



Santé!

**How a novel wort chiller changed the world of brewing forever
(And why the French Ardennes is “the place to beer”)**

Would you believe we wouldn't have the beer we have today, if it wasn't for the discoveries and inventions made in The French Ardennes during the 19th century?

France is a country synonymous with fine wines. But when it comes to a drink which truly defines The Ardennes, it's beer which makes this region stand out from the crowd.

News that the micro-brewery Brasserie Artisanale de Haybes is now back in production brings with it further evidence that The French Ardennes is once again “*Probably...* the best destination in France”!

What this means, of course, is that - when it comes to beer - the whole world needs to raise a glass to The French Ardennes...

Why? Because there were three or four major inventions in the history of Ardennes beer which influenced the entire process of modern brewing.

So let's all say “Santé” (and “Merci”!) to Jean-Louis Baudelot - born in Vendresse on May 19, 1797 - who was just 19 years old when, at the Haraucourt distillery, he invented bubblers that allowed energy savings. From then on, his inventions flowed like beer from the tap.

Most important of all Baudelot's inventions, however, was a novel wort chiller in Haracourt that changed the world of brewing forever.

Technically, this allowed breweries not only to complete in less than two hours what they previously did in eight hours, but also to prevent brew contamination.

His invention - which reduced cost, and also earned him a gold medal at the Paris World's Fair in 1867 - was quickly adopted by a large number of breweries in Europe and North America. Baudelot himself even set-up a branch in New York - the ‘Baudelot Patent Beer Cooler’ - to market his machines which being manufactured by the Sedan-based company Vauché.

But he didn't stop there; and later invented the barrel washing machine in 1862.

Prior to all of this, in 1827, another Ardennes resident, Bridier-Royer from Sedan, had invented another game-changer - the malt mill. This involved grinding barley malt - a crucial step in brewing before mixing the cereals and water. His discovery is today widely regarded as the first invention of modern brewing.

So, for a variety of reasons (amongst them being actual consumption of beer!) the Ardennes has long been known as one of the three leading regions in France for beer, and brewing. Nord and Pas-de-Calais are right up there, too. But what makes this

particular part of France so very special when it comes to beer is not simply the production of the stuff, but also the creation of the tools of the job.

Part of the reason for this, in turn, is its geographic location. That, plus the fact that in the days when the water of the area was unfit for consumption, the local population drew on its apples to make cider, and locally grown barley and hops for beer...

It was actually nicknamed "The Beer Capital" during its golden age between 1880 and 1914, and for good reason: the Sedan conurbation, then populated by around 35,000 inhabitants, had 37 breweries and malt houses on its territory. A dozen of them were located within the walls of Sedan, which produced hops, had one of the most prestigious brewing schools, and the offices of the only specialized magazine had taken up residence there.

Everything came together to make the city and The French Ardennes "the place to beer."

By the time of the industrial revolution, there were 283 breweries in 104 towns and cities of The French Ardennes. But many of these were destroyed during the First World War, and the shortage of manpower which followed meant that few were rebuilt.

A "second wind" took hold of the Ardennes around a century ago, in 1921, and lasted to 1979 when the world of brewing in France became exclusively industrial with huge factories producing uniform beers at low cost.

The Ardennes tradition for brewing good quality beer was reintroduced, and its beers once again started to sell throughout much of northern France - especially during the 1950s. But by the end of the 1970s, it seemed like a part of The French Ardennes' history and heritage had been lost forever.

Since the turn of the 21st century, however, there has been a gradual re-emergence of locally brewed ales; and it has reached the point now where - a century after its second wind - there is a "third wind", with a dozen or so micro-breweries now well-established here and producing more than 80 different varieties of beer, from Haybes to Rethélois and from Warcq to Carignan.

Today, beer consumption among Ardennes residents is still well above the national average, with between 60 and 80 litres per year per capita, according to sources, compared to the national average of 32.

The Ardennes' tradition for brewing good quality beer is being revived these days by numerous local micro-breweries - not least, at the Brasserie Artisanale de Haybes, where owner Julien Dejente is also keen to once again highlight Haybes' close connection with Stockport, in England. Haybes, along with other towns in the Ardennes, was obliterated over three days of bombing by German forces in August 1914. After the war, Stockport sent aid and support to help with its rebuilding. Dejente is hoping to reintroduce a beer named "Stockport" to his range of locally produced ale - to help highlight the close connections which still exist between the two towns.

Visitors looking for other true flavours of l'Authentique France, meanwhile, will find a host of farmer's markets, festivals and events, aimed at highlighting some of the region's best-known food and drink.

Beer may now once again be the most popular drink in the Ardennes, but cider, sparkling drinks, wine, hydromel (the oldest alcoholic drink in the world), absinthe, gin and whisky are also produced in the region.

Its cider is representative of the produce of the Ardennes region, with producers applying their combined know-how to obtain ciders of fine quality in Barbaise, Lalobbe and Mouzon.

Where spirits are concerned, it is possible to taste “*La Marcas- sine*” in Séraingcourt - an organic hydromel (mead) with 12% ABV, prepared following an old recipe. In Falaise, the juice of 3,000 redcurrant bushes is converted into red or white sparkling wine, clear fruit brandy, or ratafia. The lees are distilled to produce eau de vie, and also produce candies or fruit jellies. While in Remaucourt, 2,000 rhubarb plants provide 5,000 bottles of sparkling wine and 3,000 litres of fruit juice and fruit drinks.

So let's lift a glass and say “Merci” to The French Ardennes - “the place to beer”.

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Editors notes:

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