

CRAFT INNOVATION AND  
BIOTRANSFORMATION

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON  
THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

# The Beer Connoisseur®

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**150**  
**TOP-RATED**  
**BEERS**  
**of 2020**

the  
**BEST**  
**BREWERIES**  
**OF 2020**

**2020**  
**CONSUMER**  
**SPENDING**  
**TRENDS**

**#1**  
**RATED**  
**BEER**  
**OF 2020**

**2021**  
**INSIGHTS**  
**FROM**  
**THE NBWA**

**2021**  
**THE HOP**  
**REPORT**



THE BEER IN REVIEW • WINTER 2021, ISSUE 52

## BEER & FOOD PAIRING

*When I see you, in your magnificent glass, it makes my mouth water. This creamy foam, this "lemony" aroma, this fruity taste. Everyone loves you, who can resist you? And then add the character of the Comté cheese... A perfect food pairing, one must share and discuss with others. Drink the beer young, and taste the cheese old!*

*Pauline*

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Belgian Beer Sommelier

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THE BEER IN REVIEW

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ANNUAL PRINT EDITION

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WINTER 2021, ISSUE 52

# THE BEER IN REVIEW

CHRIS GUEST

COVER | *BARREL AGED BROWNIE BATTER BLEND #1*  
 BY PONTOON BREWING | PHOTO BY THE CORK BROS



PUFF PUFF PASTRY STOUT BY GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO.  
 RATED 96 – WORLD CLASS

***“2020 was a tough year for everyone, but brewers were able to adapt and continue to cultivate creativity despite the myriad challenges created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the year’s difficulties, congratulations are in order for the brewers of our best beers of the year.”***

***– Chris Guest, Managing Editor***

**W**elcome to the 52nd edition of *The Beer Connoisseur* magazine! 2020 saw us release our landmark 50th issue, a touchstone release in our publication’s history, as well as grapple with a worldwide pandemic.

2020 was a rough year around the world, as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues apace, with no end in sight for some countries – such as the United States.

Though the pandemic stunted the industry for a short time, things picked back up as the year went on, and we have a variety of stories devoted to the year that was within the industry. Whether an award-winning brewer or devoted beer aficionado, we believe this issue has something for everyone.

Issue #52 is split into three sections. First off is our Industry Outlook, which explores the past year in the beer industry while also keeping a steady eye on what 2021 will bring. Multiple angles are covered – the perspective of consumers, restaurants and the craft brewing sphere are all discussed. Statistics and plenty of in-depth data abound in these expertly crafted stories, including interviews with industry insiders.

The main course of the issue, as always, is our collection of the top-rated beers of the year, which features the Top 150 Beers of 2020 as found in our *Official Review*. Despite an unprecedented global pandemic, brewers were still able to get creative, and thus, a wide range of fascinating styles are featured in this section.

We also provide our list of the Best Breweries of 2020, which features a returning favorite as well as some new names. The issue closes with our Trends section, detailing emerging and popular styles that will look to gain ground in 2021 as well as upcoming popular hops that are sure to be hot commodities among brewers next year.

In the end, this issue would not be possible without you, our dear readers. So, many thanks to you for joining us for Issue #52, and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it. Cheers!



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# TRADE MEMBERS

2020/2021 DIRECTORY

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# The Real Deal

CONSUMER TRENDS | STORY BY JIM DYKSTRA

**2**020 has seen the beer industry jerked around like a starfish in the churning tides of pandemic politics and economics. Shutdowns, lockdowns and massive shifts in public opinion have consistently made it difficult to plan more than a week in advance, and nearly impossible to find balance between what the market wants and what the brewer can provide. At this point, much of the beer industry is just holding on for dear life. But it's never too late to look ahead.

As of November, the market is showing signs of stabilization, and consumers have spoken with their wallets – demand for beer isn't going anywhere. The question then becomes – what segments of the marketplace are the dollars flowing to and which ones have dried up? Here is *The Beer Connoisseur's* 2021 Consumer Trends report.

## The Numbers

As always, the data we've examined comes from IRI Worldwide, a market research firm that tracks category-wide sales trends of beer sold in numerous retail outlets and then produces a monthly report of its findings. These findings can be used to provide real-time insight into the ever-changing beer marketplace, both in craft and macro categories. They can also help industry participants adapt to the marketplace and help you make more informed choices as a consumer. To save you the spreadsheet trawling, we've pieced together the most important changes in beer sales over the year of 2020 and will compare them to the prior year.

Before we delve further into this year's data, here are a few things to keep in mind – these numbers are on an international scale and may not represent individual brewery or regional sales accurately. The numbers also do not draw a hard line between beer styles within certain categories, which could mask sales trends of smaller brewers. They track sales of packaged beer only and from a few different sources, including convenience stores (think gas stations), a general “food” category (grocery stores, etc.), and a combined multi-outlet and convenience (MULC)



store category (a combination of grocery, drug, Wal-Mart/Sam's Club, dollar stores and military stores, among others). We will focus on the MULC category. While not all-encompassing, it's a great, well-rounded resource.

## Why Beer Sales Are Up in Retail Stores

Let's start with some good news – beer category sales are up compared to last year, at least in traditional retail channels. Year-to-date beer sales are up \$4.7 billion, an increase of 15.7%. This marks the highest market share of U.S. alcohol sales that the grocery channel has seen in five years.



*As American drinkers are becoming increasingly calorie- and ABV-conscious and the demand for healthier drinking is skyrocketing, the Craft Light Beer style was up 40 percent from last year. This may also explain why darker, maltier beer categories are seeing continually dropping sales.*

The reasoning is simple – draft sales aren’t happening, so people are buying from the store in bulk rather than lingering at pubs – and they’re buying high-quality products – a trend that had a precedent prior to the pandemic.

“Two-thirds of the sales gains in grocery are due to increased spending per trip, which is being driven by two factors: premiumization, which is shoppers buying higher-priced beverages... and secondly, they’re buying larger packs,” Brad Golden, senior vice president of insights at IRI, said in a recent report.

Of the 300 categories IRI tracks, beer has increased year-to-date dollar sales in the grocery store more than any other. For comparison, wine saw the fifth-highest increase, and spirits saw the eighth-highest.

But beer as a category includes everything from Colt 45 to White Claw. How is traditional craft beer doing?

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### **Popular Craft Beer Styles in 2020**

In the least shocking news of the year, IPA is yet again perched atop the craft beer throne, now comprising 41.3% of all craft beer sold – up from 37% in 2019. To put this in perspective, the next highest-selling category, Craft Seasonal, is a catch-all, and still only amounts to less than a quarter of total IPA sales.

It’s safe to assume that brewers played it safe this year. There simply was too much volatility to take big gambles on new craft brands, and no guarantee

that raw materials would be available at a reasonable price. So, brewers stuck with what they had diled in already from a production standpoint.

One could argue that COVID-19 aside, supermarket shelves are a bit more reserved these days, in terms of craft selection. Gone are the days where every trip to the grocery store could result in a new beer discovery. Competition from large, mature craft breweries is too tough to gamble on the limit-

low calories and exotic flavors that appeal to a large swath of drinkers.

That segment saw an increase in sales of more than \$2.3 billion over the last year, translating to about a 75% sales increase. This growth, which shows no sign of slowing, puts FMBs on track to overtake Imports as the second-largest segment by 2021, and has them rapidly closing in on Domestic Premium – macro brews – which remains the largest segment of beer sales.

FMBs are a versatile category, and the winning strategy so far has been to join it, rather than try to beat it. You'll find many mid-sized craft brewers sporting their own seltzer brand, allowing them more flexibility to experiment with flavoring and CBD/THC adjuncts, which are further cementing their hold on the marketplace.

Case in point – Atlanta-based SweetWater Brewing Co., the 14th-largest brewery in the U.S. in 2019 per the Brewers Association, was sold in November to Aphria Inc. for \$300 million. SweetWater, which has found success with cannabis-themed brews like 420 Extra Pale Ale and its G13 Strain Series, was seen by Aphria – a cannabis firm with no prior experience in the beverage alcohol industry – as much as a “lifestyle brand” as it was a brewery.

Non-alcoholic beer has also made a splash in 2020, with sales up 39% from 2019 – a trend that is forecasted to continue throughout the next decade. The growth of the segment can largely be attributed to a few brands. Heineken 0.0, introduced in 2017, accounted for about 29% of total NA sales. O'Douls followed at around 25%, and Busch NA at 17%.

However, in order to truly break through like seltzer, NA beer will have to become a drink that people drink for enjoyment, and not just out of necessity. To that end, an honorable mention goes out to Athletic Brewing, which brews only craft NA beer, and has seen its sales grow exponentially – 1000% in 2019, and another 500% in 2020.

A major factor for the company's success is its ability to see the category as a standalone – marketing outside of typical beer-drinking circles and producing limited-edition offerings, which can sometimes sell out in seconds online.

“Non-alcoholic beer has a great place in today's world. Our goal is definitely not to cannibalize alcoholic beer in those sessions,” Athletic founder Bill Shufelt said. “We're definitely trying to reimagine



The Flavored Malt Beverages category, led by the explosive growth of Hard Seltzers, saw sales increase by a staggering \$2.3 billion last year.

ed number of SKUs afforded to the category, whose shelf space grows ever smaller due to pressure from Domestic Premium brands.

IPA aside, Belgian Witbier and Golden Ale saw notable growth, up 18 and 19%, respectively, from last year. These are changes we attribute to maturation of the palate, and an understandable counterpoint to the polarized hoppiness of IPA.

Perhaps most telling, though, is the expansion of the Craft Light Beer style, up 40% from last year. American drinkers are becoming increasingly calorie- and ABV-conscious, and demand for healthier drinking is skyrocketing. This may also explain why darker, maltier beer categories – porter, ESB and barleywine – are seeing continually dropping sales.

---

## Seltzer and Non-Alcoholic: Teammate or Competitor?

While Imports, Craft, Domestic Super Premium and Cider all saw double-digit growth between 10 and 20% over the last year, two “health-conscious” segments of the total beer category saw incredible growth – Flavored Malt Beverages (FMB) and Non-Alcoholic. FMBs, of course, were powered by the explosive growth of Hard Seltzer, which offers

the category, like an athletic beer category. We're adding beer to a lot of different days of the week, but we're also attracting a lot of soda drinkers or functional beverage drinkers into the category."

So far, signs are positive. The company outgrew its original Connecticut brewery, slated to last for five years, in 10 months, and recently purchased an 80,000-square-foot San Diego brewery formerly owned by Ballast Point Brewing Co. For brewers looking to build their consumer base, FMBs offer a relatively safe option, and NA beers show promise as well.

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## Homebrewing Resurgence

Obviously, people are going out less, but they're also becoming more self-sufficient and picking up hobbies around the house, including homebrewing. The Associated Press reported in April that major homebrew supplier Northern Brewer's sales had "shot up by 40% to 50%," in response to lockdown.

Homebrew starter kits were a popular choice, but interestingly, so too were "classic hops," according to Mike Brennan, sales manager for the homebrew division of BSG Handcraft, a brewing supply wholesaler.

"Hazy IPAs are trendy these days, but many customers are asking for 'classic hops' like Cascade, Centennial and Chinook that were popular years ago," Brennan said.

"They're dusting off their old equipment, the fermenters, and they're going back and brewing some of those classic-style IPAs, those more bitter IPAs, like we used to do."

Regardless of whether homebrewers were just pining for simpler times, or legitimately craving a currently underrepresented IPA style, it's a trend worth noting – especially given the fact that Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and Lagunitas IPA, both in the West Coast vein, are the country's most popular Pale Ale and IPA brands, respectively. We've officially come full circle on hop profiles.

---

## The Corona Factor

It's a thought many will have had at some point in 2020 – "This can't be good for Corona beer."

During March 2020, a PR firm found that 38% of American beer drinkers surveyed stated they wouldn't buy Corona "under any circumstances," and that 14% who said they would buy it refused to order it in public. Given all the negative

press, it's a bit surprising to find that no Corona beer brand saw a decrease in sales in 2020, and each grew in line with previous years.

---

## Drinking Trends to Watch In 2021

We know to expect more consumers to buy in bulk, and that they're willing to buy premium products when possible. But stylistically, what can we



Despite unfortunately sharing a name with a global pandemic, no Corona beer brand saw a decrease in sales in 2020, and each grew in line with previous years.

expect for 2021? The extremes of today provide clues for the norms of tomorrow.

The growth of craft light lagers, non-alcoholic beer and hard seltzers are a clear indication of where future market growth will be concentrated. To put it succinctly, we are moving towards more health-conscious drinking. The field is still wide open, and there is plenty of room for experimentation, whether through CBD/THC infusions, or cross-over drinks like hard kombucha and hoppy sodas.

Each of these sub-categories will continue to gain traction, and the competition will force increasingly creative products. Most will be busts, but for every 1000 busts, there will be one product that carves out a following and begins making way for the next evolution in drinking. Eventually, it'll come to a fever pitch, and drinkers will long for simplicity again. It's a cycle as predictable as the bell bottom jean.

We can expect continued innovation in the land of milkshake IPAs, sours and lager crossovers. Exotic yeasts like kveik, which were forecasted to make a big splash in 2020, may find purchase among tired palates, but more likely, 2021 will be a year of incremental change in beer, as brewers hold on to their hats and hope for steadier economic footing to spur their growth and creativity.



# TRENDS IN CRAFT

by Jonathan Ingram

The year 2020 was a bummer. So, let's move on. But first, there's the business of craft beer to consider and how it has weathered a pandemic year.

Just looking at the beer headlines and what's trending about beer on Twitter as the year came to a close could be a perilous pursuit, because the headlines and stories emphasize problems such as a shortage of cans just when they're needed the most—by everybody from Coca-Cola to craft brewers. There's more fallout than usual when it comes to closings and bankruptcies. And then there's the eternal 2020 weirdness such as sales of beer for off-premises consumption, although it increased year-over-year, beginning to lag behind wine and spirits.

When money and jobs are tight and people are drinking far more often at home instead of restaurants, bars or taverns due to a pandemic, one would expect relatively affordable beer sales to be strong. People may be drinking more alcohol in some quarters to cope, but some are drinking less due to job losses, which may be higher among those who often buy beer.

However, as Brewers Association founder Charlie Papazian often stated in his best-selling homebrewing book *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing*: “Don't worry, have another (my substitution here) extraordinary craft beer innovation

like a juicy or hazy IPA.” The sales of this style, as time and the pandemic march on, are among the leaders in retail sales.

It is worth asking just how it's going with innovation in craft brewing. Apparently, there's more emphasis than ever on existing flagships when it comes to drink-at-home packaged beer. Two of craft's best-known beers, New Belgium Brewing's Fat Tire and The Boston Beer's Samuel Adams Boston Lager,”

Draft beer, the crucible of innovation in taprooms and brewpubs, remains a quandary in terms of sales. An unverified anecdotal viewpoint by this writer – due to a lack of travel but no lack of visiting local taproom emporiums with carryout or outdoor seating – indicates that innovation continues. If the market is sick, what better medication than producing new, exciting beers?

Some segments that are measured in off-premises buying trends continue going forward from 2019. Hard seltzer sales continue to increase by astounding amounts, which only serves to put more pressure on can manufacturers and smaller brewers when it comes to accessing the retail market. White Claw's variety pack, for example, ranked eighth in the Top 100 brand sales of IRI Worldwide tracking of retail sales, just behind Budweiser. Overall, the White

Claw brand's retail sales are up 129% and the sales of the Truly brand owned by Boston Beer increased 121% per the IRI's tracking of retail sales.

Non-alcoholic beer continues to do well, a trend that became noticeable in 2019, which confirms not everybody is drinking alcohol products to ward off the travails of the pandemic. Led by macro brewer Heineken, which is spending considerable sums on safe driving advertising as a partner in Formula One racing via track signage that is telecast worldwide, leads the way in the non-alcoholic segment with its 0.0 label. A few craft NA-only brewers such as Athletic Brewing, Surreal Brewing, Bauhaus Brew Labs and Hairless Dog are having success in this relatively small American market segment. They have the advantage of being able to ship anywhere since their beers, many in familiar craft styles, carry non-alcoholic status.

Overall, the sales trend is down for on-premises consumption in the form of draft beer as one would expect. How far down is a matter of expert assessment best left to economists such as the Brewers Association's Bart Watson or Lester Jones of the National Beer Wholesalers Association.

Watson calls the question of how much has been lost in draft sales of craft beer the "one-million-barrel" question. It's tougher for the Brewers Association to assess the loss in draft sales, because so many members serve from taps in either tasting rooms or brewpubs and because craft brewers work in different climates and in different states, which suffer disparate effects from the pandemic. Watson can survey members, but it becomes difficult to pursue the triangulation of data he normally performs to double-check the accuracy of his sampling—because of the location questions and so much upheaval in general.

According to NBWA data, in weeks 1 through 11 of 2020, draft beer distribution in kegs was 8% of total draft beer product, which includes cans and bottles. In weeks 12 through 21 (the core of the pandemic lockdown period), the distribution of draft in kegs plummeted to zero. In the subsequent weeks of 22 through 45, the draft distributed in kegs went up slightly to 3.3% of the total.

All observers agree that the sale of packaged beer will not make up for the deficit from draft sales, especially given the winter wave of the pandemic. Watson estimated in his annual mid-year report that the decline in sales in 2020 compared to 2019 was 10% through June. On a more upbeat note, the number of craft beer closings in the first half of the year was 112, a modest 4% increase compared to the same period in 2019. (New brewery openings, meanwhile, have declined, but still far outpace closings.)



But what about innovation? The core of craft lives on despite the challenging times. Tasting rooms may not be drawing as many beer drinkers, but lower volumes required by brewers allowed them more time to consider what to do with spare capacity after the downturn in draft sales. The BA estimates as many as 80% of their more than 8,000 member brewers are confident of continuing in business in 2021, which means continuing to innovate.

The innovation trend was evident in the summer months when craft lagers began appearing more often due to the time and space in fermentation tanks usually dedicated to other styles. Among drinkers who favor craft as well as big-name lagers, it's a welcome change that the style closely associated with macro brewers' light pilsners is no longer considered a sacrilege to brew without designating it as a German or Mexican lager or a Czech pilsner.

If you're inclined to think lagers are not ever connected with craft innovation, consider Brooklyn Brewing's Winter Lager. It's made with dark malts, but it's not a schwarzbier. Rather, it's a lager that's refreshing in the fall and winter at a time when a darker beer suits the clime without the relative strength of darker malts in a porter or a stout. In many respects, it's the perfect beer for the "second summer" being experienced on the East Coast.

This brings up a bit of a sticking point. Larger craft brewers may have the time and money to innovate, then bring a beer to the market. Smaller craft brewers – who may be facing a can shortage that looks a little like a firing squad – may not be able to convert tasting room success and innovation into a beer case offering at the local store. At a time when market risk is simply not a welcome prospect, the double-whammy of a can and cash flow shortage from lower-than-usual draft sales are certainly daunting.

The most daunting element in craft innovation continues to be biotransformation and its role in juicy and hazy beers, usually referred to as New England IPAs. The judging guidelines for the Juicy or Hazy style at the Great American Beer Festival, which first appeared in 2018, do not make mention of biotransformation, hewing instead to the characteristics of flavor, appearance and mouthfeel when it comes to judging this approach for pale ales, IPAs and imperial IPAs. On the other hand, this style originated as “Vermont IPA,” starting with The Alchemist’s Heady Topper, which is widely recognized as the first biotransformation success story.

A chemical process that can be broadly applied to brewing techniques is the creation of esters by interaction with yeast during fermentation, and the more complicated version of biotransformation is considered to be the origin of geyser-like aromas of tropical fruits in the New England IPA. The NEIPA flavor profile is accompanied by a soft mouthfeel, an underlying level of resinous hops (in place of bitterness), a noticeable sweetness and, of course, haze resulting from the grain bill and no filtering.

These processes describe the new “hazies” showing up from larger craft brewers that are faring quite well according to IRI Worldwide statistics on packaged retail sales. Sierra Nevada’s Hazy Little Thing continues to boom in sales and is joined by a new entry from New Belgium from its Voodoo Ranger line called Juicy Haze IPA, though it’s still too early for data on Oskar Blues’ new Can O’Bliss. This trio of hazies includes an IPA, a double IPA and a pale ale that are likely to make their mark in the marketplace as well-executed examples of an IPA style whose popularity does not look like it will stall any time soon.

When it comes to biotransformation, it’s a bit like Eastern philosophy. Those who know how to execute it aren’t saying and those who are not using biotransformation are talking about it—in the sense that they question its role in brewing absent more research. Notable among those who do have some insights—but decline to talk specifically about the process—are Heady Topper creator John Kimmich of The Alchemist, Shaun Hill of Hill Farmstead and Sean Lawson of Lawson’s Finest Liquids. They are the original primogenitors of “Vermont IPA,” which became the New England IPA that took that region and the rest of the U.S. by storm once Heady Topper was released in cans in 2011 and became more easily transportable.

One can’t argue with the IRI’s results showing the sales of Hazy Little Thing being up 82% in 2020

and New Belgium’s Juicy Haze IPA up 41%. Look at those numbers in comparison to traditional American IPAs such as Bell’s Two-Hearted IPA (up 23%) and Lagunitas IPA (up 20%). The IPAs that mimic the New England style to some extent, Elysian Space Dust and Cigar City’s Jai Alai, are each up 23% in package sales. None of this accounts for the prevalence of IPAs that are cited as juicy, hazy, dank or all three on taproom boards.

It’s a phenomenon in the same vein of the American IPA style that has led craft brewing since 2002, when the category first outpaced the American Pale Ale in number of entries at the GABF. If a style can add more hops, it’s good to go.

There’s also an increasing portfolio of confirmed scientific research about the process of biotransformation, which depends on having the right yeast to pitch during the initial dry hopping in fermentation tanks. A lot of brewers big and small are trying to figure out biotransformation with the help of this research information. They are also searching for yeasts known for making the process work with aroma hops such as Cascade, Citra and Simcoe.

During dry hopping, there is a process at work in which additional compounds are generated through hydrolysis of the hops via yeast during fermentation. These added quantities of familiar fruit-flavored compounds, monoterpene alcohols such as geraniol and citronellol, are further leveraged by the release of tropical fruit-flavored compounds from thiols, also found in hops. The sulfur-based thiols produce compounds that have relatively low flavor thresholds, making them highly detectable by the complex system of human smell and taste. These thiol-derived compounds, also released by hydrolysis, produce synergy and boost the citrusy flavors of geraniol and citronellol already present in relatively large quantity due to big doses of dry hopping and then biotransformation. Hence the arrival of huge gushes of tropical hop aroma.

To what extent the style is being mimicked by the use of a ton of dry hopping, which can leave a vegetative taste behind that can be masked by the haze and soft mouthfeel, remains an open question. There are a lot of “hazeboiz” that use lactose or actual juice as a sweetener as well as oats in the grain bill to generate an extremely thick, almost slushy-like, unfiltered haze, bypassing the need for biotransformation to achieve a similar result. This sort of hop stuffing is a reminder of the “bitterness race” that took over American IPA—until the arrival of the far less bitter, but still very hoppy New England IPA.





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## Restaurant Insider



*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, dining in at restaurants was a non-starter in 2020. In its place, delivery and pickup*

# What a difference a year can make.



PHOTOCOURTESY FLICKR / TRAVIS WISE

became the default option for those looking to enjoy local cuisine.

**L**ast year we touched on the growing popularity of fast casual dining and zero-waste cooking. This year, the theme is survival.

How do businesses predicated on a dine-in model survive in a world where dining in may be a life-and-death situation? How do restaurants that pride themselves on making you feel like family operate in a world of plexiglass screens, table dividers, mandatory temperature checks and masks? There's no sense in fighting it – all that can be done is to accept it and move forward. Those businesses that don't will simply not survive.

On that rosy note, here is *The Beer Connoisseur's* 2021 Restaurant Trends report – an idea of what sort of restaurant experience you can expect in the coming year and the foreseeable future.

## **Less Dining In When Eating Out**

Let's start with the obvious. For now, at least, dine-in is a shell of what it once was. That means that off-premises dining, already a growing trend, has now become the preferred method of ordering from a restaurant. In fact, it is what kept the restaurant industry from falling apart entirely as weeks of lockdown stretched on.

Many businesses that formerly relied heavily on dine-in have since joined delivery services like DoorDash and UberEats, or even created their own in-house delivery apps. As a result, they are reaching a broader range of customers than ever before. There is no reason to expect this mode of service to disappear when the pandemic subsides. It works, it's convenient, and proven. Delivery, even from traditionally dine-in-focused restaurants, is here to stay.

Pickup is every bit as prevalent as delivery these days and will see a similarly lasting boon. It's contactless, and in true American fashion, you often don't even have to leave your car – they'll bring it out to you and put it in your trunk, maintaining


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# THE ULTIMATE ONION SOUP

with **La Fin du Monde**



**WORLD  
BEER  
AWARDS**  
WORLD'S BEST  
STYLE  
WINNER



APPETIZER PREPARATION : 20 MIN | COOKING : 45 MIN | SERVES : 6

## INGREDIENTS

- 6 medium onions (2 lbs 1/2) peeled and finely chopped (2 red, 2 white, 2 Vidalias)
- 1 green onion chopped finely
- 1 bottle of Fin du Monde (750 ml format)
- 1 garlic clove chopped finely
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil or butter
- 1/2 cup of Porto
- 1/2 cup of red wine
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 VERY small pinch of dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon celery seeds
- 1 large bay leaf (to be taken out before putting in oven)
- Salt, ground pepper to taste
- 6 French bread slices – 1 cm (1/4 in.) thick
- 2 cups of grated swiss cheese (gruyère or emmental)
- 1 cup of fresh grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese

## PREPARATION

1. In a large saucepan, caramelize half the onions at medium/low heat (1 of each color), the green onion and the garlic in the butter or olive oil, stirring often, until mix is a dark golden color (about 20 minutes).
2. Deglaze with Fin du Monde, while scraping bottom of pan. Reduce to half.
3. Add broth, Porto, red wine, thyme, celery seeds, bay leaf and leftover onion.
4. Preheat oven to 450°F.
5. Salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for about 25 minutes.
6. Pour soup into 6 bowls, add a slice of bread over each one and cover with 75 ml (1/3 cup) of Swiss cheese and 1/6 cup of fresh Parmigiano Reggiano.
7. Place the bowls on a cooking tray, brown.

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six feet of distance all the while. In a society that fights over the closest parking spot and waits on the elevator rather than taking the stairs, that convenience is priceless.

While this makes perfect sense for traditional pickup establishments like pizzerias, finer dining options have found a much-needed lifeline in contactless pickup. These establishments can also create standardized options – like family meal kits, which allow for easy ordering and reliable, streamlined inventorying. Restaurateurs need every bit of predictability they can get in a year of chaos and offering pre-selected menu options can be a win for both the chef and indecisive customers.

These sorts of adaptations can be tailored to any business model. Establishments that relied heavily on alcohol sales, for example, can sell house-made drink mixes and cocktail kits. Restaurants can capitalize on the pickup trend by stocking what they know sells and packaging it in a way that suits the needs of the average customer. In 2020, where convenient dining is the norm, the more streamlined the ordering process, the more likely you are to have a return customer.

### **Convenient, Hands-Off Ordering**

Speaking of ordering, COVID-19 has helped usher restaurants into the 21st century. Mobile apps and touchless payments had already been gaining steam, as they offered more convenience to the user, as well as more consumer data to the business.

In 2020, these means of ordering became essential for health reasons, and businesses that had been slow to adopt these advancements suddenly sprung to life. Hard copies of menus began falling by the wayside. Why invest time and cleaning supplies into sterilizing menus when you can simply have a customer scan a QR code?

