

# The RARE BEER CLUB



## LES TROIS MOUSQUETAIRES BROSSARD, QUÉBEC, CANADA

### GRANDE CUVÉE STOUT IMPÉRIALE

The Québécois good-beer scene was renowned early on 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 handful of occasional offerings, particularly 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 some 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

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#### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Style</b>	Imperial Stout
<b>Alcohol By Volume</b>	11.5%
<b>Serving Temperature</b>	50–57° F
<b>Suggested Glassware</b>	Snifter, Small Nonic, or Tulip Glass

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 beautifully hopped imperial stout, brewed almost entirely with Québec-grown ingredients. The Grande Cuvée Stout Impériale is a generously built take on the style, packed with dark specialty malts and resinous hop character. This one is very limited stateside, with less than 50 cases to be available outside of the club, heading to a limited set of Virginia and DC markets. We hope you enjoy this one as much as we did. To many more exceptional beers from our friends at Les Trois Mousquetaires!

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## GRANDE CUVÉE STOUT IMPÉRIALE

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Les Trois Mousquetaires' Grande Cuvée Stout Impériale is a deliciously potent black ale with decadent roasted malts, chocolate, and bitterness throughout. This one strikes a nice balance between specialty malts and resinous hop additions. The malt profile on this imperial stout is 85% Québec malt, including pale, Munich, Carafa, and Carafa160 malts, as well as oats. And all of the hops used in this beer are grown in Québec—Nugget, Chinook, and Cascade—for a potent bitterness

of 85 IBUs. LTM's Grande Cuvée Stout Impériale sees very limited distro, with less than 50 cases to be sold stateside, in the Virginia and Washington, D.C. markets.

This pours a super-dark, black color, basically impenetrable to light even at the far edges. A dense coating of dark-tan foam caps things, showing surprisingly good retention and lacing in spite of the 11%+ ABV here. The lacing's pretty exceptional on this imperial stout. Loads of cocoa, baker's chocolate, and roasted malts lead the initial aromatics, supported by licorice and bright anise character, along with hints of rye bread and caramelized sugars. We love just how detailed this imperial stout is, without any barrel aging or fancy special additions—those locally grown malts and hops shine exceptionally well as they're expressed here. There's this potent licorice vibe that we really enjoy in tandem with everything else going on in this beer.

Grande Cuvée Stout Impériale is a full-bodied imperial stout that leads with dense chocolates and anise, cocoa and baker's chocolate. Exceptional lush chocolate/cacao vibes to this beer, with little occasional glimmers of sweetness that land like biting into a chocolate bar. There's also a wealth of generous bitterness keeping this

impy stout on course, with lots of mineral, herbal edges being provided here by Nugget, Chinook, and Cascade additions. Old-school hop varieties, sure, but they work great here in terms of balancing out that inky sweetness from the specialty malts. We were enamored by this beer: a lux, incredibly nuanced imperial stout that's basically a love letter to the beer ingredients of Québec. Spend some time with this one, allow it to warm up a bit—there's some super-neat stuff going on with this stout.

### AGING & PAIRING NOTES:

In terms of cellaring-time suggestions, the brewery recommends a max of three to five years. There's a lot of core bitterness to this imperial stout, plus a potent ABV, and pretty minimal caramelization at this point, so we wouldn't be too shy about aging bottles of this for some considerable time. Plenty of bitterness right now from those hops and roasted-malt/licorice notes. For pairing with food, the brewery suggests lamb, mac n' cheese, chocolate-raspberry mousse, or aged cheddar. The lamb suggestion feels particularly on point, as there's a subtle mint-like note to this stout that should work great in that context.

# The RARE BEER CLUB



## BJ'S BREWHOUSE BEER CLUB TEMPLE, TEXAS

### BJ'S BARLEYWINE ALE

Our history with brewmaster Alex Puchner goes back a long ways. Back in 1994 (eons ago), Alex was brewing for what was Laguna Beach Brewing. BJ's wasn't even brewing beers back in those days (it was still called "BJ's Pizza & Grill") and the beer world overall was a far less charted place, especially compared to today. Alex had been homebrewing for nearly a decade at that point and, along with Laguna Beach, had honed his skills at Newport Beach Brewing, Huntington Beach Brewing, and Westwood (not a Beach) Brewing. Amidst all of that, Alex served as a founding brewmaster on the club's selection panel, working with us for our first three years and providing invaluable insight into Belgian-style brewing in our fledgling days.

Today Alex is the Sr. Vice President of Brewing Operations at BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse,



and we've been looking forward to securing another one of his beers for our members. Back in September 2011 (slightly fewer eons ago) we featured Camaraderie Ale: the collaborative beer resulting from BJ's involvement with Belgium's Brouwerij Bavik. That first European venture proved wildly successful, to the degree that Camaraderie became a staple offering at BJ's locations nationwide. This time, we've chosen one of their epic barleywine releases.

