

THE LOST ABBEY BEER DINNER

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On April 17th this year, a hundred and thirty of us piled onto a bus from the Craft Brewers' Conference in San Diego to attend a dinner that featured The Lost Abbey beers. Created by Port Brewing Co, The Lost Abbey is a brand it reserves for Belgian-style beers. The dinner that evening would also celebrate the launch of Isabelle Proximus ale, apparently brewed by "Allaverdogportrush"...

We arrived at the brewery around seven, to find rows of candle-lit tables, impeccably set in blue and white, nestled between large stacks of wooden barrels. On the tables were also set 750ml corked bottles of Holy Water with coordinated Lost Abbey labels describing their content as being "from a blessed municipal water source". As we made our way to our seats, brewer Tomme Arthur introduced Isabelle Proximus. This sour ale was brewed in 2006 by Arthur, along with Adam Avery (Avery), Sam Calagione (Dogfish Head), Vinnie Cilurzo (Russian River) and Rob Tod (Allagash). Inspired by a recent trip to Belgium, Arthur describes Isabelle Proximus as a unique way for the five men to document their travels. He adds: "by getting us all together for the brew...we combined our energy and passions for brewing in this one beer." Isabelle Proximus was aged, for 16 months, in barrels from all five breweries so that each would "contribute their own house character to the final batch". It was then blended earlier this year.

The April 17th launch re-united the five brewers with Lorenzo Dabove, "Prince of the Payottenland", who had organized the 2006 trip and guided the brewers through Belgium. Arthur called on Dabove to say a few words, and sample the first official pour. Delighted with Isabelle Proximus, Dabove describes it as "Exceptional. A team effort that has resulted in a masterpiece inspired by sour Belgian beers with a hint of originality typical of the American Renaissance". To complement the Isabelle Proximus, Co-owner Vince Marsaglia and his team prepared a green salad with candied walnuts, Gorgonzola, and a raspberry vinaigrette.

The salad was followed by plantain egg rolls, with a maple orange cilantro reduction, accompanied by Lost and Found Dubbel. The next beer was affectionately introduced by Arthur as 'Cuvée de me'. This complex and flavourful barrel-aged beer won gold in its category at the 2008 World Beer Cup. Cuvée de Tomme was particularly enjoyable that evening, paired with a seafood plate, including barbecue oysters with Point Reyes blue cheese, seared scallops and steamed mussels. Next came the main course: lamb chop and braised short ribs accompanied by Amazing Grace, the barrel-aged version of Lost and Found. Co-owner Gina Marsaglia provided desert. Her delightful chocolate cheesecake was accented by the evening's only Port Brewing beer: Older Viscosity. Usually combined 20/80 with a fresh batch to form Old Viscosity, that evening the barreled aged version was served on its own.

The strength of the Lost Abbey beer dinner that night definitely lay in the attention to detail. Between the table setting, the Holy Water, the characterful beers, wonderfully prepared food and mindful pairings, the Port Brewing team's passion and enthusiasm was reflected everywhere, resulting in an evening that won't soon be forgotten.