Once reserved for only the haughtiest, busiest of establishments, online table bookings are now a fairly standard expectation for businesses. They minimize crowds in a time where crowds can induce anxiety, and help restaurants plan ahead, while offering a foolproof means of reserving a table. Modern table reservation software can also shine where the human brain falters – staggering arrival times, creating virtual waitlists, monitoring capacity and gathering contact info automatically, freeing up the extra-short staff to handle everything else that only a human could do.

Just as with off-premises dining, we can mark all these hands-off, electronic trends down as permanent changes. It hasn't taken long for consumers to catch on, and they now expect these methods of ordering and the convenience they offer. Anything

less is a statement that a business is lingering in a bygone era, whether intentional or not.

### **Automating the Kitchen**

Technology isn't just making ordering easier – it's helping to perfect food preparation, and to protect employees. One of the tougher challenges of operating a restaurant during a pandemic is maintaining social distancing, and most kitchens do not have the luxury of excess square footage.

There are a few solutions. Staggering shifts, monitoring health of workers and operating with smaller teams have been basic precautions. When possible, employees can be specialized as well, minimizing their contact with others.

Anyone who's worked in a kitchen, however, knows that cashiers inevitably have to run into the kitchen every now and then, and cooks occasionally grace the dining room with their presence. One proven method for minimizing front-of-house and kitchen staff contact is through the use of kitchen display systems (KDS), which send orders straight from the POS to screens installed in the kitchen. If this sounds familiar, it's because KDSs are standard in most fast-food restaurants, which are tailored towards high-volume takeout orders and maximum efficiency. Businesses that have pivoted from dine-in to takeout have likely felt the stress of being short-staffed, taking orders over the phone and running back to the kitchen to relay the order.

A KDS system will automatically display menu items in the order they are to be prepared, and can be sent to station-specific screens, like the grill or fryer. They also remove human error from tracking and fulfilling orders, simplify work during rush periods and help employees meet scheduled time slots for pickup and delivery. While nothing is more important than a quality employee, a quality employee backed by quality technology can greatly enhance a restaurant's efficiency.

### **Dining Outdoors Is In**

Legality and public health permitting, sit-down experiences are still feasible, more often than not in an outdoor, 'al fresco' setting. Many businesses already had patios or outdoor garden-style seating, but many more have been able to convert parking lot space into functional outdoor dining spaces, helping to account for decreased indoor dining capacity and the need for proper social distancing.

OpenTable, an online booking service, reported a tenfold increase in outdoor seating compared to the previous year, and this avenue has helped sustain, or even breathe new life into many businesses.

If nothing else, it has restaurateurs rethinking the classic floor plan, and with it, options for dining and service. Some businesses have really taken the opportunity to rethink their business and run with it, downsizing menu items or changing menus entirely. Hotels have converted rooms to private dining areas, and fine dining establishments have converted to drive-thru burger joints, all in order to keep business flowing.

We can expect outdoor dining to see a drop in the winter months, but it's a safe bet that this trend will be back with a vengeance once temperatures climb again.

### Keep Calm and Dine On

As hard as it is to put COVID-19 in the back of mind, it is not wrong to remember that life goes on, and that there is life beyond the pandemic. In that spirit, we'll take a look at some purely culinary trends for the coming year as delineated by the National Restaurant Association (NRA).

Topping the list is eco-friendly packaging – paper straws, biodegradable food containers and more. As evidenced by the shift towards cans and recyclable six pack pop-tops, green packaging is only becoming more popular, and it can send a strong signal to attract more environmentally conscious clientele.

The next hottest trends, per the NRA, are scratch-made dishes, plant-based proteins and healthy bowls. Here we see recurring themes echoed from within the beer industry – namely that of minimizing waste and paying closer attention to what is consumed. Again, these provide a reliable consumer profile to tailor your business to.

Next on the list? Creativity with catering. Think niche, colorful takes like a coffee bar or “donut wall” or more “experiential” catering options. Examples cited include “cactus tacos” as a vegan alternative or a flavored milk station. The experience can also extend to those serving the food, whether they incorporate some sort of presentation, game or just shout something funny. The goal is to provide a memorable experience, so that the clients being catered to are able to fully appreciate the experience.

After that, we have revamped, classic cocktails. This one's pretty simple. Make a staple cocktail, make it well, and find a way to spice things up.

Flavored salts for the rim, a colorful splash of juice, an intriguing flavor combo like bacon in the bloody mary... again, you want to create a memorable experience to build word-of-mouth buzz, as well as keyword buzz in your Yelp and Google reviews.

Rounding out the list are “stress relievers,” a roundabout way of saying CBD- and THC-infused foods. As mentioned last year, 2019 saw the opening of the first fully-cannabis themed restaurant,



to huge fanfare. For the right business and clientele, expanding into these realms offers massive growth potential.

### Restaurants With Purpose

2020 has been a year of extremes – unity and division, sickness and health, monotony and radical societal shift. Restaurants were deemed essential not just because they provide food, but because they play a vital role in American society. They're social hubs, one of the country's largest industries, and an avenue to the American dream. Lest we forget, breaking bread is the universal symbol of unity and understanding.

Restaurants that recognize the role they play within communities, and within the nation at large, are automatically better suited to survive the pandemic. These are the businesses that will partner with local retailers to drive traffic between one another, and bring in other business with charity food drives. They will retain their quality employees, because they care about paying a decent wage and providing a means of earning a living.

The opportunities between beer and spirits producers and the food industry are innumerable. These localized, creative partnerships are one of the best defenses against what has been, for the restaurant industry, a painful year.

# TOP 150 BEERS OF 2020



## OFFICIAL REVIEW

**E**ach year, we collect the highest-scoring beers of the year from our *Official Review* in a compendium of the best beers of the year. This year, 150 beers were included ranging from adjunct-filled pastry stouts to light-bodied and elegant craft lagers.

Though 2020 was a year unlike any other due to an unprecedented global pandemic, brewers managed to experiment in a variety of styles – and those styles are represented in our Top 150 Beers of 2020.

Hazy, juicy IPAs were at the forefront of the craft beer scene (as expected), but the sheer volume that our judges reviewed was truly staggering. Beyond those lush and citrusy brews were barrel-aged stouts and other strong styles, which were reviewed in impressively high numbers by our judges. Perhaps it was because everyone was stuck at home for many months of the year that these high-ABV brews came to the forefront.

We sincerely hope you enjoy exploring this list of the Top 150 Beers of 2020 and employ this list as you venture out into the wide world of beer.

### ABOUT THE OFFICIAL REVIEW

The *Official Review* is conducted in a single-blind tasting format that adheres to the Beer Judge Certification Program 2015 Style Guidelines. This method provides the best opportunity to rely on facts and to avoid favoritism, ensuring a level playing field for all brewers. It serves both the industry and the consumer to have unbiased and objective scores from qualified experts.

In effort to provide the most credible evaluations, *The Beer Connoisseur* hand-selects judges with a minimum BJCP ranking of “National” or Master Cicerone®. Judges are required to work with an assistant that handles beer prior to evaluation, and breweries are not allowed to solicit judges directly.

In the single-blind tasting format, judges are presented with a chilled, properly poured beer and given its style category. Scoring is then done on the following basis using a 100-point scale: Aroma (24 points), Appearance (6 points), Flavor (40 points), Mouthfeel (10 points) and Overall Impression (20 points).

### The score breakdown is as follows:

- 100 to 96: World Class – You need this beer in your life.
- 95 to 91: Exceptional – Don’t hesitate.
- 90 to 86: Very Good – A brew to savor.
- 85 to 75: Average – Somewhat unimpressive.
- 74 and below: Not Recommended – Just walk away.



# VERY GOOD (86-90)

## #150 | RATED 88 | VIEUX BOIS 3 YEAR BLEND #2 | BOZEMAN BREWING CO. (MT)

Review by *Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Vieux Bois 3 Year Blend #2 by Bozeman Brewing Co. pours golden in color with a slight haze and a small, quickly fading white head. The aroma is of prominent lactic sourness with a light wild note of leather and a hint of tropical fruitiness. The body is medium-light and moderate in carbonation. The flavor has a moderate level of clean, lactic sourness with a tropical fruit note of pineapple. The finish is lightly bittered leaving a dry, sour, thirst-quenching beverage. This is a pleasant, easy-drinking sour beer, but the wild character is restrained to a simple lactic sourness and a hint of leather; more prominent wild flavors are typical for the style.

## #149 | RATED 88 | STRAWBERRY RYE | CRYING EAGLE BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by *John C. Tull* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The malt is balanced well – lending some sweetness and body to the beer. There is a slightly acrid/bitter quality in the finish that is not from hop bitterness, perhaps a result of the fruit addition. Hop bitterness is subtle, but well balanced such that it does not overpower the floral strawberry quality. The mouthfeel is medium with good carbonation. The finish is a bit astringent and has a lingering sharpness. This beer presents a good strawberry character without being overly fruity, and the fruit balances nicely overall with the malt and hop profiles. If you have an affinity for fruit beers, I would not hesitate.

## #148 | RATED 88 | WHISKEY HOUR | PONTOON BREWING (GA)

Review by *Michael Bury* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The nose is reminiscent of a Sprite with intense lemon, lime and slight candy-like sweetness. The flavor picks up where the aroma left off with a sweet-tart juxtaposition. The lemon simple syrup is balanced by the lactic acid, which results in a zippy finish with lingering barrel, citrus and tannins. Whiskey Hour is an interesting offering from Pontoon that comes off as more of a beer cocktail than a beer. This makes sense, as the brewery was likely emulating a whiskey sour with this brew. It's sweet and syrupy upfront but the lactic acid and bright lemon character clean up the backend. The quality execution, though, is what will keep you coming back for another sip.

## #147 | RATED 88 | PASSIONFRUIT & LIME BIZARRE GARDENING ACCIDENT | MOTORWORKS BREWING (FL)

Review by *Dan Preston* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

It has a very fruity nose, similar to that of a raspberry lime rickey but with some extra tropical/citrus notes of passion fruit and lemon. The flavor is similarly very fruity and bubbly, almost to the point of being a hard seltzer though not quite as effervescent and the fruit flavor is truer (i.e. not artificial). It is very fruit-forward with notes of citrus (lemon, lime), berry (raspberry) and tropical (passion fruit, guava), with a moderate tangy sour finish that leaves a light puckering on the tongue to go along with the tingly bubbles. It also has a light body that keeps it nice and refreshing, great for the summer heat much like a cold glass of lemonade.

## #146 | RATED 88 | PHILLY SPECIAL | IRON HILL BREWERY & RESTAURANT (PA)

Review by *Jim Koebel* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

Philly Special by Iron Hill Brewery & Restaurant is a New England IPA brewed by Iron Hill Brewery & Restaurant. Classic West Coast hops make up the aroma of this beer and include pine, lemon and resin. There's a note of passion fruit as well. The aroma overall is subdued. It pours with a low white head and a yellow-orange color. Its flavor is assertively bitter with a biting, spicy hop taste. High carbonation and full mouthfeel fill out this beer's major characteristics. This NEIPA is tasty, but largely comes off as a standard-issue American IPA.

## #145 | RATED 88 | PEACH STAND RAMBLER | ODELL BREWING CO. (CO)

Review by *Brian Eichhorn* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

On the pour, there is a faint protein haze over a pale golden body with a persistent and sticky white head. On the nose, it's a huge hit of juicy peach, but under this is a fairly robust bready malt backbone. Not much in the way of hops here, as this is all about the fruit! At tasting, it is fairly straightforward and a bit less robust in the peach department. Even in this blonde ale, the fruit gets lost pretty quickly. Moderately sweet and clean overall, this is a summer crusher that doesn't lose its beer character behind the fruit. Great aromatically and a really well-structured fruit beer overall. Reminiscent of candy peach rings!

## #144 | RATED 88 | DAS LABYRINTH | PONTOON BREWING (GA)

Review by *Sean Coughlin* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The beer pours a clear burnished copper with a small, light khaki-colored head that diminishes moderately. The aroma is bread crust-forward with light oxidation and a note of caramel malt sweetness evident. The flavor is rich, with profound malt flavors of bread crust, toast and biscuit. There is no apparent caramel malt flavor, but some residual sweetness makes the beer fall a bit short of ideal balance. The hop bitterness is moderate, and hop flavor is subtle with appropriate herbal qualities. Overall, this beer hits the style well – lightly oxidized malt and some unwelcome residual sweetness keep it from being World Class, but it's closer to a traditional example of the style than many examples.

### #143 | RATED 88 | BRETT NOIR | AREA TWO EXPERIMENTAL BREWING (CT)

Review by Jason Johnson | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This beer is going to be a good compromise for couples where one prefers wine, and the other prefers beer. It would certainly be a satisfying beverage to share between fans of those two beverages. But for this reviewer, it's a bit too much wine and not enough beer. It comes down to the balance of the components more so than anything else. I would personally like to see a bit more hop and malt character to bring the beer forward instead of taking a backseat to the grapes. I wouldn't want any more roasted grains added, but a bit more Two-Row or even wheat added would elevate the beer over the wine-like elements.

### #142 | RATED 89 | ISLAND MANGO TWIST | GARAGE BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The initial taste revealed a nice light malt along with tropical flavors and negligible hop bitterness. If it's a true hefeweizen, I should also detect some of the characteristics of the style, such as clove and banana-like flavors, but I didn't. Instead, those flavors were replaced with tropical ones (pineapple, mango and coconut). All three flavors were equally present in the beer with no one flavor overwhelming the other. Again, they were complementing flavors that melded well with one another. The body and mouthfeel, however, was light almost to the point of being a little watery. The carbonation level was fine. The overall impression of this beer is that it is a likable and drinkable light tropical fruit beer.

### #141 | RATED 89 | TRUCK CHASER STRAWBERRY ECLAIR | WILD LEAP BREW CO. (GA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Truck Chaser pours golden in color, is very hazy and has a small, finely beaded off-white head. The aroma is of moderately strong citrusy and resinous hops with hints of strawberry fruit and nondescript malt. The flavor is similarly prominent resinous hops with lighter tangerine hop flavors. The beer finishes lightly bitter with a light sweetness and plenty of resinous hops. A light strawberry flavor comes out late in the finish. Truck Chaser Strawberry Eclair is a solid strong New England-style IPA with plenty of resinous and citrusy hops. However, the strawberry is subdued, and the vanilla is absent. As such, hopheads will love this beer, but those seeking out more fruit may be disappointed.

### #140 | RATED 89 | SIGHTGLASS | SINGLE HILL BREWING (WA)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The pour revealed a straw-like hue with an obviously cloudy and hazy appearance. It had nice carbonation that dissipated quickly. The aroma had nice citrus reminiscent of grapefruit. Nice balance of malt and hops. The malt had a nice malt sweetness, and the hop bitterness was moderate. It just falls under the standard ratio of IBUs for a pale ale. The hop flavoring again had a nice citrus taste and flavor – once again of a grapefruit quality. The beer was somewhat dry and crisp. The body and mouthfeel were light with light carbonation. This is a very quenching summer beer. Very light malt and hop bitterness make this a very drinkable beer for long summer days.

### #139 | RATED 89 | FRESH AS | ASTRO LAB BREWING (MD)

Review by Michael McGuire | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Fresh As by Astro Lab Brewing poured light golden into the glass with a slight haze and a moderate white head with adequate retention. Its initial aroma was very sweet and fruity with notes of pineapple. As time passed, the aroma became more complex and revealed a variety of hop and malt notes. The flavor profile was that of a sweet, tangy, well-balanced and very refreshing American IPA, with a smooth texture and a pleasant creaminess on the palate along with moderate alcohol warmth on the finish. Overall, this is a highly quaffable example of this style, perhaps more suitable for those who enjoy sweeter, New England-style IPAs than more resinous, piney flavors.

### #138 | RATED 89 | THE BLUPRINT | BIRDS FLY SOUTH ALE PROJECT (SC)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Big, dank, sulfury Mosaic hop aromas along with a blend of citrus hop notes greet you upon the pour. This hop complexity pretty much dominates all aspects of the aroma, with just a touch of fruity esters behind it. This is an attractive brew. The beer is a clear, dark golden color with a nice, small, white-bubbled, lacy head with very good retention. The flavor has moderate dank hop character and bitterness, but as mentioned before, the balance of the hop flavors is a bit off. You can taste the individual hops, but for some reason they do not come together to deliver a flavor balance. The malt backbone is solid with the base malt delivering a level of interesting complexity.

### #137 | RATED 89 | SYNOPSIS BLACKBERRY | AREA TWO EXPERIMENTAL BREWING (CT)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Opens with a whiff of funky Brett character that is quickly obstructed by the blackberries. A note of wood follows along with an impression of lactic and citric sourness. The acidic notes blend nicely with the fruit and funk. The flavor opens with moderately high levels of berries along with Brett to a lesser degree. A touch of wood is also noted along with some malt sweetness to keep the tartness from dominating. There are some deeper fruit notes and a tannic aspect that are reminiscent of a young Merlot. The berries make a final appearance in the aftertaste. There is some acidic tingle to the palate, prickling but not astringent, and a mouth-drying effect from the tannins.

### #136 | RATED 89 | HIPSTER IPA | IRON HILL BREWERY & RESTAURANT (PA)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Hipster IPA by Iron Hill Brewery & Restaurant has a sweet, juicy hop aroma containing notes of pine, mango and other fruit. It pours a milky yellow color and is hazy. The flavor is also hop-dominated but tastes more of pine and resin than fruity. The hop flavors don't linger, making each sip a quick hit. It's pretty bitter but comes off as quite smooth. This example has a fluffy, highly carbonated texture with low alcohol warmth. Overall, there's no mistaking that this beer is a New England IPA, but an enhanced, deeper flavor would make this more satisfying.

### #135 | **RATED 89** | EVERGREEN TERRACE | PONTOON BREWING (GA)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Evergreen Terrace pours golden in color with a very slight haze and a small off-white head. The aroma is of moderate citrus and resinous hops with a hint of tropical fruit and nondescript malt. The flavor features moderately strong resinous and citrusy hops with a light support of nutty malt. The finish is of moderately strong bitterness with moderate resinous and citrusy hops. This is a very pleasant double IPA. The bitterness was aggressive as expected, and the medium body aids in quaffability, but the level of hop flavors was towards the low side of the style and the flavors could have been more complex. Regardless, hopheads should not shy away from this double IPA.

### #134 | **RATED 89** | STONE DELICIOUS IPA | STONE BREWING CO. (CA)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

Delicious IPA pours dark golden in color with excellent clarity and a medium, fluffy off-white head. The aroma is of moderate orange, lemon and flowery hops over a light nutty maltiness. The flavor is of moderately orange and lemon hops with hints of pine with a light nutty malt flavor. The beer finishes moderately bitter with lingering herbal and citrus hop flavors and a hint of malt. This is a very good IPA that is deceptive in alcoholic strength at 7.7% ABV. The hops are in the new-world style and hopefully the gluten-removal process makes this an excellent choice for those suffering with Celiac disease. Check this one out hopheads!

### #133 | **RATED 89** | COAST WEST DOUBLE IPA | WILD LEAP BREW CO. (GA)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Coast West pours golden in color with a light haze and sports a moderate, clingy, cream-colored head. The aroma is prominently hoppy with resinous and piney characters with a light sulfury dankness; a light nutty malt provides a backdrop to the hops. The flavor is again prominently of piney and resinous hops with a hint of citrus and a light nutty maltiness; a light sulfury dankness detracts. The finish is moderately bitter with a lingering piney and resinous hop flavor over, again, a hint of nutty malt. Coast West is a decidedly hoppy IPA with a West Coast IPA profile minus the high bitterness (which I personally find welcoming).

### #132 | **RATED 89** | PENTUPLE | HOPPIN' FROG BREWERY (OH)

*Review by Dan Martich* | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The flavor is expressed as very malty, with a fruit-forwardness that resembles caramelized pineapple. Fruity esters of ripe pear are present but secondary to the malt sweetness, which is honey-like. Spicy phenols add balance to the malt characteristics mentioned. With no hops detected, the bitterness seems to come across as moderately bitter citrus-orange peel. The elevated alcohols add in part to the overall experience. Overall, Pentuple is a big, voluptuous beer, with a body to kill for. Pour this beauty into a big snifter glass. Savor those big notes and the mild ones too, and don't rush it with that big ABV, which can quickly catch up to you. Enjoy this one responsibly.

### #131 | **RATED 90** | HYDRA'S HAZE | HEAVY SEAS BEER (MD)

*Review by Dan Martich* | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The flavor mirrors the aroma with the addition of a soft honey-like maltiness, which is not sweet. The hops are citrusy, fruity and then become resinous; this beer is quite a show of hop characteristics. The bitterness is higher than expected but still within reason for the style. They are of a citrus peel character, fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice bitterness and more pineapple juice. The finish is short and dry with a lingering citrus flavor on the palate, similar to citrus oils. The body is medium-light, but the moderately high carbonation gives the impression of a lighter-bodied beer. There's a moderately low alcoholic warmth that's not offensive but supportive, a rarity in a beer of 6.0% ABV.

### #130 | **RATED 90** | SUPERFLUID | SHORT'S BREWING CO. (MI)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Superfluid pours golden in color with excellent clarity and a huge, resilient and thick white head. The aroma is of very prominent resinous hops with just a hint of malt. The body is medium and quite dry. The flavor again is strongly resinous hops with just a hint of nutty malt flavor. The finish is of moderately strong bitterness with strong resinous hop flavors that linger long into the finish over a hint of malt. This is a very hoppy and bitter double IPA. This beer hits the elements of the style, but the hops are singularly resinous in character. Drinkers looking for a middle-of-the-road double IPA might find this example aggressive, but true hopheads will rejoice!

### #129 | **RATED 90** | STARGAZER BLACK IPA | LAND-GRANT BREWING CO. (OH)

*Review by Nelson Crowle* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer is a square peg. It looks like a bad saison topped with a thin, frothy head that recedes quickly but the dance of Mexican honey, epazote and cilantro with the Belgian yeast flavors, spicy hops and pale malts kicks the beer up to a higher level. The flavors have a layered complexity that weaves in and out. They all work together with no element demanding too much attention. It comes on like a savory, sweet and spicy honey scone and finishes with a hint of tea that provides a friendly bitter punch and a slight, drying astringency. The above-average carbonation and crisp medium body make this a very refreshing, elegantly flavored beer.

### #128 | **RATED 90** | HONORARY GIRL SCOUT: SAMO'NUT COOKIE | PONTOON BREWING (GA)

*Review by Michael Bury* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma is reminiscent of a Mounds bar with moderately high milk and dark chocolate, rich caramel, vanilla and supportive toasted coconut. No hops are present, and neither are any esters from fermentation. The flavor follows the aroma with rich chocolate and coconut with restrained toasted malt. The caramel alongside the semi-sweet finish gives the beer a dessert-like character that's not cloying in the slightest. Well-attenuated with a medium-low body, this is a relatively easy-drinker that has lingering dark chocolate and coconut. This is another solid offering from Pontoon that approaches dessert status but stops short with its lower body and solid attenuation.

## #127 | RATED 90 | FREDERSDORFER | SEEDSTOCK BREWERY (CO)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Fredersdorfer pours light amber in color with excellent clarity and a medium, retentive tan head. The aroma features moderate toasty and bready malt with a hint of smoke and herbal hops. The mouthfeel has a medium body with moderate carbonation and a light creaminess. The flavor is moderately bready alongside toasty malt with interesting molasses notes; a hint of smoke and light spicy hops both complement the malt. The beer finishes moderately bitter with a lingering maltiness. Fredersdorfer is an interesting beer that takes us back to 19th-century Germany. This is a very pleasant style that complements bready malts with molasses and packs a little punch at 7.5% ABV.

## #126 | RATED 90 | ALPHA ABSTRACTION, VOL. 11 | WILD LEAP BREW CO. (GA)

*Review by Dan Preston* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The low bitterness combined with the fruity hops makes for a soft, fairly sweet finish. This beer employs an experimental hop called HBC 472, which I had the pleasure of using in a homebrew club experiment. This hop appears to be chameleonic and adapts to its style as I used it in a porter and got more of the claimed woody, coconut tones rather than the punch-forward fruit in this wonderful example. The fruit blend in this is truly remarkable, as even the hoppy homebrew examples were more pina colada-like being basically just pineapple and mild coconut rather than an assault of different fruits. I will certainly have to give this hop another shot after this.

## #125 | RATED 90 | SYNOPSIS RED FRUITS | AREA TWO EXPERIMENTAL BREWING (CT)

*Review by David Sapsis* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The flavor up-front is fruity, with tart notes of raspberry and cranberry mixed with a clean and bright lactic tartness that lasts a long time into a sweet/tart and fruity late palate. Possibly, just possibly, I pick up some currant in the setting sun of flavors. The conditioning is very high, accentuating the tart and sharp finish. Overall, I think the beer is well-made as a wild fruit beer; it is quite tart with limited but enticing sweetness and the hint of *Brettanomyces* pepper. The beer straddles that line of tart but not sour, expressing both fruit and a mild wild fermentation character to produce a nice sour fruit beer.

## #124 | RATED 90 | WITKIST WHITE | ODELL BREWING CO. (CO)

*Review by Joseph Formanek* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The brew has a hazy, light golden color and a very slight, white, small-bubbled, lacy head with rather poor retention for the style. The base beer flavor is solid, with cereal and a wheat bite along with coriander, citrus and banana flavors. These flavors linger through the middle, finish and aftertaste. As in the aroma, the grapefruit flavor is a bit subtle for the overall flavor build for a fruit beer. The body is light-to-medium and the carbonation is moderate. The balance of sourness and sweetness from the grain is very good, giving an enjoyable clean finish adding to the brew's overall quaffability. Witkist White is an enjoyable interpretation of a traditional witbier.

## #123 | RATED 90 | TANKER TRUCK SOUR SERIES - PINEAPPLE MANGO GOSE | TWO ROADS BREWING CO. (CT)

*Review by John C. Tull* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The fruit lends some sweetness, but the specific fruit flavors are subdued and hard to discern as either pineapple or mango. This is a good thing, and the restrained fruit balances the relatively tart character of the fermentation. The carbonation is lively, but not excessive. Though this is a fruit beer by description, it really serves to showcase the gose style, not the fruit. And as a gose, it is quite good. As a fruit beer, it very much lands on the subtle side of fruit expression in beer. If you like tart or sour beers, this one is very good. If you are looking for a fruit-forward beer, this one may not be for you.

## #122 | RATED 90 | WHIFFLE | RHINEGEIST BREWERY (OH)

*Review by Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Whiffle is brewed with barley, wheat and oats and was hopped with Mandarina Bavaria hops. Whiffle pours golden in color with a moderate haze and a medium, finely beaded white head. The aroma is of moderate lemony citrus and wheat with a hint of black pepper. The body is medium-light and slightly dry. The flavor is moderate wheat with a delicate light lemon and orange ester, spice and hop meld. The beer finishes lightly bitter with a light wheat and lemon spice. This refreshing witbier is a little lighter on the coriander than more traditional examples and is unusually hopped with Mandarina Bavaria hops. Regardless, this well-brewed beer is light, refreshing and quite quaffable.

## #121 | RATED 90 | SCIENCE BOX | SINGLE HILL BREWING (WA)

*Review by Richard Wong* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma had a very subtle citrus element of oranges and grapefruit. There was a very nice malt sweetness upon the very first sip with hop bitterness towards the end that was not upfront. Hop bitterness was restrained somewhat for an IPA, but it was still plenty hoppy to live up to its style. Nice citrus flavors were found throughout the first sip. The body and mouthfeel were medium, and the carbonation was sparkling in the palate. It had a nice crisp, smooth finish. This beer was almost like a session IPA in terms of its lightness in malt and hop bitterness. A clean and eminently drinkable beer.

