



March 2012

This month's selections are a testament to the craft beer's elegance and artistry that ignores national borders. Upright's Five shows off American-grown hops with delicate Belgian balance. Spike & Jérôme's Cuvée, a collaboration between BFM and Terrapin, explores an intersection of beery technique -- American, European, sour, and spirits-barrel-aging -- all in one elegant, artful beer. Enjoy!

Cheers,

Rich Higgins, Master Cicerone

Five

Upright Brewing Company, Portland, Oregon, USA

5.5% ABV \$/750 mL

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Upright Brewing Co. in North Portland is best known in the Bay Area for its numbered series of Belgian-style farmhouse ales: Four, Five, Six, and Seven. They increase in intensity and alcohol content as the numbers increase. In Five, Brewer Alex Ganum has brewed a farmhouse pale ale; that is, a pale ale with pronounced hoppiness balanced by malt and fermented with a Belgian saison yeast that lends peppery, lemony, and subtly earthy notes to the beer. Ganum uses Oregon-grown Willamette, Liberty, and Perle hops in this beer -- hardly the chosen, glamor hops used in most bitter beers these days. These are not the noble hops of Germany, nor the "C" hops that bitter so many American pale ales (Cascade, Chinook, Columbus, and Centennial). Ganum's selection are hops that are often used for their aromatic finesse, but they can lend a coarse, almost soapy bitterness in Belgian-style if not used deftly. Their deft use is the mark of a well-balanced, well-bittered Belgian beer, since Belgium has never been blessed with (or had its hand forced by, if you prefer) a bounty of its own expressive bittering hops. Many Belgian brewers rely on German and Czech hops for bittering, but others use transplanted varieties grown in Belgium (including Nugget, Northern Brewer, and Perle), understanding the role that their yeast, water chemistry, and carbonation can play in lending grace and nuance to the hops in the finished beer. In Five, Ganum tempers any coarseness of these hops, and instead plays up their subtle floral and parsley notes to add a leanness to the yeast's notes of ripe peach, champagne mango, and pumpkin.

Amidst this interplay of fruit, herbs, bitterness, and leanness is a carbonation that won't be ignored. Carbonation is carbon dioxide gas that is literally dissolved in a beer and that bubbles out of solution and floats to the top of your glass and bursts on your tongue when you drink it. Carbonation is a powerful element of a beer: it can add body to a beer, letting it sparkle and froth on your tongue; it can volatilize and lift beer's flavors to the tastebuds in the back of your nose and throat; it can tame the sweetness of a beer and increase the perception of bitterness; and it can actually assert itself by tasting mineral, bitter, and/or acidic in various quantities. It's an incredibly important consideration for the drinker in assessing the interaction of flavors in a beer, and an incredibly useful tool for the brewer in helping to guide the intended experience of the drinker.

For a highly carbonated beer such as Five, a glass of pretty much any shape will do it justice, since there's no need to capture or concentrate aromas; Five provides its own constantly effervescing bouquet. (In fact, feel free to use an outwardly tapering glass, like a pilsner, which will help support a lasting head.) Five pours very foamy and lively, an orange-honey hue underneath a cap of thick, beady white foam. Drinking it is the tale of two beers -- enjoy its bitter minerality at first, then, after it calms down and warms a bit, its delicate floralness and fruitiness emerge. This two stage experience is the result of the interplay of the complex ale yeast, high carbonation, and high bitterness. Because it's in a large bottle, you're able to freshen your palate and become thirsty from its angular, steely aperitif phase -- mineral with a woody-graphite note, cleansing with bubbles, bitter from the carbonation and the sharp hops -- almost stoic compared to the luscious, approachable beer that awaits. After a couple minutes of warming and degassing in your glass, Five lets its hair down and slips into something a bit more comfortable. The malts



transition from crackery into caramelly, and the hops are tamed by the fruity Belgian yeast's hints of lemon, apricot, peach, and mango. The final movement of the suite is a marriage of hops and minerality that lingers as lavender, heather, and wool.

