

# The RARE BEER CLUB

## VAN TWEE BELGIAN ALE

### DE PROEF BROUWERIJ BREWMASTER'S COLLABORATION

The most recent annual creation of integrated Belgian & American brewing art comes this month in the form of Van Twee (meaning "From Two") Belgian ale. It is a unique beer of interesting synergy, brewed by host Dirk Naudts and guest John Mallett of Bell's Brewery in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Neither brewer is a stranger to innovation.

Bell's, formerly Kalamazoo Brewing Company, was founded by Larry Bell as a home-brewing supply shop in 1983, and sold its first beer in 1985. Originally brewing in a 15-gallon soup kettle as a tiny operation renting part of a former plumbing supply warehouse, it has grown to be a respected and recognized regional craft brewery.

The Midwest saw the first wave of U.S. craft development much later than most other parts of the country, and Bell's Brewery stands as the oldest craft-brewer east of Boulder, Colorado. For the purposes of this tasty beer, its Michigan roots are significant: the state is known for producing outstanding sour, dark



cherries, as well as native sugar beets. Both ingredients play into the unusual recipe, as a special emphasis was placed on using ingredients from both Belgium

and Michigan.

"It is a sort of mix between Porter and

Belgian Dubbel, with sour cherry juice from Michigan added." Dirk told us. "We used *Brettanomyces* in the secondary fermentation, which gives it a mild but noticeable brett character."

The hops are Nelson Sauvin variety from New Zealand. Additionally, dark Belgian candy sugar was used, along with Michigan sugar beets for the bottle-conditioning sugar. "This is a very unique brew!" Dirk has smilingly proclaimed.

Van Twee is a complex, multi-layered beer, and quite easy drinking for its 7.5% abv. It is very dark, with each individual ingredient lending a subtle hint of fruit: plums and prunes from the roasted malt, gooseberry and grape from the hops, pear and banana from the yeast and sugars, and of course the actual cherry flavor. It is all integrated into a roasty malt base that carries its own chocolate and coffee tones, and the slightly tart wild yeast character should increase over time. This is going to be an interesting beer to watch as it develops, assuming that anyone has the willpower to cellar a bottle or two!

Michael Jackson, the world's leading beer critic according to the *Wall Street Journal*—and author of numerous best-selling books on the subject—was the original founder of this unique club, which is also extremely popular with wine lovers.

Members receive surprisingly sophisticated beers that are often aged in oak, or fermented like Champagne, and delivered in 750 ml cork-finished bottles. These are beers that are intended to be

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paired with fine foods, and accorded the same respect as great wine. Obviously not for every beer drinker, they are extremely complex with a depth of character that is unheard of in the traditional beer-

drinking world. The selections for this club come from all over the globe with the emphasis on the countries that make the world's most amazing beers. Members are provided with monthly tasting notes on each beer, and an overview of recommended food pairings.

A standard membership consists of six 750 ml. bottles per month (or six 500 ml. bottles) at a cost of \$75 per month (plus shipping and local tax).

# TASTING A NEW LAMBIC ON THE BELGIAN CAM

## WILLEM JOINS THE RANKS OF BLENDERS MAKING AN ENDANGERED BEER STYLE

*In the years that Michael Jackson hunted for and wrote about beers for the Rare Beer Club, he would often talk of endangered styles, and had great respect for those brewers who worked hard to preserve them despite the temptation to produce and sell only the guaranteed market darlings. His high regard for Dirk Naudts of DeProefvrouwerij in Lochristi, Belgium stemmed not only from Dirk's obvious talent as a brewmaster, but also because of his desire to reproduce ancient styles, in some cases beers that had been almost entirely forgotten by consumers - if they were ever even known in the first place.*

*This is a very fitting piece that he wrote in 1997, about the resurrection of the classic Belgian Lambic.*

"We have arrived," announced my companion, pointing at the hanging sign. At first glance I saw only the Flemish rendition of "Police Station", then I noticed an additional sign for the De Cam Community Centre.

