

## BEER AND STUFFING

by Bruce L. Brode

The Home of the Stuffed Sandwich (that's the entire official name) is a unique sandwich shop in San Gabriel that came onto the Falcons' radar screen in the early 1990s, thanks to the efforts of the club's Activities Director at the time, Gerry Stoker, for one important reason: the proprietors stock more than 700 different beers, at last count. Our kind of place! Gerry thought it would be a good idea to inaugurate a yearly holiday beer tasting at the place, and we've done so every December since that time. This year, the "Stuffed Sandwich" celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year in business, and I knew it was time to reprise my role as more-or-less official note-taker at this fun event, something I've done many times in the past.

Sam and Marlene Samaniego met in the wholesale beer business, and opened the doors to their own retail establishment in 1976. Sam often serves his beer with a bit of attitude; just sling a little right back, keep laughing, and you'll be fine. I must say my pastrami sandwich certainly lived up to its billing. It was if anything overstuffed and quite a couple of hands-full. Marlene always puts together a stellar tasting for us, and that certainly was the case this year. Fifteen different brews were served, and her goal was to come up with some things that our current Activities Director, Drew Beechum, had never tasted. That's a tall order for the well-traveled Mr. Beechum in the world of beer, but she succeeded (I'd never tasted them, either). Twenty-one enthusiastic Falcons convened, dined, sipped and exclaimed on the afternoon of December 9.

Here are my tasting notes:

1. Noche Buena Cerveza Especial 2005, Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc Moctezuma, Monterrey, Mexico. This is a seasonal lager beer that is hard to find; 'Noche Buena' is the Spanish-language reference to Christmas Eve. Richly malty aroma. Deep amber color with good clarity. Smooth, nutty-malty flavor with some creaminess and a nice crisp dry edge. Weighs in at a surprising 5.9% Alcohol By Volume (ABV), sort of a buffed up Oktoberfest, Mexican-style. A nice starter, we collectively rated this one at 3.5 Falcons on the 0 to 5 Falcons scale, 5 being best.
2. Deschutes Jubelale, Deschutes Brewery, Bend, Oregon. Fruity, herbal aroma with some malt. Dark cola color, nice clarity, and a rich rocky head are inviting. The flavor displays a roasty-chocolate edge reminiscent of a Porter, with some earthy-musty quality amid the rich palate presence of malt and hop bitterness. 6.7% ABV. 3.5 Falcons.
3. Ridgeway Criminally Bad Elf 'Barleywine-Style Ale,' Ridgeway Brewing, Oxfordshire, England. Malty-estery aroma with just a touch of tangy sourness. Hazy amber color, thin head. Fruity, malty flavor, and a surprisingly light body (reminiscent of

a Belgian ale), with some crispness from minerals and hops. This is the latest in their series of Bad Elf beers, which include Very Bad Elf and Seriously Bad Elf. Drew mused about what kind of beer Criminally Insane Elf would be, perhaps this with 80 IBU? At 10.5% ABV, it's a very strong beer for England. A real favorite, rated at 4.25 Falcons.

4. Mahr's Christmas Bock, Mahr Brau, Bamberg, Germany. Rich, complex aroma of German malt. Slightly hazy honey-like amber color with a nice head. Crisp yet balanced flavor, rather quaffable for a bock without losing much richness or complexity. A Maibock for Christmas? Why not? 6% ABV. Rated, controversially, at 3.5 Falcons.

5. Ridgeway Santa's Butt 'Winter Porter,' Ridgeway Brewing, Oxfordshire, England. The name is an obvious reference to the old term of "butt" once used to refer to Porter, along with the bawdy label art which has gotten the brewery and its distributors into trouble in some jurisdictions. Rich malty-roasty aroma, nice esters. Deep garnet color, fair head. The complex flavor is spread across a rather thin body, a bit of lactic sourness is not out of place but gets a little too well-exposed, and there is a touch of metallic character. 6% ABV. Controversially rated at 3 Falcons.

6. Weltenberger Kloster 'Winter Traum' [Winter Dream], Klosterbrauerei Weltenberger, Kelheim, Germany. Rich malty aroma with elements of vanilla. Lovely honey-amber color, fairly good head. Creamy, malty flavor with some grainy complexity, and good hop bitterness to balance. Ultimately, there is a pleasant lingering malt flavor. ABV not stated, but clearly 6% or higher. Rated at 3.25 Falcons.

