

A new all-malt recipe signals a return to tradition for AB's upscale brand

# Michelob

## Comes Home

by Sean Ludford

*New & Improved!* How many times, in this age of extreme marketing, have we seen these words? Hundreds? Thousands? Today, *New & Improved* is a phrase with little or no meaning, having gone beyond raising skepticism to being faint background noise. Conversely, though, our ears perk up when a product upgrades with hardly a whisper. Such is the case with Michelob, a brand that has quietly reverted to its roots, using an all-malt recipe. (Most commercial beers are made with a large portion of cheaper cereal grains.)

Michelob is a brand with more than a century of history, having been introduced in 1896. For much of its life, Michelob was available exclusively on draft, long after Anheuser-Busch's chief product, Budweiser, was widely available in bottle. AB positioned, and brewed, Michelob as a "beer for connoisseurs."

In 1961 AB introduced Michelob in bottle. Although the product abandoned its all-malt formula, the unique hourglass bottle with a gold foil neck-label gave Michelob an upscale look. As the decades rolled past, the brand saw variations in packaging and marketing schemes that, coupled with the emergence of craft beer, diminished Michelob's standing as an elite brand.

In the mid-1990s, AB decided to dip their toes in the craft beer pool, creating a selection of all-malt beers in a variety of classic styles, most notably Amber Bock. Rather than creating a new identity for these upscale

brews, AB offered them under the Michelob banner. While the beers enjoyed largely approving nods from beer aficionados, the strategy did little to lift the flagship Michelob product.



**Michelob's signature hourglass bottle and gold label have changed subtly over the brand's history.**

Fast-forward to 2007. AB was determined to return Michelob to its winning heritage. When the dust settled from the obligatory corporate wrangling, it was decided that the best way to achieve their goal was to return to an all-malt recipe. By summer of this year, the *new* Michelob was on shelves across the country with only small type on the bottle's golden label alerting the observant consumer to the change. Thankfully, the phrase *New & Improved* is absent. ■■