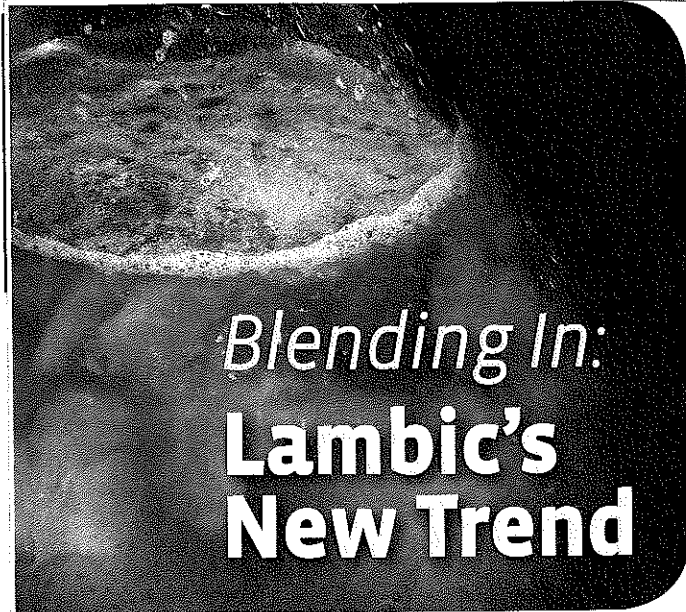


WHAT'S BREWING

Gregg Glaser
NEWS EDITOR



Blending In: Lambic's New Trend

August 2008: One Friday afternoon, a German is staking out the old Bellevue Brewery in Molenbeek, Belgium. He's already been to the main brewery in Zuun, but found that only in Molenbeek can he get what he needs. The gate opens to allow a car to exit, and he slips in; an employee makes a brief call and then uncorks a cask, filling the German's 10-liter can to the brim with Bellevue's oude lambic. He returns to his base in Cologne, and on the eighth of September, does what no professional brewery has ever done: create an Oude Geuze with lambic from all 12 operating lambic brewers. He names it Cuvee Pajottenland and will dispense it to friends and interested strangers at beer festivals.

In actuality it's not as mysterious as all that; Ulrich ("Uli," aka "Hertie," which accounts for the "h" on his labels) Kremer is more about enthusiasm and friendly curiosity than subterfuge. He's a leader among a handful of hobbyists blending lambics at home, often indulging in fascinating unconventional combinations: lambic dry-hopped with Nelson Sauvin; Drie Fonteinen Kriek blended together with Westvleteren 8; fruit

was coloring outside the lines, blending some Cantillon left over from a blending session with a nonlambic favorite, Orval.

Matt Rooney, a Californian, also came to lambic blending from outside the world of beer. A former sommelier, he stumbled upon Russian River Brewing's sour and *Brettanomyces*-influenced beers because a winemaker friend sold used barrels to the brewery. In 2007 Rooney moved to Antwerp, where he developed an appreciation for Belgian sour beers and began making his own blends. "Lambic is a spontaneous product, so they are all very unique," Rooney says. "I think one of the hardest parts of being a successful blender is figuring out what strengths and benefits certain producers' products can contribute to a blend. Certain producers are more acidic than others, other have more of a lactic taste to them, some more acetone.

"There are two major aspects when blending that play an important role in the finished product. The first and most important is the blend itself. You need to find whatever balance you're looking for. The second part is how much old lambic you're using compared to how much young

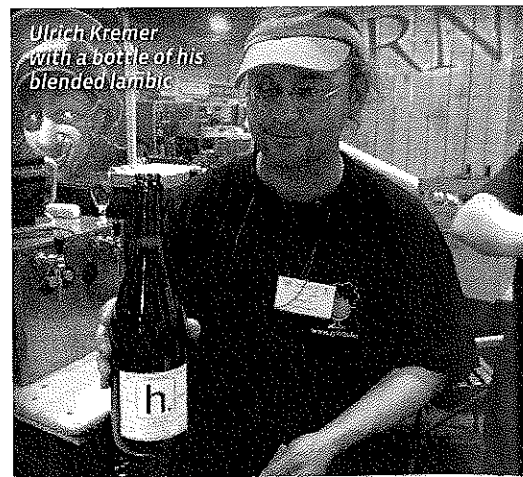
lambic with Schlenkerla smoked malt, dry hops and Rochefort 8.

Kremer says his taste for acid-driven beers was primed by drinking German Apfelwein (German cider); he read about lambics in one of Michael Jackson's books, and, after a visit to Cantillon Brewery, became a full-fledged convert. In spring of 2007 he began making his own blends, at first using lambics—and plenty of advice—from Drie Fonteinen, Girardin, Oud Beersel and Hanssens. Each month he focused on a particular brewer's lambic to see what it brought to the blend, and by January 2008 he

lambic. Lambic beers get their secondary fermentation in the bottle when the young lambic, which still has live yeast, eats the sugars. The byproduct is carbonation. If you use too much young lambic, your beer will be overcarbonated, or your bottles can explode."

Blends can go awry in other ways: "I've had more unsuccessful blends than successful ones," Rooney says, and even Kremer says he was plagued by poor bottle fermentations in 2010.

