



Perfect partners

The Amuse Gueuze evenings organised by Karen Blereau showcase the versatility of lambic beers. Alan Hope attended the second edition

Karen Blereau is the organiser of the Amuse Gueuze evenings – a set of three evenings featuring dinner in one venue, accompanied by a selection of lambic-based beers: the familiar gueuze and kriek, but also some less familiar variants. We asked her, how did this idea come about?

“In my other job I’m a legal consultant, and I often have to go to restaurants for dinner. I’ve always been a fan of restaurants that use natural products, local products, seasonal products, and those who serve natural wines, because it’s all in line.

“Most of them also serve a gueuze, but usually it’s only as an aperitif, and they don’t

combine it with food, so that’s how I came up with the idea. I’ve been a huge fan of gueuze for many years. I thought it would be a great idea to serve a dinner, and instead of the natural wines to serve different lambic beers. I looked around and there was nobody who was already organising such a thing, so I started doing it myself.

“The first Amuse Gueuze dinner was in May last year, at the Veranda in Antwerp. I know the owners and I’m a big fan of their restaurant and they were enthusiastic about the idea. I just needed a tryout, and their place is not too big. We had about 100 people over three nights. It was sold out in two weeks, and it was such a success I decided to organise a second edition, in Antwerp because it’s my

home town. The second edition was in October and I invited 50 people a night, also for three nights.”

How does the selection take place? Do you choose the beers or does the chef do that?

“I choose the beers, and then I present them to the chef. Normally you start with food and then choose the wine; I work the other way around.”

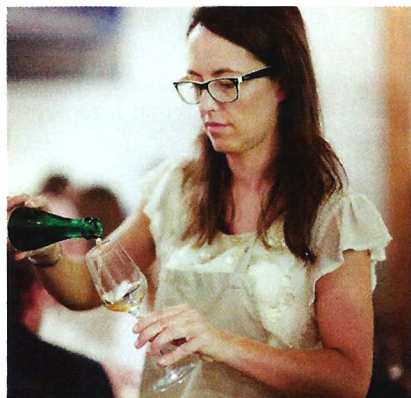
The next, third edition will take place in Het land aan de overkant in Leuven, a restaurant that featured heavily in our fourth issue. As we explained then, chef Wim De Jonghe already works with beer, and the restaurant offers beer pairing with every meal. Does that make it easier?

“It’s a plus, but to be honest it’s not crucial for me. I always ask Ben and Jeroen, who are beer sommeliers, to assist me in explaining the beers and the combination with food. Jeroen helps me choose the beers, but organising the rest of it is my responsibility.”

How do you see this developing? If it gets any more successful you may have to give up your day job.

“I don’t know yet! Let’s see. Anything is possible. The next edition, after Leu-

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ven, will be in another province, perhaps East Flanders and Ghent, or Limburg and Hasselt. In the beginning I was thinking about one province a year, two editions per province, but then it takes too long to complete the circle. So now it will be a different province for each edition.”

The next edition of Amuse Gueuze will feature Flanders Kitchen Rebel Wim De Jonghe. It takes place at Het land aan de overkant in Leuven on March 12, 13 and 14 with . For more on Flanders Kitchen Rebels see page 44. ■

For more on Amuse Gueuze see:
www.amusegueuze.com

AMUSE: Rosemary cracker with fleur de sel, aioli and arancini. Accompanied by an 18-month-old unblended lambic from Frank Boon, deep and complex, full of mature flavour.

First: Zeeland mussels, ras-el-hanout, potato, preserved lemon, green olive. Accompanied by an Oude Quetsche from Tilquin, lambic ripened for four years over macerated unstoned plums. Herbal and fruity, and a perfect match for the food.

Second: Wild mushrooms, cream of boletus, rocket salad with grilled polenta and hazelnuts from Piedmont. Served with Oude Gueuze from Hanssens, full of Brett funkiness and acidity to cut through the olive oil in the dish.

Third: Barbecued pork belly, parsnip, cream of smoked pumpkin, marinated red

cabbage. Accompanied by a Golden Blend gueuze from 3 Fonteinen, spectacular with lambics of up to seven years old in the blend. Taste of Tokay grapes, sherry, cake and burnt sugar; hot milk and honey, barely any acidity left.

Fourth: Pan-fried breast of wild duck, five-spice, beetroot, celeriac, radish fresh and marinated. Served with the multiple award-winning Oude Kriek from Oud Beersel. Almond flavour from the pits but overwhelming taste of cherries – 400g of them to the litre!

Closer: Vintage cheddar and Wissant with a mostarda of figs and spelt sourdough toast. Served with Cantillon Iris, all barley with no wheat, made with 50% fresh hops instead of 100% old hops as lambic usually is. Fresh-hopped after two years in the barrel. Brewed only once in a season.