



## Gose

January 2012

**Gosebrauerei Bayerischer Bahnhof, Leipzig, Saxony, Germany**

**4.6% ABV \$/330 mL**

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Germany is a country of lagers, right? Pilsners, bocks, and schwarzbiers, all made from water, malted barley, hops, and yeast, just as the Reinheitsgebot says? Well, there's more to it than that. First off, Germany brews plenty of ales, not just lagers. It's ale yeast that adds all the fruit and spice flavors to a hefeweizen. Lager yeast stays in the background and doesn't contribute much in the way of flavor to a beer -- certainly not the banana, bubble gum, and clove flavors that a hefeweizen's ale yeast adds. Hefeweizen brewers, despite their beers' crazy flavors, still abide by the current version of the 500-year-old Reinheitsgebot, the "German Beer Purity Law" that only allows beer to be made from water, malted grains (like barley, wheat, or rye), hops, and yeast. The Reinheitsgebot, drafted in 1516, was stricken down by the European Court of Justice in 1988 for being as protectionist, but the vast majority of Germany's brewers still proudly abide by it. However, there is a style of German beer, pre-industrial in process and tasting of time and place, that is an incredibly tasty, savory, spiced ale that flies in the face of stereotypes of German beer: gose.

Gose (pronounced GO-zuh; different from Belgium's *gueuze*, which is pronounced GEU-zuh) is a low-alcohol, low-bitterness, slightly sour, spiced beer in the vein of many northern continental European beers that are regarded as esoteric in today's pilsner-dominated beer culture. Hops are anti-bacterial, and hoppier beers more successfully fight off bacteria that can sour a beer -- the same bacteria that makes yogurt and sourdough bread, for example. Hops are finicky plants, and on the Continent they grow best in a few valleys in southern Germany and the Czech Republic. For centuries, brewers in Belgium, the Netherlands, and northern Germany had less economic access to hops, and their beer cultures appreciated and celebrated sour and earthy flavors that weren't popular among Bavarian and Bohemian drinkers. What northern Continental brewers lacked in access to hops, they made up for in access to exotic spices due to their proximity to maritime trade centers like Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Hamburg. Thus, local herbs and exotic spices found their way into northern Continental brew kettles to provide flavor and balance.

Throughout history, German Saxons have enjoyed their tart wheat beers, low enough in preservative alcohol and hops that some lactic fermentation occurs, adding delightful, refreshing tartness to the beer. This type of beer is still around today in the form of Berliner weisse (which is so tart that Berliners mix syrup into the beer) and gose (which is less tart, balanced with the addition of coriander and salt). Gose derives its name from the town where the style coalesced in the early 1700s: Goslar on the Gose River, near Leipzig. Today in Goslar and Leipzig, goses are nowhere near as popular as pilsners, but they nonetheless enjoy a place in the cultural fabric of this part of Germany. They recreate terroir, as the untreated brewing water there is naturally a bit salty and the airborne lactic-acid producing bacteria are the critters originally responsible for the acidification of the beer. I say the terroir is "recreated," however, because in contemporary German brewing culture, little is left to chance: the water can be pre-treated, so now pure salt is often added to the beer, and the lactic-acid bacteria is added to the wort in a measured, propagated culture. Today there are only three German breweries brewing gose, including Leipzig's Bayerischer Bahnhof, but some American craft brewers are trying their hand at the style.

Goses are about complex interplay of flavors and texture, and are not especially aromatic beers. Because of this, your glassware options are more numerous than my typical recommendation of an inwardly-tapering glass that focuses the nose. Pour your Gose into a more classically Germanic beer glass, like a straight-sided stange, glass mug, or an outwardly-tapering pilsner glass that lifts and cradles the beer's head. The Gose pours deep golden, slightly hazy and unkempt, with a fluffy white head. Go ahead and pour all the yeast at the bottom of the bottle into your glass -- this is not meant to be a crystal clear beer. The nose is full of mineral, salt, coriander, and honey. The taste greets with layers of straw, hay, and clean, wheaty breadiness interwoven with soft, yogurty lactic acid. True to style, there's hardly any bitterness to get in the way of nice layers of spice, acid, and malt; the lemony, husky spice of coriander mingles beautifully with the



bread of the malt (and a whiff of sulfur from the yeast). Despite the beer's moderate alcohol, this gose has a distinct maltiness and relatively full body from a combination of the high-protein wheat, some rustic, undermodified barley malts, and the mouth-filling qualities of the salt.

