

# BEER BUZZ:

## BEER I'D LIKE TO AGE

by Joey Williams



Last week, on Black Friday, we were fortunate enough to receive a very limited quantity of two infamous beers from Brewdog, Tactical Nuclear Penguin and Sink the Bismark! These two beers have incredibly high alcohol contents, 32% and 41% respectively, and come with price tags to match their lofty ABVs and rarity. These unique circumstances have many asking a lot of questions about when to open their bottles, how to store them until that time and with whom to share such treasures with. These questions are the heart and soul of “beer cellaring”, a movement that is quickly picking up steam, but has more than likely been going on as long as beer has been made. In this article I will do my best to regurgitate all that I have read, learned and experienced in the way of storing and saving beer so that you might be able to enjoy your own cellared beer down the line.

First, we have to address the obvious, why would a person want to age a beer? The “born on” and “best by” dates on most beer packages have many consumers feeling like their beer will spoil like milk at some point. The way that this dating should be viewed is that a brewery has an ideal taste that they wish for their consumers to experience and after the date given that flavor will have changed and no longer be what the brewery intended. It is very likely that the change won't be noticeable to most until long after any suggested date passes, but it's a way for a brewery to make sure that what is being bought in the market is what they intended to sell. A consumer can decide to age beers for two basic reasons, an interest in the development of certain flavor profiles or the curiosity of what might or can happen to the beer. With the lack of knowledge and experience with aging beer, more often than not the second reason is most often the reason.

During the aging process, several things will take place in a beer that will impact the flavor and perception of the beer. The first thing that will occur is that the delicate flavor and aroma compounds associated with hops and yeast will diminish. What this means is that the floral and citrus flavors in your IPA will fade and you'll be left with a bitter beer without the dynamic flavors to accompany it, or your German Hefeweizen will lose its banana and clove aromatics and become a refreshing, but lacking wheat beer. Bitterness from hops and darkly roasted malts also begins to fade and the malt will begin to take on more caramel, toffee and honey flavors. Both of these occurrences will lead the aged beer to seem sweeter and richer than it did when it was fresh. As with wine and liquor, alcohol heat and bite will also fade and mellow. The overall flavor of the beer will meld and become more integrated, like a soup or stew left in the refrigerator a few days.

Oxygen is the enemy of beer, because oxygen creates off flavors and unwanted stalling in beer. The presence of oxygen can lead to musty wet paper/cardboard flavors, the aroma of Sherry or Madeira wine or even soy sauce. Oxygen can also cause the darkening of color in a beer. If you're curious to see what oxygen can lead to, just leave the last of a beer in your glass overnight at home, the next day look at it and smell it, not good. All of these effects can be desirable in small quantities and add to the richness and complexity of an aged beer, but only in small amounts. Crown caps and corks provide good closures for beer, but they aren't perfect, small amounts of oxygen get in over time. Allowing a beer to age too long can lead to unwanted levels of oxidation and off flavors.

Downtown we are fortunate enough to have a large selection of beers with some great potential for aging, but to get you started, here are a few of our favorites:



### North Coast Old Stock Ale

Old Stock is amazing beer when it's fresh, but it does have a prominent alcohol presence that is bordering on hot. Aging this strong ale will help to mellow all of that alcohol and bring out dark fruit and wine flavors and create a beer worthy of a brandy snifter and possibly a smoking jacket.



### Brewdog/Mikkeller Devine Rebel '10

I tried this beer the day we first received it, as a celebration of something I can't remember at the moment, and my enjoyment of the beer was blunted by a hop bitterness that I thought was out of balance with the rest of the beer. Some time spent in a cellar should reduce that bitterness to a more appropriate level and provide that added bonus of accentuating the malt and barrel character. I look forward to this one in a year or so.



### Unibroue Terrible

One of the best beers I have ever had was a 2004 Unibroue Terrible in 2007. The flavors were so rich and deep. Terrible provides a nice alternative to those that already cellar Chimay Grand Reserve (blue label), because both beers develop a similar vinous character with dark fruit and brandy flavors.



### Mikkeller It's Alive!

Bottle-conditioned with my favorite wild yeast, Brettanomyces, It's Alive! will lose the hop bitterness I felt stuck out in the fresh version and continue to develop the earthy, spicy flavor associated with Brett. It's Alive! is a great alternative to Orval, a cellar staple for many, but neither is recommended to be stored for longer than a handful of years.

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### Widmer Brrrbon

This beer presents a unique opportunity to beer drinkers. Brrrbon is a bourbon barrel-aged version of the brewery's winter seasonal Brrr. Trying the two side by side, a beer drinker can see the affects of four months in a bourbon barrel on a beer. Brrrbon has taken on a bit of wood tannin and astringency from the barrel that I think will fade and add to the complexity of the beer in six months to a year. Along with the fading of the tannins into more favorable elements, I think the malt will concentrate and the flavors imparted by the barrel will become more apparent.



### Samichlaus

A 14% ABV double bock out of Austra only brewed one day a year, Samichlaus used to hold the Guinness World's Record for strongest lager. The beer is rich and sweet with a noticeable alcohol warmth. I was fortunate enough to pick up some old bottles of this beer in a little shop in New Orleans before we got it in Texas. This beer is the most reminiscent of port wine that I have had. Age will help to mellow the huge alcohol, concentrate a lot of the fruit and malt flavors along with providing some oxidation flavors to help balance the richness.

No matter what you choose to age or how you decide to store it, know that you will get mixed results. Like with aging wine, aging beer is a crap shoot. Beer does things in the bottle over time that is still a mystery and not much research has been put into the goings on of an aging bottle of beer. The good, and even great, experiences far outweigh the bad though. The key to aging beer is to make sure that you have enough beer on hand so that you don't get tempted to dip into your stash. It also doesn't hurt to buy multiple bottles of something you want to age and try it every six months or a year. After that, just wait and keep an open mind, you'll be rewarded for your efforts and patience. ☺



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## NEW ON SHELVES AT SPEC'S DOWNTOWN:

Brewdog Tactical Nuclear Penguin 12oz

Brewdog Sink the Bismark! 12oz

Rogue Chatoe Creek 22oz

Rogue Santa's Private Reserve 22oz

Avery The Czar 22oz

Duvel Triple Hop 750ml

Samichlaus 750ml

Samichlaus Helles 750ml

Delirium Noel 750ml

Boulevard 21st Anniversary Fresh Hop Ale 750ml

Dogfish Head Squall IPA 750ml

Mikkeller Santa's Little Helper '10 750ml

Mikkeller Red & White Christmas '10 1.5L

Victory Yakima Glory 6pk

Sierra Nevada Celebration 6pk & 12pk

Real Ale Coffee Porter 6pk

Rahr & Sons Winter Warmer 6pk

New Belgium Frambozen 6pk

Harpoon Winter Warmer 6pk

