

Partizan Saison – Lemon & Thyme

I reckon I'd hate to be a beer judge trying to adjudicate on saisons. It is the beer style with the broadest range of interpretations, from traditional earthy and thirst-quenching to the higher ABV specialty creations. And everything in between.

Partizan brewer Andy has taken a step backwards with some of his saisons which are much lower in alcohol. Falling firmly into the newly-created style of 'session ales', the ABV varies a little from batch to batch; but is that not truly the mark of artisanal brewing?

The version we have here comes in at 3.8%, and is a ripper of a little beer. Save it for a warm afternoon and then delight in the light, subtle but succinct character of this beer.

A big lemon citrus aroma and flavour with more than enough farmhouse funk to keep things interesting. Verging on tart the citrus is the hero, but there is some gentle spicing which adds a pleasant prickle on the tongue. The beer is very dry and light, but full of flavour.

Style: Saison
Country: England
Brewer: Partizan Brewing
Alcohol Content (ABV): 3.8% (0.99 Std Drinks)



Grimbergen Dubbel

The Grimbergen label has a very long history, dating back to 1128 when the monks founded the Norbertine Abbey in Grimbergen. It was twice destroyed during times of conflict, and ceased operations in 1798 when it was demolished during the French Revolution.

With such a chequered history, it is no surprise that the monks adopted the phoenix as a symbol of rebirth. This symbol adorns the labels of all the Grimbergen beers, along with the tag 'burned but not destroyed'.

The Maes brewery (a big player in the Belgian brewing industry) began brewing beer under the Grimbergen label again in 1958. In 2008 Heineken took over Alken-Maes, though Carlsberg is given the rights to the label everywhere outside of Belgium.

So our beer is still brewed by Alken-Maes, while the Kronenbourg Brewery in France brews the beers for Carlsberg.

The beer is a delicious example of a Belgian dubbel style. There is a pleasant dark fruit sweetness with rich caramel malts and a hint of spice on the finish.

Style: Belgian Dubbel
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brouwerij Alken-Maes
Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.5% (1.69 Std Drinks)



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Viven Master IPA

We've had a few of the Viven beers, and this is the most recent creation.

This beer takes a step away from the US-style hopping of the Viven Imperial IPA, and back to a more traditional European feel.

The beer is made using hops from Germany (Mercur Hoppe), New Zealand (Nelson Sauvin) and the United States (Citra), so it isn't short on hop characteristics with a fruity aroma of lemon and grapefruit.

The flavour is a little earthier than the aroma suggests, though there is still some citrus fruit sweetness with the grainy malt body. The beer is really quite dry, which exaggerates the spicy prickle on the finish.

This beer was intended to represent an older style European IPA, presenting a more sessionable beer; if you can call a beer of 7% sessionable!

Style: Belgian/English IPA
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brouwerij Van Viven
Alcohol Content (ABV): 7.0% (1.82 Std Drinks)



Ganstaller Weizenator



This is essentially a strong bock (lager) beer, or Doppelbock style. And its made using at least 50% wheat malt (which is a requirement by German law for using the name Weizenbier).

And there is a fascinating naming convention for German Doppelbocks that means most end in 'ator'. The name comes from the Paulaner monks of who brewed the very first doppelbock. They were allowed to drink beer during their time of fasting, so decided to brew a stronger beer with more body to help get through the fast.

They named their doppelbock 'Salvator', which was copied by many other breweries. Later the name was registered, so the other breweries decided to keep the names similar by creating name ending in 'ator'. There are over 200 different registered beer names ending in 'ator' in Germany!

The beer will pour very still, but wait a few seconds and a Guinness-like settling will create a small head. There is a sweet malty body, hints of banana and pear, bready malt and a little wood character. The hops jump in as well and give a nice prickle to mouthfeel and break up the sticky mouth character.

A really interesting beer that will take a few sips to get your head around, but a beer that I'm sure you'll ultimately enjoy.

Style: Weizen Bock
Country: Germany
Brewer: Ganstaller Brau
Alcohol Content (ABV): 8.1% (2.11 Std Drinks)

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Pêche Mel Bush

University students can create some interesting concoctions in an attempt to find their happiness while on a budget. And this beer has the Belgian students to thank for its introduction.

Years ago, a group of university students created a beer cocktail by mixing equal parts the 12% Bush Amber (Scaldis), which was then Belgium's strongest beer, with a 4% Timmermans Peach Geuze. Easy to drink, and not too harsh on the wallet!

In 2009 Dubuisson decided to adopt this style as their own, and we now have the 'Bush with Peaches'. The brewery still mix the Bush Amber but now use natural peach extract to substitute for the Timmermans Geuze.

The result is a beer with a very fruity aroma. The peaches come through strongly, with even a hint of mango. This follows through in the flavour, with a tropical fruit sweetness on the front palette. The beer never gets too sweet though, with a sustained level of hop bitterness. Good carbonation adds a little prickle to the tongue.

This is one beer which suits being served chilled more like an aperitif. And at 8.5%, Dubuisson believe they have Belgium's strongest fruit beer.



Style: Tripel (with Peaches)
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brasserie Dubuisson
Alcohol Content (ABV): 8.5% (2.21 Std Drinks)

Kees Caramel Fudge Stout

You may remember Emelisse Crème Brulee Stout from several years ago. It was a favourite of ours - and many others. Sadly, Emelisse no longer produce this beer, and former brewer Kees Bubberman moved to open his own brewery.

The good news is Kees has brewed something just as special. He had to brew a different beer to make it his own, so chose to make it bigger and richer. It truly is dessert in a glass, but remains a big, bold imperial stout as well.

Remove the cap and the sweet fudge aroma bursts out of the bottle. Chocolate, vanilla and a little burnt sugar. The flavour follows suit with the addition of the roasted malts and the slightest hint of coffee.

The body is rich and smooth, but somehow not that thick and sticky, with some hop bitterness adding balance to the sweet malt body. A very clever beer!

And guess what?: Kees has just laid down a full batch of the Caramel Fudge Stout filled into Bourbon barrels. We can't wait til they are ready later this year!

Style: Imperial Stout
Country: The Netherlands
Brewer: Brouwerij Kees
Alcohol Content (ABV): 11.5% (3.00 Std Drinks)



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