



Celebration Brews

Seasonal and specialty beers allow brewers to indulge their creativity to produce something a little left of field. CHARLES COLL takes a look at some of the available examples that should generate plenty of consumer interest.



Seasonal and specialty beers are the lifeline of craft breweries. Just as the hearing impaired use their hands to voice their thoughts, brewers employ unusual beer styles to express their emotions and passions. It's a liquid chronicle of historical events, life experiences and announcements of importance, such as births and deaths. The recent Craft Brewers Showcase in Melbourne proved specialty beer offerings are alive and well. It is also good to see local and state governments supporting their hometown breweries. Here are a few excellent examples of specialty ales that tick all the right boxes and are worthy of a tipple or two.

Grayston Reserve Vintage Ale

It was a sombre crowd from Matilda Bay when we last caught up, after the announcement their birthplace brewery in Fremantle would close. But the team at The Garage in Dandenong, Victoria, are not ones to mope. So in a moment of ale-inspired genius, the team decided it was fitting to celebrate the birth of brewer Scotty Player's first son, Jake Grayston Player, with their second vintage beer. Head brewer Brad Rogers said they don't under-estimate the freedom they have to name the beer Grayston Reserve Vintage Ale 07. "But it does create interest for the consumer and bottle shop - the 'what's new' factor," he said. "It's a continuum of the MB21, which celebrated 21 years in the business."

"Grayston Reserve is a vintage product using German yeast and the classic Hersbrucker hop to provide a spicy, resinous herbaceous character. It's then brewed with a blend of five malts, which combined with the yeast fermentation characteristics, gives the beer chocolate and toffee flavours and aromas of citrus, cloves and bananas. There's no other Dunkelweisen on the market like it. Of the 50 per cent barley, 50 per cent malt mixture, the wheat is unmalted and contains two types of crystal providing the high floral fruit esters to create the dry finish with no bitterness."

Grayston Reserve was designed for the fridge and cellar. "We've worked hard to create a beer that will age well but also taste great for those people who just can't control themselves and won't be able to resist drinking it now," Rogers said. "I recommend getting a hold of a few bottles so you can drink some now and cellar the rest for a few years and watch it develop."

Pepperjack Hand Crafted Ale

Another project for the Matilda Bay brewers has been changing wine into beer. As a winemaker in a previous life, Brad Rogers jumped at the chance to create a wine-based beer when asked to team up with Nigel Dolan from the Barossa's Pepperjack Winery. Pepperjack Hand Crafted Ale is brewed using Barossa Shiraz grapes from the 2006 vintage with a blend of pale barley malts, wheat malts and carefully-selected specialty hops. These individually-selected aromatic hops were added late in the boil to bring out the grape characters of this unique beer. The final challenge was finding the

correct yeast to ferment everything together, with Dolan choosing an authentic American pale ale yeast, which again enhances this very aromatic beer.

"Beer and wine have a common synergistic origin, but they look very different," Dolan said. "The brewing process has parallels with winemaking. In both, you are converting natural, raw ingredients into fermented juices. Winemaking is often trial and error. Occasionally we think 'let's try that and see what happens' and that happens in brewing as well... This new beer fuses a solid wine heritage with a fresh take on beer flavours to produce a distinctive brew for today's growing number of craft beer drinkers."

Jamieson Beast India Pale Ale

Jeff Whyte, brewer and proprietor of the Lakeside Pub brewery, below the Victorian snowfields in Jamieson, has an adventurous spirit. Each year he heads over with his mates to New Zealand for a spot of trout fishing. I caught up with him in America at the Beer World Cup where he was enthusiastically embracing the surge in craft beer's popularity. Part of the experience was to sample the wide range of beer styles, particularly the overwhelming popularity of pale ales to the region. Now, for a brewer who put Raspberry ale on tap at a country hotel, it was only a matter of time before this big hoppy IPA appeared as part of his repertoire.

"We have added six hops including the Northwest US hop Chinook to this Beast and you will find a mix of sweet caramel fudge with a spicy pine and citrus aroma," Whyte said. "It has a full, balanced body with strong bitterness, nice round mouthfeel with some alcohol warmth on the palate, plus a foamy, dense off-white head with good retention and lots of lacing. A long dry quenching hop finish caps off a well-rounded beast of a beer, all very balanced and all very satisfying. A tremendous drop indeed." With the cartoon-like label, this beer should work well for Father's Day and Christmas.

3 Ravens Dark Ale

The 3 Ravens Dark was inspired by two imported beers, German Schlenkerla Ruachbeir (Smoked beer) and Alaskan small brewery's Baltic Smoked Porter, which proved very popular at the company bar downstairs from the engineering firm that foots the bill for their own brewery. The Raven boys have a simple philosophy, as brewer Ben Pattison said. "We only brew what we like to drink ourselves for our entertainment," he said. "Sessionability and acceptability are crucial to us and found the smoked beers had integrity, a friendly ambassadorial quality."

According to brewer Marcus Cox, it's actually a blend of their three beers, with the Blonde comprising 80 per cent of the blend plus craft black malt from Bamberg, Germany, the home of smoked malts. "So I suppose it can be classified as a Blonde smokey sweet altbeer," Cox said. "Its smokey flavour is achieved by exposing the malt to the intense, aromatic smoke of burning beech-wood logs at the Schlenkerla-maltings, where it matures in 700-year-old cellars."