

# The RARE BEER CLUB

## BRASSERIE DUPONT TOURPES, WALLONIA, BELGIUM

### AVEC LES BONS VOEUX

In reflecting on the provenance and characteristics of classic Belgian saison in his *Great Beers of Belgium*, our Club's founder Michael Jackson wrote, "The most famous Saison strain is that of the Dupont brewery. 'A brewer with the Dupont yeast is touched by God,' I was told by a proud possessor." It's pretty difficult not to be enamored by the beers of Brasserie Dupont.

The Dupont brewery was formally established in 1920, when the father of agronomist Louis Dupont purchased it for his son to discourage him from moving to Canada. Their loss is the beer world's gain, and Louis found himself with an historical farm-brewery renowned for its seasonal and honey beers, with a heritage



extending back to the mid-1700s. Its success only grew in subsequent years. Olivier Dedecker, the fourth generation of the Dupont family to serve as head brewer, currently runs the show. Since the modest (now-legendary) Dedecker began there as an engineer in 1990, Brasserie Dupont has gradually expanded its production, initiated regular export (we've been drinking much better since 1992), developed a rigorously certified lineup of organic beers, and branched out further with beers like Monk's Stout and Posca Rustica. We featured the latter, a mind-blowing Gallo-Roman gruit beer, back in 2011, followed by Dupont's La Bière De Beloeil (a glorious strong saison) a few years afterwards.

Through all of this, Brasserie Dupont

has maintained its time-proven methods and attention to detail. Their extended bottle-conditioning periods provide their beers with a fine-bubbled effervescence and the potential for lengthy cellaring, while their direct-flame kettles continue to instill that (seemingly magical) touch of caramelization. Details matter. Brasserie Dupont is regularly cited as one of the planet's finest breweries. *Men's Journal* previously declared their Saison Dupont "The Best Beer in the World," and we'd have a hard time arguing with that. Offerings like the core Saison, the Moinettes, and the featured Avec les Bons Voeux continue to challenge both American palates (via that spicy Dupont yeast)

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### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Style

Strong Holiday Saison

#### Alcohol By Volume

9.5%

#### Serving Temperature

50–57° F

#### Suggested Glassware

Chalice, Goblet, Tulip or Pinot Glass

and American brewers (who make great efforts to replicate its effects here). We are pleased to offer our members this especially tasty offering from Brasserie Dupont, one of the world's truly inspirational farmhouse breweries.

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## AVEC LES BONS VOEUX

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We've had the opportunity to sample many different limited releases from Brasserie Dupont over the years—but we always make a point to keep coming back to one in particular. We're huge fans of Dupont's seasonal, limited-release Avec Les Bons Voeux: a gloriously generous "super saison," crisp and massive all at once. This annual holiday offering isn't always one of easiest to track down (when it does arrive each year), and we couldn't imagine a more perfect beer to toast the holidays with than the reliably cheering-inducing Avec Les Bons Voeux.

This pours beautifully. Avec Les Bons Voeux is a bright, mostly clear golden color that leads into more honeyed, orange-tinged hues at the edges. Capped by a vibrant, thick foam of tiny white bubbles, this looks far more modest in alcohol and subtle in expression than proves to be the case. A dense foam lingers even after some length in the glass, often replenished from below. This can be nicely effervescent in texture; Champagne parallels are totally on-point. A rich,

yeast-driven set of aromatics lands as soon as this gets poured: pepper, dough, honey...

The phenolic top notes in the aroma arrive as white pepper plus a touch of clove—held aloft by pillowy sourdough, vanilla, almond and candied orange. There's an abundance of fruit, all the way from fresh apple and banana to elements more like sweet lemon. Its sweetness, as a whole, never weighs heavy, even at nearly 10%. There's that crackling, peppery profile of Dupont's house yeast all over this. Avec's incredibly expressive, streamlined, regal but refreshing. An endearing front profile of complex pepper shapes everything. As pairing-ideal as things get.

For those who've had it, that first sip's almost too good. Everything about the aroma follows through fully in the flavor, from the ballast of white- and black-pepper yeast qualities to the complexity of fruit and baked elements underneath. It's toasty, for sure. All kinds of spruced up with its zesty punch of carbonation, an effervescence that lands right beside the pepper. There are almost baklava-like layers of honeyed pastry and vanilla and breadiness beneath. We're constantly struck by how incredibly drinkable this remains, despite the potent ABV.

