

## **BIER ESSENTIAL BREWNZ AND BEERVANA**

Posted by Craccum on 14 September 2009

Stephen Bier recently had the good fortune to travel to the BrewNZ Awards and Beervana in Wellington. He writes a rundown of the awards, and lets us know which beers to keep an eye out for this year and next.

### **Wednesday - Mashing In**

When I first organised a media pass for Beervana, I thought I'd just be going down for the Friday and Saturday. However, I was lucky enough to be invited to Mashing In, essentially a 'thank you' event for the various people involved with the week's festivities. As a 'thank you event', it involved free finger food and more importantly, free beer. So I flew down to Wellington on the Wednesday, and in the evening I made my way along to the Malthouse to begin my participation in the week.

Upon arrival I was given a nametag and then headed up to the bar for my first beer, a Tuatara IPA. I found it to be nice and refreshing (especially after walking around town all afternoon), with a pleasant bitterness. With a beer in hand, it was time to start meeting people. First up I had a chat to Craig, who was enjoying an Emersons Pilsner. He talked about the passionfruit tropical fruitiness of the beer due to the Rewaka hops, and how he'd tried to emulate it with his own homebrew attempts.

Upon finishing the Tuatara I moved onto the Renaissance MPA (Imperial Pale Ale) which I found to be maltier than the Tuatara with a slight aniseed note. Very tasty. I paused this beer halfway through to talk to Roger from Schoc chocolates, who was there to demonstrate beer and chocolate matching. I had to try it. This basically involved letting a piece of chocolate begin to melt in your mouth, having a sip of beer, then seeing what happens. At first the beer would kind of seize the chocolate, becoming almost sour, but as the chocolate began to melt again the flavour morphed into a sensation much greater than either the chocolate or the beer on their own. I tried three matches, the best of which was Tuatara Porter with a strawberry and black pepper dark chocolate. The bits of dried strawberry in the chocolate started fizzing like sherbet in my mouth. It was amazing.

After this I had a chat to Brian from Renaissance about his upcoming beers, including a chocolate stout and the MPA I was enjoying at the time. He mentioned that the MPA is in direct competition with the Epic Armegeddon, which Luke (the Epic brewer) tricked him into buying at the start of the evening (it wasn't one of the list of beers available for free). Brian then introduced me to one of his brewers, Soren Erikson (best Viking name ever), who is planning to start his own brewery called 8wired soon. Soren mentioned his plans to do an Imperial Stout, and we talked about examples of the style including the Red Oak Old Baltic Porter – The most incredible beer I've ever tried. It was nice talking to someone who truly understood how amazing that beer is.

The night just continued to get better from there, but I best move on seen as the Editors won't let me take over the entire magazine for this article.

### **Thursday - BrewNZ Awards Dinner**

In addition to being invited to Mashing In, I was also fortunate enough to go to the BrewNZ awards dinner. The BrewNZ judging had been happening in the first half of the week, and it was time to see what the judges had decided. So I headed along to the biggest night on the NZ craft-brewing calendar, and mingled with the movers and the shakers of the brewing scene.

Prior to the formal session of the evening there were of course pre-drinks, and I used this time to scope out who else was there. In addition to the brewers there were a mixture of sponsors, possible future sponsors, various helpers and other media people. I had a chat to the official photographer, who was sadly unable to enjoy any of the beers as he has celiac disease. He took it in good stride though, joking that it made him the only photographer safe to cover the event. I also met some other beer writers, with a bit more experience under their belts than I have – let's face it, they've been in the industry since before I was legal to drink.

As we moved in to the dining hall to be seated, I elected to sit near the back at a table with the friendly people from Steam Brewing (The Cock and Bull). To our delight, there was not only an open bar with a range of tap beers, but also a wide selection of bottled beers in an ice bucket in the centre of the table which was frequently replenished throughout the night. Beer was even incorporated into the menu – the main options included a beer-braised lamb shank with a mini venison pie, roasted winter vegetables and a red wine jus, and the desert was bread and butter pudding soaked with summer ale, beer scented ice cream and vanilla cream.

The awards were broken up into 16 categories, including 12 beer style categories, a cider category, a packaging award, champion international brewery and New Zealand champion brewery. The champion international brewery was Deschutes Brewery, but the highlight was seeing Emerson's Brewery win New Zealand champion brewery. Richard Emerson had to give four victory speeches that night (Emerson's also won trophies in three of the beer categories), and let me tell you, it was wonderful seeing the entire audience so attentive and respectful to speeches by a deaf man. There are few people who command as much respect as Richard Emerson in the NZ craft brewing industry, and everyone seemed to be very glad to see him come away with the award.

### **Friday - Beervana**

I had finally reached the more public aspect of the week, Beervana. Beervana was held in 4 sessions, each one identical so as to allow more people to come and enjoy them. I opted to go to the Friday afternoon session for reporting purposes, and returned in the evening with friends for enjoyments sake.

