deep in my mental bank and like the Roggen label below, this one does not have a Dewey Decimal number in my mind's library. It's oversized AND unclassifiable but not in the National

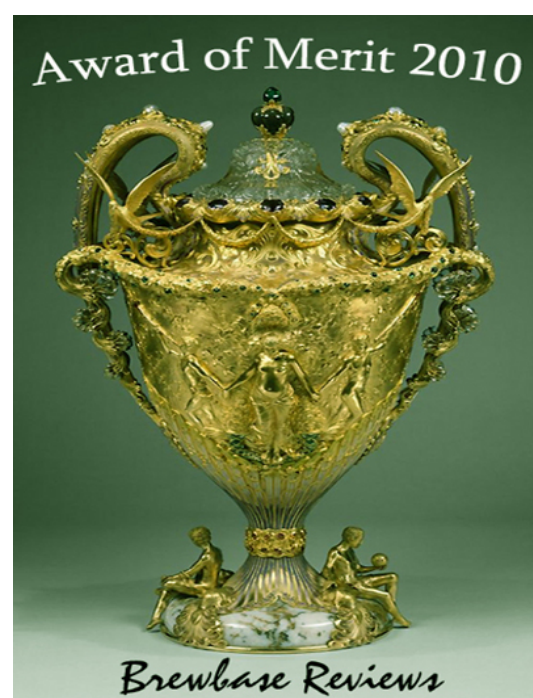
Enquirer or Barely Legal centerfold sense. The fourth or fifth sip, held long and swallowed slow confirmed the rating you see here. Sorghum beer is not new (heck, even the giant A-B boys played around with it) but this iteration was a true learning experience and a tastebud stretcher. Quite simply they cared, experimented, and now get it absolutely, straight-as-a-sorghum-plume right. Tall crop makes a tall beer. Admirable and worth replicating elsewhere. Actually, it was more of the new neuron connection maker for the old gray matter. When I sipped it long and slow until the bottle was empty the one word on my mind was "comfort". Sorghum is a comfort grain in various contexts. Once you tongue and head get around the quality-novelty of this stuff, you come to really like it. Did I buy just one? Damn...no way. Whole Foods is closed by now.

Bateman's Combined Harvest Ale

RATING: 4.5

Wainfleet, Lincs, UK

Here's a 4.7% pale golden-amber ale formed from barley, oats, wheat, and rye. It won a Gold Medal in the International Beer Awards. The head is mid-sized, rocky, and pale cream to off white. Pale and Crystal are the familiar barley malts. The hops are Phoenix and Target. This is the first I've seen that is labeled as "Vegan friendly" (September 2012). This is not a multi-grain bread approach because it is lighter and more fruity than a even a sweet, organic bread. It is however multi-layered and rich, very pleasant and both enjoyable and wholesome. This brew is deep and complex but in the final analysis the fun-on-the-tongue factor is very good at best. I wonder how we could get a much better multi-grain brew by barrel-aging it or making the yeasty more fruity yet. Even had multi-grain raisin bread from a preppy bread shop? It might be that yummy plus or minus some cinnamon and the hint of fruit-cake flavors. I can imagine Frankie's or Fran's or Fernando's Fruitcake Ale made with these same four grains, semi-sweet, and as fruit-filled as a truckload of cornacopia. Combined Harvest is an education for us, and these are accumulating nicely by 30 years of brew-guzzling, and we think of this as prototype, decent but leaving us wanting for more.



Bear Republic Hop Rod Rye

RATING: 5.0

Healdsburg, California

This bright amber ale is made with 18% rye with "dual overhead hop injection". Like me it is alcohol-burning and high performance...I mean the former thing in my case. The head is tan and long-lived. The hop injection is dual by most pale ale standards, many just a single carb by Sierra Nevada standards. With 8.0% ABV I'd put it with the Imperial American Pale Ale Group plus the rye category of course. My first question was this: doesn't all that hopping make the rye hard to taste. The answer is yes at first sip. As you let it linger with a second glass, the alternative grain's nature becomes more apparent and valuable. I really think this is a very well constructed ale, not unique or crazy or creative - just solid brewing qualities and lost of them in a refined proportion. It's very

near my "desert island list" and could replace most any IPA there. And the price is very reasonable.

Bison Organic Red Rye Ale; Reunion '08: A Beer for Hope

RATING: 4.0

Chico, California

This large bottle benefits the Institute for Myeloma and Bone Cancer Research and thus I'm reserving my usual rant about lengthy beer names. There are few "painted", silk-screened bottles around with more paint than this one in loads of red, black, and beige. It is dedicated to their friend and partner Virginia MacLean who lost her battle (as they say) in 2007. Besides using rye they add caraway seeds as a bit of spice in what is called a "malt forward" approach. This ale is very dark amber with one of the most yellow heads I've seen since....[insert your politically incorrect joke here]. It is USDA Certified Organic and carries a 6.5% ABV rating.

I'm not sure I like all the modern focus on tumors and runny diseases when eating or drinking. Nor am I sure if all these efforts do much in part or together but the effort I generally applaud. Indeed, I'd rather drink good beer for charity than run even half a block or sell something sweet and nasty that might contribute other diseases. I take NAC and Milk Thistle and so my liver isn't (Lord willing) going to need a fundraiser anytime soon. I was shocked by the State of California warning that says the "decorations" on the label might contain lead or cadmium that cause birth defects from time to time. What? On a bottle raising funds for cancer? That's nuts and very close to Jay Leno joke material. Sorry guys...I'd have gone with natural, low toxicity labels for this cause.

Back to the point: flavor is sharp, acidic, both in a good way, the rye is clearly there if you've tried the grain in liquid form before. Malt hides some of the rye and caraway and that might to be a good thing for both could get wild and crazy in a hurry. Their restrained, sensible use of the two special ingredients is to be praised. Is it a great, good, or magical brew? No, yes, and no. It is different, worth trying again, and curious.

Clipper City Heavy Seas Letter of Marque Rye Porter

RATING: 4.0

Baltimore, Maryland

The whole "Letter of Marque" thing was about making a general, average pirate his own brand or privateer status. It was an early form of certification, covering ships, persons companies, dating to 1295 and perhaps before. The politics became complex. If you had the wrong LOM from an unpopular leader or King, your fate was likely unkind. Clipper City uses this theme today to make a brewer a noted and admired professional but make his or her recipe into a distributed, bottled reality of a quality they can support. Their 2010 recipe is 7.8% as executed and comes from Frank Butt and Neil Heinlein and comes in 22 oz. bombers of brown hue. The bottle presents in dark brown, transparent but barely, not as dense as some of the porter style. The head is above ample, inversely rocky and light tan, nose of complex malts. Here is a porter with some nip and yet a curious oddity of flavor that comes from the clever boldness and zest of the rye ingredient which is apparently dosed to full effect. Blindfolded I would not call it a porter but a Brown Rye Ale might be more suited to the overall effect. Does this mean the label is not uber-malty and zippy-potent in the porter style? No. It qualifies as a porter to me but with not much room for semantics. The quality of this brew will win over most beer lover but I still expect the extreme, narrow definition porteristas to find fault while still appreciating it as something else. I think it is a notch or two too sweet for a porter but I have vowed to grade brews for their quality and not their name or claimed style. 4.0 in general and lower if porter law is enforced.

Craggie Battery Hill: An English-style Rye Ale

RATING: 4.5

Asheville, North Carolina

For \$13-15 per half gallon jug, this NC pours a cloudy amber with a lasting head. The rye flavors are evident in the nose and one can almost recall childhood aromas outside a bakery. The carbonation is assertive and there is some sweetness in the mid passage, the finish being drier and a tad more bitter. Craggie is becoming known in the southeast for copious volumes of very good brew - mass quantities without going the way of weak piss-water. Something country about a big brown jug and the contents being other than enough to pickle your liver and trachea in 30 seconds. It's best very cold and quite an impressive new introduction.

Dogfish Head Tweason'ale Gluten-free Sorghum-based Ale with Strawberries and Buckwheat honey

RATING: 4.5

Milton, Delaware

Leave it to Dogfish to go over the top with a style, turning and spinning it a couple of notches. Flows out medium gold, big lace, near white head, nose of bright berries and slightly different earthy grains. First sip is oddly unlike strawberry juice and because the ingredient list says "strawberries" instead of juice, syrup, or puree, we suspect the more acidic difference is in a more whole berry approach. Sorghum is there but in sorghum syrup form. It is tart and yummy from the honey and sorghum syrup for there is nothing at all like it - and we are lads and lasses who have blended lambics with non-gluten ales before. This is a special find, more curious than Award o Merit material. A superb choice for your next (controversial) beer tasting session. Make the newbies guess!

Founder's Red Rye (Red Ale made with Rye)

RATING: 4.5

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The label draws the eye for the lunatic old man with wild hair and spectacles smiling insanely in a shade of scarlet on cream. Color is amber-red and the cream head large. The nose is generic pale ale with extra sweetness. It sips very smoothly and the rye difference is immediately apparent; it's valuable and superb. Some rye-enhanced brews are barely discernable as such. This one is really what alternative grain recipes are about. It's a rich pale ale (as many red ales ultimately prove to be) and overall the hops are more dominant. There is a luxurious, easy, refined quality to the rye notes and I truly hope many more ales will be made this way. Here is a sensual beer and one well worth a beer tasting event. Get some.

Great Divide Hoss Rye Lager

RATING: 5.0

Denver, Colorado

Among so many luscious, stunning brews from Colorado, this new Hoss product is 6.2% and based on German Marzen lagers. "Rich layered, malt notes...hints of cherry and dark fruits" are claimed while the rye imparts spicy, earthy characters. It pours a luminous reddish-amber, so bold it set almost any table ablaze with light and beauty. The cream head is irregular, medium in all other respects. It has a faint loafy bite of rye bread (an flavor I adore on a weekly basis with my eternal grilled cheese and reuben sandwiches) and there are also quality sweet malts, layered well (yes), and these making an integrated approach of the highest quality. There is some hops in the finish but not much. If this is the only alternative grain beer you try, then you have had a fine, solid introduction to their merits and will surely come back to the atypical species vat again.

Take more than a nip of this rye nip and you'll be happy, content you have been served well from a fine establishment, learned something, and helped establish the rewards for creativity in American brewing. We have to dig deep at times and honor these American brewing heroes if we want them to continue to dazzle us, innovate, and shine on. That means buying and trying lots of new beers, even if just one small bottle per innovation, and passing on the goodness to our friends and family. Judging the label silhouette this is very much an homage to western, tough cowboys and in American legend something of Bonanza's Hoss Cartwright (played so admirably by Dan Blocker), a towering man of muscle and yet sweet calmness, anger when the time came, and a teddy bear with both teeth and a hug as the situation called for them. The word "hoss" in the US west and south seems to mean friend and partner but probably traces from the Swedish "hass" for "big in stature and big in spirit" - and Ben Cartwright's second wife on the show was from Sweden. Hoss Rye Lager is big in many ways, punching when a snap is called for but tending to be mellow in the background, cracking, smacking at times, sweet and gentle at the core, yet rough and ready.

Hambleton Toleration Ale

RATING: 4.5

Yorkshire, England

Toleration is wheat, rye, and barley-free for those intolerant of gluten is mainly based on sugar and hops. It is

thus "no grain" instead of substitute grain. Cascade, Liberty, and Challenger hops and lots of quality sweetness are the basis for the flavor it seems. There is fruit, citrus tartness, and some others notes before the sweetness taps you firmly and affectionately. Color is a glorious, glowing amber, the head browner than expected. They use a "unique blend of sugars...conjured up an exciting wort in the copper where minerals and sugars interact". No malt from any grain is used and yet you'd swear that under all their deep, rich caramel waterfall must be some kind of malted something!!!! I'm not sure how they did it but they did it very right. The "beer soda" label fits but this is gourmet, hand-crafted, lavish-flavored beer soda and not something crude, simple, or offensive at any time. They gave us the caramel and roasted sugars without using a grain to deliver them. As of today, the 14 morons at the Beer Advocate (who in the usually larger population range from pompous idiots to real insightful students of beer), give it a D+ and there are lots of F's. This is no common oversugared beer - there is much more and I would think the morons who normally taste asparagus tips and wombat fruit in trendy British ales would take time to appreciate it and be...well...tolerant. I not only tolerate it, I admire much about it. Anyone has a right to say they don't like it but the brewing skill is remarkable here even if an illusion is pulled off. I think the Copperfieldian trick works (malty sugars without malt) but purists will posture and prance in the opposite direction. I probably would have toned down the sugars and brought the hop bitterness up 2-3 notches but I really like this adventurous, resourceful approach to give people something different; whether needed a bit, necessary, or optional. To me it's visionary but give it a slightly less sweet, more hoppy variation and I'll be coming back month after month.

Kiuchi Hitachino Nest Red Rice

RATING: 5.0

Ibaraki, Japan

Okay, okay. Rice is not really an exotic, strange alternative grain for brewing because oceans of cheap brew and light beer crapola is made with it. This 7% refined Japanese product is to those loutish, rude creations what pristine, rare brown sushi rice is to some nuke-in-a-bag thing sitting on the supermarket shelf for 2.7 years. The red rice is a superior variety cultured in the ancient Japanese style, giving a special taste and a reddish-amber color. People sometimes write about it's rosy color from the rice. I used four different light sources (flourescent and incandescent) and found no such color magic going on. I cannot quite express what flavors I'm experiencing although some warm grain notes did sooth my sore throat better than any beer tried that night - and there were about 20 of them. It is somehow cheerful and somber at once, very different and very competant. It is almost a malt broth, a ricey soup yet with a slight tart spriteliness. Is sprite-li-ness a word? It is now and it belongs here. I cannot place the fruit notes in that tartness. Sometimes we just have "general tartness" in a beer and we need not same a particular berry or pome. Except for grain and green olives, one would be a fool to be very specific here. I have never described a brew as grainy, brothy, and yet clearly emanating scents of green olives! Being a oleaphile, I though I was going mad until I read two web reviews that confirmed my unripe olive observation. Maybe all three of us a nuts. It has a vital quality one is not used to from the known European portfolio of styles. It is earthy yet not simple. Detractors found it "funky", "too medicinal", "thin and metallic", and "sour". I disagree but then again I adore green olives, any kind of quality rice, and most any broth than comes down the pipes.

Knee Deep Ryedentity Crisis

RATING: 3.0

San Jose, California

Here is not only an alternative grain but one rigged to put out a nice 8% thump with a saison theme. It's crisis is that's like a Frenchman carrying a jewish rye load in downtown San Jose. I'd be neck deep in confusion. The label for once is pleasant uncluttered but actually reveals too little about the stuff - so their website was a must visit. There we learn the recipe is a rye-based, unfiltered Belgian saison designed to have both tartness and fruit aroma. Malts are Pilsner, Wheat, Rye, Munich, and Belgian Candi. Hops are all Hallertau made to 27 IBU and 17.5 Plato. The presentation is slightly-hazy gold, the head very coarse in bubbles and fading fast. Pils is on the nose more than saisonity - is that a word? First sip is a muddle of flavor, some nice, but very diverse and lacking a unified theme. Initially it gives the approach of a homebrew gone crazy and a bit wrong. Saison tartness is not terrible evident and most of us on the team here felt it was "Pilsy with rye notes" and not much more to brag about. But the whole "identity crisis" theme may reveal they themselves did not know what to make of the entire recipe and project. That is certainly okay and attracts beer tasting clubs (whose members spend thousands a year on brew by the way) but when the experiment fails to please...we have a more serious identity crisis. To say

this one is "all over the map" was kind and most of us could not admire it and two could not bear it beyond class number two. Curious is one thing but boring-odd is quite another.

DeProef Green's Endeavour All Natural Dubbel Dark Ale

RATING: 4.0

Gent, Belgium

These \$6.95 bottles are just 500ml but have 7% ABV and are bottle-fermented. Millet, Rice, Buckwheat, and Sorghum are used, making it taste different and also appeal to those with wheat and/or barley allergies. Color is a very dark rootbeer, the lace typical bottle-conditioned ale, and head a bit quick to depart here. First notes are a bit tart, lean, and only faintly malted. It has a soda-like level of high carbonation (far less sugar however) where it begins to mix good grain flavors with malt throughout the mid to late notes. Finish is rather dry and one gets a nice harmonic blend of grain flavors even in warmer temperatures. It is overall an interesting departure from normal dark ale flavors, Belgian or not, and in this sense it is a rewarding change of pace. It is not as rich or deep in malt as one might like to make it either memorable or "a must buy again". It will be too thin for most of you and at this price, we deserve to expect much, much more. They have a nice line and each is worth at least one go.

New Holland Golden Cap Saison Ale

RATING: 3.0

Holland, Michigan

Here is an American facsimile of an old European Saison Ale but differs in the use of spelt, an ancient grain that predated wheat and barley in some regions. This is old, old, old school. Actually super-old farmyard. Color of the pour is pale like a Belgian White and the spicing is similar but decidedly nippy in the finish - stinging and buzzing even. ABV% is 6.25% so the nip must come from spices and hops I suppose. The big question remains: does the spelt make a difference, any difference, good or bad? I would give that question a possible maybe with a questionable likelihood of some potential for yes. It is smooth enough and luxuriantly so - but wheat can do that too. Maybe if they toned down the spice, the spelt would shine or would that make it weak or dull? Can't say because I can't de-spice it but I think the the spelt novelty is very much lost - unless it needs to be lost; in which case they disguised a mistake well enough for it to sell. It's a good beer not a great one and overspiced, too peppery regardless of the grain in my opinion.

Rogue Morimoto Black Obi Soba Ale

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

Soba is a traditional Japanese noodle made from aromatic buckwheat flour and in the case of this brew the roast soba or buckwheat grain is used. The main aroma in buckwheat or soba is Salicylaldehyde (2-hydroxybenzaldehyde) for you brew chemists among us though five other compounds add additional flavors. Besides being "buckwheat flavor", this big chemical imparts something we perceive as faint almond flavor. It has been used in perfumes, so wonderful and light it's character. Curiously, this same chemical is used by a dozen insect species (at least) in their behavioral signals. Barley malts of the Harrington, Metcalf, Munich, C-15, C-60, and Carafa No. 2 style are added. Hops include Horizon, Sterling, and Cascade. Rogue uses their familiar and proven Pacman yeast. An "obi" is a Japanese sash or belt, the "Black Obi" being a likely reference to the Black Belt rank in the martial arts. This label got Gold in the 2005 World Beer Championships and the coveted World Champion Prize in 2006. I had tried the regular Morimoto Soba Ale years ago, even before knowing about the magical, brilliant chef's work from the Iron Chef America TV series. This is a darker, more potent, diverse flavor panel, quite worthy of the man whose name it bears.

Color is very dark brownish-amber (the regular Soba Ale quite golden), the head rocky and beige. It smells of sweet breads. First taste is tart transitioning very quickly into smooth, yummy soba flavors of the more remarkable alternative grain style. It has a rewarding dark nut flavor laced with spritely almond subthemes, earthy but never harsh, as smooth as a telescope mirror, and as dominating-elegant as a 10th degree black belt's master class. Chef Masaharu Morimoto would not have given his name to this label or the others without meeting his strict standards not only for superb flavor and quality but having his own brand of unique originality; something not done before but not sacrificing anything for the novelty of it. His new is always as good or better than the finest of "old". This is truly what a World Champion Beer should taste like - drinkable to

a 9th bottle, mind-blowing, flavorful without pummeling you with malty and hoppy sledgehammers, dry not missing sweet, enchanting strata of flavors, and all around perfection. I'd love a dipping or sushi sauce made from this reduced with honey. Better, stage an Our Gang/Little Rascals movie night at your house, serve this, and see if anyone gets the "black buckwheat" reference. The botanist in me also wants to be certain you know that buckwheat is not a grain, despite the name, but a fruit not in the big Grass Family but having a similar function. The latin name is Fagopyrum...have fun with that too.

Schierlinger Roggen Rye (Obergarig Hefetrub)

RATING: 4.5

BREWBASE AWARD: BEST RYE BEER 1996

Bavaria, Germany

This is a BAVARIAN RYE BEER. We were at one time putting it under the wheats in our database for convenience as the yeasty cloud and flavor are similar. If anyone knows what 'obergarig' means (upper something?) please enlighten us. Until then we'll assume top-fermenting (?). 'Hefetrub' roughly means muddy yeast but it is only slightly so. Flavor is fruity with apple notes like any mild white or weisse beer but there is a sharper spice quality and a firm dryness. Mr. Jackson notes the claim of "first rye beer in 500 years" would have to ignore the Finnish rye-based Sahti brew (Pocket Guide 1991: 60). The color is reddish amber and far redder than any DUNKEL WEISSE. It is a valued novelty but for all practical purposes 'just a wheat with a dry bite'.



Shmaltz Hebrew R.I.P.A. (Rye Double India Pale Ale) on Rye

RATING: 5.0

Sarasota Springs, New York

Paying \$11.99 (August 2010) for a single 22 ounce of any beer had better lead to some burning bush class revelations with all the miracles and fanfare possible from a liquid libation. Unlike their Lenny's Bittersweet RIPA, 6 Year Sazerac rye whiskey barrels were used to take this very complex recipe to 10% ABV and matching sophistication of flavors. Ten different malts, including some rye-based one were added to seven different hops, three of which were involved in dry-hopping later. It pours a nice bright amber, the head very deep at first, intermediate between beige and light tan. The nose is a stern blend of hops and fresh ryebread fresh from the bakery. Wow and superwow for aroma. All those flavors combine to make something of a sweet broth formed of rye flavors and malts, supported in the mid to late notes but zingy, spicy hops; of this in turn mellowed by the kind of oaky-whiskey finish you only get in these aged, rare beers. It would probably undrinkable and common-barleywine abusive if not aged as nicely as a it is. The refinement here is remarkable and everyone here was impressed beyond measure. We're delighted and shocked and wondering why we did not have aged brews from the US this noble 10 years ago. This is a pinnacle of American brewing, worth even more than charged, so above the fray you have to drink it long and lovingly to know. This is one of the most interesting beers I've discovered

in a year or two, endlessly revealing and all of those surprise notes better than the last.

Brewbase Fives



Sierra Nevada Ruthless Rye IPA (2012)

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

With all their post-2010 experimentation in fresh-hopping, locally-vined hops, organic, and more exotic premium recipes, it's nearly about time the dude from Chico went to novel grains. The familiar, detailed, and ornate SN label is manifest here in a lovely medium blue, tan, cream, and black set of complimentary colors. They always exude class. Citrus hops blend with the peppery nature of rye to good effect. The full-cone hops are IPA strong, making this a member of two major beer categories. The 6.6% fluid flows rich gold, tending to amber in a dank room, the head ivory and lasting well. The rye and hops are potent, offset well by just the right margin of sweetness to temper and even out their rugged assault on the oral buds. Well-judged is a term nearly the default for anything from this legendary American firm. The Schmalz formula above was slightly better and perhaps not by chance also an IPA. The Schmalz gets their edge from barrel-aging and 7 varieties of hops. Time for an SN, ultra-premium to match those specs? They can't abide New Yorkers beatin' 'em now!?!

Sprecher Shakparo Gluten Free

RATING: 1.5

Glendale, Wisconsin

Despite the Teutonic-like name and font, this is a Wisconsin beer made with sorghum and millet in a suitably pale yellow Pils-like tone. Our first sip was horrible, an insipid thing of strange flavors and not the best of the two chosen grains by any means. It gets worse and only a letter better when we go several minutes without sipping any of it altogether. If this was the only beer our bodies could tolerate we'd rather sip generic grape soda augmented with generic, once-distilled vodka from a jug as big as our garage and some nips of good anti-freeze for color. If Bud is flavorless and Coors even more weak and subtle, this stuff is strong in a bad, beer-is-evil way. AA could pass this out and not a recipient would sip it for more than 1.3 seconds with no one watching. I'd say dilute it down 20:1 and hope something thinks it's a light, "clean" beer. Panelists should not be quoted in these instances suffice to say the words undrinkable, hideous, "so bad I nearly spit it out on my good table" and "is Shakparo (with the label's silhouettes of African creatures) another name for wildebeest pee?". One of the worst brews, alternative or not, in our experience at 1550+ labels.

Brewbase Fives



Thurn und Taris Roggen (Rye)

RATING: 5.0

AWARD: BEST RYE BEER 1997

Regensburg

This RYE ALE or ROGGEN beer is dark amber with a persistent cream colored head. It has a rich aroma typical of

rye beers and as you wheat beer lovers know these are wonderfully flavorful beverages - especially with the rich Hefe or yeasty-cloudy quality of this one. It is extremely rich and flavorful perhaps on the order of a Maisel's Hefe-Weizen but does not seem to have as much lace as many German wheats. It ranks ahead of Schierlinger (our former BEST RYE in the database) with a superior depth and sophistication. There is absolutely nothing to fault with this fine product and some of us acquired half liter bottles as cheaply as \$2.99. Label collectors note some nice artwork here - an old-fashioned carriage in a rye field below a crest dating from 1490. Must try!

STOUT

The relationship between stout and porter styles is curious and one should refer to our notes there contrasting them.

Abita Jockamo Stout

3.5
Abita Springs LA

Color is very dark brown. Flavor is rather thin for a stout and instead it favors that sweet, drinkable side of the stout classification. Caramel malts (though not an over abundance to be sure) are emphasized and a hint of hops comes out in the finish or sometimes earlier. Like many of Abita's products it is often tame and aimed at a more timid beer experimenter than an avid beer taster.

Allagash Black Belgian Style Stout

RATING: 3.0
Portland, Maine

While I might have lumped this with the dark Belgian ales, the merger of Belgian Ale and Stout is technically a new and curious class. The overall approach is Imperial Stout, the more potent or Double Stout type. The hue is nearly opaque brown but I see faint glints of red against two compact fluorescent in my desk's 30 in. wide Tiffany Pink Daffodil replica. The head is light brown, enduring well, and the aroma about average for a regular stout. At 7.5% ABV this is not your Uncle Trevor's stout recalled from his days in Belfast. It has both wheat and oats in the recipe along with Belgian dark candi and a Belgian yeast strain.

It is by no means a stronger Belgian Brown for it has no spice, yeast, fruit, or sweet malt. I'm assured by beer nuts greater than myself that "Belgian Stout" is neither a true nor recognized style though Hercule Stout might come to define it someday, somewhere. Ommegang Chocolate Indulgence Ale is another candidate for standard. High ABV does not a style make and so I'm still wary of this claim whether from Maine or across the pond. This stuff has malty-tart overdose to an extreme but I do not find it complex, layered, or any of those important things that differentiate average stouts from the legends. I do not need an elevated ethanol buzz to get off for I can easily consume beverages in any combination to get me to nirvana at any point in time and for said amounts of plastic money. Perhaps I am unimpressed for there is nothing here to distinguish this except big alkies boosting; the performance of grace notes (which might have been Belgian spices or fruit esters or yeasty charms) are silent. Stouts to me are comforting, slow-sipping, easy-swallerin', blessedly warm, and softly hedonistic to the hilt. If you dare to add the phrase "Belgian-style" you better be dripping with Old Country, brilliant execution to the very last drop. High ABV without anything more going on is worthless as sub-category in my opinion. If Ethanol gets in the way of the style's traditional mellowing approach to liquid life - do cut it down to a balanced and reasonable dose! Try to thrill us will ya' and not load your website with hollow hype; undelivered in the real beverage. And please give us something special and memorable that a pricey bottle deserves. A mid-rate stout boosted to 7.5% is not worth \$14.00 in this decade or the next. I don't like to be hoodwinked and screwed over and I felt it was a \$6.99 750ml at best. Lesson learned. Try it if you're rich and don't care about money or being stoutly micro-raped.

Brewbase Fives



Anderson Valley Barney Flats Oatmeal Stout

Rating: 5.0

Mendocino, California

This is perhaps the most praised product from AV's Mendocino house of wonder- ful beer. Color is similar to Deep Enders Dark Porter but more opaque. Like most oatmeal stouts it is smooth and rather sweet. Pale, carmel, and choco- late malted barleys were employed for this effect. The finish is more herbal and hoppy than AV Porter. This is one of the finest American dark beers to be bottled and marketed. It is not easy to find in many Eastern cities. One of the best stouts in our archives.

Atwater VJ Black Imperial Stout

Rating: 4.5

Detroit, Michigan

The pour is dark brown, nearly opaque, the head light tan, having a mid-meter nose of mellow malt. The malts are tart on first presentation and stupendously infused with toffee, luscious at times. Panelists here said "simply brilliant...lovely...potent and candy-like in good ways" and "very informative...slight harsh finish at times". We think it should be aged to get it to new, very lofty places.

Brewbase Fives



Avery The Czar Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

This big stout is brewed with English yeast and German Halltertau hops, giving a dark blackish-brown color that lets just a smidge of light through. You get a thin ray of red light through the inky darkness. The head is surprising pale, cream, large-bubbled and short-lived for me. This is a very fascinating stout, loaded immediately with fruit notes like a cornicopia made of malt. Wow! Must be an ample amount of UK yeast? The hops spicing is very nice, balanced with precision or should I say....artfully. Magnum hops also round out the recipe as do two-row, black, cocholate, carafa 111, cara 8, cara 45, and honey malts. It's a whopping 11.7% ABV and it's nicely disguised until the finish's final chomp. Early on it could pass for 7%. 60 IBU's are notable too. It is one of the smoothest sipping 11% beers on the planet, very well developed as is and cellerable for even more beauty. The 2003 Gold at the US Beer Tasting Championships went to this label. There are faint passages of anise, resin, molasses, currants, and caramel throughout the presentation. Some friends felt it overpowering but some of them are used to big beer flavor or ethanol. Those of us who suckle malt and Etoh like mother's milk will have a far more impressive evaluation. This stuff will put hair on your chest and you'll enjoy the sophisticated, fruity, diverse notes in the process.

Aviator BlackMamba Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 4.0

Fuqay-Varina, North Carolina

When I first heard about Aviator BlackMamba I thought of the movie Snakes on Planes. This 6.3% brew is full of dark roasted malts and a 2-row malt, smoothed out by oatmeal and hints of dry, slightly mono-dimensional chocolate. There is a nice balance between heavy oatmeal recipes and a very accessible, lighter formula. These are frankly big jugs of good juice with average to slightly better than average satisfaction - affordable mass quantities go a long way to making one happy. They did us a time or four. We still find all the jugs so four is our best guess. Presentation aside (and this firm really excels in the local, fresh big jug and a sub-preppy taproom market), this would not be a big winner in pricey little bottles with or without a dancing, cool black snake with glowing red eyes hovering ominously over the mineral springs which are conveniently bulging with bags of oatmeal and hops. Nice beer which served a role on one low budget night but if one is pursuing perfection...go elsewhere. By the way, if any Aviator dudes or dudettes ever read this, a name like Black Mamba gives one the opportunity to give this bottled Dendroapsis polylepis a real BITE of perhaps ginger, chipotle smoked peppers, or some locally grown potent (and legal) herb; maybe all three in moderation. I'm guessing a few F-V farmers would gladly help sell you some delightful venom.



Bell's Special Double Cream Stout

RATING: 5.0

Comstock, Michigan

Most of the time when I'm buying a gourmet product with "double cream" it would be some kind of Brie or otherwise odoriferous Euro-cheese wrapped in white wax or wood or braided crap. Here is stout claiming to be extra creamy we think or would that be imperial, czar-worthy creamy? Ten different malts were used. That sounds cool even if perhaps needless. The words sweet, strong, roasty, and soft appear on this artistic label that provides the silhouette of pretty much any piece of shrubby along the highway - maybe a touch more rugged than some ragged bushes. Cream, brown, and black intensifies the odd design. Alcohol is 6.1% and the price for this one 12 oz. bottle was a whopping \$12.49 at Total Wine (January 2013). Now by this point this here better be some damn creamy, roasty stout.

A buck an ounce? Really Bell dudes? The pour is very dark reddish-brown, the head a very dark tan and tall. First sip is quite mellow and then the plethora of infinite complex malts come to the foreground, the finish brothymalty and dry, still very rich and stratified. There is enough sweetness early on to make it effective overall. I like this brew best warmed down a bit to 45-50 F. or even less. Very cold it proves harsher and too simple. Immediately the depth and substantial foundation of malts proved to make this a 5-bottler with no doubt on anyone's part. Refined power and subtle strength are the nature of elite experiences whether they be beer, cheese, CEOs, automobiles, or jet fighters. As to the claimed double creaminess we mostly agree and found these malts rich without trampling on the buds. Worth the big price? No question. These yummy malts are layered or as one panelist said "expertly staged" to please the most experienced stout lover. It is something like genius barley choreography and we are firmly impressed. Today our taste buds danced for joy. Encore!

Big Hole Montana Russian Imperial Stout

RATING: 3.5

This dark brown stout has a strong punch of both malt and alcohol though perhaps not in the refined way one would hope for. There are strong roasted and molasses flavors and rich herbal notes that are very hard to characterize. They may be at once pleasant and yet sometimes disagreeable. This is therefore an interesting beer to taste test if one can get a sample.

Big Rock Flying Buffalo Oatmeal Stout u ds 4.0 1018 MI Color is blackish brown with a big tan head of some size. Flavor is quite strong and favoring the malt side with sweet carmel to the forefront. A floral hopping comes

out though one does not have the total balance that the standards have. And as a warning: if you do start seeing flying buffalos it's time to call and get some help.



