



## The New American Mavericks



As a style, “American wild ale” loosely assembles top-fermenting beers that have been purposefully introduced to fermenting agents beyond the typical assortment of beer yeasts, sometimes replacing them altogether. Strains of wild yeast such as *Brettanomyces*, along with lactic acid-producing bacteria such as *Lactobacillus* and *Pediococcus*, which are normally considered contaminants in beer- and wine-making circles, are employed to deliver unique sensory profiles by brewers who are willing to take risks as to both the unpredictability of the results and the perception of the public. Because while the difficulty of controlling the effects of these unorthodox, usually unwelcome microbes is enough of a daunting challenge, getting people to push their preconceptions aside about these strange elixirs is another matter.

“Reserve Signature Ale”, De Proef Brouwerij, Lochristi-Hijfte, Belgium .....8.5% abv  
*Matched with hcfeweizen steamed green-lipped mussels*

The origins of this new wave of American experimentation are decidedly Belgian in nature, where brewers have long toyed with the effects of exposing beers to barrels which play host to a gamut of unknown critters, so it shouldn’t be much of a surprise that the first taste on our list is a beer brewed collaboratively between a brewer in Belgium (where it was bottled) and a brewer from San Diego (who drew up the recipe). The mussels were Tomme’s idea.

“Ommegeeddon”, Brewery Ommegang, Cooperstown, NY .....8.0% abv  
*Served with Arina goat gouda and roadside apples, drizzled with truffle honey*

Not only dosed with *Brett*, but dry-hopped as well, this “funkhouse ale” has some commonalities with the above “Reserve”, as it’s also the result of an American brewery with some serious Old World ties. Ommegang’s relationship with Belgian brewing outfit Duvel-Moortgart means that the only thing they don’t import to the home of the Baseball Hall of Fame is the water. That goes for the brewing expertise as well, as the Flemish roots of this carefully contaminated doomsday ale are readily apparent behind the undeniably American veneer of aggressive dry hopping.

“Fifteen”, Avery Brewing Co., Boulder, CO .....7.7% abv  
*Served with Turkish figs under a dollop of mascarpone with orange zest*

The choice of Bruegel the Elder’s *Peasant Dance* for the label of this, the most recent anniversary ale from Colorado’s most boundary-defying brewer is an apt reflection of its spiritual ancestry. Whatever’s in that crock, it’s emboldened our rustic friend to get rather up close and personal with the local moezelzak player for a special request. It’s a near guarantee his beer was nothing if not funky.

“Interlude”, Allagash Brewing Co., Portland, ME .....9.5% abv  
*Enjoyed aside Fra’ Mani salame Nostrano and Gentile*

*C’est la goût, toujours!* The label boasts a simple credo that undermines the complex labor behind this bottle. Beginning its life as a farmhouse-style ale, it later undergoes a secondary fermentation with a house strain of *Brettanomyces*, and is then split and aged in Merlot and Syrah barrels, before being bottled with yet another conditioning yeast along with a fresh dose of sugar. “It’s the taste,” indeed.

"Temptation", Russian River Brewing Co., Santa Rosa, CA.....7.3% abv  
*Served alongside Cypress Grove's "Humboldt Fog" and toasted sour wheat bread.*

Vinnie Cilurzo, brewer for Russian River, had this to say about Temptation: "The Temptation was the first barrel beer I made though now it is getting harder and harder to get Chardonnay barrels because wineries are holding on to their barrels and converting them to red wine barrels." The beer that we're tasting today comes from the first barreling that Vinnie produced, to which the bottle log reflects, "This beer needs some age to mellow out some of the wine flavors that were contributed from the Chardonnay barrels." Fermented initially with White Labs' "Bastogne Ale" yeast and bottle conditioned with a house wine yeast. Brewed on 3/27/2004, and bottled on 5/14/2005.

"Oro de Calabaza", Jolly Pumpkin Artisan Ales, Dexter, MI.....8.0% abv  
*Paired with garden plucked Fairfax baby greens, tarragon and grapes in a simple vinaigrette*

Oak-barrel aged and bottle conditioned, the complete lineup of beers masterminded by "Captain Spooky Ron J" are as categorically odd as his moniker. The "golden melon" is listed as a strong golden ale in the Franco-Belgian tradition, but has the telltale kick of a beer that's been exposed to more than just the typical regimen of fermentation catalysts. "Strange golden ale" might be a better classification for a beer that seems to have less in common with Duvel as it does with Petrus Aged Pale. Brewed 1/15/08, put in oak barrels 1/21/08, bottled 4/23/08.

"Supplication", Russian River Brewing Co., Santa Rosa, CA.....7.0% abv  
*Served with shredded pork "carnitas" accented with a red wine vinegar and cherry gastrique*

From the bottle logs: "We primed the bottles with a little less sugar than the Temptation so they will need a little more time to carbonate, otherwise this is a brilliant beer." Considered by many to be the flagship of the current wave of American wild ale brewing, this one was fermented initially with White Labs' "Bastogne Ale" yeast and bottle conditioned with a house wine yeast. Brewed on 4/11/2004, and bottled on 5/28/2005.

"La Roja", Jolly Pumpkin Artisan Ales, Dexter, MI.....7.2% abv  
*Accompanied by a wild plum and almond tart with a pinot noir cranberry glaze*

A final Flemish slap in the face from our friends from the Great Lakes state, the only brew of their lot they admit to being sour. "If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look around you," says their state motto. Sounds familiar. Brewed 10/11/06, put in oak barrels 10/26/06, bottled 12/14/07. Just 53 barrels were produced.