First up I went to the Green Man stall. We had a chat about their brewer, who worked for 16 years as a German brewmaster before coming to New Zealand. As such their beers are very authentic to German style, including the "Cyclist" which we talked about at length. I tried their Pilsner, which was quite mild in flavour and as such a good beer to start the day. 7/10.

Next on the list was Peak Brewery, based in Masterton. They've been brewing here in New Zealand for three years, in addition to trying their hand at winemaking. Their Great End ESB was one of the few cask conditioned offerings at the event, and as such I had to try it. It had a very pleasant aroma, with the malt and hops nicely balanced. 7.5/10.

Throughout each beervana session there were a number of "education" slots, and so I headed off to learn about the right glass for the right beer. The main principles were pretty simple – glasses should keep your hand low on the glass so that greasy fingers don't ruin the beer, and the more alcohol or flavour the wider the glass. A good pour should also provide 2 fingers width of head, made up of small bubbles rather than large.

Some of the stalls were beer importers rather than local breweries. One such importer is beerforce, who among other things import a lot of the Belgian beers available in New Zealand. The guy running the stall was ex UoA, so knew about Craccum and was more than happy to give me a glass of Maredsous Tripel. It was a fairly middle of the road Belgian abbey style beer, with a spicy aroma and flavour. 7/10.

After this I took a wee break from beer to try some cider. Old Mout had a stall serving a range of their ciders, including their scrumpy which won the cider category at the BrewNZ awards. While not an expert on cider, I can say that it had a nice aroma and was very refreshing. They also had a lighter cider that wasn't far off apple juice, an organic cider that was much drier and a boysenberry and apple cider which had a summer feel about it.

Getting back to the beer, I went along to the Twisted Hop stall. The Twisted Hop is a brew bar in Christchurch, which I happened to visit when I was down there last Christmas. They've changed their recipes slightly since then, so trying their beer was really interesting. First I had their IPA, which had a really big, hoppy aroma but yet the flavour wasn't overwhelmed by the hops like it can be in IPA's. With its superbly balanced flavour I gave it an 8/10. I then tried their sauvignon pilsner, which is made with hops grown on ex sauvignon blanc fields. When I tried it at Christmas, there was a very noticeable sauvignon blanc flavour to it. This has now been toned down and offset with a bit more malt, but is still very nice. Another 8/10.

Having talked to Brian from Renaissance on the Wednesday, I had to go try some of the beer he'd talked about. So I grabbed their Craftsman Chocolate Stout, which was (as the name would imply) very chocolatey and very tasty. 8/10. Brian also mentioned that all of their beer is made with New Zealand ingredients – Canterbury malt and Motueka hops.

Now I gathered that Moa had made an Imperial Stout (which happens to be my absolute favourite style of beer) which had indeed won a trophy for the "Specialty, Experimental, Aged, Barrel & Wood-Aged Styles" category of the BrewNZ awards. So with much anticipation I went to try the Makariki Barrel Reserve. As expected of the style the flavour was really big, and really tasty with burnt caramel and currant notes. The aroma didn't quite match the flavour in intensity, but it was still a fantastic beer. 8.5/10. I also tried the oak-

aged rendition of their Five Hop Winter Ale, which had a nice hop aroma and a good mouth feel. 8/10.

Dotted around the place there were also stalls for some Australian beers. One such beer was the Stone Wood Draught, which was quite different to all the New Zealand beers I had tried. It utilised galaxy hops for a really fruity smell and had a little bit of wheat in the malt for mouth feel. It had a nice clean finish, and was very enjoyable, 8/10.

The next “beer education” session I went to was on beer and cheese matching. Beer actually goes better with cheese than wine [lies! – Ed (who works at a wine shop)], as beer is able to cut through the layer of cheese that builds in the mouth. Some of the tasting principles were to let the cheese and beer warm up a little before tasting, and to match mild cheese with mild beer and strong cheese with strong beer. The nicest combination of the session was Renaissance Stonecutter with Kikorangi blue cheese, which provided a fantastic flavour sensation in my mouth.

The last brewery I tried for the session was Townshend, a Nelson Brewery doing cask-conditioned ales with genuine UK malt. Cask-conditioned ale is still rare in New Zealand, with apparently only four places in the country that can properly handle it. I tried the ESB which utilised two yeasts, and had a nice, fairly mild flavour. 7.5/10.

The next session I returned with a couple of friends, including one of the guys who helped me develop a passion for beer and his flatmate, a probation officer (probation officers tell the best stories, sans names). A good time was had by all. I’ll finish with a guest review from my friend Richard of the last (and possibly best) beer of the evening:

“Emersons BeWITched: truly tasty, wonderful, drink it! Two words – simply AMAZING. Thought it was great, like Hoegaarden on crack. 10/10”