



BELGIUM

PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## Stalking a wild brew Spontaneous

fermentation and vintage methods make lambic reminiscent of another time and good times

BY JOE RAY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**B**RUSSELS — Belgium is boring. That was the preconception. Then I remembered: great fries, friendly people, beautiful architecture, and beer that makes aficionados drool. What was I thinking? I grab a cone of fries and head to a brewery where I begin to understand why beer, particularly lambics — “wild beers” that are products of “spontaneous fermentation” and aged for three years in oak barrels — runs in Belgians’ veins.

“There was a choice, and then again, there wasn’t a choice,” says Jean Van Roy, who, along with his semiretired father, Jean-Pierre, runs the Cantillon brewery, which was founded in 1900 and calls itself the last traditional brewery in Brussels. “My parents worked so hard to bring it back that, psychologically, I couldn’t do anything else.”

The machines and methods used at Cantillon are decades and even centuries old and create beers that have blissfully little to do with the mass-produced brews that line the world’s supermarket shelves.

On a production day, light streams through the window, people work in overalls, and steam collects in drips on the ceiling. The tiny facility is a perfect way to understand how beer is made.

To begin, huge quantities of crushed wheat and malted barley are given a hot-water bath in a giant wooden tub, creating a heady-smelling liquid called wort, but this is where the similarities between lambic and mass-market beer end.

Aged hops — more of a preservative than a flavoring agent for lambics — are added and the near-boiling liquid is pumped upstairs to catch a cold. In a shallow copper vat known as a cooling tun that’s nearly as large as the drafty, musty room it’s kept in, the wort is exposed to the elements, particularly the wild yeasts native to Brussels’ Senne Valley (especially *Brettanomyces bruxellensis* and *Brettanomyces lambicus*) and perhaps others unique to the brewery itself.

Inoculated with the wild yeasts that will kick-start the fermentation process and turn this water into beer, the liquid is aged in winery-style

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Top, then left to right: At Cantillon brewery in Brussels, hot wort pours into a cooling tun and wild yeasts settle onto it. Jean Van Roy adds hops to some wort; the engine that drives most of the brewery’s moving parts; Jean-Pierre Van Roy (Jean’s father) samples lambic in the tasting room; storage at Joost de Four’s restaurant in Liedekerke; Gert Christiaens with a barrel for aging beer at Oud Beersel in Beersel; blanche beer at de Four’s restaurant.

### INSIDE

Where once were South Carolina rice plantations is **Brookgreen Gardens**, founded by a sculptor and home to works by her and many others. **M4**

### EXPLORE NEW ENGLAND

**Climbing** in New Hampshire is cold and challenging in winter. Oh, but the views. **M5**

The Appalachian Trail is a **thru-hiker’s** dream, and its own job. **M5**



MARK ARSENAULT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## FOR THOSE WHO KEEP A COUNT, WHAT COUNTS AS A VISIT?

By Christopher Klein  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

As the verdant peaks of the Great Smoky Mountains nestled under a blanket of Tennessee fog, the magnificent panorama rewarded our decision to take a short detour across the border from North Carolina.

I had still another reason to be happy about our jaunt to the Volunteer State.

“Well, Tennessee is number 25! I’m halfway home to visiting



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all 50 states,” I boasted to my wife as we approached the state line for our return trip.

“That doesn’t count,” she said, throwing water as cold as the mountain streams on my milestone.

“Why not? We were in Tennessee for three hours. I even got out of the car a few times and walked around.”

“Yeah,” she said, “but you didn’t have a meal in Tennessee, **COUNTING, Page M3**