



**BIER**  
*passie*  
MAGAZINE



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# Tasting of Blond Trappist Beers

AUTHENTIC TRAPPIST PRODUCT

The trade names “Trappist” and “Trappist Beer” have been protected since 1962. On 28 February of that year, the magistrate of the Ghent Tribunal of Commerce declared that tradesmen making wrongful use of these names would be prosecuted for unfair trade practices, as the names refer to the origin of the product. During the following decades, the distinction between Trappist beer and so-called abbey beer, which is brewed on lines similar to those of Trappist beer, became less clear due to often misleading advertisements, which made abundant use of rosy-cheeked monks to suggest a “monastic” origin.

To enable consumers to distinguish clearly between genuine Trappist beers and products which attempt to give themselves a monastic image, the appellation of origin “Trappist” was created in 1997.

This appellation guarantees not only that the product is of monastic origin, but that the products sold fulfil the quality and tradition criteria created by the Trappist community. Although such appellations can be bestowed on other products, beer was the first to receive it. Six abbeys were now permitted to use this name for their beers: Chimay, Orval, Rochefort, Westmalle and Westvleteren in Belgium and Koningshoeven (La Trappe) in the Netherlands, and no others.



At the beginning of December, the Dutch Trappists lost the “Authentic Trappist Product” label after selling their brewery to Bavaria. However, on 10 December 1999, Achel, who had re-opened a brewery in the meantime, received this label, so that the abbey beers certified with the “Authentic Trappist Product” label are all brewed by Belgian abbeys.

#### BLONDE AND TRIPLE: UNITY AND DIVERSITY

It was high time to taste Trappist beers. Like the spontaneous-fermentation beers (lambic, fero, gueuze, fruit beers), Trappist beers, as has often been said, are part of a uniquely Belgian style of beer. Six Belgian Trappist abbeys - no more and no less - brew different beers, both pale and dark. It would therefore be too much to taste them all in a single session.

We shall therefore begin with the pale Trappist brews and will return at a later date to their darker sisters.

#### ACHEL

It is not always easy to find an appropriate location for beer-tasting, but Trappist abbeys are among the most suitable for Trappist beers. The brewer of the most recent abbey brewery in this country, Brother Thomas, organised the tasting for us. On a fine spring morning, we left for the distant town of Achel, on the Dutch-Belgian border, on the edge of the vast Forest of Leenderbos, owned by the Dutch Forestry Commission.

This tasting excited an unusual degree of interest: all the guests invited were present. The representatives of the Trappist breweries sat side by side with brewers of abbey beers under the attentive eye of the Beer Passion Magazine staff, who were keeping their ears wide open.

Rob Imeson and Michael Beane (World Beer Tour/U.S.A.), as well as Michael Jackson, had come specially for this occasion to the remote town of Achel. Once the 18 guests were seated around the long table in the monastery brewing room, the party could begin.

The beers were tasted blind according to alcohol content, beginning, as is the rule, with the least alcoholic and graduating to the strongest. The beers are listed here in the order in which they were tasted.





**ACHEL 4**

**Origin:** 'De Achelse Kluis' Benedictine abbey  
**Alcohol content:** 4 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** available only on tap at the abbey cafeteria  
**Colour:** very pale, dense white head  
**Aroma:** very fresh, bitter, dry with hints of lime and fresh hops  
**Taste:** well-balanced, pleasantly bitter in the mouth, with a solid aftertaste. The alcohol content is not perceptible in the aroma or taste.



**ACHEL 6**

**Origin:** same as Achel 4  
**Alcohol content:** 6 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** same as Achel 4  
**Colour:** very pale, the fine white head is supported by fine, abundant fizz.  
**Aroma:** dry and hoppy, with a hint of sulphur and solvent.  
**Taste:** fuller than Achel 4, striking a good balance between bitter and fruity. The aftertaste, however, is really bitter.



**ORVAL**

**Origin:** Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Orval abbey  
**Alcohol content:** 6.2 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** 0.33 l, with metal top  
**Colour:** light amber, abundant off-white head, which becomes uneven.  
**Aroma:** although mainly bitter, there is a perceptible if slight acidulated note.  
**Taste:** also predominantly bitter, and very pleasant. Persistent bitterness. Hops have been used to good effect in this beer!



**WESTVLETEREN BLOND**

**Origin:** Saint-Sixtus Westvleteren  
**Alcohol content:** 5.8 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** 0.33 l, with green metal top (no label)  
**Colour:** pale, slightly cloudy, with an abundant head and fizz similar to that of champagne.  
**Aroma:** takes one back to the brewery; the ingredients are perceptible (especially the hops and malt), as well as a slight touch of fruit.  
**Taste:** the hops linger on the palate, creating a slight imbalance between malt and hops. The aftertaste is very bitter.



**TRIPLE DE CHIMAY**

**Origin:** Notre-Dame de Scourmont  
**Alcohol content:** 8 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** 0.33 l, with metal top  
**Colour:** between warm gold and light amber  
**Aroma:** spicy (cloves and a hint of Curaçao) and bitter, with a slight touch of honey.  
**Taste:** the succession of tastes is unusual: first, dryness (normally perceptible at the end), then fruitiness, and finally the warmth of the alcohol. The aftertaste is very bitter, almost harsh.



**WESTMALLE TRIPEL**

**Origin:** Notre Dame de Westmalle  
**Alcohol content:** 9 vol % alc.  
**Bottle content:** 0.33 l, with metal top  
**Colour:** golden, with a surprisingly fine fizz and a white, creamy, fine and abundant head.  
**Aroma:** this is the fruitiest-smelling of the beers tasted (overripe banana), finely malty and bitter.  
**Taste:** delicately sweet without being syrupy. The aftertaste is pleasantly bitter.

**CONCLUSION**

Although the Trappist beers we tasted were very different from each other, both in terms of alcohol content (4 to 9% vol.) and colour (from pale gold to light amber), they nevertheless, according to Michael Jackson form an entity.

Belgian Trappist beers form a family in their own right, characterised among others by top fermentation, a second fermentation in the bottle and a high alcohol content, characteristics adopted by abbey beers brewers after World War II.

The quality of Trappist beer is not due to the fact that they are brewed in abbeys, but to their intrinsic goodness. The Trappist label is not a quality label, although Belgian Trappist monks are among the best brewers around, unlike the German and Austrian monks, whose beers differ little from commercial beers.

Flemish lambics and acid beers, which are fermented a second time in the bottle, and in particular Trappist beers, are jewels among Belgian beers; they transfigure Belgium and give it an extra touch of individuality and diversity. According to Michael Jackson, Belgian beers have no rival.

