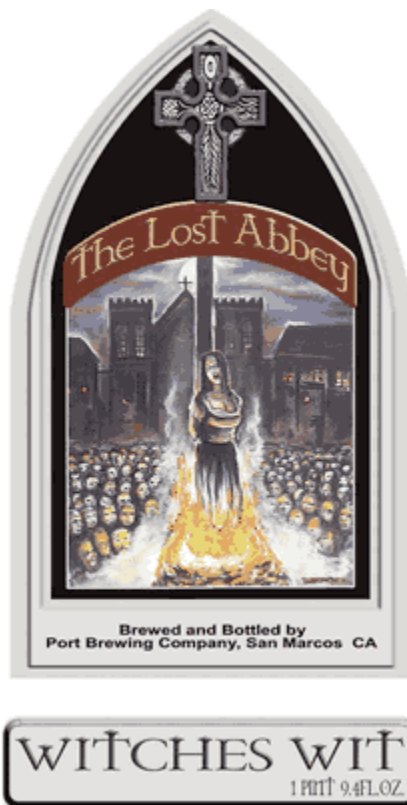


The RARE BEER CLUB

LOST ABBEY WITCHES WIT

Inspired by the classic Belgian wit beer style originally resurrected by Pierre Celis and the renown Hoegaarden white, Lost Abbey's Witches Wit was first brewed in the fall of 2008 after San Marcos brewmaster Tomme Arthur sampled some very tasty, floral grapefruit honey that was brought to him by his "bee guy." The idea of brewing a light and delicately-flavored wit for warm weather refreshment was something that he found tempting (and for those who do not live in a southern California-like climate this winter, probably doubly so about now!).

A traditional wit mash of 50% raw wheat sets the foundation for a classically pale yellow/straw color, slightly cloudy at first pour. The yeasty, citrusy nose is in part derived from the addition of some grapefruit zest, along with the more common coriander. The resulting beer is light to medium bodied, with a smooth texture and very nice balance of spice with malt and honey sweetness.



While sunshine, a good thirst, and a long afternoon without too many responsibilities can be the best companions for a wit like Tomme's, it also serves as a wonderfully food-friendly brew. The Germans often use their wheat beers as a breakfast beverage, and certainly with white sausages and potatoes they make a fine match. Try Witch's Wit with brunch foods, or paired with a good, nutty Gruyere or a young goat cheese.

For the ultimate refreshment, enjoy it with a citrus sorbet. It's the type of cooling experience that the not-so-lucky young woman pictured on the label would appreciate. Tomme's initial thought was that the design should show a bucolic farm scene similar to his Avant Garde or Devotion - alas, his sinner side won the battle on this one, and fire and brimstone prevailed.

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

The RARE BEER CLUB

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).

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BEYOND THE BARMAID'S SMILE ... MY QUEST FOR A VISIONARY'S BEER

A MICHAEL JACKSON ARCHIVE ARTICLE

It looked very nice but no, I did not want the pint of Guinness that was being offered to me by the smiling lady behind the bar. Nor a glass of Bass or a Stella Artois. Different though each of these pleasures would be, they are all made from the same grain: barley that has been malted. They are all flavoured with the same ingredient, too: the cone-like blossom of the hop vine.

I was looking for something different: a beer made with an additional proportion of unmalted, raw, wheat, and further flavoured with ground coriander seeds and dried peels of the Curacao orange. I had two reasons for seeking this beer:

1. It was a warm, spring, day and wheat gives beer a tart edge that makes it especially quenching. However refreshing a light lager can be, a wheat beer is a much better thirst-cutter.
2. I was in Belgium. After a few days in Brussels, I had ventured the 15 or so miles east to Leuven, the most important university town in Belgium. It was also the birthplace, in 1926, of Stella, and of the Artois brewery, which traces its history to at least 1366. I was looking for the kind of beer that the locals might have been drinking in the 1300s.

