

BEER BUZZ

American Pale Ale – The Sierra Nevada Story (Part 2 of 4)

by Joey Williams

After Fritz Maytag and other pioneers brought artisanal brewing back from the pre-Prohibition era, a movement began. People all over America were bringing home stories of beers had while abroad. Many of these people started home-brewing as a hobby, despite the activities less than legal standings. In fact, home-brewing wasn't legalized in the United States until 1979, when President Jimmy Carter signed an Act to permit home beer and wine making. The revolution had begun.



Home-brewers soon became professional brewers and well-established, well-educated people started making the risky jump into craft beer brewing.



However, few of these career jumping daredevils have had the success of homebrew shop owner turned craft beer pioneer, Ken Grossman. Founder of Sierra Nevada Brewing Company in Chico, California, Grossman has become a legend in the craft beer community and

the beer that started that journey to such status is just as legendary, the Sierra Nevada Pale Ale.

Up until 1980, the Pale Ale was a beer of British tradition. The bottled version of the popular English Bitter, a Pale Ale was traditionally amber in color, with a bready malt flavor and satisfying hop bitterness derived from classic English hops. English varieties were good, but Grossman was going to do one better. Using ingredients traditional to the style in conjunction with new domestic ingredients, He crafted a full-bodied, lightly sweet, spicy and citrusy pale ale. Sierra Nevada Pale Ale was an instant classic, emulated by home and professional brewers alike. The beer can be found in home refrigerators, gas stations, stadiums and most delicious of all, pizza joints all over the country.



Soon American-Style Pale Ales found their way into nearly every professional brewer's lineup. Even today, you'll find that many breweries are judged based on the quality of their Pale Ales. Many breweries, like Texas' very own Real Ale Brewing, add their own twist to the standard lineup of ingredients to set themselves apart from the herd. Real Ale's Full Moon Pale Rye is an all time favorite of mine. With an interesting grainy bread quality from the generous portion of rye malt paired with the familiar spicy, citrus hop notes and a level of bitterness that makes it amazingly quaffable, Full Moon Pale Rye is a must try for anyone wanting to see a Texas brewer shine.

On occasion, fruit has even made its way to the party, sometimes with surprising results. Magic Hat Brewing of Vermont is new to the Texas beer scene, but not new to people who like flavorful beers. Magic Hat #9 is billed as a "Not Quite Pale Ale", a nod to aspects not typical of pale ales, like apricots. The light caramel sweetness, fruity yeast and hop aromas are accented by a subtle addition of Apricots. Don't confuse this beer with a fruit beer though, it's all pale ale.

Back in Chico California, Ken Grossman and company are still shipping out the same sort of style defining and envelope pushing beers they were nearly 30 years ago. In 1996 Sierra Nevada, in conjunction with hop farmers in the Pacific Northwest, produced an American Pale ale using whole, freshly harvested "wet hops". Hops, like herbs, are dried because of a very short shelf-life, but unlike herbs, fresh hops have a depth of flavor unrivaled by their dried version. The only problem was that these gems were only available at the brewery each fall during the harvest season. Finally, in 2007, Sierra Nevada Harvest Ale began showing up on store shelves in bottles. Another instant classic was born. Fans flock to stores each Fall to get their fresh hop fix.

In 1980, many would say, the American-Style of craft brewing was born. Traditional styles recreated using large amounts of domestically harvested ingredients, experimentation, assertive flavors and our love of pushing the envelope have become our style. ☺



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Oktoberfest Events around the State

WurstFest

October 30th through November 8th. A "Ten Day Salute to Sausage," Wurstfest has been drawing visitors to the German-influenced Hill Country town of New Braunfels for over four decades. In the early days, when it was still known as a sausage festival, the event drew a few thousand. Today, well over 100,000 people attend the event annually. See what a little beer can do!!!

