



November 2011

This month, we turn to the darker, richer beers that this chilly weather seems to call for. German monks used to brew strong beers to sustain them during winter fasts, and this month we feature two beers who borrow from the German weizenbock style to create new, unique, satisfying brews.

Teufelweizen

Copyright Rich Higgins, 2011.

Divine Brewing, Sonoma, California, United States

9.2% ABV \$/750 mL

The Brewers Association announced that there were 1,759 breweries in the US at the end of 2010 -- more than at any time since 1900. The pace increased in 2011, with 165 breweries opening between June 2010 and June 2011, and with a staggering 725 in planning. Whether the industry can sustain such continued growth is up for debate. One thing for sure is that we will continue to see more and more beers brewed by contract brewers, gypsy brewers, nanobrewers, picobrewers, and all the other terms du jour for today's new breweries. Used brewing equipment is becoming scarce and the waiting period for new brewing equipment is stretching into five and six months. So, for the next couple years, at least, as talented brewers strike out on their own to put their ideas into barrels, bottles, and cans, they'll often be using other breweries' equipment.

The craft brewing industry is incredibly collegial, and the sense of camaraderie comes into to play when a brewer strikes out on his or her own. The brewer frequently ends up brewing at neighboring breweries, or sometimes even at the very same brewery he or she brewed at previously, but this time for his or her own company. Divine Brewery is a one-man outfit run by well-respected Bay Area brewmaster Kevin Robinson. He was able to knock on the brewery door of his friend Tim Goeppinger of Sonoma Springs Brewing Co. -- not to borrow a cup of sugar, but to brew beer using Sonoma Springs' extra tank capacity.

Robinson has a star-studded resume. After graduating from the UC Davis Professional Brewing Program, he brewed at Lagunitas before becoming Head Brewer at Speakeasy and eventually moving on to Russian River Brewing Co. He has worked in the wine industry, too. For now, Divine Brewery is a side project for Robinson, who maintains his Head Brewer position at Russian River. No stranger to the sometimes blurry border between wine and beer, Robinson has bottled his first release, Teufelweizen, in a port-styled bottle. Divine's focus is on quality, not quantity, and only 125 cases of the 2011 Teufelweizen were produced. The name is German for "Devil's Wheat Beer," but this beer is nothing but saintly. It has grandeur and exquisiteness that make it a perfect companion to a main course of meat or game, and it should be allowed to linger to be sipped with a cheese course or a dessert of dark fruit and dark chocolate. And with a wealth of supple flavors, it works wonderfully as a night cap digestif. Kept upright in the bottle, it will age contentedly for years, its alcohol and fruit flavors mellowing into an intertwining of currants, leather, and nutmeg with whispers of molasses.

Teufelweizen's label mentions that it is 9.2% ABV and full-bodied, which are uncommon for most wheat beers, but not for the rich, German-style weizenbocks with their spice box aromas and fruit bowl flavors. They are fermented with German weissbier yeasts that leave their calling card of banana and clove notes. However, Divine has a goal of moving "past style guidelines and beyond regional boundaries," and Teufelweizen showcases distinctly Belgian abbey yeast flavors against the bready, cottony backdrop of a German strong, dark wheat beer. Belgian abbey and Trappist yeasts ferment malt sugars into alcohol, carbon dioxide, and flavors of stone fruit, dried fruit, and spice hints of pepper and cocoa. The beer's bitterness and depth of roastiness are bigger than is common in either Germany or Belgium, and there is a distinct red winey-ness that takes Teufelweizen out of any beer style altogether.

Pour Teufelweizen into a wine glass or snifter -- anything with an inwardly-tapered bowl that will focus the beer's bouquet. Aromas of plum, currant, blueberry, magic marker(!), and leather meet your nose, giving hints of the fruitiness and complexity that await your palate. Upon sipping it, the beer is a ribbon of toasty, sweet malt that is punctuated in the middle with flavors of date, currant, cranberry, anise, and a savory hint of soy sauce. The beer's body is lush and



cottony with a combination of dextrinous sugars, moussey carbonation, and a slightly roasty, tannic finish. Its layers unfold with slow sipping, so take the time to experience it at different temperatures, and pair it with rich, gamy foods. Red meat, duck, wild mushrooms, roasted garlic, earthy cheeses, fruit sauces, chutneys, compotes, and chocolate are all revelatory with this beer: they reveal secrets in the beer, and the beer reveals nuances in the food.

