

The RARE BEER CLUB

JESTER KING BREWERY AUSTIN, TEXAS

BLACK METAL

Michael Jackson once remarked on Austin, Texas' counterintuitively rich beer scene. In the heart of a land not necessarily renowned for good beer, the Austin environs had numerous brewpubs and breweries, and offered a welcome breeding ground for better beer culture. Even the legendary Pierre Celis, famous resurrectionist of Belgian Witbier, settled there in the 1990s to open his U.S. brewery. Austin helped foster strong bits of creativity and growth for brewers in the microbrewery boom of the 1990s. But it didn't last... Various downtown brewpubs were almost all shuttered, Celis' own brewery was dismantled,

and a few breweries evaporated in the brutal heat of Texas' overall feelings about beer. That was back then.

For much of its more recent history, Texas' craft brewers have had to be rather careful not to stray too far off the map, sticking to traditional, almost "starter" beers in their lineups. It was a training-wheels approach that seems to have lasted a bit longer than in other states. But the craft beer movement has helped pierce that balloon, and what's rushing through the aperture is better beer. The newest influx of Texas breweries hit the scene at a rapid pace.

with wild Texas yeast harvested atop the brewery's rooftop, to a European-inspired, porter-colored mild ale, to a monstrous double stout. Not the standard opening lineup of an amber, a blonde and a pale ale, they instead debuted with an oaked rye IPA called Wytchmaker, and Commercial Suicide, their English dark mild ale—a 3% ABV session brew that drinks like a beer twice its strength. They have a passion for marrying the extreme with poise—which means some of their beers are made using techniques such as open fermentation, whisky barrel aging, and bottle-conditioning with wine yeast. Or, you know, brewed to 10%+ ABV. But remarkably, for extreme domestic craft beers, they've remained refined

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One of them is the Jester King Brewery, located on a ranch in the Texas Hill Country on the outskirts of Austin. The folks behind the brewery have opted out of the "safe and careful approach," deciding instead to brew anything from authentic, oak-aged farmhouse ales made

SPECIFICATIONS

Style

Farmhouse Imperial Stout

Alcohol By Volume

10.8%

Serving Temperature

55–61° F

Suggested Glassware

Snifter, Tulip, Chalice, or Pinot Glass

and balanced.

The Jester King brand continues to evolve while maintaining its artisan vibe. Local artist Josh Cockrell, who was at the brewery during our three initial visits giving tours, sterilizing things, filling kegs, rolling barrels—whatever was needed at the time—designed their label artwork, brewery logos, and tap handles. We found a couple of his tap handles while in Austin checking out the local better beer scene, and these handles are truly works of art. We've long been fans of Jester King's attention to detail, the passionate commitment to unleashing unconventional beers on the marketplace, the artisanship, the risk-taking, the do-it-yourselfism, the brewing prowess shown by these homebrewers turned pro, the will to experiment, and the drive to source and use local, organic ingredients and harvested rainwater. We think you'll dig what Jester King's up to. For more info, check out their website over at jesterkingbrewery.com.

BLACK METAL

Jester King's Black Metal currently sees very limited distribution, with only about 20 cases sold in the U.S. in 2018. This year's limited run will be predominantly heading to our Rare Beer Club members, with around 50 to 75 cases left over for distribution solely in Texas. Jester King Black Metal is brewed with a variety of malted barleys and rolled oats, English-style hops, aerated and filtered Texas Hill Country

well water, and fermented with a mixture of traditional brewers yeast and locally harvested native yeast and bacteria (and black metal music played to the beer during fermentation, of course). It's essentially pure black in color at first glance—it's actually a super dark brown when held to a penetrating light source—blanketed by a very thick, brownish head. There's a show on display here as cascading effects fizzle down the side of the glass at the interface of the liquid and foam formation.

