



October 2007

Wychcraft

Wychwood Brewery, Witney, Oxfordshire, England

4.5%abv \$4.00/500ml

Wychwood Brewery lies amid the Cotswold Hills of west Oxfordshire, in an area that has been famous for its brewing for centuries. The first large, commercial brewery in the area was built by John Williams Clinch in 1841, and Clinch's Brewery was an integral part of the town of Witney for 120 years. At its height, Clinch owned 71 pubs in Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties, which attracted the eye of brewing giant John Courage & Co., who purchased the company in 1961. Unfortunately, all that courage was interested in was the pub business, and they promptly closed the brewery, laying off the entire staff and leaving Witney without a brewery for the first time in known history. In 1983, an Englishman named Paddy Glenny, who had learned the brewing trade in Germany, purchased the old Clinch's Brewery and renamed it Eagle Brewery. Initially more of a hobby brewery, its total production was only about 800 barrels per year. Then, in 1988, Paddy was asked to brew a special beer for a local landlord to serve at his daughter's wedding. Paddy handed off the assignment to his new assistant, Chris Moss, who created the beer that would become the brewery's most famous – the Legendary Hobgoblin (BoM Club selection for Halloween 2003!). In 1990, the Eagle was renamed Wychwood Brewery, after the Wychwood Forest, a local wood that was once a Royal hunting ground. Subsequent beers from the brewery followed the fantastic whimsy of the Hobgoblin, with names such as Black Wych, Circle Master, and BeeWyched, all with beautiful artwork on their labels that became as much the hallmark of the company as the beers themselves. Wychwood is now one of the largest independent brewers in Britain, producing more than 50,000 barrels per year, and the largest brewer of organic beers (Wychcraft does contain some organic ingredients, but is not itself organic).

While Wychwood don't use the terminology on their label – they refer to it as “Thrice Hopped and Golden” – the Wychcraft is essentially an India Pale Ale. India Pale Ale, or ‘IPA’, 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 pale ales, 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. Wychcraft is brewed using Caramalt for its body and color, and Lager malt for lightness and crispness. Gentle English Fuggles hops are added during the boil for their subtle bitterness, and the more pungent and citrusy Styrian Goldings hops are added at three intervals during the fermentation for their heightened aromatics. The beer is lightly filtered before bottling, so it should be consumed while fairly fresh. Because of its lighter body compared to American IPAs, I like the Wychcraft a little bit colder, around 40-45°F. It is best enjoyed from a classic pint glass.

Wychcraft pours into the glass a rich, golden apricot color and a slight haze, with a pale, wispy head that leaves a faint lace in the glass. The nose is full of malt, citrus, and even hints of more tropical fruits like passion fruit. It is bright and crisp in the mouth, and waltzes across the palate with a certain lightness to its step. There is plenty of sweet malt, and a slight bread quality from the yeast, before it finishes in a burst of citrusy Styrian Goldings hops. This is an easy beer to like, and very drinkable – a good session beer for Halloween night, or as an accompaniment to your favorite seasonal foods. I tried it with a rotisserie chicken served with a roasted squash and red onion salad the other night, and it was a match made in heaven!



Okocim Porter

Okocim Brewery, Brzesko, Galicia, Poland

8.3%abv \$2.75/500ml

In the mid-nineteenth century, the province of Galicia, in what is now southern Poland, was a part of the Austrian Empire. Brewing technology at the time was undergoing its first great modernization, echoing the industrial revolution that was happening in other industries, and older breweries were struggling to replace their outdated brewing systems with the new copper and stainless steel equipment that was revolutionizing brewing, bringing about the lager style of beer. Okocim Brewery (oh-koh-CHEEM) was founded by Viennese businessman Johann Götz in a narrow river valley outside the small village of Brzesko in 1845. Johann was joined in the business by his son, Jan, who had married the daughter of a local noble and taken the family name Götz-Okocimski. Okocim was one of the first large, modern breweries to be purpose-built entirely from scratch, following the famous Urquell Brewery in Bohemia by just three years. Almost immediately, Okocim became one of the largest and most important brewers in the region, a distinction true to this day. Over the years, the brewery expanded as demand called for, including its own rail yard to facilitate shipping the finished beer. The brewery now has three brewing halls, from three different generations, including the original, with its pre-copper equipment. Times have changed Poland, as well, and the brewery was nationalized during the communist era following World War II. The last of the Götz-Okocimski family died in exile in Africa in the 1960's, so when the communist regime collapsed in Poland, it was only an influx of foreign investment that kept the brewery open. Initial capital came from the Danish brewing giant Carlsberg, who owned one third of the company when it initially went public in 1996. In 2001, Carlsberg purchased all outstanding shares, and have owned the brewery outright ever since.

The Baltic Porter is an interesting amalgam of different beer styles. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Porter was the great dark beer style of the British Isles. At one time, the style was so popular that many breweries would produce multiple Porters of different strengths, and the stronger of these gradually became known as 'Stout Porters', or just Stouts. As the British dominated much of the sea trade in the Baltic and North Seas, their beers traveled with them, and over time it was discovered that Stout brewed even stouter, with higher strength and more hops, traveled better than lighter beers. When the Tsars of Russia discovered and fell in love with this new style of Stout, it became known as Imperial Stout – and brewers throughout Scandinavia and the Baltic nations began to emulate the style. Some of these brewers embraced the Imperial Stout label, while others – presumably those not so enamored of the Russian Imperial Court – used the older terminology, and called their beers Porters. But not so fast! Traditional British Porters are made using top-fermenting ale yeasts, and usually top out around 6-6.5% alcohol, while most of the Baltic Porters are made using a more efficient, bottom-fermenting yeast, so they are lagers rather than ales, and tend to be stronger in alcohol, topping out around 9%. So, the Baltic Porter has as much in common with the Double Bocks of Germany and Bohemia as it does with traditional Porters, and tends to show more of the maltiness of the former than the roastiness of the latter. Okocim's Porter is brewed in this style, using Munich, Crystal and dark malts, primarily from Polish-grown barley. The hops used are two local varieties, originally derived from the Czech Saaz variety, called Lublin and Marynka, which are distinctive for their spicy, almost licorice-like flavors and aromas. The beer is lagered and slightly filtered before bottling, so it is not a 'live' beer, but its inherent strength ensures that it will age well for a year or two. I don't like heavy beers like this too cold, and find that it shows best from a snifter-type glass, at around 50°F.

The Okocim Porter pours into the glass with an opaque reddish-black hue, and a big, rocky brown head that leaves a thick lace in the glass. The nose is full of roasty, toasty malt aromas, almost coffee-like, with a bit of a woody character from the hops. The palate is hugely full-bodied, with a slightly sweet chocolate toffee quality common to Baltic Porters, as well as some nice, fruity esters and a licorice-like spiciness. The finish lasts seemingly forever, and becomes drier as it goes. This beer demands big, hearty foods (think Polish!), or a nice fireside easy chair at the end of a cold day.