



July 2012

This month's selections are both new beers to the Bay Area, and they're fittingly stout and warming for the chilly San Francisco summer. From New Zealand, which is experiencing the depths of winter right now, we've chosen a beer that's roasty and hoppily spicy, and from San Diego we've chosen a deep, dark imperial stout in protest of the SoCal sun. Enjoy!

Cheers,

Rich Higgins, Master Cicerone

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Pot Kettle Black

Yeastie Boys, Wellington, New Zealand

6.0% ABV \$/330 mL

New Zealand is enjoying a craft brewing explosion right now, and there's a delightful bit of cross-pollination with US craft brewing. The American craft beer movement has been built on a backbone of American hops, a collection of native and European hybrids that express remarkable citrusy and piney notes. Hops are flowers, and as such they're perfumey and pungent, and these aroma compounds help make American beers unique. In the never-ending experiment with beer ingredients and flavors, American craft brewers have increasingly sourced hops from New Zealand. Their hops are akin to American hops: bright and zesty, but they are less citrusy-leaning and instead have spicy, herbal hints combined with lush, tropical accents (mango, passion fruit, pineapple, ripe melon).

Yeastie Boys is a Wellington-based brewery making delicious beers that embrace an American boldness of flavor, with liberal use of New Zealand hops. The punny Yeastie Boys name is the brewers' attempt to remind a "too serious" artisan and gourmet scene to let its hair down and not get too precious; along those lines, their website proclaims its founding date as "Established in the future." The Yeastie Boys -- Stu McKinlay, a homebrewer since 1998, and business partner Sam Possenniskie -- turned pro in June of 2008, heading 600 miles south to the southern tip of the country to contract brew at Invercargill Brewery (a craft brewery in its own right since 1999). Their first brew was Pot Kettle Black, and it's been a flagship ever since.

PKB is a dark, hoppy, new-style beer -- basically what we'd call a black IPA in the US, with a tad more balance and maltiness, perhaps influenced by New Zealand's British influences. US black IPAs gain their dark color from the use of dehusked black malts which don't impart a lot of roasty flavor and bitterness. PKB is a bit richer than that, though, as its dark color comes from judicious use of chocolate and Black Patent malts. These malts' phenolic roastiness pairs beautifully with the New Zealand Cascade and Nelson Sauvin hops' spicy, herby character, though most of the hops' tropical overtones are sufficiently swaddled by the roasty malt. Yeastie Boys says the beer can be called an American porter, too, though I'd argue it's a little too bright and hop-driven for that moniker. It's in between the two styles, and embracing a delicious gray area is part of this Kiwi brewery's irreverent sense of adventure.

Pot Kettle Black pours a rusty charcoal color in your glass. Taking a smell, hints of malt, roast, woody herbs, mint, and gasoline dance forth. The palate is sage honey on toast with an ethereal char, and it finishes with a bitter, herbal, resinous stickiness. The beer's big malts are cut by the minerality and acidity of carbonation, resulting in a drinkable, medium-bodied beer. Overall, it's relatively clean and spare, both because of the mineral carbonation and the fact that it's not the dank, citrus bomb that it might be were it brewed in the US. It's got a worldliness and savvy that makes it hard to pin down, whisking you along in its travels among the kola nuts and cloves of the South Pacific Spice Islands, the sweet coffee of Vietnam, the hoppiness of the West Coast of the US, and finishing with an Alpine herbal amaro quality. (Along those Alpine amaro lines, it's not dissimilar to Fernet Branca, though without quite the intensity and heat.)

Enjoy it with crackers and a dry cheese like an aged cheddar or Wensleydale, or start a meal with it alongside steamed mussels with chorizo or a beet salad with sage. Some squid ink pasta with cream sauce and peperoncino wouldn't be a bad partner, either. Nor would Chinese



salt and pepper squid. Or Malaysian beef rendang. Or pastrami on rye. This beer is just great with all kinds of bold, spicy, herbal food.

