



11-11-07

Since founding our brewery in 1996, we have specialized in the rare art of brewing beer in oak barrels. In the fall of 2006, we released a limited edition oak-aged strong ale called 10 to commemorate our 10th anniversary. The experience was greater than anyone of us could have ever imagined. We now present Eleven, our second release in what promises to be an annual autumn rite at our brewery.

The Vision Behind Quercus Alba- Our Barrel Aging and Blending Program:

(some things have changed... but the vision has not)

The Goal: To create complexity centering on oak, in a multitude of forms, by brewing high gravity beers in complementary styles, aging them in different barrel formats and then blending them together to achieve new harmonious flavors.

The Puzzle: Blend these various components (or lots) to create a synergistic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This has once again been done with the help of a few of our neighboring Paso Robles winemakers who are practicing experts in the art of blending.

The Inspiration: Firestone Walker's oak brewing tradition and our connection with winemaking. More specifically: a study of Port wine (solera) blending tradition and how it could be applied to brewing. Of course historically, brewing is also deeply rooted in the alchemy of blending.

The Barrels:

The individual lots were aged in oak barrels, most of which were hand selected from premium Kentucky spirits producers by Tom Griffin, who is extremely passionate and knowledgeable about bourbon barrels and beer. Each barrel lends its own unique influence to the final blend. Tom delivered some real treats this year including a number of charred barrels that were first filled with bourbon in 1991... The year I turned 21!

Barrels hand delivered by Tom Griffin from the distilleries freshly dumped:

Old Fitzgerald Bourbon / Old Fitzgerald Wheat Whiskey
Heaven Hill Bourbon / Heaven Hill Brandy / Heaven Hill Rye

Barrels purchased directly from American Coopers toasted to Firestone Walker's specifications:

New American Oak produced by World Cooperage
Retired Firestone Union Oak produced by World Cooperage, Seguin Moreau and Barrel Associates

The Aging Cellar – The Components

Following are descriptions of key components with their original code names:

	Final Blend %
Parabola (13% ABV) - aged in bourbon barrels - <i>Russian Imperial Oatmeal Stout (brewed 2-09-06 Racked to Barrels on 2-20-06)</i> OG=28P FG=7.5P IBU=80 Color=Black / Hopped with Summit, Styrian Golding and East Kent Golding	(4%)
Bravo (11% ABV) - 3 barrel varieties- Bourbon (57%), Brandy (18%) and New American Oak (7%) - <i>Imperial Brown Ale (Brewed 8-2-06 Racked to Barrels on 8-11-06)</i> OG= 22P FG= 4.8P IBU=35 Color=32/ Hopped 100% with an experimental hop variety provided by S.S. Steiner Inc.	(82%)
Rufus (11% ABV) - 2 barrels- Bourbon (3.5%) and Rye (3.5%) - <i>Continental Imperial Amber Ale (brewed 8-17-07 Racked to Barrels 8-28-07)</i> OG=22.5 FG=4.5 IBU=40 Color=15 / Brewed utilizing Belgian Dark Candi Syrup / Hopped with Styrian Goldings and Saaz	(7%)
Velvet Merkin (5.5% ABV) - aged in Bourbon barrels - <i>Traditional Oatmeal Stout</i> OG= 15P FG=5.5 IBU=32.5 Color= Black / 15% Oats / Hopped with 100% U.S. - grown Fuggles	(7%)

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A Note from Brewmaster Matt Brynildson

A Time to Celebrate - The Quercus Alba Barrel Aging Program Continues...

Another amazing brewing year is almost behind us and the Firestone Walker Brewery Team is once again able to share a piece of our now well established oak aging cellar with you! This year, we have ever more reason to celebrate the good people and accomplishments that surround us here on the Central Coast. I have always emphasized that brewing is a team sport- and the FW Crew has never been so strong and in-tune. I am constantly amazed by this group's accomplishments and this special release beer is yet another example of what can happen with good energy and good chemistry... both in the kettle and on the floor. The FW Team brewed more turns of the brewhouse than any other year and were honored with more recognition and awards than ever before. The defining moment came in early October, when the FW Crew brought one of the Brewing Industry's most coveted awards back to Paso Robles—The 2007 Great American Beer Festival- Mid-Size Brewery of the Year! I simply could not ask for a better group of people to share my working hours with... and this beer is all about the flavor and character that can be created when a group of talented people get together.

Another reason to celebrate is that Adam and David have given their blessing to continue our oak aging program and to experiment behind the scenes of this busy and growing brewery. We are very lucky to be living in a time and place when good folks like **you**, are so interested in creative expression through the higher malting and brewing arts... and equally important is that there are brewery owners who allow this expression to be realized, regardless of the time, costs and efforts involved. Consolidation and homogenization be damned—let there always be independent brewers who create freely and good people who enjoy the fruits of their labors!

