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his year, 802 beers of 60 various styles from 25 countries were reviewed in the six bi-monthly tastings that comprise the 1997 World Beer Championships. At the end of the tasting year, the Top Ten Breweries of the year were named. To qualify for this honor, breweries must have submitted four or more beers for 1997 tastings. The scores for all the beers submitted are averaged and breweries with the top ten average

scores are named our Breweries of the Year. This year welcomes five new breweries and five repeating breweries from last year's list. Local availability of these beers should not be a great problem for anyone near a large metropolitan area. Any seriously minded beer shop should have some of these beers in stock, or be able to obtain them easily. If not, ask the manager to stock them.

ANDERSON VALLEY BREWING CO., CALIFORNIA.

Anderson Valley Brewing was founded in 1980, during the early days of US microbrewing. Located in Mendocino wine country a few hours north of San Francisco, the brewery features the adjoining "Buckhorn Saloon" which lies on the site that housed a bar of the same name founded in 1873. It is still a family concern, with the son of the founders Ken and Kimberly Allen working as the brew master. Having started life as a brew pub, the brewery has in recent years undergone expansion and now bottles a range of beers that rolls off the tongue of northern California beer lovers.



Five beers were tasted this year: Barney Flats Oatmeal Stout (95/100); Belks Extra Special Bitter Ale (90); Winter Solstice (90); Boont Amber Ale (89); Deep Enders Dark Porter (88).

Current production is around 8,000-10,000 barrels per year. The draft form of these beers is limited to the local northern Californian market, but out-of-state 22 oz "bombers" can be found. They are currently distributed in 21 states, but may be difficult to find in the midwest and southwest of the country. Six pack versions of Boont Amber are due to be rolled out soon.

PRIVATBRAUEREI AYINGER, GERMANY.

This is the fourth time Ayinger has been in this honorary group of breweries, and followers of the World Beer Championships will be very familiar with the ringing endorsements that are frequently handed out to Ayinger beers. In its fourth generation of family ownership under the stewardship of Franz Inselkammer, Ayinger produces classic rich Bavarian brews that are almost instantly appealing to the novice and the discerning beer drinker alike.



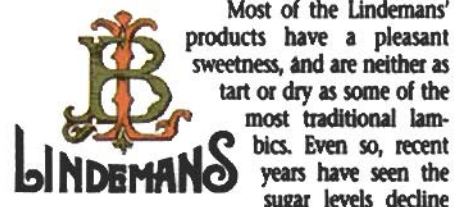
The brewery is located in the heart of Bavaria only a half hour out of Munich in the charming hamlet of Aying. Some of the structures of the associated inn and brewery date back to 1550 and a tavern is believed to have stood on the same spot as far back as 1300, which gives a sense of historical perspective to the operation. The current brewery's first batch of Ayinger beer was brewed in 1878.

Although one can locate their distinctive labels in havens of good beer from New Orleans to Chicago to New York, their true market does not extend more than 60 miles concentrically from their brewery, where 90% of Aying is consumed. The small amounts that find their way here in bottle are a commercial afterthought in deference to thirsty connoisseurs in this country. Nonetheless, it is often possible to find these brews, albeit rather expensively priced, in taverns of good taste all over the country.

Of the seven beers that we saw from Aying, none of them scored less than 90 points and six of them were World Champions in their categories: Ayinger Oktoberfest-Märzen (96/100); Ayinger Ur-Weisse (94); Altbairisch Dunkel (93); Celebrator Doppelbock (93); Jahrhundert Bier, Munich Helles category (93); Ayinger Maibock (92).

LINDEMANS, BELGIUM.

Lindemans is a significant commercial presence in the lambic brewing industry and was established in 1869. They are located in the lambic brewing region southwest of Brussels, where the airborne yeasts are favorable for the creation of such spontaneously fermented exoticae. Currently, they brew the equivalent of 2.4 million 750 ml bottles, making them a fair-sized producer of lambic beers. Still a family concern, the head brewer and proprietor is René Lindemans.



