

July 13, 2016

## Romancing the Foam No. 97

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I am at Alex's baseball game and things aren't going well. He is pitching. It's 1:30, he hasn't eaten and he wants to be somewhere else. I yell at him that if he gets these guys out I will buy him a buttermilk chicken sandwich at Lake and Irving. He is striking kids out but the catcher keeps dropping the third strike and the first baseman, when he is paying attention, does all he can to avoid being hit by the ball. This makes Alex mad. When he is happy his fastball is in the 50 mile per hour range which is fairly normal for a 12 year old but the madder he gets the harder he throws. He is really mad firing bullets somewhere well north of 60 miles per hour which terrifies most batters but the catcher can't handle them.

While I am feeling sorry for Alex, a small boy – 4 maybe 5 – precocious and very bright, strikes up a conversation. I ask: "what is your name?"

"Gunnar"

"What a wonderful name." I notice a cast on his arm: "how did you hurt your arm?"

"I jumped off a fence"

"What were you thinking?"

"I wanted to fly"

"How did that work out for you?"

"I broke my arm."

"You should learn to roll when you fall."

"Will that help me fly?"

"Probably not but it will hurt less if you don't."

"I know how to roll on the ground."

"Great but start out small – like on the ground and ask your dad first."

"OK"

And off he went.

Jumping off a fence to see if you can fly is a lot like starting a brewery or like trying to brew wild and funky Belgian style ales. Nobody knows this better than Borealis Fermentary's founder, head brewer and owner, Ken Thiemann. He brewed for over 22 years and spent time working in the Netherlands and learning all he could about brewing Belgian beer before buying 20 acres of land north of Knife River on Lake Superior's north shore. He built his wood frame and straw bale brewery himself and the experience included a fall off the 28 foot roof. Fortunately, Thiemann and his dream survived the fall. A few years ago most American made Belgian style beers were not very "Belgian." Thiemann captures the Belgian character in his beer. Right now I am drinking Vinegoblin named in honor of his cat that used to



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play in the hop vines around the brewery. Vinegoblin is a 6.7% alcohol by volume (abv) Belgian Pale Ale bottled January 15<sup>th</sup>. The glass fills bright tea gold under a moderately persistent white mousse-like foam cap. Light grain, over ripe fruit, traces of pear and banana aromas rise from the glass. A barrage of fruit flavors leads the attack on the palate with a light dose of funky over ripe fruit. Orange, pear and banana blend with light caramel notes balanced by a moderate hop accent. Thiemann captures the creamy Belgian texture. Vinegoblin has a medium to medium light body and medium high very fine soft carbonation. This is a full flavored yet subtle and elegant beer. To fully appreciate Vinegoblin's rich flavors, take the beer out of the fridge 15 minutes before you drink it so it can warm up a little. Some people do not appreciate this beer's light touch of funk and rate it lower. I do and rate it 85. Try this with some Edam cheese or nice aged Gouda with a little crystalline crunch. Borealis Fermentary beers are available in Duluth and the Twin Cities area.



Patrick Rue and his family started The Bruery in Orange County, California in 2008 and earned a reputation for brewing innovative, high quality, Belgian style ales. They are particularly adept at barrel aging. Their reputation went nationwide long before their beer did. Originally I had to order their beer from a California beer store then about 3 years ago they began distributing their beer in Wisconsin. Within the past few months their beer has started appearing on Minnesota liquor store shelves. The Bruery Jardinier is a Belgian Style Pale Ale (4.5% abv.) perfect for sitting in the garden reading a book with, eating a salad or some mussels and frites on the deck or washing down a roast over dinner. A hazy straw gold pour produces a 2.5" cream colored foam collar that takes a good 5 minutes to reduce to a thick, half inch film that produces Belgian window lace. Traces of peach, light funk, faint citrus, herbal and a faint suggestion of tomato fill the nose. The flavors include stone fruit, herbs, some earthiness, bread crumb in the background and moderate hop bitterness in the finish. The yeast driven fruit flavors

are moderately high, the hop bitterness and flavors are medium. It has pleasant moderate to moderately low level of tartness with more orange flavors coming forward as the beer warms. Overall balance leans towards the yeast. Jardinier is very effervescent with above average carbonation that gives a little tingle and a moderate wild yeast texture. The body is just a shade below medium. This is a very refreshing, full flavored beer with a delightful texture. I rate it 86. The Bruery's beers are available on the east and west coasts, Colorado, Texas and Louisiana and the Midwest.



