

Hank Speaks... So Listen

Here's a little article I want to share about some wild and wacky brewers in a kinda Frenchie, damp, flat and marshy place...non, mon ami, it's not Carencro but Beer Fantasia (pronounced bel' jum).



Renaud Pirotte, left, and François Dethier work in their micro-brewery in Liège, Belgium

In Belgium, Battle Builds Between Brewers and 'Beer Architects'

Brews Flavored With Cucumber, Insects, Rile Old Gueuzers; Oyster Stout, Anyone?



BRUSSELS—A storm in a beer glass is raging in Belgium. Traditional brewers are sour about “beer creators”—Internet-savvy startups who create recipes then employ other Belgian brewers to make the final product.

“They don’t get their hands dirty, they don’t have pain in their backs, the only thing those guys do in a workday is sit in front of a computer,” said Yvan de Baets, a co-founder of Brussels’ Brasserie de la Senne, a brewery in the Belgian capital. “They make a lot of noise on social media.”

Contract Brewing — where brewers make beers for clients ranging from Michelin-starred chefs to discount supermarkets—has long existed. But things are turning bitter in Belgium. Some brewery owners are foaming with rage about “beer architects” who create a recipe then get it brewed under contract.

The country’s traditional brewing prowess is legendary. Cantillon, another brewery in Brussels, still uses brewing equipment over 100 years old, making acidic gueuze beers with wild yeast floating in the air near the River Senne. Westvleteren, rated by some the world’s best beer, can usually only be bought from the front gate of the Trappist monastery where it is brewed.

In Monk, a bar popular with hipsters in downtown Brussels, Sebastien Morvan is promoting heresy. “We’re the antithesis of the old theory that there’s a relationship between God and what’s in the beer glass,” said the co-founder of the Brussels Beer Project, a collective of beer creators who get others to brew for them.

He creates beers with the aid of mass tastings, crowdsourced recipes and Internet forums. And then he gets someone else to brew them. “I get frustrated at people acting like the guardians of the temple of brewing”



Beers made by Brasserie de la Senne, a brewery in Brussels.

Mr. Daniels loves brewing, but is happy to produce just one beer of his own a year. His brewery even holds a competition—“So You Think You Can Brew”—targeting “beer geek” home-brewers. First prize: 264 gallons of the winners’ own-recipe beer.

The team behind the Brussels Beer Project, a collective of beer creators who get others to brew for them, are Olivier de Brauwere, Antoine Dubois and Sebastien Morvan.

Mr. Morvan, who is a fan of Ayn Rand, has hired an architect. Together with his co-founder, Olivier de Brauwere, he plans a crowd-funded “pilot microbrewery.”

The “co-creation and innovation hub” is due to open in 2015. Right by the rapidly gentrifying canal in central Brussels, it will be capable of producing 2,000 bottles a day, with one recipe a year selected for production at Anders.

“It’s not an abbey, it’s a playground,” Mr. Morvan said. “I want to come up with a new recipe every two weeks, not every 250 years.”

Brasserie de la Senne, one of the breweries involved in the letter condemning the beer creators, isn’t that old: It opened in 2010. It took five years for Mr. De Baets and his co-founder Bernard Leboucq to find a location, raise funds and build it. Before that, they rented the facilities of De Ranke, a brewery in Flanders. The difference, he insists, is that they took the risk of failed batches and raising funds—and that they never tried to associate their beers with a particular town.

“Every week now you have a new fake beer firm coming on the market,” he said. “They manipulate enough that people think they are the new craft beer of the city.”

In Liège, 60 miles from the capital, François Dethier and Renaud Pirotte, two young agronomists, uncorked trouble when they were on “Starter!” a reality TV show for entrepreneurs. Their pitch: a beer created in Mr.

Now settled in Brussels, Mr. Morvan studied at Johns Hopkins University, got into the craft brewing scene in Canada, and likes to talk about disruption. His latest project: an oyster stout, infused with shellfish from his native Brittany.

Not everyone is drinking to that. Mr. De Baets and 14 other brewers wrote an open letter decrying those who create recipes and market the finished product, but don’t brew. The writers want to change the law so the name of the contract brewery is printed on the bottle.

The Brussels Beer Project’s ales are made at Anders brewery in Halen, 40 miles away. In a country the size of Maryland, a few miles are enough to cause big controversy. “We are in the middle of the war between the beer firms and breweries,” said Davy Daniels, commercial manager at Anders, which means “Different” in Dutch. He has produced beers with cucumber, green tea and even powdered insects. “The idea was to start up brewing for people who have crazy, nice ideas, but can’t find a brewery.”

Dethier's garage, which they wanted to be a prestige beer for their city. But they needed quick action so they took the recipe to La Binchoise brewery, 70 miles away.

"It's not like we went to the Czech Republic...we just drove down the road," said Mr. Pirotte. "We were really upset by the polemic."

In June 2013, they opened a small brewery and pub, Brasserie C, in the medieval center of Liège, to make their beer—named "Curtius" after a famous resident of Liège—but will continue to brew it elsewhere as well.

Mr. De Baets doesn't think it is right that they claim a connection to the city, when the beer isn't made there exclusively.

Others say contract brewing is paradoxically a way to retain control. Johan Van Dyck left his job at one of Belgium's biggest brewers to try to re-create Seef, a beer popular in 19th-century Antwerp which ceased production after World War I. But he is brewing the beer at Roman, a brewery in Oudenaarde, 55 miles away.

"I know there's criticism, nine times out of 10 that comes from people who inherited a brewery," Mr. Van Dyck said. He wants to build his own brewery in Antwerp one day, and "every glass of Seef people drink is helping this."

All the "beer architects" and brewers involved probably represent less than 1% of the Belgian market, estimates Sven Gatz, a former head of the Belgian Brewers Federation, which includes the world's biggest brewer AB-InBev, monks and microbreweries alike.

He is now a lawmaker in the parliament of Flanders, the country's Dutch-speaking region. While he understands the call for a federal law to have precise breweries printed on beer labels, he is also sober about the industry's issues.

"Do we really need a law?" he said. "What's important to the customer is that they drink a good beer."

SEEF...didja read SEEF?

Here's a nice link to it and lots of other unusual Belgian beers.

<http://belgianbeerspecialist.blogspot.com/2012/11/seefbier-and-old-antwerp-style-is-reborn.html>

The neat thing for us beer explorers about that country's products are that even in Belgium most everything is bottled not kegged so one can get a fairly authentic taste if one buys now in the cold seasons before those bottles have to come travel across the ocean and be stored in a hot warehouse.

THNX Hank