

SAISONS AND GRISETTE – SOME CLARIFICATIONS

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Styles and responsibilities: facts, interpretation of facts and individualism.

The example of Lambic.

Farmhouse beers

A valid concept?

Defining a beer style is difficult:

sources are scarce

history is moving

co-existence of different methods within a same period and area.

Over-representation of urban styles

What influences the making of beer, hence the styles?

Raw materials availability

technological / scientific level

taste of the local drinker

environmental issues

political issues

geography

economy

culture

Taxes!

1804: French law: tax to be paid by HI > favors light beers

1822: Dutch law: tax on the size of the mash-tun > favors light beers

1885: Belgian law: tax on the yield, but brewers (11%) can choose to be taxed according to the ancient law.

1919: Law Vandervelde > open doors to strong beers

General families of beer in Belgium in the 19th Century:

- running beers v/s keeping beers
- specialty (w. local typicity) v/s classic beers
- one brew gives different beers (Small and Main)

Saisons and Grisette: countryside beers for the hard worker either in fields or mines.

SAISONS



Origin: Countryside.

Goal:

Hydrate the farmers and seasonal farm workers (saisonniers) on a safer and more tonic way than water.
Beer brewed during the good season (winter), in order to be drunk during harvest time (summer).

Where?

Everywhere in Belgium. Flanders included but more typical to Wallonia with a very high concentration in the Hainaut region, where the beer stayed popular longer.

Who?

Originally the farms of a certain size having a brewing equipment.

What for?

- quenching thirst
- giving work to permanent workers during low season (winter)
- feeding the cattle with spent grains

Main characteristics: linked to the raison d'être of the beer and its origin:

- **light.** Most of the keeping beers were stronger than the average at the time, but the early Saisons were not, as they were a replacement for water.
- finished beer is **highly attenuated** and **dry**
- **refreshing**
- **= high drinkability**
- **pungent** from the high rate of hops employed
- **pale:** blond to amber ; Black Saison has never existed
- **"rustic"** (hard to define) rural, unrefined, simple
- often **hazy** (no filtration, raw grains)

The places for making a Saison:

- Farm-brewery: for yourself or your neighbor
- Communal brewery used by farmers without brewing equipment
- Local professional brewery for/by farmers without brewing equipment
- After WWI: professional brewery only (specialization between brewing and farming)

Two main periods in the evolution of the style: before WWI and after it.

The period between the two wars was a period of slow transition for the Saison brewers.

Ancient techniques have co-existed with more modern ones until the early 1980's.

Many possibilities in the ingredients and methods: Saisons are a family of beers rather than a defined style.

RAW MATERIALS:

Grains:

Originally: what was cultivated in the farm.

Noble (no rice, no maize)

- malted barley. Winter barley (escourgeon) seen as the best.

Sometimes: mix of winter and spring

- wheat (unmalted)
- oats
- spelt
- buckwheat
- rye
- anything local to you

Brewing methods: step infusion or turbid mash

Gravity:

1850's: 7 to 9°P

1900's: 10 to 12,5°P

1920's: 12 to 14°P

Sugar:

No trace found of its use in the copper.

Unlikely as it would have cost too much for farms to make a beer with.

Not necessary as the beers were light.

Hops:

- high dose: 500 to 1000gr/hl
- classic, not overwhelming aroma; rustic to noble.
- dry hopping was very common.
- the quality of hops could vary dramatically from place to place. Even old hops could be used.

Spices:

Often used but not mandatory.

Some Saisons were only hopped.

Moderation in their use!

Were often used because the quality of hops was judged unsatisfactory.

It makes sense to use local spices or herbs.

Flowers:

Only trace found: elderflower.

Fruits:

No trace of use ever found in the literature and chats. It does not make sense to use any.

FERMENTATION:

A. Pre-WWI:

The fermentation organisms:

- A consortium. Brettanomyces were most than probably always present. In many cases, bacteria would have too.
- There is no such thing as a "Saison yeast"!
- Phenols? Can but not mandatory!
- Brewers could use different strains from different breweries for the main fermentation of their Saison.
- As drinkability has to be high, some balance was sought after in Saisons.
- It is obvious that the hopping rate, skills and hygiene practices of each brewer would give very different results in the way contamination was kept at a low or rather high level.
- It doesn't seem impossible that in some cases only Saccharomyces and Brettanomyces were involved.