## #120 | RATED 90 | GALIPETTE BIOLOGIQUE | GALIPETTE CIDRE (FRANCE)

*Review by David Sapsis* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The body is medium, and I don't pick up any saltiness. Overall, the balance would put this at a medium-sweet cider. The sweaty apple nature begs toward traditional longer maceration and keeving; however, I detect no noticeable funky character or phenolic notes that often arise from malolactic fermentation processes. This leaves the cider sweet and fresh with light but balancing fruity tartness in a quite straightforward and somewhat simplistic form. Fear not, it is surprisingly light and fresh and has true-to-breed cider apple character top to bottom, and while the sweet balance is high, the body, balancing acid and prickly carbonic note brightens the finish into a lovely fruity treat.

## #119 | RATED 90 | GNARLY BARLEY WEE HEAVY | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

*Review by Rick Franckhauser* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This is sweet but shy of cloying thanks to the presence of alcohol and just enough bittering hops. Appropriately balanced toward the malt sweetness for the style. Alcohol esters come out toward the finish, which manages to be medium-sweet. More deep caramel and cherries return in the aftertaste as well as a touch of plum. This beer is full-bodied and chewy. Low carbonation levels leave behind a very creamy impression. Pleasant levels of warming alcohol are present. A little sticky-sweet mouth-coating is left behind, like you just finished some butterscotch hard candy. A very luscious, filling dessert beer. Reminds me of Schneckens sweet buns topped with cherries. A perfect beer to replace an after-dinner liqueur.

## #118 | RATED 90 | BAD SEED | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

*Review by Rick Franckhauser* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The acidity of the beer and fruit is a tad aggressive but not unpleasant. Light-bodied and moderately carbonated but not effervescent. A little prickle can be felt on the tongue, but it's not astringent. There is a slight lingering tannic mouth-coating, like a red wine. This gose provides an impressive berry fruitiness that is nicely balanced by its lactic tartness. The salt levels are nicely played as is the coriander. The acidity levels are somewhat assertive but may be closer to historic examples of the style. That said, I found the beer to be thirst-quenching with a great balance of flavors. I would have appreciated higher carbonation levels, and a touch of wheat malt character would also be welcome.

## #117 | RATED 90 | HOMESTYLE | BEARDED IRIS BREWING (TN)

*Review by Sal Mortillaro II* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

There is a low wheat/oat flavor, which adds a distinct creaminess to the flavor. This beer balances towards the bitter with a lingering dank, bitter orange and spice in the finish. Despite its thinner flavor, this beer has a medium body with medium carbonation. There is no alcohol warmth or astringency, though the creaminess noted in the flavor also translates into creaminess in the mouthfeel. Overall, this is an interesting IPA that is quite drinkable, though it slightly lacks the hop character intensity of more traditional American IPAs. Despite this, it's a sessionable and flavorful beer, and it is one of the more refreshing IPAs that does not sell out hop nuance to attain this.

## #116 | RATED 90 | PINEAPPLE UPSIDE DOWN CAKE | HOPPIN' FROG BREWERY (OH)

*Review by Dan Martich* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The flavors mirror the aroma and make this beer like nothing this judge has had before. It has a lactic yogurt note unexpected in a beer, followed by a spicy/dry herbal note in the finish. Another flavor that develops (not originally perceived in the aroma) is a sweetness like pineapple marmalade. No hops or malt-driven flavors are detected. Purely fruit-forward. This beer finishes semi-sweet, which makes it hard to put down, since the sweetness beckons another sip, and then another. Medium-light bodied. Medium carbonation with a pleasant fruit juice mouthfeel. No alcoholic warmth, but with a small degree of astringency. A perceived creaminess from the lactic quality is present.

## #115 | RATED 90 | GNARLY BARLEY IIPA | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

*Review by Jim Koebel* | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This DIPa is expectedly juicy, fresh and fruity. The hop burst can be detected from over a foot away. It looks a bit like orange juice in the glass with a small white head. The taste isn't as flavorful as the aroma would lead you to believe, but it still carries a solid hop presence. It has a slightly sweet impression that dries out into a spicy, herbal-tasting finish. It's on the creamy end of the mouthfeel spectrum with a medium-full body and a warming sensation. Many drinkers might find this to be a low-key example of a DIPa, but it's still very enjoyable.

## #114 | RATED 90 | BELCH'S | PONTOON BREWING (GA)

*Review by Dan Preston* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Behind the fruit and sour, there is fleeting crackery grain and light doughy malt. The flavor is similar, but with a bigger sour punch, like marmalade mixed with lemon curd. It has a light body and high carbonation, effervescent with lots of little bubbles on the palate enhanced by the bright acidity. The finish is dry with a bit of sweetness from the fruit. There is a sour tingle on the tongue and a bit of puckering as well. This beer is very quaffable, like a tall glass of lemonade spiked with mixed frozen fruit that would be great on a summer day and still quite enjoyable on those colder nights.

## #113 | RATED 90 | J-BOX | TRICKSTER'S BREWING CO. (ID)

*Review by Brad Darnell* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is of moderate sweat and dank hops with an underlying grassiness and medium toasted bread malt. A medium-high toasted bread/cracker malt supports moderate grassy, herbal and tropical fruit hops and moderate hop bitterness. Further analysis yields some green tea and kiwi hop character in the aroma and flavor, along with a particularly clean fermentation devoid of any esters, which is typical in Northwest/West Coast interpretations of this style. The hops, flavor and bitterness dominate here, but there is enough malt backbone to keep this from being one-dimensional. A lingering fresh hop character persists well into the bone-dry finish.

## #112 | RATED 90 | ARCHES FESTBIER | ARCHES BREWING (GA)

*Review by Brad Darnell* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

A brilliantly clear and sparkling bright copper-colored beer supports a large, bubbly beige head that persists somewhat. Rich caramel malt rises from the glass and greets the nose, and light spicy and earthy noble hops follow suit. The same rich malt aroma carries into the flavor, and faint toasted nuttiness joins the palate. Medium-light hop bitterness rounds out the flavor. The aroma presents some light toasted nuttiness upon further analysis, along with a clean lager nose. The clean lager also creates a clean flavor that allows the malt-forward character typical of this style to shine. The finish is of dry, lightly sweet malt. The beer is medium-bodied with medium-high carbonation and a light alcohol warmth.

## #111 | **RATED 90** | ROCKET DOG RYE IPA | LAUGHING DOG BREWING (ID)

Review by *John C. Tull* | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

What was lacking in hop aroma can be found in the flavor. A big, fresh hop character dominates the palate from start to finish. The hops, again, are not citrusy, dank, or tropical; rather they are floral and herbal with an old-world hop quality, like noble hops. The malt is medium with a slight caramel character, some general malt sweetness and a little bit of malt spice that you expect from a rye malt addition. The body is medium-full with good carbonation that makes for a slightly creamy mouthfeel. Overall, this is a very enjoyable rye IPA that takes a break from the often over-dominating, newer American hop varieties to feature the herbal and floral side of the brewer's flower.

## #110 | **RATED 90** | ANIMAL HAZY IPA | DENIZENS BREWING CO. (MD)

Review by *James Link* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The bouquet was characterized by a tropical fruit aroma along with mixed citrus notes while only a light hop complement was perceptible. Zesty fruit flavors dominate the taste profile and were reminiscent of citrus (tangerines and grapefruit) and other tropical fruits. Malt was barely detectable as was hop bitterness as it appeared that the majority of hops utilized here were in the form of dry hopping, which enhanced the complexity. Alcohol came into play and lent its warming character without overwhelming. Quite typical of the New England IPA style with its fruit-dominated flavors and aromas yet not overly juicy as other renditions of the style frequently are.

## #109 | **RATED 90** | WEE DEMON 95-CALORIE IPA | TWO ROADS BREWING CO. (CT)

Review by *Pat Mulloy* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A slightly hazy pour kicks up a medium off-white cap of foam with fair retention, and it smells like hops – tropical fruit, citrus and berry rather than corn or rice. It is light, refreshing, thirst-quenching, crisp and clean yet also packed with flavor. Medium-plus tropical fruit and citrusy hop flavors lead throughout. A light background malt presence carries you to a dry bitter finish that leaves you looking forward to another. Low-calorie, low-alcohol beer is a category of beer I generally avoid. This beer changed my mind. In a perfect world every sack of sliders, bag of drive-through burgers or platter of fish and chips would include a couple cans of this beer.

## #108 | **RATED 90** | CHERRY CHOCOLATE MILK STOUT | GARAGE BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by *Brad Darnell* | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

A tall, bubbly tan head sits atop the beer and recedes fairly quickly, leaving a random scattering of bubbles and film. The initial flavor is of sweet, rich dark chocolate, lightly sweet red cherries, and a medium-sweet finish. Additional evaluation uncovers some light stone fruit esters in the aroma and flavor and no perceivable hops, though a faint hop bitterness keeps the malt sweetness in check. The cherry flavor has a candy character without introducing any cloying sweetness. A rich and complex malt flavor provides nutty, roasty and caramel qualities to the beer. The body is medium-full with some light alcohol warmth and medium-high carbonation. This beer would pair nicely with a rich New York-style cheesecake.

## #107 | **RATED 90** | OH, SURE | LAND-GRANT BREWING CO. (OH)

Review by *Michael Heniff* | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Oh, Sure pours golden in color with a very slight haze and a big off-white head. The aroma is of moderately strong hops with notes of tangerine, pine and passion fruit over a hint of malt. The flavor is similarly hoppy with citrus, pine and mango flavors over light malt. The beer finishes with moderately light bitterness and moderate citrusy and herbal hops with a lighter tropical fruit note. Oh, Sure is a solid American IPA with a blend of traditional and new-world hop flavors. The hop flavors are well-balanced and change a bit from the aroma, flavor and finish. As the beer warms, a note of honeydew melon can be detected. Hopheads will enjoy this one.

# EXCEPTIONAL (91-95)

## #106 - #SABROMO

**Peter B's Brewpub** | Monterey, CA | [www.portolahotel.com/peter-bs-brewpub](http://www.portolahotel.com/peter-bs-brewpub)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.7% | IBUs: 28 | Serve at: 38°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 36 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review by *Brad Darnell*

Despite the thick and tall head, fragrant tangerine, mango and honeydew hop notes emerge and awaken the senses. The first mouthful is moderately bitter hops, pulpy white grapefruit and medium-light bread malt. The body is medium-light and carbonation is medium. The head persists a while on this beer. It is thick and bubbly and leaves a nice ring of lacing on the glass. Further deep sniffs yield light hop character of berries but no fruity esters. The hop flavor profile continues to evolve as I take more quaffs, yielding the berry, mango and honeydew notes originally found in the aroma. The hops tip the balance in their favor, but enough malt remains to keep them in check. There is a lingering prickly sensation that helps the white grapefruit pop a bit at the end.

## #105 - ALPHA ABSTRACTION, VOL. X

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.0% | IBUs: 46 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Alpha Abstraction Vol. X pours dark golden, is very hazy, and sports a big, fluffy off-white head. The aroma is of moderately strong piney and resinous hops along with a hint of malt. The flavor again features aggressive piney and resinous hops with a hint of malt and a touch of sweetness. The beer finishes moderately bitter with prominent piney and resinous hops and a hint of malt. This is a very good double IPA. The hop levels are prominent, and the hop flavors have some depth. However, the malt is a bit subdued compared to typical examples and the bitterness is on the low side of the style. Regardless, this is a solid, hop-forward beer that all hopheads will enjoy.

## #104 - 'PACK AND BRASS

**Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.** Hawley, PA | [www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com](http://www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com)

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 6.8% | Serve at: 55°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 16 / 20

### Judge's Review *by James Link*

Poured from a 16-ounce can into a pint glass, this beer's coffee IPA title is very misleading as this rendition pours a clear golden color with a medium-white head. The bouquet is characterized by a firm grapefruit-like hop aroma accompanied by a plethora of fruity esters and clean coffee notes that blend in nicely without overwhelming the other aromatics. Unique forces are at work here as the flavor and dryness of the coffee melds with that of that of the citrus hops to create a dry, yet not puckering, mouthfeel and leads to a finish in which bitterness is surprisingly not overstated. Alcohol levels were in line with IPA style guidelines as was the base beer, which enhanced and supported the coffee-like nature manifested here.

## #103 - SHAKA BERRY PASTRY STOUT

**Coronado Brewing Co.** San Diego, CA | [www.coronadobrewing.com](http://www.coronadobrewing.com)

Style: Fruit and Spice Beer | ABV: 10.5% | Serve at: 50°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 36 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Richard Wong*

The pour revealed a wonderful pitch-black hue with a tan, creamy head. Bubbles were small and compact, and the head lingered a long time in the glass. One could have been fooled thinking this was on nitro, but it wasn't. The aroma of this beer was to be expected: a nice malty roastiness (chocolate and coffee notes) and minimal hop overtones. I didn't detect any of the various berries listed, but I did get subtle hints of vanilla. The flavor of this beer had everything listed on the can. I detected dark, roasted malts that had hints of chocolate and coffee notes, a subtle fruit flavor that had a slight sweetness that balanced nicely with the roasted malts. Subtle hop bitterness lingered in the background along with vanilla and lactose.

## #102 - YEAR OF THE RAT

**Reformation Brewery** Woodstock, GA | [www.reformationbrewery.com](http://www.reformationbrewery.com)

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 7.2% | IBUs: 10 | Serve at: 40 to 50°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Pat Mulloy*

The brewer uses a deft hand with the added ingredients in this stout. The added coffee, chocolate and cinnamon enhance the flavors and aromas of the roasted malts rather than dominating them, making this a joy to drink. You notice this first in the aroma with roasted grains lightly seasoned by coffee and chocolate and a hint of cinnamon. It pours deep dark brown under a robust dark tan cap with good retention. An initial medium sweetness brings out the roasted grains, chocolate and coffee flavors. The sweetness diminishes slightly as the beer moves over the tongue, and by the finish a light astringent note from the roasted grains comes forward to lightly dry the beer and create the urge for another sip. The cinnamon lies in the background and comes forward in the finish.

# #101 - BARREL AGED BROWNIE BATTER BLEND #1: HAWAIIAN BROWNIE

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 20 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 13.1% | IBUs: 55 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

## Judge's Review *by Rick Franckhauser*

This is a dessert sipper, reminiscent of a chocolate fudge brownie with a chocolate liqueur chaser. The coconut, macadamia nut, vanilla and coffee are present at very low levels. The barrel aging aides in providing some needed complexity. Whenever I see beers that provide a long list of ingredients like this, I worry that I'll find a muddled mess. Fortunately, this beer presents all the elements, albeit very subtly in a sublimely well-integrated manner. So well-integrated, in fact, that the beer might be better represented simply as a barrel-aged imperial sweet stout without listing all the separate ingredients. Perfect over a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

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# #100 - BIG DIPPA

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

**Reformation Brewery** Woodstock, GA | [www.reformationbrewery.com](http://www.reformationbrewery.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.5% | IBUs: 50 | Serve at: 38 to 45°

## Judge's Review *by Pat Mulloy*

This beer immediately grabs hop lovers with its aroma, blending citrus and tropical fruit with touches of peppery rye, gooseberry, lemon and very faint pine and wood. It fills the glass brassy gold under a robust off-white cap with good retention. The aromas show up in the flavor as the beer flows over the tongue. An initial, lightly sweet sip laced with tropical fruit and citrus gives way to a medium-high bitterness that lingers well into the finish seasoned with peppery rye malt. The rye malt dries thing out on the finish with a light astringent note. The alcohol is mildly warming. The bitterness grows with each drink but remains balanced by the malt. The balance, where no part is out of place, makes this big, full-flavored beer a delight to drink.

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# #99 - CONCEITED GENIUS

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 17 / 20

**Wise Man Brewing** Winston-Salem, NC | [www.wisemanbrewing.com](http://www.wisemanbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.1% | IBUs: 80 | Serve at: 45°

## Judge's Review *by Jason Johnson*

The hop aroma leans very heavily into the citrus realm, and I could literally smell the hops from two feet away. Aromas present were a combination of grapefruit, orange and pineapple. The malt takes a backseat to the hops, but it is still presented as lightly sweet-smelling and doughy. Moving into the flavor, we see a lot of the same. Citrus hops (grapefruit and orange) with low secondary notes of pineapple are at the forefront. The malt is lightly sweet and tasting of a combination of doughy bread and honey. The hop bitterness is not too high; it falls into the moderate range. The beer also finishes a bit drier than I expected, which is welcome. No hop astringency, which is something I tend to watch out for in heavily hopped beers.

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# #98 - HELLO, LA

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

**Highland Park Brewery** Los Angeles, CA | [www.hpb.la](http://www.hpb.la)

Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.8% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

## Judge's Review *by Jason Johnson*

You could easily drink a few pints of this. There is a very light alcohol presence that shows up a bit more as the beer warms. The mouthfeel is medium, as is the carbonation. Overall, I really enjoyed this beer. It's intensely tropical, which, putting the judging hat aside, is my favorite hop flavor/aroma profile. What I would personally like to see is a bit more malt showing up to the party. Perhaps just a touch (or a touch more if it's already there) of biscuit malt would provide a little bit more malt depth. The sweetness is nice, the lightness of it all is nice, but I just feel the malt is a touch underdone. Still, this is a solid American IPA.

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## #97 - ALPHA ABSTRACTION, VOL. 14

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.0% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 8 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael McGuire*

This beer's aroma showcased the prominent floral hoppiness expected for style on top of the solid malt base also required of double IPAs. That said, the aroma lacked sensory evidence of the alcohol strength imparted by a double IPA's hefty grain bill. The flavor profile included hops and malt and alcohol in harmonious abundance with a delicious, caramel-like undertone. The mouthfeel consisted of a full body and a curious but not unpleasant slickness on the palate. Overall, this beer had surprising drinkability given its strength, a testimony to the brewer's skill in loading up the brew kettle with double IPA quantities of high-quality ingredients that did not cancel or trip over one another, forming a delicious whole greater than the sum of its parts.

## #96 - MEDALLA LIGHT

**Cervecería de Puerto Rico** Mayagüez, Puerto Rico | [www.cerveceradepr.com](http://www.cerveceradepr.com)  
Style: American Light Lager | ABV: 4.0% | IBUs: 54 | Serve at: 38 to 42°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 7 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sean Coughlin*

As expected for the style, the clarity of this bright blonde beer is immaculate, and it pours with a dense white head that stays atop the beer for a long time. This beer focuses on the malt alone as there is zero hop flavor and no perceptible bitterness. There is a light corn-chip flavor that adds a bit of welcome character. The fermentation is flawless – this lager is clean as can be, allowing the light malt characteristics to shine. Carbonation seems lower than usual in this style, but its incredibly light body and flavor make up for the lack of crispness that a drinker would normally associate with the style. This is a well-engineered beer that checks most of the boxes of the style. Seek out this local cerveza if you're in Puerto Rico!

## #95 - FEAR.MOVIE.LIONS DOUBLE IPA

**Stone Brewing Co.** Escondido, CA | [www.stonebrewing.com](http://www.stonebrewing.com)  
Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 8.5% | IBUs: 60 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Fear.Movie.Lions pours dark golden in color with a slight haze and a big, fluffy off-white head. The aroma is of prominent hops, tropical fruit and pine with a hint of pineapple and lime; the malt takes a far backseat to the hops but notes of malt can be detected. The flavor is of moderately strong tropical fruit and piney hops with a hint of lime. A moderately light caramel malt flavor helps to balance the aggressive hops. The beer finishes with moderate bitterness and a moderately light caramel malt, along with hop flavors of tropical fruit, generic citrus and a hint of lime. Fear.Movie.Lions is a solid double IPA that leans towards the New England double IPA style. Hopheads should definitely seek this IPA out.

## #94 - TIE 9 ON

**Monday Night Brewing** Atlanta, GA | [www.mondaynightbrewing.com](http://www.mondaynightbrewing.com)  
Style: Mixed-Style Beer | ABV: 13.0% | Serve at: 45 to 55°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 35 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sal Mortillaro II*

The flavor consists of barrel character of medium intensity, medium-low vanilla, low cherry-like notes, light dark chocolate and light char. The flavor of ethyl alcohol is apparent, and it is smooth and not harsh for a high-ABV, well-fermented beer. In the finish, the drinker is left with a medium-low lingering bitterness, low roast and light chocolate, which is more apparent in the aftertaste than the initial flavor. However, a medium-intense lingering sweetness weighs heavy on the palate and affects both this beer's drinkability, possibly masking its full potential with regards to depth of flavor. This beer has a medium-full body with low carbonation and light alcohol warmth along with a nice creaminess due to the viscosity of the beer and low carbonation. This is an extremely nice beer to drink, contemplate and enjoy.

## #93 - BORN BOHEMIAN PILS

**Denizens Brewing Co.** Silver Spring, MD | [www.denizensbrewingco.com](http://www.denizensbrewingco.com)  
Style: Czech Pilsner | ABV: 4.9% | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 36 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by James Link*

The aroma profile reflected a clean spicy hop aroma quality that takes control, only allowing the soft malt aromatics to take a secondary position. This handsome deep yellow lager was brilliantly clear and supported a bone white head that held up throughout this review. Grassy, spicy hop flavors reminiscent of Saaz were firmly evidenced and lightly balanced with a toasted pilsner malt character. The finish was very dry and a bit overstated while the mouthfeel reflected a medium-full beer with traditional alcoholic levels per style. Overall, an easy-drinking example of a Bohemian pilsner recommended for all and especially those who relish this style.

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## #92 - LONG RIDE PALE ALE

**Confluence Brewing Co.** Des Moines, IA | [www.confluencebrewing.com](http://www.confluencebrewing.com)  
Style: American Pale Ale | ABV: 5.1% | IBUs: 54 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 36 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Long Ride pours dark golden in color with a light haze and a big, fluffy, off-white head. The aroma is of very prominent hops of tangerine, mango, blueberry and pine with just a hint of malt. The flavor again is very hoppy with flavors of tangerine, pine and mango with just a hint of malt. The beer finishes with a moderately light bitterness and lingering hop flavors of citrus and tropical fruit. Long Ride is a well-made hoppy beer. But the hop-to-malt balance is more akin to a New England IPA than an American pale ale, in which the malt is definitely present and more in balance with the hops. Perhaps think of this as a more sessionable New England IPA. Regardless, this is a great beer and hopheads will love Long Ride.

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## #91 - KUJO

**Flying Dog Brewery** Frederick, MD | [www.flyingdog.com](http://www.flyingdog.com)  
Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 6.0% | IBUs: 15 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 8 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Jason Johnson*

The flavor is classically American porter. I get a lot of dark roasted grains, dark chocolate and coffee, with a subtle burnt tone. The coffee addition ramps up the coffee perception in the beer quite obviously. All in all, this is a solid coffee porter, and I actually feel the base beer is outstanding. It's not sweet like so many American porters are, and the baselines for the beer seemed to all be within style. The only thing is I wish there was a bit more hops in there, but the range falls in the lower end of the scale for this beer style, which allows for low-to-high hop presence. The coffee addition was very well-done in my opinion, and I wouldn't want anything more overshadowing that base beer.

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## #90 - ATTENTION PLEASE!

**Bearded Iris Brewing** Nashville, TN | [www.beardedirisbrewing.com](http://www.beardedirisbrewing.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.2% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Attention Please! is brewed with Citra hops and measures in at 8.2% ABV. It pours light golden in color with moderate haziness and a moderate fluffy white head. The aroma is prominent resinous and citrusy hops with notes of mangos and peaches over a hint of malt and non-discernible esters. The flavor is similarly prominently hoppy with flavors of citrus and tropical fruit over a hint of malt. The beer finishes moderately bitter with prominent hop flavors of citrus, tropical fruit and peach. This is a well-brewed, single-hop double IPA. The Citra hops are fantastic in character and very prominent in intensity as expected. The malt plays a backseat to the hops and the quaffability is high. Hopheads will particularly enjoy Attention Please!

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## #89 - GNARLY BARLEY INDIA PALE LAGER

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)  
Style: Experimental Beer | ABV: 5.9% | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

IPL pours light golden in color with very good clarity and a big, mousse-like white head. The aroma is of moderate floral and honeydew melon-like hops with a lighter citrusy note; the aroma also has a hint of malt and no esters. The flavor has a light pils malt character underneath a moderate lime and floral hoppiness with a hint of grapefruit. The beer finishes moderately bitter with light lime and floral hop flavors. This is a refreshing lager with a more intense new-world hop character than typical low-to-middle gravity European or international lagers. The new-world hop character brings a lot of different hop flavors without being overly aggressive. Pilsner lovers and hopheads will equally enjoy this beer.

## #88 - BIG DIPA

**Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.** Hawley, PA | [www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com](http://www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.0% | IBUs: 55 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Big DIPA is brewed with Galaxy, Comet and Vic Secret hops and measures in at 8.0% ABV and 55 IBUs. Big DIPA pours light golden in color with a moderate haze and a big, fluffy, white head. The aroma is of prominent peach, resin and citrus hop characters; just a hint of malt stands out among the big hop aromas. The flavor features moderate tropical fruit, resin and herbal hops over a hint of pale malt. The beer finishes moderately bitter with big hop flavors of tropical fruit and generic citrus. Big DIPA is a solid double IPA with a wealth of hop intensity and flavor.

## #87 - VICIOUS HOOK

**Flying Dog Brewery** Frederick, MD | [www.flyingdog.com](http://www.flyingdog.com)  
Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 5.3% | IBUs: 5 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 35 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sean Coughlin*

The aroma of this beer will take you back to childhood and the glory days of sipping fruit punch-style drinks such as Hawaiian Punch, Hi-C or Capri Sun. Its aroma is reminiscent of an umbrella-laden cocktail you might enjoy oceanside. The fruit is loud but complex – it is difficult to ascertain a distinct note of blood orange, pineapple or cherry; they blend harmoniously and create a sum that is greater than its parts. Oceanside, poolside or even sitting in front of the television, this is a bright fruit-forward beer that can be enjoyed in a wide variety of settings and by a wide variety of beer drinkers. Whether you are a kettle-sour aficionado or someone just dipping their toes into craft beer, Vicious Hook is unique and enjoyable down to the last drop.

## #86 - LIGHTPOINT

**New Holland Brewing Co.** Holland, MI | [www.newhollandbrew.com](http://www.newhollandbrew.com)  
Style: Witbier | ABV: 3.7% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 91**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

The aroma is light and dominated by a sweet orange and faint orange peel character above a soft white bread note. An additional aromatic angle is noted – almost woody, but clean and dry, and definitely not like coriander. A very faint malt sweetness emerges as the beer warms slightly. No hops and decidedly dry in character. The flavor profile has a light bread malt front with a surge of orange and orange peel flavor dominating the middle, again juxtaposed with an elusive dry-woody note that is quite pleasant, along with what seems to be a bright citrus-spice angle from coriander. Bitterness is low despite the presence of citrus zest/oil. The late palate has a long and lingering orange peel note and provides a nice flavor and lasting bitterness.

## #85 - SINGILLIS DONKER

**Singillis Bieren** Belgium | [www.facebook.com/SingillisBieren](http://www.facebook.com/SingillisBieren)  
Style: Belgian Dark Strong Ale | ABV: 8.5% | Serve at: 43 to 46°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review by Michael Heniff

Singillis Bieren is located halfway between Antwerp and Ghent where the family has been brewing beer since 1908. Singillis Donker pours a brownish amber in color with good clarity and a small tan head. The aroma is of moderately rich bready malt paired evenly with peppery phenolics. The flavor is similarly rich as bready melanoidins pair with peppery phenolics and a note of alcohol. The beer finishes with moderately light bitterness and a moderate bready/bread crusts, melanoidin-rich maltiness that is contrasted with peppery phenolics. This is a very well-made Belgian dark strong ale. The bready malt was evenly balanced by the phenolics, but a little more malt complexity and a note of a light ester could have made this beer even more complex and enjoyable.

