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COLUMBIA BAR

Snakebites at the Fort

A snakebite, which originated in the U.K., is a pint glass of 50/50 lager and hard cider

By RYAN HUME

For over two years now, this monthly column has solely dedicated itself to the Hard-A alchemy of our talented local mixologists and their tireless efforts to dream up and discover both new and old ways to layer liquor upon liquor, cut with any number of mixers and enlivened with infusions and extracts galore, often housemade.

I have come to consider myself something of a cocktail guinea pig (I always let the bartender pick their poison with as little coaching as possible, placing an emphasis upon signature drinks, customer favorites and seasonal delicacies), and I have learned much of what I know about the science of spirits by listening to the knowledgeable bar women and men of the North Coast.

But this is not to say that I don't occasionally just yearn for a good pint or a tall boy.

Living in Astoria, which seems to have one church,

brewery and pot shop per every five residents, the hop-minded are eternally rewarded with a variety of complex and unusual brews.

Entering August 2016 and hoping for some truly warm weather before the summer slips away like so many of July's clouds, my mind inevitably turned to the beer cocktail — the lemonade-punched shandy, or the michelada, that sudsy Mexican cousin of the Bloody

Mary. There's never been a better friend to have around on a hot, sweltering day than a beer cocktail. Beer: You know, it's for what ales ya.

So I approached Fort George, figuring the North Coast's veritable brewery behemoth, which boasts three separate menus, a number of lecture series and charity events and a rotation of employee-catered and locally inspired one-off batches, might be down for the challenge.

After chatting up a few servers, who assured me many a customer enjoys personalizing a pint out of what

is available on tap, I settled into an experimental round of snakebites. Two out of three of these experiments centered around some new batches of sours that the Fort has been playing around with as of late, with one

low-volume IPA thrown in for good measure.

Traditionally, a snakebite, which originated in the U.K. — home to only one venomous snake, the adder — is a pint glass of 50/50 lager and hard cider, but many variations had already appeared internationally, including a stout-and-cider combo state-side, prior to Brexit.

The Fort keeps Anthem Cider on tap, which ferments a semi-dry from apples grown in Oregon and Washington right out of Salem. With an alcohol by volume of 5.0% to 6.5% per batch, this crisp cider formed the control group for the following concoctions. What variations occurred relied upon what was available on tap at Fort George as of Aug. 1 and on the various beer-to-cider ratios applied.

Like I said above, I have often felt like a guinea pig doing this column, but with so many sample glasses laid out on the bar before me, this is the first time I have felt like a kid with a chemistry set. My results and musings are listed below and are based on trying three different beers mixed with the same cider at two different ratios: 50% beer to cider and 75% beer to cider. The ABV of each brew is listed along with the board description of the beer. Precision is not necessary to recreate these experiments — to each their own palate — but, whether by Fort tap or by can or bottle pulled from the cooler, peer review is encouraged.

—Experiments courtesy of David Licitra, server at Fort George, Astoria, Oregon



I HAVE OFTEN FELT LIKE A GUINEA PIG DOING THIS COLUMN, BUT ... THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I HAVE FELT LIKE A KID WITH A CHEMISTRY SET.

ANTHEM CIDER PLUS



Anthem Cider + Suckerpunch: 4%, lemon and lime zest kettle sour

Notes: Really, the Suckerpunch packs such a strong, citrusy left hook that the 50% and the 75% ratios made little difference, though the 75% ratio did feel just slightly heavier, beer-wise, on the back end. Overall, flaxen and effervescent, like a carbonated glass of lemonade — the closest thing to a shandy on this list — the 50/50 was my personal favorite of the entire flute, but I may be biased simply because I like the idea of a drink called Snakebite Suckerpunch being in existence.



Anthem Cider + Overdub IPA: 4.5%, mellow, pristine, passionfruit

Notes: Honestly, I'm sure this would work for some, but the 75% pour of this long-session IPA reminded me that there are floral and citrus notes in dirt — it's that earthy. The beer itself is great, but when mixed with the cider at this level some eruption of hoppiness occurred against the cider that I frankly did not care for. In complete contrast, the 50/50 pour was the most traditional snakebite of the bunch and something that I would certainly hold in hand on a hot summer day.



Anthem Cider + Brown-eyed Girl: 4.6%, sour brown ale

Notes: I could rip off a bunch of Van Morrison quotes to describe the distance a single sour can go while traveling the distance between the top of a tooth to the back of the esophagus. Into the mystic, anyone? Sours are unusual. I'm just getting to know them. This one is brown and round until the end, where it takes a sharp nod up toward your sinuses. The 75% pour remained tart, playing off the malic acid in the cider, but weighed down the tongue with the full-bodied richness one would expect from a brown. The 50% on the other hand was sweet, crisp and malty: overall, pretty well balanced and rich.

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