

The RARE BEER CLUB



STRANGE ROOTS EXPERIMENTAL ALES MILLVALE & GIBSONIA, PENNSYLVANIA

ANCIENT VORTEX (RARE BEER CLUB EXCLUSIVE)

Strange Roots Experimental Ales will be a new name to many of you, but some of our members will recall their mixed-culture Agent Orange with persimmons and apricots which we featured in 2018, or this Pennsylvania brewery’s previous name: Draai Laag Brewing Co. Dennis Hook started Draai Laag back in 2011, self-engineering an \$800 brewing system and bootstrapping an operation that focused heavily on complex sour ales and bringing in local ingredients and microflora. And that small-batch, out-there approach—Draai Laag’s system at the time made only two barrels of beer at once—brought

forth some amazing results, and a small amount of Draai Laag’s bottles saw wider exposure through Shelton Brothers. But as Dennis was looking to move into exploring a wider range of beer styles (and, let’s be real, we can’t consistently spell Draai Laag either), the brewery became Strange Roots in March 2018.

Rest assured, Dennis is still doing beers that are way, way out there. He’s been building his brewing capabilities for around 20 years, since he was 17 years old and his mom agreed to let him brew (as long as he wouldn’t drink any, relying on of-age

neighbors for feedback)—and as Strange Roots looks to the future, he’s looking to push the envelope even further. Strange Roots recently released Grand Blu, a collab with House of 1,000 Beers that uses penicilium roqueforti, responsible for the distinct character of blue cheese, accompanied by additions of peaches and fermented in casks for 11 months. The brewery’s been surveying and testing local wild microflora for brewing possibilities, with one key highlight being their Park Series of beers—fermented with yeast and bacteria harvested from local Pittsburgh-area parks. Dennis mentioned projects with foraged pawpaw fruit and mayapples. We got to learn about fruit and other

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neighbors for feedback)—and as Strange Roots looks to the future, he’s looking to push the envelope even further. Strange Roots

SPECIFICATIONS

Style
Belgian-style Dark Ale w/ raw cacao & candi sugar, conditioned on cacao beans
Alcohol By Volume
9.2%
Serving Temperature
52–59° F
Suggested Glassware
Snifter, Tulip, Goblet, or Pinot Glass

ingredients that we had no idea were growing in Pennsylvania.

Which is kind of the point. Strange Roots continues the traditions of Draai Laag while giving Dennis and company even more room to explore. We're pumped to be able to offer an exclusive release that Strange Roots put together for the Rare Beer Club: a Belgian-style dark ale brewed with raw cacao and candi sugar, and conditioned on cacao beans. If you're near Pittsburgh, the brewery has locations in Millvale and Gibsonia. Tell Dennis we said hey!

ANCIENT VORTEX

We've enjoyed any number of great releases from the folks at Strange Roots Experimental Ales over the past few years, and we wanted to work with them on an exclusive beer for the club—something that would showcase what they've been working on in the realms of bigger beers and special adds. The result is Strange Roots' Ancient Vortex: a Belgian-style dark ale brewed with raw cacao and candi sugar, and conditioned on cacao beans. The malt-forward emphasis of the quadrupel-like, Belgian-style ale leads, with potent levels of caramelization, brown sugar, and dried fruits amplified by subtle acidity and fruit. The cacao's super smooth.

Strange Roots Ancient Vortex pours a dense, mostly opaque golden-brown, capped by light tan foam that sticks around for a good while after the initial pour. There's definitely a bit of a reddish hue present, and this Belgian-style dark ale overall provides a reddish-brown glow when held up to the light. The foam's persistent, leaving behind dense lacing along the edges of the glass. A dark, colorful beer with nice visual presentation overall.

Generous aromatics are present from the first pour of Ancient Vortex. Expressive caramels, burnt sugar, and plenty of dried dark fruits lead. This dark ale leans heavily on an expressive quadrupel approach, with that massively malty and creamy Belgian style forming the core framework here. The cacao throughout is a pleasant chocolate undertone. There are welcome touches of char and licorice and bitter clove, providing a nicely bitter edge to counterpoint the core malt focus. There's also plump fruit and maybe a hint of oak underneath?—lots of cherry, strawberry, and currant. The aroma expands quite a bit with some time to warm.

