

San Jose Mercury News (<http://www.mercurynews.com>)

San Jose, CA | Now: 72°

(<http://www.mercurynews.com/weather>) | High: 72°

(<http://www.mercurynews.com/weather>) | Low: 49°

(<http://www.mercurynews.com/weather>) | 5-Day Forecast

EAT - FOOD, RECIPES AND RESTAURANTS (/JAY-BROOKS)



Tesla Motors to resume sales in New Jersey
(<http://www.mercurynews.com/60-second-business>)



No more trauma: A quiet revolution in math class
(http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci_27730834/hate)

(<http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-police>)

San Jose Woman jumps from I-880 overpass after standoff
(http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-police/ci_27736463/san-jose)



Los Gatos man killed in called easygoing
(http://www.mercurynews.com/courts/ci_27738301/los)

Home > Eat - Food, Recipes and Restaurants > Story

Brooks on Beer: Belgian Family Brewers

Jay R. Brooks | For the Contra Costa Times

POSTED: 03/24/2014 12:00:00 PM PDT | UPDATED: 12 MONTHS AGO

0 COMMENTS



0 0 0

MOST POPULAR (/POPULAR)

DAY (/POPULAR) HOUR (/POPULAR) NEWS (/POPULAR)

SPORTS (/POPULAR) BIZ (/POPULAR) A&E (/POPULAR)

EMAIL (/POPULAR) LIFE (/POPULAR)

1. Ask Amy: I insist they invite my difficult son along with my easy daughter (http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-living/ci_27672080/ask-amy-child-misbehaving-an-issue?source=most_viewed)
2. Katie Holmes upset with Tom Cruise (http://www.mercurynews.com/celebrities/ci_27735525/kat-holmes-upset-tom-cruise?source=most_viewed)
3. San Jose: Lion among huge taxidermy collection in womar apartment, but the owl brought her down (http://www.mercurynews.com/weird-news/ci_27732831/san-jose-woman-sentenced-after-agents-find-apartment?source=most_viewed)
4. San Jose: Woman leaps off I-880 overpass following five-hour standoff with police (http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_27736463/san-jose-police-shut-down-two-lanes-southbound?source=most_viewed)

(3 from the previous hour)

[See the full most-popular-of-the-day list \(/popular#pop-day\)](#)

San Jose Local Guide (<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/>)

Featured Businesses

Derek Deaton
(<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/los-gatos-CA/real-estate/real-estate-agents/Derek-Deaton-408-422-7408>)



(portal/article/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5818016)

Taste a lineup of Belgian beers, like this assortment from Brewery Duvel Moortgat, which is one of the 21 members of the Belgian Family Brewers alliance, and you quickly realize there is no one distinctive Belgian beer style. (Jay R. Brooks)

When you think of countries with a long brewing tradition, Belgium is unique. England is known for its ales, Germany for its lagers and the Czech Republic for pilsner. A large part of what makes Belgium such a magical place for beer is its incredible diversity. It's the antithesis of a national beer identity. So many of its brewmasters make beers that are unique to their own establishment that you cannot try one and say you've truly tried Belgian beer.

This tiny nation, which is slightly smaller than the state of Maryland, is home to about 170 breweries and beer brands, and native Belgians are justifiably proud of their beer heritage. Over the centuries, different regions within the country developed diverse types of beer, due to the water, the microclimates, local ingredients and wild yeasts. As these towns and cities grew, they became known for particular types of beer: Bruins in Oudenaarde, Seef in old Antwerp, Flanders Reds in West Flanders, and Gueuze and other Lambics in the Pajottenland region, southwest of Brussels.

Others have no geographic allegiance, but share other characteristics. There are more Trappist breweries, for example, in Belgium than any other country. They make very different beers from each other, but are known collectively as Trappist beers. Similarly, Abbey beers are made at non-Trappist monasteries or any brewery that uses a similar monastic style.

And we categorize many Belgian beers for simple expediency, dividing them by color, as in Belgian blond or dark strong ales; by strength, as in strong ales, dubbels and tripels; or as saisons and biere de gardes, which can be almost anything.

