

Florida Farmhouse Special BREW

This Special BREW was given as a tasting entitled “The Saison Savoring Society Special Summer Sampling Super Session” by Dave Perez and Mark Tumarkin, two high profile BJCP judges in Florida. From reading their commentary and descriptions, it is very obvious that it was fun AND educational. Special thanks to those guys for having fun while educating as well as sharing it with the rest of us so that we can do something similar. To aid to the educational aspect, comments gathered from the brewery and from other judges have been added (as indicated).

Guidelines for a Special BREW:

Description

This is an adaptation of the normal BREW sessions of the CEP. There are basically two different types of special event BREWs that qualify.

THIRD PARTY

The first is for especially large regional competitions or courses organized by "third parties" to the BJCP. These include, but are not limited to AHA Nationals, MCAB and other competitions, National conferences or extended learning programs (e.g. Siebel, UC Davis, etc.) where there are many different seminars and brewing discussion sessions. These are typically advertised nationally and sponsored by private institutions.

CREATIVE.

In the second type we want to allow for the creativity of home brewers. These type of "Creative" special events are usually much more local and could include, but is by no means limited to, brewer led tastings, some pub crawls, triangle tasting sessions, detailed brewing sessions (e.g. teaching decoction), special meetings (e.g. tours of a malt house), etc. These events are typically club-sponsored extracurricular activities.

These all will have the common thread of expanding judge knowledge for improving perception and feedback. It is up to the participants to notify the CEP and/or the organizer, prior to the event, to gain CEP sanctioning. The CEP will not generally seek out events to sanction, but may make inquiries on behalf of BJCP members that request it.

Organizers Comments

We started collecting these beers intending to do a Fantome tasting. We decided to expand it a bit to include some more classic examples of Saisons. As you can see, we got a little 'carried away' and also included Biere de Gardes to make it a more representative Farm House Ale session. Alright, so we had way more beers than we should have.... But better judgment prevailed (at least a little bit) and we didn't open all our examples.

Most of those attending were already very familiar with the styles and this was intended to be an exploration of the similarities and differences among the Saisons, and also a chance to compare a range of Saisons and Biere de Gardes to get a better understanding of how they are related, and also how they differ.

The order below was not the order in which we tasted the beers. We started with the homebrewed Saisons. We then moved to the Biere de Gardes, and on to some of the Fantomes. After that, we just opened them as people requested specific beers. Many of my notes are shorter than usual, especially as the session continued.

We also had a full table of interesting foods. We tried to choose items whose tastes would both complement and contrast with the beers. Some of the more successful choices included the figs, chocolates, cheeses and nuts, and the French bread. These styles go well with food as they are highly carbonated (which cleanses the palate) and have enough complexity and depth to match with a variety of dishes.

16C. Saison

Aroma: High fruitiness with low to moderate hop aroma and moderate to no herb, spice and alcohol aroma. Fruity esters dominate the aroma and are often reminiscent of citrus fruits such as oranges or lemons. A low to medium spicy or floral hop aroma is usually present. A moderate spice aroma (from actual spice additions and/or yeast-derived phenols) complements the other aromatics. When phenolics are present they tend to be peppery rather than clove-like. A low to moderate sourness or acidity may be present, but should not overwhelm other characteristics. Spice, hop and sour aromatics typically increase with the strength of the beer. Alcohols are soft, spicy and low in intensity, and should not be hot or solventy. The malt character is light. No diacetyl.

Appearance: Often a distinctive pale orange but may be golden or amber in color. There is no correlation between strength and color. Long-lasting, dense, rocky white head resulting in characteristic “Belgian lace” on the glass as it fades. Clarity is poor to good though haze is not unexpected in this type of unfiltered farmhouse beer. Effervescent.

Flavor: Combination of fruity and spicy flavors supported by a soft malt character, a low to moderate alcohol presence and tart sourness. The fruitiness is frequently citrusy (orange- or lemon-like). The addition of one or more spices serve to add complexity. Low peppery yeast-derived phenols may be present instead of or in addition to spice additions. Hop flavor is low to moderate, and is generally spicy in character. Hop bitterness may be moderate to high, but should not overwhelm fruity esters, spices, and malt. Malt character is light but provides a sufficient background for the other flavors. A low to moderate tart sourness may be present, but should not overwhelm other flavors. Spices, hop bitterness and flavor, and sourness commonly increase with the strength of the beer while sweetness decreases. No hot alcohol or solventy character. Substantial carbonation and bitterness give a dry finish with a long, bitter, sometimes spicy aftertaste. No diacetyl.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body. Alcohol level can be medium to medium-high, though the warming character is low to medium. No hot alcohol or solventy character. Very high carbonation with an effervescent quality. There is enough prickly acidity on the tongue to balance the dry finish. A low to moderate tart character may be present but should be refreshing and not to the point of puckering.