So what about this blend?

We started talking about this program in the winter of 2005 and began brewing beers for barrels in early 2006. We now have beers that have been in oak, mellowing and growing in complexity for more than 20 months! There are nearly 100 barrels sitting in our cold house... I believe this a perfectly noble retirement for these barrels. How long can a beer last in a barrel? I have no idea- there are brewers out there, with far more barrel experience than my own, who may have an idea. We have yet, in our young aging program, to have a beer fall apart due to age... I assume it will happen eventually. The idea of aging beer in oak is by no means a new concept. Brewers have utilized wood as a vessel for brewing and storing beer for centuries and it wasn't until the relatively recent Industrial Revolution, and the advent of steel brewing implements, that the finer points of keeping a wood barrel happy in the brewery was lost from the modern brewing text books. Our program has centered on strong, straight ahead ales, formulated to provide a canvas for oak and barrel aging flavors. So far: no critters, no spice, no fruit; even though the flavors sometime suggest otherwise.

Last year, **Bravo**, which is the foundational component of Eleven, played only a small part in the final blend... it was young and full of brash unripe fruit character. Each time Jim and I went back to the barrels [huge thanks to Jim Crooks for all of his love and care for this program!] to sample, top-up and taste, we became more and more drawn to this seductive brew. The recipe is very simple which is likely why this beer showcases so well the vanilla and coconut notes that are a signature of our barrels. Bravo from the Bourbon barrels possesses a complex blend of spice and tobacco- an aged Madero wrapper with a touch of sweet molasses. The lots that were aged in Brandy Barrels became silky, full of wine like texture and ripe, fruit flavors—subtle marion berry, pear drop and plum. This is by far the most positive development we have experienced with any single beer in this program. Paso winemaker's **Larry Gomez**, owner of **Via Vega Winery**, and **Steve Martell** of **Kaleidos Winery**, were instrumental in formulating this blend. Both agreed that Bravo was a perfect starting point. Both felt that integrating the Brandy barrels to tone down the bourbon notes made for a more seamless base on which to build. I wish that I would have recorded our main blending event.

Larry is a true artist and speaks with an intense intellectual wine vocabulary that describes flavors so well. He immediately gravitated to the **Velvet Merkin** (Oatmeal Stout) as a mellowing piece in creating, with Bravo, his favorite "Base Wine." Interestingly, bringing this beer to the table was completely random; it had been brewed to be our Christmas stout and had only been in barrel for a few weeks. In the end, this component brought cocoa and fresh roasted coffee into the mix (velvet mocha.) The soft oatmeal texture along with rich roasted barley softened any alcohol burn that might have been present, while still carrying a surprising amount of Bourbon barrel character along with it.

Next there is **Rufus**. Formulated to be the "fruit cap" for future blending, this beer took the Gold at FoBAB in the Strong Barrel Aged Pale Ale group as an adolescent... never intended to be consumed on its own. We chose to experiment with Dark Belgian Candi Syrup with this beer and it shows well. Complex fruity notes are brought to the blend by Rufus- banana ester, ripe raspberry (our fruit bomb Grenache) coupled with heavy Rye spirits and yet a touch of candi sweetness.

Last of all, there was **Parabola**. The elder (and strongest at 13% ABV) of the current barrels beers, it has mellowed into rich Belgian dark bitter chocolate goodness. Intense and complex on its own- it is the chocolate espresso note that pairs well with the raspberry of Rufus and the coconut of Bravo. It is the inky Malbec of the blend with nuances of anis and black licorice. Larry kept saying that there were two beers on the table... a second blend that was driven by more roast and ink- we left that for another day. In the very end, I made the executive decision to add two barrels of New American Oak aged Bravo's to the blend. The tannic toasted oak adds yet another level of complexity and texture – a touch of the Firestone Union that we know so well.

The Finished Piece

As a finished beer- Eleven is far more structured and refined than any previous blend. We bottled this beer a full month before release to allow it to integrate fully. It is not a beer of broad strokes or exclamation points, but a beer of subtle nuances and secrets. It best enjoyed in a half filled brandy snifter or wine glass. Allow it to warm to 55F to fully enjoy the pleasing and complex aromas. We kept the carbonation very low to compliment Eleven's smooth texture. If left in a cool dark place, I suspect that this beer will age well. I truly hope you enjoy our second oak aged blend. This crazy beer journey continues!

Dedicated to MJ – words could never describe all that he has done for brewers around the world. All the very best!

-Matt