



March 2013

This month we're on to two lively, aromatic beers to ring in the springtime. Morpho is a globetrotting herbal beer whose aroma is guided by tropical flowers, Turkish bay leaves, and South American *mate*; Tank 7 is a farmhouse-style ale whose bouquet is all Belgian yeast and American hops. Make sure to enjoy these beers with some fresh spring produce!

Cheers!

Rich Higgins, Master Cicerone

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Morpho

MateVeza, San Francisco, California, USA

6.0% ABV \$/22 oz

MateVeza owner and brewmaster Jim Woods is passionate about four things: Argentine culture, drinking craft beer, brewing organic craft beer, and Elvis Presley paintings. (He may have a few other interests, as well, but these are good for starters.) The story goes that one afternoon, Woods was drinking a mug of *yerba mate* tea, and had a hankering for a fine pale ale. Upon cracking a bottle open, flavors of the citrusy, hoppy beer and the bitter, herbal tea melded in his mouth and he knew he had to brew a beer with *mate* in it. After homebrewing and tinkering with recipes and *mate* addition techniques, he was ready to scale up production and go pro. In 2006, he opened MateVeza -- a combination of the words *mate* and *cerveza* -- earned USDA organic certification, and began partner brewing at Mendocino Brewing Company in Ukiah, California.

Yerba mate, pronounced "YER-ba MAH-tay," a shrub native to South America, contains caffeine and can be steeped in water to make tea. A hearty shrub, *mate's* thick leaves and twigs contain a host of tannins which taste bitter and can feel drying and astringent on the palate; coupled with the alkaline bitterness of caffeine, *mate* is a bold addition to a beer. Woods uses it deftly in MateVeza's beers, relying on it to add bitterness, tannic structure, and a drying, lean finish. The *mate* also adds subtle flavors of green tea, tobacco, and leafy earthiness. It's a savory and welcome partner that pulls its own weight in creating delicious beer.

After starting with two classic styles -- American IPA and schwarzbier -- Mateveza's third beer was an out-of-the-box creation. Woods collaborated on it with his friends Justin and Tyler Catalana of Mill Valley Beerworks, creating Morpho, an herbal beer brewed with hibiscus blossoms, Turkish bay leaves, and *yerba mate*. It's named after the iridescent blue butterfly common in Argentina that Woods sees at the *mate* plantations he visits. Unlike MateVeza's other two beers, which are bittered with both hops and *mate*, Morpho is made without hops and its delicate bitterness comes solely from *mate* added to the mash. (Actually, hops are added to Morpho so as to keep any regulators fully satisfied that it is a beer brewed with malt and hops, but the hops are added to the grain bed at the end of the lauter process -- akin to salting the pasta water after you've cooked your noodles.) The result is a bright pink beer that is lively and delicate, a delicious and striking glassful to start off a celebration or provide a fruity, herbal partner for cheeses, salads, and fish.

And the Elvis connection? After five and a half years of being a location-less brewery, last spring Woods opened up Cervecería de MateVeza in San Francisco. It's a combination bottle shop and tasting room that sells Argentine-style empanadas and small-batch experimental beers brewed on-site. (As of this writing, Cervecería is currently pouring spot-on taste-alikes of five different Girl Scout cookies.) And up on the wall above the beer coolers hang two large '70s-era paintings of Elvis, mid-croon, in all his high-collared, sideburned resplendence. That microphone in his hand might as well be a beer, and as you drink your Morpho, Samoa, or Thin Mint, it's nice to know The King is smiling down upon it all.

Morpho rests regally in the glass like a flawless, fuchsia-colored gem. Pearls of carbonation lazily ascend to add to the fine, white head. The bouquet is a walk through a meadow in springtime, with herby wildflowers in bloom and damp earth beneath. Bay's heady perfume and hibiscus's Hawaiian Punch and cherry cola notes sing forth, but the beer stays grounded by a woody, mushroomy undercurrent. Up front, the hibiscus bats its eyelashes at a little sourness, while the *mate* provides a leafy lushness in the mid-palate and a softly astringent finish. At no



point is the beer lacking for bitterness, despite the absence of hops, and even if it doesn't look like your average beer, it offers a gentle corny-grain flavor to remind you that it is still a beer -- albeit one that's on vacation in a far off Xanadu. Morpho is delicious with veggies, goat cheese, eggs, and muffins, and with the caffeine of half a cup of coffee per 12 oz. of beer, it's a perfect brunch beer.

