

ERIK VERDONCK

BREWERS

OF

**BELGIAN
BEER**

THE UNIQUE BELGIAN BEER CULTURE IN 50 STORIES

Lannoo

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BRASSERIE DE
BRUSSELS - BRUSSELS

BRASSERIE DE
LA SENNE
BRUSSELS

10/11/18

BRASSERIE DE LA SENNE

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**IN THIS FIELD, YOU'VE
NEVER LEARNED ALL
THERE IS TO LEARN.
AS A BREWER, YOU
FEEL THE MATERIAL
THAT YOU WORK WITH,
YOU GET YOUR HANDS
DIRTY, YOU TAKE RISKS.
EVERY DAY I LEARN
SOMETHING.**

YVAN DE BAETS

Yvan De Baets and Bernard Leboucq met in May 2002 at the biennial Zinneke Parade in Brussels. For that event, Bernard had brewed Zinnebir in the basement of a squatted building. Yvan had a degree in political and social sciences, and worked in the social sector, but his heart belonged to the brewer's art, and he had been brewing his own beer at home for years. He did regular work on the side for Cantillon. Bernard played trumpet, and at one point wanted to start a brewery in Elsene, but the project didn't go through. In 2003 he had access to a small space in Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, in the building that just happened to have housed the old Moriau lambic brewery. That's when Yvan decided to go full-time with his brewing. He completed studies in brewing and then took on the production side, while Bernard handled the day-to-day management. Yvan also did work on the side as an operator and salesman for De Ranke in Dottignies. The two men brewed at Deca in Woesten. "I found out how difficult it was to sell bitter beers," Yvan recalls. "The market wasn't ready for it." In 2006, Yvan and Bernard became partners in the brewery, and Yvan quit his side job at De Ranke (although he still works part-time as a guide and operator at Cantillon). At the end of 2005 the two brewers left Sint-Pieters-Leeuw and set out to start a brewery in Brussels. It took five years to find the location and the equipment they needed. "In the meantime, we brewed at De Ranke," says Yvan. "We rented their facilities." But when Jambe-de-Bois joined the product range in 2008, it quickly became clear that there was insufficient capacity available in Dottignies, so production was temporarily moved to Brasserie Thiriez in northern France. In 2010, the Brewers found a home in a former industrial bakery in Molenbeek, and produced



their first Brussels beer: Brussels Calling. In 2019, the brewery picked up and moved to Tour & Taxis in Brussels, where they now have a state-of-the-art facility. “Brussels is really close to our hearts,” says Yvan. Brasserie de la Senne is a Brussels brewery. We serve our city first, and then Belgium.” Today, the Zinnebir pale ale has grown into a local treasure favored by beer aficionados and the Brussels bourgeois alike, and the signature blonde ale Taras Boulba has inspired many brewers. Their biggest export markets are the United States and Italy.

The master brewer prefers to maintain complete control. “I myself am in there for the brewing at least once per week,” Yvan is quick to point out. “I truly believe in the importance of the personal bond with the product.” Zinnebir and Taras Boulba are both recognizable by their distinctive maltiness, hoppy bitter notes and fruity yeast. These brewers aren’t exactly following a roadmap. “We make distinctive beers that are the kind of thing we would want to drink ourselves,” says Yvan. “Like in the old days, when there was no such thing as flavored beers.” Our ingredients are only water, malt, hops and yeast. And our main style is lighter beers with a lot of flavor. Our trademark is hops. We stick to European hop varieties grown in their country of

origin.” It generally takes about six weeks for a beer to make it to market, from primary fermentation to racking, to bottling, to secondary fermentation, to resting in the warm room, to warehousing. The beers are left to fully ferment. So you won’t find any residual sugars in them, or any herbs. The brewers are continuing to experiment with a mixed fermentation for a Flemish red and a “19th-century style” saison: beers that mature in former wine barrels. Yvan takes a great deal of inspiration from the history of beer. In the primary phases of the production process, they use what they call “low-tech intensity” to retain the full character of the flavor and texture of the raw materials. That’s why all their beers are unfiltered. The cloudiness of the beer is an indication of their natural character. The right choice of technology and hygiene is every bit as important as the recipe. Yvan is also inspired by technology where it benefits protecting the natural qualities of the beer, but never where it accelerates the process. None of their beers are filtered or pasteurized. All the grains used are organic. Their regular products are the unfiltered pilsner Zenne Pils, Belgian pale ale Zinnebir, hoppy session beer Taras Boulba, hoppy tripel Jambé-de-Bois, Brussels dry stout Stoutestik, brett-pale ale Bruxellensis, dry-hopped double stout Brusseleir and spelt

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YVAN DE BAETS



saison Saison van de Bruwer. The Brewers strive for a balanced beer, with pronounced hop aromas and flavors. They typically go for German and Slovenian hops that are not too overpowering in aroma, and pair them with Belgian malt.

