



May 2008

Palo Santo Marron

Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, Inc., Rehoboth Beach & Milton, Delaware

12.0%abv \$4.00/12oz

In the seven years since we got into the beer business here in Noe Valley, the single most requested family of beers that we have had no access to here in California has been, hands down, the products of Dogfish Head. Well, the wait is finally over!

Dogfish was founded as a small brewpub in the seaside resort community of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, in 1995, and at the time was Delaware's first. Founder Sam Calagione started brewing very modestly, to say the least, with a homemade brewing system made from three old kegs hooked up to gas burners. At first, he could only brew in batches of twelve gallons at a time, and as the pub became popular with the locals, he found himself brewing as many as three batches of beer a day, five days a week, just to supply himself. As word spread about the quality of the beers that Sam was brewing, a new brewing system had to be installed to keep up with demand. Within a year, though, and as the brewery was launching its first ever bottled beer, another expansion was needed, followed by a third expansion just another year down the road. By now, Dogfish beers had been winning awards at brewing competitions, and the brewery began to enjoy fame even outside its home region in the Mid-Atlantic. In 2002, no longer capable of keeping up with increasing demand for their products, the Dogfish team built a brand-new 100,000 square foot brewery in the nearby city of Milton to take over the brewing of all of their packaged beers, while the original brewpub would continue to produce its own draft beers. Sometime later this year – or early next – they will be moving again, into an even bigger facility in Milton, where they may finally be able to keep up with demand. The brewery now produces 18 different beers each year, plus the occasional one-off or specialty item. Their most famous product is their 90 Minute IPA, but they produce a stunning array of beers, from the sublime to the ridiculous (and back), and we're proud to offer their latest innovation as an introduction to the Dogfish family.

Palo Santo Marron translates as "Holy Tree Brown". Obviously, it is a brown ale (actually, more of an 'Imperial' Brown, but could easily be called a Porter), but what really sets this beer apart is the Holy Tree itself. Palo Santo is one of the hardest woods in the world, so dense that it doesn't even float on water and requires specialized tools to work. Palo Santo comes from South America, is very closely related to the Frankincense of Africa and the Middle East, and although it is sometimes used in winemaking in South America, most wine makers consider it too aromatic for that use, as it imparts quite a bit of its own character on a wine aged in it. However, this is just what attracted Calagione to it for his beer. The first batch of Palo Santo Marron was brewed in the regular brewing vessels at the brewery in the fall of 2006, and aged in a tank with planks of Palo Santo wood. It was meant to be a one-off experiment, sold only on draft at the pub, but everyone was so impressed by the finished product that they set out to make it a permanent addition to the lineup, so last year they purchased an entire Palo Santo tree in Paraguay, had it made into planks, and shipped the lot to Delaware. When the lumber arrived at the brewery, Calagione brought a Paraguayan wood worker to the US to help them fashion the wood into a single, 10,000 gallon tank to age the beer in (this is the largest wooden fermenting tank built in the States since before Prohibition!). This is the very first commercial release of Palo Santo Marron.

The brewing process for the Palo Santo Marron starts with an amazing 92 pounds of malt per barrel of beer produced (even most brawny micros top out around 60# per barrel!). Pale, Chocolate, Crystal, Black Patent and a touch of wheat malt are used in the mash. The hops used for this beer are Warrior, Glacier and Palisade, all fairly low-aroma varieties, and they are added during the boil for bitterness; no dry-hopping occurs. After the boil, the wash is transferred to the Palo Santo tank, where a Scottish ale yeast is introduced, and the ale is left to ferment and age for eight weeks. At bottling, a small dose of brewers' sugar and fresh yeast are added, and the ale further conditions in the bottle before being shipped. Of course, this means a slightly cloudy (if you can see through it well enough to tell!), but entirely natural beer that will age well for a couple of years at least. We found this ale showed best when we served it in a wine glass that helped to display the aromatic qualities of the Palo Santo wood, and it was most aromatic and enjoyable around 50°F.