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Wreck Alley Imperial Stout

Karl Strauss Brewing Company, San Diego, California, USA

9.5% ABV \$/22 oz.

San Diego is known in craft brewing circles as the hotbed of aggressive, super contemporary ales that push the limits of beer. Breweries like Stone, Green Flash, Port, and Lost Abbey challenge and awaken tastebuds with limitless hops, high alcohol, wild yeast, and barrel aging. Little known in the Bay Area is a San Diego brewery that's been brewing a line-up of more tried and true classics for almost 25 years. While breweries that survived the exuberance of the '90s and bust of the early 2000s feel rightfully that they've been around the block once or twice, Karl Strauss virtually built the block, opening its doors in 1989, the first brewpub in San Diego in over half a century. No dinosaur, Karl Strauss has kept up with the times with series of imperials, barrel-aged beers, and seasonals.

They're brewers of really quality beers, but I also respect the company greatly for taking the path less traveled. At a time when craft breweries set out to be different from the Big Three (Anheuser-Busch, Miller, and Coors) by brewing English- and new American-style ales, contemporaries like Saxer, Gordon Biersch, and Karl Strauss fought fire with fire, brewing full-flavored German-style lagers without cutting corners. The brewery's namesake, Karl Strauss, immigrated from Germany in the 1930s and spent 40 years as a bottler, brewer, and eventually VP of Production at Pabst Brewing Co. During the pre-opening planning phases of what was to become Karl Strauss Brewing Company, co-owner Chris Cramer called his cousin -- one Karl Strauss, the man who had put so much into the perfection of brewing lagers -- and coaxed him out of retirement to become the Brewmaster of the new brewing company. (Strauss's favorite beer was always his Amber Lager.) The company has grown, now with 6 brewpubs, yearly beer production of 44,000 barrels, with a plethora of added beers, and endowing a Brewers Education Fund with the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego. Until now, Karl Strauss beer has only been available in Southern California, but as of this last week of July, Karl Strauss is launching in the Bay Area, so you're holding some of the first Karl Strauss beer sold outside of SoCal. Enjoy Wreck Alley Imperial Stout -- it's certainly not one of the classics that the company opened up with, but it's a great beer, and one that shows the brewery can keep up with the youngsters.

Pour Wreck Alley into a snifter glass so that you can warm it in the palm of your hand and bury your nose in the glass, breathing deeply the aromas of coffee, cocoa, and burnt toast that emanate from its blackness. At first sip, the beer commandeers your palate for its dark deeds, coating your tongue with the thick, inky beer. The taste is roasty with undertones of dark chocolate, blackstrap molasses, cigar box, and red wine. As the beer warms, the prickly carbonation becomes more noticeable on the palate. Wreck Alley is more highly carbonated than most beers of this heft, and the bubbles break up the stout's intensity, leavening the beer and wafting roasty-fruity hints to the back of the throat and nose -- I get a flash of apple coated in burnt caramel, or maybe toasted almonds dusted with vanilla sugar. On the finish, the beer quits the scene with a hit of boozy alcohol and warm espresso -- tannic, lush, and lasting.

Most people think of this beer as a nightcap, but it's great with food (though I wouldn't serve it at the beginning of a meal). For savory partners, think coffee-rubbed braised beef short ribs, smoky, grilled rib-eye steak, or grilled portobello caps dripping with melted scamorza and finished with a dollop of toasted hazelnut pesto -- you want something that carries smoke and char well to echo the beer's intensely roasty malts, and you want something rich and fatty to stand up to the full-bodied beer. That said, desserts, are really this beer's bread and butter, so to speak. Anything decadently chocolatey, sweetly coffee-ish, or buttery and burnt toffee-ish will be smitten with this beer. Chocolate-chocolate chip cookies, semifreddo with double fudge brownie ice cream, mocha lava cake, and cocoa nib stroopwafels layered with burnt caramel -- they're all getting in Wreck Alley's line and taking numbers.