Sources of "contamination":

- consortium present in the leaven to be reused
- micro-organisms present in the wood
- micro-organisms present in the air and the wood in case of spontaneous fermentation

Different ways to get the desired taste profile (tart and vinous) and the keeping properties:

- One batch is brewed and is kept until the desired character becomes present.
- Two batches are brewed in the same brewery: one to be kept until it turns sour + one "fresh" (a few months). A blend is then made before consumption.
- One fresh beer is brewed in the brewery and another beer, sour, is bought from another brewery.

Main fermentation:

in an open fermenter in wood at first, then in metal.

Secondary fermentation:

in wooden barrels placed in the coldest possible cellar. A slow secondary fermentation was seen as being very positive for the qualities of the beer.

Cellaring from a few months to two years or even more. The barrels were topped.

Third fermentation:

The beer could have been drunk almost flat on the field or either undergo a refermentation in the serving keg or, later, in the bottle.

Sugar or young fermenting beer were added for it.

B. Post WWI:

- Pre-WWI techniques are still present in some small breweries until the 1980's.
- Changes in Belgian brewing after the war.

A **new style of Saison** emerges, which is **cleaner, stronger, hoppier** and **less tart**.
ABV was between 5 and 6,5.

Some stronger versions were made from the 1920's and call **Double** or Super Saison.
All the beers of that style above 6,5 ABV should **not** been called Saison but Double.

SUMMARY:

5 main styles: (some can coexist)

"Traditional": 3,5 to 5,5 ABV (light ones brought to the fields, stronger ones to the pubs)

- mixed fermentation
- brett
- spontaneous

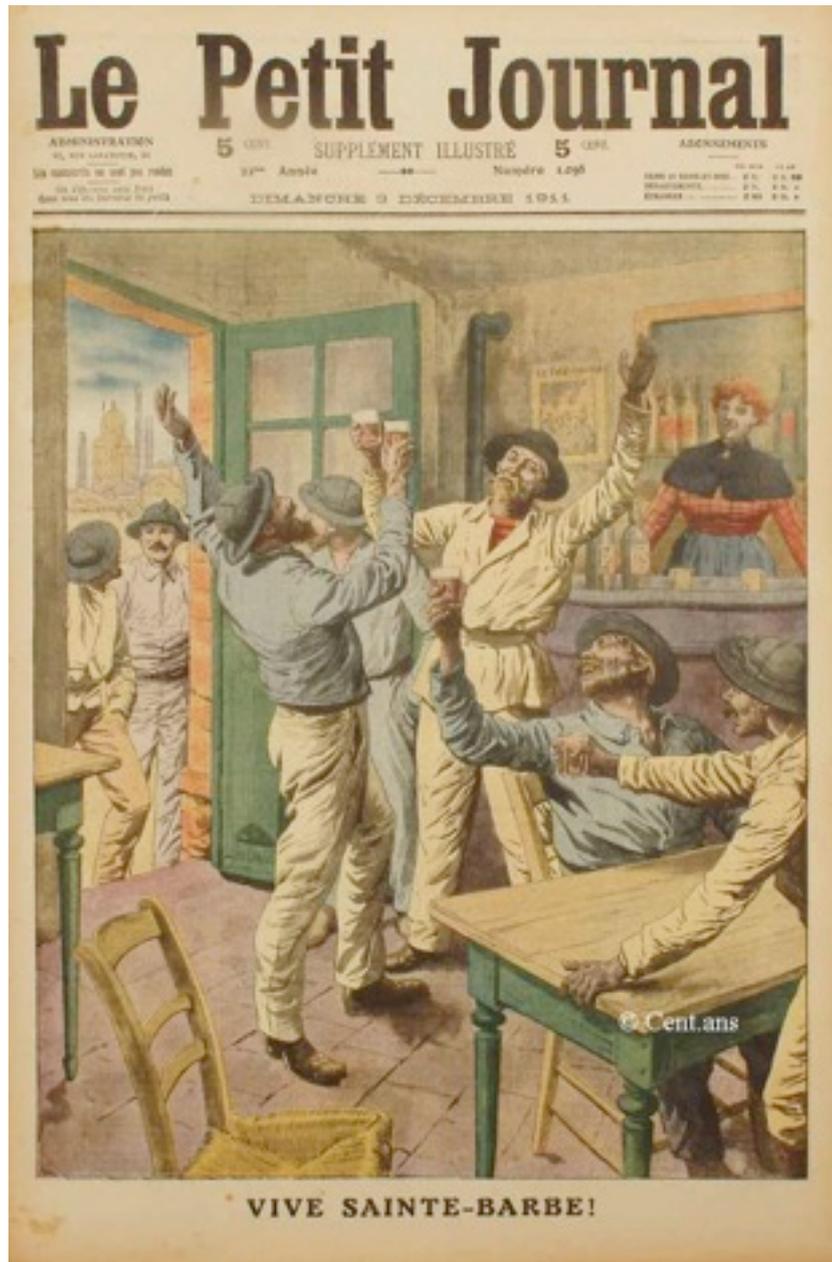
"Modern":