Overall Impression: A medium to strong ale with a distinctive yellow-orange color, highly carbonated, well hopped, fruity and dry with a quenching acidity.

History: A seasonal summer style produced in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium. Originally brewed at the end of the cool season to last through the warmer months before refrigeration was common. It had to be sturdy enough to last for months but not too strong to be quenching and refreshing in the summer. It is now brewed year-round in tiny, artisanal breweries whose buildings reflect their origins as farmhouses.

Comments: Varying strength examples exist (table beers of about 5% strength, typical export beers of about 6.5%, and stronger versions of 8%+). Sweetness decreases and spice, hop and sour character increases with strength. Herb and spice additions often reflect the indigenous varieties available at the brewery. High carbonation helps bring out the many flavors and to increase the perception of a dry finish. All of these beers share somewhat higher levels of acidity than other Belgian styles while the optional sour flavor is often a variable house character of a particular brewery.

Ingredients: Pilsner malt dominates the grist though a portion of Vienna and/or Munich malt contributes color and complexity. Adjuncts such as candi sugar and honey can also serve to add complexity and thin the body. Hop bitterness and flavor may be more noticeable than in many other Belgian styles. A saison is sometimes dry-hopped. Noble hops, Styrian or East Kent Goldings are commonly used. A wide variety of herbs and spices are generally used to add complexity and uniqueness in the stronger versions. Varying degrees of acidity and/or sourness can be created by the use of gypsum, acidulated malt, a sour mash or *Lactobacillus*. Hard water, common to most of Wallonia, can accentuate the bitterness and dry finish.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.048 – 1.080

IBUs: 25 – 45 FG: 1.010 – 1.016

SRM: 5 – 12 ABV: 5 – 8.5%

Commercial Examples: Saison Dupont, Foret and Moinette Blonde; Fantome Saison(s); Saison de Pipaix and La Folie; Saison Silly; Saison Regal; Saison Voisin; Lefebvre Saison 1900; Ellezelloise Saison 2000; Brooklyn Saison; Southampton Saison; New Belgium Saison; Pizza Port-Carlsbad Saison

16D. Bière de Garde

Aroma: Prominent malty sweetness, often with a complex, light to moderate toasty character. Low to moderate esters. Little to no hop aroma (may be a bit spicy). Commercial versions will often have a musty, woody, cellar-like character that is difficult to achieve in homebrew. Paler versions will still be malty but will lack richer, deeper aromatics and may have a bit more hops. No diacetyl.

Appearance: Three main variations exist (blond, amber and brown), so color can range from golden blonde to reddish-bronze to chestnut brown. Clarity is good to poor, although haze is not unexpected in this type of often unfiltered beer. Well-formed head, generally white to off-white (varies by beer color), supported by high carbonation.

Flavor: Medium to high malt flavor often with a toasty, toffee-like or caramel sweetness. Malt flavors and complexity tend to increase as beer color darkens. Low to moderate esters and alcohol flavors. Medium-low hop bitterness provides some support, but the balance is always tilted toward the malt. The finish is medium-dry and malty. Alcohol can provide some additional dryness in the finish. Low to no hop flavor, although paler versions can have slightly higher levels of spicy hop flavor (which can also come from the yeast). Smooth, well-lagered character. No diacetyl.

Mouthfeel: Medium to medium-full body, often with a smooth, silky character. Moderate to high carbonation. Moderate alcohol, but should be very smooth and never hot.

Overall Impression: A fairly strong, malty, lagered artisanal farmhouse ale.

History: Name literally means “beer which has been kept or lagered.” A traditional artisanal farmhouse ale from Northern France brewed in early spring and kept in cold cellars for consumption in warmer weather. It is now brewed year-round. Related to the Belgian Saison style, the main difference is that the Bière de Garde is rounder, richer, sweeter, malt-focused, often has a “cellar” character, and lacks the spicing and tartness of a Saison.

Comments: Three main variations are included in the style: the brown (brune), the blond (blonde), and the amber (ambrée). The darker versions will have more malt character, while the paler versions can have more hops (but still are malt-focused beers). A related style is Bière de Mars, which is brewed in March (Mars) for present use and will not age as well.