## #84 - LARGEMOUTH IPA

**Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.** Hawley, PA | [www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com](http://www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com)  
Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.5% | IBUs: 32 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 8 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review by James Link

A plethora of citrus-like hops come to the forefront of the aroma profile accompanied by tropical fruit notes that suggest profuse dry hopping. This beer was amber-colored and quite turbid with an off-white head, which persisted throughout this review. The taste, much like the bouquet, was dominated by citrus flavors (mostly grapefruit) and was then followed by pineapple and other tropical fruit allowing the malt base to contribute only a supporting role. The body was medium and a bit acidic with a prickly carbonation bite and only a touch of alcoholic warmth. Quite drinkable. Very representative of this popular style and stands up well to other available renditions.

## #83 - WESTLAND WHISKEY BARREL AGED METAMORPHIC FLANDERS STYLE RED W/ RASPBERRY AND CHERRY

**Bozeman Brewing Co.** Bozeman, MT | [www.bozemanbrewing.com](http://www.bozemanbrewing.com)  
Style: Mixed-Style Beer | ABV: 10.2% | IBUs: 8 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 36 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review by Michael Heniff

Metamorphic pours amber in color with a very slight haze and a small off-white head that fades quickly. The aroma is moderate wild characters of barnyard and horse blanket with rich fruit of plums, currants and cherries. The flavor is an evenly balanced sweet-and-sour with moderate currant and cherry fruits with raspberry at a lighter level. The beer finishes lightly bitter with a sour-over-sweet balance with evenly balanced cherry and raspberry fruit flavors. The beer is a very well-done fruited Flanders red ale. The level of sourness is perfect and the balance between the sourness and sweetness adds to the complexity of the flavors.

## #82 - FIGHT MILK

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)  
Style: Oatmeal Stout | ABV: 7.7% | IBUs: 50 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 8 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review by Dan Martich

Roasted malt, coffee and light cream flavor are pleasant and complex. The complexity exhibits flavors of dark caramel and chocolate bitterness mid-palate, before the medium-dry finish. There's a woody, cinnamon-like flavor that gives this beer more depth. The alcohol is slightly high for a beer that should be lower in ABV. There was no hop flavor detected (more balanced toward the roasty malt character), and the beer had a medium-bitter aftertaste. This beer has a medium-full body and moderately high carbonation, which keeps it on point for the style. A little smooth silkiness makes the mouthfeel very pleasant. An exceptional beer that is delicious and complex with its myriad roasted malt notes. The alcoholic warmth complements the overall flavor and palate experience.

## #81 - THREE HARVEST

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.2% | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 36 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Three Harvest pours golden in color and very hazy with a medium, finely beaded, mousse-like white head. The aroma is of moderately strong citrus hops with notes of honeydew melon and white grape; no malt or esters are evident. The flavor is similarly hop-prominent with flavors of citrus, melon and white grape. The bitterness is quite low as the beer finishes with prominent citrusy and herbal hop flavors. The hop character of Three Harvest is unusual for the Cascade variety, but the flavors work well together and add a layer of complexity that would not be there otherwise. The bitterness is quite low for the style, but the beer does not come off as being overly sweet. Regardless, this is a great beer that all will enjoy.

## #80 - BARREL AGED BROWNIE BATTER BLEND #2 MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 13.9% | Serve at: 60°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Rick Franckhauser*

The underlying imperial stout seems terrific. The heat level will likely be overpowering for some. However, the heat did serve multiple purposes in balancing the beer, and if the heat were reduced it would need to be replaced by some additional bitterness and carbonation. I expected a more distinct barrel character and some smokiness to come through. Pepper-infused beers are much like smoked beers, in that they take some time for palate acclimation. After adjusting to the heat, you begin to appreciate the other aspects of the beer. Upon acclimation, this beer is wonderfully complex. Take your time with this one; sip and ponder.

## #79 - NEW WAVE

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.bhramaribrewing.com](http://www.bhramaribrewing.com)

Style: Blonde Ale | ABV: 4.2% | IBUs: 5 | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 4 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Jim Koebel*

This golden-colored beer has a very pleasant aroma, which is also more complex than typically found in the blonde ale style. It has notes of corn and light DMS, grainy sweetness and noble hops. There is also a strawberry character that carries over into the flavor. It tastes similarly grainy-sweet with very low noble hop flavor and gentle bitterness. This beer has a smooth, medium body but needs additional carbonation. This is indicated not only by the mouthfeel, but also by the lack of foam when poured. Otherwise, New Wave is a very enjoyable example of the style.

## #78 - ONCE AROUND THE SUN

**Thompson Island Brewing Co.** Rehoboth Beach, DE | [www.thompsonislandbrewing.com](http://www.thompsonislandbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 9.2% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Once Around the Sun pours opaque black in color with a huge brown head. The aroma is of strong bourbon, toasted oak and vanilla over moderately strong roasted and chocolate malts. The flavor is of strong bourbon with barrel notes of toasted oak and vanilla that complements the moderate chocolate, roasted and dark caramel malts. The mouthfeel is similarly boozy and slightly warm (but never hot). The beer finishes moderately light in bitterness with a wealth of bourbon and barrel notes along with rich dark malts. This is an excellent bourbon barrel-aged beer. If it has a fault, it's that the stout is a bit too boozy; the dark malts could be a bit more forward or the bourbon a bit more restrained. Regardless, this is a very enjoyable beer to drink.

## #77 - PRE-PRO LAGER

**East Brother Beer Co.** Richmond, CA | [www.eastbrotherbeer.com](http://www.eastbrotherbeer.com)

Style: Pre-Prohibition Lager | ABV: 5.2% | Serve at: 38°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

The aroma is of light crackery pils malt with a hint of corn; the hops provide a light floral and minty background. The flavor features elements of moderate pils malt and an equal level of corn with light floral hop notes. Pre-Pro Lager is exceedingly well brewed and accurate to style. The level of malt, hops and bitterness are higher than mass-brewed American lagers yet lower than the levels found in traditional European pilsners, such as German pils. The corn adjunct aroma and flavor are present and add to the complexity of the malt base. The hops may be a bit peculiar for those more accustomed to typical pilsner hop varieties, though. Pre-Prohibition lagers are exceedingly difficult to find; be sure to seek this one out to get your history lesson while enjoying an exceptional beverage.

## #76 - BIRTHDAY MONTH TRIPLE IPA

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Triple IPA | ABV: 10.5% | IBUs: 50 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Jason Johnson*

I am so happy the beer was not just a huge hop bomb. Overall, it's well-balanced and delicious. The mouthfeel is a bit on the chewy side, with a medium-high feel to it. It's very creamy and doesn't have much in terms of hop astringency, which I was expecting to get. In the end, this beer is really well done for a such a big beer. It weighs in at 10.5% ABV, but it hides it well so be careful. The hop balance is nice with the grain bill, and the bitterness is just high enough, as it should be. It drinks like a really nice IPA with a lot more alcohol. Is that what the brewer was going for? I would suspect so because it's drinkable, tasty and will hit you like a hammer.

## #75 - ALPHA ABSTRACTION, VOL. 13

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.0% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Alpha Abstraction is double dry hopped with Sabro hops and measures in at 8.0% ABV. This beer pours light golden in color with an abundance of haze and a medium white head. The aroma is made prominently of hops of tropical fruit, citrus and pineapple; a hint of malt provided a backdrop for the hops. The flavor is again prominently hoppy with hop flavors of pineapple, coconut, peaches and generic citrus. The beer finishes moderately light in bitterness with an abundance of tropical fruit and citrus hop flavors. Alpha Abstraction is a well-made, New England-style double IPA. The hops are very prominent and offer a multitude of complementing flavors. The quaffability of this double IPA is excellent. Hopheads rejoice!

## #74 - LOUNGING IGUANAS

**Abita Brewing Co.** Covington, LA | [www.abita.com](http://www.abita.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.5% | IBUs: 50 | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 36 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Brad Darnell*

The beer pours moderately hazy and cloudy straw gold with a large, bubbly and foamy white head. The head lasts throughout the sample and leaves some lacing. Immediate heavy aromas of toasted coconut, overripe pineapple and juicy mango greet my nose; these are followed by a light biscuit and white crackery malt backbone. The initial flavor is moderate, sweet coconut and a medium, juicy pineapple and mango hop character, medium-light hop bitterness, medium-sweet biscuit and crackery malt along with a dry finish. The body is medium-full with medium-high carbonation. The hops linger freshly in the aroma and carry over pleasantly to the flavor. The carbonation and hop bitterness combine to create a prickly sensation primarily at the tip of my tongue, and the coconut hops linger well into the finish.

## #73 - PAPAGAYO

**Denizens Brewing Co.** Silver Spring, MD | [www.denizensbrewingco.com](http://www.denizensbrewingco.com)  
Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 6.1% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by James Link*

Aromatic fruity notes assail the nostrils upon initial pour, which is dominated by pineapple notes and supplemented by passion fruit. The barnyard aroma of *Brettanomyces* is clearly present and adds complexity to the bouquet. A hazy pale-yellow ale with an abundance of tiny bubbles is accompanied by an aggressive white head, which fell immediately off. A citrusy pineapple-like flavor marries with the wild yeast, wet hay nature of the *Brettanomyces* strain to create a unique tang. Due to the high attenuation of wild yeast, malt is accorded only a secondary position. The aforementioned attenuation produced a thin-bodied slightly acidic beer with a touch of warming. Overall a crisp, dry rendition of the style that balances its fruity nature well with its Brett character.

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## #72 - WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

**Monday Night Brewing** Atlanta, GA | [www.mondaynightbrewing.com](http://www.mondaynightbrewing.com)  
Style: Triple IPA | ABV: 10.0% | IBUs: 70 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sal Mortillaro II*

In the flavor, a medium-high malt sweetness with low malt flavor and low graininess hits the drinker immediately. The hop flavors of this beer become extremely subdued due to the intensity of the bitterness and malt, though a slight grassy note lingers in the aftertaste. The flavor of ethyl alcohol is present but low. This beer has a medium-full body with low carbonation, which leads to a slightly creamy aspect. No astringency is noted and there is a medium-low warmth in this beer. Overall, this beer is definitely a sipper, with high malt and almost as high hop character. The malt character versus hop character seemed to favor a triple IPA that had been aged; a touch more hop character would have been more in line with the architecture of a fresh example of the style.

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## #71 - NIGHTMARE FUEL

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)  
Style: Fruit Beer | ABV: 6.5% | IBUs: 8 | Serve at: 46 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 36 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Nightmare Fuel pours dark red (almost purple) with excellent clarity and a medium, pink-colored head. The aroma is of moderately strong dark berries of cherries and raspberries and a hint of currant; a light lactic acid aroma is also noted. The flavor is moderate lactic acidity with moderate dark fruit of currants and raspberries. The beer finishes lightly bittered with a moderately high carbonation and lingering dark fruits of cherry, raspberry and currants. This is a very well-made beer. The level of fruitiness was slightly high, but each of the fruits came through the flavor with an excellent balance between them. The level of acidity was slightly low for a true Berliner Weisse but is at a level that will be well received by both sour beer and fruit beer aficionados.

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## #70 - IT'S TIKI TIME!

**Westbrook Brewing Co.** Mt. Pleasant, SC | [www.westbrookbrewing.com](http://www.westbrookbrewing.com)  
Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 5.0% | IBUs: 5 | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by John C. Tull*

The initial reminiscence of peach is more notably tropical fruit than the aroma as the palate becomes used to the flavors and begins to pick out the guava and passion fruit. The pineapple is less prominent and likely a contributor to some of the acidity in the flavor. The sourness makes the fruit seem like it is transforming into a lemony tartness as it progresses through your palate. The acidity from the ferment (and maybe also from the fruit) is nicely balanced with a perception of sweetness from the relatively intense fruitiness. The fruit lingers, but the sour and acidity linger even longer through the finish. Overall, this is an excellent sour with distinctive fruit and aggressive sour and tart flavors that make this beer quite multi-dimensional.

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## #69 - DIREWOLF

**Olde Mother Brewing Co** Frederick, MD | [www.oldemother.com](http://www.oldemother.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 7.9% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Bury*

The aroma is hop-forward with dominating grapefruit, lemon and resin alongside other more modern hop characteristics such as lychee, papaya and cantaloupe. Distant malt of grain and a hint of honey provide intrigue. Clean fermentation with no esters was present but alcohol can be detected, especially as it warms. Form follows function and the flavor is an extension of the aroma with similar flavors. The temperate bitterness provides balance and after a dry finish, resin, grapefruit, papaya and especially alcohol linger. Complementary to the hops is a moderately full body and average carbonation. The smooth alcohol is ever-present. Overall, the fresh, vibrant, new-world hop profile is the star while the alcohol, although well-incorporated, stands out a bit too much to keep this out of the high 90s.

## #68 - C'MON SUNSHINE

**Birds Fly South Ale Project** Greenville, SC | [www.bfsbeer.com](http://www.bfsbeer.com)

Style: Brett Beer | ABV: 5.0% | IBUs: 24 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Joseph Formanek*

The Brett is the star of the show regarding flavor, delivering a moderate tartness along with a medium level of barnyard character. This is a moderately aged Brett beer, in that the fruitiness of a young Brett has subsided, but the overwhelming barnyard sourness of a well-aged Brett beer is not yet present. The base beer flavor beyond the Brett character is rather clean and lacking in complexity – cleaner than a typical saison. The body is quite thin, which delivers a quite refreshing dry and crisp quality to the beer. The carbonation is highly effervescent. C'mon Sunshine is a surprisingly quaffable and approachable version of a Brett beer. While the saison character of the base beer is a bit subtle, the overall presentation is quite well done and would be a great option for summer refreshment.

## #67 - PFRIEM MEXICAN-STYLE LAGER

**pFriem Family Brewers** Hood River, OR | [www.pfriembeer.com](http://www.pfriembeer.com)

Style: International Pale Lager | ABV: 4.4% | IBUs: 17 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Nelson Crowle*

This beer pours a beautiful, brilliantly clear, light yellowish straw color with a large white head of tiny bubbles that is persistent. Aroma is moderately grainy with a slight perfumy floral note. The flavor is of mostly grainy malt with a hint of unsalted crackers and low floral and white pepper notes. Very light body and highly carbonated, there's a short grainy very dry finish with hints of honey and corn. There are no faults or defects – this is an excellent example of a Mexican lager (without the usual skunkiness of a Corona, or the need for a lime). Bitterness is low but smooth. There is a moderate alcohol presence that is clean but noticeable. This beer would pair nicely with fresh crunchy corn tacos.

## #66 - NOT MY KING

**13 Stripes Brewery** Taylors, SC | [www.13stripesbrewery.com](http://www.13stripesbrewery.com)

Style: American Lager | ABV: 4.6% | Serve at: 35 to 40°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 17 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Not My King pours golden in color with excellent clarity and a moderate, finely beaded white head. The aroma is of light pilsner malt with light herbal and floral hops and no esters. The body is medium-light and the flavor is light pilsner malt and a hint of corn with a light herbal hop character. The beer finishes lightly bittered with a lingering light pilsner malt. This is a very well-brewed American lager. The malt and hops are subtle but apparent. The fermentation attributes lend themselves to a very clean beer. While this might not be every craft beer aficionado's favorite style, it is still worth checking out. This beer would be great after mowing the lawn or after a long afternoon run.



## #65 - GNARLY BARLEY STOUT

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)

Style: Imperial Stout | ABV: 9.4% | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

This beer pours an opaque black with a quickly fading dark brown head. The aroma is of moderately strong roasted and chocolate malt with lighter caramel and molasses notes and complementing plum-like esters. The body is medium-full with a moderate creaminess and a note of alcohol (but never warm or harsh). The flavor is prominent chocolate and roasted malt with lighter caramel and molasses notes. Dark and dried fruit esters of plums and prunes complement the dark malt characters. The beer finishes moderately bitter with a light sweetness; lingering chocolate and roasted malt with plum-like esters coat the palate. This beer is a very good version of an English-style imperial stout. The light sweetness is well balanced by the moderate bitterness leaving a beer that is not overly dry or overly sweet.

## #64 - PULP THEORY HAZY IPA

**Odell Brewing Co.** Fort Collins, CO | [www.odellbrewing.com](http://www.odellbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 7.5% | IBUs: 45 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Brian Eichhorn*

The pour is hazy, bordering on turbid, with a pale gold color and touch of orange and a creamy white head that persists. I'm getting guava and pineapple in the nose along with some jasmine and grapefruit. Super clean and fresh, with a complementary ester profile as well. Some vanilla also is peeking out, probably due to the yeast. Great nose. On tasting, the bitterness is definitely on the lower end, but to style. Faint notes of some odd plastic, likely from fermentation as well. Hop flavor dominates, with guava and pineapple leading, followed by some less acidic passion fruit notes. Clean and fresh overall, just a few odd phenolic notes up front. The bitterness grows in the finish, which helps to round it out. Really great overall and hits all the tropical fruit boxes.

## #63 - NO MATES - NELSON SAUVIN

**Astro Lab Brewing** Silver Spring, MD | [www.astrolabbrewing.com](http://www.astrolabbrewing.com)

Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.7% | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael McGuire*

No Mates - Nelson Sauvín by Astro Lab Brewing is a New England IPA and was judged as an American IPA (BJCP sub-style 21A). It poured cloudy and light golden into the glass with an impressive white head with moderate retention. Its aroma was subtle and refined with mild hop notes that gave way to apple and white grape. This is a complex and well-balanced beer, restrained in the sense that there is just enough hop bitterness to avoid the cloyingly sweet flavor profiles of many New England IPAs, but not so much that it tastes like just another American IPA. A creamy mouthfeel and moderate alcohol warmth add to the pleasant combination of hop and malt flavors, resulting in an extremely flavorful and delicious beer.

## #62 - TAN LIMES

**Cape May Brewing Co.** Cape May, NJ | [www.capemaybrewery.com](http://www.capemaybrewery.com)

Style: Fruit Beer | ABV: 4.5% | IBUs: 12 | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Tan Limes is brewed with Cape May sea salt and Persian lime juice. Tan Lines pours light golden in color with a slight haze and a big, fluffy, white head. The aroma is of moderate crackery pils malt with a hint of lime; no hops or esters are present. The flavor shows a lot more lime at a medium-light level over a light clean pils malt with a gentle acidity. The beer finishes lightly bittered with a crisp, clean finish with a light lime flavor and a light, pleasant acidity. The base international lager is well brewed with a quality pils malt character. The lime complements the style well and is never overwhelming. The lime and a gentle acidity make this beer very thirst-quenching.

## #61 - THE CALL

**New Holland Brewing Co.** Holland, MI | [www.newhollandbrew.com](http://www.newhollandbrew.com)

Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 6.6% | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

The flavor character starts brisk and sharp, with a bite of lactic acid and then a full tart and lasting middle of dark berry fruit flavors, with the raspberry winning the show of dominance, with some darker berry character as first mate. The mid-palate lingers tart, with only a hint of malt and sweetness to balance the appreciable lactic acid. The finish is dry, tart (almost bordering on sour) with a nice clean lingering berry note that lasts and lasts. Finally, a small grainy, almost wheat-like malt sweetness comes in softly at the end. Mouthfeel is surprisingly full, possibly due to fruit pectins adding viscosity. Overall, it makes for a rounded and tart berry beer with a clean and direct tart backdrop and wonderful fruit accents that really shine here.

## #60 - PEAR LAMBIC

**Area Two Experimental Brewing** Stratford, CT | [www.tworoadsbrewing.com/areatwo](http://www.tworoadsbrewing.com/areatwo)

Style: Fruit Lambic | ABV: 7.0% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 19 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by John C. Tull*

The flavor is intensely sour with some pear and a lemony zing from the fermentation by-products. The finish is tart, though adequate sweetness balances the sourness well. Similar to the aroma, there are not strong earthy characteristics suggesting that the wild yeast has not developed too much as would be anticipated in a younger fruit lambic. The body is medium-light with a high tartness and puckering quality, almost like sucking on a lemon wedge. The overall impression is of a pleasant, relatively young fruit lambic. The pear presents a nice aromatic quality with a subtle fruit offset in the flavor that a mild-flavored fruit is expected to provide. I would love to have a little more lambic complexity in the aroma, and I suspect you will get this as the beer ages.

## #59 - FIT BITS

**WeldWerks Brewing Co.** Greeley, CO | [www.weldwerks.com](http://www.weldwerks.com)

Style: Session IPA | ABV: 4.2% | Serve at: 38 to 42°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Fit Bits pours golden in color with a strong haze and a huge mousse-like, off-white head. The aroma is moderate citrusy, mango and piney hops over a hint of malt. The flavor is moderate tropical fruit and piney hops with a hint of malt in the background. The beer finishes moderately bitter with lingering piney and citrusy hop flavors and a hint of coconut. This session IPA is well done and avoids the pitfall of many session IPAs: overly dry body with a harsh bitter flavor. The selected hops provide a good balance of a lot of different hops flavors, especially of the tropical fruit variety. The beer is certainly easy to drink and will be enjoyed by hopheads looking for an IPA flavor without all the alcohol and calories.

## #58 - DR. JUICE

**Parish Brewing Co.** Broussard, LA | [www.parishbeer.com](http://www.parishbeer.com)

Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.0% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Brian Eichhorn*

At tasting, the bitterness is really subdued, and this seems further muted by the brewing process, as there is a creaminess here that leads it down that "juicy" path. The flavor is driven by softer tropical flavors (think papaya, guava and pineapple). The beer finishes a bit on the sweet side, due to the restrained bitterness, but it still remains super fresh and bright overall. Some light sweet cherry go into the finish as well. The mouthfeel is creamy with no astringency with appropriate carbonation and conditioning as well. Medium-full body. Overall, this really does tick all the boxes. I appreciated the brightness and freshness of the hops, though I like a bit more bitterness personally. That's just me, and it really does fit the mold for modern hazy and juicy IPAs.

## #57 - LITTLE SIP

**Lawson's Finest Liquids** Waitsfield, VT | [www.lawsonsfine.com](http://www.lawsonsfine.com)  
Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.2% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 92**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

American IPAs are hop-forward beers typically expressing American or new-world hop characters and are most typically citrusy, piney or resinous in character. Little Sip pours dark golden in color with a slight haze and a big fluffy off-white head. The aroma is moderately hoppy with notes of mangos, generic citrus and resin with a hint of malt beneath the malt. The flavor is similarly hoppy with flavors of mangos, resin and tangerines. The beer finishes moderately bitter with flavors of tropical fruit, resin and herbs. Little Sip is a good American IPA with tropical fruit and resinous hop notes. The hop flavor is prominent with a slightly restrained bitterness. Hopheads should surely seek this one out.

## #56 - GNARLY BARLEY LAGER

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)  
Style: International Pale Lager | ABV: 4.2% | Serve at: 38 to 40°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Rick Franckhauser*

The flavor provides the same lemony hops found in the aroma but adds some pleasant floral qualities as well. The malt profile is predominantly grainy with a little white bread backing it. The corn and sulfur elements found in the nose are absent in the flavor. I'm not complaining, but as a pale lager, they would have been acceptable at the levels found in the aroma and may have added a touch of complexity. Near even hop bitterness balances the malt. A dry, crisp finish and a nice lingering touch of the lemony hops continue into the aftertaste. Clean fermentation with nothing off or out of place. Light-bodied with moderately high levels of carbonation. A very slight carbonic tingle, just slightly prickly but not astringent.

## #55 - LOW LIGHT

**Motorworks Brewing** Bradenton, FL | [www.motorworksbrewing.com](http://www.motorworksbrewing.com)  
Style: Fruit Beer | ABV: 4.3% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 38 to 42°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 40 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 8 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sal Mortillaro II*

There are neutral malt flavors followed by a moderate amount of lime and lemon peel character, ending with a low level of white peppercorn spiciness. A faint amount of sweetness, from the adjuncts presumably, is detected just prior to the finish. Floral hops are here too, but at an extremely low level. The finish is soft and long-lasting. The added flavors balance well against the base beer. The mouthfeel presents a light-bodied beer with moderate carbonation. The overall picture of this flavored beer is that of a shandy. A very good beer that surprised this judge in its overall drinkability. I can see this beer becoming a favorite around the summer barbecue season, especially with the younger beer drinkers. The aroma comes through pleasantly as you raise the glass to your lips.

## #54 - COOKIES & CREAM STOUT

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)  
Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 10.5% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Bury*

True to its style, this beer is inky black with a small, tight, dark brown head that lingers around the edge of the glass. Moderate dark chocolate, earthy coffee, cherry, restrained caramel and toast are immediately perceived. Restrained vanilla rounds out any roughness from the rich, roasted malt. The flavor is reminiscent of a cookies and cream milkshake. Forward toasted malt, bittersweet chocolate, slight dark stone fruits such as cherry along with moderately sweet vanilla creme all blend together in a harmonious marriage. The semi-sweet finish gives a dessert-like impression especially with the moderately full, velvety body. Subtle nuances provide intrigue where many offerings in the style are sickly sweet shadows of this version.

## #53 - HAWLEY HEFEWEIZEN

**Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.** Hawley, PA | [www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com](http://www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com)

Style: Hefeweizen/Weissbier | ABV: 5.1% | IBUs: 11 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by James Link*

Banana esters were immediately discernible upon first pour and dominated the aroma profile. Other fruity esters were evident in the background and combined with wisps of wheat to create a pleasant bouquet. True to style, the beer was a cloudy golden color and supported a rocky white head that persisted. The flavor was dominated by a host of esters and phenols, which could only emanate from a traditional German yeast strain. In addition to the above-mentioned banana notes, a distinct clove character was present and balanced well with the malted wheat. The absence of hop flavor and bitterness allows the subtlety of this effort to represent itself in fine fashion. Rich flavors, traditional alcohol levels and medium-to-light body make this an easy-drinking example of the style.

## #52 - STAND BY IPA

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)

Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.6% | IBUs: 80 | Serve at: 46 to 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Bury*

The hop-forward nose is fairly intense, and features notes of pine, resin, grapefruit and hints of guava and passion fruit, all of which are supported by moderate toasted malt and restrained caramel. A faint whiff of strawberry emerges as it warms. Like all solid American IPAs should be, the hop bitterness is firm but not abrasive. Definitely hop forward but the solid toasted caramel backbone provides plenty of support. There's more berry and papaya in the flavor than the aroma but the pine, resin and papaya are still present. The lingering, dry finish leaves you wanting another sip. Overall, this is a solid IPA that could easily be in your regular rotation. With its thirst-quenching ability, this IPA would be a lovely addition to your beer refrigerator in the summertime.

## #51 - ABITA AMBER LAGER

**Abita Brewing Co.** Covington, LA | [www.abita.com](http://www.abita.com)

Style: International Amber Lager | ABV: 4.5% | IBUs: 17 | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

Overall, the beer is refreshing and crisp, with notes of malt richness leaning to low lovibond caramel malt, with a reserved and delicate German hop character in a tight and dry package. It is extremely drinkable and would work both to slake a hot day's thirst as well as complement a rich meal on a cool evening. I am not sure why, because it's not a common meal for me, but the idea of pairing this beer with a rich and fatty Bavarian pork knuckle has popped into my brain and is very appealing. Not because the beer is overtly Germanic, but its light richness seems the perfect counterpoint to lifting the heaviness of the meat-fat-breading off the palate. This beer is an excellent example of the style and deserves credit for its balance and elegant light flavors.