This is a very savory beer, almost like a soft pretzel in its breadiness, salinity, and lack of bitterness, or maybe a bit like a salty lassi, with its salty-tartness and palate fullness. It makes a great aperitif -- it practically makes you thirsty and hungry. Start a meal off with it, or drink it with some rich cheese, potato chips, or bacon-wrapped scallops to allow the beer's carbonation and salt cut through the food's richness.

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### **Pissenlit**

**Brasserie Fantôme, Soy, Luxembourg, Belgium**

**8.0% ABV \$/750 mL**

At Brasserie Fantôme, brewer-owner Dany Prignon is committed to brewing high quality, small-batch saisons -- both classic and experimental versions. Fantôme beers are known for their interesting, inimitable, and sometimes downright weird flavors, and the land, people, and history of his native Ardennes Forest region of Belgium are his muses. Prignon was a world traveler prior to settling down to open Fantôme in 1988, and he found that some of the most interesting history, characters, and beer ingredients were right there at home. The brewery's eponymous phantom is Princess Berthe, whose ghost is a local legend said to inhabit a nearby castle, and Prignon likes the name because it evokes the playfulness and superstition of legends throughout the region. He operates Brasserie Fantôme "with intention." *Se veut* (French for "is intended" or "with intent") is one of his common phrases in describing his beers' commitment to artisanship and quality and in describing the brewery's commitment to family, legacy, humor, music, passionate pursuits. Furthermore, he feels the region around Soy has been dormant for too long, so he intends his brewery for to "animate" the region and for his beers to "animate" the townsfolk.

Scanning the short list of common beer ingredients, you won't find dandelion. However, *pissenlit* is colloquial French for dandelion, and that's exactly what Prignon has added to this saison. Long defamed as a weed in America, dandelion is a respected and common ingredient in European and Asian salads, vegetable preparations, and bitter beverages. While its jagged leaves earned it the name *dents de lion* (lion teeth) in French, it also is known as *pissenlit* (piss in bed), as it historically has had medicinal use as a diuretic. My guess is that Prignon was relying more on its culinary properties than the latter ones when he decided to use it in the brewery.

When you open your bottle of Pissenlit, you'll find that you need both a bottle opener and a corkscrew. (I'm not really sure why the double closure, frankly.) The bottle pours a hazy, rosy, honey colored beer into your glass, with lively carbonation and a thin, lasting, lacy head. The aroma is floral, perfumey, and candy-like, with hints of meyer lemon, pepper, and clove, along with earthier tones of button mushrooms and dry leaves. On the palate, you're first greeted with a spritzzy splash of carbonation, like a minerally palate-cleanser to ready you for the next wave of beery intrigue. By the time the sting dissipates, the beer has seamlessly taken over your senses, and the one-two punch of flavor and aroma enrobe your palate and waft to your nose. Taut acidity and crackery malts skim the palate while aromas of parsley, roses, lemongrass, and Sprite-like "lymon" carry up to the back of your nose. The addition of dandelions (leaves? roots?) brings in soft bitterness and subtle vegetal notes and combine with the yeast to evoke another member of the aster family: chamomile. The beer is elegant and rustic at the same time, with an herbal bouquet and champagne-like austerity soaring above a foundation of loamy, vegetative notes and high-sulfate, calcareous water. Some slight astringency and carbonation sting linger after each sip, providing structure to the beer's long finish; it *se veut* to make you thirsty for another sip.

Almost a vinaigrette on its own, Pissenlit is wonderful with bright and bitter salads, intense, cooked mushroom, and, of course, a variety of cheeses. Feel free to pair it with an underdressed salad, substituting beer calories for olive oil calories. Or honor Prigny's Belgian pride by pairing it with Belgian endive leaves stacked with roasted beets, sauteed mushrooms, and a runny cow's-milk cheese.