My point is that Belgian beers are more different than alike, and it takes work -- of the pleasantest sort -- to fully appreciate the wide range of possibility.

A little over a year ago, 21 brewers formed an alliance, the Belgian Family Brewers. By American standards, the bar for BFB membership is set high. Breweries must be at least 50 years old and have been family-owned throughout their existence. (The oldest modern craft breweries in this country are in their mid-30s; most are still in their teens or younger.) Collectively, the 21 Belgian breweries have been making beer for more than 3,500 years.

All the groups' original beers carry the Belgian Family Brewers label, an assurance that the beer is from a traditional, independent, family-owned Belgian brewery. They're also hoping to put a stop to non-Belgian breweries using the name "Belgian beer" on their labels.

In November, I took a tour of the BFB breweries with a group of other American journalists. It was a whirlwind tour, but because we tried beers from one brewery after the next, the vast differences between breweries and beers were even more noticeable. Most of the beers were known to me and there were many I'd sampled before, but trying them in rapid succession, at the source, was an amazing experience. It quickly became obvious that although there is a Belgian character to their beer, almost no two are alike -- and in many cases they are not even close.

Belgian beers are all about flavor. Some are malty, some hoppy and some yeasty. Some are very low-alcohol table beers, while others soar above the 10 percent mark of alcohol by volume. Some are flavored with fruit or spices. Some are sweet; others are sour. Some are crystal clear; others are impenetrably cloudy. Some have simple, clean flavors; others are indescribably complex. And most of these beers are served in special, proprietary glassware, unique to the brewery.

- AdvantaCare Health, Inc.
(<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/sunnyvale-CA/medical/medical-equipment/AdvantaCare-Health-Inc-831-887-1301>)
- Cavallino Collision Center
(<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/palo-alto-CA/auto/auto-repair-shops/Cavallino-Collision-Center-650-326-9800>)
- Bay Area Airstream
(<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/home/22917665>)
- EZ Coin-Op Laundromat
(<http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/san-jose-CA/clothing/laundry-and-dry-cleaning/EZ-Coin-Op-Laundromat-408-298-9274>)

[Find San Jose Attractions](#)

Search for a business

Add your business here +
(http://mylocal.mercurynews.com/#add_business)

So give Belgian beer a try, but don't try just one. Pick a range, invite a few friends over, pick up some Belgian chocolate and cheese, and maybe some fresh frites, or french fries, too. (The Belgians claim to have invented fries, though the French contentiously disagree.)

Need ideas? I've created a page on the Eat Drink Play blog to get you started, with a list of beers imported by the Belgian Family Brewers. Find it at blogs.mercurynews.com/eat-drink-play (<http://blogs.mercurynews.com/eat-drink-play>)/2014/03/21/bfb/ or use this shortcut: bit.ly/BFBeer

Contact Jay R. Brooks at BrooksOnBeer@gmail.com (<mailto:BrooksOnBeer@gmail.com>).

• [Article commenting rules of the road \(/opinion/cj_24039589/article-commenting-rules-road\)](http://opinion/cj_24039589/article-commenting-rules-road)

0 Comments Mercury News  Login ▾

 Recommend  Share  Sort by Newest ▾



Be the first to comment.

 Subscribe  Add Disqus to your site  Privacy

San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com>

Copyright © 2015 San Jose Mercury News [Copyright \(http://www.mercurynews.com/copyright\)](http://www.mercurynews.com/copyright)
[Privacy Policy \(http://www.mercurynews.com/portlet/layout/html/privacypolicy/privacypolicy.jsp?siteId=568\)](http://www.mercurynews.com/portlet/layout/html/privacypolicy/privacypolicy.jsp?siteId=568)
[Site Map \(http://www.mercurynews.com/site-map\)](http://www.mercurynews.com/site-map)
[MediaNews Group, Inc. \(http://www.medianewsgroup.com/consumers/Pages/OurBrands.aspx\)](http://www.medianewsgroup.com/consumers/Pages/OurBrands.aspx)