

The RARE BEER CLUB

GARDEN PATH FERMENTATION SKAGIT VALLEY, WASHINGTON

THE GARDEN PATHS LED TO FLOWERED

This month we're pleased to introduce a brewery that will be new to the majority of our Rare Beer Club members but that we've been loving the releases from: Garden Path Fermentation up in Skagit Valley, Washington. Garden Path's beers are bottle conditioned and yeast driven

while focused on showcasing the region's wealth of locally grown ingredients—even making cider, wine, perry and mead from Skagit Valley ingredients. They use 100% native yeast, but specifically cultivated their house culture to focus on native *Saccharomyces* (the genus that

includes most traditional brewer's yeasts) rather than a pungent or acidic strain. They focus on making balanced, nuanced, drinkable products—uniquely produced in the Skagit Valley.

Founders Ron Extract and Amber Watts may be familiar names to some of you, as both are coming from positions at Jester King Brewery in Austin, Texas. The pair

wanted to realize a brewery with their own unique vision at the core, and Skagit Valley has proven to be optimal for them realizing the kind of hyperlocal, native-yeast-driven brewery they wanted to build. Garden Path's house culture was largely developed with their original lead fermentationist

Jason Hansen, who'd come to Garden Path from the illustrious Sante Adairius Rustic Ales in Capitola, California. (He's since transitioned to a less-rural gig and remains on Garden Path's advisory board.) What Skagit Valley lacks in proximity it makes up for in many other things, though. The cooler

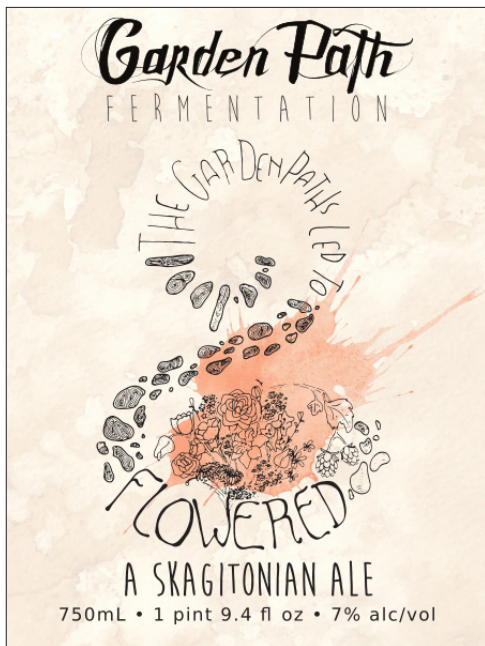
temperatures and lack of summer heat, for instance—highs generally stay below 80—make for great fermentation conditions for a brewery focused on native yeast.

Everything that Garden Path does is typically blended to taste, with batches often separated into different fermentation vessels before being re-blended afterwards. Their emphasis on

a native house culture and using open fermentation and oak foeders benefits from the lack of high temperature swings. It also reduces their need for artificial temperature controls. Every edition of a beer is approached as a recreation of a theme rather than a fixed replication, so these beer lines will further develop and evolve as additional editions are brewed. Ultimately, Garden Path Fermentation's looking to take people in directions they don't expect to go.

We've been loving what we've been tasting from Garden Path up in Skagit Valley, and this month we're excited to bring the brewery's The Garden Paths Led to Flowered to the Rare Beer Club. This is a hoppy blonde ale conditioned with local blackberry honey and fermented with the brewery's native

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SPECIFICATIONS

Style
Hoppy Blonde Skagitonian Ale bottle-conditioned w/ Blackberry Honey
Alcohol By Volume
7.0%
Serving Temperature
42–48° F
Suggested Glassware
Tulip, Chalice, Small Nonic or Chardonnay Glass

house *Saccharomyces* culture. It's dry-hopped, aged in oak, and delicious. If you're up in Washington, Garden Path's tasting room just opened in April of 2018. They're just a little over an hour north of Seattle. Learn more about Garden Path at www.gardenpathwa.com.