Boulder Obovoid Oak-aged Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

Boulder Beer Company's latest oak-aged stout is apparently named for obovoid (like an upside down eggshape) asteroids - apparently for it is as dark as deep space. From their LG or Looking Glass Series, this item is positively blackish-brown even with my 24 LEDs trying to look through it. The head is massive, lasting, and root-beer float brown. Flavor is mellow on first sip, the finish a bittersweet chocolate feast of the highest order. As you approach consumption of a full bomber, licorice notes come to prominence. The nips of hops appears at mid passage in later sips, this given it what might be called a silky zip. It is finer than their long-famous Boulder Stout, mostly for the added strength and oak-mellowing. If you think you stouts should have enough hops to make them like a real ale or dark hoppy lager, this would be a very choice for your next session. Black and choco malts conspire with the hops and oak to make a truly remarkable, primo stout. One of the best American stouts to come on the scene in 2010.



Boulder Stout

RATING: 5.0

Boulder, Colorado

This Colorado classic has found its way to the East and gives a wonderfully complex and satisfying malt elegance. In our experience you may have to look hard for this. It is a worthy comparison to any Anchor or Sierra Nevada dark beer.

Boundary Bay Oatmeal Stout u ds 4.0 1019 WA This near black stout is intensely malted and carries a strong hop bitterness. You get smoke flavor and bitter hops in one big dose that not all find so appealing. It is certainly not as sweet as the name may imply either. You are likely to either love it or leave it alone forever. Oh yes, it also has a rocky head (bad pun alert).

Breckenridge Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado\Breckenridge, Colorado\Dallas, Texas\Buffalo, New York

There are just so many fine stouts made in this country one hardly knows where to begin. This one is deep brown with one of the darker heads made on the entire continent. That advertised rich aroma, chocolate notes, sweet malty nature, and smoothness are all there. It will satisfy and some of our tasters gave it that illusive perfect bottles. Others did not and it seems mainly because it is competent and not really startling enough; sort of Honda of the stout world. It won't fail you but then it will not knock your socks off either. A few stout

authorities (pun very true) felt a balance of hops was the main reason for lack of a deeper sophistication. Everyone wanted more.



BrewDog Paradox McAllan Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

Having loved the Paradox Isle of Arran product, we had high hopes for this small bottle of casked juice. McAllan sherry casks are used to produce this 10% ABV nectar that flows in a nearly opaque cherry-brown with a densely foamed tan head. Faint nose of mixed liquors and malt. Initially you feel it is mild stout but then the rivers roll and the clouds rumble with malts, nice hops, and burnt-oak flavors coming down like a flood after raining cats and dogs. The finish is dry, yielding to scrumptuous, unspeakable sipping glory to say the least. Words fail. Rarely has a stout been this smooth and deep without being a sugar milt stout. This has less spice than the Isle or Arran but is an equally fine product and worthy of the same awards. It is one of the best stouts I know, aged or not. I frankly they find ever empty cask in Scotland, call it something cute, and send the mini bottles over here. I for one will buy as many as they can name.

Brock's Extra Stout

RATING: 4.5

Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

Niagara Falls Brewing of Ontario stunned us with their Gritstone Ale so this stout arrived with high expectations. Color is solidly opaque brown and the head is the amongst the darkest known to us. The early flavor elements are traditional and strong stuff with all the right effects on our senses. The finish is never sweet but has a dry bitterness. Given a go against Sierra Nevada Stout you'll find the California product stronger and more overpower- ing. Ditto for Guinness. Brock's fits the DRY STOUT or IRISH STOUT group which Guinness owns as the industry standard. Reviewers here noted "the finish lacks a certain complexity that is not to be confused with strength or density" and "very enjoyable...no complaints except for availability". Mixed reviews.

Casey's Smooth Stout

RATING: 4.5

Waterford/Faversham Kent, England

Brewed by Shepherd Neame for Casey's of Waterford this stout is a not quite opaque reddish-brown with a lasting tan head. It proves rather dry and is remarkably complete in flavor elements. One finds both good ale fruit flavors plus full malt potency. The finish has echoes of chocolate that are quite refined. While full enough for most fans it reminded others of an ALE PORTER or DARK BROWN ALE. It was indeed very smooth and

rewarding as advertised. Reviewers noted 'superficially rather moderate but a diversity of quality flavors quickly present themselves'. Another wrote 'not as rich as I demand in a DRY STOUT but as BROWN ALE it would rate quite high in my opinion'. The \$8.00 or higher price tag was not a positive point for modern value.

Cooper's Best Extra Stout

RATING: 5.0

Leabrook, Australia

Award: BEST STOUT FALL 1994

Leabrook From Copper's of Leabrook South Australia comes a very superb stout that is extremely opaque brown with a dark head and modest carbonation. It is much the equal of Sheaf Stout and even Grant's Perfect Porter. It is rich with chocolate and roasted malt quality by the truck load. At \$8.50 a six it is and should be superior to Guinness Extra Stout. It really has no flaws and is one of finest dark beers you can buy when and if it can be found. Top fermentation together with bottle fermentation is an uncommon combination of methods that shows in the finished product. One reviewer mentioned the large bubbly head as a tiny distraction - many stouts are more finely foamy. You find real depth, graceful malt power, and a balanced semi-dry finish.

Dragon Stout

RATING: 4.0

Kingston, Jamaica

Desnoes & Geddes Ltd. of Jamaica produce this fine stout that has a brown head of some duration and dark reddish-brown color. It starts a bit sweet but soon reveals it's mellow molasses themes. The finish is never tart but is always smooth and syrup-filled. At about \$7.00 for 6 bottles it was nicely priced compared to British stouts. While it lacks some complexity it is absolutely enjoyable and appealing as a moderately full SWEET STOUT.

The Duck-Rabbit Milk Stout

RATING: 4.0

Farmville, North Carolina

The "Dark Beer Specialists" from eastern NC produce this very dark brown brew with a foamy cream head of good duration. The smooth milk sugars are used to good advantage and the malting is full and pleasant. There's a nice fullness of flavor but not as complex as it will be in many other bottles reviewed here. It's neither offends nor impresses and is "microbrew nominal" if you will. There are nice chocolate, coffee, and even almond notes throughout but one is never bowled away at any point. The finish is dry with a bit of hops, not much, but occasionally with off, awkward notes; the late only occasionally noticeable when near room temp. I suspect it was bred and raised from the beginning to be smooth above all things and that reduces the chances to for hoppy insurgencies and fuller malt finishes. The sweetness level is nicely chosen for my taste at least. The malts are too earthy, perhaps lactose residuals as well, for some tastes. My favorite stout test is to sip a bit and see if my brain and body want more. They did and points were earned. Still it's not yet "spot on" or polished as they may reach in coming years. I think they ought to sit down with a panel of local stout-o-philes who have many gallons of the delicious inky brew under their bulging belts - and take all the little points down. It's a very nice recipe but fine-tuning will take careful work.

[Brasserie] Dupont Monk's Stout

RATING: 4.0

Tourpes, Belgium

The thick, green, Champagne-corked bottles suggest a trippel or brown Belgian ale at first appearance. Then the fat, thick word STOUT hit's your eye and soon your brain's Department of Disbelief. This recipe is from Sylvia Rosier in the 1950's and is now named for the monks who apparently never did nor now make it. Maybe Sylvia was a monk. One hears odd things about abbeys these days. ABV is 5.25% and the head dark tan and bubbly. Monk's Stout is very dark in the pour, the overall flavors a Belgian brown augmented with sharp hop notes and a thrust of dark, bitter coffee. It is technically stoutoid but the low ethanol and high-hops approach is not overly convincing. Carbonation is high to the point of being annoying a few sips in. It will present a bit thin for stout experts and some said it had more porter traits than anything else. The stout mouthfeel and comfort at nor there no matter what their declared substyle or goal. The last time I acquired something from Brasserie Dupont I think it was a cute pink thing at Victoria's Secret with spandex cups. These cups are less satisfying and full and

I'll end this terrible pun here. Well-rounded, ebony-toned, silky, uplifting, peach tending towards melon, and nicely shaped...sorry...basically an ample milk stout. To save the big price point perhaps it should be marketed in cans or jugs.

Eel River Raven's Eye Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Scotia, California

A strong, USDA-certified organic stout is a very rare thing but I suspect we'll get more of these in coming decades; along with stouts certified not to be tested of stray kittens or dumb blonde teen models. It's 9.5% ABV and I like that in stout as much as I like dark color and malts. It's just the other side of opaque in the pour, mixed beige and brown in the head, a nose lavish with tart and rich malty notes. There's a little sweetness early for pleasant but the finish is dry and with the high ABV thingy going down your throat. In my silly head I see a river writhing with long eels of several species known to me with iridescent ravens flying low over the water and occasionally diving to barely handle a long slippery creature before taking it back to the church steeple. Occasionally two large birds work together to snare a thick green moray, each carrying one end back to the house of worship like an rebellious, thick banner. Their lowly cousins, the crows, sit outside the church, occasionally squabbling over bits of eel flesh that thump down on the lawn with some regularity during the day.

This dandy stout has a very special, not ordinary balance of hops and malt. It is not overly tart like many porter-stouts that are sold under the imperial tag these days. The malt is warming to be sure, beautifully stratified, notes varying and shifting with an entertaining way about it. This dark brew is overflowing in goodness, malty variability, and that should be enough for most of us. The finish is a bit simple by the time the bottle is drained. The ethanol is there but balanced and not always intrusive; sometimes not with every sip and not a flaw for my armored tube. There are finer stouts but some of the greats are not always as interesting in the final analysis. Is the organic thing a ploy? Sure! and why not? That element is neither a pass, tastebud condom, nor an affirmative action point booster. Very competent, a good fit, and it happens to be dark and fun; and no equally qualified blonde ales from Alabama lost their jobs as a result. THUMP...yes! Fresh eel tartare for everyone!

Epic 825 State Stout (Elevated Series, Release #8)

RATING: 4.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

The 5.7% ABV tag tells me this is more about Utah and low-ABV-region sales than being truly elevated and brave. Not sure if I was put off or refreshed by their admonition to visit their website for a description of this label and the other variations. No sermons, no detailed analysis or list of ingredients, no long lofty monologues painted on with 25-dollar words. Just see their website. By the way, hit the back button at your own risk - you'll be rompted to re-enter our age every single time to qualify for re-entry. The web page classifies it as an Oatmeal Stout with "roast chocolate, toffee, mocha, coffee, brunt [sic] marshmallow, and roasted nuts or combinations thereof". We got the brunt of the abusive marshmallow though I assumed they intended it be burnt or toasty. "No specialty natural or other flavorings are added in our Elevated Series" but their Exponential series of stouts promises chocolate and real coffee. Real coffee? Wow! How could they afford that in the deluxe line and not in this one. What is that another half a cent per bottle? Their previous variants, Release #7 (January 20, 2011) and Release #6 (December 6, 2010), are surprisingly of slightly different formulae. Curiously, Release #8 is not yet described in comparison to the earlier ones!

It pours very dark root beer brown with red tints under high LED lamps. The tan head is medium duration, rough, and ridged. Nose is malty, a bit different than usual. First not is a medium-strength malty broth which would have benefited from that rare, illusive thing called "real coffee". It fades into moderate to weak hop notes and a finish ranging from distasteful and weak to "mellow malt"; the later quote from our team being far too polite. This is clearly an underpowered stout which holds much back, presumably to elevate their exponential series. So far, we are apt to think their regular and elevated tiers are best left for dead and focus on quality, real stouts and ales. Remember the Cadillac Cimarron fashioned so lovingly from an ordinary Chevy Cavalier body, adding tiny leather seats and lots of chrome? This is a non-stout stout and pretty much a Chevy pretending to be very much more. Speak panel: "Weak as water...how can expect this crap to sell" and "this is pretty label stout marketing to it's most disappointing and scary extreme...they don't deserve to make one nickel from this tasteless, bland stout; a real waste of a good brown bottle". Also "many ordinary brown ales are stronger and

more mannered...they need to elevate the amount of ingredients and brewing skill by about 80 stories".

Flying Dog Pearl Necklace Oyster Stout

RATING: 4.5

Frederick, Maryland

This 5.5% brew benefits the Chesapeake Bay Oyster Restoration project because they really do use real (Rappahannock River) oysters in this brew. Oddly enough, this is not a rare or surprisingly ingredient if you know stout history. Once you get beyond the mangy dog on the cover trying to look like a classy dame in a pearl necklace, the ultra-dark brown brew comes to your attention, carrying a faint reddish afterglow under strong lamps. The head is rich tan, last, and lumpy. Like the other oyster stouts reviewed here, there is surely something different about them, perhaps just a bit more earthy, oddly nuanced, and even vegetal - never fishy or shellfishy at all. The real oyster stout (and some only carry the name and not the real ingredient) exude class for they are faintly brothy like a warming, comforting soup but not like a beef broth mind you. Herbs and fruits and yes even shellfish will make ales and lagers more substantial, multi-dimensional, and in the final balance - richer and more complex. This is a very delightful product and the word comforting comes back to mind as the best one to describe it. Shell out some clams (sorry, lousy pun) for this one. Aw shucks...just slurp it all down.

Flying Fish Exit 13 Chocolate Stout

RATING: 4.5

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

These \$9.50 bottle-conditioned bombers named for the famous NJ Turnpike exits are a fine creations and superb values. This dark-as-night beer is made with Irish ale yeast and Pacific Northwest hops, giving a somber, warm, but occasionally sharp set of citrus notes. There is some underlying fruit with enough sips - and by "enough" I do not mean a tiny Solo cup at some sticky, over-sold beer festival. You need a good portion of a bottle if not more to understand beers and their truly alluring, chemical delicacies.

Fort Collins Chocolate Stout

RATING: 4.5

Fort Collins, Colorado

Their goal is a "velvety, smooth mouthfeel and impeccable flavor" and this super-opaque product matches the marketing for once. Roasted and choco malts are blends with a bit of hops bitterness for a nice product that is very accessible but refined enough for the experienced beer lover. They offer a Double Chocolate Stout in larger bottles and I've yet to get that but hope to. This product is gratifying enough, pacifying even, and good for slow sipping on a slow afternoon on a day off from work. (Sip a bottle of this some Monday and think of your co-workers suffering and laboring away while you watch a House MD marathon and later drift off the sleep about 3pm). It warms and charms without much detail or attention-getting notes and in a stout that is a good thing. You get malt supremacy, friendly delivery at all times, little sugar, and a dry finish.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



Founder's Breakfast Stout

RATING: 5.0

Grand Rapids, Michigan

He's the "liquid lunch" for early in the day. Their argument is sensible. It has oatmeal, chocolate, sweetness, and coffee. I even detected a big of bacony smoke. And no cholesterol. Vegetarian too. The label of a cute lad in a bib taking down his morning meal from a bowl. It's a curious convergence of ideas for some years ago I did pour a bit of Guinness Stout into some oatmeal and found myself better for the experience. (Note to self: stout-battered, country-fried chicken biscuits with Heizen-weizen white gravy. And for the record, our southern US country-fried everything with peppery white gravy is really a version of German Wiener Schnitzel made by immigrants in Texas with the more readily cube steak, pork, and chicken of their new home). It pours as dark and opaque as any brew on the planet, the head very brown and enduring. It's satiny malt overload, oatmeal doing very nicely here.

They actually used bitter and sweet imported chocolate; the real mud and not the malt of the same name. Sumatra and Kona coffee, two of the finest gourmet regionals, are added too. It comes down to 8.5% ABV and 25 IBU with unfiltered presentation. It's clearly of the double or Imperial variety of strong stout but despite the extra flavorings and high ABV, it's easy on the mouth. Their effort with all the real cacao products and coffee is evident and should be a lesson to other brewers who go cheaper and quicker in their premium stout offerings. It's a clearly brilliant, ambrosial presentation of semi-sweet "coffee beer" but not a pathetically sugared-up, Star Bucksian cup of overpriced crap. Breakfast Stout delivers a wonderfully intricate yet potent beverage, as serious and honest as any stout from any land at any time in my memory. This is my favorite, newly tried American Stout for 2008-2009 and I'm delighted to become acquainted with another fine brewery whose work I will follow and buy at every occasion. Those of you have been cheatin' and going generic recipe on your premium stout had better try this label before bringing it on - because you're going to be "brought hard" to this bench to view it's hefty mark. If I could melt a couple of No-Doz pills in it each morning I'd never drink regular coffee again - then again the 8.5% ABV would make me too big a revenue source for Highway Patrolman Buzzcut and his new silver Hemi Charger.

Brewbase Fives



Great Divide Pak Age Yeti Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Denver, Colorado

This \$8.99 bottle is 650ml, labeled "massive" and "complex" with a silhouette of the Patterson film Bigfoot (or maybe her cousin Ms. Yeti) running across the frame. The ABV is 9.5% and thus above their regular Imperial Stout. It pours chocopaque and the head is one of the deepest brown shades known in the beer world. Nose is that of chilled chocolate ice cream when gotten straight from the store's cooler. My first impression was simply the world SUMPTUOUS. The ABV is apparent and they've certainly not taken the sweet or milk or oatmeal line to hide that. There's no crying with imperial stouts. They are big, brawny, massive, and yet remarking agile; fierce and friendly as the situation demands.

This brew reminds me of a reported Sasquatch sighting where a big hairy beast was pursuing a young deer in the woods. The human witnesses swear the deer leaped the ditch elegantly and with species typical grace. The fast-closing Bigfoot left just as gracefully and intercepted the prey mid-flight, ending up with it's snack in arm by the edge of the 10 foot bank. There's grace and there's also grace with absolute power and inevitable control. The flavors are rich of chocolate malts, very clear and surreal complexity, explosions of so many notes I can count them about as well as when listening to an unfamiliar Presto movement. While the ethanol can be jabbing and medicinal at times (this being a minor flaw to me), I do not find it terribly annoying or lingering, the layered flavors doing there job exchanging and stratifying glory upon glory. I am certain it benefits from the oak but this is not a whiskey or sherry type augmentation by any means. I think one would or should put some of these away for cellar aging - I am never no disciplined or patient but in theory that's a good idea.

Brewbase Fives



Green Man The Dweller Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Asheville, North Carolina

Their regular Stout is reviewed below and the was about decent quality but more about value - quantity for the buck. These thick, brown, capped bombers were an outstanding \$17.99 across the state in Raleigh (April 2012) - quite a different price point! Color is super-opaque with a medium-rich tan head of long duration. The nose is of sweet malt derivation. First sip is malt-drenched, slightly tart, and this leads to a mid passage complex, layered, and sweet in a few spots. Coffee and chocolate notes, much stronger of the later theme, some warming, yummy caramel malts reinforce the beauty of the whole, diverse, stratified formula. The 9.5% was very welcome as was this being Batch #1 from the 2012 offering. Hops are Old World in style, Magnum, Fuggle, and Golding. (and before the emails flow, let's establish Fuggles and Goldings as plurals or possessives of of proper names are not correct). It serves well a bit cold and still honors the more traditional lower ranges too. This dweller from their cellar was brought to green botanical life after a suitable interval and I believe they got it right. There is a very nice balance here although caramel sweetness are favored over dry hops and coffee. It has something for everyone and is a mile wider and deeper than any supermarket stout - including tubes from legendary G-word.

One of the very finest dark brews made in NC or the SE US for that matter, elite, expertly designed, and enlightened in the execution. It is rewarding to see a brewery mature as Green Man has from the growler to The Dweller. And just in time for big boys from Chico (and their legendary stout) coming to town...

Green Man Stout

RATING: 4.0

Asheville, North Carolina

The most famous dark beverage from Asheville NC is the Biltmore line of wines from the east coast's most visited winery. Green Man is seeking to uphold the city's great beverage tradition but without the \$2 billion mansion. While their Porter is a regular, year-round creation, their 6.5% Stout is an occasional or seasonal offering. Colored in the familiar ways, these gallon jugs of goodness are special value - notably because they do not carry the \$4 recycling fee of other jugs from NC breweries. It is competent and affordable, infused with black and caramel malts to mid-strong intensity. Hops support the finish, stronger the longer you consume. The quality is there but most importantly I feel the quantity is there. I'd rather have this jug than most of the \$13.99 sixpack stouts from the west coast. Moderate to high quality PLUS quantity and we folks in the SE US have a reason to support this and other Green Man labels.

Greenshields Stout u ds 4.5 646 Raleigh NC Out of the Old City Market in Raleigh North Carolina comes this dark stout which is opaque reddish-brown with a short-lived head but abundant carbon- ation. Curiously the package says to serve at 40-45 (50-55 is ideal by most stout experts) but perhaps that is just a leftover mistake from other labels. We tried both temps but the warmer was more aromatic and rewarding. The brew is nicely malty (as the color would predict) but there's a delightful, well brewed hop-based nip in the mid palate. 'It grabs your tongue' said one re- viewer. The finish was a bit 'ragged' to a few but others had no such com- plaint. Overall its a DRY STOUT but not as bitterly so as some IRISH STOUTS.

Even golden beer enthusiasts felt it was the best of their 4 labels tried.

Guinness Extra Stout i ds 4.0 147 BEST BEER SOLD IN CANS 1994

No flippin' way!!!! I can read the emails in my mind now. Let me explain. This is a review of bottled and canned beers only.

This was the first extra dark beer to be widely sold in recent years. It taught Americans about how good a dark mellow beer could be. One does still hear comments that this would make a better walnut deck stain. It lacks our highest rating as we feel Mackeson Triple Stout, Beck's Dark, and Grolsch Dark are a touch more smooth - less bitter. Super refined Whitbread Ale is another alternative. It is tops for mixing 50:50 with a gold lager.

HaandBryggeriet 'dark force' Double Extreme Imperial Wheat Stout

RATING: 3.5

Drammen, Norway

I do believe the consecutive words double, extreme, and imperial are fairly redundant in the beer and many other realms. What is not redundant or conventional here is a "wheat stout". Despite some some horrible Star Wars references on the label (read: real literature if you're a non-beer geek type) this 9 percenter is "as far as we know the only wheat stout in the universe. This is a true wheat beer made from mainly wheat malt and lots of dark roasted malts, our house wheat yeast, and plenty of both bittering and aroma hops". The wheat:barley ratio or wheat percentage is not published to our knowledge. We Goggled "wheat stout" (one must use double quotation marks on such searches) and other homebrew recipes for this stellar entity. We also found a wheat stout from Crown Wheat Stout from Sheffield, England but cannot personally vouch for it's wheat-cred despite some solid online reviews. There are other stouts with word "wheat" in them but authenticity and a high percentage are still unclear in all cases.

The dark bottle with a dank, blue, astrophysical panorama and a very black hand-print...I mean Haand-print...looks like something to be loaded on the thing mounted on the deck of a slealthy, blackout frigate. The visual pour is as dark as pitch during a lunar elipse and the fat, irregular head is more brown than any shade of tan. My old 1985 Buick Century which I tortured and nearly bound up after for 11,000 miles on one oil change produced a stream paler than this stuff. Does wheat matter? Yea or Nay on the Hay? It is malty and stout but it's

a good deal less intense on one level - more of a super-rich dark wheat but with malt overpowering most of the wheat flavors. It's a bit like a lavender-scented hydrogen bomb - it's less intense but in the final analysis not a big factor in one's consideration. There are differences and you'll need a laboratory to be sure of all of them. For humans at least, it is a solid, approachable stout but the wheat does nothing of substance - except to lighten it and give it some reserve. There is no wheat flavor to admire like a fine yeasty, dark German wheat. Some finish notes are a bit too tangy and ragged. This imperial wheat stout is a harmless ninja and toothless pit bull...perhaps of use to someone...oxymoronic in concept and ultimately useless. Still I would like them to try again and again and give us another go with more hefe-type yeast and wheat explosions. \Being a nerdy beer blender I have blended German hefe-weizen with stouts and porters and some of those odd lab creations would be good in this "wheat stout" category and surely finer than this effort.

Hoppin' Frog B.O.R.I.S. (Bodaceous Oatmeal Russian Imperial Stout) - The Crusher

RATING: 4.5

Akron, Ohio

Let's start with the most important fact about this brew: GABF Gold Medal Winner 2008 for Imperial Stout. With a 9.4% punch, 17 OG, and 60 IBU "The Crusher" (aka BORIS) is one potent item. It pours as dark as anything in the style and the head too will contend for darkest in the beer world. Malt is so thick it will saturate your tastebuds from the first second. The finish is a mix of medium hops and ethanol bite. This "grand-daddy of all stout styles" does not disappoint. It warms wonderfully and with the ethanol nicely disguised - unless you chug half a 22 oz. bottle for some unknown reason. (I tried - it's a new technique I perfected in college and surprising it works well to quickly saturate the buds and get to an evaluation point). Flavor elements are dominated by dry malt, coffee for certain, light chocolate noticeable in time, faint licorice, and the finish very dry. It is too bitter for one stout expert I consulted though admired the overall craftsmanship. It is not so sweet the "oatmeal" word in that name normally implies. There are also dark fruit esters there but I cannot name a single pome species with any confidence. Perhaps it's the mystical Malaysian Malt Berry which just combines coffee, licorice, and cocoa. Wasn't that handy? If you like your stouts very rigorous, tall in flavor, and very dry, this will please.



Humes Steep Canyon Stout

RATING: 5.0

Glen Ellen, California

In 1996 Brewbase voted it our BEST AMERICAN STOUT SPRING. When was the last time you had a 100% organic, bottle-conditioned stout? We've not had the honor before. Color is very opaque brown and due to the krausening and bottle conditioning it has the deepest head you could want. As the light-blocking color would suggest it is very rich and deep in malt flavors. The finish is crisp and dry - slightly bitter but a good bitter. Reviewers commented on its "highest possible quality in flavor and presentation...surely one of the finest dry stouts from this country" and "truly yummy dark beer...a never-ending feast of malt with a head that lasts all night". Highly recommended for all stout lover even if the organic ingredients aren't a priority.

JBW 77 Old World Russian Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

The name of this stuff is obscure, legally defined as "JBW 77 Unit 1 Kessock Workshops". The signed label speaks of James Watt and Martin Dickie so we assume JBW 17 is Mr. Watt in some form. They carefully brewed it

to the old, traditional 8.2 percentage which was selected to avoid freezing during the voyage between the Baltic Sea and Moscow. The "opulent whirl of hops" is used to create a modern stout as a "fitting tribute with which to toast our own empire". Imperial is a big word for all your brewers out there. Use it wisely and be a Czar or go home. The color eats up the light and lets none pass. The head is dark tan and lasting. The flavor is decidedly smoked, not a Rauchbier really but with a piece of that theme to be sure. There are some higher-ethanol zips in the mid and later notes, hops bitterness also adding to this later nip as saturation of the tastebuds takes hold in about the second 10 ounces. It is surely as smooth as the Czarina's inner thighs and as silky as her young maid's even paler, younger posterior. The malt is intense but fairly monothematic and not complex. This is a curious decision for us. Do we grade this on the simple one or two malt basis of the traditional, ancient Ruskie thing or by the modern standard of multi-malt, micro-savvy, uber-complexity? We will say it is likely likely quite authentic but we have pledged to rate beer for what it is and not what it's called or supposed to be. Four bottles about does it well on both accounts.

Johnson's Authentic Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 4.5

Charlotte, North Carolina

So far we have found the Johnson Beer Company products a mixed lot - their Brown Ale being as intensely wonderful as their Pils was mediocre. Such are the hazards of a new firm. Happily this London-style stout falls on the good side of the ledger; not the first time a brewery had great darker beers and questionable paler ones. Color is dark reddish brown with a lasting tan head of some distinction. It is sweet, malty, brothy, smooth, rich, silky, and all those other adjectives a good stout possesses. It is perhaps not as complex as some others and we put that down to a central theme of malt with less of a hops presence to round it out. But oatmeal stouts are perhaps properly so mono-dimensional (sweet malt) so it would be a fact rather than a fault.

Lakefront Snake Chaser Irish Style Stout

RATING: 4.0

Milwaukee, WI

This \$12 sixpack (March 2009) is named for the legend about St. Patrick driving the (evil, Satanic) snakes out of Ireland. The label here looks more like Pope John Paul giving a severe reprimand to a Komoto Dragon but I get the point; wood carvings were this way back when. This brewery has been around since 1987 and they're apparently working one bottle at a time to restore the town's former reputation for actually flavored beer; something which lapsed, shall we say, from maybe 1950 to 1987, when American watery pseudo-Pil, faux-lager become their stock and trade in Milwaukee; Milwaukee's Best is their Worst, etc. It pours absolutely opaque brown and I kept holding it to a 300 watt bulb to prove otherwise. Head is foamy light brown, very durable. IT begins "porter tart" but ends with elegant, rich malts of smoother, more stout-like quality. As I normally do in recent years (experience helps with stout tastings), I try any new stout at at least three temps and more if possible. There are some different notes here which some people describe various as earthy, mineral-like, or acrid. I find these adding to the quality and not the reverse, chocolate notes vague but acidic coffee nice in the mid notes. It's very dry in the true Irish so if you want a sugar-malt bath try another style and not complain about this one being true. My fault it that's it's two notches thinner than the style demands. I can live with the tartish dryness and mineral notes.

Laughing Dog Dogfather Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.0

Ponderay, Idaho

The head is tanner than tan and the soup as opaque as a four mile deep mountain of coal. The malts are finely balanced, easily strong enough, supported in the finish with some hops zip. High marks for the parody poster-label of Dogfather is the Canine-American Godfather and those bullet holes splashed into the label. Flavor is very pleasant, highly sippable, and really the kind of premium stout more US micros should be making. While very good and enjoyable it does not stand out. I would think of it as a very perfect execution of a generic, traditional recipe - but lacking anything especially rich, notable, or "outside the box".

Left Hand Fade to Black Volume 1 Foreign Export Stout

RATING: 4.5

Longmont, Colorado

Here's a label for some hall of fame somewhere - there's never been a black and white beer label as snaring to the eye. But for the 300th time, it's really all about the fluid behind the glued paper. Head and color are stereotypes. This 8.5% stout sips with above average malt complexity for a US micro-stout, clearly a dry and hoppy product from recipe forward. There's enough comfort in the mid notes, prior to the dry-as-Gobi blast, to win one over on their brewing style. Hops are Magnum and US Goldings, developed to a nice balance. Malts are pale 2-row, roasted barley, balt malt, chocolate, cara-aroma, and malted wheat. If the "Foreign Export Stout" phrase is accurate, then I can see why they put their best dark foot forward. "Smooth as a Longmont debutant" one friend asked me write about this; I'll let you dream naughty ebony dreams from there on your own. The Left Hand website proclaims flavors of "licorice, espresso bean, molasses, and black cardamom that gives way to a feeling of self loathing, burnt opportunities, and smoked relationships". Now that's different - was their site hacked or are they being obtuse, clever, and like most microbrews love to be portrayed...a bit insane. "We're a bunch a crazy, long-haired dudes in vintage t-shirts with more money than we deserve and rogue, genius talent and a bottling machine". That's what three hundred of those sites present but Left Hand actually manages to deliver fluids worthy of the website. I just wish they'd change the Community Involvement page to read "we get people drunk on good beer and make them happy. Happy people will do the rest."

Lion Stout

RATING: 4.5

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka I exclaimed and then read the quote from beer guru Michael Jackson on the label which includes a mini-image of him. High marks for that. They claim five international gold medals on the neck labels too. My first reaction was the lovely, highly collectible lion's head cap - one of the best animal caps seen in years. This black-as-night brew is 8.0% ABV, aromatic and big-headed. It is all-get-out smoky and potent and yes I really do like that style of things. One bottle of this stuff would keep Hickory Farms going with flavoring for months. Still the smoke doesn't cover faults for there's enough chocolate and moderate roasted flavors to round it out. A little research shows they use Czech, Danish, and British malts, hops from Syria and an unnamed English yeast. The presentaton here is excellent and Guinness will not always show as well. Some reviewers thought it was a tad salty, having "soy sauce" notes even. I'm not certain of that but I do not roasted soybeans and roasted malt are going to have some chemistry in common. In the final analysis, I think one's rating (to me but 3.5 to others) comes down to whether you like your lion's roaring and loud or quiet and tame. Some folks think smoky malts is an overdone, crude style and I certainly don't agree with that. Excess is good in many categories in life and Stouts deserves of them. This one gets the because the smoke trails off and doesn't overwhelm the finish which is clean enough for the overall style. Excess + sophistication = real thrill. Now let me move on to my blonde Czech supermodel girlfriend and our no-holes-barred trip up the coast in my vintage Ferrari. (Okay...it's really a burrito combo TV dinner, more good labels of beer, a rusty Ford F-150 with 223K, no trip, and my divorced, chain-smoking neighbor who looks pretty darn super in her Daisy Dukes and black roots after the bottles hit the floor).

Brewbase Fives



Lost Coast Stout

RATING: 5.0

Eureka, California

This product of Eureka CA is made with American 2-row barley, northwest hops and ale yeast. Color is among the most opaque black and the head is persistantly dark brown. It is of the rich chocolate type of stout that bears taste-testing with North Coast and Anderson Valley stouts that come in similar bottles. It finishes very cleanly although if too warm it may take on some full herbal notes. It is wonderful and highly drinkable.

Brewbase Fives



Mackeson Triple Stout XXX

RATING: 5.0

London, England

Whitbread Co. of London also has a more stout version of their superior Whitbread Ale. Mackeson XXX is ABSOLUTELY opaque - even next to a strong light. The thin dark brown head matches a deep black chocolate fluid. While very potent is it not bitter nor crude. Its long lingering taste is crisp and always pleasant. It has an almost smoky transitional taste that gives way in time. Mackeson is the Port of beers with substance and real style. Here is a real, not as available as in the past it seems but a wonderful delight at all times.

