

# Vintage Beer

## AND VERTICAL TASTINGS

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

Last month we looked at the upside to selling vintage beer and the increasing interest beer connoisseurs have in experiencing the changing complexity of beer over time. But as a retailer how do you effectively let your consumers know that your store is offering vintage beer and how do you introduce the joys of vintage brands to a wider range of beer customers? Vertical tastings are the answer.

Vertical tastings are becoming very popular, and they are an event that is unique, will take a little coordination with your distributors and brewers, but will certainly be an event that can make your store or restaurant standout. Unlike the beer dinner that requires a bit of partnering and planning with a cooking team, this type of event is less about food and more about the evolving flavors of beer.

### VERTICAL TASTINGS: THE VINTAGE BEER EXPERIENCE



In his book *Vintage Beer: A Taster's Guide to Brews That Improve Over Time* (Storey Publishing), Patrick Dawson explains the joys of aged beer and the unique flavors and aromas that develop over time. Patrick knows firsthand that some consumers might not be overly open to aged beer, but hosting a

vertical tasting can be great opportunity to get your customer base on board.

**BT:** So what started your interest in vintage beer?

**PD:** A friend brought a magnum of Duvel to a party. It was one of my favorite beers at the time and I was super excited until she triumphantly told me that it had been aged for three years. I was disappointed upon hearing this since all my experience with aged beers up to that point had been bad, finding time apt to turn once great beers into stale, bland messes. But as soon as I tasted it I realized I couldn't have been more wrong. The slight booziness in a fresh Duvel was now totally gone, and replaced with a candy-like sweetness. And there was also a new edge of tropical fruitiness that had emerged that I've never before experienced. I was hooked after that.

**PD:** There seems to be a lot of buzz around "vertical tastings" - can you explain the concept? Would this be a good event for beer retailers to host?

**PD:** A vertical tasting is when you drink bottles of the same beer, but from a span of years. For example, opening 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 bottles of Alaskan Brewing's Smoked Porter and tasting them sequentially. Vertical tastings are a fun way to experience how a beer changes over time, and would be the perfect way to introduce a customer to the concept of cellaring beer. While the vertical tasting concept was born in the wine world, it actually is much more conducive to beer. This is



because brewers are able to typically replicate the same beer each year, whereas a wine will change each year depending on the weather.

**BT:** Brewers are usually aware of which of their brands are best for aging and are known to have various vintages in storage. Any suggestions for brands that might be good for vertical tastings?

**PD:** Five beers to build a vertical tasting would be:

- Goose Island Bourbon County Brand Stout
- Alaskan Smoked Porter
- Sierra Nevada's Bigfoot
- Samichlaus
- Deschutes Abyss

### ARE YOU THINKING OUT-OF-THE-BOX?

How innovative is your store at selling beer? We would like to know. If you have promotions that go beyond refilling the cold box, we would like to hear from you and share your "out-of-the-box" thinking with our fellow *Beer Trends* readers.

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