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Culture in a Glass

BEER WORKS FOR YOUR FOOD AT FATHER'S OFFICE

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Few things evoke the spirit of international conviviality like Munich's Oktoberfest. While we Angelenos may be miles away from Germany, the essence of this great tradition can be found year 'round at **Father's Office** in Santa Monica. Talking about unique ales is a favorite pastime for chef/beer sommelier Sang Yoon, who bought the bar in 2000. And sampling his selection of forty-eight beers is a great prelude to this celebration of the harvest. "My approach is to appreciate beer as we do wine, to bring European culture to beer," explains Yoon.

This classically trained chef's interest in beer started in France. A night of cooking and relaxing with a Belgian "Tripel" led to an epiphany. "The multi-ethnic foods we love on the West Coast—spicy Indian curries, coriander and tomato-lime flavors—pose a challenge to the wine connoisseur," she says. "At some point in the meal, wines do not complement the food like a really tasty, high malt Belgian beer."

According to Yoon, Belgium is to beer what the Bordeaux region is to wine. For one thing, brewing has a tradition there. Though grapes will not grow in such a cold climate, the country's unique water and hops create the terroir for great ale.

A Tripel means a beer in the European style, packed with live yeast and high malt. A classic, like Tripel Karmeliet, is brewed from wheat, oats, and barley—a highly unusual blend—and packs an alcohol content of eight percent. Few people know such beers can be cellared, allowing more delicate nuances to develop.

Yoon trains his staff to "pour violently," his demonstration of which feels strangely liberating. "Most people pour beer gently along the side," he explains. "But it's important to create an impact—agitate the carbon dioxide out of the liquid. If poured too carefully, it actually exacerbates the heat of the food."

While Belgian beers are the gold standard of Tripels,

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Yoon also favors Indian pale ales, created for British soldiers to drink in colonial India. From Canada, he prefers a strong red ale with a typically Québécois name, Maudite, which literally means "damned one." The label bears the legend of the Flying Canoe, a tale of lumberjacks who strike a deal with the devil in order to fly home for Christmas. Aged on lees, like many fine wines, Maudite offers a decidedly herbal nose, creamy mouth feel, and dense vegetal flavors that pair perfectly with meats, stews, and spicy dishes.

Yoon's selections change frequently, often reflecting the season. For the autumn, the pours of choice include wheat and white beers like Great White Ale, an unfiltered Belgian style scented with lemon grass; or Craftsman Triple White Sage, an herbal, sage-nuanced golden ale from Pasadena.

And while early Oktoberfests may have needed a horse race to lure the crowds, Father's Office is packed nightly with folks eager to imbibe the international parade of brews and to nibble on savories like spicy lamb skewers with roasted Japanese eggplant, or organic beet salad with Cabrales blue cheese, walnuts, and aged sherry vinaigrette. Many concur with Yoon's idea of luxury: sipping a great brew from a balloon of fine crystal. "That's why I like what I do... I get to combine the worlds of fine beers and fine dining." -E



Tripel
16  79
Karmeliet

TRIPEL THREAT

Wheat, oats, and barley are the unusual elements in Belgian Karmeliet—one of the many offerings at Father's Office in Santa Monica.