It's a brewery with a strong identity. The beers are ones you will always recognize because of the characteristic styling of the labels by artist Jean Goovaerts – Bernard's cousin. "It's an amalgam of the pure lines of Art Deco and classic Soviet propaganda," Yvan says. Timeless, and with a satirical twist. And the River Zenne is an ever-present thread running through all that the brewery is. "We've always brewed very close to the river, and we still do," Yvan concludes. You can find Brasserie de la Senne in the prominent Tour & Taxis building in the Brussels port zone. Tours of the brewery, in which you can see the entire brewing process in a contemporary building, can be booked on Once (www.onceinbrussels.be). Microbreweries En Stoemelings, La Source and No Science are just a stone's throw away. Tip: combine a tour with a visit to the Atomium.

WWW.BRASSERIEDELA SENNE.BE





VAN DAI AVOÛL ON TOP
ZINNE PYS
ZINNEBÛR
TANAS BOUWA
DAMBE DE BOIS
BOUTERIK
BRUSSELEK
BRUSSELS CALLING
→ CHECK THE MENU
\$10.00 PER PLATE



BRUSSELS BEER PROJECT

“

**CRAFT IS CREATIVITY,
INNOVATION AND
DYNAMICS. BUT DON'T
THINK FOR A MOMENT
THAT WE SIMPLY CAST
OFF ALL TRADITION.
JUST LOOK AT OUR
MICROBREWERY
DANSAERT BY BBP,
WHERE WE BREW
LAMBICS AND MIXED
FERMENTATION BEERS.**

SAM FLEET

Here we go off to the flavor playground” is this brewery’s slogan. These craft brewers combine pure tradition with experimentation, and love to color outside the lines of traditional beer styles. Every month they roll out a new beer to feature alongside their familiar All-Stars. It was 2013 when Olivier De Brauwere and Sébastien Morvan first went knocking on the virtual doors of crowdfunders. That year, 369 people pledged to their project; now, that number stands at over 4000 funders. Brussels Beer Project (BBP) is the child of an effervescent, modern, multicultural metropolis. In their vision of Belgian beer culture, there is always something brewing in the city. These two men regularly invite fellow brewers to collaborate on new beers. Innovation and smart marketing are second nature to them. As one example, their Babylone is brewed with unsold bread sourced from Brussels bakery Delhaize. Brussels Beer Project is continually evolving, and doesn’t seem to ever be slowed by obstacles. And the community is closely involved in the whole story, perhaps most directly in BBP’s All-Star project, in which the fans get to elect which of the brewery’s beers become permanent fixtures on the menu. The first All-Star? Delta IPA.

It seemed like a fantasy, but the brewers stuck to their guns, kept their promises, and convinced the fans. At this point, brewers from Kyoto, Buenos Aires, Québec, São Paulo, Barcelona, Copenhagen and many more cities around the world have stood at the brew kettle behind the doors on Dansaertstraat, or at the grand new brewery Port Sud on the canal. There have been “collabs” with breweries





and others outside the brewing world, like Dandoy (biscuits), Forcado (patisserie), and even the British band Editors. The brewers see themselves as chefs. They are constantly coming up with new ideas that come into being in beers. Tobacco leaves from Nicaragua, flowers from Japan, pastéis de nata from the best Portuguese baker in Brussels, all this and more now live in liquid form. The team is made up of ten different nationalities, including brewers from Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, Portugal and Belgium. And the cross-pollination is clearly working. Experimentation also results in many partnerships. For example, Brussels Beer Project is now a testing center for new hop varieties from hop supplier Yakima Chief, and there are close-knit activities with hop grower 't Hoppecruyt in Poperinge and malthouse Dingemans in Stabroek. Up to now, BBP had been outsourcing the production of the All-Stars to Brouwerij Anders, and the brewing of the alcohol-free Pico Bello and Pico Nova to Proefbrouwerij. BBP's bottling partner is Anker.