Ingredients: The “cellar” character in commercial examples is unlikely to be duplicated in homebrews as it comes from indigenous yeasts and molds. Commercial versions often have a “corked”, dry, astringent character that is often incorrectly identified as “cellar-like.” Homebrews therefore are usually cleaner. Base malts vary by beer color, but usually include pale, Vienna and Munich types. Darker versions will have richer malt complexity and sweetness from crystal-type malts. Lager or ale yeast fermented at cool ale temperatures, followed by long cold conditioning. Soft water. Floral or spicy continental hops.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.060 – 1.080

IBUs: 20 – 30 FG: 1.012 – 1.018

SRM: 6 – 19 ABV: 6 – 8%

Commercial Examples: Jenlain (brown), St. Amand (brown), Ch’Ti Brun (brown), Ch’Ti Blond (blond), La Choulette (all 3 versions), La Choulette Bière des Sans Culottes (blonde), Saint Sylvestre 3 Monts (blonde), Biere Nouvelle (brown), Castelain (blonde), Jade (amber), Brasseurs Bière de Garde (amber)

Saisons from Brasserie Fantome, Soy, Belgium

Dany Prignon started Brasserie Fantome in 1988 after years of working in the local tourism trade. Realizing that many have never experienced the traditional seasonal beers of the Belgian countryside, he started his brewery producing beers local to his region. Dany later gave up his work in the tourism trade to run his brewery full-time. Today, he produces many traditional beers with occasional unique offerings in his tiny countryside brewery, most often utilizing seasonal herbs and spices.

Fantome – 8% abv, lots of floaties, orange aroma, big moussey head, very fruity – cherry & lemony citrus flavor, maybe grains of paradise, somewhat bready malty with subdued hop presence, very complex fruity & herbal, refreshing

Brewer's Comments: our standard beer, fruity and soft

Other notes: Clouded golden, big white head. Aroma is strong fruity, pineapple, light banana, citrus with spice, slightly peppery. Body is citrusy, pineapple, orange, banana, carbonic, mildly acidic, slight acetic. Finish is fruity, some citrus, low bitterness, no hops, slightly but not overly acidic.

Fantome Dark White - 8% abv, more sour, dark amber, pronounced funkiness, pepper heat in finish, cidery, stinky cheese in nose but not in finish, very interesting but not as good as the original

Other notes: Amber in color, clear small off white head. Aroma is herbal and spicy black pepper. Body is pepper, citrusy, strong pepper, lingers long, touch of malt, medium body. Nice pepper flavor but over done. Finish is strong black pepper with hints of other peppers.

Fantome Hiver (Winter) - 8% abv, nose is full of grass with society garlic, very odd aroma (grassy???), moderate malt, dry finish, little funkiness,

Other notes: Amber, cloudy with a small cream colored head. Aroma is moderate Brettanomyces wild yeast character, leathery, aromas of peach and orange. Body is thin-to-moderate, fruitiness of peaches, moderate Brett character with leathery and mustiness, sweetness low, mild but certainly not overwhelming acidic, citric, Brett character. Finish is citric, Brett, leathery, hints of peach and orange, light Munich maltiness in the far background.

Fantome Printemps (Spring) - 8% abv, some floaties, very bright and lemony, extremely high carbonation.

Other notes: Clouded brown amber, medium tan head with decent head retention. Aroma is rustic, slightly musty, some toasted and a hint of caramel malt, very earthy, hint of smoke. Body is medium, creamy, hint of sourness, slightly smokey, interesting pepper-like character, hints of vanilla. Finish is toasty, low bitterness, malty finish, hint of caramel, moderate smokiness.

Fantome Ete (Summer) - 8% abv, orange/amber, lots of lace, very fruity nose & aroma – citrus and lemony, alcohol well integrated, refreshing & bright, some funkiness, light caramel in background, finishes dry but with a hint of sweetness

Fantome Automne (Autumn) - 8% abv, bitter choc in finish, slight heat from hot peppers, very dry, some sour notes, cocoa, firm malt base, low hop presence, some brett funk, dry finish, not as prickly from CO2 as most Fantomes though still fairly well carbonated

Other notes: Cloudy brown, deep amber with a tan-brown head. Aroma is complex fruity with light phenols and a hint of lactic and slight mustiness. Body is moderate, tart to start with light fruit then developing into a char smoke and smoked bacon, complex with a citric and lactic mild tartness. Finish is caramel malt, some smoke, on a lactic but sweet finish.