Instead, I was being offered the kind of beers that someone with a British accent might be expected to want. My best efforts to speak Flemish were falling on stony ground. I tried French (a dangerous tactic in a city where there had been riots over language). If the words I spoke were recognised, they were met with silence.

It was 25 years ago — no, closer to 30. Stella, and other local Pilsner-style lagers like Jupiler, were sweeping all before them in Belgium. After spending my youth as an amateur beer-hunter, I had just turned professional. I was working on my first book about beer. People thought I was mad trying to find a wheat beer, but you know my philosophy: think global, drink local. This part of Belgium is rich in chateau farms growing wheat.

Eventually, I did find a wheat beer, a few miles further east, in the smaller town of Hoegaarden. There had once been more than 30 wheat-beer breweries in and around Hoegaarden. The last had closed in the 1950s, but this type of beer had been revived in 1966 by a visionary named Pierre Celis. He was a milkman, but in his youth had helped in the local brewery. After its closure, he had one day been chatting with friends and the conversation had drifted (as it does) to beer. It seemed that they all missed the wheat beer that Hoegaarden had once made.

With some financial help from his father, a cattle dealer, he bought equipment from another recently closed brewery, and started to produce Hoegaarden wheat beer. He bears a passing resemblance to the singer Charles Aznavour, and is very short. "I am a really small brewer," he once told me. His brewery became so successful and big that it was acquired by Artois' parent Interbrew. Pierre used the money from that deal to set up a wheat beer brewery in Austin, Texas. He then sold that to Miller, though he is now trying to buy it back. He wears a bolo necktie to show that he is a Texan at heart.

There are now scores of wheat beers similar to Hoegaarden, made in Belgium, The Netherlands, the U.S. and other countries. Pierre put the brews of his home town on the world map, but he was never a man to sit still. I met him the other day, 42 metres underground, in a cave near Belgium's border with The Netherlands. He is now in his 70s, but his thirst for beery adventure is undimmed. He was down there tasting his latest beer, which he is maturing like Champagne. It is made from barley malt, and flavoured with herbs: a wonderfully complex, toffeeish, honeyish, dark ale of 6.5 per cent alcohol. Could "cave beers" be the next success story?

Why wheat?

Early brewers used any grain available. Barley, which is not very suitable for bread, became the brewers' most frequent choice, while wheat was appropriated by bakers.

Barley is the easiest grain from which to brew.

Its well-formed husks create a natural filter, and it produces rich flavours. Wheat's more refreshing crispness means that it has never been completely abandoned by brewers. Its lack of a proper husk makes for a cloudy brew, and it is often served unfiltered to highlight this characteristic.

Because wheat can make for very pale beers, they are often identified as being "white". In Belgium, the Flemish word Wit or the French Blanche are used. In Germany, white is Weisse. The Germans also use the term Weizen, meaning simply "wheat".

Instant wheat - A quick guide to the different styles

Belgian Lambic: Fermented with wild yeast, imparting winy sourness. Fruits, typically cherries or raspberries, are sometimes added during maturation.

Belgian Wit/Blanche: Cloudy, with a very evident orange and coriander character. Some brewers use additional spices, such as ginger, cinnamon and anise. Spices and herbs were extensively used in beer before the widespread adoption of the hop.

Berliner Weisse: Fermented with a lactic culture, giving a sour acidity. Often sweetened by the bartender with raspberry syrup or green essence of the herb woodruff.

Kristall Weisse/Weizen: South German type, filtered. Flavours resembling cloves and bananas imparted by local yeasts. Sometimes served with a slice of lemon (especially in the U.S.).

Hefe Weisse/Weizen: Unfiltered, cloudy, version of the above, very popular with young drinkers, who like the idea of its beinh "unprocessed". They are also aware that the yeast has health benefits..

Dunkle Weisse/Weizen: A curious contradiction, a dark-brown "white" beer. Delicious, though. Tastes like toffee apples.

Weizenbock: Usually dark, but also very strong. Tastes like chocolate-coated toffee apples soused in whiskey.

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