- classic: 5 to 6,5 ABV
- double: 6,5+ ABV

There are many ways to get to the main characteristics a Saison should have:

- **attenuation:** either very attenuative *Saccharomyces* or poorly attenuative *Sacch* then finish with another strain or Brett
- **dry:** playing with attenuation and water
- **"rustic"**
 - rustic grains: spelt, wheat, oats, ...
 - funky brewers' yeast, funky wild yeast, bacteria

GRISSETTE



Introduction :

- Refreshing pale beer, between a Saison and a witbier but made with “cleaner”, at least less rustic brewing techniques and meant to taste cleaner and be faster to make.
- A “simple”, everyday beer, originally made to quench the thirst of the local coal miners or stone quarries workers and by extension, the blue collars of the Belgian industrial revolution.
- Gris means grey. Indicates a color between white and amber. Also refers to the grey color of the workers, covered by stone or coal dust.
- Typical of a specific area of the Hainaut province in the region of Wallonia. Around the cities of Mons, Charleroi and Tournai.
- Origin: uncertain. Industrial revolution? For sure around 1800.
Popular in this very region until WWII.
- Sometimes, a brewery making a Saison would also make a Grisette (e.g. Biset-Cuvelier).

3 types:

Grisette Jeune:

Brewed all year round. +- 4 to 5% ABV

When brewed in summer, more grains and hops were added in order to enhance its shelflife.

Grisette de Garde, de Saison, or “Fine de conserve”:

Brewed between September and end of December

ABV: +- 5 to 6%

Grisette Double or Superieure:

Made with the strong worts only. The weak worts were then used for making a Small Beer.

ABV: 6%+

Brewing period:

All year round except for the Grisette de Garde: winter

Ingredients and brewing methods:

Grist:

- **Malted barley**
- **Malted wheat!** The essence of the style.
Proportions wheat to barley is 1 to 10 to 1 to 7 = between 10 to 14% of wheat.

Water:

All can do but soft waters are preferred.

Hops:

- Local ones for bittering (Mons, Aalst, Poperinge).
- A fine hoppy aroma is desired.
- If the brewer wants to increase the quality of his Grisette, he adds more hops.
- First Wort Hopping is common practice.
- Late hopping too. Sometimes, extra hops are added on the coolschip.
- No mention found of dry-hopping but it doesn't mean it was not practiced and it would make sense anyway.

Amounts:

- Jeune in winter: 300gr/hl
- Jeune in summer: 450gr/hl
- de Saison: 600gr/hl

Mashing:

- mash-in classic, between 43-50°C depending on the season
- turbid mash with either the wheat placed in a separate kettle, either in the mash-tun

Boiling:

quite long: 10-12 hours. Probably the origin of the "grey" color.

Fermentation:

- Type of yeast: no one knows. The beer should be cleaner than a Saison.
- The importance of a high vitality of the yeast is stressed.
- Starts in a metal kettle first then finishes in wooden barrel
- Topping of the barrels is made
- Except for the Grisette de Garde, the lagering is not very long
- In de Grisette de Garde, due to the long aging in wood, it is obvious that Brettanomyces yeasts would have play a role, and maybe some LAB.

The beer:

- refined, mellow, easy to drink and thirst quenching. A comparison is made with Bavarian beers.
- it was drunk very young during summer time.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