Fantome Pissenlit 2004 – 8% abv, very loud pop on opening, highly carbonated, nose very like Dupont, but softer & more floral, soft bready & caramel malt, slight lactic & brett funkiness, flavored with dandelions which gives a herbal & floral presence, light malt, lifting foam from high CO2, like champagne, lingering alcohol warmth, very dry finish, very layered & complex, pleasant oxidative notes especially in finish

Brewer's Comments: brewed with spring dandelion flowers.

Fantome Chocolat - 8% abv, less cocoa & hot pepper than Automne, though they are specified in this beer, but not in Automne, seems to be a similar recipe.

Brewer's Comments: created in conjunction with local chocolate factory DEFROIMONT, has an upfront cocoa bitterness

Fantome La Gourmande - 8% abv, green pepper, vegetal in nose & flavor, but fresh, peppery, funky

Fantome Brisse Bon-Bons - 8% abv, orange gold, cloudy, huge off white head, hoppy but not a 'ball-breaker' as in description, good malty base, very citrusy & herbal, slight sour notes, champagne carbonation, med-full body, crisp & dry finish, mild acidity

Brewer's Comments: Brewed in honor of the Burgundian Babble Belt forum members, <http://www.babblebelt.com/>.

Other comments: Amber in color, cloudy, huge white head. Aroma is very citrusy, spicy, slightly smokey. Body is medium, slight tartness, citrusy/lemony, moderate smokey character, touch of malt. Finish is citrusy/tart, smoke lingers, somewhat harsh finish.

Fantome de Noel – 10% abv

Brewer's Comments: very caramelized, uses torrefied malts, and is rather strong, it is beer for a rigorous winter.

Other comments: Clouded golden, big white head. Aroma is fruity, pineapple, light banana, citrus with spice, slightly peppery. Body is citrusy, pineapple, orange, banana, carbonic, mildly acidic, slight acetic. Finish is fruity, some citrus, low bitterness, no hops, slightly but not overly acidic.

Homebrewed Saisons

Dave & Sara's – 7% abv, Amber color, under attenuated, sweet finish, low-mod hop bitterness, low flavor, no spices, slight orange citrus sweetness.

Ron's – 6.5% abv – amazingly close to Saison Dupont!! Very light gold, Duplicated Dupont mash procedures, yeast, etc closely as possible, very bright, citrusy, med hop bitterness, dry in finish, very well done.

Jim's – 8% abv, sweet malty aroma, raiseny, vinous, malty, med hop bitterness & flavor, med sweet finish, more like a Biere de Garde.

Other

Saisons

Saison Dupont – Brasserie Dupont, Tourpes, Belgium – 6.5% abv, cloudy orange color, big head, lots of lace, dry, hoppy, citrus lower than usual in this example, hints of citrus & lemon but subdued, no spice used but peppery & spicy in aroma & flavor, hallertauer hops & pilsner malt, hops coming forward in finish.

Brewer's Comments: The Saison Dupont is a top fermentation beer with refermentation in the bottle. Since 1844, this beer has been brewed in our farm-brewery, during the winter time. During the next summer, this very thirst-quenching beer was served to the "saisoniers" which were working on the fields. Our Saison Dupont is considered as "the classic" among the Belgian season beers! Coppery blond, the finest aromas and a strong bitterness transform this beer into a thirst quencher with no equal, just the way it was created. Our selection of yeasts is the perfect base for these typical aromas and taste.

Dupont Avec Les Bons Vœux – Brasserie Dupont, Tourpes, Belgium – 9.5% abv, alcohol dominates, not as crisp, sharp or citrusy as standard, somewhat hot, phenolic – peppery phenols & alcohol & black pepper spice flavor, not as light or bright, boosted gravity with candy sugar? Tastes like it.

Brewer's Comments: This Bons Vœux is coppery blond, has very fine hop aromas and tastes bitter, fruity and mild. Our selection of yeasts, in combination with a long aging process, on a "dry hopping" base, are creating a typical and complex aroma and taste.

Saison d'Erpe Mere – Kleinbrowerij De Glazen Toren, Erpe-Mere, Belgium – 7.5% abv

Other comments: Golden, cloudy, huge off white head. Aroma is lemony, citrus, low esters, some spicy notes. Body is citrusy, thin, carbonic, slight spice. Finish is lightly acidic, smooth, low bitterness.

La Moneuse – Brasserie de Blaugies, Blaugies, Belgium – 8% abv, musty, lots of floaties

Other comments: Light amber, cloudy, huge mousse-like off white head. Aroma is moderate spicy phenolic, hint of spicy hops, moderate pale malt and a slight fruitiness. Body is spicy phenolic, slight gentle acidity, dry, light pale malt flavor but certainly not sweet, well attenuated for an 8% beer. Finish is a balanced spicy phenolic, touch of pale malt, and a slight acidity lingering.

