

The RARE BEER CLUB

BROUWERIJ ROMAN
 OUDENAARDE, BELGIUM

ADRIAEN BROUWER OAKED (RBC EXCLUSIVE)

Let's consider for a few moments the explosion of Belgian beers in the U.S. Whether it was your first Hoegaarden, perhaps a Saison Dupont, or that first magic sip of Duvel, chances are your first taste of Belgian beer left a profound impact on you, and maybe even expanded your own working definition of what beer "is." Maybe it was the shock that a pale Belgian ale could taste so interesting, be so palatable, and carry an 8%+ ABV without any indication of its strength catching your notice in the flavor profile. Or perhaps it was your reaction to the spicy phenolics inherent to so many Belgian yeast strains. Or possibly you tried your first Trappist quad, or tart Belgian lambic!, and it tasted like nothing you'd ever sampled before.



The fact is, Belgian beers are so very different than mainstream U.S. macrolagers, and it is that difference that has helped make them so popular in the U.S. Big, interesting, flavorful and complex brews that are elegant, refined—often bottled in fancy champagne-style bottles complete with a cork and capped by a wire cage & cap.

"This is beer?" "Beer can be fancy?" Obviously, yes. The Belgians have been happy to send the U.S. their beer too—it's good for their business, of course, and we're grateful to have them, as for many people these are the very gateways to better beer drinking that heighten people's interest in exploring other out-there beers, and which certainly helped set the groundwork for U.S. craft brewers to find a foothold. Even

macrobrewers capitalized on Belgian beer's popularity, creating their own "Belgian-style" beers (Blue Moon, a Belgian-inspired witbier, is made by Molson-Coors).

Therein lies a problem. Now with so many Belgian-influenced beers out there, what happens to the family brewers of Belgium who really lay claim to being traditional Belgian breweries? While they remain unique and limited, the consumer can understandably be confused by the virtually ubiquitous use of the word "Belgian" on beers found at their favorite beer bar or retail store. So what's a brewery like Brouwerij Roman, with brewing roots tracing back at least

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SPECIFICATIONS

Style

Oak-aged Belgian Strong Ale
 (aged in Sherry & Whisky barrels)

Alcohol By Volume

10%

Serving Temperature

44–52° F

Suggested Glassware

Tulip, Chalice, Goblet, or Pinot glass

as far as 1545—making it the oldest family brewery in Belgium—do to better distinguish itself from other Belgian-ish offerings out there? For starters, well, they join up with a sort of guild of Belgian family brewers, of course. Belgian Family Brewers is a non-profit association whose members have been brewing in Belgium for at least 50 years, non-stop, and together they represent less than 10% of all Belgian brewers—with a total of more than 1,500 years of experience in traditional beer brewing. Anywhere one spots the Belgian Family Brewers logo or encounters a member brewery, this lets the consumer know that the beer is genuine Belgian beer brewed in Belgium, comes from an independent family brewery that's been making beer for at least 50 years and is thus a traditional brewery, and that it is an original beer, meaning no copies of the recipe are sold under any other name or label. Fitting distinction for a brewery that has had 14 generations of family members at the helm, from founder Joos Roman to the current helmsmen, Carlo and Lode Roman.

Think about that for a minute—this family has been making beer since a couple decades after Cortés met Montezuma in the Aztec empire. In fact, the first commercial brewers of the family were contemporaries of Cortés—meaning they could have served him a beer (but probably didn't... given he was in Spain when the brewery was founded). A historical span that wide-reaching is truly impressive, and we're particularly excited by the beers that have been coming out of Brouwerij Roman as of late—combining traditional brewing

techniques while continuing to evolve into the best of what contemporary Belgian brewing has to offer. For the latest news and visiting info for Brouwerij Roman, head on over to www.roman.be.

ADRIAEN BROUWER OAKED

Brouwerij Roman's Adriaen Brouwer Oaked is a deftly balanced dark-brown strong ale that's been matured inside a combination of sherry and whisky barrels. Top fermented, and 100% organic, Oaked combines the caramel and dried fruit intensity of its base strong ale with the plush, velvety details extracted during this beer's aging time in wood barrels. Only about 50 small-bottle cases of this were sold across a handful of Florida markets over the past couple years. This 750mL packaging of Oaked was created exclusively for the Rare Beer Club.