Five's a great beer with a variety of foods. Its bitterness and carbonation are tools to parry the fattiness of salumi, cheeses, and olive oil. Salty foods will tease out the beer's hints of herby, fruity intrigue, and it's a flavorful partner with raw vegetables. This beer is perfect with salt & vinegar potato chips, raw vegetables dipped in bagna cauda, or a meaty, olive-y muffaletta sandwich.

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Spike & Jérôme's Collaboration Ale/Cuvée Délirante
Brasserie des Franches-Montagnes, Saingelégier, Jura, Switzerland
10.0% ABV \$/330 mL

Cuvée Délirante is an exciting beer, both in flavor and in spirit, and is intriguing on several levels. It is a collaboration brew, a refreshing and artistically interesting perk of the craft brewing industry. Most craft brewers join the industry because they love drinking great beer, and it's other breweries' beer that they grow up drinking and are inspired by. Sort of like how a movie star is excited to work with another movie star, brewers have the same excitement about brewing with their colleagues. So far, most collaboration brews have been among American brewers; Cuvée Délirante is a trans-Atlantic collaboration -- not the first, but definitely one that explores and redefines the boundaries of Old World and New World beer styles.

Terrapin Brewing Co. Brewmaster Brian "Spike" Buckowski traveled to Switzerland to brew a collaboration with Jérôme Rebetez, the Brewmaster of renegade Brasserie des Franches-Montagnes in the Jura region. Both brewers enjoy brewing flavorful beers with high ABVs, and Rebetez in particular is known for his robust barrel aged and sour ales. The two collaborated to brew a "Barley Ryne" -- a barleywine aged in used rum barrels. The result is beer that is supremely malty, as a barleywine should be, but whose spirit is transformed by its time in the barrels. The wood previously housed rum, and undoubtedly some rum soaked into the wood and went on to flavor the beer. This rummy, woody flavor marries with the toasty, caramelly flavors of the malt and builds up spice notes of cinnamon, clove, and coconut. As is common with barrel-aged beers, a tart note has developed from souring bacteria (the same ones that make sourdough, yogurt, and pickles) that have taken up residence in the wood and the beer. Furthermore, beer evaporates out of the barrel, and this slight concentration of the beer, combined with access to oxygen, has developed subtle nutty, honey, and sherry-like flavors in the beer.

As for the name, Collaboration Ale is bit prosaic, but leave it to French (the language of the Swiss Jura) to be able to capture its essence in words: "Cuvée Délirante," which translates to "Delusional Work" or "Delusional Blend." This is certainly a unique, contemporary beer -- I doubt pirates of old sang about a happy marriage of English-style barleywine, an American-style alcohol level, and Swiss souring bacteria in a barrel of rum. But whether it's delusional because of its pioneering status or because the two brewers were delusional from too much barrel-tasting when they came up with the recipe, I hope you'll be delusional with pleasure upon drinking it.

Pour your Cuvée Délirante into a snifter, which will focus the beer's nose and allow your hand to warm it to its best drinking temperature of around 60-65 degrees -- just cooler than room temperature. It pours Tootsie Roll brown, and despite its minimal carbonation, tons of aroma emanates from the beer. The bouquet -- cinnamon, clove, rum, wood, leather, and sourness (is that dill pickle in there?) -- builds in the glass and its savory spice begs you to take a sip. The flavor is endless, with hints of dark rum, fino sherry, clove, red apple, blackberry, leather, and salt. At first, the silky, uncarbonated mouthfeel of caramels enrobes your palate, but through it all acidity shines brightly and refreshes you for the next sip. The finish is reminiscent of an amaro liqueur, with a hoppy bitterness, alcoholic heat, and lingering cinnamon and black pepper spice.

This beer makes a great nightcap on its own, but it also has some great food pairing possibilities. The classic squash ravioli with sage and brown butter would be heavenly, as would peking duck, pizza with sautéed onions, prosciutto, and sour cream, or a boozy tiramisu.