

ULLAGE AND SPILLAGE

by J.Random

The subject of defining the products and the producers that CAMRA supports always provokes lively discussion. In July 2010 the CAMRA Vancouver web site, under restructuring, stated this was “the brewing of traditional styles of beer in the traditional manner, using traditional ingredients.” This definition focuses on the process, not the product, which is perhaps for the best. A lot of people would go along with that statement, but a high proportion of CAMRA Vancouver members would turn out to sample a keg of Pacific Northwest IPA infused with cranberries if it came out of one of the once small but now huge breweries in California and Oregon. Pacific Northwest IPA is not a traditional style unless you count your traditions in decades. It bears little resemblance to the IPA that would have been shipped to the troops of the British Army in India (see this column in What’s Brewing Nov. 2009). A keg is not a traditional method of serving beer, unless traditions can be firmly established in less than 50 years. The breweries I am thinking of have outgrown the term microbrewery. Cranberries are not a traditional ingredient of beer since they don’t grow in Europe.

It is worth considering the definitions of those that should know what they are talking about.

Subject: Real Ale

Source: CAMRA UK (CAMRA.org.uk)

Definition: Real ale is a beer brewed from traditional ingredients (malted barley, hops water and yeast), matured by secondary fermentation in the container from which it is dispensed, and served without the use of extraneous carbon dioxide. Brewers use ingredients which are fresh and natural, resulting in a drink which tastes natural and full of flavour. It is literally living as it continues to ferment in the cask in your local pub, developing its flavour as it matures ready to be poured into your glass. Real ale is also known as ‘cask-conditioned beer’, ‘real cask ale’, real beer’ and ‘naturally conditioned beer.’

Note to non-CAMRA BC members: Real ale

is more prone to problems with infection, over or under carbonation and yeastiness. It is also more variable from batch to batch. One day it might be the best beer you ever tasted; another day it might be the worst if the outlet is not careful. That is why most brewers stopped making it.

Subject: Microbrewery

Source: Brewers Association (BrewersAssociation.org)

Definition: A microbrewery is a brewery which produces a limited amount of beer. In the U.S, the Brewers Association use a fixed maximum limit of 15,000 US beer barrels (1,800,000 l; 460,000 US gal; 390,000 imp gal) a year to define microbrewery.

Note to non CAMRA BC members: Not all beer produced by microbreweries is good beer.

Subject: Craft Brewer

Source: Brewers Association (Craftbeer.com)

Definition: An American craft brewer is small, independent and traditional. Small: Annual production of beer less than 2 million barrels. Independent: Less than 25% of the craft brewery is owned or controlled (or equivalent economic interest) by an alcoholic beverage industry member who is not themselves a craft brewer. Traditional: A brewer who has either an all malt flagship (the beer which represents the greatest volume among that brewers brands) or has at least 50% of its volume in either all malt beers or in beers which use adjuncts to enhance rather than lighten flavor.

Note to non CAMRA BC members: Not all beer produced by craft brewers is good beer.

Subject: Craft Beer

Source: Brewers Association (Brewersassociation.com)

Definition: Craft beer is generally made with traditional ingredients like malted barley; interesting and sometimes non-traditional ingredients are often added for distinctiveness.

Note to CAMRA BC members: Clearly this was a definition developed by a large committee.

Just because I don’t know what I am talking

about, does not mean I am not about to come up with some definitions of my own:

Subject: Good Beer

Source: J. Random

Definition: 1. Beer that is true to type (You may not like that type of beer but you can appreciate the craftsmanship in brewing it).

2. It tastes clean with no detectable off flavours, or flavours inappropriate for that type of beer, when drunk at a temperature around 15°C. This may be warmer than the temperature the brewery intended it to be drunk at, but maybe that is because they wanted to mask the true flavour. (This factor is partly controlled by the outlet, whether it be a liquor store causing skunkiness or oxidation, or a bar using the wrong combination of metals in their systems or not cleaning their lines.)

3. It has sufficient heading ingredients to generate a reasonably lasting head of foam to help the aroma reach the nose (However the density and thickness of the head is partly controlled by the tap used by the outlet and the cleanliness of the glass).

4. It has the appropriate amount of carbonation for the beer style (though this is mostly controlled by the outlet, not the brewer).

5. It is sufficiently free of yeast suspension to permit the flavour of the beer as intended by the

brewer to be appreciated (with cask beer this too is controlled by the outlet, not the brewer)

What the above definition clearly demonstrates is the delivery of good beer to the consumer is a partnership between the brewer and the outlet. Outlets trying to serve good beer owe it to good brewers to educate themselves and their staff about beer styles, off flavours, factors affecting head formation, carbonation and cask conditioning where appropriate. Consider sending your staff to the next CAMRA educational session on off flavours (the last one was August 4th at Firefly Fine Wines and Ales in Vancouver). More extensive courses are available at the Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts, given by Chester Carey, CAMRA Vancouver member and certified beer Cicerone.

Note to CAMRA BC members: Not quite as good as the name Canadian Reform Alliance Party, but Wikipedia defines pica as a medical disorder characterized by an appetite for substances largely non-nutritive (e.g. metal [coins, etc.], clay, coal, soil, feces, chalk, paper, soap, mucus, ash, gum, etc.) or an abnormal appetite for some things that may be considered foods, such as food ingredients (e.g. flour, raw potato, raw rice, starch, ice cubes, salt). Sounds like the right place to go for information on strange flavours. §



*Chester presides over the CAMRA Vancouver off flavour tasting event in August.
Photo credit: Lundy Dale*