Locals like Thomas de Smet and Stijn Van De Velde, have also gotten turned out to home-blending. "I actually just recently started blending by myself, mostly because of the endless enthusiasm of my German friend Uli," de Smet says. "The way he always describes his wonderful blending of lambics with other lambics, other beers like Orval and Westvleteren, but also with fruits and so forth. The beautiful thing about living near to Brussels is that we can just go and get lambic and wort straight from the breweries and start our own blends with them." Van de Velde recently created a kriek with



wild cherries from his own backyard, and de Smet has a strawberry lambic in the works—a Hanssens clone, he says, made without any Hanssens lambic—and both he and Van De Velde plan to experiment



2012 Beerdrinker of the Year

J Wilson, a Prescott, IA, writer, homebrewer, beer judge and beer blogger, is Wynkoop Brewing's 2012 Beerdrinker of the Year. He won the title on Feb. 25 at the Beerdrinker of the Year National Finals held at Wynkoop Brewing in Denver, CO. Wilson said he was helped by a 2011 beer and water fast.

Diary of a Part-Time Monk, and landed him national attention.

At the finals, Wilson discussed his philosophy for a life rich with beer. "Having a balance is all important," he said. "I love beer, but I also truly love my family, and in the grand scheme of things, that's far more important."

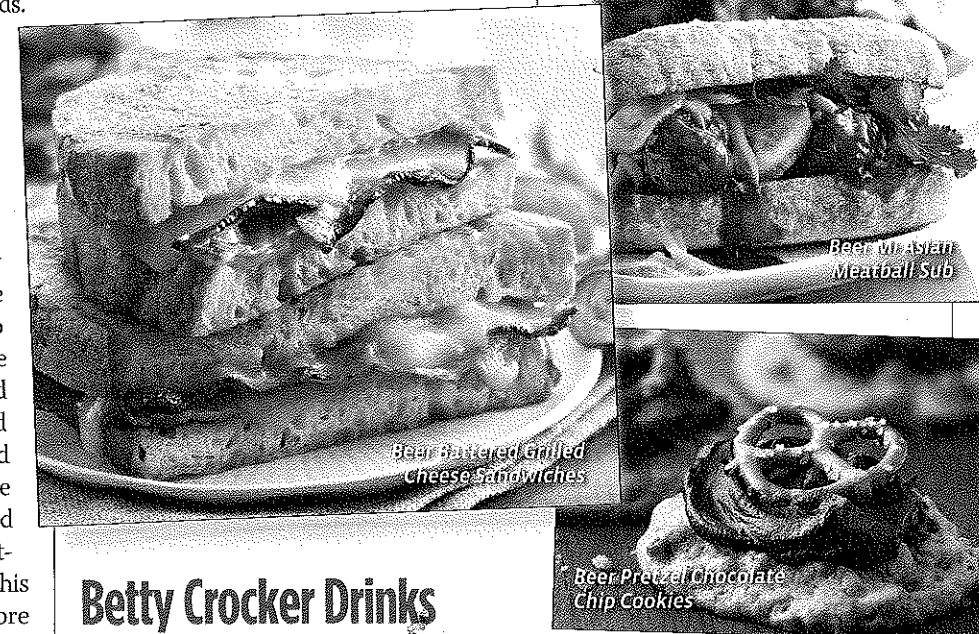
Last year, Wilson fasted for 46 days on just water and a doppelbock he brewed at Rock Bottom Brewery & Restaurant in West Des Moines, IA. His experience became a book,

Wilson wins free beer for life at Wynkoop Brewing, \$250 worth of beer at his local beer bar (El Bait Shop in Des Moines, IA) and clothing proclaiming him the 2012 Beerdrinker of the Year. He'll also have his name engraved on Wynkoop's Beerdrinker of the Year trophy, and he'll brew a special batch of beer with Wynkoop Head Brewer Andy Brown that will be served at next year's Beerdrinker of the Year event.

The finalists in the competition included Warren Monteiro, a New York City freelance writer, beer traveler, homebrewer and beer journalist; and Greg Nowatzki, a Las Vegas, NV, accountant, homebrewer and beer judge.

more with homegrown fruit in their blends. Using fruit in the blend adds another level of complexity, as the fermentation of the fruit's sugars also has to be taken into account.

Rooney, de Smet and Van de Velde don't have any plans to go pro, but Kremer has given in to demand. Braustelle, a small brewery in Cologne, has a new warehouse, "and they asked me to make my blends there. They said I must do it because my beers are so good." He also has some collaborations planned in Belgium; after Urbain Coutteau and Carlo Grootaert of De Struise tasted Kremer's blend of Drie Fonteinen and de Struise's Pannepot Reserva, they wanted to make a commercial version; Grootaert says they're planning something this summer. On home-blending he's more circumspect. "Not all but some [of the amateur blenders] are doing a good job; I think Uli is one of them. But blending has more to do than just pouring different beers together. It's about understanding flavors and aromas. If you mix something you have to make sure the result is at least like 1 + 1 = 3. If not, it's better not to do the blend at all." —*Jim Clarke*



Beer Meets Bar Meatball Sub

Beer Battered Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

Beer Pretzel Chocolate Chip Cookies

Betty Crocker Drinks Beer—And Cooks With It

Betty Crocker partnered with TV personality Mario Lopez in March to create 16 party food ideas for the second annual Betty Bracket during the NCAA basketball crazy season. Fans were able to vote on the 16 recipes to determine the top party food. Those recipes were evenly divided between Beer Meets Bar Food and Beer Meets Bakery. The winners are posted at www.bettycrocker.com/bettybracket.