Dark Force

HaandBryggeriet, Drammen, Norway

Copyright Rich Higgins, 2011.

9.0% ABV \$/500 mL

The four pioneering brewers that run HaandBryggeriet have a great time brewing interesting beers. They dedicate their efforts to promoting Norway's brewing heritage, yet they completely embrace the adventurous craft brewing spirit that's more common among American craft brewers. They brew serious beers with fun personality, including Røyk Uten Ild (a smoke beer brewed to showcase "as much smoke as the Weiermann malt will produce" but "the beer is not scary but actually very nice"), Nissefar (a Christmas beer that farmers are supposed to put out for the Christmas gnomes to avoid their nasty tricks), and Dark Force (a beer which, since it's an "Imperial that really strikes back," they "reckon Sidious would love").

Dark Force is a great example of the brewery's sense of adventure and curiosity. Claiming to be a "Double Extreme Imperial Wheat Stout," it's a weizenbock -- a strong wheat beer, usually malty sweet and fermented with a yeast that leaves behind huge flavors of bananas and cloves -- re-envisioned as an imperial stout. Imperial stouts are known for their high ABVs and their big flavors of roast and coffee (to the point of being smoky). In the brewers' words, they have brewed what is "a rather unique beer as we have never before heard of a stout made as a wheat beer." Their goal was to marry the chocolatey, roasty intensity of an imperial stout with the yeasty fruitiness and light, almost leavened, breadiness of a German-style weizenbock. Wheat adds protein to breads and beers, which helps them hold on to carbonation -- as when bread leavens and when a robust carbonation forms in a beer. Also, wheat adds a hint of tartness to a beer, which adds a sensation of dryness, as it helps cut some of the lingering sweetness of a beer's residual sugars. To brew a beer with a lot of alcohol in it -- like an imperial stout -- a lot of malt goes into the recipe, which often leaves a fair amount of residual sugar in the beer. By brewing Dark Force with a malt bill that is more than 50% wheat, HaandBryggeriet "dries out" the beer, using the wheat's subtle natural acidity to temper the residual sugars.

Dark Force pours molasses-black with a head the color of burnt caramel. The head, driven up by the beer's high carbonation level, dissipates fairly quickly, hinting at a decent amount of alcohol. This is an aromatic sipping beer, so a snifter is the appropriate glassware, allowing you to get your nose into the glass to smell the beer's aromas of dark chocolate, roasted banana, dried strawberry, leather, and wintergreen. A snifter will also allow you to warm up the beer with your hand -- this beer is best drunk on the warmer side. The palate is rich with coffee, chocolate, dates, some smoke, and a hint of banana. The finish is long, roasty, and warming with alcohol.

This is a very flavorful beer. Most people would say its "go-to" food pairing is chocolate -- the brewers even recommend on their website that it "Goes very well with sweet des[s]erts and bitter chocolate or just nipping to it front of the fireplace." While it'll be darn good with flourless chocolate cake or cocoa-nib-dipped chocolate cannoli, I don't think those pairings expose enough other interesting flavors in the food or the beer; there's too much harmony without counterpoint. This beer loves toasty, roasty flavors, and with a beer this flavorful, you can always find a pairing harmony in bread, since beer and bread share the same cereal base -- think strong, nutty breads, like toasted rye or dark walnut bread. However, in topping your bread, Dark Force will overwhelm even sharp flavors like parmigiano and raw onion, so top it with lingering smoky and spicy flavors, like a smoked cheese or a rich pork spread with spices like caraway or fennel. Or, for an even less-intuitive combination, try rich shellfish -- buttery lobster, grilled octopus, or large oysters full of mineral liquor. They're perfect with giant, inky, molasses-and-ash-tray imperial stouts like Dark Force