

Hank Spoke & I Listened. He recently brought this up so here's a bit more.

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Seefbier, an old Antwerp style is reborn....



Belgium has a "new" beer, and it's an interesting one. "Seefbier" was launched in Belgium in March, and what was projected as a seven-month supply sold out in two weeks!

The driving force behind Seefbier is former Duvel/Moortgat Marketing Director Johan Van Dyck, with his Antwerpse Brouw Compagnie. Van Dyck, who lives in Antwerp, became intrigued, even obsessed, he might tell you, with finding the recipe for a style of beer that was said to be the most popular one in the city from around 1800 to about 1930.

Seefbier is mentioned numerous times in local historical records. An 1863 account called it a "white beer that foamed like champagne, and went to the head like port." A 1904 account said that it was a "Poor man's champagne."

An area of Antwerp called the Seefhoek was actually named after Seefbier: "In those days, this was the area where all the nightlife, dance halls and bars were located. Since a beer was at that time synonymous with Seef, that part of town was nicknamed the beer area, or Seefhoek," Van Dyck remarked. "In fact, that area is still called the Seefhoek!" he added.

Van Dyck told me during a recent interview: "I searched for two years to find a recipe. I searched the city archives, old newspapers, talked with descendants of old brewing families, and even interviewed elderly people in retirement homes, hoping to find an old brewer. I finally found a brewer's handwritten notes. At that point, I knew I needed help to translate this old recipe to modern brewing equipment."



Johan Van Dyck (left) and Dr. Filip Delvaux

Van Dyck contacted Professor Freddy Delvaux and his son Filip of the Catholic University of Leuven. Both men are highly respected scientists in the field of brewing in Belgium, especially in the area of fermentation. Both agreed to help analyze the recipe and help recreate Seefbier.



Van Dyck stated: "We test-brewed several batches of Seefbier, true to the original recipe, with ingredients such as wheat, buckwheat, oats, malted barley, and Belgian hops, as well as a historic yeast strain. It is a very cloudy beer, somewhat akin to a witbier, but without spicing. It's also a bit stronger, at 6.5% abv."



Van Dyck continued: "Seefbeer is completely against all current beer trends in Belgium: everybody is now making extra hopped, high ABV beers, or other more 'experienced' beers such as sour brews. Seefbeer is the complete opposite: instead of a complex or extreme 'sipping' beer, it is a very mild, soft and balanced brew, with a subtle taste and similar aromas. The bitterness is even lower than a standard Belgian lager, at 17 ibu."

I tasted the beer at the Zythos Beer Festival in Leuven in April, and found it an interesting, refreshing brew. But that was a long weekend with many beers, so I decided to taste it again. Last night. It is indeed as I remembered, an easy-drinking, cloudy, refreshing brew with notes of citrus, other fruitiness and light spicing. Seefbier, in fact, already has an accolade under its belt. It won a Gold Medal in the Belgian "other" style category in the World Beer Cup Awards in San Diego in May.



Brouwerij Roman, Oudenaarde, East Flanders

Seefbier is currently brewed at Brouwerij Roman in Oudenaarde, East Flanders. I visited this brewery in 2007, and it is a great place to have a beer brewed. It has a beautiful brewhouse with copper kettles and other historic equipment, and of course modern fermentation and maturation methods.



Johan Van Dyck, left, Carlo Roman, Albert Follens and Filip Delvaux

Roman is a member of The Belgian Family Brewers, which helps promote and protect traditional Belgian breweries and beers. There are twenty breweries in the group, including some of the best in Belgium.



Grain mill at Brouwerij Roman



Van Dyck plans to build a brewery in Antwerp to craft his products, which will likely include more beers in the future. "We discovered a lot of old recipes in the search for Seefbier, and we have some ideas about new beers in the future. First, though, we must meet the demand for Seefbier," he remarked.

Will we see Seefbier in the U.S.? "As millions of families emigrated in the 19th century to the U.S. through the port of Antwerp, the last beer they had before leaving for the new world was a Seefbier in Antwerp. So it would be great if their grandchildren could now share in this moment in the US, also drinking a Seefbier . . . So we are looking into that!", Van Dyck commented.