Oaked pours a deep cola-brown color, like that of super-dark caramel, capped by some well-formed off-white foam with mousse-like texture. Despite a potent ABV, this shows excellent head retention and lacing that coats the interior of the glass; a beautiful pour. Mouthwatering red and dried dark fruits land first and foremost within a gorgeously oaked aroma, packed in with a multidimensional barrel character. The combination of sherry and whisky barrels, as they're used here, provide this beer with a brilliantly warming, oak-forward impact from the start. The presence of sherry and whiskey character appears secondary, providing exceptional spirit and burnt-sugar elements, offering exceptional depth even from these initial

aromatics.

Full-bodied mouthfeel with lush, velvety texture is immediately apparent. From the moment we first tasted this release, we just couldn't get over how well it renders that Belgian strong ale side—showing vastly detailed dark fruits, tons of esters, and nicely integrated clove and spice phenolics to balance. But the oaked aspect gives this truly one of the most compelling oak-barrel qualities of any beer we've had in a long time. This beer owns its oakedness. Top notes of vanilla and almond proceed to open up to that berry-tinged sherry character as well as some spicy, caramelized, burnt-sugar aspects from the whiskey. All of the pieces here are positioned perfectly, though: a rich, deeply oriented base beer, the nuanced impact from the sherry and whisky barrels, and harmonious integration that makes this beer a pleasure to dig into. Transcendent Belgian strong ale from an incredibly seasoned Belgian family brewery.

AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

This 10%-ABV Belgian strong ale is sturdy enough for some cellaring time, but we wouldn't push it too far—this is drinking in its prime right now. The combo of a lightly sweet oak and deep fruitiness have us looking to vanilla- and chocolate-focused dessert courses, though this should also pair beautifully with cheese and charcuterie. Super flexible in both situations.

The RARE BEER CLUB

BROUWERIJ MAENHOUT (W/ BOOM ISLAND BREWING CO.) PITTEM, BELGIUM

KOLLUSION (RBC EXCLUSIVE)

Brouwerij Maenhout is an artisanal brewery located in the municipality of Pittem in the West Flanders province of Belgium. The brewery got its start towards the end of 2009, founded by Thijs Maenhout and Birgit De Rammelaere, who took over the former company buildings of the Gerdox bouillon factory in Meulebeke. Brouwerij Maenhout began with a 5-hectoliter brewery (which equates to around eight full kegs per batch), and initially all of their bottling and labeling was done by hand.

They'd spend the next five years developing recipes and building an audience.

As demand outpaced their ability to produce beers on the small system in Meulebeke, they decided to relocate to a larger building in Pittem located along the Brugsesteenweg, the main road connecting the port city of Ghent and West Flanders' capital city of Bruges. The effort to expand the brewery's operations began in 2014, and the new system at their new location started production in early 2015. Unlike

their earlier facility, Brouwerij Maenhout's new digs have a capacity of 1,200 hectoliters per year and include a counter-pressure bottling line that both automates and improves the bottling process. The current facility also accommodates a 60-liter test brewery where they're able to develop new recipes, including one-off seasonals.

Brouwerij Maenhout's core releases are generally focused on Belgian style staples, including a 6.5%-ABV blonde ale

called Blinde Mol (originally created for the Graszoden David Lannoo company in Pittem, and named after the subterranean mammal common in the area) as well as an 8.5% tripel called Koeketiene. The brewery's one-off releases have included renditions of traditional Belgian styles like saisons, witbiers, dubbels, and Belgian pale ales.

This month we're excited to be able to offer our favorite of Maenhout's releases to date: an incredibly detailed imperial

stout done in collaboration with Boom Island Brewing Co. based in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Kollusion is the result of a Belgian brewery collaborating with an American one, all while being influenced by the Russians. This Russian-style imperial stout is further detailed with the addition of roasted coffee beans plus Belgian chocolate, while East Kent Goldings and Cascade hops provide some balancing bitterness for the overall package. We're getting this one packaged into 750mL bottles exclusively for the Rare Beer Club.