De What? The odd name may derive from camum, a Latin word, possibly of Celtic origin. Camum meant beer, though it was not as common a term as cerevisia. Is camum the origin of cambier, an old word for a brewer in French Flanders?

Or of the old brewing city of Cambrai? Perhaps an alternative origin for Cambrinus, the legendary King of Beer? Or do we stick with the spelling Gambrinus, as a corruption of Jan Primus, first Duke of Brabant? Yes, I think we do, but it's always fun to speculate.

The word cam is still sometimes used in Belgian Brabant, in the old brewing region to the west of Brussels. This is where the winey wheat beer Lambic made with the aid of wild yeasts has been produced since at least the 1600s and probably well before.

In this region, a cam is a brewhouse or, more specifically, the actual space where the mash tun and copper are housed.

This leads to another possible explanation: cam is related to "comb", and was used around the beginning of this millennium to identify the yoke from which a farmhouse brew-kettle was suspended over the open fire.

These musings arose in the heart of Lambic country, north-west of Halle and St Pieters Leeuw, in the village of Goolk. This pretty village has a Romanesque church, a windmill and the remnants of two Lambic breweries known as "The Old Cam" and "The New Cam" (The latter, dating from the 1700s and long closed, still has some equipment intact).

The older of the two was on a site that in the late 17th century grew into a chateau-style farmstead. The buildings, set round a courtyard off the main street, have now been restored as a police station and community centre.

They embrace a café a room for the performance of folk music, a museum of musical instruments, a collection of horse-drawn vehicles..., and a cellar in which Willem Van Herreweghen ferments and matures Lambic; blends young and old versions to create the sparkling bottled version known as Gueuze and adds cherries to create Kriek.

At Café De Cam, I enjoyed a light, firm, lemony Lambic produced by the revivalist brewery Frank Boon in Lembeek.

This had been aged for one year at the brewery and for a further six months in the same cask in Willem's cellar.

By now, there will be Kriek made from the Lambic wort of Frank Boon and René Lindemans, fermented, matured and fruited with cherries in Willem's cellar.

He will shortly blend and bottle a Gueuze ready to served this time next year.

This, too, is likely to be offered at the café though there is no link of ownership with Brouwerij De Cam.

Lambic has for decades been regarded as a threatened species, despite the efforts of Boon, Lindemans, and a handful of other brewers.

Can today's world support a style of beer that ties up capital in maturation for up to three years, in hard-to-maintain wooden casks, then emerges with flavours far too tart and complex for the Pepsi generation?

Against that background, a new blending house is cause for celebration as an added "voice" in the world of Lambic.

De Cam is for the moment not actually a brewery but Lambics are shaped even more than other beers in fermentation, maturation and blending.

More remarkable even than the emergence of a new blender is his source of wood. A couple of dozen 10-hectolitre casks have been built to a design set out in a German manual, with staves cut down from lagering vessels used at Pilsner Urquell until the Czech brewer switched to stainless steel.

A further 40-odd are on order, half of them for Willem's friend Armand Debelder, whose family blend Lambic at one of the region's most famous beer places, Café Drie Fonteinen, in Beersel. The third blender in this tiny industry, Hanssens, has not been very active in the last year or two.

Willem said he bought the Pilsner wood because it was available, inexpensive and of excellent quality.

In theory, the pitch used to line the vessels at Pilsen has been removed; in practice, some traces have proven stubborn. How the wood will influence the flavour in Lambic has yet fully to emerge.

I sampled a Lambic that had been on cherries four months and found it very fresh and grassy-tasting.

I asked Willem, who is 46, how he had developed his love of Lambic.

He said he had inherited it from his father Hubert Van Herreweghen, a poet. In the 1950s, Mr Van Herreweghen published a treatise on Gueuze and Humanism, relating the survival of this beer to the history, religious and social mores of agricultural communities in Flemish Brabant.

Willem himself is a cosmopolitan character who has worked in breweries in several European countries.

His present "day job" is as production director for Palm, one of the biggest independent breweries in Belgium.

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