7. Wychwood Bah Humbug! 'Christmas Ale,' Wychwood Brewery, Witney, Oxfordshire, England. The aroma displays rich malt, esters, and a touch of iodine, with an interesting nutty edge to it. The deep red color is festive, with good clarity, but a thin head. The flavor is soft, buttery-malty, and slightly salty around the edges, but the core of the malt flavor actually lingers well. 6% ABV. Rated at 2.75 Falcons.

8. Moylan's White Christmas 'Belgian Style Wit,' Moylans Brewing Company, Novato, California. Brewed with dried orange peel, mace, cinnamon, coriander, and white pepper. The aroma has ginger and other spices to it. Clarity is a classic hazy "double-shine" characteristic of Witbiers, though the color is a bit darker than most and the head is rather low. The palate flavor displays a wealth of spices but the flavor finishes fairly light, making it rather easy to drink. A unique idea to brew a winter seasonal beer in a style usually associated with the warmer months of the year, but hey, this is California! Alcohol 6.5%. Rated at 3 Falcons.

9. Marin Hoppy Holiday Flavored Ale, Marin Brewing Company, Larkspur, California. Flavored with cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, orange peel, and vanilla extract. Lightly spicy aroma with some grainy malt. Hazy light amber color with a good head. Flavor is well-

balanced between beer and spice elements, with a fruity aspect and a pleasant finish. 7% ABV. Rated at 3.5 Falcons.

10. Wostyntje Torhouts Mustard Ale, DeRegenboorg, Brugge, Belgium. This was the most unusual brew of the day, with some mustard seed included in the spicing regimen. Complex, spicy-fruity aroma, with some sulfur, some acidity, and some mustard pungency. My sample was quite cloudy, I guess it was time for my yeast-borne vitamin B dose (I did taste a little of a clearer sample). The flavor is fruity; it has the effect of some spices played against light malt, with a crisp acidity and typically light Belgian finish. 7% ABV. Unusual and interesting, but rated at only 2.5 Falcons.

11. George Gale's 'Christmas Ale' 2002, George Gale & Co. Ltd., England. The aroma displays fruity esters, a tiny lactic touch, and some sherry. Dark murky red color and a flat head. Interesting flavor combines elements of ink, lactic acid, sherry, and some malt. There was also a 'serious hooty factor' of Brettanomyces yeast effect, etc. It did improve with air and a bit of warming, but managed only 2 Falcons. Must've been the hooty factor...

12. Sint Pieters Zinnebier Xmas Ale, Sint Pieters ("Belgium's newest and smallest brewery"), Leeuw, Belgium. Malty aroma with some fresh yeastiness. Very dark color and a huge head. Roasty-malty flavor has a touch of black malt character that imparts charcoal and licorice notes, a bit Porter-like, with a nice substantial aftertaste. 6.6% ABV. Rated favorably at 3.5 Falcons.

13. Reaper Sleight Double IPA, Reaper Ale, Vista, California. Very fresh aromatic hop presence that climbs out of the glass, smells like it was dry-hopped last week! Hazy amber color with a decent head. Rich, hoppy flavor with fruity aspects (both from esters and hops), it handles its power well and manages the heavy hop load without transgressing into hop phenol territory, a great accomplishment. Jimbo, where are you? 9.1% ABV. Rated highly at 4.5 Falcons.

14. Gouden Carolus D'Or 'Grand Cru of the Emperor 2004,' Brewery Het Anker, 2800 Mechelen, Belgium. Very complex aroma with smoke, banana, maple, and alcohol. Deep dark brown color is obscured and is topped by a thin but persistent head. Flavor matches the aroma well, marrying malty body and depth with the interesting aromatic elements. 10% ABV. Special and rich, and too sweet for some but still managed an impressive 4.5 Falcons rating.

15. Hurlimann's Samiclaus Brown, bottled in 1997, Hurlimann Brewery, Zurich, Switzerland. This is the last batch of Samiclaus brewed by Hurlimann, the originator of the brand; it's currently brewed by Eggenberg in Austria. Aromas of maple, licorice, a touch of iodine, and lotsa malt. Deep hazy brown color, no head. Flavor has rich malt, a dry edge that is slightly chocolate-like and roasty, and the alcohol plays a role in the

flavor but is well-covered by all the malt. Talk about a treat! 14.7% ABV. Rated at a near-unanimous 5 Falcons, and a spectacular way to conclude the tasting.

Our thanks to Drew Beechum for setting this up, and most especially to Sam and Marlene Samaniego for another great holiday tasting at the Home of the Stuffed Sandwich. May they continue for many years to come!