



## Beer of the Month Club

May 2006 Selections

### Zoetzuur Flemish Red Ale

Andelot Proefbrouwerij, Lochristi, Belgium

7.0%abv      \$10.50/750ml

The Andelot Proefbrouwerij was founded in 1996 by husband-and-wife brewers Dirk Naudts and Saskia Waerniers. Previously, Dirk had worked as the brewmaster for the Roman Brewery, and was also serving at the time as a Professor of Brewing Sciences at the St Lieven University in Ghent. Their goal from the very beginning was to create Belgium's most state-of-the-art brewing facility, to act as a sort of proving ground for new developments in brewing, as well as a place to refine old techniques. Appropriately enough, "proef" is Flemish for both "test" and "taste", and the Proefbrouwerij has become Belgium's laboratory for brewing experimentation. Over the past decade, Dirk and Saskia have helped many other breweries, both large and small, to refine their existing beers and develop new products for the marketplace. They have also worked as contract brewers for specialty beer clubs, restaurants and pubs, all the while developing their own portfolio of world-class ales and lagers. The Zoetzuur is one of their latest products, a modern reinterpretation of one of Belgium's oldest traditional styles of ale.

The Flemish Red is a style of ale developed in West Flanders over the last 300+ years. Traditionally, these beers are brewed as medium-bodied red ales of moderate alcoholic strength, fermented in traditional fermentation vats, then put away to age in oak barrels for 18-36 months. During this extended barrel aging, wild airborne yeasts and other organisms slowly work their magic on the brew, turning it into a perfectly (one would hope) balanced sweet and sour taste experience – in fact, Zoetzuur literally translates as "sweet-sour". The Zoetzuur is brewed from a combination of 2-row Munich, Pilsner and Caramel malts. The hops are East Kent Goldings from England, and a very pungent new variety from the Pacific Northwest called Tomahawk. As is sometimes done in the more traditional breweries that practice this style, a small amount of sour dark cherry juice is added to the boiling wort to give the finished ale higher natural acidity and deeper fruit flavors. The brew is then inoculated with both *saccharomyces* (a cultivated brewing yeast) and *brettanomyces* (a cultivated version of a wild, airborne yeast), two yeasts that help to provide the desired sweet and sour flavor profile, as well as a certain 'wild' flavor quality. During its time in barrel, the beer is further exposed to the *lactobacillus* bacteria, which slowly converts some of the naturally occurring acids in the beer to lactic acid, giving the finished product its telltale creamy texture and lactic tang. Flemish red ales will hide their fruitiness and be quite acidic if served too cold, but some people prefer them this way. We like ours at cellar temperature (about 55°F), served in a nice ale goblet or red wine glass to capture all of its stunning aromatics.

The Zoetzuur pours into the glass with a hazy reddish-orange color and a rocky, tan colored head. The aromas are deeply fruity, with tart cherries, raspberry, apricot and citrus, just a hint of spice, and a touch of musty *brettanomyces* character. On the palate, this ale is very bright and tangy, with even deeper citrus and red fruit character, and an unmistakable, almost yogurty tang from the *lactobacillus*. The finish goes on for minutes, echoing hints of wild yeast and wild berries. One of my favorite pairings for the Flemish Red Ales is roast duck breast, as the high acidity of the beer really helps to cut the rich fattiness of the duck meat. But I also think an intriguing match to highlight the sweet-sour effect of this beer would be something Cantonese – or maybe Peking Duck.

## Hopsickle Imperial IPA

Moylan's Brewery, Novato, California

9.2%abv      \$5.00/22oz

Brendan Moylan got his start as a brewer in the same way as many other American microbrewers, as a dedicated home brewer. Just one year removed from high school, and before he could actually buy beer, Brendan bought his first home brew kit. After many years of brewing as an amateur, it was a visit to Buffalo Bill's Brewpub in Hayward that convinced him to take his hobby professional. After taking extension classes in Fermentation Science at UC Davis, Brendan became a founding partner and the brewmaster of Marin Brewing Company in 1989. By 1991, though, he was ready to expand his horizons and pursue other possibilities in brewing, so he began working on designs for a state-of-the-art brewing facility that would eventually become Moylan's Brewery. By the time building began, Brendan had secured some \$3.5 million in seed money, and the brewery was built with room to expand in mind, even though production started at very low levels. The brewery and attached restaurant finally opened to the public in 1995, and has become a Novato institution over the past decade. Since that time, Brendan and his partners from Marin Brewing Co. have added a third restaurant to their lineup with Noonan's Bar and Grill, where one can enjoy the products of both breweries, but no beer is brewed on site.

The most notable recent trend in American microbrewing right now is the pursuit of the ultimate hoppy ale. Not too long ago, the IPA (India Pale Ale) was considered to be our most intense style, full of fresh hop character. Then, just a few years ago, we began seeing things labeled as 'Double' IPA, beers made with twice the normal levels of malt and hops, making for an even more intense quaff. Now, though, all of the rules seem to have been tossed out the door as brewers from coast to coast try to out hop each other by taking things to the extreme...and sometimes beyond. I don't believe that we have really discussed it before, but there is a unit of measurement in the beer world known as the IBU, or International Bitterness Unit. While this measurement could be used to determine the bitterness of any comestible, it is most often used as a measurement of the hoppiness of beer. A Budweiser has about 6 IBUs, and your typical bitter or IPA will most likely fall somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 IBUs. The scale actually tops out around 110-120 IBUs, and anything beyond that is essentially immeasurable. The Hopsickle is off the charts. They accomplish this by adding hops to the brew kettle during the brew, dry hopping the wort repeatedly using a variety of different Pacific Northwest hops (Tomahawk, Cascade and Centennial), and then doing the unthinkable: essentially filtering the beer through a whole new batch of fresh hop flowers. If you have ever tasted a beer with this much hop flavor before, you should tell Brendan Moylan, because he insists that this is the hoppiest beer in America. Serve your Hopsickle in a traditional pint glass or other tall vessel. I find that the colder the beer is served, the more bitter it comes across, and as it warms to about 55-60°F is when it seems to show the best balance between the sweet, malty notes and the bitterness of the hops.

The Hopsickle pours into the glass with a beautiful golden-amber color. The head is fairly thin and quick to disappear, but a quick swirl of the glass will bring it back to life instantly. The initial aromas that come from the glass are evocative of a Fish concert at the Greek Theater at Berkeley – somewhat understandable, as hops are closely related to cannabis – with big, resinous, weedy aromas that are so intense, they almost drown out the malt. Slowly, though, hints of citrus and sweet malt poke through the hop veneer. On the palate, there is an initial rush of intense malt flavor, but before individual flavors can begin to emerge, the hops take hold. Initially quite citrusy and resinous, gradually the hop character becomes more bitter and grippy on the palate. Still this is a much better balanced ale than the first release of Hopsickle, when the beer was so darned bitter as to be almost undrinkable. I believe that the strong hop flavor in this beer would overwhelm most food pairing possibilities, but a dish with copious amounts of fresh herbs or a lot of sweetness, like barbecue, would likely do best.