The Palo Santo Marron pours into the glass with an almost opaque blackish brown color, and a firm, rocky head the color of espresso. The nose shows the expected aromas of coffee, chocolate, and dark-roasted grains, but there are also subtle notes of wood and brown spices in the background. It hits the palate with tremendous impact, with sweet, dark coffee, chocolate-covered cherries, hints of resinous wood from the Palo Santo, and copious amounts of roasted grains and nuts. The finish is equally huge, and may show a touch of alcoholic heat, but it echoes on for minutes. This beer may, in fact, be too big for food, but I can imagine it making a welcome addition to an oceanfront crab boil or clambake on a foggy summer's eve.

St-Ambroise Pale Ale

Brasserie McAuslan, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

5.0%abv \$3.25/11.5oz

Peter McAuslan was born and raised in the Montreal area, and from a very young age, he became very proud of his Quebecois ancestry. By the time he was of college age, though, part of Montreal's unique French heritage seemed to have been lost: the brewing of fine ales. By the 1960's, Canada's market, like most of the rest of the world's, was dominated by just a couple of brands of mass-produced lager (in this case, Molson and Labatt, who together controlled 95% of Canadian beer sales), and nobody in Quebec was brewing ales at all. So, Peter took up home brewing as a way to explore his mixed Scottish-Quebecois heritage – not to mention as a way to drink good beer. By 1987, with some 20+ years of brewing under his belt, and while working as a university administrator, Peter decided it was time to make the leap of faith and begin brewing commercially. Over the next year, while Peter put together the group of investors that would allow him to follow his dream, his wife, Ellen Bounsall, would move temporarily to Chicago, where she added to her degree in Biology a degree in brewing sciences from the Siebel Institute of Brewing. At the end of 1988, the McAuslans hired an experienced English Master Brewer to help them develop their first beer for the market, St-Ambroise Pale Ale, named for the Montreal street that the brewery was built on. Brewing began in January of 1989, and the first batch of St-Ambroise was bottled and ready to be shipped by mid-February of that year. Montrealites who had long been accustomed to nothing more interesting than Labatt's Blue took an immediate liking to this new beast, embracing the hoppiness, the slightly stronger alcohol, and, especially, that the product was locally made and a sort of return to their French roots (the French are traditionally ale drinkers and brewers; lagers historically come from Germany and the Czech Republic). The brewery has expanded several times over the years, and later this year will move in to a brand-new, state of the art facility just a few blocks from their original site. It is now the largest and most award-winning independent brewery in Canada.

The St-Ambroise is labeled as a Pale Ale, but in my researching the product, I have seen it referred to several times as being an 'ESB', or Extra Special Bitter, which would make some sense considering that their founding Brewmaster was British. It, like the Nøgne Ø Pale Ale last month, definitely shows a bit stronger hop presence than one might expect of a Pale Ale. It is brewed using Pale and Munich malts, plus a very small percentage of malted wheat. Only Quebec-grown Styrian Goldings hops are used, and the yeast strain is one that was brought by their original brewmaster from England. The brewing processes themselves are pretty straight-forward, with brewing, fermenting and conditioning all taking place in stainless steel. The beer is filtered before bottling, and is bottled without any additional yeast, so it will pour quite limpid, but will not improve or evolve with any additional bottle age. It is best enjoyed from a nice, wide-mouthed ale chalice, and it seems to show its full array of flavors best at a fairly cool temperature – say 40-45°F.

The St-Ambroise Pale Ale pours into the glass with a crystal clear copper/amber color. The head is off-white to beige in color, fairly light and frothy, and leaves a faint lace in the glass as it subsides. The nose shows crisp malt and toasted grains, with a strong citrus/hop note, and even a touch of grassiness. It is medium- to full-bodied on the palate, with pronounced nuttiness, toast, and hints of fruit. The hops are almost entirely missing from the middle of the palate, before returning in the finish with a pleasant bitter note, but very little citrus character. This will make a great session beer over the summer, with its combination of big flavor and easy drinkability. Or, if you are really daring, try it with a plate of *poutine* – the classic Montreal dish of French-fried potatoes smothered in fresh cheese curds (you could use fresh mozzarella) and thin gravy.