Make sure the beer is served at the correct temperature—cold is its only known weakness! Expect big notes of roasted barley from the start, with quite a bit of coffee, anise, and even some toffee, plus a little suggestion of the hefty 10.8% ABV, at least when this is served on the lower end of the suggested serving temperature (the alcohol does start to reveal itself with added temp). From the aroma alone, it seems like this beer might have been played a softer, gentler kind of black metal during fermentation, with comforting notes of treacle-ish, singed syrup and deep chocolate. But while it starts with some sweetness, this is quickly dried up by the unleashing of coffee (espresso, esp.), burnt currants, vinous warmth, scorched raisins and charred wood. Esters are perceived as low, but they are there if you look for them, offset by a bit of fruity impact from the alcohol. Black Metal finishes with heaps of coffee and treacle, and ends quite dry for the style, thanks to a very high attenuating traditional

yeast strain. The sudden flash of citrus rind and earthy hoppiness contribute on the bitterness side, working nicely with the malt-derived bitterness from this beer's specialty malt additions.

This beer's certainly an anomaly for Texan beer—and Jester King's Black Metal is also a bit anomalous for the style itself, remaining balanced for what it is and almost unnervingly easy to drink, with a sort of split personality: for those seeking out extended waves of flavor and intensity, you'll get it. But if you're seeking more subtlety and sophistication, you'll get that too, though it may take a particularly refined palate to realize it given the richness of flavor. This is not just a big bad monster of a beer thrashing about, beating its chest and crushing beer cans on its forehead, but a well crafted, smart, interesting beast of a beer that manages to retain balance and poise. It's an impressive juggling act, even for the ablest of jesters.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

The 10+% ABV and style category here suggest Black Metal should do just fine with, say, six months or more in the cellar, as some of the core chocolate notes gravitate toward more of a caramel focus with time. We suggest pairing this with a maduro cigar, sinister heavy metal, a mace (or other similarly unwieldy device), and maybe something by Dante for balance.

The RARE BEER CLUB

LES TROIS MOUSQUETAIRES BROSSARD, QUÉBEC, CANADA

GRANDE CUVÉE WEIZENBOCK

The Québécois good-beer scene has been renowned for breweries like Unibroue and Dieu du Ciel!, both of which see significant distribution throughout the States, but it's small-scale operations like Les Trois Mousquetaires that remind us that it's frequently better to visit. Located directly southeast of Montreal, maybe an hour or so north of the Vermont border, the brewery exports only a few occasional offerings, most often their hefty Porter Baltique. Les Trois Mousquetaires got its start back in 2004, shortly after its three founders lost their jobs after a production plant was moved to Ontario. Hence the Alexandre Dumas reference. "One for all, all for one!"

Using their experience as production engineers, they decided to purchase a small brewing operation along the north shore of Montreal. (We're glad they did.) In 2008, brewer Alex Ganivet-Boileau took over brewing responsibilities, and in



the years since the company has expanded its lineup from a pair of lagers to its current expansive range of German-influenced creations and beyond. Like the Greater Montreal region, the Les Trois releases—Maibock, Rauchbier, Kellerbier, etc.—conjure an Old-World, European charm.

Some of our Rare Beer Club members will fondly recall their Sticke Alt. Of the brewery's German-style offerings, we were particularly thrilled with the brewery's take on that older style—which can be challenging to track down in the States, especially fresh. Or pretty much anywhere else in the world, aside from Düsseldorf... We were able to secure the Les Trois Mousquetaires Sticke Alt as a Rare Beer Club selection a few years back. Like many of their beers, it utilized 100% Québec-produced malted barley, and to this day it's still one of the finest examples of that elusive style that we've ever

tracked down. We also recently featured (and loved!) their pale and zestily hopped Maibock—also brewed with Québec-grown malt.

This month, we're pleased to introduce our Rare Beer Club members to arguably the finest beer we've had from these folks thus far: a dark wheat ale in the form of their Grand Cuvée Weizenbock. It's brewed with 100% Québec malt and Northern Brewer hops—and it's one of our more cellarable features in recent memory (for those looking for a little something to tuck away for a while). This one's very limited stateside, and we hope you love it as much as we did. To many more exceptional beers from our friends at Les Trois Mousquetaires!

GRANDE CUVÉE WEIZENBOCK

Les Trois Mousquetaires' Grande Cuvée
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SPECIFICATIONS

Style
Weizenbock (dark wheat ale)

Alcohol By Volume
10.5%

Serving Temperature
50–57° F

Suggested Glassware
Tulip, Chalice, or Weizen Glass

Weizenbock is a 10.5% ABV dark wheat ale that perfectly showcases what this brewery is up to when it comes to crafting traditional German beer styles. Weizenbocks, for those not familiar, combine copious amounts of wheat to the complex maltiness of a bock or doppelbock. The net result, more often than not, proves to be surprisingly drinkable beers often weighing in at 8+% ABV, with lush layers of detailed maltiness tempered by the soft texture and underlying toastiness of the wheat. And when it comes to weizenbocks, the folks at LTM have made one of our favorite takes yet.

