



## Beer of the Month Club

December 2006 Selections  
Hoppy Holidays!

### Doggie Claws 2006

Hair of the Dog Brewing Company, Portland, Oregon

10.5%abv     \$4.25/12oz

Hair of the Dog Brewing Company was founded in 1993 by two friends that met in the Oregon Brew Crew, a Portland area home-brewers club. Doug Henderson was a California native with a background in computer science, and Alan Sprints, who is now the sole owner and brewmaster. Sprints had trained as a brewer at the Widmer Brothers' Brewery, one of Portland's first microbreweries, but it was a trip to Belgium that changed his approach to brewing. The last thing the partners wanted to do when they started their own brewery was to create the typical West Coast lineup of Pale Ale, Brown Ale, Stout, etc., but rather to honor the strong and age-worthy ales of Belgium and certain parts of Germany. Their first product, 'Adambier' (now called 'Adam'), was based on an ancient and then extinct style of ale that had been brewed in the area of Dortmund, Germany, in the middle ages. With the exception of 'Ruth', a light ale named after Sprints' grandmother and meant to be an everyday session-style ale, all of their beers are very strong and bottle conditioned, and like the great ales of Belgium, worthy of being laid down for extended aging.

Doggie Claws was introduced as HOD's holiday seasonal ale in 2001, and has been produced as a vintage ale each year since. Doggie Claws is a West Coast style barley wine, and differs from the classic British style in its strong hop character. It is made using British Crystal and Gambrinus Pale malts, which undergo an extended four hour boil to create a very rich and reduced wort. Simcoe hops are added to the boil twice, and toward the end of the boil, dark wildflower honey from Mount Hood, and Amarillo hops are added to finish the wort. It is then fermented using Wyeast 1728, a cultivated strain that was created specifically for brewing strong, sweet ales in the Scottish style. After fermentation, the beer is dry-hopped with a final addition of both Simcoe and Amarillo hops to bring it to its final level of hoppiness. At bottling time, a final dose of sugar and yeast are added to each bottle for a final fermentation. This results in a very thick layer of spent yeast in the bottle, and your Doggie Claws should be stood upright for a day or two before consumption, and poured gently into a brandy snifter or specialty ale goblet in order to leave the sediment in the bottle. You will get optimum enjoyment out of your Doggie Claws if you serve it around cellar temperature (about 55-60°F).

The Doggie Claws is so rich and liquorous that it pours into the glass more like an after dinner liqueur than your typical beer, with little or no effervescence. The color is a rich, mahogany-brown, with reddish highlights. The aromas are very fruity, but the level of hoppiness is such that the impression is more of candied citrus and sangria than the more usual caramel malt and stewed fruits of most barley wines. Hints of pine or spruce nicely balance the sweetness of the fruit aromas. The body is quite full and very rich, but once again, the impression is one of balance between the richness of the malt and honey, and the drying bitterness of the hops. Candied citrus, glacé fruits, wildflower honey and sweet malty notes all vie for your attention. This is a very well balanced barley wine, but I'd still have a hard time matching it to food – maybe Holiday treats like fudge or fruitcake, but my inclination would be to treat it as if it were a fine after dinner libation, and enjoy it on its own.

## Val-Dieu Winter Ale

Brasserie de l'Abbaye du Val-Dieu, Aubel, Belgium

10.5%abv      \$9.00/750ml

The Abbaye du Val-Dieu ('Abbey of the Valley of God') is a Cistercian monastery that was founded in 1216. It is located near the village of Aubel, right where the borders of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany meet. While there are many 'Abbey' ales made in Belgium, most of them have for years been brewed outside of the abbeys themselves, by laymen at commercial breweries. The Abbaye de Val-Dieu is the last non-Trappist monastery that still produces its own beer for sale to the public. These days the brewing is actually handled by a layman, but every step of the operation is still overseen by the monks. The proceeds from the sales of their beer go to maintaining the buildings and grounds of the monastery, and to support the various charitable organizations formed by the monks over the centuries.

The Val-Dieu Winter Ale is basically what is known as an Abbey-style Quadruple ale. The Belgian terms 'Single', 'Double', 'Triple' and 'Quadruple' refer to the strength of the final product, not strictly the number of fermentations the beer goes through, although that is a common misconception. Quadruples are the strongest category, and they are usually dark, very strong, and meant to be consumed in small quantities, usually after a large meal, but sometimes with richer foods, cheese, or dessert. The Val-Dieu Winter Ale is brewed using Pilsen and Torrifier malts, but Candi sugar is also added, in order to bring the wort up to the desired level of potential gravity (basically, the amount of fermentable material). This is a lightly hopped style of ale, using Hallertau-Hersbrucker and Saaz hops, but just enough hops to add a balance of bitterness to the sweet malt notes and to extract the preservative qualities from the hops. The beer is fermented twice in tank, using two different strains of yeast, then bottled unfiltered and un-Pasteurized, with a final addition of sugar and yeast, so as to complete fermentation in the bottle. This makes for a very age-worthy beer that will produce some sediment in the bottle over time. Drink your Val-Dieu Winter Ale at cellar temperature, or a little warmer, to make sure that you experience its full range of complex flavors.

The Val-Dieu Winter Ale pours into the glass with a dark brown, almost coffee-like color. The head is off-white, almost creamy, with very lacy foam. The aromas are as dark and brooding as the color, with brown bread, dates, chocolate malt, some woody character, and a hint of dark cherries. On the palate, this beer is surprisingly light-bodied, almost gliding across the tongue. The flavors nicely match the aromas, with lots of toasty, dark-roasted grains, brown bread or Christmas pudding, and several layers of dark fruits like cherries, dates, figs and plums. Thankfully, the finish is almost completely dry, so it never becomes heavy or cloying at all. This ale would make a fine match for roasted game, sharp cheddar with brown bread, or fireside at the end of a cold day.