Port Sud can be found at Biestebroekdok in Kuregem. Now, all BBP beers, including the All-Stars, are brewed here. Close by, on Dansaertstraat, there is a microbrewery and taproom for sour ales and beers of spontaneous and mixed fermentation. Recently (after already opening taprooms in Paris and Tokyo), Brussels Beer Project opened a second Brussels taproom on Louizalaan that boasts 36 taps – 30 of them reserved for BBP's own beers. A few of the choices: Delta IPA, Grosse Bertha (witbier), Babylone (bread bitter), Jungle Joy (passionfruit & mango dubbel), Wunderlager (hoppy lager), Juice Junkie (New England IPA), Pico Bello (alcohol-free New England IPA), Pico Nova (alcohol-free West Coast IPA), Dark Sister (Black IPA), Viens Gamin (Indie popcorn pale ale), Kick Back (Detox Slow Gose), and Black Swan (Baltic Porter). The biggest by far is Delta IPA (accounting for half of the volume), with Jungle Joy and Juice Junkie coming in a distant second and third. "We get our crowdfunders closely involved in the product development," brewer Sam Fleet assures me. "We have no sacred cows. Even All-Stars like Grosse Bertha or Babylone go through the rigors of testing. The crowdfunders taste them right alongside prototypes, and they tell us their preferences. That keeps us on our toes." Experimentation comes naturally to these brewers. In Port Sud, the smallest batch is 10 hectoliters. "We strive for very drinkable, lighter beers," Sam says. "We want to make beers our customers drink to enjoy, and surprise them with something new, not get them drunk fast. That's why



we dialed down Delta's alcohol volume from 6.5% to 6%." He stresses the importance of consistent quality and research – especially because the brewery is active in projects on sustainability. Using Delhaize's unsold bread in the wort for Babylone is just one example. Currently BBP is working with dry yeast. In the medium to long-term they plan to start reusing yeast from previous brews, with the objective of ultimately culturing their own yeasts. The All-Stars are bottle-conditioned, so they continue maturing in the bottle (that, of course, does not go for the Pico Bello and Pico Nova non-alcoholic beers). The other beers do not go through secondary fermentation. They are centrifuged and pasteurized. Sam Fleet is the head of the production team of 13 members, whose nationalities are a reflection of the international culture of craft beer: Portuguese, Brazilians, Italians, Americans, British, Canadians, and others. A real cluster of microbreweries is now springing up around Port Sud, and the same is happening at the Tour & Taxis site a few kilometers to the north. "Craft is creativity, innovation and dynamics," Sam says. "But don't think for a moment that we simply cast off all tra-

dition. Just look at our microbrewery Dansaert by BBP, where we brew lambics and mixed fermentation beers. We're using an open coolship, and ferment the lambics in wooden barrels." Dansaert by BBP is housed in a former brewery. Brewer Dimitri Van Roy is my guide. He leads me through the cellar, where the foam bubbling up from many bungholes on many barrels indicates a lot of active fermentation going on. "This is our playground," Dimitri says. "You know, when you make lambics, you really learn something every day. Right now we're experimenting with blends of lambic and things like herbal, lightly bitter saisons and a grappa lambic." We taste a blend of two-year-old saison and young lambic, Sonic Freefall, in which they macerate the marc of Savignon Blanc and Sauvignon grapes. A collaboration with an Argentinian brewery, Jugetes Perdidos, produced a new variation on the Flemish red style. They added an Argentinian strain of yeast to the base beer and then let it develop in the barrel for over a year.

Visit either of the brewery's two locations on the canal. In Port Sud, you can see the entire

production process and taste the beers in the tasting room or on the large terrace facing the water. If you're in Brussels, Dansaert by BBP might just be the best place to be initiated into the world of lambic brewing and the steken, or blending, of geuzes. Adjacent to the taproom is the brewery shop. From there, the Dansaertstraat takes you to the city center. That's where Brussels Beer Project has opened its taproom on the corner of Louizalaan and Baljuwstraat, where you can sit on the terrace and sample any of the thirty BBP beers on tap. Cyclists can reach either location on the Brussel-Beersel cycle path along the canal. In Beersel and Lot you will find lambic brewery and restaurant 3 Fonteinen and Geuzestekerij Oud Beersel.

WWW.BEERPROJECT.BE





PALM/ DE HOORN

ARTHUR VAN ROY GAVE HIS SPÉCIALE BELGE THE TRADE NAME "SPÉCIALE PALM", A SUBTLE JAB AT BOTTOM-FERMENTED PILSNERS SUGGESTING THE "VICTORY" OF TOP-FERMENTED BEER OVER THEM. HE WAS VERY FRANK IN HIS CONVICTION THAT HIS BEER HAD MORE AROMA AND MORE FLAVOR THAN PILSNER.