Evil Twin's Jeppe Jarnit-Bergsø jumps off the fence and soars like an eagle, capturing the essence of drinking coffee while eating a glazed doughnut, with his Imperial Doughnut Break, an imperial American porter actually brewed with an insane amount of glazed doughnuts. On the other hand, from my point of view, the Bruery's Or Xata, (7.1% abv) an American Blonde Ale brewed with cinnamon, rice and fresh vanilla beans that attempts to capture the essence of Horchata – a traditional sweet Spanish and Latin American sweet milky drink, crashes to the ground with a resounding thud. Coming out of the bottle into the glass it looks decent, pouring hazy gold with a moderately persistent cream colored foam cap perched over a continual stream of rising bubbles. As I move the glass towards my nose, I grow nervous because the beer smells like a Cinnabon with cinnamon, sweet sugars, bread dough, yeast and big vanilla. The beer begins its nosedive about 2 seconds into the palate when a refreshing tartness gives way to an overly sweet Cinnabon flavor so intense and cloying that it

forces the realization that this is the first beer from this brewery that I am unable to finish. Years ago as a grad student while in Mexico, some Mexican friends were mixing warm Kahlua with warm Pet milk. It was abominably cloying. To me, Or Xata has that same cloying character. It has medium to medium low body, medium high carbonation and a little wild yeast character in the background. This is a very well made but poorly composed beer that is a complete drain pour. While this gets an 88 on Beeradvocate.com, I give it a 54.2.

Opening a brewery specializing in tart, barrel aged beer is another jump off the fence to see if you can fly moment. Owner Art Lawrence and brewmaster Ron Gansberg did just that, opening Cascade Brewing in 1998 in Portland Oregon. They have stuffed their barrel house with 1,500 French oak, Kentucky Bourbon and Northwest wine barrels along with 9 foudres (really big aging barrels). Cascade Brewing/Raccoon Lodge & Brewpub Figaro is aged in oak chardonnay barrels for up to 18 months with figs and lemon peel. At bottling they blend the fruited beer with a small portion of sour blond to get the



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right flavor profile. The bottle I am drinking is their 2014 project with 9.1% abv. A hazy peach pour fills the glass with a ½" white foam cap with a superfine bead as a mild, lemony sour funk with faint fig aromas and a touch of vanilla rises from the glass. On the tongue, initial lemony tart flavors recede slightly as fig enters mid-palate with touches of vanilla and a light sweetness in the background with chardonnay notes. It has layered and complex fruit flavors. The above average fine carbonation gives it a very airy and mousse-like feel with a moderate carbonic bite that is a surefire palate cleanser. It has a medium to medium low body. This is an interesting, complex and very refined drink. I rate it 91 and would drink it with salads, lemon meringue pie, fish or chicken paella. Despite the beer's elegance, I would like to try this with fish and chips. The lemony elements would take the place of the vinegar often served with the fish and the carbonation would cut through the fat and cleanse the palate. Beer from Cascade Brewing is available on the West Coast, Minnesota, Illinois, and in limited areas along the East Coast.



These beers remind me a little of Gunnar, brewed with innovation, risk and a sense of adventure. They are difficult and expensive to brew and not to everyone's taste or idea of what beer should be like, so building a brewery to brew them is a little like jumping off a fence to see if you can fly. Sometimes it rolls and sometimes you land with a painful thud. Three of these beers fly very well, while the fourth, nosedives, leaving a crater in my stomach.

Alex's team loses but I take him to Lake and Irving anyway. He orders Furikake Chicken and the Buttermilk Chicken sandwich with fries. I order a Surly Todd the Axeman. We are both happy.