

# BEER BUZZ:

## SLEEPING GIANT AWAKENED?

by Justin Cody

As I have said many times before, Texas is smack dab in the middle of a craft beer explosion. New Texas breweries are popping up almost monthly. That, coupled with all the new breweries entering Texas and the influx of their beers, makes it inevitable that some low volume brands will be squeezed out. I chalk it up to the price we must pay for more beer, a survival of the fittest scenario, if you will. We all have our bets on the first few brands destined to fall. But, I must admit, one particular brand I had on my "death watch" list has come back in a big way.



BridgePort Brewing, located in Portland, Oregon was a clear cut favorite of mine to fall by the wayside during the hustle and

bustle of our rapid craft beer boom. They were going through a slow death as wholesaler by wholesaler cut their products one by one to make room for new items. Soon they were left with only their IPA to defend themselves. Doesn't seem like much, but in Texas, IPAs and hops thrive.

BridgePort was a pioneer in the craft beer industry and recently celebrated their 25th Anniversary back in 2009. But since helping craft beer gain momentum, BridgePort seemed to hold steady for years to come. What was once a cutting edge portfolio soon became the same beers being brewed at every microbrewery across the country. For beer drinkers located outside the Pacific Northwest, it quickly got to the point where they had nothing else to offer consumers that wasn't being brewed by a local brewery. For a brand playing on a national level, keeping attention and consumer focus on their brand is a game of life and death. With a limited portfolio range, especially here in Texas, this was a game they fell behind in fast.

But, against all odds, BridgePort has hung on and re-engaged national consumers by producing some innovative beers that helped get the life blood flowing once again. It started with Hop Czar, an Imperial IPA. Not only is this a great beer, but an outstanding value. A double IPA for under eight dollars is a steal and has allowed them to stay viable in an increasingly competitive market. Hop Czar's blend of Nugget, Chinook, Cascade and Centennial hops is kept in delicate balance by its big malt backbone. Citrus and pine aromas paired with flavors of subtle caramel and reiseny hops make this beer a must try.

Their next move was the release of King Pin Double Red Ale. Did I mention hops were big in Texas? Kingpin is another beer that BridgePort triple hops and as a result takes an average beer style to the next level. Kingpin is hopped using Liberty Hops, a very rare hop variety grown in the Willamette Valley. Rye malt is also a part of the grain bill and imparts a bigger body and malt flavor profile to stand up to the aggressive hopping.

As if the brewery once on the brink of extinction didn't have enough momentum already, around the same time Kingpin was rolled out, Café Negro was released. Café Negro is a porter infused with a special blend of coffee developed by several Portland area coffee roasters. What sets Café Negro apart from other coffee porters is that the base beer is infused with the coffee during cold conditioning. This allows the beer to retain subtle coffee nuances that would otherwise be lost during the boil and fermentation.

Next week we are scheduled to receive Highland Ambush, a Scotch Ale from their Big Brews Series. Available in 22oz bottles, Highlander is a big bodied malt bomb. Brewed with Scottish Crystal Malt and roasted Chocolate Malt, the resulting beer has complex caramel and toffee notes. The beer is then aged in Maker's Mark barrels fresh from the distillery. The barrels add another layer of complexity with the addition of vanilla, oak and American bourbon flavors.

I have to take my hat off to what BridgePort has done to return as a craft brewing front runner. They could have very easily pulled out of a lot of markets and remained content doing business exclusively in Pacific Northwest. Their commitment to producing innovative beers has me excited about what the future holds for the brewery. If you have forgotten about BridgePort, I recommend revisiting their beers and checking out their new products. I think you will be just as pleased as I have been. ☺



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