## #50 - OVER THE IVY

**Confluence Brewing Co.** Des Moines, IA | [www.confluencebrewing.com](http://www.confluencebrewing.com)

Style: Czech Premium Pale Lager | ABV: 4.5% | IBUs: 36 | Serve at: 38 to 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Over the Ivy pours golden in color, is crystal clear, and sports a medium, fluffy white head. The aroma is of balanced, moderate spicy hops over a moderately light bready and crackery malt. The flavor is of moderate spicy hops and bready malt that finishes with a moderate bitterness and a lingering spicy hop note. Over the Ivy is a very well-brewed Czech premium pale lager that will leave you reminiscing about your summer trip to Prague. The hop character has a very clean noble hop character, and the malt is just rich enough to provide a good balance. Seek this beer out for an authentic Czech premium pale lager that is even fresher than what you will find from the motherland. Na Zdravi!

## #49 - JAMMY PALE

**pFriem Family Brewers** Hood River, OR | [www.pfriembeer.com](http://www.pfriembeer.com)

Style: American Pale Ale | ABV: 5.4% | IBUs: 32 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Nelson Crowle*

The aroma is big and fruity with raspberry and blackberry, a hint of strawberry, and moderate tropical mango, papaya and passion fruit, with moderate tangerine and medium grapefruit zest. There is also a little bready malt backbone behind all those hops. The flavor also highlights the fruity, tropical and citrus hop character – it's moderately grassy (probably dry hopped), with moderate raspberry, blackberry, mango, medium overripe peach, a hint of lemon and medium grapefruit juice. Again, the flavor has understated bready malt that does its job by staying out of the way and showcasing the hops. As the beer warms, the peach and the fresh-mowed grass notes come out more. Very nicely balanced with just enough malt to let the hops shine.

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## #48 - REUBEN'S CRUSH SERIES: CRUSH CANCER

**Reuben's Brews** Seattle, WA | [www.reubensbrews.com](http://www.reubensbrews.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.0% | IBUs: 47 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

This beer has a distinct orange creamsicle/Orange Julius note in the aroma that is pleasant and inviting. The flavor is very fruity up front with a very noticeable but not dominating bitterness in the middle, mingling with melon, mango and pine notes above a light base-malt sweetness and an evident dose of ethanol. The body is medium-full, creamy in texture, and lacks any evident astringency. While there is a nice malt structure and residual sweetness mixing with the hop-juicy character, the lingering bitterness provides balance and counterpoint. Overall, the beer hits all the marks I look for in a hazy IPA, where the freshness and bright fruit notes shine but are not dancing solo. I really like this beer, and if you like the style, I am sure you will too.

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## #47 - ST. FEUILLIEN QUADRUPEL

**Brasserie St-Feuillien** Le Roeulx, Belgium | [www.st-feuillien.com](http://www.st-feuillien.com)

Style: Belgian Dark Strong Ale | ABV: 11.0% | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

The nose is vinous, almost solera-like, with complex woody notes, rich sugar-malt, black figs and a whole lot of ferment and alcohol. The starting flavor is extremely rich, with candied dark-fruit, a nice nuttiness rounded with malt sweetness and a big dose of alcohol heat. The mid-palate dries out nicely with light bitterness and spice notes, with lingering demerara sugar-malt character. The ethanol and spicy malt last through the aftertaste, with a long and ethanol-infused off-dry finish. Overall, the beer is rich and boozy, with nice angles of fruit, spice, candied malt sweetness and heft, all in a tight and relatively dry package. The beer would be fantastic with a nice meat and cheese plate to start a meal. Of course, you could finish the meal with it too or have it solo. Quite delicious, indeed.

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## #46 - HOLY SIMCOE, BATMAN!

**Bhramari Brewing Co.** Asheville, NC | [www.bhramaribrewing.com](http://www.bhramaribrewing.com)

Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.0% | IBUs: 30 | Serve at: 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 3 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Joseph Formanek*

The Simcoe character comes through very strongly in the flavor, along with a full and rich base malt note. There is a moderate level of bitterness in this brew that balances out the malt and hop flavors quite well. This full flavor is maintained throughout the middle, finish and aftertaste, with a slight estery and perfumy note coming through. The body is medium, and the carbonation is moderate. Overall, Holy Simcoe, Batman! is a fantastic clinic on Simcoe hops, with enough base malt character to stand up against the hops and be noticed. The biggest drawback is the turbidity of the brew, which is way too cloudy for a standard IPA, but the hop bitterness is too high for a NEIPA. Still a nice brew, though.

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## #45 - PFRIEM GOLDEN IPA

**pFriem Family Brewers** Hood River, OR | [www.pfriembeer.com](http://www.pfriembeer.com)  
Style: American IPA | ABV: 6.8% | IBUs: 50 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Nelson Crowle*

The hops in the aroma are quite perfumy and fruity with notes of chamomile, ripe apricot, papaya, honeydew and peach. The first taste is grainy with ripe peach, chamomile, black pepper, lemon and light grassy notes. As the beer warms up, there are more citrusy elements (grapefruit zest, lime zest) and tropical papaya with hints of honeydew. Moderately bitter, there is a fairly dry and crisp lingering finish of grass, pine, peach and chamomile. Very complex hop notes are present in flavor and aroma, but they play well together. Tastes like some of the newer hops coming out of Oregon and Washington. With all that's going on in this beer hop-wise, I think this beer would work really well with mustard-based Carolina BBQ sauce on beef brisket.

## #44 - VLAD THE IMP ALER

**Cascade Brewing** Portland, OR | [www.cascadebrewing.com](http://www.cascadebrewing.com)  
Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 11.6% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Vlad the Imp Aler pours light amber in color with a slight haze and a small, quickly fading off-white head. The aroma is moderately wild with aromas of leather and horse blanket along with red wine, dark cherries and bready malt. The flavor is moderately lactic acidic with wild notes of leather along with red wine, toasted oak and a hint of bourbon. The beer finishes lightly bittered with a moderate lactic sourness and flavors of red wine, dark cherries and a hint of bready malt. Vlad the Imp Aler is a solidly brewed strong (11.6% ABV) sour ale. The wild character is straightforward and not overly funky. The sourness is moderate and well balanced by enough malt to not be overly sour. The alcohol content is extremely deceptive.

## #43 - SQUIB CAKES

**Odd Breed Wild Ales** Pompano Beach, FL | [www.oddbreed.com](http://www.oddbreed.com)  
Style: Wild Specialty Beer | ABV: 6.0% | IBUs: 30 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sean Coughlin*

The flavor has quite a bit more strength than the aroma due to a large presence of oak that packs a heavy punch of tannins into this beer. The blueberry is the star of the show once the palate adjusts to the tannic presence and is well balanced by a punch of acidity that complements the fruit. The finish is perfectly dry, and a bit of wild yeast funkiness noticeably creeps into the aftertaste with each swallow. For those that like a substantive beer or wine with firm tannic presence, this beer will check a lot of boxes. Overall, it is quite well-balanced, but the fruit weighs it down just a touch. This is a serious beer for serious beer drinkers and is highly worth seeking out if you enjoy traditional lambics.

## #42 - EVIL HAZE FACTORY

**WeldWerks Brewing Co.** Greeley, CO | [www.weldwerks.com](http://www.weldwerks.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.7% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Evil Haze Factory is brewed with Galaxy, Nelson Sauvin, El Dorado and Lotus hop varieties. Evil Haze Factory pours golden in color, very hazy with a finely beaded off-white head. The aroma is moderately hoppy with aromas of tangerine and mango with no malt. The flavor is of moderately strong tangerine and pine hop flavors with notes of tropical fruit; appropriately, the malt takes a backseat to the hops but is nevertheless present. The bitterness is moderate with the beer finishing with a lingering tangerine and pine hoppiness. This is an excellent take on a New England double IPA. This is a highly drinkable, hop-focused beer with a broad depth of hop aromas and flavors. Hopheads will love this appropriately hop-forward beer!

## #41 - GALIPETTE BRUT

**Galipette Cidre** Brittany, France | [www.galipettecidre.com](http://www.galipettecidre.com)

Style: French Cider | ABV: 4.5% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 40 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by David Sapsis*

The apple character is very tasty yet fairly simple and straightforward as there is no appreciable funk as can be found in some traditional French ciders. The cider clearly has a body and finish reflecting unfermented residual sugar and complex yet clean apple flavors. The finish does have a very apparent apple skin character, with notes of spiciness and an astringent and drying character that both offsets and complements the bright and sweet apple in the finish. Overall, this is a simple and simply delicious cider, with proper clarity and a sweetness that's rich (but not cloying) all in a refreshingly light and apparently low-alcohol package with a nice crisp character. While it lacks some of the stronger ferment character of the style, it still represents the French cider tradition well, and is worth seeking out.

## #40 - SMALL STASH RESERVE - BARREL AGED DOPPELBOCK 2020

**Seedstock Brewery** Denver, CO | [www.seedstockbrewery.com](http://www.seedstockbrewery.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 10.0% | Serve at: 45

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

This beer has been aged in a Laws Whiskey House bourbon barrel for twelve months and weighs in at 10.0% ABV. It pours dark brown in color with a slight haze and a rim of off-white head. The aroma is of prominent bourbon, toasted oak with bread crust malt flavors and dark fruits of plums. The body is medium-full with moderate, pleasant and never-harsh warmth. The flavor is of moderately strong bready malt with lighter dark fruits of plums over a moderate bourbon and toasted oak. The malt character could be a little more complex, but the malt level is appropriate and works well with the bourbon and barrel characters.

## #39 - CLOUD SOURCED HAZY JUICY IPA

**Two Roads Brewing Co.** Stratford, CT | [www.tworoadsbrewing.com](http://www.tworoadsbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.5% | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 21 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Cloud Sourced pours light golden in color with a moderate haze and a large, fluffy white head. The aroma is moderate mango, generic citrus and tropical fruit hops with a hint of malt. The flavor is a mélange of citrusy and tropical fruit flavors including tangerine, mango and pineapple over a hint of malt. The finish is of moderately light bitterness with lingering citrus and tropical fruit hops. The hop flavor is well done with a great mix of hop flavors. The bitterness is lighter than a traditional American IPA, which is a hallmark of the New England IPA style. If you like supreme drinkability and a ton of juicy hop flavors, this beer is for you. Hopheads rejoice!

## #38 - HAVANA LAGER

**Concrete Beach Brewery** Miami, FL | [www.drinkhavanalager.com](http://www.drinkhavanalager.com)

Style: Vienna Lager | ABV: 5.2% | IBUs: 20 | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 93**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sal Mortillaro II*

On the initial sip a medium bitterness is perceived. A low malt sweetness barely peeks its head through with a light, toasty malt flavor, and is quickly overtaken by the bitterness again, which causes the flavor to be balanced towards the bitterness. Medium-low spicy noble-style hop flavor, very light citrus, light malt sweetness, low lingering bitterness and a clean lager character all manifest together and carry over to the finish. This beer has a medium-light body, with medium carbonation, a slight creaminess and no warmth detected. Overall, this is an excellent interpretation of a Vienna lager, albeit a tad more bitter than the style allows, which gives it an "American" interpretation. It is a lovely drinking, quality, smooth beer of a style that is increasingly hard to find.

## #37 - ORNG DOUBLE IPA

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.2% | IBUs: 40 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by James Link*

A firm pour released a potpourri of aromas that were intensely citrusy in nature and reminiscent of orange and tangerine rind. The hue was pale hazy-golden and topped off by a tight white head that persisted. The flavor was intensely hop forward, and, as in the aroma, an authoritative fruity and citrusy blend was evident. Complementary tropical fruit and piney flavors accompanied citrus notes, with the former being more prominent here than in the bouquet. Malt, which claimed only a supporting role, lent a bit of sweetness leading to a dry yet not bitter finish. A full body supported a pleasant alcoholic warmth that lingered nicely on the palate. Quite a fruity citrus representation of the style without the exaggerated juicy character found with lesser double IPAs.

## #36 - HYPNIC JERK

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)  
Style: English Barleywine | ABV: 10.0% | IBUs: 60 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Joseph Formanek*

The flavor is of rich base malt augmented by a moderate level of hop bitterness and pleasant biscuity and toffee notes in the background for complexity. It is quite mellow and seemingly a bit aged, though there is no real oxidation character. Some woody hop flavors are evident in the background behind the malt. The middle and finish retain the same character, with pleasant rich malt flavors lingering through the aftertaste up to the point when you take your next sip. The overall fermentation character is quite clean, which is rather unexpected for the style. Many times, English barleywines have a higher alcohol bite. No such issue in this one. This is a clean, solid English barleywine that is quite enjoyable to drink. You will not be disappointed!

## #35 - BARREL AGED BROWNIE BATTER BLEND #2 S'MORES

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)  
Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 13.9% | Serve at: 60°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 3 / 6  
Flavor: 39 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sean Coughlin*

Light graham cracker emerges as the beer warms, but the aroma remains predominantly chocolate. The flavor offers more complexity with well-integrated barrel character – there isn't any oak presence, but a kiss of bourbon makes this decadent beer even more indulgent. Along with chocolate and vanilla there are also molasses and maple flavors that add richness and depth. There is enough hop bitterness to keep this from drinking like a liquefied candy bar, but it is in the ballpark of syrupy-sweet. This beer features a very thick body, and it delivers a wallop of chocolate and marshmallow to the palate with plenty of complexity.

## #34 - GALAXIE:503

**Black Lung Brewing Co.** Waukegan, IL | [www.blacklungbrewing.com](http://www.blacklungbrewing.com)  
Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 7.0% | IBUs: 20 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Randy Scorby*

Galaxie:503 pours a milky deep yellow with a long-lasting white, rocky head. The aroma is a cornucopia of tropical fruit with a focus on fresh mango and pineapple that has an impression of sweetness. A candy-like malt character of cookie dough laced with vanilla emerges to provide balance to the hops, along with light floral alcohol. The flavor follows the aroma, with prominent fresh tropical fruit of mango, pineapple and guava. The rich cookie dough maltiness emerges mid-palate with a hit of vanilla and medium-low hop bitterness, lingering into a medium-sweet finish. Light floral alcohol, a touch of warming and a creamy mouthfeel rounds out this hazy double IPA. The tropical fruit hop character plays well with the rich cookie dough maltiness to create a very flavorful beer that is quite enjoyable overall.



## #33 - TIMBO PILS

**Highland Park Brewery** Los Angeles, CA | [www.hpb.la](http://www.hpb.la)

Style: International Pale Lager | ABV: 5.8% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Jason Johnson

The malt is crisp and light with a cracker-like quality that is pretty typical in a pilsner-style lager. The finish is lightly bitter and dry. Overall, the fermentation quality is very clean. The beer as a whole is quite refreshing and a welcome change to other, sweeter hoppy lagers. The mouthfeel is medium and crisp, and there is not a lot of creaminess to the texture. The beer's solid carbonation helps scrub away any sweetness you may perceive on your tongue, preparing you for the next sip. In the end, this beer is a very welcome change to the typical hoppy lager styles out there right now. It's light, crisp, refreshing and quite hoppy. Over the course of its 16-ounce pour, this beer won me over!

## #32 - HAZY BOOM

**Garage Brewing Co.** Temecula, CA | [www.garagebrewco.com](http://www.garagebrewco.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 7.35% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Brad Darnell

The beer arrives displaying its cloudy, rich, straw/golden color with light orange hues and a large, frothy white head with long retention. The aroma is of fresh, fragrant hops providing notes of mango, pineapple, blueberry and melon accompanied by a mildly sweet bread malt and light stone fruit esters. A bold hop bitterness coats the tongue as the mango, pineapple and white grapefruit hop flavors present themselves, all of which are supported by the lightly sweet bread malt. The balance rests squarely with the hops, particularly the bitterness, and the beer finishes quite dry. Body is medium-full with moderate carbonation and light alcohol warmth. This beer would pair nicely with a sharp cheddar grilled cheese sandwich or a warm bowl of truffle fondue.

## #31 - 95 SHILLING IMPERIAL SCOTCH ALE

**Wild Heaven Beer** Avondale Estates, GA | [www.wildheavenbeer.com](http://www.wildheavenbeer.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 9.0% | IBUs: 21 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by John C. Tull

The aroma of this beer is whiskey barrel (whiskey, oak, vanilla) with a rich malt aroma of caramel malt. There are no hop aromas, but some alcohol fusels and generally fruity esters are detectable. The barrel flavors of vanilla, oak and whiskey also jump out in the flavor. This is backed by a rich, caramel malt sweetness that balances well with the alcohol and barrel flavors. The alcohol is warming in the mouth, and the body is quite full. Overall, this beer can be summed up as very rich. This is an incredibly enjoyable winter warmer that doesn't get lost in trying to be anything more than a really well-fermented, imperial ale that builds from the basic blueprint of a Scottish wee heavy, cranks it up a bit, and adds complexity from barrel-aging.

## #30 - BIRTHDAY MONTH BARREL AGED CAKE AND ICE CREAM STOUT

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 10.0% | IBUs: 35 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Jason Johnson

I can see why it's called a birthday cake and ice cream stout. It tastes like an adult dessert in a glass. You get the chocolate, you get the vanilla, and you get a hint of booze in the end. This beer is quite unique to me, in that it has a lot going on without being muddled and overbearing. If I'm being honest, I went into this based on the description thinking it was going to be decent at best, but by the end of the glass I'm sitting here wishing I had more! If I had one criticism, it would be the mouthfeel is a bit heavy and feels a bit like drinking sweet cream, but it's a big sticky beer, with a ton of malt in it, so that's not surprising.

## #29 - MIERKA

**Väsen Brewing Co.** Richmond, VA | [www.vasenbrewing.com](http://www.vasenbrewing.com)

Style: Mixed-Fermentation Sour Beer | ABV: 6.0% | Serve at: 45 to 50°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Dan Martich*

Grainy malt flavor can be discerned with a small amount of honey (suggesting sweetness) and herbal notes deliver on the spiciness attributed to the yeast character. Not too wild or sour but balanced with an agreeable acidity. A refreshing beer. Mild in the way of sour ales, with the added mixed-fermentation character the yeast and barrel condition provide. This beer can be aimed at introducing new drinkers to the sour/wild ale style of beers without coming across as too acidic, tart or funky. However, its delicate balance would also please the seasoned sour beer fan. The subtle qualities work in harmony to deliver an excellent beer experience on the palate. Pair this beer with acidic foods like salads, fish dishes, pickled vegetables and tomato sauces.

## #28 - 951 BLONDE ALE

**Garage Brewing Co.** Temecula, CA | [www.garagebrewco.com](http://www.garagebrewco.com)

Style: Blonde Ale | ABV: 5.3% | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Randy Scorby*

951 Blonde Ale pours a bright gold with brilliant clarity and a thick, creamy white head that makes it very inviting. The initial grainy, breadly malt aroma slowly gives way to a floral hop aroma with a hit of lemon zest. A hint of stone fruit esters develops as the beer warms and vents. The overall aroma is clean, fresh and bright. The flavor follows with a moderate grainy malt character that lingers with a light floral hop flavor. Light residual sweetness develops in the middle, eventually giving way to a medium-dry finish. Low hop bitterness emerges mid-palate and lingers through into the aftertaste, remaining smooth throughout. This is a crisp, easy-drinking and well-balanced blonde ale. The medium-light body and the fresh, bright character makes this a very pintable beer to enjoy.

## #27 - 7B HAZY IPA

**Laughing Dog Brewing** Ponderay, ID | [www.laughingdogbrewing.com](http://www.laughingdogbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.0% | IBUs: 44 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by John C. Tull*

The aggressiveness of the hops, both in flavor and bitterness, is immediately discernible in the flavor. The hops flavors are aggressive, bold and delightfully offset with enough malt character to balance that aggression with a complementary residual sweetness. The hops are herbal, just a little citrusy and tropical (guava) all at once. You also taste a little alcohol, slightly nutty. The malt is relatively simple with no caramel or other adjunct malt flavors. A mild yeasty quality is in the flavor, but it is not a dominating feature. The body is medium-full, and you can tell this is not a low-alcohol beer as some alcohol heat is in the mouthfeel, particularly in the finish. The hops are very well balanced. The complexity of the hops make for a wonderful example of the style.

## #26 - HERE COMES THE SUN

**Monday Night Brewing** Atlanta, GA | [www.mondaynightbrewing.com](http://www.mondaynightbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 7.2% | IBUs: 40 | Serve at: 40 to 50°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sal Mortillaro II*

This beer has an aroma that is gentle yet complex. A medium-low aroma of peach, tropical notes, light pine and the occasional wisp of strawberry are present. No malt aroma is detectable as the hops really take the stage here. A light honey malt-like flavor with low malt sweetness is present in this beer. As the beer fades after the swallow, a medium-low bitterness manifests with slight grassiness, and a tropical lime character is left in the finish. This beer is extremely creamy across the tongue and eminently drinkable as a result. No astringency is noted. Overall, the interesting choice of hops for the hop schedule creates a unique and interesting NEIPA. This beer's flavor is still soft but with enough complexity to keep the drinker engaged for the next sip.

## #25 - ROCKY ROAD ICE CREAM STOUT

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)  
Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 10.5% | IBUs: 35 | Serve at: 50 to 55°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

The flavor is of moderately strong chocolate and roasted malt with lighter coffee, vanilla and nuttiness; a light lactose sweetness tempers the dark malts but does not make this stout overly sweet. The finish is of moderate bitterness with moderate chocolate and roasted malts with a light vanilla and a light lactose sweetness. I will admit that upon hearing the description of this beer, I was doubtful that I would enjoy it (I am not a fan of excessively full and sweet dessert beers and this stout was definitely not excessively full and sweet). I was pleasantly surprised that the execution of this difficult style was very well done with a delicate complement of a number of different flavors. The result is a rich, flavorful beer that is not too over-the-top.

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## #24 - CONTEE

**Definitive Brewing Co.** Portland, ME | [www.definitivebrewing.com](http://www.definitivebrewing.com)  
Style: Kölsch | ABV: 4.6% | Serve at: 40°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 4 / 6  
Flavor: 39 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 20 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Pat Mulloy*

This beer has a light haze in the glass with a head with moderate to poor retention. Soft and subtle in smell and taste it offers a thirst-quenching delicate malt flavor lightly seasoned with a dash of apple and pear and accented with a mild, refreshing bitterness and a crisp, clean finish that leaves you wanting another glass. Nothing is overly big, and it all works very well together. It has just enough alcohol to lightly loosen the conversation without impairing judgment and just enough flavor to keep it interesting without overwhelming. This is a delicate style that does not travel well, and it is a pleasure to enjoy a glass that is fresh and has not suffered the abuse of a 3500-mile trip that strips the character from so many of the imports.

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## #23 - PARTICLES

**Definitive Brewing Co.** Portland, ME | [www.definitivebrewing.com](http://www.definitivebrewing.com)  
Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.3% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 39 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Pat Mulloy*

I cracked the can open, and the aroma took me back to the fruit section of the Mazatlán city market – redolent of rich tropical fruit aromas weaving together supported by a mild, light grain, neutral malt background. It is hazy amber gold – not cloudy or murky – under a robust off-white cap with good retention. This New England IPA on steroids delivers rich tropical fruit flavors with a dash of stone fruit and citrus. The malt flavors serve the hops offering a light graininess but no toasty or sugary sweet flavors to get in the way. The beer feels good – smooth, medium body and medium-plus carbonation and a soft alcohol that provides a gentle, gradual warming. The beer is not too acidic, and, while big and satisfying, is still very drinkable.

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## #22 - FERMATA

**Olde Mother Brewing Co.** Frederick, MD | [www.oldemother.com](http://www.oldemother.com)  
Style: Mixed-Fermentation Sour Beer | ABV: 5.0% | Serve at: 50°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 37 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Bury*

The complex aroma features dried apricots, leather, hints of cherry-like acidity alongside grainy malt. No hops are to be found. As it warms, additional honey-like sweetness emerges as well as lactic acid, but both are well blended and in step with one another. The refreshingly tart flavor from a moderate lactic acid twang showcases dried stone fruits juxtaposed with sweet honey as well as grainy malt to provide a perfectly balanced sour beer. The semi-dry finish helps to cleanse the palate for the next sip, but tart cherries linger into the aftertaste with hints of funky barnyard. Fermata is a lovely sessionable sour beer that deftly blends sour beer characteristics with cleaner fermentation products. Unlike many modern sours, this one won't strip the enamel off your teeth either thanks to its restrained acidity.

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## #21 - PFRIEM JAPANESE LAGER

**pFriem Family Brewers** Hood River, OR | [www.pfriembeer.com](http://www.pfriembeer.com)

Style: International Pale Lager | ABV: 5.0% | IBUs: 15 | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Nelson Crowle*

This beer pours a clear yellowish color with a huge white head of tiny bubbles that holds together nicely. Aroma is a light bready note with hints of graininess and a light floral hop character. The flavor follows the aroma with a grainy malt character, a hint of floral hops and just a smidge of black pepper. With a light body and moderately high carbonation, this beer is well attenuated and finishes dry and crisp with a low clean alcoholic presence, inviting another sip. Very clean fermentation with almost no yeast esters or phenolics. This is a difficult beer to brew because there is nowhere to hide any defects – and this beer has none! This beer would be great alongside sushi with some wasabi, washing away the spicy notes with each sip.

## #20 - BLACK RASPBERRY LAMBIC

**Area Two Experimental Brewing** Stratford, CT | [www.tworoadsbrewing.com/areatwo](http://www.tworoadsbrewing.com/areatwo)

Style: Fruit Lambic | ABV: 6.7% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

Black Raspberry Lambic pours dark purple in color with good clarity and a huge, fading, pink-colored head. The aroma is intense, rich black raspberry with a light lactic undertone and notes of leather. The flavor is similarly intense, rich black raspberry, with moderate lactic sourness and a contrasting light sweetness; a light leather funkiness contributes to the complexity. The beer finishes lightly bitter with rich, ripe raspberries and a sour-over-sweet balance. While this beer is not as funky as some traditional Belgian lambics, the sourness is prominent yet kept in check by a subtle sweetness. The black raspberry character is outstanding; the fruit is a little forward but is extraordinarily rich and fresh. Seek this one out!

## #19 - ALPHA ABSTRACTION, VOL. 12

**Wild Leap Brew Co.** LaGrange, GA | [www.wildleap.com](http://www.wildleap.com)

Style: Double IPA | ABV: 8.0% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Bury*

This beer pours hazy with an amber color, which sits beneath an ivory, persistent, finely textured head. Moderately intense tropical and stone fruit hop aromas entice: apricot, ripe papaya, lime and a hint of guava and coconut. A wheat-based malt note is in the far background. First sip is of intensely tropical fruit. Low bitterness. Proper attenuation. Aftertaste features sweet alcohol, mango, lime, coconut and biscuit-like malt. Honey-like malt emerges as the more sips are taken. Just a bit of alcohol warmth indicates that it's a bigger beer. No hop-based astringent bite that many versions of this style have. Alpha Abstraction is a high-quality offering from Wild Leap Brew Co. with well-crafted and nuanced hop flavors and aromas. It goes down almost too easy for its ABV, which is an impressive 8.0%.

## #18 - JUCIFER

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 6.0% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 94**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Joseph Formanek*

The flavor is very dank, with overripe tropical fruit and citrus hop character predominant from start through finish. Citra is the leader of the pack here. The malt backbone is light to moderate. The drink starts off somewhat dry, but it becomes progressively sweeter over time, probably due to the fruity hop flavors. The body is a light medium, the carbonation is moderate, and the finish is a bit sweet but is tempered a bit by the residual hop bitterness. The overall fermentation character is very clean, allowing the hop flavors to be well expressed. This is overall a well-crafted and quite enjoyable brew. Do not get this one thinking it is a quaffable thirst-quencher – this is a full-flavored IPA that really deserves to be savored.

