

(excerpt from Craft Beer & Brewing magazine)

The Oxford Companion to Beer definition of

Trappist breweries

Trappist Breweries are breweries located within the walls of a Trappist abbey, where brewing is performed by, or under the supervision of, Trappist monks. The name “Trappist” originates from the La Trappe abbey located close to the village of Soligny in Normandy, France, where this reform movement of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance was founded in 1664.

Over the past several decades the Trappist beers have become some of the most influential inspirations for commercial brewers large and small. There are seven Trappist breweries—six in Belgium and one in the Netherlands—that brew beer for commercial sale. They are Westmalle, Westvleteren, Chimay, Koningshoeven, Rochefort, Orval, and Achel. Most of the breweries are operated by secular employees who do not live onsite but work under the supervision of a monk from the abbey. Trappist beer is not a categorical style, but there are some common characteristics that almost all Trappist beers share. Each is top fermented, unpasteurized, contains no chemical additives, adds sugar to the wort in the kettle, and is bottle conditioned. Since 1997 authentic Trappist beers can be recognized by a hexagonal logo on their label that guarantees the following:

They are produced within the walls of the monastery.

The monastic community determines the policies and provides the means of production.

The profits are primarily intended to provide for the needs of the community or for social services.

(Beers produced in similar styles and connected, even if only in name, to a religious order are termed “Abbey beers” rather than “Trappist.” See [abbey beers](#).)

Despite beliefs to the contrary, Trappist beers as they are now produced have only existed since the early 1930s, when Orval and Westmalle developed their first commercially available beers. Similarities in flavor among Westmalle, Westvleteren, and Achel are a result of the fact that all three use the same yeast culture. The Westmalle abbey and brewery are located northeast of Antwerp and produces three beers: Extra (5% alcohol by volume [ABV]), Dubbel (6.5% ABV), and Tripel (9.5% ABV). Westvleteren is located northwest of Ypres, 10 km from the French border, and produces three beers: Blond (5.8% ABV), 8 (8% ABV), and 12 (10.2% ABV). They are only available in bottles sold in wooden crates at the abbey gate. Chimay, arguably the most famous of the seven Trappist breweries, is located south of Charleroi, 1 km from the French border, and produces four beers: Dorée (4.8% ABV; not for commercial sale), Rouge (7% ABV), Tripel (8% ABV), and Bleue (9% ABV). Their beers are transferred by tank truck to Baileux, 8 km away, for bottling. The Koningshoeven abbey and brewery, located close to Tilburg, 12 km from the Belgian border in the Netherlands, produces at least eight beers: Tilburg Dutch Brown Ale (5% ABV, for export), Witte Trappist (5.5% ABV), Blond (6.5% ABV; filtered), Dubbel (7% ABV), Bock (7% ABV; a seasonal beer), Isidór (7.5% ABV), Tripel (8% ABV), and Quadrupel (10% ABV). They are all available in bottles and in kegs. Rochefort is located south of Liege, 30 km from the French border, and produces three beers: 6 is 7.5% ABV, 8 is 9.2% ABV, and 10 is 11.3% ABV, in bottles only. Orval is located less than 1 km from the French border, south of Florenville, and produces two beers: Orval (6.2% ABV) and Petit Orval (3.5% ABV; not for commercial sale). It is the only Trappist that uses a *brettanomyces* yeast culture for refermentation. See [brettanomyces](#). Achel is located less than 50 m from the Dutch border northwest of Hamont and produces five beers: Blond and Bruin, both 5% ABV

and only on draught at the brewery, Blond and Bruin (8% ABV in bottles), and Extra (9.5% ABV in 75-cl bottles).

Most of the abbeys brew a lower-alcohol beer for consumption of the monks called “refters” beer, enkel (single), and for light-colored versions, blonde. These seldom leave the abbey. Westmalle’s version is called Extra (5% ABV), Chimay’s Dorée (4.8% ABV), Orval’s Petite (3.5% ABV), and at Achel they produce Achel Blond & Brune (5% ABV).

Dubbel (double), tripel (triple), and quadrupel (quadruple) beers are the styles for which the Trappists are most famous. The terms “enkel” (single), “dubbel,” “tripel,” and “quadrupel” loosely refer to the amount of malt with fermentable sugars and the original gravity of the wort prior to fermentation. Rochefort and Achel are the only Trappists still using the gravity scale of Belgian degrees instead of dubbel, tripel, etc. to refer to their beers. See [belgian brewing degrees](#). Rochefort 6 corresponds to an original gravity of 1.060 (15°Plato) 7.5% ABV, 8 corresponds to 1.080 (20°P) 9.2% ABV, and 10 corresponds to 1.100 (25°P) 11.3% ABV. When these beers were first brewed in the 1950s these figures were close to the actual alcohol content. Today, improved ingredients, temperature control, and yeast management have resulted in much stronger beers using the same amount of raw ingredients.

See also [chimay](#), [koningshoeven brewery](#), [orval brewery](#), [rochefort brewery](#), [westmalle brewery](#), and [westvleteren](#).

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