

INTRODUCTION

Hidden

adjective /'hɪdn/

“out of sight; concealed; secret.”

Belgium's beers are world-famous.

You can probably list a few off the top of your head.

There are internationally known brands such as Stella Artois, Hoegaarden, and Leffe, all distributed by the world's largest brewing company: Leuven-based Anheuser-Busch InBev.

There are the Trappist ales, produced within the walls of Cistercian monasteries under the supervision of monks. Belgium is home to five of the world's 12 Trappist breweries, including the producers of iconic brands such as Orval, Westmalle, and Chimay.

Then there are the beers produced by multi-generational family breweries which have inspired enthusiasm internationally. Think of the iconic Duvel brand from the Moortgat dynasty; the Delirium Tremens range from Brouwerij Huyghe; or the powerful Bush beers of Brasserie Dubuisson.

And there are Belgium's spontaneously fermented Lambics and blended Geuzes, produced by breweries like Brasserie Cantillon and Brouwerij 3 Fonteinen, which have, in recent decades, found new international audiences.

The celebrated beers mentioned above have made Belgian beer famous around the world. But under the hood of Belgium's beer scene, beyond the big-name brands, exists a trove of breweries producing lesser-known but distinctive, varied, and extraordinary beers.

These more unfamiliar beers offer exceptional quality, diversity, and character – so much so that they've

helped Belgium become the only country in the world whose beer culture is recognised by UNESCO as part of the “Cultural Heritage of Humanity.”

But these hidden beers are often difficult to discover.

Firstly, there's the language barrier. Belgium has three official languages – Dutch, French, and German – but the prevalence of regional Flemish, Walloon, and East Belgian dialects means that navigating the country to find the best of its more obscure beers can be frustrating, time-consuming, and often requires local guides or translators.

Then there's Belgian beer's complex and sometimes intimidating ecosystem and nomenclature. Think of the long list of associations: the Belgian Brewers Federation; the Belgian Family Brewers; HORAL; and Zythus, among others. Abbey beers are different to Trappist beers. The terms Geuze and Oude Geuze have distinct legal protections. Something as apparently simple as the Saison style might be – because of its history, variety, and evolution – more like “a story” than a coherent beer style. It can be difficult to make sense of it all.

And then finally, there's the sheer abundance. There are estimated to be no fewer than 1,500 different beer brands available in Belgium today.

Many of the most compelling of these beers are produced by passionate people who do not have the resources to invest in promoting their products, and so they often remain confined to their regions, appreciated only by niche fandoms.

Enter *Hidden Beers of Belgium*.



Thirst-quenching. Crushable. Low in alcohol
and high in drinkability. These are the *hidden beers*
that are finished before they're started.



THIRST CRUSHERS



PILS 13 DELTA

A dry, thirst-quenching lager with a balanced body, earthy hop character, and refreshing finish

Pilsner
4% ABV

DOK BREWING COMPANY
Dok-Noord 4B
9000 Ghent

IBU: 55
EBC: 6



Pale gold with
a long-lasting white head



Grainy, herbal,
and earthy



Biscuity malt with
a bitter, spicy hop finish

INGREDIENTS



Ghent municipal water



Pilsner malt



Hallertau Mittelfrüh,
Saaz, Magnum



Lager strain with a neutral
fermentation profile

DISCOVER



DOK BREWING COMPANY
Dok-Noord 4B
9000 Ghent



CAFÉ DE WELKOM
Oudburg 70a
9000 Ghent



DE HOPDUVEL
Dok-Noord 7/bus 05
9000 Ghent

ABOUT THE BREWERY

Founded: 2018
Brew capacity: 20hl
Annual production: 1,000hl

OTHER BEERS PRODUCED BY THE BREWERY

Waar is Loca: Belgian Pale Ale,
6.5% ABV

RECOMMENDED FOOD PAIRING

Gourmet hamburger from
RØK Barbecue & Burgers



AUTHENTIC

If at first you don't succeed, try and try again. Pilsner is the most popular and competitive beer segment in Belgium, but when Dimitri Messiaen couldn't find one with the character he wanted, he kept brewing until he did.

I. LOADING DOK

Dimitri Messiaen – hair styled in a greying, trendy undercut; wearing dark, thick-rimmed glasses; and showcasing a carefully kempt handlebar moustache – is a creative entrepreneur in Belgium's food and drinks scene. He co-created Pils 13, a beer brand now produced by Dok Brewing Company, which he co-owns with Janos De Baets; Koen Van Laere; and his son, Arthur Messiaen.