Brewbase Fives



Marston's Oyster Stout

RATING: 5.0

Burton-on-Trend, England

In 1997 the Brewbase (then just a computer disk sold as shareware and from our humble PO Box in Raleigh) considered it the BEST BRITISH STOUT 1997. This ultra opaque brown beer is made by Marston, Thompson, and Evershed, one of the famous Burton Ale producers. It is not made with oysters and is named for its popularity with seafood meals in that part of Britain. (What better combination than beer and oysters to get a man (or woman) in gear!). It is wonderfully malt-ladden, rich, and exudes a true sophistication so rare in the style today. It is moderately sweet and as one reviewer put it 'absolute nectar of the Malt Gods'. A few reviewers prefer a

more fierce 'assault with malt' rendering of the style but all admitted the excellent craftsmanship evident in each lovely bottle. One gentlemen said 'this is one stout where the hops are wonderfully apparent and not masked over...'. A rewarding experience.

Mendocino Black Hawk Stout

RATING: 4.0

Hopland, California

This 'Special Edition' caps off the 15th year for this heralded brewery. We note their popular reputation although the bottled products we have rated so far do not always match their local acclaim. This dark beauty is totally opaque brown and has a tan head of average duration for the style. It is quite clearly assignable to the BITTER DRY STOUT GROUP but is far less rich and potent than a traditional IRISH STOUT. In short it is smoother for sipping though if one is not used to bitterish hops it could offend slightly. It bathes the tongue with nice maltiness but as we have already stated the hops portion of the flavoring is quite apparent. It is surely better sipping stout than your average dry or Irish style stout. A good food match would be essential.



Mendocino Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Saratoga Springs, New York

Medocino's Black Hawk Stout is legendary in many regions and is a regular staple in many grocery stores and beverage shops. I find it decent but not worthwhile unless none of 20 other finer choices can be had - and my neighborhood is blessed with one of those 400-beer shops on the corner so better is always an option save for five of snow which never happens in Raleigh. Maybe the odd hurricane hinders my prowls for a worldly stout. Now in their 25th year, the brewing is done far from Medocino Co. CA in a the frigid land of upstate NY. This potent 10% stout comes in 4 packs for \$10.39 (October 2010) and it was the large "10% alcohol" font that made me think I'd better it ASAP. Since I didn't have BrewBase on my nook with me, it might otherwise have been "yep, think I've had that years ago". An Imperial IPA was rolled out at this same time. The brew pours as dark as a coal soup during a total eclipse, the head detailed in texture, rich tan, and with a nose of very rich malts. Flavors are rich, the secondary notes popping up with Scottish Ale-style molasses and nip, the finish dry and full of liquid black licorice. Here is everything their Black Hawk is not and could be. The ethanol is not very obvious but after one bottle you do get clogged a tad on all the bitterness and dense flavors. Imperial anything is often best in small sips and one is often best not aiming for more than one bottle. This dark brew is spanking stiff, a force for good in the stout world, yet more proof than US micros have merit anywhere and everywhere. With two potent bottles left, I think they were put into service for blending with other styles, other 5 bottle grade brews in general, to make some special stuff. This is almost like a malt-licorice concentrate and one can apply such thick, mighty fluids for good in the brew blending arts.

There is one thing a brew is direct from the crafter and second being what it can be when combined. I also wonder if it can be aged and "put away". That is the third great thing a fine brew can become. I know this will make brewers cringe (should any of them care) but I sometimes use good stouts and porters to make weaker, wanting brews drinkable, especially when I have many bottles left of them. They serve a utility purpose, this mixed curious hybrids of stout, inspid Pils, and failed Belgian copies. My beer-loving friends are too wise to fall again for my odd pitchers of mingled styles, yielding commingled colors and some strange heads. Yet the results when tasted, tested, and recalibrated over and over make for some fine sipping. I should be hugely famous were I too be able to brew these hybrids from scratch, exact the first time without blending.

Mercury Clown Shoes Blaecorn Unidragon Russian Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.0

Ipswich, Massachusetts

Still now sure I get it - or care - but this name is a written blend of black dragon and unicorn as shown on the dark, ferocious label. It pours as dark as a dragon's lair with a short-lived cream head. This 12.5% powerhouse of a beast has an alive, brightness like some porters but the finish is more stout thick and full. There are rich malts, multi-dimensional refined ones blended to zippy, nippy hops which make it like a hoppy porter in fact. Not many Old World stouts are this overtly buzzed by ethanol and tangy hops. Reviewers here added "quite assertive for a stout....no easy, mellow sipper...in the final analysis a potent stout for the hops lover!" and "just when I thought it was smooth...the high alcohol level hits me and makes you uncomfortable...sent chills down my spine at one point - the good kind". This is a power-wielding beast to be sure, admirable, glorious at times and also out of control; not a domesticated, comforting stout by any means. I think it would do better with oak aging to round off and mellow the rough notes.

Miller Reserve Velvet Stout

RATING: 4.0

When I first tried this experimental "macro-brew" in 1994 from a massive brewery trying to be otherwise, I was impressed and saw a bit of potential. Worldclass? Not a chance. Decent? Yes. This fourth product in the 100% Barley Draft Series was a real surprise. A real honest stout from Miller? (Can Budweiser Cherry Lambic be far off?). The color is positively dark opaque with a very large head of light brown color. The proof is in the flavor which is on the medium side - hence velvet. It is no creamy Sam Smith or brothy Sheath Stout but surprisingly good taste for the greenbacks. Warm it to 50 degrees as your supermarket is likely to freeze out the taste.

Murphy's Irish Stout

RATING: 4.0

County Cork, Ireland

While Guinness is so much better known the 'other Irish stouts' (Murphy and Beamish) are well worth adding to any taste test. Like Guinness this comes in tall cans and claims a true draught pub taste - in this case the trademarked DRAUGHTFLOW SYSTEM. We liked the detailed chilling and pouring directions and the accurate warning that warmer cans may overflow. While Guinness can be overpowering and harsh (best if mixed to some of us) this product is far thinner. The nearly opaque brownness is there and also a dense head. Instead of being brothy or malty this stout is more crisp/weak/bright not unlike some German and American darks. It finishes very dry but not until one gets a dose of roasted smoked flavor. Respectable but not exciting. It is hard to justify the import price in the 2010's when a good US micro-stout will beat this all day and night.



The Musketeers Troubadour Obscura Mild Stout

RATING: 5.0

Ursel, Belgium

Other than the Belgian origin, the 8.2% rating, the rarely seen moniker "mild stout", and the curious Latin name obscura there is nothing to suggest this stout will be different. Roasted, chocolate, and spicy malts were selected to go into the plasti-corked, brown 750 millers. It pours dark amber-brown, about as pale as stouts get, and the head is solid tan and immense. Nose is rich and doppelbockish. First sips is smooth, the mid notes and finish being an overload of the best malt flavors on earth, toasty, roasty, and very real. As the flavors saturate by the 5th sip or so, some supporting hops of fine quality come into the picture. The entire palate is consoling, creamy with an edge, mild but never weak, all the spicy nips being lovebites, none too sharp, and above all else a true pleasure to sip long and lovingly. Reviewers here noted "a spicy and hoppier take on the familiar British classic...very rewarding, I'd buy it anytime, anyplace again" and "thirteen bucks [November 2010] set me back a

bit but an experience worth having more than once...diverse malts, fine hops in the finish, and a nice ensemble of flavors like nothing else in the stout category". It is one of those truly educational brews and a nice one to pick for a beer tasting session among friends, experts and otherwise.



Neptune Black Sea Stout

RATING: 5.0

Manhattan, New York

MOST LUSCIOUS DARK BEER AROMA 1996 Manhattan, New York, NY From Manhattan's Chelsea district comes this very opaque stout with a tan head of much size and long persistence. The aroma is one of the finest we've sniffed in some time - like an instant trip to Star Bucks on a windy day. Flavor does in fact overflow with coffee and light roasted smoke with a fairly dry finish. The aroma truly improves it and much of your room as well. It will easily hold it's own with dry stouts like Guinness or Murphy's though less potent than the former. It could easily be America's finest DRY STOUT as we offer so few micros in that form of stout; most being chocolate and sweet sorts. If you are a smoky beer lover the subtle smoke here will please you as well. It is highly refined sipping or dessert beer and UNQUESTIONABLY worth the \$8.99 tab.

New Holland Night Tripper™ Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Holland, Michigan USA

Typically dark, thick on the tongue with a suitably tan head and low carbonation, this offering from their High Gravity Series is a serious dark drink of malty quality. It is very, truly good, maybe even fun. One reviewer said "maybe memorable" quite tongue in cheek! The 10.8% ABV rating is notable and one large bottle will tank the average small dude. I admire it but don't love it in a way that might get me buying it over and over or for international guests. This is a curious formula to be sure because at mid-approach one gets some fruit, maybe faint raspberry notes.

New Holland The Poet Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 4.0

Holland, Michigan USA

The stark silhouette of a raven against the pale sky suggests Edgar Allan Poe but I'm guessing they could get clearance to name a brew for him or the bird in particular. I know that ravenbeer.com uses his the great poet's likeness on merchandise and "The Raven" name. The brew here is medium opaque brown, the head light tan, and lasting. You get a refined balance of malt with supporting hops in the finish though it ends clean and neat, never tart or rough. Of course, the cruelest thing that might be said of such a brew is "nevermore" and I would say this one gets two or three more tries though I'm not a convinced fan yet. It gets my attention and admiration but for only as long as it lasts in liquid form before me. And to get the obvious out of the way, it's not "weak and weary" either but is a mid strength stout of very good quality. The brew is refined enough to like but the marketing is a bit contrived and silly in the final analysis. It's a fine enough beer with dinner. Stouts are superb companions with peppery Fettuncini Alfredo and fresh blue crab sushi caught on tuesdays...actually I made that up. All beer styles are good with everything edible in fact. Go forth and eat well and swallow lots of suds. Then say something silly about why your chosen beer that night matches the thing you happened to have ordered...noting offhand with a faintly European accent that a "spicy Belgian double ale would be a VERY SOLID second choice".

Brewbase Fives



North Coast Old No. 38 Stout

RATING: 5.0

When I first tried this in 1993, it got my choice as the best American stout I'd taste in that year and perhaps ever. Choices are better and more refined now but this still holds up like a coastal cliff against the oceans of reviewer's blogging and pontificating. This superb Californian dark is very dark reddish-brown but not quite opaque. It is delightfully full of chocolate flavor and finishes semi-dry and very smooth. We find it every bit as appealing as top British stouts from Smith, Young, or Watney. Purists might say it is too close to chocolate soda but we find its lack of strong herbal and bitter elements to be positive. It is very drinkable from the first sip. Just \$4 per 750ml and worth much more! Silver Medal in Dry Stouts at 1993 GABF - the Gold went to Ugly Dog which most of us can't find in bottles.

Ommegang Chocolate Indulgence Ale Brewed with Belgian Chocolate

RATING: 4.5

Cooperstown, New York

Up until now this town has given us withered cow-skin gloves under studio lamps from baseball nobility, breathtaking autumnal maples, and Natty Bumppo. This 10th Anniversary offering in Belgian-style bottles is 7% ABV and actually uses cocoa powder in the brew. It has been classified on the web as a Strong or Dark Belgian Ale but the bottle itself says Chocolate Stout for those of you deaf, dumb, and blind and not able to taste the actual product. Dark Belgian Ale my ass! This fine bottle can be "cellared" to increase its flavor and complexity of time - great beers should not be "fresh" as the TV commercials would want us to believe. The pour is traditional stout dark and dense, malts very full and the chocolate variety more full than most common stuff with chocolate in the name or website. In fact, most "chocolate stouts" have as much cacao, candy flavor as a Chocolate Lab in the rain. Is the flavoring dripping with the world famous richness and mouth-watering depth of Belgian chocolate? No. Is it a much better type of chocolate stout with more sophisticated and charismatic notes? Yes. The finish is tad bitter for me and two associates of mine felt the same - not all. This 2008 product is a "fine-tuned" version of their original 2007 offering. I don't know how much Belgian cocoa powder one can add to a vat before ruining it or clogging it up to hell - but let's give that a try in 2009! What the heck...add chocolate liqueur shots to every \$15 bottle if that can be done. I don't know but this is a superb idea worth exploring over the next few years. I hope to explore it with them.

Otter Creek World Tour "Otter Mon" Jamaica-style Stout

RATING: 4.0

Middlebury, Vermont

The brew-firm's omnipresent otter has donned a rainbow-knit cap and dreadlocks for this curiously themed beverage. I've had non-THC hemp beer before and liked it, sort of. I've even given a run or two at things more potent including the infamous "Electric Heineken" which has one "trippin' for days" to quote the noted philosopher Thomas Chong. I'll explain the purple haze on the skunks later. I wasn't sure what to expect here until I read the informative label about Jamaican stouts. I scrolled up and recalled Dragon Stout from that country but it was never anything to write home about. Are they jerkin' my chicken here? No. The use of sugar cane to simulate a rum-like taste was nice but only partly effective - I'd have used a bit of the real thing. If an ancient log of fruit cake at the Dollar Store can taste a bit nicely of rum why can't this \$5 bottle?

Black malt among two others and British yeast were nice touches. If you love your stouts super sweet without

beer stout soda, this is a nice pick. The sugarcane tapers nicely into a medium malt broth which has a collar of hops for prettiness and appeal. The rum might have been too much to overlay here but I'd have given it a try and made this formula about Hawaii or Brazil and slapped the oily little critter in a grass skirt or soccer jersey. And it all comes from Middlebury, Vermont? Stay tuned for my review of worldclass fish tacos from Fargo, North Dakota paired with a superb Soldotna Gewürztraminer.



Porterhouse XXXX Wrasslers Full Stout

RATING: 5.0

Dublin, Ireland

In the old days when stout was young, Guinness made X, XX, and XXX formulae and I understand the surviving modern stuff is the XXX style. Here is XXXX. When I first was introduced to Porterhouse Oyster Stout some weeks ago, I found their "pull cap" a bit odd but the pourables were so excellent and festive I was delighted to spot another cap in my local shop. "Ireland's Largest Genuine Irish Brewery" makes this bottle-conditioned, unpasteurized product using pale malt, roasted barley, black malt and flaked barley. Hops favor Goldings with some Nugget and Galena. The debottling reveals a broth as opaque as Irish coal, the head dark tan, and long-enduring. The nose is malty, suggesting a good hopping. It sips first of strong malt-coffee, settling to down some shockingly smooth yet deep mid notes of the finest malt density, ending in a dryish finish that is toasty and with only the faintest chorus of hops notes. The ingredients are clearly superior and \$4.99 per 11.2 oz. pretty much demands such goodness. I am very harsh on and cranky about pricey trash but this is five green Washingtons very well spent; pleasure, education, and admiration for brewmaster skills flowing from it. As more sips continue, the hopping gets more joyous and fulfilling, bitter-drenched in some notes, nearly missing in others, malt always dense and refined. XXXX Wrasslers is an elixir of joy in the best sense of those words. If I were a hummingbird that needed to live off malt nectar, this XXXX stuff would be the first bush I flew into. There are few stouts as impressive and I am delighted to have tried it - and will do so again soon.

Pyramid Espresso Stout

RATING: 4.5

Seattle and Kalama, Washington

This microbrew is made using a 'rare black malt' to have strong coffee and chocolate notes. Color is very dark - very opaque with a brown head that lasts all day. If you tastes run to a very strong, semi-sweet stout (drier finish) that holds NOTHING BACK - this is your find of the year. We paid just \$2.99 for a 650ml bottle and that is a superb steal. Reviewers here noted "rich, big head... simply sumptuous malt, coffee, chocolate, and herbal flavors in complete abundance" and "surely among the best American sweet stouts from the west...on par with California's best stouts".

Brewbase Fives



Red Hook db (Double Black) Stout with Coffee

RATING: 5.0

Woodinville, Washington/Portsmouth, New Hampshire

This "Limited Release" in big five dollar bottles is from Batch 08-0410 in the broad style of an Imperial stout augmented with coffee for "big roasty flavor". Color is thick brown, opaque, lace light, leading to a giant light brown head of moderate duration. The bouquet is moderate malt but not enticing. The malt is deep at all taste points, coffee clear but not dominating, the end notes are dry, very lightly bitter, and overall silky in the finish. This stuff has grace and urbanity, almost a faux simplicity that begs for further sips and more analysis. The coffee and bitter hops are layered with supreme gentleness, quite perfectly so in fact, a real lesson for other brewers in laying out malt in quiet, lofty, effortless doses. It's more creamy than many cream stouts but it holds nothing back to attain this fluent successions of flavors.

I would expect Red Hook to offer a limited release with this quality but I judged it as it came and was prepared for a 3 bottle rating if they let me down. God bless them for not doing so and making my sudsy day off from work a numb, pleasant experience leading a unplanned afternoon nap. They did not abandon hops utterly to make a crude malt sledgehammer with no dimensions or parity of ingredients. This is truly brewing symmetry, things done right with scale and attention to the details. Red Hook products have an elegance, skilled builds all of them, and yet a sensibility that does not suit everyone. But they almost always please the informed beer drinker with a few hundred or 1500 (as me) bottled labels under or over their belt.

Ridgeway Lump of Coal Dark Holiday Stout

RATING: 4.5

Oxfordshire, England

For the naughty lass who deserves something hard in her stocking....okay I'll behave. At 8% ABV this is a nice warming stout but like other Ridgeway seasonal products for the US market it seems smoother and less heavy than expected. Less heavy and not less good I must quickly add. It pours dark root beer brown but it has moments of translucency under strong light that few stouts will reveal. The head never surrenders and is light tan. The malts are rich, medium deep, almost like a dark German blended to a stout - and I assure you I've done lots of such curious blendings. It is a Dark Malty British Ale if such could be known without the baggage of the porter or stout tag. There is some nip, likely the ethanol more than hops but I get some sense of cherished vine in the finish after the bottle was nearly gone. This "liquid consolation" (self edit)(self edit)(self edit some more) is fine stuff and worthy of six bucks for the overflowing pint bottle. I sincerely hope to try all of their Christmas oddities this year.

Brewbase Fives



Rogue Imperial Stout (2008)

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

The big, fat, pricey, and very impressive ceramic vessels here are about \$14-17 a piece but the fluid therein is just as solid, fat, and impressive. It pours darker than a moonless night if the sky were normally made of dark Belgian chocolate. The head is one of the darkest brown shows in the beer world. The ABV is 11% and that is music to me eyes and buds. Malts include Great Western Harrington, Klages, Hugh Baird Crystal, Black, Munich, and Chocolate. Hops are Willamette, Cascade, and Chinook. Yeast is their own Pacman pick. "Imperial" implies something turned up twelve notches and not just the rich diversity that Rogue usually puts into it's shopping list. God Lord! This is a strong stout that drips with zesty IPA notes at mid passage. Holy...whatever. Malt is King and Hops his Precious Glorious Queen.

This approach is new, righteous, and worthy of a royal rogue. "Rogue Imperial" seems to mean, at least in this context, everything fun and potent and cool and neat, except the kitchen freakin' sink. Nearly choking and covering my face with vast, dark head, I sipped some more and found a stout so balanced in the eternal Hops:Malt equation one might expect it to be called Triple Imperial Barleywine or Global Thermonuclear Porter. Perfection needs no boundaries and this transcendent brew no nomenclature at all. The malts are not the only thing stout here, my pals. The hops are mighty stout and that vine is as tall and thick and climbable as Jack's beanstalk. Giants are falling. Awesome stuff. Potent perfection in a tall jug! A King of American Stouts and by my reckoning a worthy judging standard for years to come.



Rogue XS Russian Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

You can get an entire sixpack for what I just paid for this 7oz. single bottle in the Rogue XS line. You would not be as happy as I am now. It pours dark and yummy, loaded with favorite ingredients including RISK and DARE malts and PACMAN yeast. The result is a drink so excessively fine I will absolutely try to find it again. Wisely they have counteracted the lack of quantity with quality in both the flavor realm and the ethanol realm; the later a full 11%. Thus one might as well have 16oz. of 4.5% stuff in terms of buzz control. The diversity of five malts and four hops types is evident for the broth comes off not only well made but harmonized with the best acids, esters, and polyphenols money can buy. There is dark malty candy one moment, a bittersweet hop-sicle another, and then a somber fruity soup the next. This is the kind of fine brew that will win over wine snobs and you can point to your retail cost per ounce to make very sure they better love it.



Rogue Shakespeare Stout

RATING: 5.0

Newport OR

Oregon Brewing Co. of Newport OR makes an extremely opaque brown stout with a head as dark as their Mocha

Porter but more finely foamy. It too uses the Crystal and Chocolate malts but instead roasted barley and oats come into play. The hops are Cascade and not Perle plus Centennial. We enjoyed it more than the Mocha Porter as it seems more focused on one flavor theme and is what they call 'earthy'. The rich heavy finish really appealed while the Mocha Porter proved lighter and tart. The hops seems clearer in the Mocha Porter. The all out malt blitz of this Stout was impossible to ignore. Whether The name is from the Oregon festival and a gimmick. This is as fine as any- thing from Samuel Smith or Youngs. One of the best stouts made anywhere.

Brewbase Fives



Rogue's Wild Irish Stout

RATING: 5.0

Newport, Oregon

Oregon Brewing Company aka Rogue produces this very dark opaque brown beer that is visibly like their Mocha Porter. Both share Chocolate and Crystal malts and carry a dark tan head. Hops here are Cascade and rolled oats are used to impart 'earthy flavor'. The formula is similar to their equally fine Shakes- phere Stout which also got our 5 bottle. The overall drink is one of the most satisfying American dark beers we've tried in 1995. It is on the par with anything from North Coast or Anderson Valley. The painted bottle proclaims: Dedicated to the Dick in all of us. (No kidding). This 69 IBU brew has a slight fruity (maybe blueberry) finish that blends well with the malt and hops overdose. It is easy to mass consume. The bottle is most collectible. Since 2000 or so we mostly see the Shakespeare Stout in stores in place of this.

Roth Dark Construct Sweet Stout

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

You could point a search light from a Billy Bob's Nissan at a glass of this dark elixir and not one photon would pass through it. The head is large, lush, and medium tan. Ryan (CEO) and Eric (Head Brewer) Roth make this lovely stout in smallish bombers. It is semi-sweet by mid passage, fairly mid-dry in the finish, and very malty, roasty and toasty from the first sip. It is not overly sweet but more sweet in the bowl-of-morning-oatmeal sense. It is cut with some interesting bitter notes which appear to be strong-hopping by British stout standards. Rather unique it is. "We confess it to be our most mature beer as we have had time to refine our process" says their website. Their effort and education shows and your editor has been through three decades of eastern NC brewhouses - nearly all of them long gone. These lads show a higher level of skill than most past locals so far and we wish them the very best. This stout has a quality all it's own, truly interesting, and dare I use the abused word special? Reviewers here noted "roasted to perfection...licorice-infused hops was a surprise....delightful" and "Sweetness, hops galore, and some smoke...rather different...head is too big and gets in the way unless you wait 5 minutes to sip it...more coffee than chocolate to me...herbal/tobacco notes in subtle perfection". Let's just call it a Hoppy Sweet Stout and go with that.

Samuel Adams Cream Stout

RATING: 4.5

The label describes this wonderful dark as 'richer and smoother than other stouts' and indeed it is. It may be the darkest, most opaque color in this datafile. The head is persistent and dark tan. One immediately tastes the overwhelming chocolate roasted malt. The charming flavor reminds one of some iced coffee drinks we have tried. The finish is smooth and not heavy like some British stouts. It is EASILY one of best dark American beers.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Smiths Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

This worldclass stout is a shade darker and with a browner head than their Oatmeal Stout. It has more of a pleasant bitterness and brothy aftertaste than the Oatmeal. The initial taste has a bite followed by bitterness but the lingering effect is smooth but very persistent. This is perhaps better blended with a non-stout beer if served with a rich meal. Some folks prefer this to the Oatmeal due to the extra zip at first taste. Truly memorable.

Brewbase Fives



Samuel Smiths Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 5.0

This special dark beverage is a slightly redder dark than the Imperial Stout and lacks its initial bite. It is smoother and less persistent on the tongue and would make a better choice with some foods. It carries more of a molasses taste than the Imperial. As such it begs comparison with Old Peculier and Royal Oak although all are good choices. It is hard to pick between the Oatmeal and the Imperial but with food the Oatmeal seems more compatible. It remains a worldwide standard for the substyle that is Oatmeal Stout.

Sapporo Black Stout Draft

RATING: 4.0

Sapporo, Japan

The sculpted, precisely angled cans look like they just came off a computer-guided machine bench. This approach is classically Japanese; not happy to be ordinary, enjoying odd yet simple angles, century-proven designs and charm. One reviewer said the thick, heavy can looked like it could be a piston for the latest Lexus. Others noticed the unfamiliar pairing of the words 'draft' and 'stout'. (This is the perfect can for challenging a rival to crush against his skull; though we suspect not many of our readers still do that sort of thing). Color is dark brown but there are surely many blacker stouts. Head is tan and tall. Flavor is intense malty, very smooth, and decidedly smoky. The finish seems a bit ragged and weaker. One reviewer wrote that it was like 'drinking beef jerky' and that illustrates the point that the smoke is perhaps excessive. Enjoyable but not world beating. Yet.

Saranac Adirondack Fall Stout

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

F.X. Matt of Utica NY has become famous for quality (and sometimes world-beating) beers at a surprising \$5.99-\$6.99 price tag (2005-2009). This stout follows their Black & Tan in the dark beer group. Color is very nearly opaque reddish-brown with a big foamy tan head. Flavor varies with temperature. Mostly it's 'surprisingly hop-filled for a stout but much maltiness prevails in the end'. As to the self-described 'crescendo of complex flavor' not all our reviewers agreed. Reviewers noted 'not as rich as my kind of stout' and 'more my idea of a brown ale than an Old World stout'. The finish can be a tad too bitter but there is no doubt abundant ingredients were

employed. Overall it's a nice DARK version of their Pale Ale - not a deep malty stout but a nice value, more like a Honda than a Mercedes.

Saranac Chocolate Amber (Adirondack Spring)

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

This arrived in North Carolina the last week one January so I doubt it was anywhere close to spring yet in Utica. But I suppose the celebration of the 'coming of spring' must be marketed early. After tasting this \$6.99 dark malty feast we said: WHY NOT SELL IT ALL YEAR! Color is dark brown - reddish under strong light. The head is big, lasting, and very tan. The flavor is chocolatey as labeled and its very aromatic as well. Calling this amber is a genuine misnomer. Overall it would complete with a DRY STOUT. Reviewers too noted 'good dryish stout but not as chocolate-filled as some stouts...hard to beat at the sub-\$6.50 price' and 'the best of their dark beers...far ahead of Saranac Black and Tan if you like a rich malty dark'. Lacks a bit of detail.

Scheldebrowerij Oesterstout Belgian Ale (Dark Stout)

RATING: 4.5

Meer, Belgium

One could make a pale case for this being a Belgian dark but it is just 8.5% and so weaker than many malty tripels. The label says stout many times and calls it "soft yet robust". The wort is also filtered over oyster shells of all things. It is quite dark but faintly reddish-brown under very intense shine of LED lamps. The head is dark tan. The malt is rich, not as earthy or corn-loaded as a German dark lager; as some non-British Euro-stouts can be. "Soft Yet Robust" is a good and accurate slogan. The finish does have something of a faint spicing, very faint mind you. It is almost of a mint quality but could be a wiff of coriander. Given that a large capped bomber of their beverage is \$17.99 (November 2011) and it's assignment to authentic Belgian origins, the bar of excellence is about as lofty as a high wire across the Grand Canyon. It is yummy and educational but one cannot fairly say it is amongst the finest percentile of stouts from any country or from any style. It is special, a bit different but slightly wanting in the sophisticated malt layering and the dark feathering of flavors. I would rather the boosted ethanols, spiced it some, and called it a tripel.



Sheaf Stout

RATING: 5.0

Australia

Carlton & United Breweries sends up these massive 1 pt. 9.6 oz. bottles that in our area sell for \$5. The head is light brown and persistent. The body is positively opaque black against a strong light. The taste is rich but finishes silky smooth. It is more drinkable straight than Guinness Extra Stout and about the equal to Mackeson XXX which looks similar. This is truly one of the top imported darks and one of Australia's very finest labels. In 1994 BrewBase called it the best Australian Beer Import of that year.

Shipyard Blue Fin Stout

RATING: 4.5

Portland and Kennebunkport, Maine

First of all we're impressed with the blue-grey and maroon packaging and engraved style ship on the label. It has a very classy Americana look. Your first pour of the stuff will likely result in some work of exclamation. It is as dark and inky as any liquid on earth. Even against a 100 watt bulb not one photon seems to get through. The head is amongst the darkest brown we know. Yet the flavor is not as heavy and rich as expected. It is fully malted with hints of chocolate and smoke. While fully-dosed it is somehow a slight measure (that's half a bottle

to us) less complex than some others. Tried cold, cool, warm, and at room temp. it will still please. It's a natural for blending with their Export Ale too. Test against Anderson Valley and Rogue darks if you will.



Brewbase Fives



Brewbase Reviews

Sierra Nevada 30th Anniversary Fritz and Ken's Ale Stout

RATING: 5.0

Chico, California

This bottle has two sides and two labels, one of them like SN doing a very classy gold on black Champagne and the other a ornate, dark version of their usual top notch graphics. Everything is about elegance, sharp arts, and tasteful splendor here. hereThis double or imperial stout is 9.2% strong and is named for guest brewer Fritz Maytag from their competitor and apparently friendly firm called Anchor. Maytag and Anchor are pioneers, legends in fact in American microbrewing and our rich brewing history in general I would say. Godfather Maytag founded the California craft brew movement and with Ken Grossman of SN brought super high quality ales to the US bottle market and from there established what beer guru Michael Jackson (not the creepy gloved one) would call the possibly and actuality that Americans can make beer as well as Europeans anytime, anyplace. I remember him saying that American microbrews from these folks and others were ABSOLUTELY as fine and in some ways more curious and creative. No doubt, no question. This is like Ferrari and Lamborghini doing a joint \$200 million car with diamond dust metallic paint, carbon fiber panels made from real moon rock, and a shift knob molded from an original Faberge Tsar Imperial egg.

The sierra30.com website tells the tale of the four brews in this series so far and I will be swilling all of them as soon as they come to my pike. This robust dark ale has visuals down cold from the bottle shape to the two remarkable labels and the actual darkness of the head and beverage itself. It is "worthy of the finest brandy snifter" as they hope and overall the mix of rich hops and intoxicating malts are judge perfectly with the decades of greatness these two Gods of Beer have created in all their other labels. The learned owner of my local brewshop said he tried one bottle and by the next day had picked up two more, a thing judged well for he did not want to deprive his customers entirely of thisof scorching, rare issues. I personally would have said "none for you riff- raff, it's all mine, mine, mine" using a falsetto Monty Python voice, "we may have something of their's later in the year...not likely...maybe not...move on now and grab some Roguuuuuuueeeeeee...". To say we needed a super fine, sweetish stout with all the zippy hops of Sierra Nevada is like saying orange juice is best made with fresh oranges. Why is this not obvious to others and why is a stout this brillaint a special, anniversary issue for EVERYBODY in question? Make it every day and make it cheaper - the entire world will be grateful and really, really happy.

Sierra Nevada Stout

RATING: 4.0

Chico, California

The industry leading masters from Chico California always produce beers on the level with any in the world. Having found their Porter to be irresistible (and a favorite pick when stranded on a desert island) this one excited us. Color is 'no light brown' with a large head of foam. It is full with roasted malt much as with Guinness Extra Stout but with more carbonation and hops. Many stout fans will not be used to such a clear hops addition though maltiness is clearly favored. As with the Guinness it is too strong for some enthusiasts and can be preferred for mixing (black and tan) or treated like a DESSERT BEER as one would drink tawny port. It is far stronger than our recently tried Murphys Irish Stout. A few of us still prefer Cooper's and Sheaf where available.

SKA Steel Toe Working Class Stout

RATING: 3.5

Durango, Colorado

This is one of the simple labels on earth aside from a pretty pair of slightly girly-finished work boots. They use milk sugar but we get little else. The pour is a dark blackish-brown as a witch's something or other, the head tan, and short-lived. Nose is righteous malt, hard to judge. First note is thin, second a bit more fulfilling and vaguely tart, soon some monothematic, vaguely smokey malts. The flavor is a bit deep and by this I mean more buried than layered and complex. The flavor notes seem disguised or masked at times and needs just the right temp to arrive in their diversities. Review of more than one bottle is advised. The finish is oddly watery and thin at times. It is no go for us.



St. Ambroise Biere Noire (Oatmeal Stout)

RATING: 5.0

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

McAuslan of Montreal makes St. Ambroise and Griffin labels and to us they've become the leading gourmet brewer under a red maple leaf; one that never does wrong. At worst they are very good and at best they stand out and enrapture every part of your tongue and brain. This \$10 sixpack is one of the best stouts made in North America. Oatmeal Stouts tend to be sweeter and this very opaque beverage simply overflowed with roasted malt and carmel flavors. It was superior to us in a comparison to Sierra Nevada Stout although in fairness the SN is not intended to be a sweet Oatmeal Stout. While many stouts hit you with heavy malt bat this one stokes one more kindly and with honey.

