

BEER BUZZ:

THE GREAT HOP SHIFT

by Joey Williams



Even Belgian styles are seeing a rise in hop usage, both in the US and at home in Belgium. The Belgian IPA I mentioned in the last article is a type of Belgian strong pale ale with the hop bill of an IPA. The Belgian yeast and the fruity, herbal hops complement each other so well that other styles eventually began to incorporate the combination more. Saison, a style already containing a fair bit of hop character, is a personal favorite in its

traditional form. The balance between yeast, malt and hops is a delicate one and I was uncertain of any brewer that said they could increase the hop impact without negatively affecting the other two components. For the most part I was right in my assumptions, until I tried Tank 7 Farmhouse Ale from Boulevard Brewing. The beer isn't overly aggressive or bitter, the hop impact doesn't come from bales of hops added during the brewing process that results in a beer more likely to turn your face inside out than bring a smile to it. No, the hop intensity comes after the brewing when the beer is dry-hopped with Amarillo varietal hops. The result is an absolutely captivating aroma of candied citrus, tropical fruit, florals and honey and a beer that balances yeast fruitiness, malt body and hop bitterness with a dry finish.

The shift in preference over time is most notable in hop presence, but isn't exclusive to that quality. But, as Americans start to view bitterness less and less as a negative, the shift will continue. Every beer won't become a palate scrubbing, enamel scraping quadruple IPA, but they will incorporate more of those lovely green flowers that provide a myriad of flavors and aromas that continue to captivate drinkers and brewers alike. ☺



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In my last article I talked about hops and how the IPA has become the cornerstone of the craft beer movement. What I didn't cover is that it wasn't always that way. The IPA was a dying style in England, a shell of its former self, and was essentially unknown to the US market when things kicked off big in the 80s. It was the Pale Ale, thanks to Ken Grossman and Sierra Nevada, that headed up the charge into the 90s. Gradually, styles got more assertive in all respects, hop flavor and bitterness included.



The Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) is an association that assigns guidelines to beer styles for judging in commercial and home brewer competitions. These guidelines are re-issued every couple of years to adjust for new styles, growing trends and shifting palates. Over the last few decades, the BJCP has adjusted many American and international styles to skew towards bigger hop

impact. Pale Ales and India Pale Ales weren't the only beers getting an extra helping of leafy goodness.

The humble Pilsner is a simple beer often composed of a single malt, a single hop and fermented with a traditional lager yeast. The equation doesn't necessarily warrant shock and awe, but the results are almost always enjoyable in their simplicity. However, not even the bare bones Pilsner could avoid the shift when American brewers decided to turn things up. Brewers like those at Victory in Pennsylvania took the style into hop head territory. Prima Pils, their take on a Czech Pilsner, is packed full of hop aroma, flavor and bitterness. The beer is still very much a pilsner, with a crisp body and grainy malt core, but the hop impact rivals some IPAs.

The hop shift and the Pilsner weren't done. The new Imperial trend brought the Pilsner back into focus. Not satisfied with the standard strength beer and more aggressive hop character that had been created earlier, brewers wanted more of both and the Imperial Pilsner was born. Samuel Adams Imperial Pilsner is the most well known of the style, but other producers are trying their hand. Mikkeller, the nomad brewer from Europe, created Draft Bear as a variation of the style using American hops for a Pilsner meets Imperial IPA effect.

The American Wheat Beer is a style born from the German Hefeweizen. Using domestic ingredients and a cleaner yeast strain, brewers created a refreshing wheat beer with pronounced hop aroma and flavor in place of yeast fruit and spice. Over the years these beers have gone from mild thirst quenchers to wheat pale ales. Last summer Lagunitas released Little Sumpin' Sumpin' Ale, a beer with the refreshing qualities of a wheat beer and the citrusy hop intensity of an IPA. Little Sumpin' Extra Ale came a few months later to deliver more of the same. Traditional German wheat beers got a bit of buzz a few years back when Schneider & Sohns teamed up with Garret Oliver of Brooklyn Brewery to create the Hopfen Weisse collaborations. Each brewery released their version of a strong wheat beer with a bigger focus on hops.

MARCH IS TEXAS BEER MONTH

Spec's is showing it's **TEXAS PRIDE** in March. Select Crafted Texas Beers will be on sale throughout March. Stay tuned for more information!

NEW ON SHELVES AT SPEC'S DOWNTOWN:

Boulevard/Orval Collaboration Imperial Pilsner 750ml
Mikkeller Draft Bear Imperial Pilsner 750ml
Mikkeller Not Just Another Wit 750ml
Stone Old Guardian Barleywine 22oz
Left Hand 400 Pound Monkey English IPA 6pk
Harpoon Celtic Ale 6pk
Imperial Cerveza (Costa Rica) 6pk