For how endearing weizenbocks can be, there are so few of them. They're often overlooked in the extreme-beer lens, if only because they don't generate quite the immediate impact of, say, a double IPA's bitterness or the deep roast of an imperial stout. But weizenbocks can shine in their own way, combining the best elements of a German-style hefeweizen with the strength and deeper malts of a bock. They make for comforting, cold-weather sippers.

Les Trois Mousquetaires' Weizenbock is one of the tastiest we've ever found, with complex aromatics and a deft layering of flavors. This pours a deep golden-brown, almost the color of maple syrup, with a bit of viscosity to it. There's some body here, for sure, and some residual sugars. The off-white head readily dissipates, leaving the dark nectar beneath it. The aromas, combining aspects of German hefeweizen yeast and the rich maltiness of a doppelbock, spill out of the glass. There are plump raisins, dried caramel, fruit leather. A nice balance is struck by the accompanying yeast-based notes, offering clove and pepper. Everything's well tuned.

Let's emphasize one thing first: allow this to warm up a bit from fridge temperature. It's the nature of certain beers (we're looking at you, dark Swedish stouts) to come across as being a bit skewed if served too cold. This beer becomes a lot more balanced with just a few minutes to warm. After those few minutes... it's a velvety soft elixir on the tongue. Dried dark fruits, caramel (with a

welcome touch of oxidation), cola, and even some rich red fruitiness, almost berry-like. The pleasant bitterness of white pepper and cloves helps steer things, and, even at 10.5% ABV, the alcohol stays quietly tucked away. Even approaching room temperature this remained smooth. The carbonation is pretty light here, appropriately tuned to the bulk of the beer it's supporting, and this just feels like the kind of beer you want in a snifter by the fire.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

We expect this offering to age well for upward of a year or more, if not longer. There's just a bit of well-placed oxidation right now; keep an eye on stored bottles to see if they're getting overly heavy on the dried caramel. Think of it as an excuse to pop one. (That's what we do.) This should do excellent things paired alongside smoked meats—pork or duck particularly.

BEYOND THE BOTTLE: REVISITING WEIZENBOCKS BY KEN WEAVER

It has been at least a few years since the Rare Beer Club featured a weizenbock as one of its featured selections. The most recent example I dug up was Meantime Brewing Co.'s Limited Edition Weizen Double Bock, which the club featured back in August 2014. This style, as is true for many of the more out-there traditional beer styles in the world, has tended to find more frequent expression outside its country of origin (although many of the tastiest classic examples of the weizenbock space still definitely come from Germany). But the fact that the club's 2014 weizenbock example was from England—and this newest one from Les Trois Mousquetaires in Quebec—kinda echoes the general state of the weizenbock style overall.

The history of weizenbock generally traces its lineage back to Schneider Aventinus, which was introduced by famed weissbier producer Private Weissbierbrauerei G. Schneider & Sohn in Bavaria back in 1907. That said... writer K. Florian Klemp noted in the (since-defunct) *All About Beer Magazine* that bock used wheat way back in the pre-Reinheitsgebot 14th century; in that frame, this combo of

wheat + strong malty beer has at least been explored a bit before. For modern drinkers: I'll say that these beers are some of my favorite to seek out, combining the fluffy, toasty contributions of wheat with that rich, malty focus of a bock or doppelbock.

If you're digging the Les Trois Mousquetaires example, there's a decent chance you'll be able to find some other weizenbocks locally. Aventinus, Weihenstephaner's Vitus, and Ayinger's Weizenbock are worth checking out and on the more readily available side. My personal fav in this general space is probably The Livery's Bourbon Barrel Aged Wheat Trippelbock from Michigan—which clearly takes everything up a few notches. Have a local weizenbock you're digging, or a fav classic? Let the club know what's tasting good on Twitter: @RareBeerClub.

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