St. Peter's Cream Stout

RATING: 4.5

Suffolk, England

I've already applauded these cool, round-shouldered, olive green "old timey" bottles for their look in glass and label. The look is old and classic, never tiring to me. The brew is as dark as coal with a dark tan head that goes on for half of eternity. The lace is shorter than this would normally indicate. The nose is malty bliss to the third power. Not all good stouts are aromatic as this. While moderately tart the finish is smooth enough to earn the cream label though perhaps just barely. It is in fact a bit porterish at some stages in the unfurling notes; this mostly from the fruity, tart portion of the flavor profile. ABV is 6.5% so it cannot sold everywhere in the US. I found caramel, chocolate, weak coffee, brown sugar, generic fruit, and fig in the breakdown. Some trust friends I consulted thought it mis-named for the fruity tartness (acidity) and lack of comforting sweetness. I will not dispute those points as utterly invalid. It is no generic milk/cream stout in any case; being tarter, drier, and less silky soft in the finish. It is not worth trying cold so give it some time to "room up". In fact, I'd almost want to drink it rather warmish for it is most drinkable and easy in that condition. Judged in it's cream stout class, it fails on style and standardized comformity points - on it's own for what it is - and that is my judging style - it is a

very fine product.

Sweet Water Happy Ending Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Atlanta, Georgia

By their own admission on the label this thick fluid is "a huge dry-hopped stiffy, for a full-figured beer, resulting in an explosive finish". It's all about sex in beer world and here's more proof. So far the analogy is acceptable and clear to most lads. The pretty, prancing, tricolored fish on a wire is confusing the issue but it's all part of guy stuff and Sweet Water always has an aquatic species theme. Then there's the part of the Catch and Release limited seasonal series this belongs to; "catch and release" is a term some insensitive players speak for "use 'em and lose 'em" in the giant pond that is the modern dating pool. I'm not saying that we need to call chick-lib attorney Gloria Allred in next 90 seconds, but lord help the fellow who let his date swallow this thick, dark tube and it's pale foamy load and got even a little amorous without signing a permission form. I think "Third Base" is Section 1.A Paragraph C. Subparagraph G-9 and requires one to pre-submit a DNA sample (unfortunately not the fun kind) and sing the NOW theme song in the key of B major before putting paws on the prize.

This award-winning stout is very tasty though not as deep as the GABF and WBC honors might convey. It is certainly more hoppy than most generic American stouts and the 9% ABV is a sensible benchmark to reach. Liked it and enjoyed it but being a seasonal rarity (one timer?), it's not too likely I'll get this same ending again. Moved on. There's lots more imperial, wide-mouths in the sea.



Thirsty Dog Siberian Night Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Akron, Ohio

The dark label shows a very hungry-for-battle Rottweiler-Siberian cross with glowing lime green eyes in very subtle, artistic relief. The Grand-daddy of mean, tough dogs translates into the grand-daddy of stouts, similarly dark and brown yet also black and darker in some lights. IBU is 58 and ABV an impressive 9.7% as this four-pack rang up at 10 dollars. The GABF winnings of this label are notable - Bronze in 2003 and 2006, Gold in 2005. As the label tells us, these stuff is imperial but favoring the creamy side of the overall style; in other words, robust and aggressive but also bosomy and warming. Think of a large Rott that will thrash us to a bloody mass on command but a minute before or later is capable of tender nurturing and relaxed, submissive ease with her pups. We have fangs and we also have sweet caring in this remarkable, muscular malt-cocktail. Among the world's stouts this is a product of much distinction, roasted and toasted to perfection, hoppy enough in the background, strong in alcohol but not overdoing it, delicious and deep.

Thomas Creek O'Dempsey's Your Black Heart Russian Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Greenville, South Carolina

The pour of this 8% stout is as dark as a two mile deep flow of pitch at midnight on a moonless night. The head is a lovely full tan, short but lasting, very rocky and irregular. The head comes off as a very pleasing golden-tan in a tall glass, showing lots of class. The malts are lovely and dense, the ethanol contributing to that potent, imperial aura in an effective, synergistic manner. It goes all czar on your ass at first sip, adding 400 elite palace guards pounding you with malt batons by mid passage, and the finish a dry, rich choco slaughter with no prisoners taken. Panelists noted "refined, appreciable hops character adding another dimension...makes this stand above many other stouts...not your generic, recipe stout and Thomas Creek has done extremely well once again" and "impressive stout...substantial...most importantly it was enjoyable...maybe all the barrel-aged masterpieces have spoiled us but I really crave even more complexity".

Thornbridge Saint Petersburg Imperial Russian Stout

RATING: 4.0

Bakewell, England

Bottle-conditioned, a nice 7.7% dosage, and "subtle peat smokiness" make this Brit 500ml stout an interesting thing. It pours as opaque, dense as anything in the style, the head mid-large in dark tan. Nose is faint malt, not what is expected from the name. First sip is surprising smooth, almost Brit oatmeal and milky smooth, not imperial but tending to be larger on the finish. Later sips make it a sub-Czar or Russian Prince in strength, still not as overt as many Imperials of American origin which turn up all the dials to near barleywine dankness and density. The hops in the finish are nicely balanced with the busty malts but I find it less smooth, comforting, and pleasant as the sips increase. In other words, the "ramp up" to saturation of the taste buds from early to mid passages is not as sophisticated as might be desired, neither as polished as we would hope from any country.

Having tried Thornbridge IPA and this stout, I think they have elite Brit standards and American micros in mind but there are many points in the refinements and layering to be worked out. This stout is strong, moderately pleasant but far less enjoyable than English stouts of lower intensity. More is not always better, sometimes it is just more and in the final analysis...less. Bigness whether it be a matter of horsepower, anatomy, or flavor must be judged as a matter of grace, style, and perfect release. Strength for it's own sake without regard to elegance and inclusion of subtle virtues becomes...weakness. This is a good stout but not a great or admirable one.

Tomcat Leopard's Tooth Dry Stout

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

Thom Tomlinson tells us this is a new standard or paradigm perhaps for the dry stout. This OG 1052 brew is very refined and very dark opaque brown with a big tan head as expected from the style when in skillful hands. It is indeed dry as expected and fairly smooth without being weak. In the DRY and IRISH STOUT classification one finds some very rich things (Guinness being one) and so we tend to like this approach: dry, rich, but very drinkable in some decent beer-craving quantity. At \$7.00 or so per six it is certainly a finer value than most UK products. It has an emotionally potent label photo: 'shoot me or become a nice rare, juicy steak'. One panalist summed it up as "competant, pleasant, never offensive, polished, and yet not standing above others". This brewery is long gone (2010).

Victory Storm King Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

Opacity, color, and head are pretty much on standard, a medium malty nose. It has a good balance of flavors, the finish velvet smooth trailing into hoppy excellence. If you don't like a hoppy finish, go elsewhere. I do and think it's a good semi-bitter ending with total avoidance of sugary madness. Licorice, coffee, chocolate, more of the first than normal and nothing of honey or Starbucks sugar-brew. You get more hops, dryness, and bitterness than some of the style. It's got IPA in it's genes and bred to a firm, malty stout, we have a nice clever child. The 9.0% ABV dose is disguised well. It's certainly a good stout for a beer tasting for it's spun in a few directions that are wonderful for comparison and contrast to other marques.

Watney's Cream Stout

RATING: 4.5

London, England

AWARD: BEST CREAM STOUT 1993

Many people think of a British stout in terms of a DRY or IRISH STOUT as is the very popular Guinness. Stag Brewery's effort here is of the CREAM STOUT sort which is a sweet rather than dry dark. Color is positively and fully opaque. The head is very dark brown and can vanish at times quicker than desired. It is pleasantly aromatic. Flavor is mid-strength tending to a chocolate malt theme. Reviewers noted 'a full spectrum of quality malts come to present themselves one by one' and 'disappointing in strength but not in character'. It is very much a 'big drinker's stout' as many other classic stouts from the US and Europe are too heavy for mass consumption. The finish while sweet can also provide a touch of molasses but not as full as old Peculiar.

Weyerbacher Old Heathen Imperial Stout

RATING: 4.5

Easton, Pennsylvania

First off - cool label. A black mysterious, windblow, heathen(?) character against a gradient-rich blue background with neon-like brand labeling. That 8.0% ABV tag got my attention as it always will. I didn't use my colorimeter but this may be the darkest, most opaque beer I've ever poured. Huge head that is a true brown; suede shoes kind of brown. Nose is malty, weaker than expected but okay. Flavor is rich, medium so, neither tart nor sweet. It's vaguely imperial in the usual sense - which usually is beer code language for "over the top", malted to death brewing. The finish is very smooth, nearly cream stout smooth in fact. The quality is there but it's really a mid-strong rather than an overpowering strong imperial offering. I like it still and think it's a very worthwhile product. It is not perfect nor worldclass but is highly refined and will not disappoint. I suppose "will not disappoint" is hardly quotable praise except in some lurid industries. Maybe that's where the "old heathen" ties in. This malty offering is very polished, restrained in fact, suave, and also reasonably priced in my experience. I would grab one in a bar most anytime for it will probably be the best dark beer there but in a supermarket or liquor store with 200-500 choices one can do better.



Weyerbacher TINY Belgian-Style Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Pennsylvania

Wha.....ahht? Belgian-style Imperial Stout. I think my mind can imagine that but only after I've had a virtual brain drink of an IPA Red Pils and a second glass of Lambic Hefe-Porter! One is better than imagining and that is pouring down the alledged hybrid style down the usually noisy opening at the top of your body over a specific

set of pink sensors. The "velvety concoction" is 11.8% of the good stuff with "bottomless roasty, earth, and vinous notes". Okay???? Bring in the wine geek for a translation or just pour it down and hope the alcohol inspires some lucid, smart thoughts. These fat, brown, corked bottles are never cheap and most of the time Weyerhaeuser...no wait...that's the forest and paper company...Weyerbacher almost always earns one's admiration and awe for talent.

The actual glass presentation shows something so thick, sticky, and black I am tempted to try it on that nasty, recurring leak on my back porch roof. The head is bumpy, rocky, rugged and a mid to dark tan. The nose is curious blend of bright fruit and malt - very good marks here. The name TINY is a big red letters and so they are already telling us it will taste neither tiny or with timidity. I let out an loud "ahhhh....ah...oh...ahhh", mostly of pleasure at first long drink, the ethanol coming up bolding but with pleasure. My first reaction with that of "nippy stout", all the dark, dank, dangerous, and delightful malt assaults of the world-worthy stout with a little Belgian spice and one "daisy cutter" delivery of our sacred, favorite molecule. We know Imperial Stouts for higher malt and higher ABV so where is this clearly distinct from some of those excessive but fun bottles of hedonism? For one thing, the whole caged and cork things apparently gives it good lacing but it's very hard to see unless shown under very strong light. The bright fruit notes which recede much to the malts are difference #1. I am guessing they use some fruity ale yeasts of Belgian or German origin. Diff #2 is a bit of somber Belgian spice that coats and amuses the tongue when you linger on the later, finishing notes. I am inclined to think ethanol-ginger but without a Mass Spec machine who really knows?

One of my pals with lots of experience in beers told our tasting party he felt it was "crazy and strange as anything in the beer world...sometimes too schizophrenic (4.5 bottles)...but the best sips are heavenly with nectary esters and the best of the milk stout". J.P. said "this came out of nowhere and should be on every beer geeks radar for months...I'd say buy two or three bottles and sort it out later. I cannot possibly honor this kind of art with a single glass...even if a tall one...hint, hint". My final thoughts are that this is one of the finest US beers in 2010; an enigma to make WWII German scientists look like my local junior high cryptographers club in comparison. No where else will you find figs fighting chocolate arguing with Belgian musty yeasts and then smacking with bubblegum and slurping with Starbucks a mere second later. TINY is the King Kong of stouts and other stouts are mere Grand Canyons stuffed a hundred times into the gorges of the TINYValles Marineris.

Young's Oatmeal Stout

RATING: 4.5

London

From 1831-1950 this London firm made this fine label. With new demand it has been recreated using malted barley and oats. It is dark but translucent and red with a very full foamy head. It must be compared to Smith's Oatmeal Stout which has a similar color. Both products are rich and flavorful but are not brothy and heavy like some other stouts. The Young's version of Oatmeal is a little bit more tart but has a more refined and long-lived head. Reviewers admired 'a certain Bitter ale quality at mid palate with just a faintly thinner finish' and 'I'd much prefer Watney's Cream Stout or Grant's Perfect Porter give the choice'. While some OATMEAL STOUTS are fairly sweet this one is well intermediate between DRY and SWEET style stouts.

STOUT - BARREL-AGED OR WOOD-AGED

At the current time, these stouts may be fruit, flavored, or not. While most stouts mellowed on wood are put in barrels (whiskey, chardonnay, port, sherry, cabernet, etc.) the occasional label is aged over wood chips.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



BrewDog Paradox Isle of Arran Stout

RATING: 5.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

The idea of a stout aged in whiskey barrels is enough to...well...make me pay \$7 for a small bottle of beer. The aroma is hard to pin down and so one must sip. The best way to think of this fine 10% brew is that of classic super-malty stout spiced with a bit of cinnamon, vanilla, and that whiskey-barrel nip which is probably 289 different nameable chemicals - were I to have a mass spec machine on this desk. Oak aging can be overdone and underdone but here it is judged just right to compliment rather than be subdued by or dominating the classic stout theme. It is very much a spiced stout in practice and one that is ultra-yummy. This would be fantastic as some kind of flavoring for a sauce or batter given the depth and quality of flavors. I rare get two bottle beers in one day and this one came directly after 8-4-1 Redhook so I was even harder to amaze. This is a savory beer in a good sense, satisfying down to the gills, a rare combination of flavors should should be more common and be tried often again.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Fives



BrewDog Paradox McAllan Imperial Stout

RATING: 5.0

Fraserburgh, Scotland

Having loved the Paradox Isle of Arran product, we had high hopes for this small bottle of casked juice. Mcallan sherry casks are used to produce this 10% ABV nectar that flows in a nearly opaque cherry-brown with a densely foamed tan head. Faint nose of mixed liquors and malt. Initially you feel it is mild stout but then the rivers roll and the clouds rumble with malts, nice hops, and burnt-oak flavors coming down like a flood after raining cats and dogs. The finish is dry, yielding to scrumptuous, unspeakable sipping glory to say the least. Words fail. Rarely has a stout been this smooth and deep without being a sugar milt stout. This has less spice than the Isle or Arran but is an equally fine product and worthy of the same awards. It is one of the best stouts I know, aged or not. I frankly they find ever empty cask in Scotland, call it something cute, and send the mini bottles over here. I for one will buy as many as they can name.

BrewDog Paradox Smokehead (Imperial Stout)

RATING: 3.5

Fraserburgh, Scotland

This variation in the Paradox is an imperial stout aged in Islay whiskey casks. These 11.2's are pricey so far potent, very special, and worth it. This "entrancing alliance" (the label's cute phrase) mentions "Atlantic smoke" whatever that may be. This stuff flows out with an engine oil darkness and rocky tan head. Nose is rich scotch whiskey salvaged from a burned out package store brought back to savor at the F.D. with leisure. First sip is so intense I think it makes the bold Scotch Ale a mere weak daisy for sissies. The word hardcore come quickly to mind. My second thought is most consumers will be easily offended by the XXXX strength or rating. It is almost like swigging a bottle of liquid smoke concentrate, so intense and unyielding is this sinister broth. Is it good? Is it enjoyable? Or is it just shocking? Yes. No. Yes. Our informed panel here said "undrinkable...excessive.." and "here's the Howard Stern of stouts but with him you get hours of entertainment and not just random abuse". I would add: too far, over-the-top to the degree where this rowdy entertainment becomes annoying in short time.

I cut one bottle with some of Avery's New World Porter (a black, hoppy IPA) and found just 20% of the Avery (or likely any porter or stout) just what the brew doctor ordered. I will not tell them to dial it back by this 10-20% because they'll sell as many pups out of sure curiosity and reputation either way. I would make the more acceptable, approachable cut not as a compromise but as a way to make people want to buy it one or two or ten more times. Those shock, one times buys only git ya so far is this day with limited high dollar beer bucks. My best blend was 33% with Timmerman's Frambroise, giving a sweet berry flavor and blessed dilution to this intense formula. The smokey, berry blend was something very good and I suppose both breweries would be offended at my tampering. But as the customer and drinker are both always right, I'll stand by this dark raspberry idea as more friendly, brilliant, and ultimately...enjoyable.



Epic Big Bad Baptist Imperial Stout (Exponential Series)

RATING: 5.0

Salt Lake City, Utah

I've seen some stout Baptists, some big bad ones, and a few aged in whiskey but never met one from Mormon town before. This one at a zesty 11.3% alcohol pours hyper-dark brown with fully tan, intact head. (My Baptist leather commentary Bible declares the original dude John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus himself, lost his desert-tanned head due to someone else's drunkenness and some sexy female dancing). Cocoa nibs, coffee, and whiskey barrel-aging make this a gem. No brimstone here but sure as eternal fire it's a righteous soul. First sip is

delicious, loaded with wonderful, true chocolate flavors (not merely the malt type) and also with the bitterness of coffee and hops. The later are blended well and not everyone has done that before. It is both slightly sweet and savory at once, a veritable loaded stout of the most pleasant order. It's 5-bottle rating was immediately apparent to all on our panel. It is not just a noble effort but also a noble, successful accomplishment.

The other coffee stouts in this section would do well to study this awhile. Big Bad Baptist thumps the good book hard and wades the waters well; being neither a mere recipe nor hollow exercise in adding new things for their own sake, but a genuine realization of brewing arts. It has the right things in the right way and a formula and process that works. Exponential joy indeed. Clearly the oak mellowing sets it above from other choco-coffee formulas which are often a bit crude and additive in their harshness. This has rounded, mellow edges and soft, luscious notes which at once are both potent and soothing. Take me to the tabernacle...praising and singing!

Laughing Dog Dogfather Imperial Stout (Boubon Barrel Aged)

RATING: 4.5

Ponderay, Idaho

This stuff is so close in appearance of the label to their non-aged issue, I'm glad the helpful young fellow at Total Wine pointed out this variant as I was clutching the regular one like a trophy. I'll grab any new stout in this era of 4000 new pale ales and faux Pilsners. This variant is loaded with bright vanilla-oak flavors, faint cherry, a bit less smoke, and surely more luminous with fruit coming out in barrels full. I think the finish is bit fiercer than the non-aged and a shade too bitter for me. Still we have here two very nice takes from a common recipe. It is good lesson of what barrels can and will do. In my very final pour, I blended 25% of the regular with 75% of the aged and found that a distinctly more drinkable, less jarring formula, clearly better than either on it's own. 50:50 is not bad either. Note to brewers: how about a blend-your-own-beer series with your stuff? Don't let ego get in the way and just let us blend to our own tastes, having fun, fun, and more fun.



Nebraska Black Betty Imperial Stout (Ale Aged in Whiskey

Barrels)

RATING: 5.0

Papillion, Nebraska

This 9.0% barrel-aged imperial stout pours the usual color with a thick, lasting head as resembling a rootbeer float in color if not texture. Oh and there's one more thing. The \$20.99 price (Sept. 2011) that makes a fancy Belgian ale look like a Fiat by comparison. This is clearly an accomplished dark stout, smooth at first sip, transitioning towards nice bitter hops, and a that whiskey-smooth finish of the time-consuming process of barrel-aging. The rich spice and bitterness of hops is the only thing keeping it from being liquid velvet. Notes of coffee, chocolate, caramel...yea yea...and...of course. Flavors overlay flavors and one slowly discovers many styles of notes and experiences, all scented with the revered flavors of the burnt barrel. While we loved it and felt it was worth \$15-20 a bottle, the strength of the hops only pleased the hop-a-holic extreme among us. Does Imperial stout always imply strong hops? No, and it need not. Lots of many thing instead of "lots of everything" mark our concept of Imperial. A barleywine is perhaps the only justification for excess in every ingredient in our book. I would have toned the vinous floret down a bit but otherwise this is a glorious stout; refreshing, alive, dignified, and manifestly wonderful. One panelist here called it the High Priest of Stouts and given her name is Betty we changed that quickly to THE HIGH PRIESTESS OF STOUTS.

Olde Hickory Lindley Park Stout Brewed with Honey and Raspberries

RATING: 4.5

Hickory, North Carolina

I can't print what I thought the first time I saw the warm brown wax dripping down the bottle. It was most certainly not fondue. This 10% ABV product is Imperial strong, augmented with real razzelburries and honey, then aged in oak barrels. Ever had a raspberry cream candy covered in rich chocolate? Good because Lindley Park is nothing like that. Here is one of the blackest beers we're poured out and the head looks paler than some vending machine milk chocolate bars. Here is a refreshing change-o-pace brew, dry in the raspberry notes augmented with just a little bit of honey sweetness. Lindley Park is no berry lambic nor a raspberry soda beer. It is much more. Despite the dismal, mystic pigmentation it's very hopeful and reasonably vivid in the persistent flavors. Panelists here remarked "somber and deeply malty at first...later getting subtle berries...the honey is modest and prevents a dry, harsh finish...good formula but needs tuning to get 5 bottles from me" and "the berry bits did not strike me as authentic but probably the quantity was too low...berries, malt, and honey with aging in wood appeal to me in theory but something is missing...loads more berries or real cacao would help some...how long was it aged?... [I] can't get excited except in abstract theory". Nice approach but execution leaves us wanting more and these folks are very capable of knocking off our socks and hanging them in a dogwood over the county line.

Smuttynose Zinneke Belgian Style Stouts Aged in Bourbon Barrels (BIG BEER Series)

RATING: 4.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Besides the traditional artwork on their labels and a cool name like Smuttynose, we also like this brewery's pricepoints. Barrel-aged stout for \$6.99 a bomber? That's 1.5 mugs of golden, light-in-the-hops pisswater at many pubs. This 2012 bottle conditioned version (tasted 1.6.2013) pours a slight hazy dark brown, strong carbonation but hard to see the lace. Head is medium tan, low, and lasting. The Belgian-style approach comes from their use that land's yeast which is quite opposite the tendency to go Brit with yeast here. First sip[is rich but it finishes like a much smoother beast for which "mellow" is the only term. "Mellow cubed" said one panelist here. Our bottles were mum but research shows it has 8.4%. Some authorities (ie. Beer Advocate) class it in the Belgian Strong Dark Ale Group and that is somewhat reasonable for it does not have the malty warmth of a traditional UK stout - however, do recall the yeast fruits it up and the casks will do much to alter everything else. Hence our Barrel-aged Stout group here (started January 2013) for such hybrid, lavishly processed, works of dark brewing wonder that daily delight our tables. "Beautiful fruity nose" of the label is surely rare for a stout tag and yet we are happy to agree this time. Chocolate and background caramel reign here too but the choco bits are far more dominant. The wood's vanilla clearly adds distinction and we are beginning to figure out that whole oxymoronic "vanilla makes chocolate taste better thing". Does strawberry make vanilla-chocolate better yet? In any case this is a curious and serious dark ale, worthy of trying and even adoration. Ale are going new places in 2012 and 2013, Belgian yeast, dark stouty notes, and barrel wood in the mix. Bring on the experiments you lads of the copper kettles and barrel farms!

But who or what is Zinneke? And does the regal, wealthy man looking like Charles Emerson Winchester III smoking a pipe with shoulder wings of eagles, purple flat hat, caressing a faithful hunting hound give a clue? Zinneke is a biennial, themed parade held in Brussels, Belgium since the ancient year of 2000. Say what? I thought Belgium did not allow anything younger than 2000 except for children and puppies? Zinneke overall sounds like a Bohemian art thing with allowance for all sorts of other eccentricities. That fits a Belgian yeast, dark stouty ale perfected in round oak thingeys made in Kentucky. Actually Zinneke by all accounts looks like a cross between a Frisco gay parade and artists dress in clothes they invented while tripping on mesc for 10 straight days. This is all is a out there and chic-insane as the label art is not. This beer got 5 bottles from some of us but many were less generous so 4.5 is the final calculation. Your Head Editor was a fiver on this one so assemble your own Lords and Ladies of the princely suds, do a Zinneke loony event, and give this one a whirl.

STOUT - FRUITED OR FLAVORED

Stouts are widely augmented with milk, oatmeal, coffee, and even real chocolate. That's traditional and regular stuff. This section includes fruit, spices, herbs, and other flavored items.

The Oyster Stout is of two types. Originally the named was used to denote a particular fine quality stout suitable for consuming with oysters, a common practice in the 1800's when Guinness reined supreme. Marston Oyster Stout today has no critters in it. The actual use of oysters as a ingredient is thought to be in New Zealand in 1929. Hammerton of the UK used oysters in the batch in 1938 and during WWII others followed there. Sometimes a small bit of oysters are used but not enough to influence flavor - hence as a cheap novelty, not costing the brewery very much at all. Porterhouse Oyster Stout from Dublin makes oyster-infused stouts today and this is reviewed below.

Atwater Block Cherry Stout

RATING: 4.5

Detroit, Michigan

A cherry concentrate is added to a dark 6-malt stout to make this opaque, slightly tart brew from Detroit. It's just 6.5% ABV so is very drinkable. The cherry flavor is quite apparent in the tart esters but they are not overdone. The balance is well-judged and better than most cherry stouts and cherry wheats known to me. Atwater Block Brewery is from Detroit's Rivertown District (hence "at water") and to date is distributed in bottle form mostly in the Midwest, eastern, and southeastern states. Their Dunkel won a Gold at the GABF is perhaps the most praised, talked about label to date (2009). I really enjoyed this stout and recommend it be served rather cold to keep the cherry flavors sharp and assertive. It beats the Bell's Cherry Stout by a mile and that too is a Michigan product.

Bell's Cherry Stout

RATING: 3.5

Comstock, Michigan

[Stout Cherry jokes expurgated by request of everyone. Insert yours here, slowly and with romantic-like kindness]. There was a time when \$13.99 for a six of Stout had better be some rare British vintage. Today in early 2009 I happy pay this amount for an American six of stout; fruit-flavored of all things. Fruit-flavored beer of any kind is a risk. Bells I have come to love and trust. They are doing wonderful, noble, and classy work. Am I let down or fully rewarded or somewhere frustrated in the middle? The label is pretty with a little gree and giant cherries under it. This "mysterious dance of tart Michigan cherries [juice form] with the dark, roasted malts of a big and bold stout" are up for evaluation. ABV is 7.0% and that's a surprising, nice touch. It pours opaque as a chocolate bar with a short-lived tan head. Aroma is tart stout and not much more.

It starts tart, develops some complex malts, and then gives up something I suspect is *Prunus avium* in the scarlet flesh. I can't be sure and it's not authentic in my experience. Maybe Michigan cherries taste like gooseberries and rhubarb. Somewhere in the middle notes and many finishes things go muddled and ungainly; and several more un-something words as well. Cherry is a well known partner for chocolate for pungent tartness and rich sweetness improve each other. But in this form of choco malts the relationship is going odd places even though now and again interesting ones. An experienced stout-loving friend of mine (more than twenty years deep into the style) said he felt he was drinking a fresh-squeezed Vegetable Malt Beer. He nailed it! I swear I tasted an apple-spinach note somewhere one mid-late finish. There are elemental, earthy, tart notes all about but not all of them scream cherry; sour, sweet, or otherwise. I've tried cherry lambics, cherry wheats, all sorts of cherry ales and cherry lagers, and yet this expensive product from a noted, star brewer fails completely to convey the beauty and joyousness of the chosen, kingly fruit. This stuff is lambic tart but with none of the polish and complexity of that style; yet it almost has their price and thus sadly underachieves. At it's best it's has the tartness of simple cherry juice (the quality and depth of pulp being removed) merged with full-blown, dark-as-night malts. In fairness to Bells (whom I admire in other trims), I tried bottles from the usual temps to cold and back down to room temp again. Nothing got better or redeemable really. I feel like a Jack Lalanne Power Juicer and a Sam Adams commercial got screwed up on Fox computer, merged electronically, and now I'm drinking a malty-produce elixir for all the right reasons.



Big Boss Aces & Ates Coffee Stout

RATING: 5.0

Raleigh, North Carolina

This limited release (said to be 0561 of 5000!) was bottled Nov. 2008 and uses Larry's Beans (no relation) but a roasty, strongish 8% ABV stout. The beans are locally roasted (hence fresh aromatics), fair trade, organic, and probably other cool PC stuff. Are the dancing beans free range and died of natural causes while cuddled by their commune of bi lovers and ground with harmonic crystals blessed by Native American chiefs? Probably not but they'll probably be doing this soon in our neighboring town, the Peoples Republic of Carrboro, after the Post-Obama Inauguration drugs wear off. It pours as dark as a moonless night in Hershey PA; the skies are magically dark brown there or is that just the pollution? The head is light brown, coarsely-bubbled, and aroma is rich and fetching as expected. I have not always liked my chosen state's microbrews (and ratings reflect that in other sections) but this one is truly suitable for the Capitol of Mayberry. Aunt Bea wouldn't be drinking it (she has a token to get pickled) but I could see Otis lumbering into his personal cell with a nearly spent bottle in hand, announcing to Barney he was in the house for the night. (And as a fun bit of trivia, Hal "Otis" Smith in real life did the voice of Goofy, Winnie-the-Pooh, Scordge McDuck, and Elmer Fudd, didn't imbibe, and also directed a number of lauded Andy Griffith episodes).

The flavor is exuberantly malty, almost as tart as a nimble porter on first sip, dry all around, and expertly layered with just the optimal amount of roasty, toasty *Coffea arabica*. It's a Coffee Imperial Stout, a variant of the double-strength stuff by classification. There are no creamy, warm-as-a-blanket, comforting malts in the finish but these coffee-bittered malts are delightful both cold and down to 60 F. So many other coffee stout makers go too light on the treasured beans (and we need to be told they exist), appear to use commercial cheap coffee, or tart it up with too much sugar like any StarBucks scam splashed with Grey Goose from the morning flask. The "22 ounce bombers" as they call them, are splendidly crafted and while I did not swoon at their Bad Penny Brown Ale, I'm now certain these local dudes have ample talent for hundreds more limited editions of extreme merit. Love the unique gunmetal grey foil label too. Still trying to figure out the "Handle Your Business" motto but they do this well and with the 8% a gentle velvet tap and not a hammer. The integrity, "beer smarts", and perceptive refinement that have gone into this label are noteworthy. 5000 here we come...I'll be watching, buying, and trying.

Boatswain Chocolate Stout

RATING: 4.5

Monroe, Wisconsin

The blackish-brown brew is opaque under a finely-bubbled rich tan head. The chocolate flavors are real and not in name only due to the use of cocoa powder. The ABV is 5.4%, OG 14.26, and IBU 66. This is a Trader Joe's value selection but it does not taste like a bargain stout in the least. But is surely not a Southern Tier Mokah with its liquid chocolate flavors that are better than cocoa productions in general. Panelists said "substantial and choco-rich but there a couple of weak, hollow notes in the mid to late portions...nice value overall but one can do better" and "Very pleasant...highly drinkable...nice hops tang to keep it from being too sweet...refined recipe and a great execution".

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Brewbase Times



Clipper City Heavy Seas Mutiny Fleet Siren Noire Imperial Chocolate Stout

RATING: 5.0

Baltimore, Maryland

What a long name and that seems to be a trend with stouts and porters these days. The brew pours opaque, thick, and brown-headed as expected, the nose being malty and earthy. The extraAARGHdinary dark brew comes in 22 oz. packages and packs 8% of the active ingredient. The pirate dude on the label is a skull with bleeding hearts as eyes. His two crossed bones are held up by comely mermaids, one blonde, one brunette, and from their expressions fighting for his bone. Chocolate is used for flavoring so this is not just a "chocolate malt" in name only. The whole Siren Noire legend is akin to mermaid stories and in old tales these singing, pleasing ladies lured sailors off course and often to their deaths. This brew could easily be my ruination and yours but it is fairly hard to locate. The finish is all about true chocolate flavors and sweetness. One of our guest reviewers here remarked "a bit too much like chocolate soda for me...not that simple of course but it could be deeper". Another said "perfection in the choco-stout style...my bones and everything else were seized". If this were a milk stout - and it is very smooth, drinkable - it would be a sweet milk chocolate stout. Bitter chocolate hardly does much for a beverage so why not use a sugary, luscious form of cocoa flavors. This time around Swiss Miss has a tail.

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

Gordash Holy Mackerel "Mack in Black" Imperial Black Ale with Pomegranite Juice

RATING: 5.0

Melbourne, Florida

Brewed at Florida Beer Co. for Gordash this is one unique beer. Its' from Florida, porter-dark, flavored with Punica, 8% ABV, made with Belgian yeast, and features a yellow and black singing fish-lounge singer on the label. That's not going to be confused with much else! Let's cut to the chase. The Gimmick or The Goods? The fact you're reading this in the Stout- Flavored section shows it's no weak fruit ale or a fancy brown one. Nose is all stout with faint fruit esters. The chocolate malt notes reign supreme and delight the mouth and nose in every good way, fully and with complex notes popping all around. Yet there's something more to this warming, welcome, consoling brew that gives it the real goods and makes it a unique delight. Smoke is everywhere and if you like a smoky stout with divergent themes - this is your nirvana for the weekend. I would not have guessed pomegranite (a fruit I often cherish) and perhaps that is good thing. That fruit adds much to it but doesn't make it tart and awkward as in tries by other brewers with less skill. I am truly dazzled with their sensibilities here; not only in the nerve to conceive and launch it but to deliver the fully-integrated fluid so well. It's not so much Holy Mackerel as Holy you-know-what! I had not expected such a lofty mark from yet another cute bottle with an anthropomorphic creature in rich colors. Neither labels nor covers tell the true tale! You could put this in a fancy British bottle for \$6.00 a clip and it would impress as cleanly. It's tasty, well bred (despite the singing smoked mackerel with spiked hair), and the kind of thing that makes beer reviews a constant set of new delights and thrills. This is THE Flavored Fruit Stout to make us believe in the style or the cause or the passion or whatever it is or should become in future years. Sip long and believe.