## #17 - CHRISTMAS PANCAKES

**Hardywood Park Craft Brewery** Richmond, VA | [www.hardywood.com](http://www.hardywood.com)

Style: Winter Seasonal Beer | ABV: 9.2% | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 37 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by John C. Tull

Overall, this is a very enjoyable winter warmer, assuming you are not averse to maple syrup. It is a beer that strongly suggests the holiday/winter spirit in a manner that is very unlike some one-dimensional winter beers that hit you like a runaway Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve. Instead, this is a winter beer that serves up many facets, all very seasonal, that invoke memories of the season. Find one of these, put it in your favorite age-appropriate partner's stocking, and build a warm evening fire to drink this around sometime this winter season. Let the holiday memories that follow take you to a wonderful place – we all deserve the escape this beer can momentarily provide in 2020.

## #16 - 7 DEADLY STOUTS

**Monday Night Brewing** Atlanta, GA | [www.mondaynightbrewing.com](http://www.mondaynightbrewing.com)

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 13.7% | Serve at: 45 to 55°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Michael Heniff

The mouthfeel is moderately full in body with a moderate warmth (but never hot) and a smoothness balanced by a slightly sharp, spicy cinnamon element. The beer finishes lightly bittered with a rich, complex balance of dark malts and chocolates along with barrel notes and added vanilla and cinnamon. This is an exceptionally rich and complex barrel-aged imperial stout. The added spices are perfect – the vanilla complements, while the cinnamon contrasts. The vanilla blends well with the toasted oak flavors from the barrels. The cinnamon provides a light contrast to the semi-sweet flavor and dark malts without ever becoming too spicy, hot or astringent. Definitely seek this one out and do not be afraid of the long ingredient list as this stout is definitely well made.

## #15 - RHYMES WITH PURPLE

**Bhramari Brewing Co.** Asheville, NC | [www.bhramaribrewing.com](http://www.bhramaribrewing.com)

Style: Fruit Beer | ABV: 5.4% | IBUs: 3.6 | Serve at: 50°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Joseph Formanek

A rather nondescript jammy berry aroma is up front, with a lactic aroma as expected from a Berliner weisse coming through in the background. The beer is quite clear and has a rich deep garnet color with a pinkish-red moderately sized head that lingers well into the pour. Very attractive! The flavor has a slight tartness with a big hit of berries, with raspberry and black currant leading the charge. The tartness and the sweetness from the berry are in complementary balance. One of the best parts of the drink is the aftertaste, with the berry and black currant flavors shining through. The body is quite thin, but perhaps slightly high for the style if we are looking at a Berliner weisse. Overall, this is a very well-balanced, refreshing and thirst-quenching summer quaffer.

## #14 - BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

**Pontoon Brewing** Sandy Springs, GA | [www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer | ABV: 10.0% | IBUs: 20 | Serve at: 60°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### **Judge's Review** by Michael Heniff

Black is Beautiful pours black in color, is opaque and sports a medium brown head. The aroma is strong chocolate, coffee and roasted malt complemented by moderately strong vanilla notes. The flavor is a strong, rich blend of chocolate, coffee and roasted malt with lighter vanilla flavors and a slight sweetness. The mouthfeel is smooth and creamy with a medium-full body. The beer finishes with elements of rich chocolate, coffee, roasted malt and vanilla. This is a truly excellent imperial stout. The cocoa, coffee and vanilla complement the dark malt flavors well – resulting in a rich, complex stout. A light sweetness makes this imperial stout dangerously quaffable. Despite being 10.0% ABV, the alcohol is never perceived in the aroma or flavor. Be sure to seek out this exceptional imperial stout.

## #13 - AMERICAN AF

**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.** Hammond, LA | [www.gnarlybeer.com](http://www.gnarlybeer.com)

Style: American Light Lager | ABV: 4.4% | Serve at: 38 to 40°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Jim Koebel*

Offering a combination of refreshment, quality and flavor, craft-brewed versions of this style are a far cry from the fizzy yellow cans of 'lite' beer served at many a summer get-together. This excellent example makes me wonder why craft light lagers aren't a larger phenomenon. Upon pouring it has a pleasantly sweet corn aroma with a touch of bready malt. There is a faint, generic adjunct aroma in the background that would be expected in any light lager. It pours with a low white head and is a clear, straw color. This beer has bready malt flavors and a tasty dose of corn. Hop flavors are low and herbal. It is lightly bitter and dry throughout. The medium-light body makes this beer crisp, but carbonation (medium) should be higher.

## #12 - PAST & FUTURE

**Odd Breed Wild Ales** Pompano Beach, FL | [www.oddbreed.com](http://www.oddbreed.com)

Style: American Wild Ale | ABV: 5.0% | IBUs: 25 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 4 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Sean Coughlin*

The flavor packs a punch of tartness up front that takes the palate a few sips to acclimate to. Once the taste buds have been awakened, there is an entire world of flavor to explore. What this beer manages to do so well is to remain understated. With all that's going on in a beer such as this, certain attributes can be over-the-top: dominant Brettanomyces character, too much acidity, too much tannin from the oak, etc. Thankfully, this beer is a great example of how all those things can work together to make a greater whole. As with the best examples of this style, every sniff and sip brings something new. As such, this is an intellectually stimulating beer to enjoy.

## #11 - ADVANCED FLUID DYNAMICS: SULTANA

**WeldWerks Brewing Co.** Greeley, CO | [www.weldwerks.com](http://www.weldwerks.com)

Style: Specialty IPA | ABV: 8.8% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Michael Heniff*

This beer pours golden in color with a slight haze and a finely beaded white head. The aroma is of very prominent hops with resinous, tropical fruity and citrusy characters; no malt is evident in the aroma. The flavor is again very strongly hoppy with hop flavors of resin, pine, tropical fruit and coconut with few malt flavors. The bitterness is medium, and the beer finishes with very prominent citrusy, piney, resinous and tropical fruity hops. This is an excellent double IPA that has a little "New England" element; tropical fruit is added into a typical double IPA profile, the beer is hazy, and the bitterness is a little restrained. The hop character is broad and the balance between the different hop flavors is even. This is a beer that "old school" and "new school" hopheads will equally enjoy.

## #10 - RUSTIC SUNDAY

**Birds Fly South Ale Project** Greenville, SC | [www.bfsbeer.com](http://www.bfsbeer.com)

Style: Mixed-Fermentation Sour Beer | ABV: 4.8% | IBUs: 32 | Serve at: 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Joseph Formanek*

The flavor has a lot going on and mirrors the aroma quite well. Belgian yeast flavors along with spiciness from rye, a citrus character and a mild barnyard flavor profile from Brett are evident. Wine flavors are also noted in the flavor complexity, with all of these characters lingering through to the finish for a lasting, enjoyable memory. The body is quite thin, delivering a refreshing, dry and crisp quality to the beer. The carbonation is quite high as expected in a saison, and the finish is also quite dry, which is appropriate for the style. Rustic Sunday is a complex and very enjoyable brew. The saison character of the base beer is evident, and the layers of flavor on top of this work very well. Definitely a keeper!

## #9 - SION KÖLSCH

**Radeberger** Frankfurt, Germany | [www.radeberger.com](http://www.radeberger.com)  
Style: Kölsch | ABV: 4.8% | Serve at: 38 to 42°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 6 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Jason Johnson*

Overall, looking at the guidelines and tasting this sample, this beer hits all the marks that are expected of a good Kölsch, and best of all, it does it in a well-blended and cohesive manner. Sometimes a beer can hit all the marks one by one, but the individual components of that beer, while within style, just don't fit well together. This beer hits the marks and puts them together close to flawlessly. Not only would I recommend this beer, I would almost say you have to have this beer if you want a clear-cut vision of what a Kölsch should be. In my perception it's pretty close to perfect. All in all, this is probably one of the best Kölsch beers I've had in a long time.

## #8 - RUSTIQUE

**Motorworks Brewing** Bradenton, FL | [www.motorworksbrewing.com](http://www.motorworksbrewing.com)  
Style: Brett Beer | ABV: 7.2% | Serve at: 40 to 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 24 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 38 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10  
Overall Impression: 18 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Dan Martich*

This beer is very fruity and has notes of tropical fruit and honey with a low citrus element. A pleasant aroma indeed without being overly funky. Notes of peppery spiciness, along with esters of pears and a low amount of orange can also be found. A notable oak aroma increases as the beer warms in the glass, leaving no trace of the Chardonnay barrel character. The flavor resembles the base style saison beer well, with the added character that Brettanomyces brings along. There is a grainy malt presence in the forefront led by yeast esters that are represented as ripe red berries. There's a spicy character here as well to add dimension, excellently balanced between the base beer and the added Brett. This is an exceptional beer, and one to savor slowly.

## #7 - GOOD OMEN

**Reformation Brewery** Woodstock, GA | [www.reformationbrewery.com](http://www.reformationbrewery.com)  
Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer | ABV: 7.6% | IBUs: 5 | Serve at: 38 to 45°

**RATED 95**

Aroma: 23 / 24  
Appearance: 5 / 6  
Flavor: 39 / 40  
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10  
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

### Judge's Review *by Pat Mulloy*

Good Omen by Reformation Brewery is a bière brut, a style originating in Belgium and made in the style of champagne. Gin botanical aromas are joined by mild berry and white grape notes seasoned by a light, fresh-baked French bread scent with traces of wood, gin, alcohol and pepper. It pours pale gold with a light haze and kicks up a two-inch off-white foam cap with good persistence. It starts semi-sweet offering berries, light fruit, light grapes, a touch of pepper and gin botanicals that ease into a crisp, slightly drier finish. The beer is light-bodied and effervescent with a trace of tartness and a light oaky astringent note on the finish to enhance the perception of dryness. This elegant beer is a perfect companion for special occasions or occasional bouts of decadence.

**WORLD CLASS**  
**(96-100)**

#6

# Feasta

Väsen Brewing Co.

Virginia | United States

## Brewer's Description

We're celebrating our third anniversary this summer with the release of this juicy, dank New England-style double IPA. Nelson Sauvin, Citra and Vic Secret hops add intense aromas of white grape, passion fruit and pineapple, while our favorite Norwegian kveik yeast contributes subtle citrus flavors.

## Statistics

Style: Double IPA

Style Family: IPA

Availability: Seasonal

ABV: 8%

IBUs: 27

Serve at: 45 - 50°

Hops: Nelson Sauvin, Citra, Vic Secret

Malts: Pale Two-Row, Flaked Oats, German Pale Wheat

## Contact

Väsen Brewing Co.

3331 W Moore St

Richmond, VA 23230

Tel.: (804) 588-5678

[www.vasenbrewing.com](http://www.vasenbrewing.com)

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Dan Martich

### RATING: 96

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 8 / 10

Overall Impression: 20 / 20

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*Feasta has been evaluated as a Double IPA.  
(2015 BJCP Category 22A)*

This beer poured a light golden, very hazy color. The glass was crowned by a big foamy white head with light viscosity when roused.

The aroma began with fresh, sweet, juicy, tropical fruit notes of pineapple and cantaloupe that were moderately high. Some ripe peach nectar notes developed as well. Behind all that freshness were notes of grainy malt that brought you back to a sweet and juicy finish.

Those sweet, juicy flavors were mirrored in the flavor. The hops seem to dominate – as they should for the style – and the beer's grainy malts are very clean in support of the hops. There is a subtle alcoholic flavor just before the finish that adds an interesting component. Very well balanced in flavor, but it is decidedly hop-centric with a moderate degree of bitterness. This beer finishes semi-sweet and becomes drier with a long aftertaste.

Feasta is medium light-bodied with medium-low carbonation. It is a bit astringent, possibly from the hops that, at times, seem greeny and vegetal. The alcoholic notes are warming, smooth and not at all harsh.

This is a beer that's hard to put down based on the flavors and hop aroma profile. The body makes it very quaffable while keeping the alcohol in check. Enjoy this fresh, juicy beer doing any outdoors activity, but watch that ABV!





# TONY GIORDANO

## Talks: *Feasta*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

All the recipes made at Väsen are a result of the brewers and lab employees working together.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

The Feasta and all of our IPAs are different from most traditionally made IPAs due to the yeast we use. Our house yeast strains come from farms in Sweden and Norway. They are called kveik strains and assist in many ways including big citrus flavors.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

I believe that the body of the beer made with oats and wheat is velvety and smooth. Mixed with the kveik yeast characteristics and the hops we chose – Nelson Sauvin (white grape), Mosaic (dank berry) and Vic Secret (passion fruit) – make this an easy-drinking deeply tropical brew that hides the ABV well, and keeps you coming back for another sip.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

I love the nose on this beer, which features notes of passion fruit, berries and grapes.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

People truly love this beer!

### Where does this beer's name come from?

The name comes from the Norwegian word for party. The beer was brewed for our third anniversary celebration, hence the name Feasta.

### Is this your "desert island beer?"

Although I do enjoy this beer a lot, I think my desert island beer would be a saison.

### Can you describe this beer in ten words or less?

Creamy, smooth, fruity, balanced, vinous and delicious!

### What's a good food pairing for this beer?

I think this beer would pair well with a low country boil.



### Judge's Second Opinion

We're living in a time where nearly every American craft brewery has at least two or three double IPA offerings. More likely than not, one of those offerings will be a hazy or New England-style rendition. That's just the state of craft brewing in 2020.

Over the years, I've seen these beers develop from being bitterness-forward, to malty, alcoholic bombs to lactose-infused, sweet, syrupy juice. Once in a while, there comes a beer that marries the best that those three qualities present all while delivering a balanced approach to the style. Feasta by Väsen Brewing Co. is one such beer.

Fresh, juicy, tropical fruit notes of pineapple, cantaloupe and passion fruit abound with the freshness of fresh-squeezed fruit juices. Ripe peach nectar notes develop after a few sips. And behind all that freshness are notes of grainy malt that bring you back to a sweet juicy finish. Another name for this beer could be "Fresh, Sweet and Juicy!" The hops dominate in the aroma and flavor – as they should for the style. There is a subtle alcoholic flavor just before the finish to remind you that, although juicy, this beer carries a punch. Though balanced in flavor, it is decidedly hop-centric with a moderate degree of bitterness. This beer finishes semi-sweet and becomes drier with a long aftertaste.

Here's a beer that's hard to put down based on the flavors and hop aroma profile. The body makes it very quaffable while keeping the alcohol restrained.

– Dan Martich



## BREWER Q&A

TONY GIORDANO, CO-FOUNDER & BREWMASTER

#5

# Puff Puff Pastry Stout

Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.

Louisiana | United States

## Brewer's Description

We collaborated with Taco Jerks to bring you an awesome new brew. This beer's rich and complex flavor is derived from using hundreds of pounds of white chocolate bread pudding and Cocoa Puffs cereal. Our Puff Puff Pastry Stout is a decadent chocolaty treat.

## Statistics

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer

Style Family: Spiced Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 10.6%

Serve at: 55°

Hops: Cascade

Malts: Two-Row, Crystak 60, Crystal 120, Chocolate Malt, Roasted Barley, Black Prinz, Flaked Wheat, Flaked Oats

## Contact

Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.  
1709 Corbin Rd  
Hammond, LA 70403

Tel.: (985) 318-0723  
www.gnarlybeer.com

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Joseph Formanek

### RATING: 96

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

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*Puff Puff Pastry Stout has been evaluated as a Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer. (2015 BJCP Category 30A)*

The nose exhibits a solid roasted barley and black malt character followed by spicy caramel chocolate aromas. It is quite rich and decadent. The beer is an opaque black color with a thin, tan head with small bubbles that dissipate rather quickly. The imperial stout base beer is a solid one with great flavor and body. These flavors are immediately followed by milk chocolate, caramel, cinnamon and other brown spice characters. There is a lot going on here, but, surprisingly, it all works well together. The harmony between all of these big flavors is quite exceptional. The middle, finish and aftertaste are led by the caramel and spice flavors that linger through the drink. The body is medium-full with a moderate level of sweetness that is enhanced by the high levels of alcohol in this brew, and it is also balanced a bit by the high levels of hop bitterness.

This is truly a delicious dessert stout that really stands out in the crowd and would be a fantastic choice for finishing off a fine hearty meal, or for just lounging around by the fire. It is an amazingly complex rendition of the current pastry stout fad. There is a lot of goodness going on in this brew, with much complexity and a surprising level of balance that really makes this one quite the treat.





# JOEY CHARPENTIER

## Talks: *Puff Puff Pastry Stout*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

I came up with this one.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Many pastry stouts can get overly sweet, but our version does a good job of having a big body and pushes the boundaries of sweetness without getting cloying.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

This beer hits perfectly on all levels. It's hard to find a flaw in that recipe. You can't open just one of these.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

Mouthfeel all the way. This beer is just so creamy and luscious; it's the perfect chocolaty dessert beer.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

This beer sells out immediately when we release it, so I would say it's quite popular. It's one of our most sought-after brews.

### Where does this beer's name come from?

Puff, puff, pass... the pastry stout!

### Is this your "desert island beer?"

As much as we enjoyed brewing this one, I can't say that's the case. However, I would definitely knock a few of these back if they were around on that island!

### Can you describe this beer in ten words or less?

Decadent paradise of chocolate, spices and booze.

### What's a good food pairing for this beer?

White chocolate bread pudding.

### Judge's Second Opinion

These days it seems like most breweries have a pastry stout offering. These are quite literally a dessert in a bottle, typically being rather sweet and loaded with flavors associated with desserts – chocolate, vanilla, caramel, cinnamon and others depending upon the creativity of the brewer. Another consistent aspect of the style is, much like a dessert, it is best appreciated in small portions. While Puff Puff Pastry Stout certainly fits within the pastry stout style, it is an amazingly complex rendition of the style with an exceptional level of balance so that you can enjoyably consume more of it than just a taste.

This brew, even with its high level of complexity, exhibits a surprising level of balance in both the aroma and flavor that really makes it stand out from the crowd. The nose exhibits a solid roast barley and black malt character, followed by spicy caramel chocolate aromas. It is quite rich and decadent, yet quite drinkable. The beer is an opaque black with a thin tan head with dissipating small bubbles.

An important aspect of this style is the quality of the base beer. The imperial stout style is one that I am particularly fond of and particularly sensitive to when it comes to quality. If the imperial stout base is weak, then the pastry flavor elements can overwhelm the overall flavor and come off as cloying and imbalanced. The brewers at Gnarly Barley really know their craft when it comes to imperial stouts, however! The base beer in Puff Puff Pastry Stout is a solid one with great depth of flavor from the layers of malt in the grain bill. It is big, and these flavors are immediately followed by the typical milk chocolate, caramel, cinnamon and other brown spice characters seen in this style. There is a lot going on here, but, importantly, it is approachable, and it works. The harmony between all of these big flavors is quite exceptional. The middle, finish and aftertaste are led by the caramel and spice flavors that linger through the drink. The body is medium-full with a moderate level of sweetness that is enhanced by the high levels of alcohol in this brew but also balanced a bit by the high level of hop bitterness.

Yes, this is a dessert stout. However, it should be considered for non-dessert times as well. This would be a great one to enjoy during those cold winter months.

– Joseph Formanek



## BREWER Q&A

JOEY CHARPENTIER, HEAD BREWER

#4

# Caramel Cake Stout

Wild Leap Brew Co.

Georgia | United States

## Brewer's Description

Caramel Cake Stout is a dark and sweet milk stout with rich, creamy caramel notes and hints of cinnamon and vanilla.

## Statistics

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer

Style Family: Spiced Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 10.5%

IBUs: 40

Serve at: 50 - 55°

## Contact

Wild Leap Brew Co.  
308 Main St  
LaGrange, GA 30240

Tel.: (706) 298-6400  
www.wildleap.com

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Randy Scorby

### RATING: 96

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

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*Caramel Cake Stout has been evaluated as a Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer. (2015 BJCP Category 30A)*

Caramel Cake pours an inviting opaque black, and the creamy white head leaves a thick and lingering foam stand on the beer. The aroma features light cinnamon with a suggestion of nutmeg and a light vanilla overtone with an impression of sweetness. Moderate caramel and a hint of dark stone fruit esters follow with notes of chocolate, nuts and a hint of roast. Light floral alcohol helps create complexity.

The flavor greets you with a complementary light cinnamon and vanilla first, quickly followed by light floral alcohol. Prominent chocolate and nutty maltiness follow along with medium-light caramel, which lingers through the mid-palate into the medium-sweet finish. A touch of roast and low stone fruit esters make appearances in the aftertaste. Moderately light hop bitterness develops late. The solid residual sweetness in the middle dries out enough in the finish to keep from being cloying or distracting. The full body and smooth alcohol warming round out this stout and contribute to the richness, complexity and overall drinkability of this beer.

This beer is dessert in a glass (or breakfast, depending on the time of day) with enough richness and complexity to take you on a roller coaster ride of aromas and flavors. A light hand was used with the spices and it allowed the base beer to shine through nicely. If this beer is available in your area, seek it out, and plan to take your time with it, as it is truly a sipper.



96 - WORLD CLASS





# CHRIS ELLIOTT

## Talks: *Caramel Cake Stout*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

My brew team and I worked to develop different variations of this recipe together in smaller batches before the larger release.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

We wanted to make a truly decadent, dessert-like stout, so we used lactose and a lower attenuating yeast to have a decent amount of residual sugar. The result is what I would call a “dessert/beer hybrid” that is a little sweeter than many beers in the style.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

Balance. When we make beers with many different ingredients, we work hard to get each individual element to shine. With this beer, we built the cake flavors with baker's cinnamon and vanilla. It matched perfectly with layers of caramel.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The flavor of this beer is my favorite aspect. I feel like we absolutely nailed the caramel cake flavors.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

This beer, like most of our stouts, is incredibly popular with our fans. We have a very dedicated group of drinkers that really enjoy our way of brewing stouts.

### Where does this beer's name come from?

We decided to go with a very simple and explanatory name on this one. Our target was a beer that tastes exactly like a caramel cake, and we wanted the name to tell people exactly what to expect.

### Is this your “desert island beer?”

This beer is definitely one of my favorite stouts, and from a calorie standpoint it would absolutely be the best beer to have if I was stuck on a desert island!

### Can you describe this beer in ten words or less?

Thick, sweet, rich and satisfying after-dinner delight.

### Judge's Second Opinion

When you see something like Caramel Cake Stout on the label, your brain automatically sends signals to your palate that a beer with a sweet, cloying finish may be inevitable. Lesson #1: Don't always believe your brain.

Beers in the spice category are particularly challenging as the adjuncts must be carefully added to avoid either being absent or totally dominating within the beer. This takes a very careful hand. The beauty of this beer is in its balance and drinkability. One aspect of the drinkability is the roller coaster-like complexity in both the aroma and flavor, as the character continually flows and changes. Do you like chocolate, cinnamon, vanilla and caramel? You're in luck, because all four of those elements weave in and out among the fermentation esters, alcohol and malt to create an incredibly well-balanced beer. The 10.5% ABV provides a solid backbone and enhances the complexity.

What makes Caramel Cake Stout so special is that the spices linger long through the finish into the aftertaste without dominating, like a slice of caramel cake that you let sit in your mouth. Although this beer showcases the spices, there is a light roast character along with stone fruit esters that make this a well-rounded beer. The solid residual sweetness that develops mid-palate dries out in the finish.

Wild Leap Brew Co. is a relative newcomer to the craft beer scene, as it started brewing operations in early 2017. If you haven't had the opportunity to try their offerings, I would highly encourage you to do so – with beers like Caramel Cake Stout they will certainly be around for a very long time. This incredibly delightful beer is perfect for one of those long, lazy winter nights in front of a crackling wood fire where you can truly enjoy the artistry and technique that it took for the brewer to create it. If you don't have a fireplace, then use your imagination, as there are multiple scenarios that you can (and should) come up with to enjoy Caramel Cake Stout. And make sure that you have some time to spare; this is one you definitely won't want to rush through.

– Randy Scorby



## BREWER Q&A

CHRIS ELLIOTT, CHIEF BREWING OFFICER

#3

# Situational Ethics Apple Brandy

## Barrel-Aged

Monday Night Brewing

Georgia | United States

### Brewer's Description

Situational Ethics is our series of decadent imperial stouts each aged in a different barrel. This bottle is an apple brandy barrel-aged version. We added fresh meadowfoam honey and Ugandan vanilla beans for additional complexity.

### Statistics

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 13.8%

IBUs: 50

Serve at: 45 - 55°

### Contact

Monday Night Brewing  
670 Trabert Ave NW  
Atlanta, GA 30318

Tel.: (404) 352-7703  
[www.mondaynightbrewing.com](http://www.mondaynightbrewing.com)

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Sal Mortillaro II

### RATING: 97

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

*Situational Ethics Apple Brandy Barrel-Aged has been evaluated as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer.  
(2015 BJCP Category 33B)*

This beer pours a very dark brown color with opaque clarity due to the color of the beer. A mocha-colored, sudsy head consisting of large bubbles is sustained and lasts the entire time.

As the beer was being presented, I could smell notes of the apple brandy from almost two feet away – hinting at the treat I was about to have. As I held the beer in my hand, I could smell medium notes of apple brandy and low notes of chocolate behind. An underlying hint of sweetness was apparent.

On the sip, medium-high apple brandy is at the forefront with medium dark chocolate, very low vanilla and low roast manifest and mixed in with the lingering apple brandy notes. Bitterness is medium and appears to be coming from the dark malt found in the base recipe. There is no detectable hop flavor in this beer.

This beer finishes dry and is assisted by the fermented honey addition and slight astringency of the stout base recipe. The aftertaste is complex, featuring lingering chocolate, apple, bitterness and a touch of roast. This beer is full bodied with a low carbonation (no doubt hindered by the viscosity of the beer's body). There is a medium-low alcohol warmth, which is pleasant as well as a low astringency from the roasted malts.

Overall, this is quite a lovely beer and a real treat to drink. This brew features a very well-executed base stout recipe that shows excellent use of the apple brandy barrel. This beer has depth, character and complexity without being fatiguing. In a time where pastry stouts are typically cloyingly sweet and overdone, this beer reminds us that balance, complexity and restrained refinement is better.

97 - WORLD CLASS



# PETER KILEY

## Talks: *Situational Ethics* *Apple Brandy Barrel-Aged*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

Myself, head brewer Ryan Cooley and wood cellar manager Tim McDonald.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Using honey in any beer is difficult because it wants to ferment. Of course, the meadowfoam honey we used in this beer did, and it added a level of dryness that you don't see in a lot of contemporary stouts, which I kind of miss. Not to say that contemporary stouts are overly cloying, but there's definitely a trend in that direction. I like the fact that this version is balanced and has complexity, and the apple brandy barrel presence on it just shined so brightly without interference from other flavors.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

The team that made it. Our team at Monday Night Brewing – Aaron Butzen, our cellar manager, Ryan Cooley, our head brewer and Tim McDonald, our wood cellar manager, along with their teams – all had a hand in creating Situational Ethics. Also, everyone's hyper invested in it. The series has gotten better every year. After this year, there'll be twelve different variants within the series – all of them being exceptional, unique, creative and exploratory.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The mouthfeel once again, which I find to be pleasant to my palate. From there, the meadowfoam honey can come across as subtle, but I think a discerning palate, especially if you drink it a little bit warmer, will start to get notes of roasted marshmallows. If you've ever had this beer, you know the nose is king – the smell of those apple brandy barrels is incredible. There's no better representation of an apple brandy barrel-aged stout than this beer.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

I always hate to assume how popular things are, but clearly it rang true to them. There have been many people who have told me how much they appreciated it. With Situational Ethics, I always say there needs to be a variant that pushes our team, one that pushes our fans, and one that we all agree on. Last year, the apple brandy barrel was the one we all agreed on. It's simple, it's beautiful, and beauty is much easier to achieve when simplicity is your guideline.



