



Beer of the Month Club

July 2005 Selections

India Pale Ale

AleSmith Brewing Co., Miramar (San Diego), California

7.25%abv \$4.50/22oz

In the four-plus years that we have been open here in Noe Valley, we've received thousands of requests for various beers from around the world. Some we are able to track down for our customers, others remain elusively unavailable. Curiously, our most-requested-but-never-able-to-obtain brewery was located just down the coast in San Diego, but they were never able to produce enough beer to send any north. Until now!

AleSmith will be celebrating their tenth anniversary this summer, and in that short ten years they have built a reputation among beer lovers as one of the very best in the world. In fact, AleSmith ales occupy six places on the all-time Top 100 list at RateBeer.com – more than any other single brewer. The brewery is owned and operated by Peter Zien, who purchased the business in 2002 from founder Skip Virgilio. For much of their existence, AleSmith produced beers under contract for various enterprises such as restaurants and bars. This provided the company a steady source of revenue, but it had the unfortunate side effect of preventing them from brewing enough of their own products to meet even local demand, much less think about expanding their territory. When Peter took over the operation all contract brewing was ceased, and he is now able to produce enough beer to supply the North Coast as well as the South. AleSmith produces an array of West Coast and British style ales year-round, as well as numerous seasonal and limited release offerings in both British and Belgian styles that are released at various times of the year.

IPA, or India Pale Ale, is a style of beer that originated in England during their colonial period. When the Brits first tried to ship beer to their troops in India, they found that more often than not the beer would spoil due to the rigors of four to six months in the hold of a ship as it sailed through the tropics. Then, in 1790, one George Hodgson found that if the amount of hops were doubled from the normal level of a pale ale, and the beer was brewed to a higher degree of alcohol, the product had a much better chance of surviving the trip. And thus, the India Pale Ale was born as essentially a double-hopped version of the classic British pale ale. AleSmith's IPA is brewed with hops, but also sees two rounds of dry-hopping, for an almost extreme level of hoppiness (for extreme, try their Summer YuleSmith, which sees 60% more hops than the IPA!). While all of their beers are bottle-conditioned and may throw slight sediment, Peter recommends drinking the IPA fairly young to preserve the freshness of the hop character. Like most IPAs, the AleSmith version is best enjoyed at cool cellar temperature (about 45-50°F) from a pint glass or other large, straight-sided vessel.

The AleSmith IPA pours with a slightly hazy orange-gold color. The head is off-white, firm, and rocky, and the vigorous bead from the bottom of the glass keeps the head active even well after the beer is poured. On the nose you will find lots of bright citrus and resin hop character, with hints of tropical fruits shining through. The palate is surprisingly light and lively considering the beer's strength, but is certainly not lacking in flavor. Dried apricots, citrus fruits, even a hint of passionfruit all make their presence known, but there is also a core of sweet malt, and plenty of bitterness from the hops. The finish is long, very dry, and slightly bitter. As the beer warms in the glass, the fruitiness becomes even more pronounced, while the bitter flavors recede to the back. Try this great IPA with all your favorite summer foods, from burgers to crab boil, or enjoy it like I do – as the perfect capper to a round of golf.

Forêt Organic Saison

Brasserie Dupont, Tourpes, Hainault, Belgium

7.5%abv \$9.99/750ml

Brasserie Dupont is, quite literally, a farmhouse brewery. Founded in 1850 as the heart of a farm that also produced grain, meat, bread and cheese, Dupont is one of the few old farmhouse breweries that still maintain a working farm. Alfred Dupont purchased the farm in 1920 for his son Louis, who had been contemplating moving to Canada, which was rich with opportunity at the same time that Europe was rebuilding from WWI. With a farm in Hainault, though, Louis saw no reason to leave, and the farm and brewery are today in the hands of the fourth generation of Dupont brewers, Marc Rosier.

The region of Wallonia straddles the French-Belgian border, and although the region has a long brewing history, Gin is what made the area famous. From the time that the Dutch returned to northern Europe with the Arabic technology of distillation, the area along the North Sea that is now home to the Low Countries has been famous for their production (and consumption!) of Genever gin. Beer, for the most part, was a light, refreshing beverage suitable for the summer season, and became known as *Saisons*. The beer style most closely associated with the region today, variously known as *Saisons* or *Biere de Mars*, still show the influence of the old gin distillers' tradition of adding spices to flavor their products. Nearly all *Saisons* are made with the addition of coriander (usually the seed, although the herb is sometimes used) and Curacao orange peel, both common ingredients in gin production. Other spices may also be used, but each brewer keeps his own book of secrets very close to his or her chest, and these account for the slight stylistic differences from one brewer to the next.

Brasserie Dupont's flagship brew is known simply as Saison Dupont, and is considered to be both the hallmark of the style, and one of the world's greatest beers of any type. That said, I must confess that I have always preferred the organic rendition of the same beer to be slightly superior. Called *Forêt* (forest), it is made to essentially the same recipe as the regular Saison Dupont, but it is brewed using 100% certified organic malt and hops. Cristal and pale malts are used in the brewing, but an unusually long boil time results in a fairly dark golden color. Kent Goldings hops are added both to the brew kettle, and in a light dry-hopping prior to conditioning. The coriander and other spices are added during the boil. The ale is given a dosage of candy sugar and yeast at bottling time, giving the finished beer is characteristic cloudy appearance, as well as giving it the ability to age quite well for as long as three to four years. Drink the Foret Saison at around 55°F from a large, tulip-shaped beer chalice, or your favorite red wine glass to best enjoy the spicy aromatics.

The Foret ale pours with a fine, lacy white head that beautifully accents the deep coppery color of the ale itself. The nose is very spicy, showing lots of coriander and hints of orange, but also some deeper, more mysterious aromas like mace or pepper, clove and anise. On the palate there is a bit more fruity malt character, but the showstopper is still the overt spiciness. The beer is totally dry, yet not astringently bitter in any way, with layers and layers of spicy notes softened just slightly by sweet malt. The spicy finish goes on for minutes. Try the Foret with your favorite vegetarian dishes, full-flavored cheeses, and seafood prepared with fresh herbs.