Mercury Clown Shoes Chocolate Sombrero Mexican-style Chocolate Stout

RATING: 4.5

Ipswich, Massachusetts

Pour here is opaque brown with a rich tan head of medium duration and a sturdy 9% ABV. There is chocolate added along with cinnamon and ancho chiles. The label shows an evil wrestler-clown (aren't they all) with four arms and four legs. There is a pleasant chile nip, not too strong nor too timid, and the chocolate is fairly decent as well. You might not drink a gallon of this but as a slow sipping stout, it is very desirable and gracious. Panelists here said "while not the first dark chile-choco beer it is one of the best....affordable...respectible" and "a new experience for me and this enlightened my own homebrew thinking...may try this soon, perhaps with different peppers like chipotle". A good experience, agreedable ethanol power, and a fine slow sipping dark.

Porterhouse Oyster Stout

RATING: 4.5

Dublin, Ireland

This 6% ABV stout actually uses oysters in the broth, unlike some "oyster stouts" named to go with oysters but not containing any of the shellfish at all. First you notice the ring-pulled cap, a thing very rare in the US brew market today (2010). It pours dark but translucent brown with red tints under strong light - not as dense and opaque as many Irish stouts. The head is ample and light tan, lasting well. Flavor is moderately thick with malts, complex and quality ones, and some brothy bitter and organic notes one can imagine to be the product of something else...not likely oysters but one's imagination is always the key to making such novelty brews work and sell nicely. The 11.2 ounces required me to shell out just \$3.99 (August 2010) and are a fine catch...bad puns, sorry. As stout, flavored or not, it is very smooth, pleasant, and fulfilling. This is a fine quality stout even if not as densely malty and overpowering as some. It is almost mid-stout or close to the stylistic border where porters hang out.

Samuel Adams Merry Mischief Gingerbread Stout

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Massachusetts

This very dark pour comes with a toasty, tan head of some duration. This 9% fare is laced with the lovely, comforting flavors of ginger and spices (cinamon, cloves, nutmet). The three gingerbread cookies sliding down the label have curious expression, one lamenting the lose of his leg to the terrain. The merriment found in this experiemental seasonal brew is evident on first sip, the notes true to both stout and gingerbread expectations. The potent ethanol gives it a bit of a festive, adult beverage feel. Hops are of Old World sort, being East Kent Golding(s) and Fuggle(s). This was an enjoyable even not world-changing experience, very competent and a nice change of pace.

Southern Tier Creme Brulee Stout

RATING: 4.0

Lakewood, New York

Billed as an Imperial stout flavored with vanilla beans, this meets our criteria as a non-standard, fruited or flavored subvariant. Columbus hops are used in the kettle while the Horizon variety is used for later aroma development. Lactose sugar is added along with 2-row and dark caramel malts. It pours as dank and dark as a mile thick coal mine with a surprising dark, light tannish-brown head. Nose is quite sweet, vanilla-drenched, roasty, and rather strongly suggestive of it's dessert. It really is creme brulee sweet, so sugary from all that lactose sugaring, people are apt to love it or hate - polarizing it is. Our panel here "felt acceptably sweet to me given the declared theme and fact the sugar does not cover up inferior ingredients" in one case. In the polar opposite "so tarted up...ridiculous...it is pedestrian stout soda...horrible. I could hardly wait for the next sample to replace it". It is suitable for your beer tasting, so eccentric and controversial in it's theme and presentation. A small plus for real vanilla beans (and not artificial extract) and kudos for disclosing the sugar on the lable. Do remember that some very highly regarded Belgian ales receive added supplements of candy sugar. The malt base remains of very strong quality so we compromised on a 4 bottle rating, though some give it 3.0 and others 4.5.

Southern Tier Jah-Va Imperial Coffee Stout

RATING: 4.5

Lakewood, New York

Blend some Jamaican "Blue Mountain" coffee with black, chocolate, 2-row, and caramel malts and this Black Water Series brew comes in at 10.6% and loaded with flavor. Cascade and Columbus hops round out the recipe. It pours out as dark as boot black with a light brown head of good duration. Nose is like black roasted coffee on the espresso side of things. The flavor is rich and coffee-drenched, the mid notes a bit alcohol-laden, and the finish nippy from ethanol merging into saintly-bitter hops. It is Imperial enough for me as the major ingredients are dosed to lofty levels and the result is well-graded and robust. There is a spike of sweetness in the finish to temper the tall notes eminating from the hops and ethanol. I think the coffee could have been made smoother

while still being semi-robust. It was a bit off-putting to even a few talented, knowledge reviewers here though I thought the excessiveness was surely Czar-like and appropriately royal.



Southern Tier Imperial Mokah Stout (Blackwater Series)

RATING: 5.0

Lakewood, New York

Having liked their earlier Jah-va Imperial stout, also with chocolate and coffee in the mix, this fare was stronger at 11.2% ABV and has a different approach to excellence. The hops here are Columbus and Chinook. Malts are caramel, chocolate, 2-row, and black adding also barley flakes. The chocolate is bittersweet and from Belgium. The fluid is slightly darker than midnight five miles down in a coal mine during a power failure and the tan head is short-lived. Billed as a dessert beer, this label is overtly more sweet and chocolate-drenched than any flavored stout yet sipped by our panel. It is almost like a fine chocolatier in Brussels was making his own vastly superior version of Hershey's syrup and added a mite of good Jamaican java to it. Then a truck carrying stout crashes into his shop and a commercial was filmed from the lovely mishap. Mokah is not simplistically a candy-coffee beer for the supporting malts are well constructed and harmonious at every intersection. There are occasional, nippy, bitter notes among the sweet and as with fancy less liquid chocolate that fact is to be expected and praised. This Blackwater entry is easily one of the finest flavored stouts on the planet and it's imperial buzz, one can hardly wish for a finer sweetish sipping beer of dark hue. Panelists here said "distinctive and aimed at the chocolate lover who is also a stout lover...and that is millions worldwide...what a lovely combination of flavors...my highest mark", "I could drink this every day for years", and "I nearly went to heaven and saw Godiva...why are so many other choco-coffee stouts so bitter and raw?". This is very much the most luscious take on the now trendy Coffee-Chocolate Stout style and for my money the new benchmark.

Star Black Cherry Stout

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

Everyone using cherries seems to add them to wheat beers or makes a lambic. This is one better idea. This is SOME wheat. Unfortunately there is no listed choco- late malt so that cherry connection is doubtful. The fresh Oregon fruit was added to a dryish stout. Color is very opaque brown with a faint cherry glow against 100 watt lamps. Head is tall and dark. The stout-ness is overpowering to the cherry part and frankly not everyone was convinced at first sip. The cherry-ness is certainly secondary to malt and conveys itself best in a very subtle tart way. Black cherries being blander than some sweet cherries may be the reason. Reviewers noted 'good double malt stout but fruit appeal is minor' and 'once again proof that the better stouts now come from the New World'.

WHEAT - FRUITED AND FLAVORED

Wheats can be flavored with most anything but traditional tree and bush fruits are common. The citrus genus (lime, lemon, orange, grapefruit) are very popular and harmonize well with the grainy notes. Now that we also have citrus-like hop chemistry the synergy of grapefruit hops and any citrus juice is both obvious and effective. Fruit syrups are used in Germany and other countries.

21st Amendment Hell or High Watermelon Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.0

Cold Spring, Minnesota

These cans come in a neat glued box with the minty green Statue of Liberty sitting pretty on international orange Golden Gate bridge, her crown hanging on the tower and her left hand pulling a large mint-toned watermelon from a barge hauling 50 foot long melons on a barge. Her dress is raised just above her clothed knees and she smiles sternly but pleasantly with tablet and torch also laid down on the giant span. Golden rays still emanate from her bright head. Liberty is a little bold, thick, big-boned, and manish but in a faintly sexy Kristen Johnston (3rd Rock from the Sun) style. KJ would make a very fine living Liberty and far better than those hired skinny, college girls hawking tax refunds and the Libertarian Party in Ms. Liberty robes on some of our streets.

Beer buzzes and more do make for good writing. Just ask...well most any published author. Scholars with their tests cannot prove ethanol increases creativity in writing but look at the our best, most celebrated authors and see the lists of what they drank when writing their best stuff. Whatever beer or vodka or odd tonics do to free up our human thought process and the necessary flow of words, a stiff drink or twelve will surely not hurt the process - but it may shorten the attention span and devotion to actually putting thoughts down. The synergy of drink and fast wordprocessing is perhaps the best nexus in the history of literature thought we have lots of drunk, pen-wielding scribes from the last five centuries to beat.

This 4.9% ABV formula is "fermented with watermelon concentrate and added watermelon juice". Like Ms. Liberty (she is French after all) the 21st Amendment experts "stand for independence and perseverance" hoping to make affordable innovations in beer via quality cans..."no obstacle too great. No Journey too long. No fruit too gigantic...summer in a can, celebrating the right to be original". Nice lines there, likely penned with a buzz but authentically free and fun just the same. Point one: This brew is excessively and rapidly foamy but I suppose they did have A-B's 12 chemical anti-foaming agents and so we will bear the momentary adjustment to bubbly, nearly dangerous pump-a-tude so close to the precious Brewbase laptop. The pour is hazy, dull yellow, the head too large and near white. The nose is faintly fruit but not impressive. First sip is hollow and neutral, later notes more of watermelon flavor, authentic but not overwhelmingly fruity, a good subtle balance I think. More to come. I need the full box of 6 to give it a fair appraisal or so I claim to the wifey. Point two: this is more sour with time and quantity, never bad with this pH but far from the sweetness of the real rinded thing. This is not a sweet watermelon ale by any means and we sort of had that expectation going in. Sour watermelon ale is a valid take when one is going to new places and taking liberties with Liberty and the luscious melon from the Golden State. (Thankfully, they did not make our minty goddess melonaceous in her personal presentation which would have soured us even more).

Our next cans show it to be a genuinely innovative and a useful product. Male reviewers here would really like to see a sweet version and perhaps also with more ethanol in that ancient, proven effective infuse- your-pink-veggie-melon-with-hard- liquor-to-help-gain- access-to-yet- softer-pink- melons motivation. Both may have a vegetable IQ and greet the sun full of seeds. Our panelists felt "the slightly sour, low ABV take is smart for many markets but I feel the watermelon wheat subclass has more potential with endless experiments and variations" and "loved it...a nice surprise...we went out and got another box the next day...goofy and cool graphics and as a designer I'm hard to impress...a solid offering". Mega minty green kudos to a pioneering liberty with Liberty and Melons for all. Let's get the watermelon ale and wheat formula into new places very soon. The potential is endless.

Abita Satsuma Harvest Wit

RATING: 4.0

Abita Springs, Louisiana

Flavoring a wheat or wit with citrus notes is not unusual, at least in terms of lemon or orange peel. The creative folks at Abita Springs took a basic golden wheat base and used local Louisiana satsumas to make what is legally called "a malt beverage brewed with fruit and spices". Color is a very hazy straw yellow, head near white, lasting well, nose of tart wheat. Spicing is very weak to near undetectable but the satsumas present a very strange, curious, not immediately wonderful nor horrible flavor. It bears much examination and that in a new brew is something I can like - at first! The satsuma or Citrus unshiu, called Mikan in Japan, came to Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana by the Jesuits and remain slightly popular there. It is mutation from the better known mandarin orange but is considered by some a distinct species. The flavor in this rendition is dark, not light as most citrus elements beer will be, slightly musky, earthy, and yet appealing in the dank, somber quality of it all. I researched the use of this fruit in general cooking and found it has use as a fresh addition to salads, blended into a bitterish tapenade, squeezed over fish, or made into a jelly and jam products. Kudos to Abita for use a special local ingredient and moderately good marks for the result.

Boulder Kinda Blue Wheat

RATING: 3.0

Boulder, Colorado

From the Looking Glass Series, this wheat-based summer brew has "muted" blueberry flavor, fortunately no blue color, instead a cloudy golden haze and low off white head. The wheat flavors are there but not as strong a foundation as might be had from Colorado's first microbrew. Nor is the blueberry flavor clear as such, nor is it really clear is fruit in general and nor is it clearly likeable. There are promising bright notes with a few of those anthocyanin-drenched, dank notes of the wild fruit. Those few vibrant, bright hints are potential brilliance are densely interspersed with weak wheat flavors and lots of things quite ordinary and boring. Kinda Blue. Kinda Bland. Kinda Unnecessary.

Breckenridge Agave Wheat

RATING: 4.5

Breckenridge, Colorado

B-ridge is better known for worldclass snow sports and general elite resort activity and here is a tasty beer to match. This unfiltered brew is cloud, gold, and pleasant in a tall glass. The label shows a skull wearing a sombrero, holding sheaths of wheat in his remaining teeth - something of an homage to Mexico where Agave is used to flavor and ferment tequilla. There is something of a faint tequilla like flavor here but there is no telling what species their "Agave nectar" comes from - it should be Agave tequilana to be the real thing. Anyone, the flavor is very highly developed, compatible and complimenting the wheat to a degree of perfecton I had not expected. Here is a very fine use of special ingredients and I hope this label continues to be offered and tuned up a bit for even richer flavor.

Brewery Hill Cherry Wheat

RATING: 4.0

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Master Brewer Leo Orlandini takes a WHEAT ALE and adds cherry juice and natural flavors. The later additive disturbed some reviewers in this age of perfect honesty and fully disclosed recipes. We gave it good marks for the cloudy look and the big head that lasts and lasts. Near a bright light it has a very nice cherry-amber glow that's hard to describe but easy to enjoy. Despite the color is does not seem to have a Hefe-weizen yeasty base flavor. The cherry juice flavor is authentic and very pleasant in this moderate dose. It is a bit sweeter than some of us would like - 'too much soda and too little wheat' said one. But overall its very pleasant and heads above the average fruit-cooler beer of today's mass market. Yet it should be better - dryer, more wheaty.

Dogfish Head Festina Peche

RATING: 2.5

Milton, Delaware

The label says it's a "Neo-Berliner" stlye weiss fermented with peach juice. The label also says "malt beverage with peach concentrate". Boooooo...Even worse....4.5% alcohol. I am certain the "malt beverage" tag is necessary in some states since it may not quality by all state's silly, ignorant definitions of beer styles. It actually

get better for a minute. Color is hazy medium yellow with a strong lace. It cannot be a wine cooler with all that or can it? Aroma is weak. First sip confirms my suspicions. This a pseudo-lambic, having peachy tartness yet none of the rich flavors of the real "concentrate". Do we have here a wheat tarted up (in two senses of that word) with an acid fruit thing but having no depth, character, or complexity to make one admire it. I'm the wrong guy to pull this stunt on, having in my youth experimented with many beer styles and many kitchen ingredients including coffee, spices, herbs, juices, and much, much more. I think I know a cheap additive blended into a basic style, ruining it in the end and serving only to create another item for the chalk board. I can put orange or peach or any other acidic juice in a wheat beer and get more interesting results. A lemon slice and average quality wheat beer would be better. Stay away.

Eel River Acai Berry Wheat

RATING: 4.5

Scotia, California

This "Certified Organic" wheat beer is flavored with the popular "health juice", a powerful antioxidant whose scientific merits remain open to question. Regardless of it's "miracle" rep, the Acai remains a tasty juice and makes a lovely pairing with this wheat beer. Acai is actually a palm tree (*Euterpe oleracea*), a close cousin to the palm from which "hearts of palm" are derived (*Euterpe edulis*). It's rich golden, carbonation furious(!), and head cream of some duration. It's just 4.0% so it's clearly "juiced down" rather than brewed with the fruit up front and designed towards the normal ABV range. Served very cold (and this is mandatory), it's refreshing and nicely blended. I certainly find it more interesting than most raspberry wheats out there. The finish is tad ragged at times where the bitterness and fruit sugars are not as finely homogenous as in the earlier passages. It's respectable fun and a good value - just not a potent ethanol vessel.



Harpoon Ginger Wheat

RATING: 5.0

Boston, Mass./Windsor, Vermont

This is the true ginger ale. Our popular, supermarket ginger ale is soda pop, flavored sugar water, a beverage so thin in real ginger it needs to be colorized and so weak in real brewing it must be artificially carbonated. There are some nice gourmet ginger ales now but sugar is always king and ginger their lowly maid. As part of Harpoon's limited 100 Barrel Series, this Session No. 29 offering is 7.0% ABV, 18 IBU, and augmented with a bit of honey, wheat malt, and lemon juice. It pours a slightly hazy gold with slow, long lace, and a Pils type, nearly pure white head of some size.

Fresh ginger is used and as a fan of strong ginger tea (which has anti-viral, tummy soothing, and many other properties), this is a strong recipe worthy of praise and attention. By the way, strong REAL 100% ginger tea (not some diluted mass-market concoction made cheaply), taken with ESTER® (stomach friendly) Vitamin C, raw

garlic cloves, and a strong zinc gluconate drop like COLD-EEZE® is the best way to knock a cold or real flu out in 2-4 days - done it many times and went from the "hit by Mack truck feeling" (true influenza) to a clear head and ability to work in mere days. I cannot validate any medical virtues to this Ginger Wheat but it will keep you in a good mood from first sip to last drop. This is a very impressive offering, outstanding and striking the right cord in all flavor notes. There are those "change of pace" beers which merely amuse, puzzle, or cause one to think. This wheat beer is solid while others are merely curious renditions, entertaining while others remain unbalanced and discordant. Fortunes are made with "change of pace" beers you try one and their money is made - and we move on to better things or the same imperfect scam again with a new color combination of packaging or clever names. If I fall again for another not-ready-for-primetime fruity wheat beer with some flying evil monkey or fluorescent colors or busty maiden - shame on me! Here is one new-kid-on-the-block that educates and broadens our horizons, all while satisfying and maybe giving a taught grin.

Leinenkugel Lemon Berry Shandy

RATING: 4.5

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

The pour is hazy, amber-gold, the lace steady and linear, head near white. ABV is just 4.2% with this mix of lemon, blackberry juice, and apparently raspberries that appear in the label illustration along with wheat sprigs. The flavor is pleasantly fruit, authentic to the hilt, a good solid shandy and refreshing when very well chilled. The base wheat flavor is there, sufficient to be believable at least. Panelists here said "fruitful and a real joy...maybe the best Leinies I've had...and some of them are close to bad" and "Berries and citrus can be hard to mix even with a wheat framework...this one is nicely formulated and works very, very well for me."

Lost Coast Tangerine Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.5 (retaste 2012), 3.0 (original review)

Eureka, California

Our second tasting panel had a significantly different review from the originally, suggesting we think, it was improved and altered. True tangerine flavors are now apparent along with a 3mm yeast layer. The fruit flavors are authentic but do overcome the wheat notes, resulting in a half bottle deduction with us. Panelists remarked that it was "tangy but assertive...more juice than ale" and "hazy...genuine citrus flavors are impressive...something is still missing".

Original test: I've wanted fruited wheat beers to use more exotic and better quality domestic fruits as soon as I tasted my first decent apricot wheat or cherry wheat. The options are and were endless and still remain unexplored. If Michelob can figure out that tangerines (real or imagined) are good for a beer, so should the bright microbrewers and then months before. The problem usually is this: 1) the wheat is too fake, weak, and entirely covered up, 2) the fruit tastes too weak or is too sugared, 3) flavor is artificial in an portion, and 4) there is some horrible food coloring that makes me think I bought a wine-cooler or flavored malt beverage by mistakes. Will I have a eureka experience from California or something belong to Michelob or Smirnoff or worse?

It flows in my glass a medium amber, hazy and thus yeasty and likely a true wheat? Yes...please send me a true wheat! The bottle confirms the floating glory of a true style in it's more flavorful form. First sip is almost like a citrus cooler, very tangerine full and authentic but I had expected it to subside in acidity and potency towards a more wheaty or fruity-ale finish. Nope. The bright fruit of choice is very dominant and yet given the yeasty blur, one hopes they could marry the two well and wisely? The more I sip, the stronger the tangerine becomes and I cannot find the yeast and wheat they apparently put into the mix. One is a fool to make a pomegranate Grey Goose drink for the quality of the vodka is wasted and lost in such a strong presentation. Here too we have quality lost and covered up. I am sure they use all the good stuff but the smack and poke of good tangerine juice makes all the other efforts at presenting this as real beer a bit of failure. Turn that hesperidum down 6 notches because Michelob and that lot will always win if it's more about juice and less about real wheat beer. Porsche doesn't build the brightest red cars just some of best cars that happen to be red.

Pyramid Apricot Ale

RATING: 4.5

Seattle and Kalama, Washington

This cloudy orange ale has a big head and some firm carbonation. It is based on their Hefeweizen (cloudy-yeasty wheat) beer with added 'natural essence of apricot'. The word 'essence' is often modern chem-speak for

something close to natural juice but usually cheaper and simpler. It is not usually a good thing so some reviewers gave a demotion on that account. If you read our review for Kid Notorious Apricot Ale (full real fruit used) you may note how this fails somewhat. Flavor is rather tart (authentically so) but some tasters felt a touch sweeter theme would be nicer. The hops or yeast flavor balance was the main reason a half bottle was deducted by most. Won the 1994 Great American Beer Festival Gold Medal in the Fruit/Vegetable category. Pleasing but can be improved.

Oregon Raspberry Wheat

RATING: 3.0

Portland, Oregon

This northwestern brew is one of a dozen fruit-flavored wheat beers put on the market this year. A recent issue of ALL ABOUT BEER (highly recommended reading) mentions such trends as the 'Snapple-ization' of the beer industry. Can a mint lemonade beer be far off? Color is cloudy amber with a big head and strong carbonation. Raspberry aroma fills the entire room! The cloudiness comes from being unfiltered (as is their Hefe-Weizen). But this self-described 'natural flavor' (rather than 'fermented with berries') is suspect. Like Naked Aspen Raspberry Wheat there is just 'too much wine-cooler faux flavor to ever win over a true beer lover'. If I want this I have whole shelf of coffee flavoring bottles I can drip into a wheat beer. Coffee yes. Beer no.

Rogue MoM Hefeweizen (Ale Brewed with Coriander and Ginger)

RATING: 4.5

Newport, Oregon

Coriander is surely a traditional spice in a cloudy ale of Belgian style. It's the ginger here that places this with the fruit and flavored wheat ales. To the botanically correct, ginger is a root, a vegetable and not a fruit. (To those of you not aware of the horrors of real botany: tomatoes and peppers, though savory, are fruits). This ale is dedicated to "the mother in each of us" whether she be named Cori or Ginger or Hefe. The malts include Great Western Harrington, Klages, and Wheat. Saaz is the hops of choice. The color is cloudy gold, not as yeasty as I might have expected in a 650ml package, the lace very vigorous, and the head surprising white for this rich a fluid color. The coriander is subdued at first, stronger with more sips as would be expected. The ginger is noticable, barely, at first few sips, later a joyful and playful nip as the "saturation factor" comes to the taste buds. Being a big fan of real ginger tea and having done various versions (from soft, palatable cups for ladies in morning sickness to potent sticky brothes to maximum the root's antiviral qualities midst a full-bloom flu), I can appreciate their balance and restraint with the dosing here. The wheat notes are a solid quality presentation and very pleasant. I would like a bit more hefe-style fruitiness and yeasty punch but I can understand why they turned up the ginger in favor of those familiar German notes.

Samuel Adams Blackberry Witbier

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Mass.

Only the 'Marion' variety of blackberry from Oregon is used to make this wheat ale sing the praises of fresh fruit, the addition of spices and unspecific "natural flavors" as the supporting cast. It came from the Brewmaster's Collection pack of early 2009 and was stamped NEW at this time. Color is bright gold, faintly clouded, not floating yeast with a large off white head. Lace goes for a minute or two. The mix of grain and true berry fills the nose but the flavor is never as good as the sniff. It needs to be very well-chilled for it degrades into empty places and alternating fruit and weak wheat if warmed even a little. I enjoyed it okay and found it refreshing when iced up to near freezing but it was a let down from a firm so well known for very sophisticated recipes and getting things right. Perhaps the label is too new. Yet I am reminded they've done fruit wheats (especially Cherry Wheat) for ages and somehow the tartness and depth of flavor has yet to be dialed in with either. I do not want a purplish beer cooler here but neither do I want such disunity between fruit, acid, and grain as oft occurs at mid and later notes. The berry is an additive and not an interwoven part of the tapestry.

Samuel Adams Cherry Wheat

RATING: 4.5

Boston, Mass.

Many of the premium American brew houses seem to be tinkering with their wheat beers to come up with new products containing fruit, honey, chili, odd herbs or whatever. The boys at SA have taken their decent (though not ideal) wheat and augmented the flavor with cherry flavor. This is no CHERRY LAMBIC (a fermented and LONG-aged cherry wheat). In 1995 we rated this an even 4.0 bottles but in 1996 we thought it earned an improved 4.5 rating. The cherry flavor is as if fresh-squeezed or drained. The only flaw is that it lacks the complexity that more wheat flavor would have added. Reviewers remarked on "wonderful very well chilled as a summer refresher" and "nice balance and fruitiness even if a tad thinner on taste than I'd prefer". Blend with a Hefe-Weizen for a boost. A yeasty boost is very much in order.

Samuel Adams Coastal Wheat

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Mass.

This new 2010 product comes in six-packs and also part of the Brewmaster Collection boxes. It is classically colored, a faint bit hazy, and the head is finely bubbled and enduring. The whole "coastal" bit refers to the Lisbon and Eureka lemon peels used to give it some lemon flavor - a nice amount but not as much as most of my friends do with other wheats and dare I say Coronas. The later set only remain friends because they are female - just for the record. The wheat is not as strong as I'd like, nor deep nor inspiring. Wheat ales are not SA's thing when compared to what others stateside do with the ancient, honorable style. It is bright, luminous, made with a named-defined variant of a proven ingredient, and refreshing - that seems to be their only goal for charging nearly ten dollars. I would have liked more blaze with the haze, a richer wheat taste, even some yeast sediment, and turned up the lemon one or two notches.

Saranac Pomegranate Wheat

RATING: 4.0

Utica, New York

The cool brown Andirondack bear in sun glasses juggling pomegranite fruits on the label is nice fun. A basic (never grainy) wheat is blended with real juice from Punica granatum and the result is a semi-cloudy bear with semi-tart fruitiness and only moderate wheat taste. It might have been more tart and sharp in other hands but Saranac's approach here is restrained, making it more approachable and less like the beer cooler others might have produced. It is a meek, authentically fruit-filled offering, at tad simple when it might have been more complex wheaty, grainy, and intermeshed with flavor. That said, it's priced like those fruity, contrived Bud and Michelob inventions and this is galaxies above that hyper-accessible, affront-to-brewing, junk. Make that last word CRAP. This is real beer that is a tad off what it should have been but it's real beer - make no mistake in my comparisons. It's at the best when very, very icy cold. It is too Kool-aidish at warmer temps though not quite that sweet or tart. They failed to the extent is it NOT a true, rich wheat beer AUGMENTED by a wonderful fruit. It is fruit at the expense of wheat rather than balanced with it or complimenting it as it might be. I think fruit wheats are a very difficult thing to master and we do not have very many highly rated ones in this book. Sam Adams and the Wicked gang have some noted misses in the fruit wheat category. Serve this one as cold as an ice berg and it will drive away the malaise of that afternoon of hot, laborous yard work. One shouldn't have to do this but I sometimes do this to remedy a nice, affordable offering like this - I simply blend it 2:1 with a full German Hefe-weizen to boost those beloved yeasty, wheat notes. There's a book in me (or one of you?) about beer-blending and this is the type of situation when's it's both fun and practical.

Saranac Wild Berry Wheat

RATING: 2.5

Utica, New York

This is a WHEAT ALE fermented with honey, undisclosed fruit juices, and those mysterious natural flavors. Color is amber with a lasting white head. Lace is rather strong for an American brew. It is an unfiltered hefe-weizen but is only the least bit cloudy. Unfortunately it lacks either a distinctive hefe-weizen flavor or a rich berry element. The subtle berry-ness is okay if the finish was not so weak and dull. It's okay to be subtle if there are not watery places mixed along the way. And it was surprisingly dry in the finish with anything with wildflower honey it it! Reviewers here were mostly negative: "neither a good wheat nor a good fruit beer...I'd almost prefer something too sweet than this" and "love the bear on the label...sadly their worst beer I've tried."

Sea Dog Apricot Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Maine (Pugsley Brewing)

Usually when I see "natural flavor added" we do not end in a good beer review. "Real fruit" or "natural juice" are generally prone to give a better result. In this case I am wrong. The nose of this stuff is pure apricot of the finest, richest, most authentic character. And miracle of all miracles: I can actually taste grainy wheat flavors too. It's extremely bright, light yellow (never gold), the ivory head long lasting, and lace moderate-strong. There are so few good fruit ales on the planet I am delighted they succeeded here and with such a worthy, overlooked fruit. I'm not sure tart berries always merry well to citrus-infused ales anyhow and so sweet, mellow, distinct, less tart fruits as the apricot are often finer choices. While not a perfect , this is the very finest of the fruit ales I've tried in decades. Highly recommended if you normally hate fruit ales and beer soda.

SLO Boysenberry Hefe-Weizen

RATING: 4.0

San Luis Obispo CA/New Ulm MN

Boysenberry juice is brewed with a Hefe-type wheat beer for another interesting variant of what is now called a FRUIT WHEAT. Thankfully the stuff is not colored so it appear a cloudy gold with a near white head - of course that indicates the berry content is modest too (as well it should be?). The flavor of the berry is evident in the aroma as well as the flavor and is added to augment flavor not control it. One gets a quality full wheat flavor though not as completely as without the juice additive. Still it seems to be a hard combination to tame. Many of us thought a less tart approach would have been welcome though it is fortunately NOT sickly sweet; this is no honey, fruit, wheat wine cooler. We'd welcome another try at it with a less sharp finish.

Smuttynose Summer Weizen Ale

RATING: 3.5

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The "brewed with chamomile flowers" comment on the front label gets this nice wheat placed in our fruited and flavor group. The label is mostly a sky blue pool surface with an aging blonde housewife in a old-fashioned hairdo and similarly ancient one-piece suit. Not pretty but one gets the refreshing theme intended because of her smile. Color, head, and that mouthfeel thingy are normal but there is some nice cloudiness or haze to mention. I would not notice the chamomile unless I sniffed very deeply and heard before hand it was there - it's there just not very obvious. The first sip got a "wow" and I was very far from a wow mood after a hard, cruel day at the digital coal mines. The crispness of the wheaty, truly grainy flavor is wonderful. Later notes are sweeter and somewhat fruity, not German yeast fruity so much as US golden ale fruity. The hops finish together with the Chamo is very well done. Those mid notes with much sweetness seem a bit simple and contrived - as I said before, suggesting cheap sweet golden ales. There are nice flavors here and there but the wow went away as the quality did not hold up with more sips and a second bottle. She wows at first glance but fails to deliver. No, no, no, I am not going to be PC and say "he" or someone will think the fruitiness comes from me.

Star Raspberry Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

Star Brewing of Portland makes this ale usually some barley malts, wheat, and Liberty hops. Fresh raspberries rather than flavoring (a common shortcut) is employed. Color is a pale tawny amber and the head is mid-diameter foam. The aroma is fruity but not strong. Flavor is much more subtle than some of the flavored kinds (Oregon, Naked Aspen to name two) and there is more of an authentic fruit tartness. It is not spicy like the nutmeg-enhanced Pete's Wicked Winter, our overall best berry beer to date. Currently we rate in 2nd best but most of us liked their Pineapple Ale better. One noted "wonderful tart and subtle finish...three cheers for resisting a wine cooler berry overload" and "their comparison to a fruit-flavored champagne is about right". Worth trying.

Tomcat Southern Peach Wheat Ale

RATING: 2.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

The promoted 'subtle peach aroma' seems to be missing but the color surely suggests that charming fruit. It often failed our WHAT-FRUIT-IS-IT-WITHOUT- READING-THE-LABEL test. You can't imagine the range of ripe fruits that were suggested. First tastes were sometimes negative (dry, bitter, thin) though 'taste bud lock' (saturation) did improve some opinions up to 3.0 or 3.5 bottles on the rating scale. (The Queen of Beasts on the label got a perfect 5 Claw rating every time). Basically we expect a LIGHT FRUIT ALE to have some compensating wheat or ale yeast flavor elements if the fruit is not dominant. None were found. Nor is it PEACH LAMBIC or PEACH WINE COOLER. This very dry, mild beer is certainly not up to the company's capabilities or reputation.