Like the best Belgian-style quads, this big beer feels especially light and vibrantly textured as a whole. The first sip of Ancient Vortex offers

up layered caramels and toffee, bringing forth a huge amount of darker malt character—without stepping into that full-on roast and coffee of a stout. There's a pleasant underpinning of vinous, fruity alcohol that helps streamline the feel here as well, along with those bittering elements mentioned in the aromatics: clove, even a touch of peppery phenols, burnt sugars (think: crème brulee crust), and maybe even a hint of oak tannins. There's a ton to dive into with this beer, and as it warmed we found all sorts of additional details: candied orange, spice cookies, hints of licorice and char and toast... It's a brilliant beer from Strange Roots: one of the most unique quad-ish beers we've ever tried.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

The caramelization levels on this are pretty substantial, such that we'd be inclined to go easy on cellaring this. It's blended to be consumed on the fresher side. As far as food pairings go: the emphasis on caramel and fruit makes this feel prime for dishes using pork—say a simple bone-in chop alongside sautéed apples. For desserts, look to a creamy vanilla counterpoint.

The RARE BEER CLUB

BROKEN BOW BREWERY TUCKAHOE, NEW YORK

CHLOE (RARE BEER CLUB EXCLUSIVE)

Broken Bow Brewery is situated in the small village of Tuckahoe, New York in the state’s Hudson Valley. This is southern Westchester County, a little over 15 miles from midtown Manhattan. Tuckahoe’s name, since you asked, translates to “it is globular,” and was used by Native Americans to refer to the area’s bulbous roots. We’re super-excited to showcase this up-and-coming brewery—which opened its doors in August 2013—to our thirsty Rare Beer Club members. We’ve been digging everything so far from these folks, from the core Broken Auger Lager and Broken Heart Stout to their most potent barrel-aged stuff. This month, we are able to offer up a Rare Beer Club exclusive from Broken Bow Brewery, showcasing what we think the brewery does especially well with their Chloe—a decadent coconut Baltic porter aged in rum barrels, packed with barrel-aged and malty expressiveness. This seemed a perfect introductory beer from this impressive brewery in the Hudson Valley.



Broken Bow founder Mike LaMothe started homebrewing around 20 years ago, back in Stamford, Connecticut. The homebrewing interest sparked a business idea around building a brewery within the family, and today many of Mike’s family members work in different parts of the company, including his parents and siblings. (The brewery’s named after the town in Nebraska where Mike’s mother was brought up.) Distribution of their core line of cans has been slowly expanding across New York, and the brewery’s a short train ride up from NYC.

For those curious to visit the family brewery and tasting room over at Broken Bow (maybe to check out our their Great American Beer Festival-medal-winning Old Split-Foot strong ale), they’re currently open 5pm–8pm Thursdays, 1pm–10pm Fridays and Saturdays, and 1pm–8pm on Sundays. (The tasting room’s closed Monday through Wednesday.) Tours are offered Fridays and Saturdays and can be booked

online for a small fee. The brewery’s located at 173 Marbledale Road in Tuckahoe—readily accessible via either the Bronx River or Hutchinson River Parkways, or an easy walk from train stations nearby. If you do end up making the trip up to Tuckahoe, be sure to tell the folks at Broken Bow that The Rare Beer Club says hello! Also: leave some time in your visit to spend in Broken Bow’s beer garden (usually open April through October, weather permitting). Play some cornhole, snag some empanadas from License 2 Grill nearby, and enjoy some pints at one of the finest up-and-coming breweries in the beer-savvy state of New York.

