

# Lambic Timmermans: Rebirth of an Iconic Belgian Beer

Many self-respecting beer lovers consider Lambic to be one of the world's greatest beer styles. Outside Belgium, this spontaneously fermented beer is less well known. But when you add an interesting history, the rejuvenation of a fine brand and a brewery visit, an article becomes a must. With few exceptions, lambic beer is produced south and west of Brussels, in Pajottenland, where a microclimate allows for its highly specific fermentation. More or less acidic depending on its age, Lambic is a beer with nearly no fizz or froth and around 5 degrees of alcohol. It can be drunk on its own, but is more often used as the basis for faro, gueuze and kriel. Belgian correspondent **Dominique Huret** reports from the Timmermans brewery for **drinkworld**.

### A beer with a very ancient tradition

"Lambic is the oldest style of beer in the world still produced and consumed today. These authentic beers are born thanks to the wild yeasts in the Pajottenland air and to large oak barrels," explains Anthony Martin, owner of Timmermans, voted 'Best Brewer in the World' in 2022. Founded

in 1702, the Timmermans brewery is the oldest lambic brewery in the world still in operation. Located on a farm on the western outskirts of Brussels in the 1990s, the Timmermans building was threatened by a huge building project. Timmermans' lambic beer had lost most of its glamour, far outstripped by its competitor, the Lindemans brewery, also producing lambic in large quantities. The entrepreneur well known in Belgium for his commitment to preserving the country's brewing heritage, Anthony Martin, decided to buy the building, the brewery and the brand. It took him ten years to overcome the Belgian administrative complexities and the Timmermans brewery was saved. The monument was to be preserved along with the lambic beers heritage and the brewery's future.

### A very specific brewing process

Lambic is generally brewed from a grist containing about 60-70% barley malt and 30-40% unmalted wheat. During the boiling process, hops aged 2 to 3 years are added. The wort is cooled overnight in a shallow, flat, metal pan generally made of copper or stainless



steel, called a coolship. This is usually placed under the roof in the open air overnight, where the wild bacteria and yeasts do their work of inoculation. Among the 80 microorganisms, *Brettanomyces bruxellensis* and *Brettanomyces lambicus* have been identified in lambic beer, while others significant ones are *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *Saccharomyces pastorianus*.

Being exposed to the open air and the right night temperatures between  $-8$  and  $8$  °C ( $18$  and  $46$  °F) are critical success factors. Unlike ales or lagers, no yeast is added, which is why it is known as 'spontaneous' fermentation. The process is only used from October to May. The rest of the year, the beer does not cool quickly enough and the air is too rich in harmful bacteria. Climate change is further shortening this limited brewing window. In the early 1900s, lambic brewers enjoyed roughly 165 days a year in the ideal temperature range, whereas by 2018, that number has shrunk to 140. Hence the saying among lambic brewers: "In winter, brew who will, in summer, brew who can."



The seeded wort is then siphoned into oak or chestnut barrels mostly old port wine or sherry barrels from Portugal or Spain. The fermentation begins and becomes lambic. These barrels are maintained and kept for as long as possible. The lambic is left to ferment and mature for one to several years. It forms a layer of yeast that gives some protection from oxidation. This is similar in the production of vin jaune and sherry. The process is complex, as some yeasts and bacteria are very active very quickly, while others are much slower.

### Crafty, with aged and dried hops to accommodate consumers' taste

"Today, the brewery brews to the rhythm of the grain mill, which dates back to the end of the 19th century. Only lambic-based beers are produced here, both traditional lambic beers and new creations. Indeed, Gueuze à l'ancienne and Kriek à l'ancienne, whose names are protected at European level, are regarded as the queens of the beer world. Lambicus Blanche is another classic from the Timmermans brewery. This beer, created in the 1990s, is a lambic flavored with coriander and citrus fruit, typical of Belgian white beers. Kriek Retro is a delight for kriek lovers; the acidity of this lambic balances perfectly with the intense character typical of Morello cherries. As tradition dictates, the candy sugar added to Timmermans Faro gives it its sweet flavor," adds Sarah Pirlot Brand Manager at John Martin.

"Since the method of inoculation and long fermentation time of lambic beers increases the risk of spoilage, lambic brewers used large amounts of hops for their antibacterial properties. So, the recipe has changed over time. In the early 19th century, the Lambic was a very hoppy beer, with about 8 or 9 g per liter of a locally grown variety. But modern lambic brewers avoid making the beer very hop-forward. They use aged, dry hops, which have lost much of their bitterness, aroma but also flavor" explains Frédéric Van Cutsem, Operations Manager at John Martin.



### Beer portfolio revisited for the launch of the Fruit & Spice Lambicus range

"Today's young consumers are travelling the world. With or without a rucksack, they're discovering other cultures, breathtaking landscapes and exotic flavors. Once back in Europe, they look back with nostalgia at these world cuisines. This new generation of consumers, also known as 'novelty seekers', love innovation and original taste experiences. It's for them that we've added these spices to our fruity beers. In doing so, we're enhancing the taste and aroma of the fruit and arousing the curiosity of a younger generation of consumers, without detracting from our traditional

heritage," explains Anthony Martin. The brewery is innovating by adding spices to its fruity beers. These ingredients give the beers surprising, balanced flavors and an aroma that aims to appeal to a new generation of consumers. "Our new Fruit & Spice Lambicus range complements the existing range of traditional Timmermans beers. These beers are aimed at true lambic lovers in search of quality and generous, complex taste experiences. A pinch of black pepper has been added to Timmermans Kriek to give it more 'punch', while cardamom subtly enhances the taste of Timmermans Pêche. Thyme is a delicious addition to Timmermans Strawberry. Finally, hibiscus goes wonderfully well with Timmermans Framboise, giving it that little taste that makes all the difference," adds Sarah Pirlot.



### A glamorous showcase for all Belgian Beer World

After drastic renovations, the Brussels Bourse stock exchange building is now housing a Beer Museum on its upper floors. A total of 104 Belgian beer brewers from all over Belgium are involved, participants and showcasing their products. On the 12,000 m<sup>2</sup>, museum, public spaces for events, beer experience centre and rooftop tasting bar will share the space. Among other things, visitors will discover why Belgian beer is recognised as world heritage by UNESCO. [www.belgianbeerworld.be](http://www.belgianbeerworld.be) 