Tommyknocker Jack Whacker Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.5

Idaho Springs, Colorado

This unfiltered fluid looks like prototypical wheat beer but differs in the flavoring being from lemon-grass and not the traditional orange or lemon peels. Those of you who cook with lemon-grass (Cymbopogon species) know that this plant has a slightly different take on the citrus theme, containing citronella, citronellol, citral, and geraniol. Culinary and botanist types will argue endlessly as to whether the grass should be spelled as one word, two words, or with a hyphen. I subscribe to the system used in horticultural nomenclature where a plant that is not a true thing is given a hyphen - in this case it is not a true lemon or Citrus species, thus lemon-grass. By the way, lemon-grass is not only tasty but it is useful as an antiseptic in pure form and in at least one species (C. citratus) has very real anti-cancer properties. I suspect this formula has limited health properties but this is not to say one could not brew their own recipe with enough of the grass to do real good. I really like this non-classic take on citrus wheat beer but the wheat ale base is not as full or present as it might be.

WHEAT - REGULAR, KRISTALL, OR HEFE-WEIZEN

The majority of these labels will be the classic German wheat ales. Wheat can be 50% or much higher, given rich phenolic flavors with or without the cloudy yeast in the bottle.

Belgian Wheats are placed with the "Ale - Belgian - Golden" category above because they are a distinct style, very often spiced and least wheaty in flavor.

PYRAMID IMPERIAL HEFE-WEIZEN ALE (BREWER'S RESERVE 2007)

4.5

Pyramid Breweries, Portland, OR USA

These tall, rich golden glasses of wheat are made from 60% wheat are more hop-filled than expected. Flavor and feel are full but not overwhelming, the finish more assertive than a typical German label. The haze is a bit less than expected as is the lower lace. Hops come from Tettnang and Negget cultivars while the Malt is Munich 20 L style. The beautifully delivered dose of ethanol is 7.5% or more stiffer than most German imports. It's competent and enjoyable without being great. Still with the price of a dollar in the cellar, it remains a very good value (5/2008).

Weihenstephaner Hefeweissbier

RATING: 5.0

Wiehenstephan, Germany

Here begins the standard in bottled wheat beer for the American palate. I may have been the first one tried in single bottle form or any form. It has everything: deephead, lace followed by more lace, floral notes built upon fruity yeast and stunning wheat, and a color that is golden perfect. Occasionally one hears that one flavor overtops another by some slight margin or that the carbonation is too strong. This is like saying a Corvette is prone to squealing tires and a Rolls Royce has a distracting grill! The other notes are subtle enough, these being hops, bananas, citrus (identified all over the place), and general yeasty goodness. It is not sweet nor is it bitter - a good result for the style. Some will claim that Franziskaner is better standard while others swear by Pinkus, Ayinger, Paulaner, or Sailor. None of these are bad or weak or untrue to style. Back the car analogies - these are also Ferrari's and Lambo's and priceless wunderbrews.

Abita Wheat u w 4.0 7 This American wheat from Abita Springs LA is medium golden and has a

short-lived head. It is closer to their Golden label than to a real German wheat or even Sam Adam's stateside wheat. It starts with good aroma and finishes clean but a bit sweet. About the only thing wrong with it is that it is not a wheat in the traditional flavor. Called something else it would have earned some 5 ratings among us. But as advertised it was a let down.

Arcobrau Count Arco's Weissbeer

RATING: 4.5

Bavaria, Germany

Since 1567 Arcobrau of Bavaria has made superb yeasty beers. The \$2-3 pint bottles are transparent enough to reveal heavenly yeast particles dancing with joy. It is the equal of Maisel's and Spatan's most cloudy wheats but has a bit more pungency and zip than either. Carbonation lasts until you drink it. It is so rich and full that one might be tempted to blend it with another beer. On the other hand one is tempted to drink slowly - and less.

Anderson Valley High Rollers Wheat

RATING: 4.0

Although well-made we deduct a bottle from the rating as it is misnamed. The label confesses to barley malt in addition to wheat. This is really a NEAR WHEAT as it is rather fruity and has only a hint of wheat in the palate. It is touch duller and more wheaty than their Boont Amber. Color is a slightly hazy yellow. Testing it with Spaten Club-Weiss and Franziskaner was a mistake as this is not a true wheat. A nice beer but do not expect the German style.

Ayinger Brau-Weisse (Helles Hefe-Weisbier)

RATING: 4.0

471 MOST BEAUTIFUL BOTTLE CAP Aying The Brauerei Aying of Aying makes this yeasty beer with an artfully decorated cap. The head is massive and foamy as with most good yeasty wheats. It is actually 60% barley malt and 40% wheat and is less wheatful than Edelweiss or Maisel with which it was compared. It is still very pleasant and in some ways more beer-like to if you're used to German Pils. The finish does trail off into a weak watery note that is perhaps okay in a dry Pils but not for a yeast wheat beer. These PARTIAL WHEATS (sometimes called AMERICAN WHEATS) are an interesting cross-breed but like many rose wines it is neither superb at one thing or another. Retested in 1996 many of our panelists preferred their DARK WHEAT (Ur-Weisse) version for fuller flavor.

Baltika 8 Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.5

St. Petersburg, Russia

The Baltika's are numbered and #8 here is a bright wheat ale with a lasting off white head. The shapely, angular brown bottles are shiny and distinctive. According to their website it is unfiltered but I only detect a faint haze. The "biologically active substances that are useful for our health" sounds like a promotion for the next Russian Olympic team but it's actually true. That's from the website. The FDA would shut them down if it made it to the golden label. Flavor notes at first are tart, citrusy, high quality. They progress into nice wheat with moderate fruit, apple and pear to be exact. It is not full hefe-weizen and unlike your average German product this is more notable for delicate and nice fruit flavors than wheaty grain. The approach is different and not bad by any means. I'd like to see a phenolic analysis some time for I'm sure it's profile would be very different from our western offerings.

Big Rock Grasshopper Wheat Ale c w 4.0 33 This unpasteurized ale is an attractive golden yellow with short-lived head and long-lived carbonation. While the idea of grasshoppers and wheat are not compatible at our feasts this sweet and malty brew is very pleasant. But once again it is no wheat in the German and Grant's Weis sense - read: true sense. I suspect the grasshoppers must have gotten the only wheat taste! Given the merits of their Pale Ale this ale can be overlooked. We want real wheats!!!!

Big Rock Magpie Rye Ale c wr 3.0 799 Calgary, Alberta Big Rock has always been one of our favorite Canadian beers - easily on par with the best of those south of their border. This one is sadly an

exception. The color is medium golden with a small but lasting head. It is semi-dry but overall weak with just a faint rye flavor. It is 'barely a microbrew' and at nearly \$9 it was quite an offensive experience. Whatever they do they need to triple the recipe or brew it longer. A good study of the rye beer standards (Schierlinger Roggen) is in order. The only reason to go near this brew is if you collect artistic beer labels and want to pay \$9 for six of them. A very sad let down.

Breckenridge Mountain Wheat Ale u w 4.5 883 Denver Co\Breckenridge CO\Dallas TX\Buffalo NY
This pale yellow brew with a short-lived head is surely one of the top American brewed wheats around. It won the 1995 Great American Beer Festival Gold Medal in the Wheat Ale/Lager Class. That is no small accomplishment but a few of our panalists considered that like a Ford or Chevy being named Car of the Year over Mercedes or BMW. In other words the local pride might get in the way of recommending something truly better from Europe - Germany in both examples. This wheat gets some votes we're sure just on the semi-sweetness alone (sugar being a human weakness) but it does have enough depth of flavor to earn our respect. If your wheat tastes run more towards the fruitful than the rich and yeasty this may be your idea of perfection. Well worth buying.

Brooklyner-Schneider Hoppen-Weisse

RATING: 3.0

Brooklyn, New York

Two accomplished brewmasters, Hans-Peter Drexler (Schneider Brewery) and Garrett Oliver (Brooklyn Brewery) came together to produce this corked-and-wired, very elegant bottle that has more foil than than a dozen Alcoa factories. It is 100% bottle-fermented and the ABV ends up at a nice 8.9%. This "new sensation" from their cooperation produces a weissbock fermented with Schneider yeast then robustly dry-hopped with Amarillo and Palisade hops - in other words, Bavarian craftsmanship plus American ingenuity.

I drive a Chrysler 300 that is part American design and about a quarter Mercedes engineering. I love this concept. The European 300's may even come with a Benz diesel. Such Ameri-teutonic hybrids are amazing in many industries - no, no, no I'm not going to call them Yankee-Kraut products - and here is one example that fails go harmonize and synergize well. My first sip was drenchd in ethanol and not impressive. Later pours were better mixed and frankly reminded me of a Golden Belgian ale minus the spices and fruit. Still I found the ABV too sharp and upfront, not shielded or hidden as it could be. It is quite bitter and harsh but I know many of you crave such extremes and truly reverence them. Maybe if you want a beer to punish your tastebuds like a drinking grain alcohol from a beaker, there might be something for you here. There was not enough of the flavor notes or complexity to bring me around. It was just relentless hops bitterness and ultra-ethanol abrasion from first sip to the very last. I found this more than over-the-top, something like a monster-truck version of a Porsche Cayenne in lime green, glowing orange wheels, with a giant Porsche logo in flames on the hood. The yeast flavors are now and again exciting but as one would expect vary with the length, timing, and quality of the pour. Perhaps the lingering dissatisfaction is because I like my wheats yeasty, fruity, and easy to drink, best if crisp, and not full of alcohol ONLY to justify the packaging, timing, and price. I need my Porsches (weissbiers) classy, lean, all-business, potent without being raucous, and frankly not Americanized for the sake of cooperation or what should have been a marketing coup. There is so much talent between these two brewers that they can and should do this over and with full redemption. This time, I'm sorry, it was just not there and is a hybrid not so much symmetrical as raw and monstrous.

The Bruery Berliner Hottenroth Weisse Berlin-style Tart Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.5

Orange County, California

These thick 750ml bottles look very European but are not. The tag "sour=yum!" is immediately intriguing and this bodes well for the hope of authenticity. The whole unfiltered, bottle-conditioned thing in brown tones is appealing without doubt. It is named to honor Fred and Sarah Hottenroth for reasons not explained on the label. The website confirms they are the founder's Patrick Rue's parents. Say what? 3.1% alcohol? But this should not be a shock or offense to those familiar with the true Berlin style as it is often a low ABV product and certainly one loaded with Brettanomyces and Lactobacillus culture. Consider this low ethanol normal and no reason for demotion or down-grading in any system. In Germany they may even add raspberry syrup or woodruff to it and sometimes balance the tartness with a pale lager. Ever add those first two things to your wheat beer, you

American lads? Doubt it. So little do we know about European beer and traditions. I did not have raspberry syrup but a splash of blueberry pancake syrup was fun even if not terrible noble or manly. I know woodruff from my youth in herb gardening - no thanks. This ultra-hazy brew does benefit from blending and the German practice of blending down the tartness to taste with lager is not a bad one. I personally found this US version neither too jaunty or puckering so I did not need a blend. A sweetish beer would my recommendation for tempering and particularly one rich in malts - a Festbier would be ideal but only a small splash or two. Like it alot but not everyone will as poured. Modify as you will (sweet + tart = sweetheart) and with some variant on the theme you will come to adore it.

Casta Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.5

Monterrey, Mexico

This bright gold ale comes from Mexico; exactly know for yeasty wheat dreams. Chunky, floating yeast is evident, it's quite fruity, moderately sweet overall, and with refreshing written all over it. There's a nice malty backbone. I have trouble for it coming in 4-packs for it fails to compete with most American wheat ales in the value arena. Still, it's very enjoyable and one should put Corona away forever as summer chiller.

Cross Roads u wh 3.0 530 St. Louis MO Anheuser-Busch makes this new brew with 'unique color, taste, and aroma'. The 'unique color' is just a cloudy medium yellow and the taste is simply a yeasty-minty-fruity flavor. The boys at A-B have NOT tried to make an American wheat beer but one reviewer described it as 'not unlike a simple mass-produced Belgian beer'. It does have a few of those tantalizing European flavor notes but unfortunately lacks depth, a strong finish, and the potent alcohol content. To another reviewer it was an 'overengineered flavored beer' yet 'for them an interesting new direction'. The head is decent and large. This really is a crossroads for A-B. The potential for a very good 4-bottle beer is here. At \$4.19 the value is solid. Just turn up the flavor one notch!

Devil Mountain Summer Mountain Brew u wc 4.0 865 Cincinnati OH This SUMMER WHEAT is pale yellow with a tall near white head. Citrus flavors and spices are added - the later being distinct from other labels. It seems more like a lemon tea sort of spicing than any we've had to date. It respect it is quite smooth, soothing, and all those warm fuzzy words. A bright blue label banner proclaims 'Limited Release' - we'll let you to think up the couple of jokes or so that suggests. Reviewers noted: 'the spicing and citrus as so well done (a mask?) that any genuine beer qualities cannot be determined' and 'Crisp, refreshing, and all that good stuff as marketed... I would add that it also charms and satisfies'.

Edelweiss Hefetrub g wh 470 BEST WHEAT BEER FALL 1994 Salzburg This cloudy wheat from Hofbrau Kaltenhausen of Salzburg has a very large foamy head with high carbonation. It has merit equal to Maisel and other good Hefe (yeasty-cloudy) wheats but is slightly less overpowering than Maisel's effort. It is a nice balance that is also a tad sweeter and more fruity. The combination of sweetness and rich yeast flavor is most appealing - this is a perfect balance we've wanted for some time. Many may prefer its bright sweet appeal over others but we suspect this degree of difference is open to subjective review by comparative evaluation. Most of us will buy it again when found. We'd be eager to read your comments.

Edelweiss Kristalklar au wk 479 Salzburg This Austrian beer is light yellow with a tall foamy head and enduring lace. The Crystal Clear (Kristalklar) of many wheat beers are weaker than the Hefe or yeasty versions. Such is not the case here. While it is not yeasty like their Hefetrub version (#470) is carries a substantial body of flavor that in many ways is more pure and satisfying. This may be the best Kristal-klar if you like a wheat that is truly smooth, bright on presentation, and yet highly rewarding for wheat character.

Erdinger Pikanlus Dunkler Weizenbock g wd 776 BEST DARK WHEAT BEER SUMMER 1996 Erding We reviewed Erdinger's Dunkel Weiss (Dark Wheat) some years back and were not very impressed. While this name sounds similar (in part) the product and reviews are so different. The \$3.59 bottles of 500ml size show a medium reddish-brown color with a tan head of large bubbles. Lace is fast and furious. Flavor is very rich and rewarding - irresistible to some of us! It has a sweet carmel almost maple sugary malt flavor of the greatest sophistication and refinement. It is positively the best SWEET DARK WHEAT BEER we've heard about. Some folks do not like wheat beers (dark or otherwise) being this sweet. One panalist thought of it as 'malt nectar from the gods'. That molasses-carmel flavor is almost always associated with UK darks so a German

one is a true surprise. Very memorable.

Erdinger Weissbeer

RATING: 4.0

This classic wheat from a major player comes in large 500ml bottles and is distinctly cloudy as the 'mit feiner hefe' on the label says - with gourmet or refined yeast particles. The head was almost too bubbly even with a careful pour and the bubbles are much larger than the Kristallklar variant. We were careful to observe the 46-53 degree F. serving suggestion but it proved inferior in flavor and complexity to both Maisel's Weisse and its Kristallklar variant.

Erdinger Weissbeer Kristallklar g w 114 This white or wheat beer lacks the yeasty clouds of their ordinary Weisbeer but tried side by side had a superior and more lively flavor. It was as good as most German beers ever get but at \$3.50 per pint we have seen better values for consuming mass quantities. The carbonation was enduring and made it very perfect in good crystal. It was very alive and complex at nearly all cold and cool temperatures. It was please almost anyone who likes refined beer.

Franziskaner Weissbeer g w 120 Their slogan in the US is: 'It's clear why its cloudy'. Cloudy and very tasty it is! Compared to to Spaten Club-Weiss it is a touch hazier and much richer in taste. That extra richness is best when you have one or two alone. The Spaten is more drinkable in quantity although both finish somewhat dry. This Bavarian treat lacked the stunning presentation of bubbles found in Maisel. We'd say it is one of the best FULL-BODIED WHEAT BEERS. Memorable.

Grant's Weis Beer u w 142 BEST WHEAT BEER MADE IN US 1994 Bert Grant spells his wheat or white beer with one 's' but it is double taste delight. He recommends so wisely that is must be 'glacial' cold and can be improved with a touch of lemon or fruit juice - the later being a risky venture for a \$9.00-\$10.00 sixpack. Color is deeply cloudy with a very persistant foamy head. It is rich but less than most German Hefe-Weizen. I suspect they don't use Cascade hops either. Very competant but so are many others.

Great Divide Whitewater Wheat Ale u w 4.0 997 Denver CO This won the 1994 Silver Medal at the Great American Beer Festival in the American Wheat class. It's also probably Judge Kenneth Starr's favorite in flight beverage on flights back from Little Rock. Color is pale Pilsoid yellow with a thin whitish head. It is surprisingly semi-sweet and does carry a nice bit of ale fruitiness with it - a rich plum aroma prevails. A German wheat it is not nor should it be compared to it. While the AMERICAN WHEAT CLASS has often been a joke for watered down wheat-additive lagers this is nice representative our country's name. Some beer lovers (experienced and some not) were put off by some of the flavor components so opinions at your table may vary as well. Doubtless it is better than most US-made wheats.

Hacker-Pschorr Dunkel Weisse (Dark Wheat) g wd 603 Munich American store shelves are nowadays never short of quality German DARK WHEATS (dunkel weisse). This 500ml bottle sold for just \$1.99 and the solemn portrait of Georg Schorr plus 'Since 1417' suggested high quality. Experienced wheatophiles will notice the Hefe-yeasty haze and the large persistant head as good signs. A fruity aroma is quickly perceived. Many dark wheats are overpowering yeast-loaded drinks or odd combinations of roasted wheat malt taste. This one truly excels with wonderful notes of apple and citrus. However it must be served icy cold and poured with great care. One reviewer dissented and suggested it was 'too filling and heavy' - a small wine glass full might be enough for those new to this style.

Heineken Tarwebok (Wheat Bock) ho w 4.0 605 Amsterdam Maybe the planets came out of allignment or the Federal Reserve did a rock video today. We need some explanation for the externally golden and most traditional Heineken company adding real color to labels and contents alike. This microbrew-like product is bright amber but little head remains. Their welcome effort has malt (and a little hops) but I doubt any German would classify this as either wheat or bock. Probably they had Oktoberfest in the marketing focus and as such it might find a niche - right color, flavor, high price, and timing. If you put it besides Becks Fest at \$3 less it has no merit. If you love medium-deep malt-ambers it just might be your ideal. Frankly we had more fun finding words or jokes in the name 'Tarwebok'.

Highland Cattail Peak Wheat

RATING: 4.0

Asheville, North Carolina

I like many things about Asheville. First of them is the cloud-diving roads to and from the town that will test any vehicle's brakes to the n-th degree. The second is the world's finest house or home, the Biltmore House; my hopes for the promised mansion in heaven thing. Third are the nice people there and then comes the architecture, stunning autumnal trees, and local crafts. The Highland Brewing Co. comes in the later category but I'd frankly rather have a pitcher of their stuff than any Biltmore House wines. This light yellow creation has wheat and a touch of rye plus "the tang and hue of Hibiscus". Lace is slow but ample. The name derives from a cool, refreshing breeze that comes down Mount Mitchell through Cattail Peak. Hibiscus eh? Not sure what they mean there. Being a botanist, I know that genus in many forms, some of them flavorful and others quite odd and bitter. If they mean blossoms (as with Hibiscus in herbal tea) one would expect rich red bloody color and bitter flavors. Color no, but the herbal bitterness is there. Perhaps I should write them and ask. It is not a straightforward grainy wheat beer and indeed is quite herbal and bitter in a way the Germans would not prefer. Yet it is pretty decent. It is shockingly dry with very faint hints of lemon. You'll love it or hate but you should try it. Kudos for trying something new - wheat/rye/hibiscus. It will put some folks off for the bitter finish but I truly think they have something to build on - a bit like Biltmore's first year simple foundations.

Hirschbrau Hefeweisse

RATING: 5.0

Sonthofen, Germany

Color, head, cloudiness, and nose are stereotypes of Hefe-weizen but I found the first punch more carbonated than expected. The combination of tartness, fruit, and yeast delights were ideal from first sip to last, lingering notes. I never had a bad note at any time in all the normal cold to cool ranges. Citrus comes early, fading fast as the yeast gains full potency and then subsides into a easy, dry, tart finish. Spice, namedly clove, is lighter than what a Belgian (or the occasional German firm) would put in the mix. Fruit is "light banana ester" is the fancy reviewers usually phrase it. It is more tart and crisp than some reviewers have liked but I find it no object. It is almost an apple crisp beer without actual apple or long citrus flavors. You still that bright, alive, fresh stroke of a tart real fruit beverage and one I find very appealing glass after glass. One can make a case for Maisel, Tucher, Franziskaner, or Paulaner as more rounded everyday wheats but this more tart approach is an equally fine "take" or twist on the theme. I love them all and cherish their individual differences. (And to those flannel-clad fools who rate Shiner Hefe above this...I say this: cut back to 12 or fewer bottles a day. Sanity and regular bowels will come back shortly. And give mom a little cut of your stash money for rent. She deserves it. She probably spent \$26 on Febreze before Rev. Foley could come over that time you showed up late and stoned for the cheesy meatloaf.) Don't wish to end on that image! This H-W has an effectiveness, slightly different from the regular, laureate crowd but their approach is equally valid in this increasingly, dull, formulaic beer world. This is a refined, gracious wheat beer and sipped against the more available imports, it holds down the fort and then some. Not a sythe can slay this wheaty monster.



Hopf Spezial Weiße

RATING: 5.0

Miesbach, Germany

The brown, bullet-shaped bottle is typical of German single wheats imported to the US. ABV at 6% is generally a tad higher. The pour is light, cloudy yellow; "clearly cloudy" makes no sense or does it? The head is big, frothy, perhaps more creamy in tone than typical. The nose of yeasty-fruit-wheat is lovely much like a Maisel's Weisse - my personal standard for a Hefe. I understand that some people like a filtered, less fruity-yeasty wheat but for God's sake why? This is every bit as fine as other German Hefe products and it is hard to pick from among them except this is a much rare find in North Carolina and probably for you too. Head to head with Maisel this one

has a decidedly more apricot twang and is overall a shade richer. This may be too intense for the yeast-fruit haters but we found it quite spectacular and another fine benchmark for the Old World hefe. I wonder if some folks not inclined towards wheat beers might be drawn to the style if they learn to appreciate these tangy, apricot-infused esters. Might be a nice experiment that....



Lagunitas Our Own Bavarian-Styled Doppel Weizen

RATING: 5.0

Petaluma, California

When you're paying more per ounce for an American wheat than an authentic thick brown German 5.0 rated bottle, the stakes get very high and the scrutiny rigorous. (Or as least as rigorous as a room full of buzzed guys and one girl can be). This recipe was "designed by our Freistaat Bayern Brothers who also built the brewhouse upon which we brewed it". That sounds like a doubly authentic plan. ABV is a whopping 9.0%, lofty for a wheat from either the new or old worlds. It pours hazy gold shaded in amber. First sip was admiration for all involved in the project in the form of the very intellectual, perceptive phrase "holy shit!". My first well-considered remark was another holy shit followed by "they really did it" and a soft wow. More sips. Yet more. Holy wow and holy hell yes. It is fruity yeasty "as all get out" and surprisingly sweet - some other Germans might disagree on that level of sugaring up though such sweet-wheats are not unknown in Bavaria.

It is doppel or double and in the wheat realm doppel does not mean dark or malty by any means. A Belgian doppel or tripel might be dark and malty good but a doppel weizen need not be. If any wheat from any land deserves the Brewbase Award of Merit this year, this very impressive, lusty, fruity soup most assuredly does. I hesitate to add the remark "even a girly girl will like this" made by a sexist panalist here who is fully aware a good many... hundreds of females in America know a solid, well-rendered brew from the rest. This is all to say in grunting, man-cave language that this brew is awesome, brilliantly-crafted but still approachable and easy to like. Having all those Germans on the design team surely makes a difference and we would recommend that to about two hundred other breweries bottling wheats ranging from god-awful, insidiously weak imitations to mediocre, overpriced fare. Buying famous old German yeast is not enough folks. This product shows what can be done if a brewery cares to care, invests because it matters, and is not about getting by with the usual "wheat? Yes we did that style too" philosophy. Not all Lagunitas products are perfect or even enviable but this is a stellar, well-considered, genuinely impressive outcome. Ansehen (German for kudos)!!! And a another "holy shit...they actually did it!" for good measure.

Lonerider Shotgun Betty Hefeweizen

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

The thick, glossy label label shows a busty lass akin to Debra Winger circa 1980 holding a large black shotgun. She been have been a tad overendowed so hand a glass not a bottle to your favorite feminist. ABV is 5.8% so it is also southeastern state law friendly. It pours pretty classic for appearance though a tad more cloudy than average. The "rich banana-clove nose" is only partly fulfilled but the first sip will end any doubts about those being the flavors of choice. It is made very well, refreshes and thrills at most flavor points but I found the lace to be absent in all bottles tried. One expects that when cracking open the real thing from Deutschland. I guess Betty is not a lacy kind of gal. A good German copy, fairly convincing as such, and for once from the home town of your author. If Lonerider keeps this up, I may never make it to the next edition and you'll find me rolling in some alley near their brewery as happy as a soul can be.

Magic Hat Circus Boy, The Hefeweizen!

RATING: 3.5

South Burlington, Vermont

This "unfiltered and unfettered" American rendition of the grand German style shows fine pale yellow color, very little lace (I poured thrice), and yet the ivory head remains long and large. It's on the lighter side, clearly more of a sub-zero, serve with lemon, summer version of the style. In that trim it will never be a sipping hefe even if one can find any sediment at all. Was there anything to filter I wonder? There's room for an "American Light Wheat" in our market - I just don't want any.



Maisel's Weisse

RATING: 5.0

Germany

These thick 500ml bottles describe the contents as 'old classic bottle fermentation'. Unlike Maisel's Kristall-Klar malt this version is dark amber and cloudy like a good cider. Both Maisels sparkle with endless bubbles. I always smile when pouring one super cold on a super hot day. Flavor is yeasty plus 5.7% alcohol. It is sophisticated and well-detailed. It bears comparison with many other German beers in large bottles which also earn our 5 bottle perfection. The carbonation is greater than some others. This is one of my TOP 10 GO TO BEERS at all times and not a guest or friend or date will be offended. To say it is the solid Mercedes of German wheats, enthusiastic like a Porsche and prancing like a BMW would be silly. But all of that is true. Then one explains the healthy joys of yeast...and the hero praise will surely follow.

Maisel's Weizen Kristall-Klar g w±±±± 203 BEST CLEAR/KRISTAL WHEAT BEER 1993 Maisel Brau markets this malt liquor as 'crystal-clear' and 'sparkling like champagne'. It is a very sparkling beer and must be poured with the same care as the much inferior Champagne products. The flavor is rich and deep but

always smooth and refined. It tastes nothing like any ML we know and really fills a niche by itself. We give it 5 bottles since it is satisfying without being heavy and bold. 500ml bottles sell around here for about \$2.00. 5.2% alcohol.

Mission Hefeweizen

RATING: 4.0

Chula Vista, San Diego County, California

I first noticed this lineup for the crenulated, sculpted label with apex shaped like an old California mission house. This 5.3% was designed to be authentic "unlike the lemon-laden beers that flood the market under the same name". Wow! Good for them. No fruit is added but they claim good notes of clove, banana, and pear. \$5.99 per small bomber (September 2010). It pours yellow, traditionally hazy, perhaps a more faint orange glow than usual, the head very fine in bubble size, lasting medium long. Nose was very rich and nippy - to expected except for their clove and banana references. The fruit is very evident, notes ranging from yeasty realness to near juice quality.

They say Bavarian yeasts account for all the character and no juice is added. What about flavorings? I will give them SOME benefit of the doubt there for this is more overtly fruity from anything I know from Germany. It is not "lemon-laden" but a Chiquita® decal might easily be applied. The haze is there even if no big sedimentation. If you did all this with yeast alone - wow and super wow. I have personally added a bit of banana extract to beer and in little doses one could fool even the finest expert if the haze is there. I'm a bit incredulous on these flavors as they are so sharp and popping. No one else I know gets yeast to be that banana-forward without a bit of sumpin' something. Sprite and Mellow Yellow are "no fruit added" too. Did someone in Germany secretly invent an Ultra-Musa yeast made to simulate banana puree and no one in Germany is using it? I like this label but am deeply suspicious of those bright, yeast-only claims given the hundreds of commercial additives available in big fancy bottles and jars. I hope I'm wrong but would love to see a Mass Spec report telling me about every last little ester in the brew.

Naked Aspen Raspberry Wheat

RATING: 2.5

Cold Spring, Minnesota

WHEAT BEER lovers are screaming about all those berries being added to their favorite style this year. Sorry. Adding fruit to wheat beer is as least as old as Belgian abbeys or maybe Egypt. And before we forget to ask: how's your 'naked ass been'? Well this one is golden - not flushed pink or amber. Flavor is natural not artificial here. The 'hint' of raspberry is not subtle and there is no wheat flavor (German or American style) to notice around it. While fruity-sweet most reviewers felt it was 'too engineered' or even 'a horrible wine cooler imitation of real beer'. It tastes 'okay' but there is nothing in the brewing art to show merit or craftsmanship. Some said they need to cut the additive down while others suggested they try the ripple wine biz.

New Knoxville Honey Wheat Ale u w 3.5 This rich golden beer clearly benefits from real wildflower honey. Indeed if it can earn a criticism it is for the dominance of honey notes - one reviewer called it 'honey soda'. The 200-year-old strain of English yeast is simply not in evidence to the degree it should be. Pleasant it is but is this an ale or a wheat beer. While the evidence is in the chemistry it is in the flavor.

North Coast Blue Star Wheat u wh 4.5 572 Mendocino CA North Coast is known for a some great flavorful ales and one worldclass Stout (No. 38). This wheat is a Hefe-Weizen (cloudy type) and the yeast is abundantly visible at the bottom of each bottle. Color is medium gold and cloudy with a big head (very German so far). Flavor is more fruity and smooth than a basic German Hefe-Weizen like those made by Maisel or Spaten. Nor is a your so-called AMERICAN WHEAT which is usually clear and barely wheaty at all. Nor is it that fraudulent Hefe-Weizen named Crossroads that is making a media blitz around the country. This is genuinely good yeasty beer just a different yeast flavor that enthusiasts may come to expect. Must be served very cold or its rating would be lower.

Nor'Wester Hefe-Weizen u wh 4.5 755 BEST AMERICAN HEFE-WEIZEN 1996 Portland OR This is the

American wheat beer we've been waiting for some time. It has the flavor and character of a fine German cloudy-yeasty (Hefe) wheat. The yeast flavor is apparently and strong (no watery so-called AMERICAN WHEAT here). A tart apple-citrus appeal prevails though the finish is creamy and smoother. We still prefer some of German labels for complexity and polish but as American microbrew wheats run this is the best so far. One reviewer noted 'at \$8.00 per sixpack we can buy a German in most shops for about the same price...so is this really worth recommending?' You decide. We couldn't.

Nor'Wester Honey Weizen u w 3.0 860 Portland OR From the high marks most folks give to their Dark Wheat and Hefe-Weizen we had expected this to be another charmer. Sadly it was not. The brew is bright golden with a short-lived head. Clover honey, Mt. Hood hops, and 4 malts are used including 'a special honey malt'. It starts sweet enough but very rapidly goes down hill to a fairly weak yet bitter finish. It lacks an real ale fruitiness nor does it have enough malt or yeast (as with the Hefe-Weizen) to help it out. So many breweries seem to fade on this style and no doubt they think a little honey will improve a quick made, not-so-premium ale or lager. Doubtless this style is tailored to the mass-market crowd who may not always demand rich flavor. For us it merely lowers a good brewing name.

Nor'Wester Raspberry Weizen u wf 3.5 764 Portland OR The majority of FRUIT WHEAT beers are CHERRY WHEATS or a Belgian-style LAMBIC that uses a wheat as a base for long maturation. Frankly so many FRUIT BEERS are so 'flavored up' and engineered it does not matter if a wheat or ale base was used. This is one of the engineered kind 'with other natural flavors'; wink, wink, nod, nod, know-what-I-mean. They do confess to using real local raspberries and whole flower Mt. Hood hops. Color is semi-cloudy golden with a very white head and big lace. The natural fruit feel is just not there. It does BORDER on the beer cooler class but is of better quality. We think a bit more tartness would make the fruit theme believable. For us it would be much better to buy a German wheat and add your own juice fresh. Or not.

Oberdorfer Weiss

RATING: 4.0

Franz Joseph Sailer produces this Bavarian wheat with a very bubbly head and a cloudiness that is comparable to a true Hefe-Weissbeir. While far superior to most American wheat beers it lacked a bit of the charm we have found with other German wheats. High marks are earned for the Grolsh-style hardware but just a bit more flavor is in order. I suppose there is room for a wheat without the strength of Franizkaner but we're not sure who'd want it.

Oberdorfer Weiss Dunkel (Dark) g wd 256 Seldom do we find a DARK WHEAT to be superior to a regular or pale wheat. This is the case here. The Dunkel version of this \$2.69 bottle had a huge complexity of flavor that made up for the slight weakness of the regular version. It had all the wheaty charm and hop complexity one could want in a German wheat. Color was medium brown but it poured cloudy only in the last half. It is the best DARK WHEAT one can imagine.

