

The RARE BEER CLUB

ABBAYE D'AULNE TRIPLE BLONDE SPECIAL ALE



The Abbaye d'Aulne is located in the Belgian province of Hainaut. Originally a Benedictine monastery founded by Saint Landelinus – a repentant robber - about 637, the Aulne Abbey was later run by secular clerics leading a common life who embraced the Rule of St. Augustine in 1144. At the time of Henry de Leyen, Bishop of Liège, it came into the hands of Cistercian monks from Clairvaux in 1147, under Franco de Morvaux as its first Cistercian abbot. It flourished as a Cistercian monastery until the French burned it to the ground during the French Revolutionary Wars at the end of the 18th century, only a short time after it had been rebuilt on a larger scale. The library, which contained 40,000 books and 5,000 manuscripts, was also destroyed. The ruins

and beautiful green surroundings remain a popular tourist site.

In the Middle Ages it is believed that the abbey produced two types of beer: a strong beer, reserved for drinking by the fathers and their guests, and a lighter brew produced for the brothers. This lighter beer was also dispensed to paupers who received beer as a charitable act by the monks. The abbey brewery also played an important function locally by providing animal feed from the residues of the brewing process. Though destroyed by fire in 1752, the monks continued their charitable works and the brewery was re-established in 1796. The years that followed were marked by a progressive decline in the number of monks at the abbey,

and the brewery ceased production just before 1850. It was around 1950 that the beers of Abbey Val de Sambre became available again, produced by a number of different area breweries, and finally the 1998 development of the brewery on the actual abbey site.

The beers of the Abbaye d'Aulne have been made by the Brasserie du Val de Sambre, in the heart of the ruins in what were the former stables, since 2000. The picturesque village of Gozée in the Valley of Peace is on the banks of the River Sambre, near the Belgian-French border.

The Blonde Triple is a highly traditional,

top fermented ale that uses 3 different yeasts and top quality malt and hops without chemical additives. At 9% alcohol by volume it is big and complex, yet very smooth for such a strong beer. This is exceptional ale with a warm and golden appearance characterized by a clever mixture of both strong and subtle flavors, and makes a good companion for breads, cheeses, freshwater fish and shellfish – as well as a cocktail beer or quencher on its own, but beware of the 9% kick!



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).

BEERS FOR ALL OCCASIONS

AN ARCHIVE ARTICLE BY BEER HUNTER MICHAEL JACKSON

Friends call at my house for a beer, asking eagerly: "Have you any new discoveries?" I offer them an authentic Vienna lager; a dazzling golden Triple, from Belgium; a Yorkshire bitter made with six varieties of American Pacific hop; a smoked beer from the ninja country of Japan.

They sample, dubiously. "It's nice," they say, unconvincingly, "but not very refreshing." Or even: "It's good, but I couldn't drink pints of it all night in the pub." Well, those are two uses of beer, but only a couple. Some beers are meant for other moments or moods. They have, if you like, other uses.

Even if you want nothing more than simple refreshment, you could do much better than the familiar Foster's, Corona, American Bud, Carling, Heineken, Grolsch, Beck's and similar international-style golden lagers from Ruritania, Xanadu or Bongoland. People imagine that these beers are enormously different from one another, but they are all lighter-bodied, blander-tasting, distant impersonations of just one style: the Pilsner lager of Bohemia. None of these imitators is truly individualistic.

Far more refreshment is offered by the yeasty, fruity, acidity of a German-style wheat beer (identified on the label by the words Weizen, Weisse or Weissbier), easy to find in a supermarket but rarer in the pub. Or a more readily available, citric-tasting, pale "white" Belgian wheat beer like Hoegaarden. Or, if you can find it, a tingly, sweet-and-sour, oak-aged Flemish ale such as Rodenbach.