### Judge's Second Opinion

The past year has seen some interesting beer trends that have pushed the envelope of what actually defines "beer." We've seen heavily fruited sours, slushy beers, over-the-top pastry and adjunct stouts and many other "out-there" styles. While I have always been a proponent of creativity in beer, the underlying question is: At what point is the beverage in front of you so experimental and boundary-pushing that it's no longer beer?

Situational Ethics Apple Brandy Barrel-Aged by Monday Night Brewing is not one of these beers. Even several months after having the beer, I remember that when it was brought to me, I could smell the aroma from several feet away. Though impressive, I wondered if this was going to be another over-the-top barrel-aged stout. When I tasted it, I knew what a special beer I had in front of me. I thought this beer was the marriage of an incredible base stout with the proper amount of wet barrel and an addition of vanilla, both of which worked in harmony with and elevated the base beer. This was an extremely well executed example of balance in a beer, yet it had such intensity, depth and complexity in the aroma and the flavor that "balanced" and "boring" wouldn't be dared used in the same review when discussing this terrific beer.

I was extremely sad to learn that this incredible beer was a one-off as I was looking forward to attempting to get my hands on another one or two to enjoy. Though that is something that will probably not happen, I hope Monday Night Brewing and other breweries are inspired by beers such as this one. This beer show showcases artful execution and innovation. As this year ends and the winter months are upon us, I really wish I could be enjoying this beer by a fire.

—Sal Mortillaro II



## BREWER Q&A

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PETER KILEY, BREWMASTER

#2

# Barrel Aged Imperial Korova

Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.

Louisiana | United States

## Brewer's Description

We took Imperial Korova, which is a bigger, bolder version of our favorite Baltic oatmeal porter (Korova Milk Porter) and aged it in barrels for one year. Annually brewed in late fall for winter consumption, this higher-alcohol version boasts a nine percent alcohol by volume without getting too boozy. The malts provide flavors of chocolate and coffee, but this special version adds notes of caramel, plum and molasses and the barrel-aging process adds notes of vanilla and bourbon.

## Statistics

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 9.0%

Serve at: 55°

Hops: Columbus, Fuggles

Malts: Two-Row, Munich, Chocolate Malt, Crystal 30,

Brown Malt, Oats, Flaked Barley

## Contact

Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.

1709 Corbin Rd

Hammond, LA 70403

Tel.: (985) 318-0723

www.gnarlybeer.com

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Joseph Formanek

**RATING: 97**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

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*Barrel Aged Imperial Korova has been evaluated as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer. (2015 BJCP Category 33B)*

Barrel Aged Imperial Korova by Gnarly Barley Brewing Co. is an amazingly rich, complex and delicious concoction!

The aroma has an incredible complexity of bourbon, chocolate, dark malt, sweet raisins, coffee and caramel. It is very attractive and begs you to take a sip! The oak character from the barrel is mellow and complementary. The beer pours an opaque inky black color with a light tan, small-bubbled head that is fleeting.

The flavor mirrors the aroma quite well. Big bourbon notes are up front on top of an extremely rich chocolate, coffee and caramel malt character that is quite inviting. Hop flavor and bitterness is subtle, but there is enough of the latter to balance out the sweetness of this brew pretty well. The body is medium to medium-full, and the carbonation is rather low. Alcohol is hidden very well. There is a delicious lingering rich malty aftertaste that is maintained until the next sip. The body is quite full, and there is an oily slickness on the palate that is complementary to the flavor.

Barrel Aged Imperial Korova Milk Porter is a quite complex, full-flavored offering that deserves to be savored beside a roaring bonfire among friends. This one does not disappoint!





# JOEY CHARPENTIER

## Talks: *Barrel Aged Imperial Korova*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

This beer is based off of Gnarly Barley owner and brewer Zac Caramonta's GABF silver medal-winning Korova Milk Porter recipe with some small tweaks from me.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

This beer uses a lager yeast for fermentation, which I think creates a really unique flavor profile.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

When picking this beer apart it's hard to find something to be unhappy with. We took a GABF silver medal-winning beer for the base recipe, made an imperial version of it, then aged it in a barrel. I think the end result speaks for itself. We're really proud of this beer.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The flavor for sure. The bourbon barrels add so much complexity to this beer and create an incredible bourbon chocolate goodness.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

We're constantly getting asked about when we'll have this beer out again. We're currently aging another batch in bourbon barrels at the moment and planning on releasing it in early 2021.

### Where does this beer's name come from?

This beer is a riff on one of our flagship beers. The name and artwork were inspired by Stanley Kubrick's classic film *A Clockwork Orange*.

### Is this your "desert island beer?"

I would definitely need this beer in my desert island cellar!

### Can you describe this beer in ten words or less?

Bourbon. Chocolate. Delicious.

### What's a good food pairing for this beer?

You can't go wrong with pairing any kind of over-the-top chocolate dessert with this brew.



### Judge's Second Opinion

Seeing as 2020 was such a difficult and tumultuous year, it is important to find things that can help deliver some cheer to the soul – and Gnarly Barley Barrel Aged Imperial Korova truly fits the bill in that respect. I initially gave it a 97, and, looking back, I could have gone even higher. It really is an amazingly rich, complex and delicious treat.

This brew is a sensory treat from start to finish. The aroma has an incredibly layered complexity of bourbon, chocolate, dark malt, sweet raisin, coffee and caramel. Very inviting and it begs you to try a sip! The oak character from the barrel is mellow and complementary. The beer is an opaque inky black color, which is what you would expect for such a brew. This, as a whole, raises your expectations for the flavor.

And, oh, that flavor! Big bourbon notes are up front on top of layers of an extremely rich chocolate, coffee and caramel malt character that all marry very well. Hop flavor and bitterness is subtle, but there is enough of the latter to balance out the sweetness of this brew pretty well, while adding to the layers of taste and flavor. That's the important thing in a brew such as this – having these flavors that are complementary but deliver delight during their duration on the palate. Even with all of this going on, the body is still medium-full and not too thick, which allows you to enjoy the full flavors without the distraction of heaviness. The only quibble is that the carbonation is a little low. Alcohol is hidden very well. There is a delicious lingering rich malty aftertaste, and an oily slickness on the palate that is complementary to the flavor that keeps the memory of the experience maintained until the next sip.

The brewers at Gnarly Barley are very adept at brewing delicious high-octane brews!

As I mentioned in my earlier review, this beer is a complex, full-flavored offering that deserves to be savored beside a roaring fire among friends. It really is quite delicious. Cheers and enjoy!

– Joseph Formanek



## BREWER Q&A

ZAC CARAMONTA, OWNER & BREWER (LEFT) | JOEY CHARPENTIER, HEAD BREWER (RIGHT)

#1

# Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1

Pontoon Brewing

Georgia | United States

## Brewer's Description

We let Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1 age for eighteen months in Heaven Hill bourbon barrels then blended it with Brownie Batter Batch #2, which had been sitting in VSOP Cognac and Heaven Hill Bourbon barrels for a total of eight months.

## Statistics

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 13.1%

IBUs: 55

Serve at: 50°

## Contact

Pontoon Brewing  
8601 Dunwoody Pl  
Suite 500  
Sandy Springs, GA 30350

Tel.: (770) 674-1075

[www.pontoonbrewing.com](http://www.pontoonbrewing.com)

## JUDGE'S REVIEW

by Dan Martich

**RATING: 98**

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 40 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 20 / 20

*Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1 has been evaluated as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer.  
(2015 BJCP Category 33B)*

The aroma begins with moderate vanilla and an absence of the presumed oak barrel notes. Pleasant bourbon in the nose is front and center but not harsh. Dark roasted malts are secondary to a slight barrel and alcohol character.

In the appearance section, we find an opaque beer that has a foamy, medium brown head that was fizzy and short-lived.

Wow! Sweet roasted malty goodness is knocking at the door, so let it in! Big, bold flavors of espresso with a touch of cream and plenty of boozy alcohols play well for this beer's intended audience. These flavors continue to evolve, developing into a wondrously complex drinking experience. While the hop flavor and bitterness are absent, the finish is semi-sweet and drying. The aftertaste is delightfully bourbon-like. Sweet chocolate notes are here too, and a roasty malt bitterness gives this beer yet another dimension. Finally, the balance is malt-forward.

A full body with medium carbonation gives this beer a pleasantly smooth mouthfeel that is necessary with the high ABV. The alcohol warmth is high, though on par with the bold flavors.

This is a world-class beer that you should drink a bottle of now and put one away in your beer cellar. I'm curious to know how this beer will age three, five or even ten years from now. The flavor notes may become more subtle, but the complexity dial will most likely turn up to eleven. If you ever wanted to taste time, effort and dedication in a bottle, this is it!

98 - WORLD CLASS



# SEAN O'KEEFE AND CHRIS BARATZ

## Talk: *Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1*

### Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

This one is a combined effort. I (Sean) initially came up with this recipe during my homebrewing days. I've been tweaking it over the years and Chris has continued to rework it at the brewery! The combined effort has helped evolve the recipe over time, which adds to the complexity of the blend.

### What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

The flavor profile and blending. The flavor is a mix of dark chocolate and caramel with a good amount of barrel and spirit character. The end result is a liquid brownie.

### What makes this beer truly World Class?

The blend. We employed the best barrels in order to create a more complete final product. The blend also pulls enough barrel and spirit character to combine with the malt bill to taste like brownies.

### What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The body, balance and lack of adjuncts make the flavor profile of brownie batter. The barrel then rounds out the edges with some micro-oxidation to create a very balanced and refined final product with good oak tannins and spirit characteristics. Blending has become the essential part of this project.

### How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

This is probably our most sought-after beer series. It's also our favorite series!

### BC: Do you know a story – or have a personal story – that revolves around this beer?

We've been chasing this level of body on a stout since we've opened. When homebrewing, it's much easier to boil down a stout to achieve the body you want, but on a commercial-size brewhouse, that eight hour boil turned into twenty-four plus hours without putting in a bunch of maltodextrin or lactose to achieve that body. It took so long that we had to brew in shifts overnight, which was a new experience and one that we don't like to do often! It was supposed to be a one-off beer but now, we mark the calendar and dread the day of the boil that seems to grow by more hours every year!



### Judge's Second Opinion

This beer poured out of its wax-topped bottle like a moonless night. Wax-topped bottles usually entail a truly special brew, and this did not disappoint in that regard. When a brewery goes out of its way to offer a difference in package, you know you'll be in for a treat. The wax top meant this was a special offering. Like dressing up to go to a lavish ball, this beer had the looks of a winner right away. After pouring, the aroma began with vanilla, sweet roasted malt and pleasantly smooth bourbon. The aroma then went back to the dark roasted malts. I could smell this beer all day long.

On the first sip... wow! Sweet roasty goodness, big bold flavors of espresso with a touch of cream and plenty of boozy alcohol are all present, and they play beautifully together. This beer develops into a myriad of flavor experiences. With the hop flavor and bitterness absent, the finish is of semi-sweet dark chocolate. The aftertaste is of delightful bourbon primarily. Sweet dark chocolate notes are here too, and a roasty malt bitterness gives this beer wonderful complexity. And while the alcoholic warmth is high, it is on point with the bold flavors.

Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1 is clearly a world-class brew. So much so that it is worth investing in multiple bottles if possible in order to see how it ages after some time in your beer cellar. This beer will only ratchet up its complexity with a few years of time under its belt. The beer's high ABV and barrel-aging characteristics will lend themselves to extended periods of time maturing in a cellar.

– Dan Martich



## BREWER Q&A

SEAN O'KEEFE, CEO & OWNER (LEFT) | CHRIS BARATZ, HEAD BREWER (RIGHT)

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**E**ach year, we award the breweries that collectively produce the highest-rated beer of the year as evaluated in our *Official Review*. Though 2020 saw breweries worldwide grapple with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that didn't stop them from producing terrific beers of the highest caliber in a variety of styles – including complex, ingredient-packed pastry stouts and a bevy of hazy, juicy IPAs. Read on to explore the best of the best in craft beer with our Best Breweries of 2020.

### **How We Award**

We look at the **top three highest-scoring beers** (as rated by our judging panel) for each brewery in the calendar year.

We then consider **how many of the three** place into the **100 to 96: World Class** category and the **95 to 91: Exceptional** category. For example, a brewery with two World Class beers and one Exceptional would rate higher than a brewery with a single higher-scoring World Class beer and two Exceptional beers.

The brewery with the **most World Class beers** followed by the **most Exceptional beers** is awarded the Brewery of the Year.

If two or more breweries have the same number of World Class and Exceptional beers, then the brewery with the **highest point total** wins.

In the event of a tie, a **fourth reviewed beer** is counted as a tiebreaker.

If a fourth beer was not reviewed, we look at the highest score total among the brewery's **two top-scoring beers**.

*Read on and raise a glass to this year's winners!*

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# THE BEST BREWERIES OF 2020

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## MONDAY NIGHT BREWING

1 World Class Beer

2 Exceptional Beers

Total Score: 286



### Highest-scoring beers:

Situational Ethics Apple Brandy Barrel-Aged – Rated 97

7 Deadly Stouts – Rated 95

Here Comes The Sun – Rated 94

For the second year in a row, **Monday Night Brewing** in Atlanta, Georgia is our second runner-up for Brewery of the Year.

The brewery's top-scoring beer in our *Official Review* was **Situational Ethics Apple Brandy Barrel-Aged**, part of the brewery's ongoing Situational Ethics series. The series features a base imperial stout aged in different barrels, with this year's rendition being housed in apple brandy barrels. The barrels and the base beer provided an intoxicating mélange of aromas and flavors ranging from chocolate, vanilla and roasted malt as well as the expected apple and brandy notes – tying the entire brew together into a nearly flawless world-class creation from the Monday Night brewing team.

Monday Night's next highest-scoring beer was **7 Deadly Stouts**, a fabulously complex brew that featured a staggering list of ingredients: 666 pounds of Ugandan vanilla beans, toasted coconut bark, toasted hazelnuts, coffee, Ghirardelli milk chocolate wafers and Saigon cinnamon bark. This entire brew was then aged in a series of seven different barrels. Talk about ambitious!

Rounding out the brewery's World Class and Exceptional reviews is **Here Comes The Sun**, a Specialty IPA that perfectly encapsulates the ever-popular New England IPA style with its pillowy mouthfeel and juicy hop quotient.



96

### Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

This decadent brew was aged in an apple brandy barrel with the delectable additions of honey and vanilla beans.



94

### Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

An incredibly complex imperial stout with a vast array of ingredients aged in a whopping seven different barrels.



94

### Specialty IPA

This hazy New England-style IPA is just as pleasant and welcoming as the classic Beatles song it's named after.

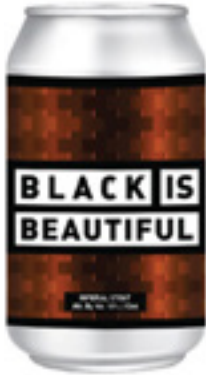
98



**Specialty Wood-Aged Beer**

A nearly flawless barrel-aged blended brew that notched the highest score of the year from our judges in 2020.

95



**Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer**

Brewed with graham crackers, coffee, chocolate and pecans, this roasty imperial stout is a filling dessert treat.

94



**Specialty Wood-Aged Beer**

The fabled camping staple of s'mores was the inspiration for this delectable barrel-aged and blended stout.



**PONTOON BREWING**

- 1 World Class Beer
- 2 Exceptional Beers
- Total Score: 287 points



**Highest-scoring beers:**

- Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1 – Rated 98
- Black Is Beautiful – Rated 95
- Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #2 S'mores – Rated 94

Pontoon Brewing in Sandy Springs, Georgia is 2020's first runner-up for Brewery of the Year.

The brewery's top-scoring beer also happened to be our #1 beer of the year: **Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #1**. This delightfully chocolaty brew was also one of only 16 beers in our history that has scored a 98 or above. An impressive feat!

The base beer was a fudgy, roasty, malty brew with heavy cocoa elements. The beer was then split into two batches and aged in different barrels – one bourbon and one VSOP cognac. All of that barrel-aging led to immense complexity – and the most delectable beer our reviewers sampled this year.

The brewery's second-highest score was for **Black Is Beautiful**, an imperial stout with a base recipe that was created by Weathered Souls Brewing Co. in San Antonio, Texas. The beer was created "to bring awareness to the injustices that many people of color face daily," per the brewery. Pontoon joined nearly 1,200 other breweries across all 50 states as well as 22 countries in aiding social justice.

Pontoon's third brew was **Barrel Aged Brownie Batter Blend #2 S'mores** – a recreation of the popular campfire favorite s'mores. Brewed with marshmallow cream, graham cracker crumbs and cocoa nibs, Pontoon didn't skimp on the authenticity of this pastry stout.



**Gnarly Barley Brewing Co.**

1709 Corbin Rd  
Hammond, LA 70403

Tel.: (985) 318-0723  
www.gnarlybeer.com

## **Congratulations to Gnarly Barley Brewing Co. of Hammond, Louisiana for being named *The Beer Connoisseur's* 2020 Brewery of the Year!**

**G**narly Barley Brewing Co. certainly earned their Brewery of the Year crown in 2020 by crafting some of the finest offerings our judges had the pleasure of sampling this year – including one beer that scored a nearly perfect rating of 97, making it one of only three beers all year that scored a 97 or above. Beyond the brewery's two highest-scoring beers – both of which were world-class examples scoring a 97 and 96, respectively – Gnarly Barley also produced six more beers that scored a 91 or above, bringing the brewery's total to eight World Class and Exceptional brews.

In 2020, Gnarly Barley's brewers were able to thread the needle of crafting immensely popular styles among craft beer aficionados, such as complex and inviting barrel-aged beers or thick, dessert-ready pastry stouts while also producing difficult-to-brew styles such as American light lagers or India pale lagers. That range of brewing expertise showcases the team's extensive knowledge of popular styles.

### **2020'S WORLD CLASS & EXCEPTIONAL REVIEWS**

Barrel Aged Imperial Korova – 97 Rating

Puff Puff Pastry Stout – 96 Rating

American AF – 95 Rating

Hypnic Jerk – 94 Rating

Jucifer – 94 Rating

Gnarly Barley Lager – 93 Rating

Gnarly Barley Stout – 92 Rating

Gnarly Barley India Pale Lager – 91 Rating

Founded by Zac and Cari Caramonta, Gnarly Barley got its start in a crowded garage “amongst the presence of two fat cats and a half-pipe,” according to the brewery. Zac was inspired by the great craft beer he had been sampling and wanted to emulate those brews with his own homebrewing experiments. His homebrews first debuted in 2011 at a nearby beer festival. Despite both being brewing industry profession-

als, Zac and Cari continue to be avid homebrewers and are members of a local homebrewing club.

In 2014, Zac quit his day job and Gnarly Barley was founded. During its relatively brief history, the brewery has established itself as one of the darlings of the craft beer scene – culminating in winning a silver medal at the Great American Beer Festival in the Sweet Stout/Cream Stout category for its popular flagship brew Korova Milk Porter.

Now, Gnarly Barley can add a Brewery of the Year title in 2020 to its trophy case – a well-deserved honor that comes from the tremendous passion that the brewery and all its employees showcase on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, the brewery discusses its brewhouse as featuring the following ingredients: “a two-vessel 30-bbl brewhouse, one hot and one cold liquor tank, a 1,220-bbl cellar and a whole lot of passion for craft beer.”

That comes through clearly in the terrific beers they produce each and every day, which is a fitting attribute for 2020's Brewery of the Year.



## GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO.

2 World Class Beers & 1 Exceptional Beer

Total Score: 288

### Highest-scoring beers

Barrel Aged Imperial Korova – Rated 97

Puff Puff Pastry Stout – Rated 96

American AF – Rated 95



97

#### Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

A souped-up version of the brewery's popular flagship Korova Milk Porter, this rendition ratchets up the complexity and flavor.



96

#### Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer

A pastry stout that would make for either the booziest breakfast ever or an indulgent dessert after a hearty meal.



95

#### American Light Lager

Brewed with pilsner malt and Saaz hops, this ultra-crisp light lager could make one forget all about "big beer."

**GNARLY BARLEY** submitted an impressive eight beers to the *Official Review* that achieved World Class and Exceptional ratings. The brewery's two top-scoring beers were **Barrel Aged Imperial Korova** and **Puff Puff Pastry Stout**.

Barrel Aged Imperial Korova is a beefed-up version of the brewery's perennially popular Korova Milk Porter, which just won a silver medal at the GABF. The base beer provides notes of chocolate and coffee in the flavor and aroma, while the additional ABV adds more complexity in the form of plum, molasses and caramel notes. The barrel-aging ties it all together with sultry vanilla and wood elements.

Puff Puff Pastry Stout is the true definition of a modern pastry stout due to being brewed with ample amounts of adjuncts. In this case, this thick, sweet and boozy stout was brewed with hundreds of pounds of white chocolate bread pudding and Cocoa Puffs cereal. Yum!

Lastly, showcasing the brewers' skills, Gnarly Barley's next highest-scoring beer was **American AF**, an American light lager. Of course, for brewers, lagers are among the most exacting styles to brew, so being able to craft both adjunct-filled pastry stouts as well as light lagers showcases the tremendous talent that Gnarly Barley's brewers possess.



Fruit Beer: Dos Puertas by Kings County Brewers Collective

## EMERGING BEER STYLES

by Ryan Newhouse

All bets were off in 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the beer industry felt it. We saw the absence of beer festivals, large and small. We hit pause on happy hours and beer flights and rare bottle releases. Instead, we applauded breweries who offered curbside pickup or, better yet, home delivery. We stocked up on beers to drink at home, sometimes alone, or at the most with small groups of friends. We started beer delivery subscriptions, growler exchange programs and weekly virtual tastings with friends from all over.

And through it all, breweries never stopped innovating, reimagining, and making great beer. In some ways, 2020 allowed breweries to try new things, whether they were new beer styles or new packaging or new distribution models. And beer fans did their best to support their local breweries, or their favorite breweries, by buying their beers, their merchandise and their gift cards – doing

anything they could to help at-risk breweries stay afloat.

So how do we take a year like 2020 and make our best educated guesses for what's to come in 2021? It's not impossible, or even difficult. We can look at what beer styles emerged out of the topsy-turvy chaos and what flagships helped breweries weather the storm. We can dive into sales, awards and the online “beer chatter” that replaced in-person, bar-top banter among friends and come up with what will likely be an accurate list of beers to keep an eye out for next year.

With that, we offer what may be the top emerging beer styles for 2021.

### Wood- and Barrel-Aged Imperial Stout

Wait, is it déjà vu all over again? Haven't the “big beers” had their day? Even in last year's version of this article, it was correctly noted that the pastry stout category isn't going anywhere, and, in fact, those beers “will become even

more dessert-like.” That wasn't wrong, as we'll see further down in this piece, but the new potential for strong stouts in 2021 is based solely on the Great American Beer Festival.

Yes, while the famous festival didn't actually occur as an in-person event in 2020, it did retain the beer judging portion of the event. There, the beer style that reemerged as one of the “Most Entered” categories after a couple years outside the limelight was “Wood- and Barrel-Aged Strong Stout” with 199 entries.

Last year's GABF competition was not hindered by the lack of 62,000 beer-drinking attendees. On the contrary, the number of beers entered in 2020 was only 7% less than in 2019, and still all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. were represented, so the case for strong stouts remains, well, strong for 2021.

It's worth noting here there's perhaps a twist of irony that one of today's iconic examples of a barrel-aged stout, Bourbon County Brand Stout by Goose Island Beer Co., was disqualified back in 1995 (the first year it was entered into GABF) because it didn't fit into an existing style category. Two-and-a-half decades later and beer drinkers can't get enough of its dark roasted malt aroma, notes of baking chocolate, dark-fruit sweetness and its lingering booziness – all elements that have come to define the style.

**Examples:** The Abyss by Deschutes Brewery, Assassin by Toppling Goliath Brewing Co., Barrel-Aged Ruckus by Melvin Brewing, BA Double Stack by Great Notion Brewing Co., Man by Perennial Artisan Ales, Snowed In Coconut by Copper Kettle Brewing Co.

### Steinbier

A lot can go right when you play with hot rocks and fire. Translated as “stone beer,” steinbier can

be traced back (in writing) to 1229 to a tavern along a 2,000-year-old trade route between modern-day Austria, Bavaria and Hungary. Making steinbier involves the process of adding superheated rocks (often granite) into unboiled wort. Instead of building fires and heating vessels by external means, heated stones could do the trick, at least in small batches.

The signature effect this has on the finished product is caramelizing the sugars in the wort, adding complexity and a delicate sweetness to the lager-style beer.

Today, new brewers are keen on recreating this historical method of brewing. Famed beer writer Michael Jackson actually featured steinbier on an episode of his show, *The Beer Hunter*, in the 1980s. Jackson had visited the Bavarian Rauchenfels Brewery in Marktobendorf, Germany to educate his viewers about the unique beer style.

Queen City Brewery in Burlington, Vermont, has been producing its Vermont Steinbier since the brewery opened in 2014. Queen City uses a specific variety of sandstone called graywacke for its steinbier because it won't split or break at high temps. Baked over a beechwood fire, brewers carefully lower metal buckets of hot rocks into the wort kettle.

Only a handful of breweries in the U.S. have been making steinbier with regularity, including Queen City and Scratch Brewing Co. (Illinois), but one or two more seem to be jumping on board each year, so chances are better now that beer fans will come across one in 2021.

**Examples:** [Hofstettner Granitbock](#) by Brauerei Hofstetten, [Steinbier Original](#) by Brauerei Leikeim, [Steinbier](#) by Night Shift Brewing, [Vermont Steinbier](#) by Queen City Brewery, [Steinbock](#) by Fonta Flora Brewery, [Stein Beer](#) by Scratch Brewing Co.

## Fruit Beer

Fruit beers outsold “craft lager” by about \$20 million in chain retail by Q3 in 2020. Just as more craft beer fans were waxing poetic about lager's clean, crisp simplicity, here comes tastes of raspberry, dragon fruit and yuzu to body-check the senses. What's more, we're seeing fruit beers shine across multiple base beer styles, from blonde ales to kettle sours.

A prevailing thought is that fruit beers can bring a diverse group of drinkers to the beer camp, and with that mass appeal and an eagerness to expand one's horizons, fruit beers will trend in 2021 and beyond. One recent study projects that the fruit beer market will hit \$379.5 million by 2027.

One brewery enjoying the fruits of their labor (pun fully intended) is Odell Brewing Co., makers of Sippin' Pretty, a fruited sour ale loaded with a blend of açai, guava and elderberry, all balanced with a touch of Himalayan pink sea salt. It's been a poster child for fruit beer.

“We launched Sippin' Pretty in November of 2018,” says Adam D'Antonio, Marketing Manager at Odell. “At the time it was our newest year-round offering and our first year-round kettle sour. It has risen to be our third best-selling beer by volume, behind only 90 Shilling and IPA.” The brewery says it will also be adding a 19.2-ounce can of Sippin' Pretty to the market in 2021.

**Examples:** [Dreamsicle Flurries](#) by Pollyanna Brewing Co., [Blue Raspberry Super Slurp](#) by Junkyard Brewing Co., [Bailey's Taproom 10th](#) by pFriem Family Brewers, [Astrolabe](#) by Urban Artifact, [Slang du Jour – Blueberry Peach Cobbler](#) by Drekker Brewing Co.