The history of Brouwerij Palm began in 1686. At that time, Anna Cornet ran the village brewery De Hoorn, just opposite the church in Steenhuffel. In 1706, Andries Van Doorselaer established a farmstead and inn here which encompassed the De Hoorn brewery. According to a receipt from 1710 Theodoor Cornet, estate manager for the nearby Castle Diepensteyn, ordered a delivery of a barrel of "half beer" and a barrel of "good beer". In the years that followed, Cornet (for whom the oaked beer Cornet would later be named) placed regular orders for beer, in part to serve the workmen at the castle. The story of Brouwerij Palm begins at the end of the 18th century with a series of takeovers. Jean-Baptiste De Mesmaecker took over De Hoorn, and became mayor of Steenhuffel. In 1908, his daughter Henriette married Arthur Van Roy, scion of a prominent family of farmers from Wieze. Arthur began the industrial development of the brewery, with the goal of being able to sell his beers far beyond the local community. He is also the original creator of his own Spéciale belge amber beer. During the First World War, the brewery was almost completely destroyed. When it came time to rebuild, he simply lacked the resources to invest in the newer "cold technology" for bottom-fermented beers – pilsner. So the brewery focused on top-fermented beers. In 1929 Arthur Van Roy gave his Spéciale belge the trade name "Spéciale Palm", a subtle jab at bottom-fermented pilsners suggesting the "victory" of top-fermented beer over them. He was very frank in his conviction that his beer had more aroma and more flavor than pilsner. In 1958, his son Alfred scored a victory at the 1958 World Fair in Brussels (Expo 58) with his "Palm-Hof", and the seeds of the new brewery were planted. In 1974, the name De Hoorn was



definitively changed to Palm. Because Alfred had no children, he asked his cousin Jan Toye, descendent of the Roman brewing family, to continue his life's work. Under Jan's direction, the brewery grew into a player of international stature. The now-familiar Brabant draft horse first appeared on the label in 1980. By that time Spéciale Palm had conquered the Dutch market. In 1988, Palm acquired Castle Diepensteyn. The castle was fully restored between 1993 and 1996. Today its stable complex is a veritable village of Brabant draft horses, and here you will see their distinctive brown coats and blonde manes all around you. In 1990 Palm entered into a joint venture with lambic brewery Boon. Eight years later, the takeover of Brouwerij Rodenbach followed. In 2016, both Palm and Rodenbach were acquired by Swinkels Royal Family Brewers.

Palm, the brewery's flagship beer, is the amber Spéciale belge that dates back to the early 20th century. In 1904 the Belgian brewery schools held

a competition to develop a new, better (and stronger) Belgian beer. The winner was Palm. The brewery has a long tradition in the production of top-fermented beers, and has produced the Steenbrugge abbey beers and Brugge Tripel, among others. Their bottom-fermented beers include Estaminet pilsner. The new microbrewery De Hoorn on the brewery site lends itself to experimenting in smaller volumes. Here the brewmasters are developing the new Arthur's Legacy beers in which they let herbs, fruits, wood or hops take the upper hand. These "limited editions" are being made available in selected bars and cafés. One of these was the Cornet Oaked. Of course, the name of the Arthur's Legacy project is an homage to Arthur Van Roy. The water used for brewing here is rich in calcium and magnesium as well as salts, sulfates and chlorides. It is pumped from 21 wells drilled around the brewery. The malt types used vary from pale to amber to dark brown, coloured in the kiln or roasted in the drum (direct flame). It is the malt grain in particular that

determines the underlying flavor of top-fermented beers. A selection of aroma hops is added at a later stage to create the desired aroma profile. For the fermentation, the brewery uses a yeast strain from the family of top-fermenters, *de Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, active between 15°C and 25°C.

Tours of the brewery and microbrewery with a professional guide can be booked by appointment only. Visitors are received in the visitor's center, De Oude Bottelarij. The first stop is the brewhall, followed by the herb cellar, fermenting chambers, bottling plant and distribution hall. And of course, no visit would be complete without a beer tasting after the tour. Guided tours can be booked for groups of 15 to 50 people. Upon request, you can also visit the stable complex at Castle Diepensteyn and see the Brabant draft horses. The Leirekens cycle route (18.6 km) to Aalst passes along the hop fields between the brewery and Castle Diepensteyn. Hikers can follow the Molenbeekroute (8.7 km), "From dry to wet Steenhuffel" (8.6 km) or the Pluimennest route in Londerzeel (7.9 km).

You can also plan a route of your own following the hiking and cycling route network.

WWW.PALM.BE