There's something almost indescribably special and crowd-pleasing about the

Dupont profile across so many of their delicious beers. A pepper-forward approach, the resulting leanness—the way it feels like one of those magical bags that you can fit a million things in but also fold up into your pocket. This is one of the magic, black-hole pouches. Honeyed, peppery depth. So many kind Rare Beer Club members have expressed their enjoyment of our Belgian beer features in the past, and we're super excited to offer up this once-a-winter offering from the world-renowned Brasserie Dupont from Belgium's Wallonia region. This 9.5% ABV seasonal seems to float, like the very best examples from the country: hefty—yet somehow managing to stay refreshing. Brilliantly fermented, robust, and vibrant all at the same time. Drink up!

### AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

We've enjoyed various vintage examples of Dupont Avec Les Bons Voeux over the years, all of them still immensely generous, nearly regardless of age. Keep an eye on celled bottles to make sure the dried-caramel character of oxidation isn't building too much. For pairings, we can't help but find its pepper, lean fruit and carbonation perfectly tuned to plump turkey and holiday fare. Pop a few bottles to ease winter along. Or set some down for future greatness.

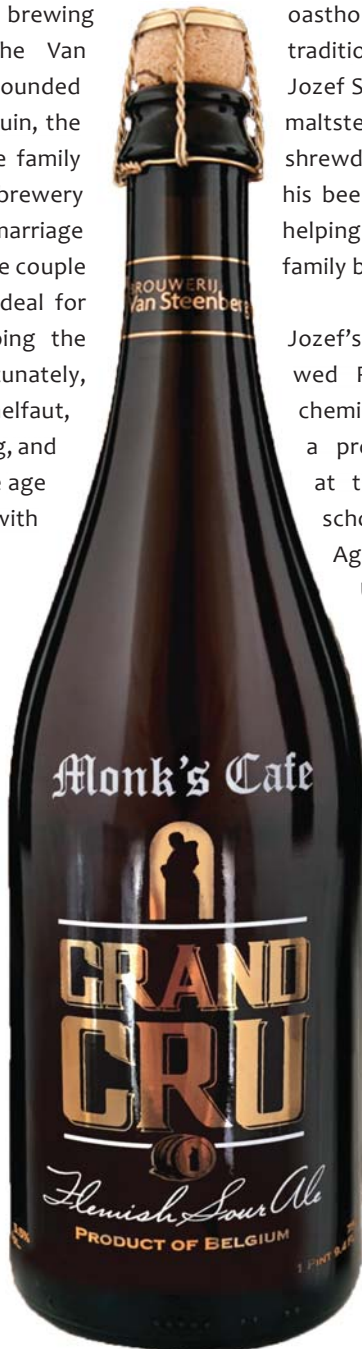
# The RARE BEER CLUB

## BROUWERIJ VAN STEENBERGE ERTVELDE, EAST FLANDERS, BELGIUM

### MONK'S CAFE GRAND CRU

From the wellspring of great brewing that is Belgium comes the Van Steenberge family brewery. Founded in 1874 by Jean-Baptist De Bruin, the brewery has remained in the family since. Jean-Baptist set up the brewery next to his farm. Despite his marriage to wife Angelina Schelfaut, the couple remained childless – never ideal for those with visions of keeping the family brewery going. Fortunately, Angelina's nephew, Jozef Schelfaut, had learned the art of brewing, and upon Angelina's death (at the age of 92!), she entrusted Jozef with running the family brewery.

The benefit of being a farm-based brewery is that, in theory, you can produce just about every ingredient necessary for the brewing process. But it's no small feat to do so. These days, nearly all brewers order their grains already malted and already kilned, and their hops already plucked or even pressed into pellet form. But this was not the route that Jozef Schelfaut took. In order to provide for the production of the necessary ingredients, he (admirably) set up his own two-hectare hops field and also constructed a malt house and accompanying



oasthouse (the name for a traditional hops drying building). Jozef Schelfaut: builder, brewer, maltster, harvester of hops, and shrewd businessman, able to get his beers featured near and far, helping secure the success of his family brewery.

Jozef's daughter, Margriet, wed Paul Van Steenberge, a chemical engineer who became a professor of microbiology at the Sint-Lievens brewery school in Ghent and at the Agriculture Faculty of the University of Ghent. When Jozef Schelfaut died in 1922, Paul Van Steenberge had gained enough knowledge to take over the family business, and eventually became the mayor of Ertvelde. Being busy on the mayoral front, it was largely thanks to his wife Margriet that the brewery stayed alive, particularly as Paul moved from mayor to senator. Paul's son, Jozef, studied law but still ended up in the brewery, taking over the business after his father's death in 1962.

Today, Paul Van Steenberge (II), son of Jozef and grandson of Paul Van Steenberge (I), heads the brewery. He entered the family business in 1978, and in 1985 took over the management from his father.