BJ's Barleywine is a well-hopped American barleywine that shows off Citra and Ekuanot hop additions, providing a citrusy, tropical, and herbaceous counterpoint to the beer's full-bodied maltiness. We've really been enjoying the higher-ABV releases we've gotten to sample from BJ's, and this barleywine release is our favorite to date. Packed

with generous specialty malts and balancing bitterness, this one's a perfect cool-weather beer to sip and savor.

It goes without saying that it's great to have Alex involved with the club again. It's been exciting for us to watch him even further hone his brewing techniques over the years, and this batch of BJ's Barleywine might even be the best beer we've ever had from him. We hope our members sip and savor this full-bodied pick as happily as we did. This barleywine will get minimal distribution outside of the club, entirely through BJ's restaurants.

#### BJ'S BARLEYWINE ALE

One of our two featured Rare Beer Club

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#### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Style</b>	American Barleywine
<b>Alcohol By Volume</b>	10.5%
<b>Serving Temperature</b>	50-57° F
<b>Suggested Glassware</b>	Snifter, Chalice, Tulip, or Teku

selections this month, BJ's Barleywine is an exceptionally full-flavored and full-bodied release from the brewery, with 55 IBUs of bitterness providing a delicate balance. Citra and Ekuanot hops provide generous levels of citrusy, tropical, herbal notes throughout. This beer sees very limited distribution overall, and it will only be available through the Rare Beer Club and directly through BJ's restaurants.

BJ's barleywine pours a deep reddish-brown color, capped by off-white foam that's nicely retained given the high ABV, leaving behind solid lacing around the perimeter of the glass. Overall: this is looking like deep, honeyed decadence in our glasses. Even direct from the fridge, you get really generous, chewy malt character from those initial aromatics, a hint at just how densely structured the core malt bill of this barleywine is. Aromatics lead with ripe red fruits and candied oranges, along with caramelized sugars and some herbaceous qualities from the hop additions. Touches of burnt sugars, honey,

currants, and blackberries serve as periphery notes, filling out the core aromatics with lush details. Beautifully developed hoppy-barleywine flourishes throughout. Do allow this one some time to warm up in your glass.

From the initial sip, this proves to be smooth, beautifully developed barleywine packed with a generous fruitiness and assertive tropical, herbaceous notes from those Citra and Ekuanot additions. We love a good hop-forward barleywine and BJ's version strikes a delicate balance between a rich fruit-focused maltiness and the bittering impacts of specialty malts and hops. Lots to dig into with this beer, and the subtle zing of core bitterness slowly aggregates with each sip, such that the sweetness here never manages to dominate the presentation. We got some nice touches of tropical notes like fresh tangerine and lime, subtle undercurrents to the main emphasis of herbaceously hopped, lush barleywine. So much to enjoy about this beer, not the least of which is how easy it is to get into a glass of this barleywine:

aggregate fruits lead everything, with generous bitterness building and constantly evolving on the palate.

#### PAIRING & AGING NOTES:

The assertive hop character of this beer has us inclined to enjoy this on the fresher side for maximum effect. That said, the caramelization isn't a dominant note just yet, and this could age gracefully for a couple years or so, depending on how caramel levels ramp up over time. Perhaps longer, but the hops and overall vibe of this barleywine make us want to pop bottles in the soon times. For food pairings, we're thinking of the top notes: plush red fruit, smooth caramel and malt sugars, plus that firm citrusy, herbal bitterness. Lamb kebabs? Roast pork tenderloin? Ribs? Just don't go too sweet, as that balancing bitterness only extends so far.

## BEYOND THE BOTTLE: THE YEAR IN BEER AHEAD BY KEN WEAVER

I don't often do resolutions, but I try to take my physical and mental wellbeing seriously, and the start of a new year's a great time to reassess and figure out how to tighten things up a bit. Personally, in addition to adding a few more off-drinking days to my usual schedule, I'd also (pandemic willing) like to get back to reconnecting with people through local beer hangouts. I've been in my work bunker for the past four+ years, and these last two really haven't made anything easier in terms of re-engaging. Been working long-ass days trying to get my art stuff off the ground, and it'll just be nice to continue getting back out into the world a bit more.

So yeah, this year I'd like to get back to reconnecting through beer. I feel like I know myself a bit better now, feel like I've made some

pretty big personal changes, and kicking back with a few beers and strangers and settling into a conversation sounds like one of the best things ever. Lord knows what the latest variant is going to do to public spaces in 2022, but at least I'd like to get back to hosting more small stuff in the beer garden with our vaccinated peeps. I'm honestly looking forward to whatever shitstorm this upcoming year has in store for us. Whatever you're working on, I hope you find lots of strength and success with it this year.

*How you holding up? Got any beer-related projects or resolutions you're working on? Have anything in the beer world you're looking forward to in 2022? Let us know what's good on Twitter via @RareBeerClub.*