## Ice Cream Beer

With all the turbulence in 2020, there was no paradigm shift in the beer industry where all breweries



Barrel-Aged Imperial Stout: Snowed In Coconut by Copper Kettle Brewing Co.

and beer drinkers turned back to flagship beers and classic styles. If anything, having little to no taproom traffic and slower sales allowed brewers time and space to experiment with all kinds of beer and venture out into unusual styles. Ice cream beer was among those styles.

“We thought it would be fun to do something different involving our favorite desserts that could appeal to everyone, especially people who don't normally like beer,” says Bre Hovley, co-owner of Barbarian Brewing. “A fateful trip down the ice cream aisle one day inspired us to go down the ice cream ale route.”

Barbarian Brewing sells “Desert Packs” of ice cream beers, which can include Apricot, Gimme 5 (their take on a Take 5 candy bar), S'Mores and Peanut Butter Fragments.

“They have been very popular, enough so that we plan on making them for the foreseeable future,” adds Hovley.

Barbarian Brewing isn't forging this frozen path alone. New Belgium Brewing Co. collaborated with Ben & Jerry's to produce Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Ale and told beer drinkers to “Put down the spoon, pick up a pint.”

Does this give new meaning to having a “frosty pint?”

**Examples:** [Cali Creamin' Creamsicle](#) by Mother Earth Brew Co.,

Gimme 5 Ice Cream Ale by Barbarian Brewing, Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Ale by New Belgium Brewing Co., Rocky Road Ice Cream Stout by Wild Leap Brew Co., Fried Ice Cream Stout by Flying Fish Brewing Co.

## Even More Double IPA

There are trends and then there are rocket ships. Double IPAs may be the latter. Low-cal and low-carb beers were thought to be an emerging beer style for 2020 (again citing last year's article) but the hard data that came out of actual sales in the last year have shown that double IPAs lived up to their name, literally, as in double the sales of healthier alternatives. Adam Boura, the brewer at Four Points Brewing in Pennsylvania, Tweeted out: "We are brewing twice as much DIPA under quarantine."

Drizly, an e-commerce site that sells and delivers alcohol to your doorstep, has stated that double IPA sales have increased +512% year-over-year by Q3 in 2020. And now many nationally distributed breweries have announced plans to start offering year-round double IPAs.

The already popular Voodoo Ranger Imperial IPA by New Belgium Brewing Co. proved to be even more popular than last year, boosting its sales in grocery, convenience, liquor and other chain stores by 85% for the first three quarters in 2020 compared to the prior year. Voodoo Ranger Imperial IPA also outsold the brewery's longstanding flagship, Fat Tire Amber Ale.

It makes sense. More people drank at home during quarantine, and without having to drive home from a bar or brewery, perhaps they could allow themselves a little more alcohol in their glass. There's also savings to be had. People want to stretch their dollar by adding a little more ABV per bottle in their six-packs. It's a feel-good return on their investment.

"We're selling full cases online because it keeps the shipping cost down for folks buying beer," says Collin McDonnell, co-founder and CEO of HenHouse Brewing Co. "DIPA does pretty well – though mixed cases are still what we sell the most of online. Twenty-four of any one beer is a big commitment for anyone, but eight bottles of three different beers seems to be the sweet spot."

"DIPAs are definitely for entertainment," adds McDonnell. "They have loud labels and fun names, they rotate in and out a ton – they're like baseball cards or Pokémon. They're not just a beverage, they're a thing to talk to your friends about. They're a reason to read a Wikipedia article you've never thought about. They're much more like a Marvel movie than a Coors Light."

**Examples:** Haze in the Hood by Reuben's Brews, Ghost in the Machine by Parish Brewing Co., Lake Haze #10 by Wallenpaupack Brewing Co., Double Dust by Pure Project Brewing, Visual Cortex by Source Brewing

## Cask Ale and To-Go Beer

Sometimes innovation comes from seeing things from a new perspective. In this case, instead of thinking outside the box, one brewery chose to think inside of it (or at least inside a reusable, food-safe container).

"We started using the bag-in-box packaging as soon as bars, restaurants and brewery taprooms were closed due to COVID back in March," says Bill Arnott, owner/brewer at Machine House Brewery in Seattle, Washington. "I actually ordered the packaging just a couple of hours after [the closures] had been announced. I had been thinking about doing them for a few years."

Machine House Brewery has focused heavily on cask ales since it opened in 2013. While many other breweries shifted to canning beers during the pandemic, that really wasn't an option for them.

"Cask breweries in England have been using polypins (a plastic, food-safe, flexible container) for quite a while, which is more or less the same thing," Arnott continued. "Polypins would be about 20 liters, which is a lot of beer to go through at home. We opted for 5-liter boxes, which is still quite a lot of beer, but suits what we are trying to promote in 'sessionable' cask beers that you can drink in pretty large volumes compared to the mostly higher-ABV beer in the craft market."

The bag-in-box beers from Machine House Brewery are available for curbside pickup and free home delivery. More importantly, they "have helped us maintain enough sales to keep us in business."

"Bag-in-boxes give a really good beer-drinking experience," says Arnott. "It's getting as close as we can to having a fresh, hand-pumped pint of cask ale at home." With a worldwide pandemic raging, that's incredibly important for fans of the style.

While bag-in-box beer, like Machine House's Cambridge Bitter, might not sweep the nation as the "next big thing" in craft, it is a clear example that ingenuity and adaptability prove to be an evergreen (and in some cases, a business-saving) trend in the beer industry that will surely see an increase over the course of 2021.

**Examples:** Cambridge Bitter by Machine House Brewery, Black Pale Ale by The Bronx Brewery, Dark Star Ale by Pints Pub Brewery, Gold Coast Nitro Cream Ale by Freewheel Brewing Co., Best Bitter by Porter Brewing Co.





Cask Ale



Barrel-Aged Imperial Stout



To-Go Beer



Steinbier

### SEEING THE FUTURE

In 2020, it was virtually impossible to venture out into the world to sit down and sample beers directly from a brewery. However, though the pandemic may continue, it did allow beer drinkers to stay in and explore new beer possibilities without having to worry about how to get home. So stay safe and healthy, and enjoy exploring new beers in 2021!



Ice Cream Beer



**INDUSTRY  
INSIGHTS FROM  
THE NBWA**  
by Jim Dykstra

**I**n a year where nothing has gone unaffected by COVID-19, it should come as no surprise that the beer industry has taken some substantial blows. Among each tier, tears were shed as staff was downsized and shops shuttered.

Seemingly naive talk of bubbles bursting and David vs. Goliath battles have been eclipsed in the shadow of a worldwide pandemic, forcing tough decisions and harsh realities for businesses – adapt or die. Many rolled over quickly. Some put up a hell of a fight. Still others have evolved, and a rare few have managed to not only survive but thrive.

With Industry Insights from the National Beer Wholesalers Association, *The Beer Connoisseur* peers through the haze to make sense of a wild year.

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### THE DAMAGE FROM ABOVE

The numbers don't look great. The NBWA, along with the Beer Institute, Brewers Association and the American Beverage Licensees published a report stating more than 651,000 U.S. beer industry jobs will have been lost by the end of the year due to pandemic fallout.

Among the jobs lost, retail-related beer jobs will have been hit hardest – with over 400,000 job losses projected. This will come as no surprise, given the myriad challenges facing bars and restaurants. However, no arm of the industry has been spared. Over 3,600 brewing jobs and 1,800 distribution jobs are predicted to have fallen by the wayside at year's end. The report also forecasts losses of more than \$22 billion in retail beer sales. Ouch.

To add insult to injury, the perishable nature of beer meant a huge amount of product was wasted – a national tragedy in its own right. Craig Purser, president and CEO of the National Beer Wholesalers Association remarked:

“The abrupt forced shutdown of bars, restaurants, hotels, arenas and more during the busy spring season left at least \$1 billion of perishable draft beer stranded in the marketplace and unable to be sold.”

As one of the biggest beer drinking months of the year, March was a particularly terrible time for the beer industry to be forced into shutdown, and millions of gallons of draft beer were lost, despite the best efforts of brewers and the NBWA to help reposition perishable inventory. However, losses due to unpredictable circumstances were but one of many financial hurdles the industry had to overcome, as Purser notes:

“In addition to this significant financial loss, beer distributors have seen their operating costs skyrocket as they have made substantial investments to keep their workforce and customers safe during this global health crisis.”

Those investments could include COVID-19 testing kits, temperature check devices, personal protective equipment like gloves and masks for employees along with additional cleaning supplies. Even for breweries, where cleanliness has always been essential, the standard for what is clean has skyrocketed, and with it, so have the maintenance costs. Many businesses have also chosen to provide masks to forgetful customers, rather than risk having to turn them away, or risk scaring off others. Hand sanitizer has to be plentiful, too.

Then, there are changes to infrastructure – protective barriers being the most universal change. Signage as well, informing patrons of safety procedures, or simply that the business is still open, are also common expenses. All of which hamper the bottom line.

“The beer industry will continue to face difficult headwinds as we navigate this crisis that is still unfolding,” Purser stated.

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### NOT THRIVING, BUT SURVIVING

There's no sense in sugarcoating it – a large amount of breweries are not going to survive the pandemic. A survey from the Texas Craft Brewers Guild found that 2 out of 3 brewery owners in the state do not expect their business to survive until the end of 2021.

Considering the amount of variables at play, there is no simple answer to surviving this period of crisis. Needless to say, now is not the time to consider expansion, but rather to consolidate and focus on what works. To this end, Purser stresses the constant that has always gotten beer makers and purveyors through the lean times – community.

“As I have said, there is nothing traditional about 2020, but one thing that never changes is our industry's strength when we work together,” Purser said.

Collaboration and community engagement will be key determinants in the fight to survive as a business in 2020. Businesses should be asking themselves how they can involve themselves in the community that supports them, how they can work with other business owners to pool resources and drive traffic to one another, and perhaps most importantly – how they can utilize this period of uncertainty to their advantage.

Agility and the ability to experiment are the greatest strengths of the small brewer. The businesses

that can find upsides to this massive downturn – ways to innovate, coming up with new product lines and creating in-roads to customers – will be the ones that live to see the light of day.

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### **ARE AMERICANS DRINKING MORE, OR LESS, DURING THE PANDEMIC?**

2020 has given drinkers all the reason they need to pick up a bottle, but there have been conflicting reports on whether or not Americans are drinking more or less. So how is the industry faring on those terms?

An oft-cited study from RAND Corporation, published by the Journal of the American Medical Association, led to a blanket statement that the pandemic was driving Americans to drink more. But it's not that simple. In general, Americans drank more frequently during lockdown, but were drinking a bit less on average per drinking session, and typically not to a point of excess.

In regards to the report, Lester Jones, chief economist for the NBWA noted, "People can't draw conclusions from random anecdotes. We need to look at the data in aggregate."

As of October 2020, Jones cited numbers that U.S. beer sales declined 2.7% from 2019 to 2020. The year started on a high note, with beer sales up 2.1% in January before dropping a precipitous 8.9% in April and a further 16.1% in May. The drop leveled out in June and began slowly climbing throughout July and August, all of which provides hope for the future.

Jones noted that the numbers didn't account for "the massive quantities of returns and refunds required by rapid shutdowns of on-premises bars, restaurants, concert venues, festivals and the like," and that other notable periods of history, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, failed to significantly affect alcohol consumption in the long-term.

"There is a very slow and predictable change in total demand over time subject to demographics and market dynamics," stated Jones. It appears that the demand for craft beer is still there – the challenge is meeting demand from both a production and distribution standpoint.

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### **DRINKING DIFFERENTLY IN 2020**

While COVID-19 hasn't drastically affected American drinking sensibility, it has certainly affected how we purchase and consume our beer, and how it is sold. The taproom-centered business model that has spurred most small brewery growth over the last few years has been directly

challenged by the pandemic, leaving those businesses scrambling to adapt.

One less traditional path to distribution for small brewers is to partner with a beer shipping service, like Tavour. Well-positioned to thrive in the time of coronavirus, Tavour has the ability to ship beer in 25 states, giving brewers a much-needed lifeline direct to the consumer, and an avenue to offload excess capacity that would otherwise expire. Business has tripled for the company since March, with over 90 new breweries signing on to have their products made available through its service.

With its non-contact business model, Tavour is paving the way for the post-COVID beer market, but there are still plenty of challenges to overcome. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for the company is legislation – an issue affecting the industry as a whole. State laws dictate the legality of interstate beer shipping, and each state has its own interpretation of the matter. Some outlaw the shipping of alcohol entirely, while others leave it up to localities to decide. Still other states – 26, in fact – allow only wine to be shipped.

The reason for the disparity is largely that of focused lobbying effort on the part of the wine industry. Winemakers are concentrated on the West Coast but have to meet demand around the country. Combined with the high-margin, niche nature of many wines, the issue of shipping legality was forced by necessity long before craft beer began running into similar issues. And when the lobbying arm of craft beer did begin to make headway into legislature, it simply had other, more immediate fish to fry – taprooms, growler sales and high-ABV brews, all of which also varied by state.

If there's a positive to be found for craft brewers, it is that the pandemic has helped force some key legislative issues that need to be addressed, shipping foremost among them. In May, California Congresswoman Jackie Speier introduced a bill (HR 2517) which would allow the U.S. Postal Service to ship alcoholic beverages to legal adults as long as state law allows it.

To-go sales – the other major lifeline for small brewers – have also been brought to the attention of legislators. While many states still languish in craft beer sale purgatory, others are progressing. In October, Ohio passed House Bill 669, effective immediately, allowing "bars, restaurants, small breweries, micro-distilleries and wineries to sell up to three drinks per meal in covered cups – or alcoholic beverages such as wine in their original, sealed containers – for customers to drink away from the premises."

Provided the drinks are ordered with a meal, the bill allows services like Doordash and GrubHub to deliver the alcohol – another positive move towards nationwide acceptance of beer delivery and commerce.

Then there's taxes. The 2017 Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act, which provides federal excise tax relief for breweries producing fewer than 2 million barrels annually, is set to expire, meaning breweries could be paying double in excise tax for 2021 if the legislation isn't made permanent. This would be the final nail in the coffin for many brewers.

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### NO CAN DO: NATIONWIDE CAN SHORTAGE

As if things weren't tough enough, increased demand and decreased supply has made for a can shortage, and small brewers have to wait in line behind Coke, Pepsi, AB InBev and many more large companies who get first dibs on orders.

According to Ball Corp., the world's largest can manufacturer, the U.S. market is short about 10 billion cans for 2020. What began as a positive, environmentally-conscious shift towards packaging in cans has been brought to a point of crisis as hard seltzer, sparkling water and sodas all exploded in popularity, while at the same time draft beer sales disappeared, requiring more product to be canned.

"The lockdown in March took the keg part out of distribution," Jones said. "That's 1 in 10 beers. Brewers naturally found themselves turning to cans, which put pressure on the marketplace."

Brewers are having to get creative – either importing cans from outside the U.S., buying up unused cans from misprints, package redesigns or other brewers' seasonals that didn't sell and "re-sleeving" them, or simply resorting to glass bottles, the former standard for craft beer, which has fallen out of style in recent years.

Even CO2 is hard to come by these days. Production of the gas dropped 20% in April, and just like with can acquisition, small brewers were some of the first to feel the pressure from a lack of readily available CO2.

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### A REBUILDING YEAR

2020 represented uncharted waters for the world, and how businesses fared often had as much to do with luck as it did with sound business decisions. While it was generally not a winning year for the industry, hope springs eternal. For one, struggle can lead to unification. With

help from organizations like the NBWA, beer distributors and brewery workers pulled together to weather the storm, and were deemed "essential" on state and national levels.

Further, according to the NBWA's October 2020 Beer Purchasers' Index (BPI), which forecasts beer demand for distributors, the numbers are showing signs of hope. "This month's reading remains significantly above historical trends as increased packaged beer sales in off-premises channels continue to 'fill-in' for lost on-premises and draft beer sales," said Jones.

"The gap between October 2020 and October 2019 is much smaller than we have seen since May." Jones attributed the positive signs to distributors' "aggressive stance in their ordering to minimize out-of-stocks, compensate for lost draft beer volumes and continued on-premise closures."

Successful business models were challenged, and many breweries were forced to pivot overnight, shifting their entire business models from draft to cans. The struggle brought innovation and creativity to an industry that was beginning to look a bit complacent. Craft beer was born struggling – a small fish in a big pond – and 2020 has been a return to its underdog roots.

"This has been a challenging year for every industry, including ours," Purser said. "But one thing is certain – the beer distribution industry worked together to support each other, our workforce and the communities where we live and operate."

***In other words: We're all in this together.***

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*The National Beer Wholesalers Association (NBWA) represents America's 3,000 independent beer distributors with operations in every state, congressional district and media market across the country. Licensed at the federal and state levels, beer distributors get bottles, cans, cases and kegs from a brewer or importer to stores, restaurants and other licensed retail accounts through a transparent and accountable regulatory system. Distributors build brands of all sizes – from familiar domestic beers to new startup labels and imports from around the world – and generate enormous consumer choice while supporting 142,000 quality jobs in their home communities. Beer distributors work locally to keep communities safe by sponsoring programs to promote responsible consumption, combat drunk driving and work to eliminate underage drinking.*

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TRENDING

# HOPS



by Owen Ogletree

PHOTO COURTESY YAKIMA CHIEFHOPS

**H**op flowers provide balancing spice and bitterness in beer. Most craft beer aficionados know the classic hop notes of flowers, citrus, grapefruit and pine, but what if hops could also provide nuances of coconut, grape, melon, peach, pineapple, chive, berries, vanilla and more? New hop types with unique aroma and flavor profiles fascinate modern craft brewers. This article showcases an exciting collection of established and experimental hop varieties that show extraordinary promise for 2021.

Just 40 years ago, brewers could only choose from less than 50 global hop varieties. These days, almost 200 varieties of hops exist, with another 100 or so experimental hop types currently under development. It takes roughly ten years for a new hop strain to make it to market by proving its worth through disease resistance, vigor and appealing

aroma and flavor characteristics. It's not surprising that only a handful of new hop varieties make it to market each year and end up in brew kettles.

Hop reproduction can involve sexual and asexual processes. In nature, the wind carries pollen from a male hop plant to the cones of a female plant, producing tiny seeds. Hops also spread without seeds by way of root rhizomes that grow horizontally through the soil or are transplanted to new areas by hop farmers. But how do growers develop new varieties of hops through cross-breeding?

Crossing two hop varieties is no simple endeavor. Only female plants produce the hop flower cones used in brewing, and breeders can place a bag over sections of the mother plant to isolate immature flowers from stray pollen in the air. Hop breeders then introduce pollen from the desired male plant into the bag, and the mother plant develops seeds that will be planted in greenhouses for observation.

The young hops are infected purposefully with diseases such as downy mildew and powdery mildew to kill any new plants that don't possess appropriate disease-resistant genes. After about five years, the strongest surviving plants earn the chance for farm trials and chemical and sensory analysis.

Craft brewers provide valuable input and feedback on which new hops will be accepted for wide-scale use. After new crosses grow for almost eight years, farmers ship hop samples to breweries for use in test beers, then brewers pick their favorites. As with all crops, demand drives supply.

Two leading American hop suppliers gave input on which trendy hop varieties they see as most likely to "go viral" in the craft beer arena of 2021. Located in St. Paul, Oregon, Willamette Valley Hops is a family-owned and operated premium hop product distributor established in 2008. Willamette Valley Hops' list of hot hops for 2021 includes Talus, Sabro and Idaho Gem.

With the demand for hops from the Pacific Northwest always growing, Yakima Chief Hops stands as an organization of growers that has supplied outstanding hops from the region since 1869. "For six generations and counting, the family farms that make up Yakima Chief have been driven by the desire to help the entire community thrive by constantly improving beer's greatest ingredient, the hop," explains Public Relations Manager Cait Schut. Yakima Chief named Idaho 7, Talus, Sabro and Idaho Gem as its top hops to watch in 2021.

## IDAHO 7

Yakima Chief's hop specifications note that Idaho 7 was bred and released by Jackson Farms near Boise, Idaho. Idaho 7 presents pungent tropical fruit notes with pleasant apricot, orange, ruby red grapefruit, papaya, pine resin and inkings of black tea. Expect aroma nuances of peach, pineapple, mango and earthy spice in this complex hop that works well in IPAs, pale ales, American wheat beers and hazy/juicy, hop-forward ales.

Found in the resin glands of hop flowers, alpha acids form chemical compounds that produce hop bitterness when boiled in sugary wort to make beer. Alpha acid percentages can register as low as 3% in mild noble hops like Saaz and Hallertau, but Idaho 7 packs a potent bittering potential of 9.5 to 14%. Due to its formidable aroma and flavor, brewers mainly add Idaho 7 during the boil's late stages to produce memorable hop flavor and aroma. The hop also works well when dry cones or pellets are added to beer at later stages in a process known as "dry hopping."



*Fresh hop IPAs continue to be one of the most popular ways to express hops in beer. Mother Earth Brew Co. brewed Fresh As It Gets with newly harvested Amarillo and Idaho Gem varieties.*

## IDAHO GEM

Idaho Gem originated at the family-owned Gooding Farms in Parma, Idaho. Gooding's notes describe the hop as having "rich levels of sweet, fruit-forward aromatic oils that are optimal for late kettle additions or dry-hopping in a wide variety of styles." Idaho Gem's intriguing resin and hop oil profile offers notes of stone fruit, berry, lemon, grapefruit, herbs, spice, fruit chewing gum and mint. An intriguing hop for hazy New England IPAs, West Coast IPAs and American pale ales, Idaho Gem ranks as a favorite among modern craft brewers. Expect an alpha acid range of 12 to 14%.

## SABRO

Sabro premiered as an intriguing entry from the Hop Breeding Company's joint venture between John I. Haas, Inc. and Select Botanicals Group. Sabro ranks as a pleasantly pungent aroma hop that shines with complex fruit and citrus character. With notes of orange, tangerine, stone fruit, papaya, coconut, mint and cedar, along with a potent alpha acid range of 12 to 16%, Sabro's powerfully expressive hop profile works well in hoppy beers

such as IPAs, American pale ales, classic saisons and American stouts. Because of the fruity nature of the hop, Sabro also performs well in various fruit beers.

Sabro originated from the cross-pollination of a female Neomexicanus hop variety that grows wild in the mountain regions of New Mexico. Alex Barth, CEO of John I. Haas, notes: “Aside from its wonderfully complex and unique flavor profile, we also love the fact that this new hop is genetically diverse. If part of your heritage includes the desert and mountain environments of the southwestern United States, you have a strong survival spirit in your genes – the essence of sustainability.”

## TALUS

Talus, a collaboration hop between Yakima Chief Ranches and John I. Haas Inc., comes from a female Sabro plant crossed with a fragrant Pacific Northwest hop through open pollination. The resulting unique hop possesses clean, intriguing medleys of aroma and flavor nuances such as pink grapefruit, orange zest, pine bark, pineapple, kiwi, roses and sage. Talus offers alpha acid parameters of 8 to 9.5%. Haas recommends Talus

in beer styles such as wheat ales, golden ales, pale ales, India pale lagers, classic IPAs, session IPAs, New England IPAs and imperial IPAs.

The creation of Talus highlights the Hop Breeding Company’s exploration of novel genetics to produce contemporary flavors and aromas not found in classic hop varieties. Jason Perrault of Yakima Chief Ranches points out, “Talus has the distinction of being exceptionally unique, yet appealing and very translatable in beer. Moreover, its complexity lends itself to functionality in the brewing process alone or in combination with other hops. Talus checks a lot of boxes.”

## LUPOMAX HOP PELLETS

The folks at Willamette Valley Hops are actively promoting two of their advanced hop products from the Haas company. Produced from concentrated

hop cone lupulin powder that contains hop resins and essential oils, Lupomax™ pellets produce a consistent, optimized hop flavor in beer. Currently, the pellets are available in Citra, Mosaic and Sabro hop varieties. Virgil McDonald, brewmaster at John I. Haas Innovations Brewery, explains, “The reduced vegetative matter of Lupomax™ pellets gives me a clean hop flavor and really saves on beer loss. It can be used at any stage in the brewing process, but it really shines where flavor intensity and reducing beer loss matter most, like dry-hopping.”



## INCIGNITO LIQUID HOP OIL

A concentrated liquid hop oil product from the Haas group, Incognito™ also contains no vegetative hop matter and delivers an impressive quantity of aroma and flavor while maximizing brewing efficiency and reducing beer loss and hop shipping costs. Brewers can choose from Incognito™ liquids that include Citra, Mosaic or Ekuant hops.

## NECTARON

Stan Hieronymus, beer journalist and hop expert, has been touting two sensational new hop varieties from the Southern Hemisphere, where hop harvests take place in our spring. Craft brewers should now be on the lookout for limited quantities of these new hops, with more shipments coming in the spring of 2021.



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Nectaron, previously known as Hort 4337, comes from New Zealand. “The name combines ‘nectar of the gods’ with the name of breeder Ron Beatson,” Heironymus explains. “This gorgeous hop has been billed as the next Nelson Sauvignon but with more stone fruit character – particularly peaches.” A close relative of New Zealand’s Waimea hop, Nectaron was developed by New Zealand’s Plant & Food Research group and took almost 20 years before full release. With 10 to 12% alpha acid and a complex canvas of fruit essences, Nectaron makes a great hop choice for fruit-forward beers.

## ECLIPSE

The new HPA-016 hop from Australia has just been given the official name of Eclipse. This release from Hop Products Australia began in 2004 but won’t be distributed around the world until 2021. Eclipse offers intense flavors of sweet fruit, crisp pine resin, citrus peel, spice and robust levels of alpha acids that run from 15.7 to 18.7%.

“Eclipse is being compared to Galaxy with more spice character,” notes Heironymus. “The hop distributor sent some for a tasting event in 2018 at Zebulon Artisan Ales that featured experimental hops used in a range of single-hop beers.

One of the attendees left a tasting note of the Eclipse beer that said, ‘If this were gumbo, it would be the best gumbo I ever smelled.’”

## HBC 472

Eric Johnson, co-owner and brewmaster of Wild Heaven Beer in Atlanta, released a

Hop Breeding Company garnered a pile of votes as fan favorite.

Like Sabro, HBC 472 comes from Neomexicanus parentage. The hop scores 9 to 11% in alpha acids, and its unique flavor characteristics have created a buzz among brewers. Tasting notes include kiwi,

current breeding programs,” says Johnson. “I definitely expect HBC 472 to be part of the hop conversation for many years to come. Finding new hops is exciting, as this opens up possibilities of so many new flavors. Beer is intrinsically culinary, and every



PHOTO COURTESY YAKIMA CHIEF HOPS

*As consumer tastes continue to adapt and evolve, so too do brewers’ interest in specific hop varieties. In 2021, expect these trending hops to be found in the ingredient lists of the most popular beers around.*

series of four single-hop IPAs last fall. Each beer was hopped with a different experimental variety. The project’s objective was to create a clean canvas to showcase each hop and give craft beer enthusiasts the ability to evaluate each hop individually. The beers were called “Next Big Thing,” and hop HBC 472 from Haas’

mango, citrus, wood and coconut. When used in dark, malty brews, an intriguing and inviting bourbon nuance comes through firmly, making HBC 472 appealing for use in stouts, porters, barleywines, strong ales and any barrel-aged dark beer.

“It’s great to see native American hops making their way into

ingredient matters. The work that the new breeding programs are doing expands the list of flavors that brewers have at their disposal. Experimental hops shape the beers of tomorrow in extraordinary ways.” These trending hop varieties will surely impact the brewing scene in a significant way in 2021.



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