Brouwerij Maenhout's brewing facility includes a tasting room that's currently open on most weekends (check their website or Facebook page for the latest hours of operation). Brewery tours need to

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SPECIFICATIONS

Style

Russian-style Imperial Stout w/
Roasted Coffee Beans & Belgian
Chocolate

Alcohol By Volume

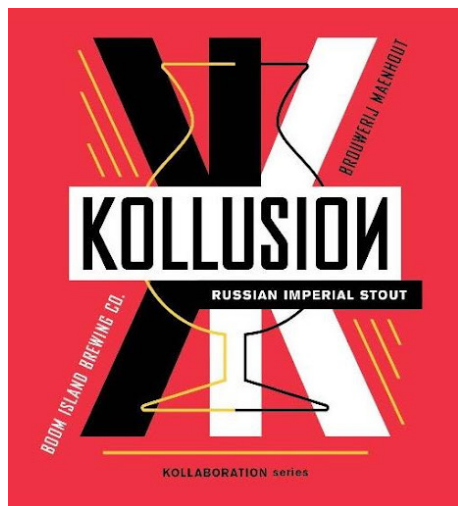
11%

Serving Temperature

50-57° F

Suggested Glassware

Snifter, Small Nonic, or Tulip



be scheduled in advance, and consist of an approximately one-hour tour of the facility followed by sampling the Maenhout beers in their tasting room. Brewery tours can be booked just about any day of the week, by appointment only, and you can find the latest info over on their website at www.brouwerijmaenhout.be (we found Google Translate helpful).

KOLLUSION

Brouwerij Maenhout's Kollusion brings together a Belgian brewery and an American one, with no small bit of influence from Russia. Clearly, evidence of collusion. This Russian-style imperial stout uses wheat and barley malt, as well as special additions of roasted coffee beans and Belgian chocolate. To balance, this stout further includes coriander along with Cascade and East Kent Goldings hops. Up until recently this beer was only available stateside in kegs in a limited number of Florida markets. We managed to get Kollusion packaged into 750mL bottles exclusively for our club members as a Rare

Beer Club exclusive.

Kollusion pours a very dark, jet-black color with medium-tan foam. Well-formed despite the high ABV, and this shows fantastic lacing around the sides of the glass. Beautifully packed aromatics showcase the roasted coffee character particularly well here. Deeper dark malts, touches of caramel and burnt sugar, dense elements of chocolate and licorice. A lot of deep, serious maltiness here—black licorice, cocoa, dark berries...—but the aromatics stay super engaging and soft to land in, with hints of vanilla and marshmallow throughout.

Full, beautifully rounded mouthfeel that leads with generous dark chocolates, immense levels of roasted coffee, and a smooth underpinning of caramelization. This is a very well-balanced imperial stout overall, with tons of dark maltiness and chocolate character balanced by some firm mineral and herbal hops, plus some bitterness from the dark specialty malts. The coffee character really takes this

imperial stout to a whole other level, with those Belgian-chocolate elements bringing everything together seamlessly. Flawless execution across the board, from the impact of special additions to how well that base imperial stout supports everything else going on here. Delicious stout showcasing specialty ingredients without ever overdoing it.

PAIRING & AGING NOTES:

Kollusion should continue to age gracefully in the bottle if you choose to cellar some. That 11% ABV and tight construction suggest this should do nicely with a bit more caramel and sherry-like oxidative qualities. For food pairings: the brewery suggests chocolate brownies, or a Crème Malakoff (an almond cream trifle from Austria that sounds absolutely delicious).

BEYOND THE BOTTLE: WINTER BEERS

BY KEN WEAVER

We recently fired up our house's heater for the first time this season, which means we're well into winter seasonals over here in Sonoma County. Sierra Nevada Celebration hit the shelves a couple weeks before I'm writing this, and that initial 12-pack of hoppy-amber goodness did not last long in our fridge whatsoever. My wife was pumped to see Anchor Christmas Ale hit shelves shortly thereafter; that's her go-to winter pickup, and a pretty consistently tasty spiced beer despite the annual recipe tweaks. For how regularly we've been pouring IPAs, pale ales, or hoppy lagers from our household's kegerator—this time of year marks a welcome shift.

What have you been picking up as the weather gets cooler? Back

when we lived on the east coast and had more immediate access to Belgian offerings, we'd often pick up St. Bernardus Christmas Ale, Corsendonk Christmas Ale, and—likely the one we'd both pick if we could only choose one—Brasserie Dupont's incredible Avec les Bons Voeux. Do you have local winter seasonals that you look forward to every year? Old-school winter classics you can't wait to see on shelves? Or are you just hanging tight somewhere tropical, sipping hazy IPA, blissfully unaware of the seasons? Let us know what's good on Twitter @RareBeerClub.

Ken Weaver is a freelance illustrator and beer writer based in Petaluma, California. He recently opened up a webshop of his Sonoma County-inspired art and prints at kenweaver.com.