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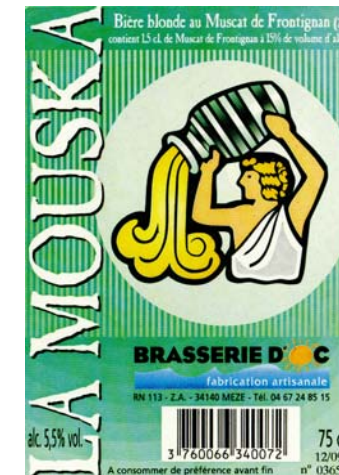
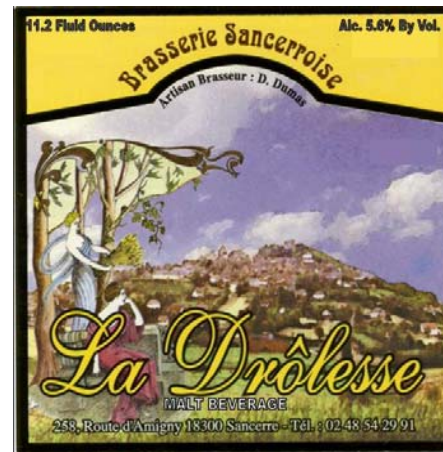
By Greg Kitsock

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Asked which of his portfolio of French microbrews would pair well with a traditional American Thanksgiving feast, importer Jocelyn Cambier ponders the question.

Cambier, who was born in Brittany and raised in Paris, confesses that he's more likely to celebrate the holiday with guinea hen, partridge or grouse. But as a U.S. resident for the past 27 years, he's familiar with our customs and cuisine, and he knows there's more than one answer to the question. "Turkey can taste so differently depending on the stuffing," he says.

For a savory stuffing incorporating sausage, walnuts or chestnuts, he recommends **Biere aux Noix from Brasserie Mandrin** in St. Martin d'Herès. This amber ale is made with walnuts from the Dauphine region of southeast France. It has a dry, nutty flavor with a slightly astringent finish and a touch of hops.



For a spicier stuffing, maybe one incorporating sage, fennel or tarragon, Cambier suggests uncapping a bottle of **Biere au Sapin from the same brewery**. Flavored with pine tree buds and needles from the Vercors and Chartreuse forests, this beer has an assertive (but not overpowering) evergreen aroma and a sweet, sappy flavor with caramel malt and spicy hops poking through.

For a stuffing incorporating fruit, Cambier's pick is Bourguignonne **Brune from the Brasserie la Bourguignonne** in Beaune. This mahogany-colored brew has the sour-cherry tartness of a Belgian red ale but a dry, smoky finish.

The great French scientist Louis Pasteur, who explained the nature of fermentation and developed the process of pasteurization for extending the shelf life of perishable liquids, arguably did more to advance the science of brewing than anyone else in history. And yet we associate France far more with vineyards than hop yards. Other than Fischer and Kronenbourg, from the Alsace region bordering Germany (and maybe Jenlain, a country ale brewed not far from Belgium), French beers are unknown in the United States.

"People have no idea of the variety of beers available," Cambier says. "We have great water. . . . France offers a variety of micro-climates. Barley grown in Brittany is not quite the same as that grown in the Alps or Flanders."

About 18 months ago, Cambier was making a sales pitch to a distributor in Denver. After sampling 48 wines, he felt his palate grow fatigued and decided to refresh himself with a glass of beer at a local bistro. "It dawned on me," he says. "I'd been going to the finest French restaurants around the country, and none of them served French beer."

Cambier did some research and learned that about 150 microbreweries are operating in France. He blind-tasted 100 of their beers before settling on 15 brands from seven breweries to import to the States. The selection ranges from perfectly quaffable blond ales such as **La Drolesse from the Brasserie La Sancerroise** in Sancerre to exotic brews such as La Mouska from the Brasserie d'Oc in Meze, made with muscat grapes and honey in addition to secret ingredients.

La Mouska would pair well with a slice of pecan pie, Cambier suggests. For pumpkin pie, he recommends the **Grand Cru from the Brasserie Saint-Rieul** in Trumilly, a strong Belgian-style spiced ale with an orange-blossom aroma and a honeyish sweetness. At 9 percent alcohol by volume, the Grand Cru is a formidable beer, but the rich flavor masks the alcohol well. Most of Cambier's brands average between 6 and 8 percent alcohol, slightly higher than mass-market American beers.

Before you waddle away, sated, from Thanksgiving dinner, Cambier has one more beer to offer as a digestive: **La Verte from the Brasserie du Mont Blanc**, in the foothills of the Alps. The beer is packaged in clear glass bottles to showcase the unusual pale-green hue. It's flavored with an Alpine herb and relative of wormwood called genepi, which is also the basis for a liqueur of the same name and an ingredient in such spirits as green chartreuse and absinthe. La Verte has a flavor similar to that of anise but perhaps a little sweeter and subtler.

Cambier's beers are available in 330- and 750-milliliter bottles (there's no draft, but he's working on importing five-liter mini-kegs for some of the beers) and can be found at select outlets in Northern Virginia, the District and [Montgomery County](#). They've been popping up at well-stocked retailers such as Chevy Chase Wine & Spirits and [Whole Foods Markets](#); at beer-focused restaurants such as Rustico and the Georgetown location of Pizzeria Paradiso; and, perhaps most gratifyingly for Cambier, at French restaurants such as the tony Michel Richard Citronelle in Georgetown.

Tip: Beer For Dinner

Jocelyn Cambier will host a pair of beer dinners in early December.

- On Dec. 1, the Old Brogue in Great Falls will serve a four-course Alsatian-style meal. Cost is \$50; call 703-759-3309 for reservations.

- On Dec. 9, L'Etoile in Charlottesville will offer a five-course "Artisan French Beer Dinner" matched with Cambier's beers. Call 434-979-7957 for details.