THE GARDEN PATHS LED TO FLOWERED

Garden Path Fermentation's The Garden Paths Led to Flowered is a deftly executed hoppy blonde ale brewed with local Skagit Valley ingredients and the brewery's house culture of native *Saccharomyces*. It combines two batches fermented together in an open-top foeder for their primary ferment, then split to be aged in either an oak puncheon or stainless steel, before being re-blended to taste. Inspired by dry, delicately bitter Belgian ales like Brouwerij De Ranke's XX Bitter, this beer's brewed with Skagit Valley Malting pilsner malt and white wheat, and dry-hopped with Willamette and Cashmere hops from Yakima Chief Hops. Like all Garden Path beers, it has seen only a slight degree of distribution, predominantly concentrated

in Washington. Our Rare Beer Club members will get first access to the upcoming release of Led to Flowered.

This hoppy blonde ale from Garden Path pours a lightly hazy, honeyed yellow color, capped by a dense white foam that leaves intricate lacing. It looks like rich, honeyed saison, and the generous peppery aromatics present themselves immediately alongside that herbal, mineral, and grassy impact of hops. This is nuanced, noble-like hop character, focused on floral and earthy notes, and there's most definitely a garden-like essence from the outset: like fresh-cut flowers, plus a stroll by the herb garden. This is lush—that's clear as soon as this is poured.

This certainly nails the dry and delicately bitter goal, but also provides whole extra layers of complexity courtesy of the oak aging and native *Saccharomyces* yeast. There's just a ton to enjoy with this beer, but first and foremost it's a brilliantly streamlined hoppy blonde: filled with herbal and grassy hops, and expanded on by the softly bitter pepper and mellow clove phenolics of its yeast. There's subtle

oak, with vanilla and toast. There are waves of evolving bitterness, alongside secondary notes from minerals to pepper, to hints of red fruits. Led to Flowered brings forth a beautifully handled hoppy blonde, uniquely made in Skagit Valley.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

The Garden Paths Led to Flowered will be hop-dominant with more Belgian-style yeastiness of the phenolic sort when young, with its native house culture taking on more of a funky and overtly acidic character over time. The brewery suggests enjoying it on the fresh side. With a focus on herbaceous, mineral hops and peppery yeast character, look to pairing options with grilled chicken or lamb, herb-encrusted goat cheeses, or a rich spring-vegetable quiche.

BEYOND THE BOTTLE: DRY, BITTER, BELGIAN BY KEN WEAVER

In chatting with Garden Path's Ron Extract about this month's featured The Garden Paths Led to Flowered, he mentioned XX Bitter from Belgium's Brouwerij De Ranke as being a point of inspiration for it. If you haven't yet crossed paths with XX Bitter, it's more bitter and expressive in its show of herbaceous, grassy hops than one would expect from a 6% blonde. And it's also basically the perfect sort of beer for repeated pints: layered, not numbingly bitter, crisp with depth.

It was a bit easier to get hold of fresh XX Bitter and the similarly poised Taras Boulba (from Brasserie de La Senne) back when living in DC, as the fresh import options are a bit patchier these days in California. Our tasting crew in DC sought out these beers and any adjacent kin: Orval, De La Senne's Zinnebir, Thiriez Extra (from France), Jolly Pumpkin's Bam Biere... In basic terms: potent hops,

but more traditionally noble/herbal/floral—plus supportive yeast.

Hoppy Belgian blonde... Belgian pale ale/IPA... Buncha overlapping terms for this general space. The club has previously highlighted De Ranke's XXX Bitter, an amped-up version of XX Bitter with 50% more hops. Up here in Sonoma County, some of the closer alternatives are session options like Redemption or, with a more neutral yeast, Aud Blond from Russian River—but still not quite that hop density + yeast combo of something like XX Bitter. Have a dry, bitter, Belgian-inclined beer you're digging? Chime in on Twitter via @rarebeerclub.

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The RARE BEER CLUB



BROUWERIJ RODENBACH ROESELARE, BELGIUM (WEST FLANDERS)

VINTAGE 2016

There is perhaps no more famous brewery in all Belgium than Brouwerij Rodenbach. While the country has a long history of brewing both tart and downright sour beers using wild yeast and bacteria, it was Rodenbach in the late 19th century that helped pioneer and define the specific style of beer we know as Flanders Red Ale, considered by many to be the most vinous, or wine-like, of all beer styles. The standard Rodenbach is a blend of approximately 75% fresh and 25% 2-year aged ale, while Rodenbach Grand Cru incorporates much more aged beer (approx. 66%). Their Caractère Rouge starts as 100% 2-year-aged ale, which then undergoes a 6-month maceration with fresh cherries, raspberries, and cranberries.