Messiaen has spent years working in cafés, restaurants, and drinks distributors. For nearly as long, he was on the hunt for a characterful Pilsner to sell with food. He sought a beer that wasn't a copy of mass-produced industrial lagers, many of which deploy cheap ingredients to keep costs down, shorten production times to increase volume, and subdue hop character to appeal to as wide a market as possible.

For Messiaen, Pilsner wasn't just a beer. It was a critical core offering for any café or restaurant, a statement to the consumer about the type of business you were



HARZINGTON

A citrus-forward Hazy IPA, produced in the forests of Wallonia but inspired by the brewers of Vermont

Hazy IPA
6.5% ABV

MISERY BEER CO.
Manoir de Harzé
Pouhon 22
4920 Harzé

IBU: 65
EBC: 8



Hazy orange-blonde with a fluffy white head



Pink grapefruit, orange, and melon



Citrus flavours with a firm bitterness in the finish



INGREDIENTS



Local spring water



Pilsner malt, Pale Ale malt, malted wheat, Golden Naked Oat flakes



Amarillo, Centennial



New-England-style Vermont ale yeast

DISCOVER



MISERY BEER CO.
Manoir de Harzé
Pouhon 22
4920 Harzé



L'ANNEXE
Rue Roture 13a
4020 Liège

RECOMMENDED FOOD PAIRING

Spicy Thai beef salad (laab neua)

ABOUT THE BREWERY

Founded: 2017 / Opened: 2020
Brew capacity: 10hl
Annual production: 700hl

OTHER BEERS PRODUCED BY THE BREWERY

Hopduction: DDH American Pale Ale, 6% ABV

Holy Moly: DDH American Pale Ale, 6% ABV

Concrete Jungle: DDH Double IPA, 8.5% ABV

Paradis: DDH Double IPA, 7% ABV

MISERY IN PARADISE

The owners of Misery Beer Co. have faced real hardship. But through misery, they've been inspired by their community to keep going.

I. VERMONT

In 2018, Rémy Perée and Samia Patsalides crossed into the U.S. from Québec to visit a village 60 kilometres from Vermont's biggest city, Burlington. In Stowe, they were surrounded by beautiful forests and mountain terrain. But they weren't there for the nature. They'd come for The Alchemist.

Before Canada, the Belgian couple had lived in Louvain-La-Neuve. Perée was from a family of brewing engineers; Patsalides' family had worked as academics. Together, they dreamt of escaping the misery of city life. "We were looking for a new start," says Patsalides. That new start began with a brewing course at L'Institut Brassicole du Québec in Montreal. While there, they made the trip to Vermont to visit a brewery that had pioneered a new way of producing hoppy styles.

The Alchemist used fruitier, less attenuative yeasts in its IPAs, delivering more yeast-driven aromas and flavours than both the English-style IPAs previously favoured on the East Coast and bracingly bitter West Coast IPAs. In addition, it promoted the greater use of dry-hopping, resulting in hazy, refreshing beer with bright minerality and extravagant hop character.

Before The Alchemist's owners, John and Jen Kimmich, had opened their brewery in Stowe, they ran a brewpub and then a small production brewery in Waterbury, Vermont. Hurricane Irene in August 2011 put their brewpub under several feet of water, and subsequently out of business. But the Kimmichs rebuilt, never compromising on how they wanted to brew or on their community-focused sustainability initiatives.

Inspired by the resilience of the Kimmichs and the innovation of Vermont's beer scene, Rémy Perée and Samia Patsalides returned to Belgium to continue their dream – to open their own brewery.

II. THE HOUSE FROM THE NOVEL

The Manoir de Harzé is a beautiful old Ardennes manor house that reminded Perée and Patsalides of Stephen King's novel "Misery." In King's horror story, a writer is injured following a drunken car accident during a snowstorm and is dragged to a remote country house by a deranged nurse who proceeds to torture him. "It was like a haunted house," says Patsalides of the manor. "When we visited it the first time, it was very old and creepy."

The manor had been used as a 17th-century hotel, a lab for water-dowsing scientists, and a Second World War communication centre. By the time Perée and Patsalides came across it, it had fallen into ruin.

"I always say it's the novel," says Perée of the reason they named their brewery Misery Beer Co. "But the community in Liège and here in the village, they know. It's because we are all living in the same misery."