Tank 7

Boulevard Brewing Company, Kansas City, Missouri, USA *Copyright Rich Higgins, 2013.*

8.5% ABV \$/750 ml

Boulevard Brewing Company is an anchor of the regional brewing scene in the Midwest. Located in Kansas City on the border of Missouri and Kansas, it's a point of cultural pride for that city and region, brewing great craft beer since 1989 (which makes it a granddaddy in the young craft beer movement). It's now the largest craft brewery in the Midwest, and its flagship Unfiltered Wheat Beer is the Midwest's best-selling craft beer.

Owner and founder John McDonald has instilled Boulevard with a commitment to regional brewing, believing that the brewery's first responsibility is to its locals and that culture suffers when the country is blanketed with all the same beer. While it is now tapping into some farther-flung markets like the Bay Area, its flagships are reserved for its locals, and it's only the specialty beers of its Smokestack Series that are the emissaries. The Series' name is inspired by the brick smokestack that stands sentry over the brewery, original to the building that Boulevard renovated in 1989. Boulevard is committed to sustainability, and with a living roof, a no-landfill policy, and investment in recycling and energy efficiency, that smokestack is a reminder of the City's industrial past rather than a facilitation of current emissions.

Six years ago, the Smokestack Series debuted with a saison that lagged in popularity behind beers like Long Strange Tripel and Double-Wide IPA. The brewery periodically brewed a stronger saison conditioned with earthy Brettanomyces yeast, which quickly became the brewery's most sought-after and culty offering. In 2009, while a batch of the Saison-Brett was fermenting in fateful Fermentation Vessel #7, but before the Brettanomyces yeast had been added, some employees got to tasting it, and tasting it, and tasting it . . . and before long that amazing beer in Tank 7 was destined to replace the slow-selling saison. Since then, the success of Tank 7 Farmhouse Ale has outpaced all of the other Smokestack beers. (The brewery still produces its Saison-Brett, too, but you'll have to head to KC to pick up a bottle.)

Saisons and other farmhouse beers were developed in Belgium and France to nourish and refresh farm laborers. In the 1700s and 1800s, these beers were 2-4% abv so that the farmhands could stay on task after a mug-full, rather than needing a nap out in the field. Nowadays, sanitary water sources allow laborers to rehydrate with H₂O, and beers like saisons have experienced considerable upward "alcohol creep," but the easy-drinking soul of Tank 7 is still there. It may be 8.5% abv, but it drinks like a 5%-abv beer, and that's in part because it's brewed with flaked corn as an adjunct. Adjuncts like corn, rice, and sugar can be added to beer as a source of low-protein, highly fermentable carbohydrates, fermenting into alcohol without adding much body or flavor to a beer. Whether you're the computers at Coors' brewing 4%-abv light lager, the monks at St. Sixtus brewing 12%-abv Westvleteren 12, or the brewers at Boulevard brewing Tank 7, adjuncts are reliable ways of making a beer more drinkable (the Belgians use the term "digestible"). Tank 7 is also very highly carbonated, and as the bubbles pop in your glass and on your taste buds, they bring out all the citrusy, fruity aromas of the saison yeast and the Amarillo and Citra hops.

Tank 7 is a feisty pour, its cloudy golden color topped by an untamable, rocky, white head. The beer bursts with aromas of pineapple, lemon, guava, and earthy heather. Vivacious, Champagne-like carbonation makes the beer dance on the tongue, offering hints of lemon curd, grapefruit marmalade, cotton candy, and savory bitterness. Tank 7 is an amiable beer, an adventure in the glass while beckoning almost any food to share in the fun. It's a perfect partner with beer board staples like cheese, bread, and sausage, but feel free to bring in wine foes like asparagus, artichoke, and tomato. Antipasti like artichoke hearts, marinated asparagus, sun-dried tomatoes, pickled mushrooms, and bruschetta with anchovies and roasted garlic will hop in this beer's convertible and never look back. Sorry, Baby, but, Tank 7 puts wine in the corner.