

Hybrid Beer-Wines:

An Opportunity to Appeal to Both Worlds

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

Craft brewers have been following the wine industry playbook for quite awhile. Looking to the promotion of “dinner bottles,” food pairings, beer cooking recipes, beer tastings, and certified beer Cicerons. These are all the tactics that were originally used to expand the popularity of wine.

Now a few craft brewers are seizing the opportunity to apply their brewing creativity to incorporate the tart, dry, sweet complexity of grapes into their brews, potentially pulling together wine and craft beer connoisseurs.

Available beer-wines

Although other fruit based beers can be one dimensional, the wide variety of grapes, champagne and wine yeasts, along with wine barrel aging, allow beer-wine brands to offer a high level of appeal. Like most styles developed by US craft brewers, it is less about rigid style guidelines and more about creatively combining the best combination of flavors to produce the best beer experience.

Currently, the number of available beer-wines is limited, and aside from the use of grapes, each is brewery’s approach to crafting a beer-wine is unique.

Brewer: Odell

Brand: Amuste (9.3% ABV)

Amuste is an Imperial Porter brewed with grape must from Tempranillo grapes grown on the Western Slope of Colorado and aged for six months in red wine barrels.

Amuste boasts a hearty malt backbone with notes of chocolate, a subtle sweet grape character, and hints of toasted almond from the oak barrels. Odell’s says

that the brand pairs well with peppered red meats, brie cheese, or dark chocolate.

Brewer: Allagash

Brand: Victoria Ale (9% ABV)

Victoria Ale is pale copper in color and brewed with over two hundred pounds of Chardonnay (Vidal Blanc in 2010) grapes, crushed on site and added directly to the mash. Victoria Ale’s has an aroma of fruity spice, and offers subtle notes of green banana, black pepper, and fresh-crushed mint. This ale has a wine-like grape character, the complexity of Belgian yeast, and a long candied fruit finish with hints of honeydew melon, and white wine grapes.

Allagash says that the brand pairs well with Pork & Slawiches, Smoked Salmon, Stilton Cheese or Mussels.

Brewer: Blue Moon

Brand: Proximity™ (8.5% ABV)

Proximity is soft gold in color, and brewed with the juice of Sauvignon Blanc grapes, New Zealand Nelson Sauvignon hops, and 100% white wheat.

The beer offers crisp, effervescent, citrus, floral, and herbal notes. Blue Moon recommends pairing Proximity with light fish, sushi, and salads with vinegar-based dressings.

Brewer: Dogfish Head

Brand: Noble Rot (9% ABV)

Noble Rot is brewed with pils and wheat malts, the must, from Viognier grapes that have been infected with a botrytis, pinot gris must, and fermented with a distinct Belgian yeast strain.

“This is the absolute closest to equal meshing of the wine world and the beer world that’s ever been done commercially,” says Dogfish’s Sam Calagione.

Nobel Rot is a Saison style of beer, pale yellow in color, with a spicy white wine body and a dry, tart finish. Dogfish Head recommends pairing Nobel Rot with crab, lobster, and Gouda.

The opportunity

Don’t think wine drinkers will cross over? The October 11, 2013 Beer Business Daily reported that according to a study from John Gillespie, president of Wine Market Council and chief of Wine Opinions, a quarter of high frequency wine drinkers, drink beer daily or several times a week. So, beer-wine offers a great opportunity to promote tasting events that can attract both your beer and wine consumers.

What was interesting about this study, and is great news for expanding your craft beer volumes, is that this segment is comprised mostly of the baby boomers and millennials, and additionally found that 41% of these high frequency wine drinkers choose craft beer.

Talk about thinking “Out of the box”, a tasting comprised of samplings of some unique beer, wine and then the combination beer-wine, could have everyone in attendance expanding their horizons and increasing your sales.

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