12th Anniversary Saison – Avery Brewing, Boulder, Colorado – 7.6% abv

Brewer's comments: Full of zesty citrus and spicy notes paired with a subtle herbaceous essence. Brewed with Rocky Mountain water, malted barley, imported Belgian malted wheat, sweet orange peel, lemon peel, grains of paradise, chamomile, lavender, hops, and Belgian yeast.

Vapeur De Artan – Brasserie Vapeur, Pipaix, Belgium – 8% Alc, vintage '95, bottled in '96, moderate CO2 pop on opening, great nose but flavor past prime, Surinam cherry nose & flavor, but metallic notes come out quickly in flavor, hard to evaluate but well past prime

Saison de Pipaix - Brasserie Vapeur, Pipaix, Belgium – 6% Alc, almost totally flat, dark orange, bad flavor, perhaps a lot of spices, acetic, dumped it

Brewer's comments: Traditional Wallonian saison beer, born with the brewery in 1785. Dry, normally hopped, slightly acidic, very spicy (black pepper, ginger, sweet orange peel, curaçao, star anise, etc.).

Vapeur Cochonette - Brasserie Vapeur, Pipaix, Belgium – 9% Alc, aged character, amber/orange, mod head, lacey, oakey & tannic, malt dominates, some spice but very simple not multidimensional, disappointing

Brewer's comments: Beer very amber in color, strong, nose fruity and delicate, soft and round with the palate; slightly hopped but correctly spiced (roasted chicory, coriander, and sweet orange peel, among other ingredients)

Red Barn Saison – Lost Abbey Brewery, Port Brewing Company, San Marcos, California – 6.7%, black pepper & spices, big brett presence in aroma & flavor.

Brewer's comments: This Farmhouse Ale traces its roots to the small rustic breweries of Southern Belgium. Lightly spiced with organic ginger, orange peels,

black pepper and grains of paradise, this brew promises to quench your thirst on the hottest days.

Belgian Style Saison – Oaken Barrel Brewery, Greenwood, Indiana – oakey, somewhat tannic, cidery apple notes, highly carbonated, big head with lots of lingering lace

Biere de Gardes
La Bavaisienne – Brasserie Theillier, Bavay, France -7% abv, Amber color, big malt nose, dark fruit, oxidation (raiseny, papery), low hop flavor, med high bitterness, seems bigger in alc than listed, fruity, slightly sweet malty, short finish with lingering bitterness.

Other Comment's: Aroma is earthy, slight phenolics, low esters, some toasted malts, very little hops. Body is earthy, some toasted, slight metallic, body thin for size, very little caramel, slightly sweet in the finish. Finish is toasty, malty, low bitterness.

Cuvee de Jonquilles – Brasserie Bialleux, Gussignies, France - brewed with daffodils, 7% abv, no cage on cork but extremely highly carbonated, very saison like, light floral & lemon citrus notes, moderate hop bitterness, bright, & light, no funk though a slight skunkiness

Gavroche French Red Ale – Brasserie de St. Sylvestre, St. Sylvestre-Cappel, France – highly carbonated, med-high hop bitterness, brilliant clarity, blood metallic flavor in finish, more orange than red in color

Domaine du Page - Two Brothers Brewing, Warrenville, Illinois – 5.9% abv, malty sweetness & toasty character, but paper oxidation notes, low-med hop bitterness, low hop flavor, low carbonation, med dry finish, caramel, figs & dark fruit in aroma though less in flavor

Brewer's Comments: Domaine DuPage is a rural, northern France, amber colored ale. This well balanced beer is full and sweet up front with caramel, toasty, and fruity characters. The finish has a gentle floral and spicy hop balance that cleanses the palate

Biere de Mars – Jolly Pumpkin, Dexter, Michigan – 7% abv, oak aged, big brett presence with lots of cherry pit, somewhat sharp & tart rather than sour, moderate hop bitterness, some floaties, citrusy, almost like OJ in finish

Brewer's Comments: A sustaining beer that is brewed to comfort in the gusty ides of March and welcome in a wealth of warmer weather.

Thiriez XXtra Farmhouse Ale – Brasserie Thiriez, Esquelbecq, France – 4.5% abv

Other Comments: Golden, cloudy, small white head. Aroma is earthy, spicy, citrusy. Body is medium, slight tartness, dry, earthy, spicy, slight astringency. Finish is dry, bitter, spice lingering.