The quenching of thirst is not the main business of the pub. We often claim to be thirsty when we feel like a drink after work, but our real need is for relaxation and sociability. Something more soothing is required: not too acidly sharp or aggressively sparkly, lower in carbonation - higher in more-ish dryness (we plan to have several pints, if you recall).

A Bavarian would probably opt for a fresh local lager, drily malty and spicily hoppy, in the basic style known as Helles ("pale"). The burghers

of Cologne, a city famous for taverns making their own beer, would not choose a lager. Their local Kölschbier is a light-bodied, aromatic, golden ale. Fashionable Düsseldorf also has a brew-pub tradition, favouring a beautifully-balanced amber ale called Altbier. Across the Belgian border, Antwerp has its local De Koninck, served in a bowl-shaped glass embarrassingly called a bolleke. This beer is a yeastier, spicier, counterpart to an English pale ale or bitter. And for a sociable beer in these islands? In England, a pint of bitter; across the border, a Scottish ale; over the sea, a stout. These are incomparably the best brews for the job; to choose anything else is to sell yourself short and spurn the best of British.

Quenching beers and sociable ones ... what about the other uses of the brew? A young woman asked me the other day what I would prescribe as a "comfort beer", the alcoholic equivalent to nurseryish foods like tomato soup or egg-and-chips, I suppose. My suggestions for that mood: a mild ale, a sweet stout, a "black" lager like the rare Köstritz Schwarzbier (which comforted Goethe) or a similar example being brewed experimentally by Freedom, in London? I have dubbed those "restoratives" in my latest book.

I wanted to call the book "Beer - A User's Guide" but my publisher, who holds the purse-strings, would not agree. In his view, drinkers would not be persuaded that they need a guide to the uses of beer. I think they do. The publisher opted, with great originality, for "Beer - by Michael Jackson," but each chapter does, indeed, present brews according to mood or moment.

Pubs may offer on draught just one style of extra-bland lager (under however many names), a bitter or three and a stout, but any sizable supermarket has a bewildering range of anything from 50 and 200 brews. Which to choose? It depends upon the uses you have in mind for your purchase. If all of the are judged purely as quenchers or sociable brews, some of the most interesting will die from neglect.

The keenest of beer-lovers often favour intense brews, like the most bitter India Pale Ales,

the Belgian Trappist brew Orval, its demonic opposite Duvel ("Devil"), or Americans such as Tupper's Hop Pocket (newly available in Britain) or Anchor Liberty. In Belgium, even the most viticultural haute cuisine is apt to be preceded by a Duvel, served in a Burgundy sampler. The herbal dryness of these beers make them terrific aperitifs, arousing the gastric juices like a Campari.

With the meal? Perhaps a Belgian Gueuze would go with soup; a dry stout like Guinness with shellfish, in the Victorian tradition; a brown ale with a nutty salad; an old ale such as Greene King Strong Suffolk with pickled dishes; an extra-strong lager like a Doppelbock with paté; a dark lager with sausages; a true Pilsner (perhaps Bitburger) with fish; an Oktoberfest lager with chicken; an Irish ale with pork; a French bière de garde with lamb; a pale ale with beef; a port-ish abbey beer like Chimay Grande Réserve with cheese; a cherry beer with a fruit dessert; an oatmeal stout with something creamy; and an even stronger style as an after-dinner beer, possibly with a cigar.

The Imperial, or Baltic, style of stout is a natural warmer, as I confirmed at a kiosk outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg one snowy day last year. In November and December, I might look to a barley wine as a nightcap, but there are whole ranges of beers for the four seasons: a spiced brew at Christmas, a Maibock in spring, a lemon-tinged summer brew.

"What about a beer when you sneak downstairs in the middle of the night?" a friend inquired. "Young's Chocolate Stout," I responded, smooth as a fridge door. "And when you want to get drunk?" Were I of that inclination, I might change tipples. You see, the average strength of beers is about half that of wines, and a tenth that of some spirits. As a means of inebriation, it is very inefficient. That is why Men Behaving Badly are such losers.

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