



Beer of the Month Club

June 2006 Selections

Bittersweet Lenny's R.I.P.A

He'Brew (Shmaltz Brewing Co.), Saratoga Springs, New York

10.0%abv \$5.00/22oz

Jeremy Cowan began his brewing career with little more than an idea, and plenty of chutzpa (that's audacity to you and me!). When he decided to make America's first Kosher microbrews, he had no brewing experience and no business experience, but he thought he did have a captive audience. Starting in 1996, Jeremy had 100 cases of beer made to his specifications at Anderson Valley Brewing Co., in Mendocino County. As he hit the road to sell his beer, he found that his most valuable asset as a salesman was shtick (a gimmick for attracting attention). Over the years, Jeremy developed his shtick to masterful levels, building his production slowly and through word-of-mouth (mostly his own!) to more than 25,000 cases per year. Along the way, he outgrew the facilities at Anderson Valley, and found new help in the form of the Olde Saratoga Brewing Co., in Saratoga Springs, New York, where the beers are brewed to this day.

R.I.P.A? Well, it could be short for Rye IPA, because that is what it is. Or, it could be Rest In Peace Ale, for it is all that, too. Bittersweet Lenny's is He'Brew's first ever tribute beer – “the most radical Jewish tribute beer ever created” - launched this summer to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the death of Lenny Bruce. Brewed “with obscene amounts of malt and hops – far beyond contemporary community standards”, it is truly a unique bottle of ale. It is brewed using a combination of unmalted wheat, and barley and rye malts (2-row barley, Rye Ale, Torrified Rye, Crystal Rye 75, Crystal Malt 65, Wheat, Kiln Amber, and Caramel 70). It is hopped during the brewing process with Warrior, Cascade, Simcoe, Crystal, Chinook, Amarillo and Centennial hops, then dry-hopped with Amarillo and Crystal after the brew. It has huge body, but excellent balance at the same time. Serve your RIPA chilled, but not too cold, in a classic pint glass, and then enjoy the changes it goes through as it warms in the glass. I actually enjoyed it best at warm cellar temperature, around 55-60°F.

Pour Bittersweet Lenny into a pint glass very slowly, lifting the bottle away from the glass as you finish the pour to add a nice head. The beer has a deep reddish-mahogany color, and a rocky, buttercream colored head. The nose is rich with roasted, malty aromas that almost allow you to taste all of the different malts used in the beer. A slight fruity component comes from the ale yeast used in fermentation. It is quite heavy on the palate due to the high gravity, but the flavors are quite refreshing, none the less. Roasted grains and toasted rye bread lead the way, with subtler flavors of citrus and stone fruits, and a perfect balance of hops. The finish goes on for minutes, provided you don't take another sip too quickly. I'm sure that there are plenty of food pairings that would work with this beer, but I loved it with a nice, thick pastrami on rye with spicy mustard – accompanied by an obscenity-laced comedy routine, of course!

Blanche de Namur

Brasserie du Bocq, Purnode, Namur, Belgium

4.5%abv \$7.00/750ml

The Brasserie du Bocq got its beginnings in 1858, when farmer Martin Belot began brewing on his farm in the small town of Purnode. An almost immediate success, Mssr. Belot was soon delivering beer in cask to virtually every pub, restaurant and road house within a days' horse drawn wagon trip of his farm. Over the second half of the 19th century, Belot slowly increased the size and output of his brewery, eventually becoming one of the province's largest brewers. In 1949, Belot's descendants incorporated the brewing company, and began buying out other small, regional brewers. By 1967 they were brewing beers under a variety of brand names at no fewer than three different brewing facilities, but in 1983 a new, state-of-the-art facility was built on the original Purnode farmland, and all of their brewing activities were moved to the home brewery, where they remain today.

The Belgian style of wheat beer is very distinctive, although it does go by a couple of names. In the Flemish speaking north of Belgium, they are known as *Witbier* or *Witte*, which is kind of a play on words, as *wit* means both 'wheat' and 'white', and in English these are commonly known as 'white ales'. In the French speaking south of Belgium, these are known as *Bieres Blanche*, which gives us our second double-entendre. In the middle ages what is now the province of Namur was a small principality, ruled by the Count of Namur. In the year 1336, the then Count of Namur sent his young daughter, Blanche (born between 1313 and 1318), to Sweden, where she was married to the Crown Prince of Sweden, later becoming Queen of Sweden, Norway and Scania (what is now extreme southern Sweden). To this day, Blanche de Namur is revered as a favorite queen in Scandinavia, and revered as a favorite daughter in her native Belgium. *Blanche de Namur* the ale is named in her honor.

Belgian *wit* or *blanche* beers are traditionally brewed using both wheat and barley malt, with hops present just for their preservative effect. Instead of hops, most of the flavor is derived from the use of dried Curaçao orange peel and coriander seeds. These last two ingredients give the beers their characteristic spiciness. At the Brasserie du Bocq, however, a tiny bit of licorice is also added, giving their *blanche* its unique flavor profile. This is a beer to serve in a narrow white wine glass, or even a Champagne flute, to capture its beguiling aromas, and should be served very well-chilled, around 40°F, to best appreciate its thirst-quenching attributes.

The Blanche de Namur pours into the glass with a startlingly pale straw, almost lemonade color. It is hazy, and has a constant bead of tiny bubbles that continuously feed the pale, lacy head. The nose is all at once fruity and spicy, with aromas of bubblegum, citrus, and tropical fruits balanced by hints of pepper and clove. On the palate, it is bright and crisp, with just a tingle of effervescence. The flavors are subtle, but penetrating, and include mild citrus and passionfruit, coriander, pepper, and just the barest touch of licorice. I like Belgian Whites with everything from fresh asparagus to lighter seafood dishes, but I find that the spiciness of this version is extremely well-suited to things like curry-steamed mussels or *boudin blanc*.