Olde Hickory Hefe-Weizen Unfiltered Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.0

Hickory, North Carolina

This southeastern US micro has a classic pale hazy tone, even if a little extra pale. Their yeast strain dates to 1040 A.D. and so traditional Bavarian virtues are nearly assured. Then they go all flapping about it tasting like banana, bubblegum, coriander, and clove. Really now? I can have all those things if I want and instead I'd rather have a fridid, refreshing yeasty wheat beer. Yes there are fruit notes there but banana is far-fetched and bubblegum is just plain daft. It is a good American copy nonetheless and panelists here said "authentic...medium fruit...no banana actually....very nice aesthetics and nose" and "good tart-fruit balance all around but not as deep as Maisels and some others".

Olde Hickory Weizen Bock (German Style Wheat Beer)

RATING: 4.5

Hickory, North Carolina

Olde Hickory is one of the most interesting and promising micros in NC and we wish them all the best. They will need it. As I type this on January 25, 2012, it was just announced that Ken Grossman and the sacred name of Sierra Nevada are building their new East Coast brewery not 94 miles west of this firm. Sierra Nevada in the US South in NC on the glorious French Broad River not a half hour from the noted Biltmore Winery too! Paradigms

and hierarchies be changed all around, brew lads! There are some fine breweries in western NC but the new "SN Challenge" together with the state's growing hops industry will be a potent force, backed they say by \$170 million, 90 full-timers, 80 part-timers, and of course their massive knowledge base.

As to this offering (and as usual I have been very tangential and off topic here), this wheat is positively amber, a very dark golden-amber in fact, semi-clouded, the head near white and fading. The wheat flavors impress on first sip but so do the unexpectedly thick, sweet, and citrus notes. Is this an Imperial, Double Wheat (God Almighty help us if such a thing exists or needs to exist) or just a tarted-up, overly sweet one? To begin, they did use "select German hops" and actual Bavarian yeast. I had to point my old dude magnifying lens three times to be sure the 8% ABV analysis (in tiny, young dude font size) was true. Is a thick, richly flavored, semi-sweet, higher-than-normal ABV wheat with SOME authentic fruit yeast flavors a good thing, a great thing, or fit only for goats? I pointed a massive LED flashlight at our glasses and the brown bottles, concluding this is hefe-weizen yeasty beyond much doubt - our first pours raised some doubt. While this wheat is hazy, authentic of ingredient, rich in many grain notes, easy-sweet, it somehow is not as fruiti-i-licious as the better German Hefe-wiezen offerings. And should you ask, "fruit-i-licious" is an official requirement of the 1813 Reichenfruchteweizen Act, a historical, revered document which only exists in our minds and signifies nothing. The 1813 Act also requires pretty pictures of Bockish, male goats on the label, bicolored beasts if possible, no phallic content, a brown bottle, and your choice of very annoying gold foil or really annoying green wax with a seal bearing sheaves of wheat. Olde Hickory went with an ocean of lava-hard green wax as if they dream to become the Maker's Mark® of wheat beer. Too much or too little, insane or brilliant or both, not all reviewers could decide and in that conundrum we fell down the alpine face onto a 4.5 rating. Time will tell and another batch of the brew and another batch of reviewers too may bring clarity.

As usual, the big beer review sites are clueless on this one, diluted by moronic masses, and not helpful in the least; even the occasionally wise bros and self-proclaimed gurus living on a rumpled, plaid couch in their grannie's moldy basement. Tangential again: Advo-dudes, stop buying micros with the 99-week unemployment money and buy some gas to get a real job in a real city! Move to freakin' Peoria or Santa Fe if you must. But neither are we of much help - so get some. Decide for yourself. Brawny male, bicolored goats are curious and waiting to be waxed if you're into that. Otherwise, tell us what you think and be fairly clear.

Old North State Honey Bee Wheat u w 4.0 843 Youngsville NC This light-medium golden beer has a near white head of some duration. The flavor is 'American wheat' (ie. not German) with a distinctly honey sweet taste. It is never sickly sweet like some honey wheats and presents a very authentic flavor. The wheatiness is moderate but better than so many mass-market AMERICAN WHEATS it deserves the higher rating. Reviewers noted 'sweet but not overly so.. refreshing but with substance' and 'bright and clean appeal but flavor needs to be upped a good notch or so...not on par with any German wheats I know'.

Old Raleigh Honey Ginger Wheat u wf 4.5 724 BEST FRUIT/FLAVORED WHEAT BEER SPRING 1996 Raleigh NC This North Carolina microbrew is made with fresh honey and ginger. Color is rich medium amber with an off-white tall head. It is abundantly aromatic with real honest ginger flavor - no artificial ginger scents here. Unlike most HONEY WHEAT brews this one is not overly sugared up. They used the same good sense with their ale. The only criticism is that there is not much wheat flavor to blend with the relatively strong ginger notes; though we admit it is not the more rich Hefe-Weizen (cloudy yeasty wheat) style. If you've ever had genuine imported English ginger preserves (or made your own) you'll appreciate the quality. Reviewers noted 'welcome addition to the range of American range of micro-brews' and 'like a natural ginger soda with alcohol...hard to miss with that!'.

Old Raleigh Raspberry Wheat u wf 4.0 822 Raleigh NC Using fresh Oregon raspberries, honey, malt, and a wheat beer base the brew-masters in Raleigh have produced an interesting ale. Color is lightly clouded amber with what one reviewer called 'that mysterious glow that lets you know fruit is in the works'. The head is surprisingly white and most persistent. The flavor is clearly of the authentic berry sort with comingling of nice tart and sweet sensations. Among the modern BERRY WHEATS it clearly finishes on the dry side. Given our feelings with Oregon, Naked Aspen, and Nor'Wester Raspberry Wheats we are beginning to wonder if this style can be perfected without full lambic fermentation. This does not convince us either but it seems to be the best of the lot. Their Honey Ginger Wheat though different is superior.

Oregon Hefe-Weizen (Wheat Ale) u wh 4.0 651 Portland OR Unlike so many American-made wheat beers claiming to copy the German style this one is truly yeasty-cloudy (Hefe). That cloudiness translates to much of a wheat beer's flavor and stylistic charm. As traditional this one has a huge white foamy head. Carbonation is good but many German bottle-conditioned kinds are more 'lacy'. Flavor is described as 'crisp and fruity with citrus notes' and 'more acidic than most German breweries and tending very slightly to a Berliner Weisse style'. The clouded color is also a bit more amber than yellow. Some reviewers felt it was 'too sharp and tart' for sipping and as such it would work out best sweet foods to mellow it. Like a Berliner Weisse style a fruit syrup can be added directly. Quality beer but a bit extreme.

Oregon Original Northwest Summer Ale u wc 4.5 876 BEST SUMMER OR CITRUS WHEAT ALE 1997 Portland OR Oregon's products have been decidedly a mixed bag for us - ranging from mediocre to some perfect five bottlers. This one uses natural citrus flavors and is what many American brewers are calling a SUMMER WHEAT or CITRUS WHEAT. (our class code is 'wc'). This one is decidedly of the Hefe-weizen or cloudy sort and that provides it much flavor above the average brews in this group. It seems more cleanly flavored with citrus than some which add spices for an effect like a lemon spiced tea. It has a depth of flavor (no doubt from the yeast dregs) that others in general lack. Reviewers noted 'surprisingly fine product...still a bit of lemon in a German Hefe would give more pleasure!' and 'so far the best American CITRUS WHEAT I've tried...fair price (\$5.99) too'.

Paulaner Hefe-Weizen

RATING: 5.0

Munich, Germany

The grand old city's largest brewery has always sent some delicious beer to the States and this is no exception. Paulaner is one of those names (like Spaten or Maisel) you can always grab with confidence when buying a wheat beer. While some cloudy wheats (Hefe type) are brothy or earthy or acidic-citrus this one tends toward the sweet fruit side without ever being thin or light. It is full-bodied but not overwhelming. Reviewers argue endlessly as to which fruit or spice or whatever tickles when and where on the tongue. After 3 centuries the only analysis that we really need is that it's: 'just right... an ideal blend that defies quantification.' Michael Jackson credits Paulaner among those making wheats popular in the US. No other wheat is better.

Pennsylvania Penn Weizen

RATING: 4.5

Pittsburgh, PA

This formula is bottle-fermented in the hefeweizen style. Hallertau hops are used together with a Bavarian yeast which gives it what they call a "banana-clove aroma". Yes on the cloves but the banana is a figment of someone's fruity dreams. Or I could say a bunch of nonsense. Bottle sediment is high and contributes much with that perfect pour. In my city like 300 others worldwide, one can have a choice of a dozen real Bavarians in their thick, brown bottles and slightly ragged, foiled labels. Most decent American bars have at least one wheat beer on tap these days; even if a major micro with a little bit of compromise in the keg form. I drank this one over and over and poured the most yeasty glass possible to rank it fully. It is high quality, not as deep or idiosyncratic as some Germans, but better than a few of them and far above the average US-made Xerox of the old recipes. They have it nearly right and perhaps right enough for a domestic seeking to win friends and influence skeptics in bars across the land. Price had better be right and so far it is.

Pete's Wicked Honey Wheat u w 4.0 571 St. Paul MN This pumpkin-colored beer appears to be a honey-flavored maltier variant of his Wicked Summer Brew which we found wanting in character. This fuller beer has enough malt and sweetness to please in a way we and they agree to be truly 'refreshing' when very cold. Tettnang and Cascade hops and honey flavor the wheat base for a flavor that is more herbal than wheat. One reviewer said it reminded him of a 'mystery Chinese herbal team of a dozen flavors one neither likes nor hates nor has any hope of naming'. A very traditional German wheat this is NOT.

Pete's Wicked Multi-Grain Beer u w 775 BEST AMERICAN WHEAT BEER SUMMER 1996 St. Paul MN Multi-grain beer? Can Wheatberry Raisin be far off? Actually this is a beer made using barley, wheat, oats, and rye malts. The first two are most common and we know of only one other beer using rye. Color is bright amber with a big ivory head - no wheat color to be sure. Sniff deeply and you know something different is going on. It has some of the grainy bite of Schierlinger Roggen Rye and overall has a quality rich feel. Closing

your eyes it might even pass for a dry SEMI-DARK BOCK of German origin. Reviewers noted 'very creative idea...shows how American brewers feel free to experiment and create new classes' and 'a darker or even Hefe version would be even more interesting...great experience'. We truly rate this a 'must try' as it's so unique and wonderful. Bravo, Pete!!!

Pinkus Weizen g w 4.0 280 Pinkus Muller of Munster is smaller than many German brewers and one can expect to pay \$2.50 or so for a suitably scarce 11.2 ounces. The brew is a light but bright gold with medium-duration head. Compared to Spaten Club-Weisse it has less wheat flavor and adds faintly fruitful elements. It finishes rather clean and dry. From research we find it is just 60% wheat. While pleasant and very drinkable we were not partial to PARTIAL WHEAT BEER.

Plank Bavarian Hefeweizen

RATING: 4.5

Laaber, Germany

The German like to send over their good wheats in brown bottles that are thick and remind me of artillery rounds; and they probably could withstand a short from a gun as well. At 5.2% this stuff barely makes it unavailable in some US states. It won a Silver Medal 2006 World Beer Cup. The color is a surprise - very dark gold, vaguely amber in a dark bar, crystal clear and thus not cloudy a bit. So how is this a true Hefe-production? I looked and looked and though I saw one little thing floating in the bottom of the bottle. Still not convinced. Is it because American's don't usually appreciate floating junk in their beer bottles? God I hope this is not some dumb-downed product for us. It's a Kristall to me in any case. It's nicely fizzy, full of wheat, sound and prudent in the malt balance, and very pleasant when quite cold. I grade for what things are and not what they call themselves. It's not a real Hefe to me but if considered a Kristall it's magnificent. Also consider their Heller Weizenbock reviewed below which I consider a finer product but perhaps not so clean and refreshing when cold.

Plank Bavarian Hefeweizenbock

RATING: 5.0

Laaber, Germany

Like their Hefeweizen this stuff has few yeast particles of any note and is rich golden. Still you taste the yeast. It is a slightly richer, more fruity and sweeter version of the Hefeweizen, loaded with banana, tart generic fruit (citrus or pineapple perhaps), faint cloves or undisclosed spices, faint supporting malt, and with 7.5% ABV or about 2.5% more than the basic Hefeweizen. It won the Gold Medal in both the 2004 and 2006 World Beer Cup. I drink these all afternoon into a numb, happy sleep and not miss anything from a stronger wheat or more spiced Belgian that too is fruity and spicy as here before us. This is an enchanting German masterpiece, always pleasant and well-mannered, full of interesting notes that change with the temp of the fluid, and yet competent and more at everything from iced to ambient degrees. I don't see it often but one would do very well to seek it out and set it's position among the other choices. I for one adore and celebrate it and it has never done me wrong when served to demanding friends.

Pyramid Hefeweizen Ale u wh 4.0 803 Seattle WA/Kalama WA Cutely tagged as 'The Northwest's Other Famous Clouds' this brew is indeed very cloudy. The frosted amber-golden glow is pleasant. The head is very bright white and long lasting - though inches shorter than a bottle-fermented German classic. Flavor is of the yeasty-citrus sort not unlike Nor'wester (our current best American Hefe). Unfortunately the finish is a let down ranging from 'flat to 'weak' in written reviews here. It is certainly good but at \$8.49 we feel it should give even the German masters a run for their money. It is not even close on that score. It is still very pleasant and drinkable but the price is a big obstacle that prevents us from recommending it. A reviewer remarked 'tender fruit notes, sweetish, refined but never rich'.

Red Mountain Wheat u w 4.0 292 This Birmingham AL microbrew is now more commonplace on southern supermarket shelves in the premium American section. The package describes this brew as 'light and gentle' but 'definitely full-flavored'. That is nearly right. It is rich clear gold (a Kristalklar sort) and has no carbonation to link it to German clear wheats. Compared to Adam's Wheat and most German Kristalklars it proves a touch too gentle. Still it is drinkable and pleasant in quantity.

Rhino Chasers Peach Honey Wheat u wf 4.0 773 St. Paul MN Someone suggested the name 'Rhino Chasers Peach Honey Wheat' resembled a very oblique SAT question on 'what word does not belong?'. You decide. This brew is a dry wheat beer first and fruit simply adds to it. It is the actually the least sweet of any

beer named Honey we know. That can be good. The peachiness is authentic and not by any means a bottled juice kind of scam. Color is cloudy light amber with a lasting head. Reviewers remarked on 'high integrity as a beer with sweet peach yielding to a bitter dryness...the finish can be ragged and need work' and 'typical RC's high standards...believable as real beer...I'll enjoy it again'. That finish was a bit off-putting for some but many of us though it was superior to a syrupy one. 1-800-788-HORN for their fashion stuff.

Saranac Summer Wheat

RATING: 4.5

Utica, New York

SUMMER BEERS are usually wheat or crisp Pils (or occasionally ales) flavored with citrus and sometimes spices in the more Belgian blonde Single style. This one confesses to 'lemon & spice' like a favorite style of warm brewed beverage. Color is rich medium gold but they boldly admit the caramel coloring. It is surprising sweet for anything not stamped as a 'honey wheat' but it is not overdone. Wheat flavor is present but minimal with what is now called an AMERICAN WHEAT; though we hate to use our country's name in vain for what is surely the inferior style. It is tart and well spiced to just the right degree. While not earthshaking it did prove to be very refreshing (the favorite adjective of summer beers) and more delightfully flavored than most CITRUS WHEATS. For \$5.99 it is a wonderful value.

Schneider Weisse

RATING: 3.5

Bavaria, Germany

This Hefe-Weisse or YEASTY WHEAT is sold by Schneider & Sohn of Bavaria in 500ml bottle-fermented form; just like about 50 others that reach the New World. The well-known aroma, massive suds, and fervent carbonation showed a typical form. It is a shade darker than usual for not being a DUNKEL or dark formula. It also proved a shade more acidic than others causing some reviewers to use the 'citrus' adjective. Yeastiness is moderate and it is rather dry in the finish. Hefe-Weisse or Hefe-Weizen beers are a matter of personal taste but we still find Maisel and Spaten products to be suitable for a wider audience. Tested against Hacker-Pschorr Dunkel (Hefe-) Weisse the H-P was in all ways superior unless you prefer a very dry ending.

Shiner 102 Double Wheat

RATING: 2.5

Shiner, Texas

Here is their 102th Anniversary brew that "sits between a bright wheat beer and wheat wine ale"; hence "double wheat". Consider many Shiner products are half-flavored in the first place, maybe doubling their efforts will prove to a good thing? Hops originate from both a Czech Saas and Washington Golding pedigree. It pours super, Weizen pale, the head longer than most American copies of the wheat style. Head is thin. Sadly the flavor is too and this is only a "double wheat" if you blend your Weiss beers with 60% club soda! It is "American factory beer" bad and is not even a true wheat, far from a single anything actually. Once again Shiner seems to be either screwing us with full knowledge (armed cars regularly running to the bank as they laugh and revel in our ignorance) or they have no clue what good tastes like in the real world. Maybe we should buy them a ticket to Bavaria if they want join the rest of the brewing world in something know as quality, flavor, and enjoyability. 102 years is a good run but I have a sneakin' suspicion that in those early years their brews had real flavor and did cheat us for ingredients. My cheer to Shiner: Here's to getting much better or hanging it up in year 103! In the later case, no one loving good beer will notice you're gone.

Shiner Hefeweizen

RATING: 4.0

Shiner, Texas

This fine Texas recipe is "for every true lover of life" and is a bottle-conditioned, unfiltered hefeweizen with lemon and orange peel added in. The head is immense every after some minutes and color a mid yellow, almost golden but not quite, very bright in all illuminated positions. Lace is pretty long even if in slow motion. Very quality aroma; this is a sniffable brew to be sure. Even in the late pours and very meticulous pours it was not as

hazy as it might be; sediment being scarce for something unfiltered. Don't spare the filters folks and give us none of the glorious gunk! I'd shell out more on a pricier Germany yeast soup than settle for this approach which dashes hopes while still providing a very nice product. I put a lot of value into expectation and truth-in-labeling. Not that they lied...it's just that "hefe-" and "unfiltered" are not realized as they should be. The citrus notes are there (a nice compliment but nothing special) but more as if one did a very quick squeeze from fresh fruit and in no way spicy-fruity like a Belgian recipe. As far as being a citizen of the hefeweizen range, this is more tart than most and that is more about the acidity than the peel of tart fruits. The finish is mixed at times, too watery in some seconds, too tart for another microsecond, mid-strength fruit but not of top quality, wheat notes far too faint, yeast still missing, and yet good things behind and coming up to keep one happy. Is it all wheat or just a wheat blend with some peel added? I tend to suspect the later.

Southern Tier Hop Sun Summer Wheat

RATING: 3.5

Lakewood, New York

For this company with some interesting complex beers like an Imperial Coffee Stout, this is a fairly simple beer in palest wheaty gold...neer yellow, head thin and off-white. Nose is weak but exists. The flavor is mild wheat, thin for sure, quality in the ingredients but still not exciting given the 12 Germans I have in the same cooler at the beershop. It is refreshing when cold and crisp but why would one buy a Hyundai or Kia copy of a Mercedes sedan if both were about the same price. There is no reason for this to exist in the international context of available wheat beers. Be better or be cheaper - if you are neither - you lose. Hop Sun is decent but unless shopping and needing a quick wheat fix in Lakewood, it has no merit for me.

Spanish Peaks Wheat u w 2.0 362 From August Schell of New Ulm in Minnesota's snow country comes a \$3.00 and 22 ounce 'wheat'. Color is pale yellow and the head is foamy with long lace. Sadly the brewmasters got this one very wrong and out of the quality league of their two ale labels. It is aptly named 'sweet water'. There is no wheat taste and no depth of character. With a hot Mexican meal or rich French cuisine such lightness might be worthwhile. On its own it tastes cheap.

Spaten Club-Weissbier g w 365 This bright and clear yellow wheat beer has medium long carbonation with a thin and short-lived head. It is alive with bubbles at first and a full wheat flavor component. In the US at least it should be the standard by which all other wheat beers are judged. Among wheats from Germany we felt Valentin was its equal but Maisel's Kristal-Klar might get a slight edge with a touch more fruity complexity and superior champagne-style carbonation when poured.

St.Stan's Graffiti Wheat u w 4.5 604 Modesto CA Quick. Name a beer that comes in a dayglo pink packages splashed in orange with a sky blue '39 Ford Coupe and 'Dont' Drive Drunk' on each label. This Modesto effort is unique. Shelling out \$8.99 for another 'American wheat' without much wheat or any flavor is not our favorite activity. Fortunately we were pleased. A German yeasty wheat or an American light wheat it is not. Actually it would be best called a FRUITY WESTERN GOLDEN ALE as with some Rogue and North Coast products. After a bottle or so you'll find the dry fruity hops flavor most alluring. It is a 'hair' thin in the finish and would be perfected by a kiss of sweetness (ie. Rogue). We recommend it both for the movie/hot rod aesthetics and the soundness of the flavor components.

Steingadener Weisse Dunkel g wd 4.5 922 Kaufbeuren Stay away from your German dictionary 'cause 'Weisse Dunkel' is only going to come up as 'White Dark'. It is merely a dark version of what is normally white or wheat beer - thus a DARK WHEAT BEER. This is of the Hefe or cloudy subtype with an amber-brown color and off white head of some size. Flavor is full and overflowing as we would expect from both the color and amount of yeast in evidence here. But like many beers of this style it is too rich and filling for some tastes - though simply heavenly and ideal for others. Still most folks are not going to be drinking 6 or more of these in one day! It is not so easy to find this style in larger supermarkets though any microbrew-oriented shop or bar is likely to have a brand or so. This is another of several fine choices.

Steinhaus Mission Street Hefeweizen

RATING: 4.0

Paso Robles, California

My first thought was that a Hefe at 4.7% already has a strike against it. The theme here is the "crossroads of quality and value". The pour is golden-amber, hazy to be sure, and the head near white but fairly short-lived. The yeasty flavor is mild fruit, quite mild in fact, and best served very chilly to get the most of those refreshing, subtle notes. The fruit quality here favors apricot and peach more than anything in citrus tribe. There is a bit of orange here too. My tastes for hefe-fruit more on that side. I had a \$15 pitcher of Blue Moon at the bowling alley of late, loaded with 5 half slices of orange and that was one fruited-up, sickly-sweet affair. Straight Blue Moon would have been better. The Mission St. formula is a step above it but I would like the fruit turned up a full notch. The balance of sweet fruit and some dryness is nicely judged.



Stoudt's Heifer-in-Wheat Bavarian Style Hefeweizen

RATING:

Adamstown, Pennsylvania

I'm not entirely sure the image of a cow in a field of wheat is appetizing but the joke is worth a momentary, mini-laugh. Actually not. I would rather have seen a smart cow with an Einsteinian wig and it called Heifer-Reason. Actually not. The color is typical but the head a bit thinner than from those thick-as-your-arm brown bottles from Germany. The first sip was...say what? The authentic, Teutonic potency and flavor are there in rich, unrelenting waves. [insert Panzer tank analogy here]. Unless they stole or borrowed or bought Maisel or Weihenstephan yeast, this quality of yeasty flavor would not normally be expected from a Stateside hefe-copy. Wow cubed. Even the finish was the right nip and potency and fresh, bright grainy delight. I have no beef with Heifer-in-wheat except for the name. If they could mass-market this stuff with a fancy, Old World-style label and that dumb German foil they'd give everyone from Seattle to Boston to Berlin a run for their hefe-money. The best American wheat I've tried in perhaps three years. Again...wow, wow, and super-wow.

Sweetwater Sch'wheat

RATING: 3.5

Atlanta, Georgia

I bought a 12-pack "Tacklebox" which says "this box contains some or all of the beers you see, depending on what we drank". That was a cute joke but still I hoped to get one of special items. No luck for \$10. This "light-bodied wheat" is just that and the faint citrus pretty saves it from worthless-ville. It refreshed me well enough but then a cold bowl of dishwater might have done that also after two hours in the 100 degree sun. As a bargain wheat, it serves a purpose but given the higher-flavored, deeper choices at even the smallest store, this is one time try for me.

Terrapin Side Project Volume 3: Gamma Ray WheatWine Ale Brewed with Honey (2009)

RATING: 4.5

Athens, Georgia

For the record, the Wheat Wine Ale is essentially a Barley Wine but it should have about half wheat or more in recipe. These "Side Project" labels are one-time offerings from the big green turtle people using one simple goal: BREWING IMPROVISATION. This wheat ale is brewed with "an obscene amount of locally grown Tupelo and Sourwood honeys from Savannah Bee Company". It is 11% so that honey is going to have a sharp partner to dry it all out. The color is rich golden-amber, a compromised color but not always bright, the head cream and moderate in size. The aroma is frankly a classic wheat with perhaps a hint of extra fruit. The first notes are tart, fading slowly into strange but luscious flavors, not as sweet as I'd expected from the word "obscene", very smooth and very satisfying. It's rich but you don't realize it, potent with a velvet glove - or an invisible bee sting perhaps. It is a fascinating brew for a beer tasting and even among the 1000+ label experts you'll get some interesting responses. The concept of a wheat raised to 11% is appealing and all that honey goes to smooth out the alcohol except in the last finish and only after many sips. I think the lofty, late-arriving ABV thump gets in the way of its excellence and 8-9% with some disguise would have served them (and us) much better. I'd have also boosted the phenolic fruit notes a bit for a more winery approach. (Of course I have no frickin' idea how to boost phenolic fruit notes with chemistry or brewing skill so I'm just wishing wildly here. Maybe more yeast a floatin' or some kinda Teutonic wheat magic. But 1400 labels deep into this beer review thing I'm going state my preferences and let them be what they are - a slight educated consumer's earnest wish). This is a very nice idiosyncratic beer, never one for your Bud Light friends, your timid mousy girlfriend, or anyone who has bought a beer cooler more than three times. (Legal notice: wine cooler purchases with the firm possibility, perceived likelihood, or absolute certainty of impending intercourse are excluded from all total values in this calculation). Then again real beer guys are not always keen about been known for anything accented with Tupelo Honey but calling it a Experimental Wheat Wine and all that cool Gamma Ray stuff should restore the Man Meter to your normal levels. This is 11.0 liter HEMI of the beer world; fun and dominating on the straight road but a bit awkward and sometimes a handful in the corners. I certainly plan to find all the Side Projects from Athens I can and consume them full and long.

Tucher Dunkel Hefe-Weizen

RATING: 5.0

Nurnberg, Germany

Nurnberg's major brewery exports a lesser known wheat in regular and dark. Color proves to be bright amber or paler than many dark wheats. Carbonation is alive as expected. Taste is moderate on the wheatful scale and is shorter in flavor persistence than Franziskaner Dark. It is pleasant cold or just a bit cool. One sample lacked the yeasty cloud we expected. Two later samples proved very flavorful and cloudy from the first pour. BrewBase awarded this the Best Dark Wheat in 1994.

Tucher Kristallar Weizen

RATING: 3.0

As expected the color is clearer than the Hefe-Weizen versions and the head lasts forever. While quite flavorful it is not a pure wheat flavor what one expects in a standard like Spaten Club-Weisse. Our bottles marked 'use before 5/94' appeared to be fresh but somehow the flavor was a touch imperfect and confused. There were some metallic notes when tasted from crystal, glass, and the original bottle. Stick with Spaten or Maisel.

Brewbase Fives



Valentin's Weizen Beer

RATING: 5.0

In 16.9 oz. brown foiled bottles for about \$2.00 one expects a very worldclass beer. It is one of the very best. The hyper-bubbly head and light straw yellow color are typical of elite German beverages. The very rich and wonderfully pungent taste is close to the equally worldclass Maisel's Kristall-Klar which comes in similar indestructable bottles to the US. It could easily become you're #1 choice! It is quite different from Maisel's Weizen Beer in taste and body.

[Furst] Wallerstein Hefe-Weizen

RATING: 4.5

Wallerstein, Germany

In 1598 the royal Oettingen-Wallerstein family started brewing beer and used natural cold cellars to those good times happen. The next year they invented fire and the wheel. The yeasty-cloudy offering is classic for color, head, and aroma. Wheat notes outlast the fruit ones but it's no weakling. I'd rather go with Weihenstephan, Maisel, or Valentin for enduring, complex, and deep flavors but served colder than ice this is one refreshing, handsome beverage. Some wheat fans will like the cleaner approach here with less yeast and fruit to cloy them up. If you like that brighter, cleaner aspect give this one a try or three. Give their website a look and you'll notice that the Wallersteins have three pretty neat castles so they kinda make the Coors and Busch families look like peasants.

Weihenstephan/Briem 1809 Berliner Weisse

RATING: 4.5

Munich, Germany

The label says "Created by Dr. Fritz Briem" of the Doemens Institute but our research tells us that Weinenstephan & Doemens does the brewing and bottling. The label is practically a history lesson in beer and that is not half bad for all the pompous nonsense I've read these year among images of multi-colored crazy canines. Dr. Briem, a noted beer historian used old recipes (so far "forgotten styles") for this Berlin-style Weisse that dates from at least 1600, mentioned by French Huguenots who traveled through Berlin to Flanders and reported on it's delights. One record says 1572 is the oldest known date of this style's production. These dates might be very off the style was in fact copied from Cord Broihan of Hamburg in the 1600's who apparently had a similar tart wheat beer. 1809 is about Napoleon celebrating their Prussian victory that year with this beer, the historical record reporting it to be "lively and elegant". At 5% ABV, this beer uses traditional mashing of about 50% wheat but not boiling of the wort. Bottle conditioning replaces any filtering or pasteurizing for a rather lactic acid tartness but complex, rich fruit flavors. Open fermentation and horizontal lagering tanks are also important to the process. Yeast and lactic acid bacteria (*Lactobacillus*) both contribute to the flavors we experience. It is one of the lightest pours in my experience with 1500+ labels, hazy light yellow with an aroma tart, lactic-loaded, and interesting. The carbonation is strong in most pours and the tartness is not so much dominate (as with some lambics) as merely a spin or take on the basic wheat style. Syrups are sometimes added to make the tartness more palatable to the masses but I found this version needing nothing but my lips, tongue, and throat. The finish is ultra dry, the tartness not clogging up the buds at all, but the wheat flavors somewhat subdued in many flavor passages. By the way, this stuff is 5% ABV and we know some of the old style was weaker at 2-3%. It was often consumed young and raw with little fermentation. This is a higher ABV, nicely conditioned product. I rather like it, either icy or near room temp. It's not an everyday wheat to me - and yes I could drink a good German wheat beer every day for remainder of my addled, befuddled life. Dr. Briem's forgotten styles have my mind and tastebuds more than curious and I suspect these will be some very unique, delicious things to inspire and educate us. As for 1809, I feel it a valuable piece to add to my knowledge of old

German beers and as a person about half of that heritage, it pleases me to no end.

Weihenstephan Weizen Crystal Clear

RATING: 5.0

This wheat is bright and very pale yellow with a quick head formation. The flavor is full wheat with some of the depth (but not the cloudiness) of good hefe-Weiss beers like Maisel and Echter. It is a bit more fruity and dry than Spaten Club-Weisse and one would be hard pressed to pick the better of the two. Like the Spaten product the head is short-lived compared to Maisel Kristal-Klar. While it should be served rather cold it was pleasant at near room temp.

Wild Goose Spring Wheat Ale

RATING: 4.0

From the makers of Sam Middleton's Pale Ale comes this seasonal wheat that is actually very amber and with a lasting foam-topped head. What wheat taste may exist (and some of us doubted that) it is overcome by full hops flavor. This is not our idea of a wheat ale - spring time or otherwise! I guess some people call these 'American Wheats' but using Grant's Weis as a U.S. standard this effort is lacking and mislabeled. A decent amber ale but not special.

Wurzburger Julius Echter Hefe-Weissbier

RATING: 4.5

As the prefix 'Hefe' implies this wheat beer is very cloudy - it even shows through the brown glass bottle. For head and oxygen display it compares well to Maisel's Hefe-Weiss that comes in similar pint bottles. It shares the same exceedingly full and complex wheatiness of the Maisel label and is so distinct from the crisper but equally superb Spaten Club-Weisse. This beer is simply alive with taste and lace. A yeasty masterpiece and treat of the first order.

Oxford Raspberry Wheat u wf Baltimore, MD Brewed by Oxford Brewing as "Maryland's Finest" this wheat ale uses real raspberries in the process. Color is a slightly amber or reddish gold with a good head and fine carbonation. The bubbles together with a dryish finish somewhat support their claim of it being champagne-like. It is considerably less sweet than most raspberry ales. They also made sure one remembers it is actually beer and dosed the fruit with moderation. If you're with the wine-cooler crowd this will disappoint. Otherwise it's a tasteful and refined variation done with good sense.

