

# Peninsula Pint

by Travis Guterson

"...to a certain degree take things seriously."



I've always embraced and eagerly anticipated the changing of seasons. Perhaps it's the autumnal air-crisp and cleansing, the soft hues that color Northwest foliage reminding us that entropy is a fact of the world, or maybe it's the arrival of fall produce: local apples, and the harvesting of pumpkins. However, before the rainy, dark months of late fall and winter begin their relentless stampede of glorious misery, we are given the mirthful month of September. Surely, there is no better way to celebrate the last cooperative days of clear weather than hosting one's own beer gathering and tasting event. There are innumerable ways of doing

so, but I suggest keeping a few important guidelines in mind when organizing such an event.

One should keep the number of guests to a maximum of eight—if you're a one-dimensional beer geek like myself this does not pose a dilemma. Invite only those who you think will enjoy, appreciate and to a certain degree take things seriously. It's imperative that the tasting be conducted in a room, deck, or patio where your senses aren't competing with other smells, tastes, or major distractions. I recommend keeping the number of beer styles under evaluation to four or five and the servings to about four ounces. This ensures that no-

body leaves too inebriated and that your sensory analysis skills function properly through the duration of the event.

Fortunately, in the Northwest it is easy to find a local grocery store, specialty bottle shop, or brew pub that carries a varied spectrum of beer styles for purchase. I encourage that for every style under review, that at least two or three different beers are obtained. It is important that the beers are arranged from "lightest" to most assertive during the tasting so as not to compromise one's sense of smell and gustation by the final couple of styles.

In addition, the beers should be kept refrigerated until about twenty-five min-

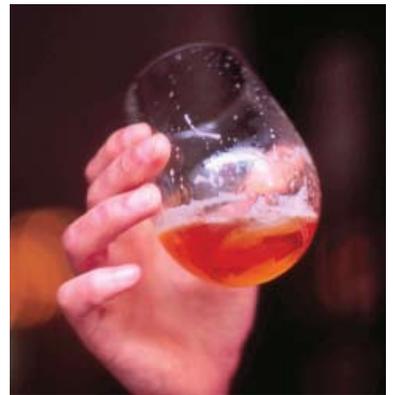
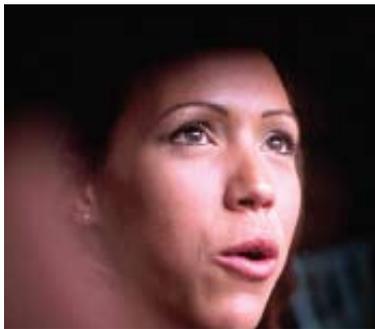
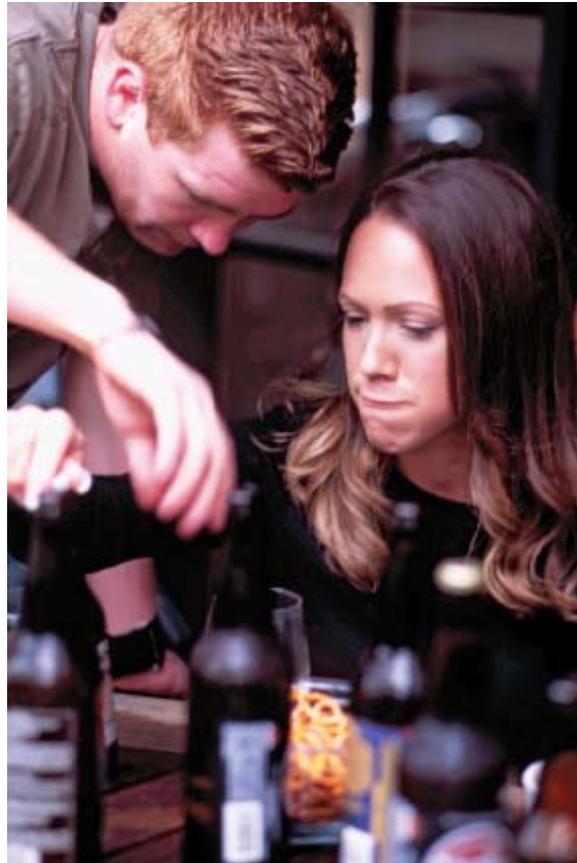


