

The Art of Darkness

How an iconic brewery's pact with the devil paid off

BY MELISSA MAKI with JASON BARTIS

THE END OF THE WORLD, *Damned*, *Holy Water* (over a painting of a smiling devil) — hardly words and images associated with the centuries-old tradition of monastic brewing. Yet seen in their original language— *La Fin Du Monde*, *Maudite*, and *L'Eau Benite* bring joy to the hearts of anyone passionate about the iconic, abbey-inspired ales of Unibroue.

When Andre Dion, Serge Racine, and Canadian rock star Robert Charlebois began Unibroue in Chambly, Quebec in the early 1990s, more than one obstacle laid in their path to success. As the first brewery on the continent to dedicate its craft solely to the creation of Belgian style ales, they not only had to produce beers to compete with some of the world's finest, they had to make sure they stood out from the crowd. And stand out they did.

DISTINCTIVE BRANDING

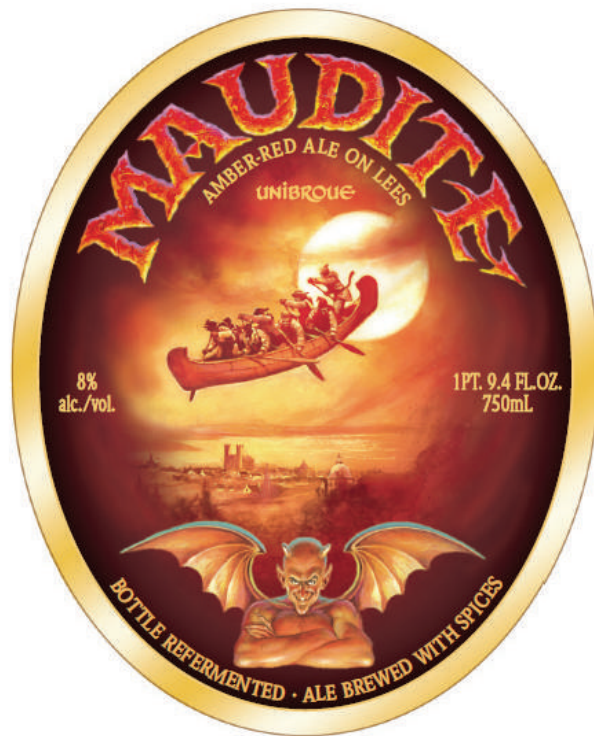
Unibroue implemented an integrated and sophisticated branding strategy. The concept and artwork for its labels generally precede the brewing of the beers. "The branding is very strong at Unibroue and therefore it is essential to have a connection be-

tween the profile of the liquid and the artwork," says brew master Jerry Vietz.

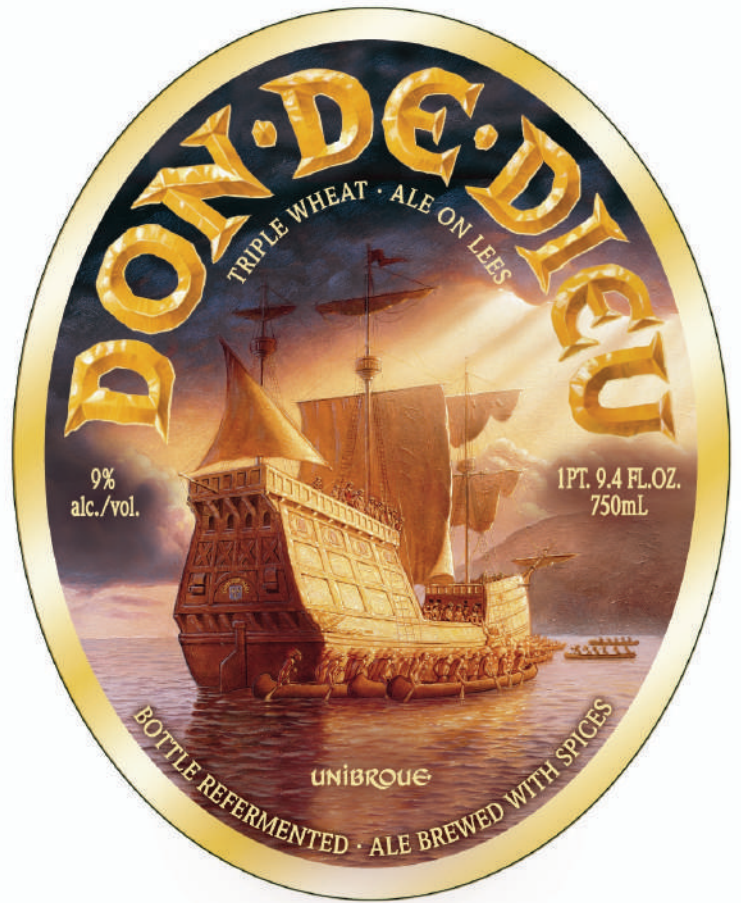
Most of Unibroue's beers take their names from the local legends of rural Quebec. Artist Asaf Mizra was determined that these stories live on in the minds and imaginations of anyone who tasted the

beers. His masterful depictions of the tales often contain dark and demonic imagery, and every label is a brilliantly crafted work of art. Labels are only the beginning. Taking a cue from Belgian beer culture, where each beer is served in its own appropriate glass, Unibroue created glassware for each beer and distributed it to key restaurants and retailers. They created t-shirts and coasters emblazoned with the artwork that told the story of the beer. And unlike the 'basket carrier' six-pack holders that virtually every

other brewery used, Unibroue originally presented their beers in a fully closed box, each panel adorned with Mizra's vision. Determined not to be over-



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**“THIS IS WHAT WE
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looked, Andre Dion was putting art on the shelves of stores across North America.