We've been able to secure Rodenbach's Grand Cru and Caractère Rouge in previous years, and this month we're thrilled to bring their stellar Vintage 2016, one of the brewery's most exceptional (and limited) offerings—with at least one bottle in each Rare Beer Club shipment signed by Rodenbach's brewmaster Rudi Ghequire.

The brewery bears the name of the Rodenbach family, who not only contributed their unique beer to the world but also helped contribute Belgium to the world, at least as an independent country. The brewery was founded in 1821

by Rodenbach brothers Pedro, Alexander, Ferdinand, and Constantijn. All four played critical roles in the Belgian Revolution of 1830, which led to the secession of Belgium from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. In fact, when Leopold I greeted the crowd from the balcony of the House of the Nation after being crowned king, Alexander (who ran the brewery from 1821 to 1836, and happened to be blind) appeared at his side.

In 1878, Pedro's grandson Eugène became manager of the family brewery. From a brewing perspective, as opposed to a political one, Eugène

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SPECIFICATIONS	
Style	Flanders Red Ale aged in Oak Foeders
Alcohol By Volume	7.0%
Serving Temperature	42–48° F
Suggested Glassware	Tulip, Chalice, Flute or Pinot Glass

is certainly the most influential Rodenbach in the family line. During his travels to southern England, he was exposed to, and learned much about, the early porter beers popular in London at the time. In the 19th century, these early porters were typically aged for at least several months in giant barrels where they matured and acidified. Eugène took what he learned and applied it at home in Belgium, developing and refining the technique, and creating the style of Rodenbach beers we know today.

Rodenbach's red ales undergo a primary and a secondary fermentation, with both yeast and lactobacillus bacteria, creating beer with distinct acidity and tartness. The beer is then aged and matured in huge oak barrels known as "foeders" in Flemish ("foudres" in French), some of which are older than 150 years. Of these impressive foeders, Rare Beer Club founder Michael Jackson once wrote, "Rodenbach, in Roeselare, has ten or eleven halls full of these tuns. There is nothing comparable in any brewery elsewhere in the world, and the whole establishment is a temple of industrial archaeology."

VINTAGE 2016

Rodenbach's Vintage 2016 is one of our favorite beers from this brewery. We've regularly loved their vintage

line and the latest release is exquisite, standing as a clear reminder of just how good their Grand Cru is, as well. Each bottle is from a single 4,000-gallon oak foeder that has passed brewmaster Rudi Ghequire's stringent selection process, where the beer was aged at least two years. Every example is unique, unblended, and labeled with the number of the specific foeder in which it was aged. Its vintage year, in turn, indicates the start of its maturation. (Rudi also kindly signed the Vintage 2016 bottles allocated for our Rare Beer Club members.)

This world-class example from West Flanders pours a deep reddish brown that's pretty clear, but with an intensity of color that speaks of its barrel time. Tart cherries and fresh apple land as initial aromatics, leading a sweet-tart impact of generous fruitiness and underlying caramel. The richness of cherries is a key highlight in the aroma: brilliantly ripe, lightly boozy, like the pinnacle of cherry beer. Fruit intensity gets softly tempered by the presence of oak, with light vanilla and almond, and while there's a sweet-sour vibrancy here, it feels like a polished wine. The aromatics start mouthwatering and get better from there. Massive, tightly woven fruits.

A brewery with the experience of Rodenbach understands how to make something at least near-

perfect when they really want to at this point, and that initial sip of Vintage 2016 feels like they really tried to with this. It's velvety, with a delicate underpinning of tiny bubbles as waves of rich fruit—raspberry, cherry, strawberry, currant—build alongside just enough of a rounded caramel and candied malt sweetness. Readily shareable, plus a pleasure to dig into. Though there are many flavor parallels to Oloroso sherry, a vibrant carbonation and superb ripeness of fruit make this an absolute pleasure to drink. Rich, honeyed malts offer up notes approximating the juiciest of Sauternes and German Reisling options. Sweet-tart perfection.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

While Rodenbach's Vintage 2016 is very much on point at the moment, this should also age quite gracefully over the next few years at least. For pairings, the cherry and caramel notes at the core, plus its touch of sweetness, make it ideal alongside moderately spicy pork sausages, possibly even roasted lamb. But we're inclined to savor it with a full-on plethora of cheeses.