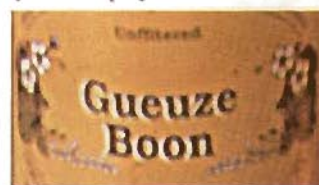
Most of the Lindemans' products have a pleasant sweetness, and are neither as tart or dry as some of the most traditional lambics. Even so, recent years have seen the sugar levels decline in the range sampled here. This sweetness is complemented by a dry, wine-like acidity and bitterness on the finish—a characteristic of fine lambics. As such, Lindemans lambics are ideal for beginners to the style or those that simply find unsweetened lambics too dry. For the dry, unfiltered, and unpasteurized lambic experience, Lindemans Cuvee René (96/100) is an authentic, tart, yeasty mouthful. Of the fruit styles, Lindemans Kriek Lambic (96) was the clear favorite, although both the Framboise (raspberry) and non-traditional Peche (peach) scored an excellent 90 points.

BROUWERIJ FRANK BOON, BELGIUM.

Although the antecedents of the lambic styles date to the middle ages—the basic process historically predates conventional hop-flavored beers—Brouwerij Frank Boon was only founded in 1977, and as such Frank Boon came into the Lambic brewing business as an outsider. As a blender of lambic beers, he could not find sufficient amounts of artisanal lambic to blend and age, so he founded his own brewery.

Enormous political debates have raged among the lambic community and its proponents and critics over what the correct style of lambic should be. While the Boon lambics are clearly artisanal products, they are not currently among the most austere examples of the style to be found, though the "Mariage Parfait" bottlings are more wine-like and complex. The latter are very rare and only imported in minuscule quantities.

His production is very small, the equivalent of 200,000 750 ml bottles across all his styles of fruit lambics, gueuze, and faro. However, one does not drink such beers in large quantities. We tasted six of his range of beers, all of which scored 90 points or better on our 100 point scale.



The Top 10 Breweries of the Year
FROM THE
1997 World Beer Championships

BY MARC DORNAN



SAMUEL SMITH, THE OLD BREWERY, ENGLAND.

Samuel Smiths should need no introduction to any regular followers of the World Beer Championships. They hail from Tadcaster, Yorkshire, in northern England and have been family owned by the Smiths since 1847. The brewery was founded in 1758. The tiny town of Tadcaster sits atop a limestone lake, the source of the much suited water for brewing. Although exact production figures are not available they have invested in impressive modern bottling facilities, and have a wide following among connoisseurs of beer all over the world.

They have become a marked success in the US, due to their inherent quality and some skillful marketing by their longtime US importer. Sam Smith's bottled beers have introduced many Americans to the taste of Yorkshire ale and to their inimitable stouts and porters. With their distinctive packaging and labels, their beers should be easy to find in any good beer specialist shop. We have found their Oatmeal Stout (99/100), Taddy Porter (92) and Imperial Stout (96) to be consistently outstanding every year. This year marked the release of a new beer, Samuel Smiths India Pale Ale (90). The revival of this traditional style that is much out of fashion in its home country, was due to the current interest in these styles in the US.

BRASSERIE D'ACHOUFFE, BELGIUM.

Although Belgium has its fair share of brewing dynasties—as one would expect of a country with such an ancient brewing heritage—the industry has received frequent infusions of new blood. Brasserie d'Achouffe, located deep in the Ardennes is, metaphorically speaking, such a microbrewery. It was founded in 1982 by two brothers-in-law who eventually gave up their day jobs so that they could devote their energies full-time to their brewing venture.

Interestingly enough, Achouffe exports 50% of its output, rather than relying heavily upon its local clientele as is the norm with micro-breweries. Current annual production is in excess of 1 million 750 ml bottles packaged with a crown and cage cork stopper. All of their beer names involve the word "Chouffe," which is the red hatted, long bearded gnome that is associated with the local area, and always depicted in varying garb on their labels.

The style of their beers is typically Wallonian, with high levels of alcohol giving them a warming character. They all are spicy, although the only spice present in some is ground coriander. We tasted four labels: N'Ice Chouffe (94/100); Chouffe Bok 6666 (92); La Chouffe (92); and McChouffe Ale (91). With the exception of the Bok, which is best drunk within a year if bottling, the others have a two year shelf life, and in the case of the N'Ice as long as five years.

BRÜWERE ERDINGER, GERMANY.

