

Steenbrugge Wit

One of Belgium's iconic styles is the white (wit) beer. This Steenbrugge Wit is brewed with 40% unmalted wheat and 60% malted barley, with coriander, curacao orange peel and a mix of spices.

An inviting aroma of lemon peel, banana and light spices. The beer light-bodied and dry, with a crisp wheat malt, tangy citrus and subtle spicing.

In 2011 this beer won 'Best Spiced Wheat Beer' and the World Beer Awards.

The Steenbrugge label was owned by the now-defunct De Gouden Boom brewery, formerly located in Brugse. The name Gouden Boom translates as 'golden tree'; and is the symbol of the city of Brugse.

In 2003 the De Gouden Boom brewery was purchased by Palm Breweries, who then moved production out of Brugse and closed down the brewery.

Palm Breweries was itself the subject of a takeover last year when Dutch company Bavaria NV acquired a majority of its shares.

Style: Belgian Witbier
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Palm Breweries
Alcohol Content (ABV): 5.0% (0.99 Std Drinks)



De Molen Winter Saison

Brouwerij De Molen might elicit memories of big and bold dark beers with names that can be a little tricky for non-Dutch speakers to pronounce.

This time around we present a beer that is neither a strong and black nor sporting an unusual name. At first this may be cause for some concern but after delving into De Molen's 'Winter Saison' all fears will be allayed.

While traditionally saisons were brewed in the winter and consumed in summer to quench the thirst of Wallonian farm workers, the style has progressed to include a wide variety of examples. Thus the 'Winter Saison' is a beer brewed with Timut and Szechuan peppers, mustard seeds and juniper.

The beer pours a light orange/amber with small amount of suspended sediment; the aroma is spicy barnyard French/Belgian yeast and a touch of caramel. It has a good amount of carbonation for the style with a little extra body for the cold winter months. There is a touch of tartness and the finish is nice and dry as to be expected.

The added spices give the pleasant herbal, woody quality of a traditional gruit, medicinal ale or witches brew. Additionally there is a slight, pleasant after burn from the addition of the peppers.

This is just another quality, boundary-pushing beer from a brewery that refuses to play by the rules.

Style: Saison (Spiced)
Country: The Netherlands
Brewer: Brouwerij De Molen
Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.1% (1.59 Std Drinks)

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Brussels Calling 2016

This beer from Brussels brewery De La Senne is one I look forward to each year. Brewed only on the 22nd December each year, it celebrates the day the first brew was completed in the new brewery back in 2010.

As mentioned for previous versions of this beer, it seems quite a simple malt profile. This remains unchanged year-to-year, with the hops being the ingredient that is altered up each year. For the 2016 version, an experimental hop from Slovenia was chosen.

The brewers describe the beer as a Belgian IPA, but I don't think there is enough hop character to move it past being a Belgian pale ale.

There is a clean bready malt body and a fresh fruity, grassy hop presence. Grapefruit, melon and pear provide a tropical fruit sweetness with a tinge of tart. A spicy yeast character compliments a firm and sustained hop bitterness for a lingering dry bitter finish.

Definitely a little spicier than previous versions, and a long bitter finish which we come to expect from De La Senne. Always favouring the old world, earthy and grassy hops, and in always generous additions.

Style: Belgian Pale Ale
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brasserie De La Senne
Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.5% (1.69 Std Drinks)



Papegaei

This beer comes from Belgian 'beer firm' Brouwerij Verstraete. It is the term used in Belgium for what we call our contract brewers. They are a recognised brewery business, without their own brewery.

Deca Services is a big production brewery in West Flanders, and it is here that the Papegaei is brewed for brewer Adam Verstraete. Papegaei translates as 'parrot' in Dutch – hence the label symbol.

The beer is a strong blonde ale, with a hazy orange body and nice aroma of citrus and Belgian yeast. Barley, wheat and oats are in the grain-bill, with whole Perle hop flowers (bittering) and Hersbrucker hops used for dry-hopping.

There is a pleasant malty backbone, with a good dose of citrus hop character and coriander and curacao orange spice. Low carbonation aids the smooth mouthfeel.

And while Verstraete may not have its own brewery, they do have a lovely little shop on the canal in Diksmuide where you can enjoy the Papegaei beer along with other local produce on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

Style: Strong Blond Ale
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brouwerij Verstraete
Alcohol Content (ABV): 8.0% (2.08 Std Drinks)



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Kaapse Jaapie

Kaapse Brouwers have their home in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam. They have a brew pub nestled on the banks of a canal in the district of Katendrecht. The area is affectionately known as 'De Kaap' which means 'The Cape'. So we have The Cape brewers from Rotterdam.

The brewery commenced in 2014 as a joint venture that involved (amongst others) John & Menno from De Molen. So it comes as no surprise that a few of the Kaapse beers are brewed at the De Molen brewery.

The Jaapie is one of the beers brewed at De Molen, and is an Imperial Red Ale. It is an inviting orange body, with strong aromas of tropical fruits from the US hops.

Passionfruit, orange and pine fruit flavours are carried by a thick caramel malt body. The hops versus malt battle is a balanced one, though there is a strong lingering bitterness in the aftertaste.

Style: Imperial Red Ale
Country: The Netherlands
Brewer: Kaapse Brouwers
Alcohol Content (ABV): 9.4% (2.45 Std Drinks)



Ganstaller Schwarze 90



This beer from Ganstaller took me a little by surprise when I first sampled it. A cursory glance at the label only picked up the 'schwarze' in the name, so thinking it would be a nice German dark lager, I wasn't at all prepared for the aroma and flavour assault that followed.

A little more thorough investigation revealed that this beer was an Imperial Stout Lager, which seems rather a unique style. Maybe a Baltic Porter would be a more commonly used label. Definitely with a lager yeast, but I think this beer has more of the roasted malt character associated with imperial stouts.

The beer pours a very dark brown, with a visibly thick body and very little head. The aroma is a rich mix of chocolate, molasses, roasted malts and a hint of licorice.

There is a strong roasted malt backbone, with less chocolate than the aroma suggests. Dark ripe stonefruit, dried fruits, a little licorice and just the slightest hints of coffee. And a sort of salty minerality, which breaks through.

Whatever label you choose to apply (and I'm sticking with imperial stout) this beer is really delicious, very smooth and rounded and beautifully balanced.

Style: Imperial Stout (Lager)
Country: Germany
Brewer: Ganstaller Brau
Alcohol Content (ABV): 11.9% (3.10 Std Drinks)