

Robb Report

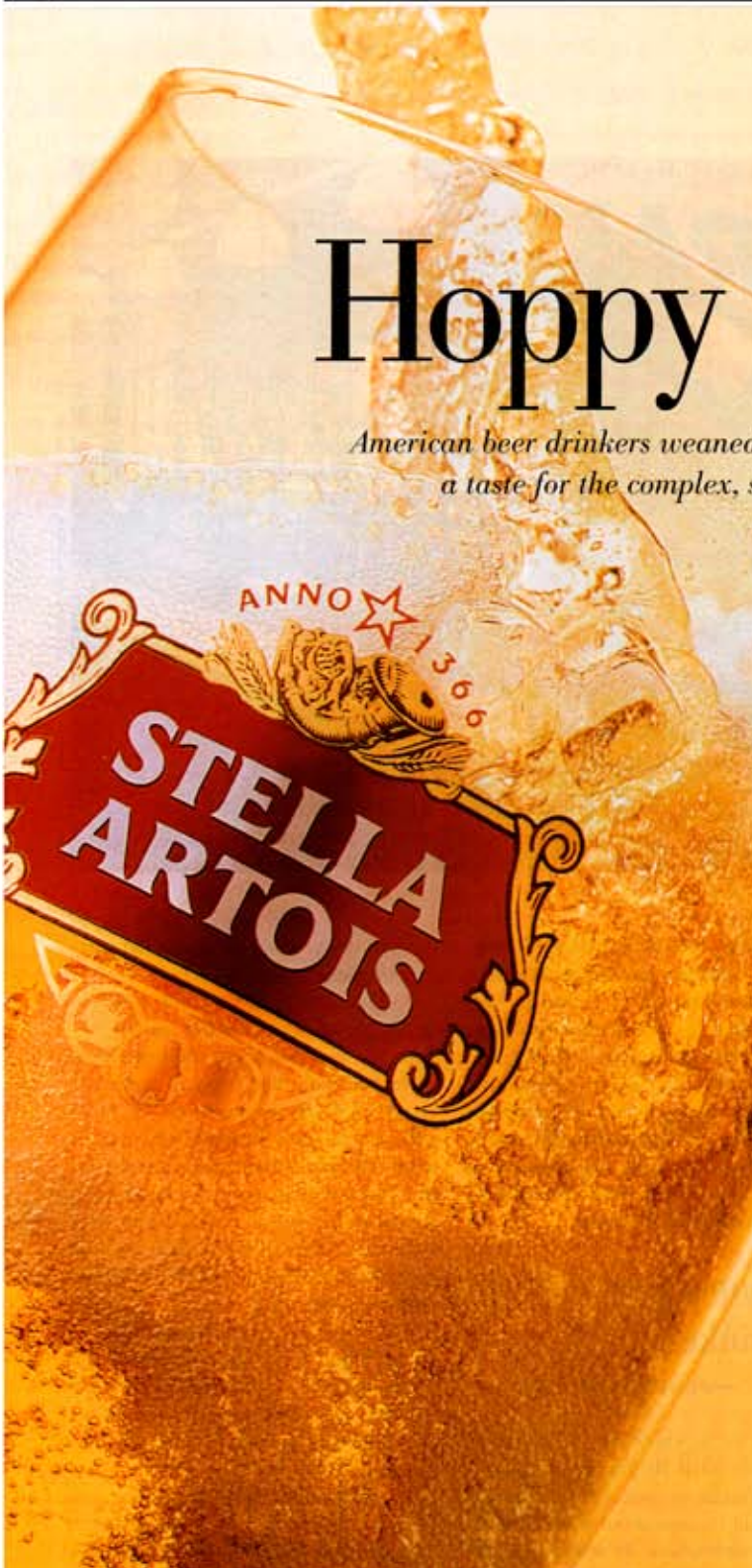
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Food & Wine

Hoppy Times

American beer drinkers weaned on microbrews are developing a taste for the complex, sophisticated brews of Belgium.

By Kim Fredericks



BELGIAN BEER IS NOT FOR PEANUTS and backyard barbecues. It demands more respect than the usual canned brews or those aided by lime. It demands to be served with hearty yet elegant dishes such as salad Liégeoise made with fresh green beans, sliced potato and crisp bacon, mussels steamed in a thyme and bay broth, and even steak tartare.

Belgian beers are popping up in brasseries and seafood restaurants across the United States. Touted as a beverage for those who have graduated from the microbrew craze that swept the country during the 1990s, Belgian brews are not for the average beer drinker. They require a more sophisticated palate and the knowledge to pair the right one with the appropriate foods.

At Markt, a popular brasserie in New York City, you can vie for space at the 60-foot-long bar to sip one of the 35 Belgian beers that it offers and snack on shrimp salad served in hollowed-out tomatoes and other appetizers. At San Francisco's Frjtz, you can sample Belgian beers with crepes and the restaurant's signature *pommes frites* (the upscale, extra-crispy version of French fries), served here with curry ketchup and balsamic mayonnaise.