color is it? Is it hazy or clear? Is there a dissipating head of foam, and how is the carbonation behaving? If the label indicates that the beer is “bottle conditioned,” meaning refermented in the bottle, one should check for a yeast sediment at the bottom of the bottle. Overall, ask yourself, does it look inviting and beckon for a sip? Second, swirl the beer vigorously around the glass so as to release its aroma. Place your nose deeply in the glass and concentrate on what you’re smelling. Is it predominately malty or hoppy? Either way, what do you detect. Is it candyish, fruity (citrusy, or ripe fig), bready, toasty, coffeeish, chocolatey, caramelly, or do you notice something off-putting, such as, cardboard (oxidized), butter (diacetyl), cooked vegetable (Di-methyl sulfide), or harsh alcohol (ethanol). These are all common words used to describe beer, but one shouldn’t hesitate to note any aroma they identify, even if it seems absurd. If the beer smells

hoppy, is it floral, perfumy, earthy, piny, or does it smell like stinky cheese? Some of the beer’s aromas might seem elusive, but focus and you’ll be surprised at the nuances you notice.

Third, taste the beer with a medium sized sip. What are the flavors, and how is the body? Is it viscous, or thin? The tongue can only identify sweet, salty, sour, and bitter, but when used in combination, almost any flavor can be perceived. How is the carbonation? Does it linger or disappear quickly? Does it taste cloyingly sweet (too much residual sugar), or overly dry and astringent (puckering sensation)? Again, don’t be alarmed if you taste hints of leather, soap, smoke, or pepper, just write it down and feel fortunate to have such an evolved, highly tuned palate.

utes prior to pouring because the colder the beer, the less aroma and flavor will be detectable. Glassware should be rinsed between each beer and oversized for a four ounce pour so sufficient swirling of the glass can release the beer’s bouquet. As a host or facilitator of such an event, I would instruct each participant to take private notes on four essential components of proper beer evaluation. First, just as we visually inspect our food for aesthetic value, consequently influencing how we perceive its smell and taste, one should examine a beer’s appearance. What



Fourth, reflect and make a final judgment by rating the beer from one to ten. Was the beer balanced, striking a harmony between all its variables? Was it perhaps overly hoppy, but still pleasant and well structured? Here, one can be subjective, what did you like and dislike about it? Was it true to style—was there enough hop character to call it a proper India pale ale, or enough roast to call it a stout? After everyone in the group has finished, open the table for discussion. Then rinse glasses and repeat.

As a responsible host, plenty of water should be available to stay hydrated and slices of bread should be on hand to help cleanse the palate and help absorb all the alcohol.

I suggest starting with five different styles. For example, round one could

consist of mass marketed American or European Lager (Budweiser, Miller, Coors, Heineken, or Becks.) Round two would include American Craft-brewed pale ales (Bridgeport Blue Heron Pale Ale, Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, or Fish Brewing Co. Pale Ale). For round three, move on to amber ales (New Belgium's Fat Tire, Full Sail Amber Ale, or Bass Ale, technically an English Pale Ale, but ultimately more of an amber). Round four could be India pale ales (Widmer Brother's Broken Halo IPA, Stone Brewing Co. IPA, and Snoqualmie Falls Wildcat IPA). Lastly, finish with stouts and porters (Guinness, Deschutes Brewing Co. Black Butte Porter, and North Coast's Old Rasputin Imperial Stout). All said beers are widely available throughout the Northwest, but also try to include some beers from smaller operations—perhaps only available at the source. Anything from Elysian Brewing Co. (Seattle), Silver city Brewing Co. (Silverdale), Port Townsend Brewing Co. (Port Townsend), or Lazy Boy Brewing Co. (Everett) Yaletown Brewing Co. (Vancouver BC),

Spinnaker's Brew Pub (Victoria, BC), Grand Teton Brewing Co (Victor, ID), are all unlikely to disappoint.

Surely, the point of such an event is to have fun and enjoy the company of each other. However, it's also to become more informed and familiar with the varied and sometimes daunting selection of all the beer we have available here in the Northwest. After all, the more we know about beer, the more enjoyable and rewarding our beer drinking experience is.

Cheers! ▶