Maudite is perhaps the brewery's most recognized label. It features a flying canoe filled with voyageurs set against a fiery-hued backdrop. A leering devil with crossed arms appears in the foreground. The label is inspired by the Legend of the Flying Canoe (La Chasse-galerie), a story of a group of homesick voyageurs working in a remote logging camp who make a pact with the devil in order to swiftly travel home to visit their loved ones on New Year's Eve. The label is appropriate for this tempting brew. Categorized as a "strong amber-red ale," Maudite is remarkably smooth, with a rich caramel malt character and slight spiciness. It pairs effortlessly with both savory and sweet dishes.

UNIBROUE AND FOOD

From the beginning, the brewery has touted their beers as food-friendly. They clearly understand that beer plays an integral role at the dinner table. They employ a beer sommelier and organized beer dinners long before the idea became fashionable. This practice continues and Unibroue beer dinners have a nationwide appeal and reach.

The beers complement food exceptionally well and are particularly suited to meals with multiple courses. The extensive array of Unibroue beers offers a broad palette of flavors for pairing — from the subtle, citrusy Blanche de Chambly (a white ale) to the rich, chocolaty Trois Pistoles (a strong dark ale). Unibroue beers stand up to food in a way that beer from other breweries may not. According to Vietz, the ancient brewing methods he employs make the beers especially suitable to food pairing.

LIVING BEER

Unibroue emulates the brewing tradition of Trappist monks, particularly those in Belgium, by producing unfiltered beers that are refermented in the bottle — or bottle conditioned. Adding sugar and yeast just before bottling initiates another stage of fermentation, which contributes complexity, body, and effervescence to beer; it gives it a much longer shelf life. Bottle conditioned beers can be cellared for years and improve with age, much like fine wine.

Due to the residual yeast these beers contain, they are often referred to as "live" beers. For this reason, Unibroue characterizes their beers as "Living Legends."

The brewery also distinguishes its beer by incorporating gruit — a mixture of herbs and spices — into their brewing. Gruit was used to flavor beer in medieval times, before the advent of hops. Vietz notes that the composition of gruit differs throughout the Unibroue beer family. The subtle herbal notes provide inspiration for food pairings. Vietz worked in the wine and cider industries before entering the world of beer brewing. He views his broad fermentation experience as helpful in the creative process, and he clearly relishes the

opportunity to experiment. "Every ingredient has a different profile and needs to be processed and managed differently to obtain the desired characteristics in the final product," he says. "At the end, it is all about balance. This is what we call the art of brewing. ♥

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WHAT'S NEW AT UNIBROUE?

WHEN JAPAN'S conglomerate Sapporo International bought Unibroue in 2006, craft beer lovers were concerned that the beer's quality would suffer, but fortunately, it hasn't. In fact, Vietz notes that investments to increase capacity and improve quality have continued. "It is very exciting to have greater resources and the benefit of support from the head office to promote the prestigious Unibroue refermented ales," he says.

Beer aficionados were thrilled with the February release of the **Grande Réserve 17**. This exceptional beer is based on the recipe of the critically acclaimed Unibroue 17, which was brewed in 2007 to celebrate the brewery's 17-year anniversary. Unibroue 17 won three gold and three platinum medals and was named the "World's Best Dark Ale" at the World Beer Awards. If you can get your hands on a bottle of the **Grande Réserve 17**, you might try delayed gratification. Vietz says the beer has "exceptional aging potential."

Blanche de Chambly

White ale; 5% abv

Refreshingly thirst quenching, mildly malty and slightly sweet, with an alluring pale golden color, effervescent head, and subtle bouquet of spice and citrus notes.

Éphémère Apple

White ale brewed with apple must; 5.5% abv

A mouth-watering bouquet of Granny Smith apples in a refreshing, lightly spiced white ale. Slightly sweet and slightly tart with a delicate balance of fruit and spice notes.

Maudite

Strong amber-red ale; 8% abv

An appealing aroma of wild spices and floral hop notes. Malty, spicy, vinous and deliciously complex, with an assertive crisp hop finish.

La Fin du Monde

Belgian-style tripel; 9% abv

Mildly yeasty with a complex palate of malt, fruit and spice notes followed by a smooth, dry finish.

Don de Dieu

Triple wheat ale; 9% abv

Complex flavor that is slightly fruity, malty and yeasty, with a hint of unfiltered sake. A palate warming finish of roasted nuts and spices.

Trois Pistoles

Strong dark ale; 9% abv

Brewed with four malts and four exotic spices, with a subtle sweetness of cocoa and fruit notes. Surprisingly smooth and satisfying.