

Chouffe Soleil

Our favourite little gnomes are back, and one look at the label art and you know what this beer is going to be. It is Chouffe's spring time ale, something of a cross between a Belgian Witbier and a Belgian Pale Ale.

Soleil replaces the Biere du Soleil (4.5% Amber Ale), which has been discontinued. Brewed only between April to October each year, this is Chouffe's attempt at putting some sunshine in your beer glass.

To do so they use three grains (barley, wheat and rye), Styrian Goldings as the bittering hop and Amarillo for dry-hopping, with the addition of a little curacao.

The result is a pleasant summery ale bursting with fresh flowery aromas. The hazy, unfiltered body is full of citrus, with a nice balance fruity sweetness against the hop bitterness.

A hint of spice adds to the lingering citrus and hop bitterness. Dangerously drinkable for the well-concealed 6% ABV.

Style: Belgian Pale Ale

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brasserie A'Chouffe (for Duvel-Moortgat)

Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.0% (1.56 Std Drinks)



Ganstaller Franz Xaver

Ganstaller is our new Germany brewery, and we're very excited to have a few of their beers here in Oz.

Although only a small artisanal brewery, they are held in high regard by those who know the beers of brewer Andreas Ganstaller. The brewery is located in the town of Schnaid, which is only 20kms from Bamberg; renowned for its use of smoked malts in Rauchbiers. This beer is a smoked Marzen.

A Marzen is the original Oktoberfest beer, though translates as 'March' beer. This is because the beers were made in spring, before the hot weather made it difficult to control the fermentation. After summer was over, and brewing could commence again, the brewers wanted to empty their kegs of Marzen. And along came the Oktoberfest Beer Festival.

This beer is very still, with barely any head at all. This is a common trait with Ganstaller's bottled beers. The aroma of smoked meat and a little charred wood is stronger than it is in the flavour. There is a little sweet malt backbone, which smoothes out the smoky flavour. Some hop bitterness aids a pleasant lingering aftertaste.

Style: Smoked Marzen

Country: Germany

Brewer: Ganstaller Brau

Alcohol Content (ABV): 5.6%

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Petrus Dubbel Bruin

Brewery Bavik-De Brabandere has several different labels in its portfolio, with Petrus being the most notable.

As with many Belgian beers, there is a strong religious tone to the branding. It is commonly done, most often with a sense of fun and playfulness which adds to the feel-good nature of Belgian beers.

The label greets us with a jolly looking fellow who we can assume is St Peter, waiting at the pearly gates with key in hand. He also holds a Bavik beer, suggesting that this instead may be the key to heaven.

So what does this beer unlock?

It is a fairly traditional dubbel style with lots of sweet dark fruit aromas flavours. An inviting caramel malt backbone, with a little burned sugar and slight winy vinuousness.

Did you know: Petrus Dubbel Bruin recently won a gold medal at the 2015 World Beer Awards (Belgian Style Dubbel).

Style: Dubbel

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brouwerij Bavik-De Brabandere

Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.5%



Viven Imperial IPA

Another of Tony Traen's beers – the Viven Imperial IPA. This was the first Viven beer I'd ever tried, about 6-7 years ago sitting in t'Brugs Beertje (The Little Bruges Bear) in beautiful Bruges. (Coincidentally, I'd thoroughly recommend it as a venue for such research!)

It was a Belgian IPA, but very different to most Belgian IPA's I'd tried. These are generally quite reserved in hop character, tending much more to the earthy, grassy hops rather than the fruity, aromatic hops we've come to expect from IPA's.

After taking over the reigns of the brewery, brewer Tony declared 'the idea to apply our Flemish brewing art to non-Flemish beers'. I think he achieved that with this beer.

The Viven Imperial IPA doesn't shy away from using the typical hops, and in decent amounts. Simcoe and Tomahawk give a lovely citrus and peach fruitiness and assertive bitterness, which is then balanced by a caramel malt body heavy and strong enough to carry all the hops.

When this beer was first introduced at the 2009 Bruges Beer Festival, it was voted second best beer – beaten only by Westvleteren 12!

Style: Belgian IPA

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brouwerij Van Viven

Alcohol Content (ABV): 8.0%



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Piraat Tripel Hop

Piraat is one of those beers, something of a classic for the Belgian beer lover. Heavily influenced by the US beer scene, Belgian breweries have been featuring hops more prominently in their beers. Or as in this case, making a variant of a classic to feature the hops (a la Duvel Tripel Hop).

But don't expect a US-style hop bomb here. It is still very much a Belgian style beer, with very reserved hopping. There is a noticeable difference between this beer and the original, but it is more a more heavily-hopped Belgian strong ale than a Belgian IPA.

The normal Piraat is the base for this beer, with four different hops used at three separate times – hence the Tripel Hop. Saaz, Tetra and Aurora are used in the boil, with Cascade used for dry-hopping.

The result is a beer which smells of sweet grassy hops combined with Belgian yeast esters. It has a fairly thick malty body, lots of fruity sweetness with caramel malt and Belgian candi sugar. This is broken up by the earthy hops that provide a lift and a lingering bitterness to balance the sweetness before it becomes cloying. And it doesn't shy away from the booziness either, but it is 10.5%!



Style: Strong Blond Ale

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brouwerij Van Steenberge

Alcohol Content (ABV): 10.5%



De Molen Hel & Verdoemenis

You know you are onto a winner when the name of your brewery's flagship beer translates as 'Hell & Damnation'.

The aroma immediately grabs your attention with a full hit chocolate and coffee, raisins and dates, burnt toast and a touch of vanilla. These all follow through in the flavour to create a really well-balanced, multi-layered tasting experience.

The five different malts used in this beer give lots of dark dried fruits and burnt caramel amid an undertone of coffee with a hint of smokiness. This is balanced by some grassy hops and gentle spices that leave a peppery tingle.

Being a favourite, De Molen have made many variants of this beer by aging in different barrels. We've recently had the sweet peaty Bruichladdich barrel version, and then some that was additionally spiked with Brettanomyces and aged in a softer Bruichladdich barrel. And for any Struise fans, they've even once blended this beer with Struise Black Albert. Now that's one beer you'd like to find sitting in the back of a fridge one day!

Style: Imperial Stout

Country: Netherlands

Brewer: Brouwerij De Molen

Alcohol Content (ABV): 10%

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