

Fort George Brewery, Seaside Brewing Company, Buoy Beer Co. and the Astoria Brewing Company fill out the impressive roster of breweries on the North Oregon Coast. I've sampled many of their beers over the years, but at some point, not long after moving to Astoria two years ago, my relationships to their beer changed, evolved. It became more about the people who made and managed the beer, people such as...“surfers, lovers, fighters, gardeners, mechanics, star gazers, dog lovers, tide watchers, loud laughers, fish catchers, and triple dog dare-ers,” as the Seaside Brewery Company describes their employees on its website.

These are the very type of Oregonians I love to drink beer with, write about, and write for.

My unique collaborations with the North Oregon Coast breweries began not long after Buoy Beer Co. opened in February, 2014. I walked in the taproom, sat down at the bar, and ordered a beer. The interior of the building, a former seafood processing plant sitting atop pilings on the Columbia River, astonished me with its huge wooden beams, metal poles and marred plank flooring. I knew instantly this room would be an incredible place to write about Astoria's past, present and future.

In short time, I met Buoy's manager and pitched the novel idea of writing a little monthly essay for the brewery, something I called a “marker.” The essays would explore various themes connected to the brewery and the Astoria environs. Buoy would add some exquisite color art to the essays, print them on 4' x 6" cards, and then distribute them on the tables and on the bars. In return, I would receive a free monthly meal and beer.

I recently ended my run as Buoy's writer-in-residence and count the experience as one of the sweetest semi-paid writing gigs of my career. I always loved knowing exactly where someone was going to read the markers—right inside Buoy, typically drinking beer. I garnered an enthusiastic following for the essays and the collaboration raised my profile as a writer and spread my words and ideas well outside my usual audience.

My next collaboration involved the Fort George Brewery. First, I taught a writing workshop in their exquisite Lovell Showroom space, surrounded by casks of aging Cavatica Stout. They also supported me by brewing a special lager for the release of my book about Astoria, surely the first such collaboration between an author and brewery in the annals of Oregon publishing. We launched the beer and the book in the Lovell Showroom in front of a packed audience and the synergy between crafted words and crafted beer has never been more pronounced.

I have yet to pitch an idea to the Seaside Brewing Company but I'm sure one will come to me soon. I do know, that upon my recent visit to the tasting room of the Astoria Brewing Company, I sat on a stool and looked down to the brewing operation below, the shiny stainless steel kettles, fermenters and other brewing apparatus, and a new idea hit me right there: April is National Poetry Month. Why not hold a poetry slam in the bowels of this brewery and let the customers above heckle and encourage the lowly poets down below while drinking great locally made beer?

I wonder if Astoria Brewing Company would go for it. All I have to do is ask.

Matt Love lives in Astoria and is the author/editor of 14 books about Oregon, including “A Nice Piece of Astoria: A Narrative Guide” and “The Great Birthright: An Oregon Novel.” They are available at coastal bookstores and through www.nestuccaspitpress.com.

