New offerings from Marston's and McMullen's

Most of today's British pale ales are around the relatively modest strength of 4.0 per cent alcohol by weight or 5.0 by volume. The great pale ale brewery Marston's, of Burton, England, recently produced a version of the style at a higher, more traditional, strength, of 5.0 per cent by weight, 6.2 by volume. Marston's Burton Strong Pale Ale pours with a big head; has an attractive, bright, deep amber color; some buttery notes in the aroma; a smooth, malty, toasty, palate; and a slight lemon marmalade fruitiness in the finish. I could have taken a little more of the typical Burton sulfur character (it sounds unpleasant but can be quite addictive), and more hop, but Burton Strong is nonetheless an enjoyable addition to the Marston's range.

Marston's Oyster Stout (4.5v) was an earlier addition. Unlike the true interpretations of this style, it does not contain oysters -- but is intended as an accompaniment to them. Very smooth and rounded, toasty and creamy, with just a hint of chocolate. More suited to a sweetish oyster variety like Kent than a gamey Belon, perhaps.

McMullen's is another British brewery that makes frequent specials. I recently tasted its Harvest Moon (5.0v); smooth, malty, fruity (apples?) and dryish, with an earthy, woody, finish.

Both of these breweries are beginning to be more active in the American market, and their products are worth sampling.

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