CHLOE

As one of two Rare Beer Club exclusives this month, we’re thrilled to have gotten Chloe, a rum-barrel-aged coconut Baltic

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SPECIFICATIONS

Style

Coconut Baltic Porter aged in Rum Barrels

Alcohol By Volume

9%

Serving Temperature

52–59° F

Suggested Glassware

Tulip, Snifter, Mug, or Nonic Glass

porter from the folks at Broken Bow. We've been loving the big beers we've had the chance to sample from these folks, and this offers up a number of the aspects that this brewery is doing great. The rum barrel comes through smoothly, with a nice degree of caramelized complexity to it. That Baltic-style porter core is well structured, a subtly bitter edge beneath the sweeter parts. And the coconut's contribution is subtle, adding a roundness of umami-like mouthfeel that adds one more dimension to this delicious release.

Broken Bow's Chloe pours a rich brown-sugar color; deeply roasted and dark at the core but with softer, honeyed tones around the edges. There's a decent cap of off-white foam here, in spite of the high ABV, and it leaves behind some tiny-bubbled lacing around the perimeter. There's a whole lot of aromatics present here from first pour: dried fruits and caramel and a touch of candied apple, a vibrant ripeness of fruit

keeping things light. As this warms a bit in the glass, we start to get more of that charred character from the rum barrels, along with the roast and malty sweetness of the base porter. It's malt-focused but never heavy, packed with an abundance of fruit, caramelization, and toast.

There's a touch of pepper and baker's chocolate. Maraschino cherry. Sweet toasted coconut.

Medium-light levels of carbonation lend themselves well to this beer, and it's rounded and sweetness focused but streamlined with a subtle, vinous alcohol warmth. This is dense, big, but poised overall and layered in a manner that's super smooth and exploratory. The ripe red fruits counterpoint the caramelized sugars, toasty barrel char, and sweet vanilla. Coconut's a secondary element for Chloe, contributing almost as much to the texture of this beer as the flavor, and there's an overall vibe of toasted

almond: like the orgeat syrup and, frankly, all the other aspects of a good mai tai minus the lime. This is rich, rewarding to dig into, and a very satisfying nightcap worth sharing. Give it a little time to warm up for the best results.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

While present, the caramelization levels on this are on the restrained side right now, so a bit of oxidation and sherry-like character from further cellaring time should fit right in. Just go easy, and check after six months or so. For food pairings, the core notes of brown sugar and dried fruit have us looking to chili-rubbed pork, bread pudding, or crême brûlée.

BEYOND THE BOTTLE: GO-TO GLASSWARE

BY KEN WEAVER

Having received a bit of glassware over the holidays, my wife and I recently decided to wade through and reorganize our glass collection. (Most alcohol writers have more glassware than we know what to do with...) We've got three spots for glassware in the house: main section in the kitchen, a few windowed shelves in the living room (for wine glasses and snifters, so I can offset having to walk by how fancy I feel), and, thirdly, a nook for backup glassware. We did our best to Marie Kondo it up, trying to be mindful of what actually sparked joy to use.

Some stuff quickly got banished to the backup nook: hefeweizen glasses, the Spiegelau wheat beer glasses (both the shape and size of a rocket ship)... The more interesting part was what made it into the prime kitchen shelves. What was our go-to glassware we used all the time?

Here's what those two shelves look like for us: A few thin, heavy-bottomed pilsner glasses. Two sets of glassware I designed for the comic—flexible, medium-sized wine goblets, both stemmed

and stemless. A few wee and normal-sized nonics. And then the two things that I personally like drinking out of most, for different reasons. The first's for pragmatic ones: a pair of Riedel Overture beer glasses, tulip-like and a perfect combo of nicely thin but thick enough that I haven't broken them yet. The second are two small chalice glasses from Dieu du Ciel! in Montreal, for more personal reasons. Ali and I snagged these up at the brewery's 10th anniversary party back in 2008, when we were roadtripping to the west coast. They're a little frou-frou and fragile—but they also hit the joy button and we should use them more.

What's your go-to piece of beer glassware? Do you tend to reach for it because of functional or personal reasons? Are you glassware ambivalent? Chime in on Twitter at @RareBeerClub.

Ken Weaver (@KenWeaver) is a beer writer, editor and cartoonist based in Petaluma, California. He makes a weekly webcomic—about a dysfunctional brewery/potion shop—at MassivePotions.com.