The Liège valley experienced abrupt economic decline in the late 20th century, after its mines and steel industry were closed. Perée saw it firsthand, when Anheuser Busch-InBev bought the Piedboeuf family brewery



ADELHEID

A rich, malty Barleywine infused with oak chips that have been soaked in apple cider distillate from the Haspengouw region

Oaked Calvados Barleywine
10% ABV

BROUWERIJ DE HOPHEMEL
Bampslaan 21
3500 Hasselt

IBU: 46
EBC: 31



Dark amber with a slight haze and off-white head



Dried red fruit, green apple, vanilla, and caramel



Spicy and richly malty, with an oaky, boozy finish

INGREDIENTS



Hasselt municipal water



Pilsner malt, Pale Ale malt, light crystal malt, Special B malt, rye malt



Magnum, Citra



Abbey ale yeast



Dark candi sugar



Oak chips soaked in *appelstook* distillate (from Het Aerts Paradijs of Beringen)

DISCOVER



BROUWERIJ DE HOPHEMEL
Bampslaan 21
3500 Hasselt



BOTTLO
Schrijnwerkersstraat 21
3500 Hasselt



MARLOU DRANKEN
Heikensstraat 11
3520 Zonhoven

RECOMMENDED FOOD PAIRING

Hasseltse speculaas cookies from the bakery BAKKERSDOCHTER
Minderbroedersstraat 32
3500 Hasselt

ABOUT THE BREWERY

Founded: 2020 as cuckoo brewers; 2023 with own brewery
Blending capacity: 10hl
Annual production: 350hl

OTHER BEERS PRODUCED BY THE BREWERY

Hiëronymus: West Coast IPA, 6.5% ABV

Alexandra: DDH NE IPA, 5.8% ABV

Joannes: Hoppy Pale Ale, 5.5% ABV





IN PERSPECTIVE

Belgium's Haspengouw is an agricultural region some consider a beer wasteland. The owners of Brouwerij De HopHemel set out to prove it could be a beer heaven.

I. WASTELAND

When Steven Broekx and Geert Vandormael met in 2012, they shared the same frustration. Sitting beside each other at a beer appreciation course in Hasselt, they lamented the lack of diversity in their region's beer scene. Broekx was an architect; Vandormael a logistics officer at the East Limburg Hospital. The pair became close friends, and hatched a plan to shake things up by creating uncommon styles that showcased local ingredients and flavours.

The Haspengouw is a loamy plateau between the Meuse and Scheldt rivers whose cultural heartland is in Limburg, south of Hasselt. Back in 2012, it wasn't highly regarded for its beer scene. Its fertile soil and gently rolling slopes were better suited to growing fruit than grain, and its inhabitants were an agricultural people with classic tastes: Brouwerij Alken-Maes' Cristal Pils, Brouwerij Wilderen's Tripel Kanunnik, and Brouwerij Kerkom's Bink Blond.

At the time, the local beer scene seemed to be falling apart. Brouwerij Amburon in Tongeren had just declared bankruptcy. The longstanding local beer club, the Limburgse Biervrienden (Limburg Beer Friends), ceased its activities for good, unable to recruit new, younger members. According to a beer importer from the region, Kristof Tack, "Haspengouw is a bit of a beer wasteland." Steven Broekx and Geert Vandormael set out to prove otherwise.

II. THE DRUIVELAAR

When they began brewing in 2017, in a barn in Zepperen, Broekx and Vandormael had plenty of inspiration for beer concepts – a Pinot Noir Brut IPA, a Mirabelle Berliner Weisse, a Thai-spiced Russian Imperial Stout – but they didn't know what to call their creations. Then they noticed the *Druivelaar*: a tear-off, one-page-per-day calendar that has been ubiquitous in Flemish homes since the early 1900s.

The *Druivelaar* features different saints for each day of the year. "It's a never-ending source of names," says Broekx, who began to see it not just as a traditional calendar but as a marketing tool. Their Imperial Maple Syrup Stout became Hilarius; their Beetroot Sour IPA Gildas; their Raspberry Hibiscus Saison Rumoldus. The name of their project followed the celestial theme: They called themselves De HopHemel (The Hop Heaven).

Broekx and Vandormael started hosting intimate beer-and-food-pairing events, but it was a challenge to bring even the most basic new ideas to locals. Vandormael had to explain what an IPA was every day. Broekx had to justify why brewers worked with cans rather than bottles. But the events quickly sold out, and garnered them a reputation for interesting beers and a novel approach. They produced bigger batches at Brouwerij Den Toetèlèr in nearby Hoeselt and then at the BRAUW facility in Genk.

By 2019, following demand from cafés, restaurants, and distributors, they planned to open their own commercial brewery.

And then, coronavirus.