Today, the brewery produces some very highly acclaimed beers, most quite difficult to find (you may have come across their famed Piraat, a well-hopped, Belgian IPA-style beer, and their classic Gulden Draak beers). Some of our long-time Rare Beer Club members might recall Witches' Brew: the brewery's delicious (and Halloween-ready) tripel that we featured some years back. This time around: we snatched up one of Van Steenberge's limited-edition, barely distributed products for our members—the highly limited Monk's Cafe Grand Cru.

#### MONK'S CAFE GRAND CRU

Monk's Cafe Grand Cru is a very limited one-off release from Brouwerij Van

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#### SPECIFICATIONS

##### Style

Blended Flemish Sour Ale

##### Alcohol By Volume

5.5%

##### Serving Temperature

48–55° F

##### Suggested Glassware

Tulip, Teku or Pinot Glass

Steenberge, as only about 50 twelve-bottle cases will be making it to the U.S. outside of the club. This one's especially rare, and absolutely delicious. It starts as a blend of carefully aged and fresh tripels, before being aged for six months inside of oak casks. Right before things get bottled, a high-fermented lager gets blended in as well to bring the ABV down to a refreshing 5.5%.

Monk's Cafe Grand Cru is a beautifully presented take on Flemish sour ale, packed with dark fruits and intricate tartness and subtle accompanying caramelization throughout. This pours a caramelized amber color with golden edges, capped by light tan bubbles. It appears pretty clear aside from the very end of the bottle; just be a little cautious with the last portion if you prefer to avoid cloudiness. (We found this a touch more expressive without the yeast.)

There's a ton of aromatic expressiveness right from the start here. Vibrant red fruits and a streamlined, refreshing sourness arrive first, followed by accompanying notes of caramel, cola, and subtle hints of brown sugar. Some examples of Flemish sour ale can feel a bit stale, packed with

an abundance of oxidation and more sweetness than sourness, but this one just stood out to us for how lively it presented itself. This has definitely seen some careful aging, but there's a ton of fresh red fruit and engaging malt character that never oversteps. This blended release from Brouwerij Van Steenberge is one of the most engaging examples of the style we've encountered in what feels like forever—and the aromatics come through with all kinds of engaging fruit, nicely orchestrated tartness, and complexity that just keeps going.

The flavor and mouthfeel here are something else. There's just the right level of carbonation, combining an impressive display of fruit, caramelization and tartness with engaging bubbles that makes this feel honeyed but still nimble. At its finest, a world-class Flemish sour ale will combine the robust acidities and caramelized malts into something that magically manages to be incredibly refreshing, as well as one worth savoring. This is one of those beers that works that magic. There's a rich, honeyed character that reminded us of Sauternes, plus additional layers of maltiness beyond the expected, including notes of brown sugar, figs and dates.

The subtle touch of influence from oak provides a hint of vanilla and welcome tannic structure.

Monk's Cafe Grand Cru from Brouwerij Van Steenberge is just a beautiful and unique take on Flemish sour ale, remaining quite crisp and drinkable at its 5.5% ABV, while offering up an immense amount of fermentation character, fruit and caramel, plus just a ton of flavor for this modestly sized beer. For us, this is a brilliant showcase of a style that can be tougher to find stateside, and it fully captures how incredibly complex and drinkable these beers can be.

#### AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

Putting further age on this will depend on your affinity to oxidation. We found a lot of well-developed (but not too far) oxidative characteristics already from the three-plus years of age certain parts of this blend have seen. For how rarely we'll encounter Flemish sour ale of this caliber, we'd be inclined to go with roasted duck—or a traditional carbonnade flamande.

## BEYOND THE BOTTLE: ENJOY IT WHILE IT LASTS

BY KEN WEAVER

*All About Beer Magazine* had been one of the leading beer publications in the country for 39-ish years. While I wouldn't be surprised if the brand re-emerged in a different form, you can read more about what's been going down over at Jeff Alworth's *Beervana* blog—"After 39 Years, All About Beer Magazine is Dead"—or via the *Forbes* article "RIP All About Beer."

It's been a weird couple years.

I was one of the last folks to depart the *All About Beer* editorial team, though I kept doing my *Trending* column over there through the magazine's final printed issues. That editorial team, led by John Holl and then Daniel Hartis up until the end, was the most supportive group of beer writers and editors I could've asked for. Managing editor Jon Page and our designer Jeff Quinn helped steer the mag

to what I'm inclined to believe were some of its brightest years. And Hartis and I had some awesome theme issues planned that never saw the light of day.

For those of you who read the mag—thank you for supporting independent beer journalism. If you're looking for something else to read, Holl's an editor at *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine* these days. I've got my first piece for the revamped *BeerAdvocate Magazine* in their latest issue. Support those publications that serve you well. They're not going to be around forever.

*Ken Weaver (@KenWeaver) is a beer writer and cartoonist based in Petaluma, California. He makes a weekly webcomic about a brewery at the end of the world at massivepotions.com.*