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WHEAT - DARK OR DUNKELWEIZEN

Aventinus Wheat-Doppelbock

RATING: 4.5

8.2% ABR is welcome in any German dark wheat. That's a plus to compensate for the price. The purple and gold label is something a bit different and kind of regal with that old dude in the central crest. Color is a dark brownish-amber to reddish-brown with ample lace and the resultant tall head. Malt and yeast fill the nose. The first sip (even if rather cool) is potent in those two areas. Light traces of banana, clove, vanilla, and hops give extra value. Warmed to the recommended temps, you get many diverse flavors that confirm it is be equal to the best of this style. Spiced-chocolate comes to mind. It's a tad like whipping up a blender full of German dark bear with some ginger snaps for flavoring; not really that wheaty of course. The higher than normal alcohol warms one but it does take away from things like some of the more crude Belgian clones. What I so much love about the style (unlike many Stouts) is that the finish is crisp and light enough not to ruin subtle foods. This label dates from 1907 but the style is much older. It is something of a "stealth dark" in that the ABV takes you

places that is not warned by the taste. That makes it a good date beer or does it?



Ayinger Ur-Weisse (Dunkel Hefe-Weisbier)

RATING: 5.0

Aying, Germany

Color is cloudy amber brown (your eyes can almost taste it!) and the head is deep lasting ivory foam. Unlike some DARK WHEATS this is NOT over-the-top in some thick brothy-yeasty way. It is fuller than their regular Hefe-Weisbier but turned up just a notch - that is, just right for us. The recipe is just 40% wheat (some are more) so one gets more flavor from yeast than the wheat it- self. Reviewers here remarked on its 'rich, full, but restrained...hearty yeast- filled treat' and 'prefer this to the regular or lighter colored version'. If you're a DARK WHEAT fan this is a must try. This was my favorite new dark wheat in 1999 and I've enjoyed it since.



Ayinger Ur-Weisse (Dunkel Hefe-Weisbier)

RATING: 5.0

Aying, Germany

This is legendary, nearly benchmark material in the brew world. Color is cloudy amber brown (your eyes can almost taste it!) and the head is deep lasting ivory foam. Unlike some DARK WHEATS this is NOT over-the-top in some thick brothy-yeasty way. It is fuller than their regular Hefe-Weisbier but turned up just a notch - that is, just right for us. The recipe is just 40% wheat (some are more) so one gets more flavor from yeast than the wheat itself. Reviewers here remarked on its "rich, full, but restrained...hearty yeast-filled treat" and "prefer this to the regular or lighter colored version".

Edelweiss Dunkel

RATING: 4.0

Salzburg, Australia

Hofbrau Kaltenhausen of Salzburg, Austria makes wheat beers on the par with any over the border in Germany. This dark version is more of a light amber brown than the color of a non-wheat dark loaded with roasted malts. The head is immense and foamy with endless lace. Wheat flavor overflows but somehow it proves a bit less satisfying than the excellent Kristalklar and Hefe-yeasty variants. Like a few other DARK WHEATS this one seems to get lost in the intensity of flavors and too much sweetness in the finish. It is cloudy with nice yeast tastes but

is somehow just a bit off the mark. One reviewer described it as 'a muddle of quality flavors'.



Erdinger Pikanlus Dunkler Weizenbock

RATING: 5.0

Erding, Germany

AWARD: BEST DARK WHEAT BEER SUMMER 1996

We reviewed Erdinger's Dunkel Weiss (Dark Wheat) some years back and were not very impressed. While this name sounds similar (in part) the product and reviews are so different. The \$3.59 bottles of 500ml size show a medium reddish-brown color with a tan head of large bubbles. Lace is fast and furious. Flavor is very rich and rewarding - irresistible to some of us! It has a sweet carmel almost maple sugary malt flavor of the greatest sophistication and refinement. It is positively the best SWEET DARK WHEAT BEER we've heard about. Some folks do not like wheat beers (dark or otherwise) being this sweet. One panalist thought of it as 'malt nectar from the gods'. That molasses-carmel flavor is almost always associated with UK darks so a German one is a true surprise. Very memorable. Brewbase gave it it's "Best Dark Wheat Beer" in the Summer 1996 review.

Erdinger Weissbeer Dunkel (Dark)

RATING: 3.0

Germany

Carbonation is almost too strong. Even at warmer temps (up to the recommended 53 degrees F.) it was no more flavorful than the regular Weissbeer so color proves the only note of interest. The Kristallklar was superior to both 'mit feiner hefe' (cloudy yeast) versions by a considerable margin.

Franziskaner Dunkel Hefe-Weissbier (Spaten)

RATING: 4.5

Germany

While many of us rate the pale Franziskaner is one of the best wheats on the planet the dark variant is slightly below it in comparative worth. The head is cream and very dominant in glass. The color is rich, hazy brown overflowing with yeastiness and slight fruit elements. While complex it is not as inviting as some other where wheat, malt, and yeast are blended to more skillful advantage. I have always preferred their non-dark wheat. While complex it is not as inviting as some other where wheat, malt, and yeast are blended to more skillful advantage. This is almost liquid "comfort food" to the depressed beer drinker. You get lots of depth in lots of good stuff and just a single bottle will get your somewhere fine and fun.

Great Divide Dunkel Weiss (Dark Wheat Ale)

RATING: 4.5

Denver, Colorado

This lovely fluid is not German dark but is very much like a cloudy cider for color and clarity. They call it "lively" and from the 750ml bottles I poured it, watching it lace long and fiercely for more than 7 minutes. It has a earthy maltiness, subtle at first, never over-reaching or extreme, almost like a malt-cider if you will. Mild fruit meshes with the malt for a fine, very drinkable effect. At 6.4% ABV it's a bit stronger than most imports. The label says their own yeast is used for a different flavor (very true!) and overall they like to speak of the fruit flavors as banana and clove. Sticky banana for sure but it's dipped in malty Ovaltine if anything. I would not hesitate for a split second to serve this to the most demanding and skeptical German beer expert.

Brewbase Fives



Hacker-Pschorr Dunkel Weisse (Dark Wheat)

RATING: 5.0

Munich, Germany

Great beer. Bad name. Sounds like a skin disease that computer nerds get from living twelve straight days in the dark on donuts in their mother's basement. American store shelves are nowadays never short of quality German DARK WHEATS (dunkel weisse). This 500ml bottle sold for just \$1.99 and the solemn portrait of Georg Schorr plus 'Since 1417' suggested high quality. Experienced wheatophiles will notice the Hefe-yeasty haze and the large persistent head as good signs. A fruity aroma is quickly perceived. Many dark wheats are overpowering yeast-loaded drinks or odd combinations of roasted wheat malt taste. This one truly excels with wonderful notes of apple and citrus. However it must be served icy cold and poured with great care. One reviewer dissented and suggested it was 'too filling and heavy' - a small wine glass full might be enough for those new to this style.

Michelob Dunkel Weisse

RATING: 4.5

St. Louis, Missouri

Two German words on a Michelob label? What's next? India landing a spaceship with their flag on the moon? Alright, okay - that happened this last Friday? While I've admired Michelob's effort to product better beers, "near micros" as some people call them, at the "value-micro" price point, I've never truly respected one of their labels until now. True respect and real enjoyment was noted and six bottles at various temps over three days caused no change. I had to give them the more thorough "variable temp/three day test" to be sure I was not hallucinating or having tastebud saturation from better beers here. Before moving on, the label is a graphics showpiece, a visual gem loaded with burgundy, maroon, gold, and tan tones; great art matching a great product. . To predict I would not be thrilled by a Michelob product until it was a dark beer is not surprising though they could have done it with other labels if the care and intensity were as focused as here.

Color is mid-dark amber, lace limited, and head varying large to medium depending on bottle temp. Tart malt hits the nose and in the first taste we get true wheat beer flavor. Gravity hits 12.7 ABV is 5.5%, IBU 17. Perhaps they used an entire year's giant warehouse of ingredients for regular Michelob in a single case here - sorry, I should not abuse them. It's all praise and "please fix your other labels" at this point. I checked the bottle about twelve times until I was sure I'd poured from the right container. The flavor is rich malt, faint notes of banana, none of the cloves the website mentions, full-on yeast fruit in general, very smooth at all points (could an major American brewer do otherwise?), yet the finish is sufficiently full. It's a tad more tart than most darks wheats from Bavaria when cold. I knew they could do better, Kudos for pulling it off, and given the scarcity of dark German wheats in US shops, this might be a buy a time or two more this short year. Some reviewers and bloggers about the vast electronic beer cosmos are looking for an old major brewery trick - make the first release(s) very rich and flavorful and then cutting back on ingredients and quality later - as if old reviews and modern drinkers will not hurt them. We'll see and if the promise and recipe are broken, the cards will come down in my next edition.

Nor'Wester Dunkel Weizen (Dark Wheat)

RATING: 4.5

Portland, Oregon

This brew won as the best DARK WHEAT at the World Beer Championships in Chicago. Color is reddish-brown and semi-cloudy - far redder than any German one we have seen. Flavor contains rich wheat flavors but there is

more of a carmel candy theme overpowering it all. One reviewer called this a 'DARK CANDY WHEAT' class of beer. A German Dunkel Weisen tends to be a maltier and more intensely wheat flavored version of their regular wheat(s). Some of them are rather rich. This one is decidedly more sweet and coffee-like and thus very hard to compare to the traditional style. Reviewers commented: 'tasty and sweet...would make an ideal Oktoberfest offering' and 'more syrup than wheat...but underlying the carmel malt is significant depth and solid brewing skill'. This is one of the best dark wheats from the old USA I've tried. It's gone now.



Oberdorfer Weiss Dunkel (Dark)

RATING: 5.0

BREWBASE AWARD: Best Dark Wheat 1998

In our 1998 review of dark wheats on BrewBase, this was our best dark wheat from any country. Seldom do we find a DARK WHEAT to be superior to a regular or pale wheat. This is the case here. The Dunkel version of this \$2.69 bottle had a huge complexity of flavor that made up for the slight weakness of the regular version. It had all the wheaty charm and hop complexity one could want in a German wheat. Color was medium brown but it poured cloudy only in the last half. It is the best DARK WHEAT one can imagine. The metal hardware and resealable lid add something to the price but is well worth it.



Paulaner Hefe-Dunkel Weizen

RATING: 5.0

Munich, Germany

The name Paulaner derives from the monks of St. Paul who since the 1634 made very strong beers for the residents of Munich. Besides commemorating St. Paul they are also known for Salvator (Saviour) double bock honoring an even higher figure and used for sustenance during Lent. What a life of denial and deprivation! After tasting any of Paulaner's brews one is apt to ask where are the applications for the THAT monastery - assuming we could have a couple of cute, young nuns to help in the brewhouse that is. Actually today they are quite high tech, secular, and take advantage of Germany's very best brilliance in industrial applications. Michael Jackson says they were among the first to use a refrigeration machine and a steam-powered turbine in their country.

This dark wheat is smooth and interweaves the tastes of full maltiness and cloudy, tasty yeast into every big sip. The head is large and enduring as one expects. There is a very wisely limited sweetness in the malt that pleases the tastebuds to no end. One would expect a few centuries to have made the recipe just right and somehow we get generous pints over here for under three bucks. That is what we call perfect respect for tradition and technology, keeping the flavor authentically excellent and the price very low. Ayinger is such a wonderful product but this Spring 2000 we give Paulaner just the slightest favor. It's maybe like Mercedes vs. BMW - most folks would be equally happy with either one.

Brewbase Fives



Plank Bavarian Dunkler Weizenbock

RATING: 5.0

Laaber, Germany

Dark Wheats have always been a weakness for me for they are strong and malty but not always predictable things. Color here is dark amber-brown with a substantial head. Wheat flavor and tartness dance with each other and the malt remains restrained but more than sufficient to impress. I like this approach where they give you malty depth with some subtle, joyous approach that does not inflict one with horrible flavors or an overdose that keeps one sipping water at the restaurant between sips. This is a beer that needs no thinner or water break. You get a calm but polite approach to offering the malt. It is not inflicted because of what it has always been. It's malt and companion wheat flavors are presented nicely and yet firmly, generous, and befitting. It's a good dark beer to give to friend who has only had the crude, over-the-top, rough stuff. Plank Dark Wheat fits, niche perfect, it honors tradition, it warms, and leaves one thoroughly content at last precious sip. Their approach is very valid, time-tested, and most of all one you'll remember in a sub-category that has relatively few top notch competitors.

Roth Sex Viking Dunkel Weizen

RATING: 4.5

Raleigh, North Carolina

"Rich caramel and roasted fruit notes" with added rye makes this a more spicy dark wheat than some. "The name of this beer was suggested and voted on by our mature and loyal customers. It just barely beat our 'Touched by a Dunkel' ". The pour is butterscotch-brown, cloudy, palish for the style, the head deep cream and tall. The 5.5% approach has a toasty, vague, covert nose. First sip is bright, semi-malty and more alive in fruit than any German label would dare to send down the line. The supporting malts are bready and mild, far from the German concept but here the fruit-yeast is more assertive at times - and that might be Viking brave. It is weaker than many Germans but no comparison is fair for the added values. Purists dislike the named style here but thoughtful drinkers do give it a whirl. It is remarkably low in European malt depth but there is room in the big, bad, vast Realm of Brewdome for a lower malt-high fruit dunkel with a hint of rye spicing. "A great breakfast beer" says CEO Ryan Roth.

Do we have a strange, forgettable departure from history or the birth of a deviant, well-spun American Dunkelweizen style? It is hard to answer this question for a full adoption of this approach (and establishment of a named style) would need to come from other states and other brands. Reviewers here pondered this point and noted "a half-dunkel seasoned with mellow rye...good comfort...very off style but that is often a good thing" and "confused on what they wanted...hard to place...shallow in spots." Perhaps we are all just virgins under the unfamiliar nordic probe, thumped hard and long on our coast, or is this beer deftly made to give only controversy and clatter? I am inclined to think this is a proto-style, one not perfect nor settled, curious and pioneering perhaps but not yet worldclass. It's apparently offbeat for a reason but nearly all BrewBasers felt it a measure too weak to fairly judge the puzzling recipe. One panelist asked us to classify it as an experimental Rye Dunkelweizen, neither rich nor great, and get over it. I too favor a stronger variant, favoring fruit turned up two notches in the German yeasty way, and with malt turned up but one notch. They might be off to the style races and some fine medals with a richer variant.

Samuel Adams Dark Wheat (Dunkel Weizen)

RATING: 4.0

This seasonal brew celebrates the beginning of summer and often sells out well before June. Like their regular Wheat it uses Weihenstepan yeast for a spicy depth. However this bright amber brew failed to charm us when

tested from ice cold to room temperature. Like Weihenstephan's own dunkel weizen and one from Erdinger it was neither a great wheat nor a great dark. It is worth a try but Adam's Double Bock and Cream Stout were far more pleasing.

Samuel Adams Wheat Beer

RATING: 4.0

Boston, Mass.

This special beer is easily spotted by the red, blue, and gold foil label. In our area (at least) it is sold out in about 2-3 weeks so it is very rare. Using German Weihenstephan yeast (which also makes Gold Cup Export so fine) they achieve a very wheaty crispness. Brewer James Koch also refers to the almost clove-like spiciness' and this taste element makes it tantalizing rather than overpowering. There is no better summer beer when VERY cold.



Samuel Adams LongShot Weizenbock

RATING: 5.0

This 2007 experiment from Rodney Kibzey of Illinois has Bavarian values, a dark amber-brown presentation, and very generous head nothing less than tan. Aroma is malty but the first flavor is less malty and much more crisp. Toffee notes appear but are not saturated in dII malt. Sweetness, faint spice (clove), and fruit are notable and not what I expected even if dark wheats can be the alert and fruity. The fruit intensifies with a second class and "banana" notes as widely reported are confirmed on the palate. The subtle hybridization of German and Belgian styles is sometimes noted and there are certainly a few dark or double Belgian items which provide a framework for any review. Giving this is an affordable, everyday American grocery store item sold in those thick, fat boxes, one must be all the more astonished by this level of quality. This LongShot is a bullseye - is that too obvious? Sorry. Let's recompose. Razor sharp handmade arrow, Osage Orange bow hewn for months, arms of steel, eyes clear, no caffeine for days, and execution flawless. LongShots in sport take a second but this formula was refined over a long time. Similar result. This series is solid and enduring even if one of the winners is this good.

Steingadener Weisse Dunkel

RATING: 4.5

Kaufbeuren, Germany

Stay away from your German dictionary 'cause 'Weisse Dunkel' is only going to come up as 'White Dark'. It is merely a dark version of what is normally white or wheat beer - thus a DARK WHEAT BEER. This is of the Hefe or cloudy subtype with an amber-brown color and off white head of some size. Flavor is full and overflowing as we would expect from both the color and amount of yeast in evidence here. But like many beers of this style it is too rich and filling for some tastes - though simply heavenly and ideal for others. Still most folks are not going to be drinking 6 or more of these in one day! It is not so easy to find this style in larger supermarkets though any microbrew-oriented shop or bar is likely to have a brand or so. This is another of several fine choices.

Brewbase Fives



Tucher Dunkel Hefe-Weizen

RATING: 5.0

Nurnberg, Germany

Nurnberg's major brewery exports a lesser known wheat in regular and dark. Color proves to be bright amber or paler than many dark wheats. Carbonation is alive as expected. Taste is moderate on the wheatful scale and is shorter in flavor persistence than Franziskaner Dark. It is pleasant cold or just a bit cool. One sample lacked the yeasty cloud we expected. Two later samples proved very flavorful and cloudy from the first pour.

Weihenstephan Hefe-Weissbier Dunkel

RATING: 4.5

Germany

At first pour this German dark immediately strikes one as different. It is less brown than others, carrying a brownish-amber tint from the start. Wheat flavors dominant and there is a little tartness to round out the appeal. It is not fair to call this an Amber Wheat as opposed to Dark Wheat but that thought is not far off. It is certainly closer to their paler style than can be said of most other German brewers.

Edelweiss Dunkel

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Salzburg

Hofbrau Kaltenhausen of Salzburg Austria makes wheat beers on the par with any over the border in Germany. This dark version is more of a light amber brown than the color of a non-wheat dark loaded with roasted malts. The head is immense and foamy with endless lace. Wheat flavor overflows but somehow it proves a bit less satisfying than the excellent Kristalklar and Hefe-yeasty variants. Like a few other DARK WHEATS this one seems to get lost in the intensity of flavors and too much sweetness in the finish. It is cloudy with nice yeast tastes but is somehow just a bit off the mark. One reviewer described it as 'a muddle of quality flavors'.

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RATING:

Erding, Germany

BREWBASE AWARD: BEST DARK WHEAT BEER SUMMER 1996

We reviewed Erdinger's Dunkel Weiss (Dark Wheat) some years back and were not very impressed. While this name sounds similar (in part) the product and reviews are so different. The \$3.59 bottles of 500ml size show a medium reddish-brown color with a tan head of large bubbles. Lace is fast and furious. Flavor is very rich and rewarding - irresistible to some of us! It has a sweet caramel almost maple sugary malt flavor of the greatest sophistication and refinement. It is positively the best SWEET DARK WHEAT BEER we've heard about. Some folks do not like wheat beers (dark or otherwise) being this sweet. One panelist thought of it as 'malt nectar from the gods'. That molasses-caramel flavor is almost always associated with UK darks so a German one is a true

surprise.Very memorable.

Erdinger Weissbeer Dunkel (Dark)

RATING: 3.0

How can a pale beer be dark? When you add enough yeast and wheat to give it good color. Carbonation is almost too strong. Even at warmer temps (up to the recommended 53 degrees F.) it was no more flavorful than the regular Weiss- beer so color proves the only note of interest. The Kristallklar was superior to both 'mit feiner hefe' (cloudy yeast) versions by a considerable margin. Like Michelob Dark this will not satisfy anyone who treasures a good stout. And yes this good German brand is on par with Michelob Dark and hardly much better.



Nor'Wester Dunkel Weizen (Dark Wheat)

RATING:

Portland, Oregon

This brew won as the best DARK WHEAT at the World Beer Championships in Chicago. Color is reddish-brown and semi-cloudy - far redder than any German one we have seen. Flavor contains rich wheat flavors but there is more of a caramel candy theme overpowering it all. One reviewer called this a 'DARK CANDY WHEAT' class of beer. A German Dunkel Weizen tends to be a maltier and more intensely wheat flavored version of their regular wheat(s). Some of them are rather rich. This one is decidedly more sweet and coffee-like and thus very hard to compare to the traditional style. Reviewers commented: 'tasty and sweet...would make an ideal Oktoberfest offering' and 'more syrup than wheat...but underlying the caramel malt is significant depth and solid brewing skill'. I has been one of the finest dark wheats from American shores.



Oberdorfer Weiss Dunkel (Dark)

RATING: 5.0

BREWBASE AWARD: Best Dark Wheat 1998

Seldom do we find a DARK WHEAT to be superior to a regular or pale wheat. This is the case here. The Dunkel version of this \$2.69 bottle had a huge complexity of flavor that made up for the slight weakness of the regular version. It had all the wheaty charm and hop complexity one could want in a German wheat. Color was medium brown but it poured cloudy only in the last half. It is the best DARK WHEAT one can imagine. The metal hardware and resealable lid add something to the price but is well worth it.

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Weihenstephan Hefe-Weissbier Dunkel

RATING: 4.5

Germany

At first pour this German dark immediately strikes one as different. It is less brown than others, carrying a brownish-amber tint from the start. Wheat flavors dominant and there is a little tartness to round out the appeal. It is not fair to call this an Amber Wheat as opposed to Dark Wheat but that thought is not far off. It is certainly closer to their paler style than can be said of most other German brewers.



Weyerbacher Slam Dunkel Double Dunkelweizen Ale

RATING: 5.0

Easton, Pennsylvania

I guess the name Doppel-Dunkel sounded stupid. I used to mock these clever beer names but as I approach 50 years on this earth they strangely amuse me more and more each day. I give the Weyerbacher guys a good bit of freedom because their label kinda looks like an old Soviet logo with a firm, angular white hand and arm

slamming a hammer down amid a crown on wheat sheaths. The radiating background sun theme sells it to this point. ABV is 7.0% and it pours to the glass in dark brownish-amber, far from the opacity the bottle indicated and what I'd expect from the name. The head disappeared on me quickly but frankly I care about the stuff that hits my tongue more than those transcendent aesthetics. It was first pioneered in 2007 and so popular it came into the regular rotation. Chris Wilson, Head Brewer is author of this recipe.

First sip? What the hell! I cannot place anything but some strange, alien malt flavors and about three fruits not known to my horticulturally-trained senses. Let's try more sips and do it more slowly. This is crazy, fun, and new territory. There's some apple, caramelized apple even. Another two sips. Good banana in the finish but lots of things coming atop it quickly. The phenols and esters are enough to send any Mass Spec machine into overload or a blue-screen-of-death. Malty-banana is one summer but there is more. More sips and some swishes mouthwash style. Faint spices, maybe clove but I'm sure they're not telling us. Their website mentions the use of the glorious Weinstephaner yeast and that is a scrumptious, oh so good addition. The net stuff also confesses to cloves. Sweetness shifts from moderate to low, variable with the portion and number of previous doses. The sweet fruit-malt increases with time into the bottle(s). This is quality chemical soup and I mean in the best possible sense like what you get with an aged Port or one of those frozen grocery store tubs full of worldclass New England clam chowder that cost \$14 a person. I checked the usual beer review sites and reviews from the experienced folks were everything from A to C - that tells me they have either a brilliant broth or a crazy one. Weyerbacher is out there on the microbrew edge, very accomplished at times and other times experimental to the point of being hard to place. I like them and will always try their new stuff.

Wine x Beer Blends

No, these are not barleywines they are ales and lager mixed with red, rose, and white wines to make a hybrid taste, favoring beer in these cases.

Blue Moon Impulse: Wheat Ale Brewed With The Juice of Cabernet Sauvignon Grapes (Vintage Ale Collection)

RATING: 4.0

Golden, Colorado

Yes, yes this is not technically a Wine x Beer hybrid since the grapes are not fermented before adding to the wheat beer. However, it is effectively a cross of the world's two leading intoxicating beverage groups. Ever Cab grape Juice? Me neither. This 8.5% recipe is bottles to look very much like a wine with a bordered rectangular label, gold foil highlights, and other such aesthetic touches. The pour is as red as cherry soda, a soft bubblegum pink. This is one big grape infusion if the early signs are to be believed. First sip is positive, none of acidic cab flavors we had expected. Perhaps the wine x beer entity is best with wine grapes that are not fermented? There is hardly anything which could keep up with a dark red wine in beer world - and yes we have tried some wine blended ourselves with assertive porters, stouts, and barleywines which potentially could hold their own in such a marriage. Nope. Not one was drinkable. The sweetness of grape juice is a worthwhile thing for it gives one the fruit ale, fruit wheat, and fruit stout options that are likely to be harmonious. Ferment it all and age it later perhaps? Is that the key? The flavor is modest really, some wheat in the background but it might as well be a generic lager or mass-market malt beverage. Grapes, very smooth and neither acidic or sour, dominant the relationship with the drinker but are never really sweet nor soda-like. It is good grape, a special variety clearly, nothing artificial, but nothing like eating this same variety off the vine either. This is a step in the right direction, neither spectacular nor amazing, but an interesting view to where wine grapes might take the style. There is something to be learned, especially if barrel-aging is used at a later date.

Dogfish Head Red and White Ale

RATING: 3.0

Milton, Delaware

The 750ml, brown, thickly capped bottles resemble a Belgian but upper label is often damaged or crimped in my experience. David Larned and Sarah Lamb's painting is superb on the main label and this kind of refined artwork is welcome in this age of magenta flying crap and punk faux-art which makes me want to puke before sipping a single note. and This "malt beverage brewed with coriander and orange peel" gets the addition of something

called "Oregon Pinot noir juice concentrate"; not a wine but presumably a very neat grape juice. The blend of "white beer" and "red wine" gets to 10% ABV with aging on oak staves. It showed up in my area in January 2009. Color is clear amber, head cream and lasting, the lace nothing to speak of. It is a decent malty ale, not great or remarkable, the alcohol and tart notes from wherever are distracting and never unified. High ABV soup of moderate malt, little hops, and an unproven additive is not going to make a prosperous ale, Belgianoid or otherwise. Their claimed "refreshing citrus" is there early on but the stodgy malts wrap up those bright themes with haste. The tartness is ragged and wraps uncomfortably about the ethanol molecule in later notes. The question of note is this: can I or anyone tell there's good red wine added? The answer is no. I cannot tell it's wine but there is a bit of fruit. I can tell something different and that thing is neither integrated or necessary. The second question is this: should they have used yeast to give fruit notes and not relied on wine? I think yes, for the fruit is there, slightly, but it's not effective in this form; perhaps too deep and unreachable with all the other stuff going on. The claimed "robust complexity of a bold wine" is more rubbish than robust if I can be frank with ya'll. I sipped and sipped, temps varied, and over the day consumed all the bottle and found nothing redeeming by this approach. Malt with yeasty wealth, floating and flying about like 1200 untethored astronauts or a lava lamp gone natural would have been more effective I think. I'm not anything close to a brewing expert to deconstruct the failure. My experience to date is that beer-wine hybrids have not worked well in my lab or from anyone else's. It's a nice concept, comforting to the brain, ignored over the last 10 centuries it seems, and save for one thick German Hefe-weizen I poured into a forgotten German white wine in 1999 (and whose proportion I've failed to repeat), such blends are hopeless. Perhaps beer needs yeast more than grape juice to produce fruit; and I cannot get the shadowed, mild juice to impress over all the malt and hops. Wine is a very delicate thing and even a weak beer can overpower it. I will blend beer endlessly among their disparate styles and do so often this month and year. Beer-wine blends on not on my schedule to try anytime soon.

Stone Vertical Epic Ale

RATING: 3.5

Escondido, California

My first foray into wine-beer blends was sometime in college when I wanted to make some undrinkable red jug wine better than the undrinkable Pabst was on it's own. The experiment failed badly and I got sicker than expected. Then the dose of two groups of congeners hit me the next morn - proving that mixing beer and wine in one sad party will usually be painful at sunlight. Later experiences with paler, white wines went a tad better. Did a dark lager, white wine thing once that was tolerable but never could match that thing again. Then a couple years ago I tried the Dog Fish Red and White stuff and despite their fine reputation and a stout pricetag, the stuff proved horrible. Here I am again hoping Stone got the formula right, this time with Muscat (my North Carolina bones say good move ya'll!), Gewurtztraminer (my Germany bones say Ya Vol), and Sauvignon Blance (and I have no French bones). Is this stuff epic or tragic?

It pours light gold, the head thinnish. The first notes are complex, acidic, and charming. The mid notes get complicated and need to settle down with some saturation of the buds. The later notes are tart, not as good as the early ones, surely white winey, and a little ragged on first take. More sips are needed. Some were pleasant and two were absoltely cringing territory. I chilled it more as white wine in anything gets crazy if not very icy. Can't fine a righteous, steady passage in this brew though it seems better than the Dog Fish stuff. It is too complex and bitter to be enjoyable though I think Muscat grapes may have the kind of potency this hybrid style will require. Perhaps a sour beer with Bret and Muscat would get one somewhere if the yeast was right? I don't know but the current experiments and all by one lost one of my own years before are all failures.

Widmer Brothers Reserve Lemongrass Wheat Ale (Limited Released #5)

RATING: 4.0

Portland, Oregon

From it's base name, it does not appear to be a beer x wine hybrid but the smaller print confesses that Muscat Grape Juice with Lemongrass is added to the base Lemongrass Wheat formula. That is not technically wine or is it? The grape juice is surely to have fermented at least some given the 9%, highly carbonated nature of this pour. Offered in Fall 2011, it pours a rich amber-gold with a short-lived, off white head. The noise is citrusy fruit, faint muscat in particular. The two main additions work well in this recipe and better than most of the above (if not all) for the grape is measured to compliment not just equal or triumph the ale base. You could easily ruin both. Their is a snippy, nippy tang to this one and that appears to be from lemon-grass with some bitter hops in the finish. Given the tradition of adding lemon to summer wheat refreshers, this is a familiar mix, made only a

little more curious and complex with use of this eccentric, very non-European grape species. It is by some measure the best wine x beer hybrid tried here through fall 2011 and we hopes this spin on the concept will be copied elsewhere.

[PLEASE LINK TO WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM](http://WWW.BREWBASEREVIEWS.COM)

INTRODUCTION:

This is a book about bottled beer, bottled only. ONLY! Your experience and mine with the draft versions of these beers should and will vary. We do make an exception for a couple of elite canned beers but not many.

A quick word about brand names and nomenclature. I have endeavored when possible to list the beer under the brewery name first and then the trademark or market name second.

If Smith Brewing Company makes Frisky Dog Ale then the brew will be listed as...

Smith Frisky Dog Ale

instead of

Frisky Dog Ale

If Smith Brewing has a subbrand or series called Motley but Motley is not a true brewery name, the product will be listed as

Smith Motley Amber Ale

instead of

Motley Amber Ale

The Brewbase Rating System is very simple. It's 5 bottles in the role of 5 stars. Basically, the 5 bottle beers are perfection, the pinnacle of the style or something worldclass in a class by itself. The 4.5 beers are very good or B+, very competent but lacking something. The 4.0 beers are decent if the price is right but one can always do much better. The 3.5 and 3.0 are pretty much good and average, respectively. The 2.5 and 2.0 are fair to poor, pretty much mass market pisswater, too weak or offensive or dilute be called beer, The very rare 1.5 and 1.0 are very poor and undrinkable.





The BrewBase Fives are perfect 5 bottle-rated labels of extreme quality and merit. These are our standards, ancient to recent, and the supreme jewels in the suds world.



There is a higher level of award we added in 2010 called the BrewBase Fives Legends. These are beers so exalted they have stood the scrutiny of time (sometimes centuries) or in a few cases really blew everything else off the modern map. They are absolute legendary creations so proven and found superior they are often THE STANDARD for their style. The best of the best of the best, sir!

Award of Merit 2010



Brewbase Reviews

When the PC version of BrewBase was around, we decided to name beers of the year in various styles, sometimes a couple in each style if both had merit. These beers are not usually legends but new discoveries to us, surprising and amazing new revelations of brewing brilliance. Taking a page from many national organizations and clubs, we have decided to create an "Award of Merit" each year for exceptional brews of the very highest quality that are new to our files in the given year. Perhaps the best known "award of merit" in the world is the Oscar or Academy Award.

Award of Merit 2011



Brewbase Reviews

What is or was the BrewBase? Back in 1987 a couple of us computer nerds and beer nuts decided to apply our horrid BASIC computer skills to our love of suds. We heard tell of wine databases one could search by style, region of origin, year, rating, etc. Some were cool and some were simple and dreadful. Once we got our 900-some reviews in a file form and bought a BASIC COMPILER, the Brewbase.exe program was available to search by any word, rating, country of origin, and beer style. We sold a few, very few, marketing fora beer database being considered insane in 1987. Then we went to the shareware market to drum up some business. We got some nice letters, some contributed reviews, but not enough orders to quit our days jobs. There was a small flow of decent

beer money. Not enough. Just more than we had before. Bottles were bought and reviews added. When DOS and .exe files died on the shareware front Brewbase 3.1 went another way about then and turned into a text-based HTML website that was short-lived for we'd all moved on to demanding professions and by then we were just one of 39,342 beer review websites and not worth a bucket of week-old Bud Light vomit with bacon bits and corn. Two of the original three BrewBasers reunited a few years ago to compile our new reviews with those of old in a effort to write a beer review book or not. Larry B. Hatch and Mark Summers come to 2010 with a new web model with PDF and HMTL files and many more bottles under OVER our belts and hopefully more humor and intelligence to please you. We write all this for our laptops, phones. pads and other cool stuff. We've bought or not bought neer since 2009 based on what our phone told us about a name with a new label or not in our files to date.

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