Erdinger is the world's largest producer of wheat beer, a style to which they are exclusively devoted. The brewery is located about 20 miles northeast of Munich in the town of Erding. The business has been in the same family since 1935, but it was only in 1991-92 that it moved from its historic site in the center of Erding to a modern facility on the edge of town, where its production capacity was much increased to two million hectoliters per year.

Despite its size, virtually all of its grain requirements of barley and wheat are supplied by local farmers who are contracted by the brewery. The local grains have a particularly low protein content, which certainly accounts in part for the clean, soft character that Erdinger beers exhibit.

Indeed, in wheat beer terms, Erdinger beers are in the softer, subtler mold, and less spicy than some other Bavarian competitors.

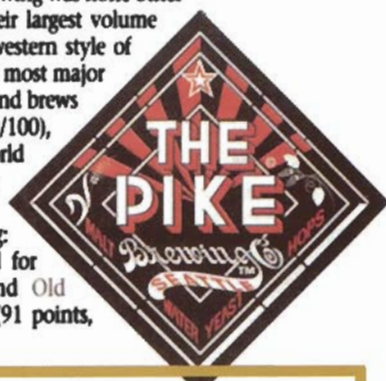
Four Erdinger beers were tasted, representing almost the entirety of their output: Erdinger Pilsantus (93/100); Erdinger Hefe Weiss (93); Erdinger Dunkel Weiss (91); and Erdinger Kristall Weiss (91). "Pilsantus" is the deep tawny colored Weizen Bock style, produced all year round and is suitable for both winter drinking and summer consumption. These beers should be widely available through various distributors.

PIKE BREWING, WASHINGTON.

Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, have long been closely associated with the microbrewing boom. Pike Brewing was founded in 1989 in the Pike Place, the gastronomic heart of Seattle. It has since moved to a location where it currently brews at a capacity of 25,000 barrel a year. The brewery has a 200 seat restaurant attached, along with a cigar lounge where one can blow smoke from "Pike" cigars, naturally.

Pike Brewing was the inspiration of the perpetually bow-tied Charlie Finkel, who is widely regarded as one the earliest advocates of real beer, back in the dark days when the beer enthusiast could only dream of the current breadth of choice and quality available now to the US consumer. Having dabbled in wine importing, and having had an involvement with one of Washington's larger wineries, he started importing classic European beers in 1979, which is still a major business activity for him.

The first beer tapped by Pike brewing was none other than Pike Pale Ale, which is still their largest volume seller and defines the Pacific Northwestern style of hoppy, assertive ales. It is available in most major markets. In addition to this, year-round brews consist of Pike Street XXXX Stout (89/100), and Pike IPA (92 points, 1997 World Champion IPA). We tasted five beers from Pike Brewing in 1997 and two seasonal specialties were outstanding: Auld Acquaintance (96 points, Tied for World Champion Winter Ale); and Old Bawdy Barley Wine, 1996 Bottling (91 points, World Champion Barley Wine).



BRASSERIE DUPONT, BELGIUM.

Saison Beers are the specialty of Brasserie Dupont. This summer quencher beer style, whose production is most closely linked to a handful of breweries in southwestern Belgium in the province of Hainaut, is not well known or appreciated even in its home country. Currently, Brasserie Dupont is in its third generation of family ownership under the stewardship of the grandson of the founder. All Dupont beers are staunchly artisanal products made, at a "farm brewery." Production is not particularly high, at well under a million 75cl bottles. They are exported in small quantities and good specialty beer shops should have some bottles on hand.

In Belgian terms, saison beers are somewhat of a hybrid, sharing some of the character of English ales as they rely on a good dose of Kentish Goldings hops for their aromatic, hoppy profiles. The Dupont brewery produces two styles of Saison under the Dupont label and Moinette label, the latter being stronger and spicier. We tasted four beers from Dupont in 1997: Dupont Les Bons Voeux, Biere sur Lie (94/100); Moinette (92); Saison Dupont "Vieille Provision" (88); Dupont Foret Organic Saison (90). The first three beers carry a I, II, and III designation on their labels, being regarded by the trinity of "bières ordinaires" (standard beers) of the saison range. Dupont Saisons are at their peak 6 months to a year after leaving the brewery.

Moinette
Belgian Ale

WILD GOOSE BREWERY, MARYLAND.

Wild Goose is the dominant microbrewery in its home state and is a noted specialist of English style ales, which exclusively make up their seven

