

Gorge Tasters Pick Favorite 7 Oregon IPAs

BY GAIL OBERST

Of the Oregon Beer Growler

Hood River's Volcanic Bottle Shoppe, owned by Amanda Goeke and Abe Stevens, was hopping last month. More than 30 people showed up to taste the IPAs contributed by Oregon brewers for the Perfect Pints consumer's choice event. Each month, the Oregon Beer Growler sponsors a blind tasting featuring a different style or category of Oregon beer.

Our resident beer champion, Will Oberst-Cairns, describes IPAs this way:

"The IPA is an interesting style of brew in that its historical origins are nearly lost in its current incarnation. Historically in England, people would load barrels of beer with dried out hops onto ships for long voyages to India. These hops imparted aromas and flavors to the beer that seemed to be quite desirable, and in this way, the India Pale Ale was born.

"Today, we have made a tradition of loading vast quantities of hops into beer to create the hoppy beers we enjoy today. The hops that we use today, though, are remarkably different and considerably stronger in bitterness, flavor, and aroma than in merry old England.

"There is a great variety of modern day hops available to brewers. As a result IPAs have a vast range of taste values, including pine, grapefruit, mint and pineapple, or any number of great flavors. Oregon's IPAs can also have a great range of strength. They can be as low as 3% alcohol by volume (ABV) or they can be stronger than most wines at 14% ABV. The colors and bodies can range from crystal clear to the color and texture of motor oil. Any kind of yeast from any country can be used. They can be served fresh from the fermenters or aged for years.

"But one thing sets IPAs apart, and that is the hop flavor. As long as it smacks of some local hop flavor, brewers can, and will, call it an IPA. So crack open your growler, make your best bitter beer face, and enjoy."

Following are the IPAs the Volcanic Bottle Shoppe's patrons chose as their favorites, in alphabetical order. They are listed with IBUs, International Bittering Units, which indicates the amount of hops added, but not always the degree of bitterness detectable in the beer:

BridgePort Hop Czar - 7.5% ABV, 87 IBUs
This popular BridgePort IPA is made with four hop varieties that are triple-hopped to give it an "aggressively bitter yet drinkable taste," according to company literature. Bottle conditioned for extra strength. Hop Czar blends Nugget, Chinook, Cascade and Centennial hops for a unique flavor. Tasters agreed: "Hop, hop, hoppy!" said one. "Best hop burp ever," said another, who said the hop finish was lasting into tomorrow. "Like floating down a cool hop river on hot day," remarked a fan.



Hood River tasters chose seven Oregon IPAs for this month's Perfect Pints tasting column. The IPAs are pictured above the city of Hood River and Mt. Hood.

Seven Oregon IPAs: One for Every Day of the Week

Pfriem IPA - 7.2% ABV, 65 IBUs

Sniff the piney aroma and taste the big hops, huge citrus and candy-like malt flavors, suggests Pfriem's literature. This Hood River brewery that opened in 2012 creates beers that are distinctly Northwest, but have a Belgian influence. Pfriem's IPA drew applause from locals. "It's like putting my head in a big bag of delicious fresh hops," said one taster. "Bright and yum, yum," said another. "Creamy, dreamy... what is it?" said one during the blind tasting.

Vertigo Friar Mike's IPA - 6.1% ABV, 62 IBU

Brewed using both American and English style malts then balanced with NW hops, this IPA provides a unique flavor with a citrusy hop finish, according to its brewer, Mike Kinion. Columbus, Amarillo and Cascade hops went into this recipe. Those who liked it noticed its lightness. "Good for a float down the river on a hot day," said one fan. "Northwest breakfast hop tea," described another. "Pretty close to excellent," said a taster. "Tastes like summer," said another.

GoodLife Descender IPA - 7.0% ABV, 70 IBU

Calling it a "hop-lover's dream," this Bend brew has won several people's choice awards since its release last year. Brewed with a process called "hop-bursting," Centennial, Chinook, Cascade, Galaxy and Warrior hops are blended into a malty concoction including NW Pale and Bonlander Munich. "It's like a refreshing Fresca, for adults," said one of the consumer tasters. "Zippity doo dah day!" exclaimed another, and several noted a wish to have more tastes of this brew. "It's what I expect and love from a good IPA," summed up one fan. "An orange sun shining through my bedroom window at 10 a.m., hitting an empty Pils glass, creating a kaleidoscope of colors on my pajama pants," said a would-be poet.

Long IPA - 6.2% ABV, No IBU listed

Paul Long claims his small brewery in rural Newberg produces "ales and lagers handcrafted without compromise." His American-style IPA with its six types of whole hops and its complex malt base is created using dry-hop methods to produce layers of citrusy and fruity character. "Wow! Slap me in the face and rub me down," reacted one taster. "Lovely for a never-ending summer afternoon," said another. "Double goodness! Big Nose," and "Yes! I need more," were among comments.

Lompoc C-Note - 6.9% ABV, 100 IBU

"The cure for all curses of the modern drinking class," according to the label, must involve a ton of hops. There are seven in this popular brew - Crystal, Cluster, Cascade, Chinook, Centennial, Columbus and Challenger - all of which, if you were reading closely, begin with "C." Also lending to its hundred-dollar name is its IBU, which is the highest of all brews tasted. Many tasters noted [despite its IBUs] a light, sweet flavor, although impressions were various. "Heavy duty," remarked one fan. "I'm nuts about this beer," said another. "Yum," and "I can taste the big IBUs," and "Pure IPA, like a sweet handful of Cascadia," were among comments.

Big Horse Pale Rider IPA - 6.2% ABV, 55 IBU

New brewer Darrek Smith has tweaked this popular recipe to suit his tastes, and it is now on tap at the Big Horse Brewery in Hood River. Smith has blended Muntions Maris, wheat, and Crystal 45 malts with three hops -- Cascade, Centennial and Simcoe, to create a brew that garnered a place among Hood River's favorite beers. "Just what I'm looking for," remarked one taster. "Oo la la, I'm having an astronaut Tang moment," said another, noting orange and tangerine flavors. "Hop heaven," "good fit for a road trip," and "smells like spring, tastes like fall," were among comments.

PHOTO BY PETER MARBACH, ART BY CHERYL MCLEAN