

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Part One: Rogue craft beers showcase innovative flavors

Review by MOUTH OF
THE COLUMBIA
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We're doing something different this week (and next). This review of Rogue Ales Public House will arrive in two parts. This week will focus on the beer. Next week will focus on the food (and deliver the star rating).

Coming of age in Eugene alongside the bubbling craft brewing revolution, Rogue was an early favorite, perhaps the first beer whose flavor I recognized as something artisan and fine. (A graphic designer at the time, I also much appreciated Rogue's art — the skeleton perched atop a barrel on Dead Guy, as well as the steady stream of righteous and revolutionary-themed stencil-style prints on 22-ounce bottles.) This was around the turn of the millennium, and I would announce to anyone who would listen: Rogue was my favorite beer.

The world seemed to agree.

At Rogue Ales Public House in Astoria, the western wall — nearly the size of a barn's — is littered with recognition not only for a flagship variety, but damn near the whole lot. Beer after beer boasts multiple, often recent "world champion" awards. In the last decade, as the industry has grown exponentially around the Newport-based brewer, the collection is ever more impressive.

At the same time, it's a whole lot harder to pick a favorite beer or brewery in 2016 than it was in 2006. The competition has become equally vast and illustrious. A few of those competitors — or is it compatriots? — have taken root in Astoria. I think first of the engaged institution that is Fort George Brewery, then the blossoming Buoy Beer Co. Compared to them, Rogue — whose headquarters is in Newport — can seem a bit of an afterthought on the North Coast. This figures,

in part because Fort George and Buoy are homegrown, and also because they're planted downtown (Rogue is on the east end of town at Pier 39). Nevertheless, Rogue's beer (and food, which we'll get to) are every bit as enticing, thoughtful aspirants as the hometown varieties. Sometimes even more so.

My trips to Rogue began — and will forever begin henceforth — with a tasting tray. Too often, breweries get it wrong. Take Pelican in Cannon Beach, who earlier this year offered four IPA variations out of a total seven tastes. By letting the customer create their own flight, with a paper and pencil, filling in each cup, Rogue gets it right. With some 25-odd taps there's plenty to sample from — and a whole lot more than just hops upon hops.

I began with the New Crustacean Barley-wineish Imperial IPA Sorta. For a depth charge at 11.6 percent alcohol by volume, it was astonishingly balanced. The molasses flavor was much deeper than the light color suggested. For that high alcohol content, it was also remarkably smooth. The New Crustacean was nearly everything at once: light, dark, hoppy, barley-y, a bottomless concoction.

The description of the Cold Brew IPA, a collaboration with Stumptown Coffee, reads as such: "(A) marriage of coffee and beer that is equally drinkable in the morning or at night." And it's true — what a temptation to start that day with one. It's not a hint of coffee — the bean is every bit as forward as the hops. Nor is it a dark, heavy stout. The bright beer and bean meet right in the middle.

The same can be said of the Jalapeño Helles Lager. As you bring the glass to your lips, before



PHOTO BY MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Above: A taster tray of four beers at Rogue costs \$8; a tray of seven beers costs \$13.

Right: Rogue Ales Public House is located on Pier 39 in Astoria.

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it touches your tongue, the pepper's essence pervades your nostrils, pricking them up. The sharp, light Helles too proffered some back-of-throat spice, yet remained imminently drinkable. It'd be awfully refreshing on a hot afternoon.

The Rogue Farms Marion-berry Braggot, though, was a bit too thickly sweet for my taste, perhaps a little heavy on the honey. I would've preferred more tartness, but I couldn't help but be impressed that Rogue also grew the berries.

Rogue also grew the peppers that went into the Chipotle Ale. It was somewhat spicy like the Jalapeño Helles, but rather than pointy it was smoky and creamy. The Chipotle Ale was another stand-

out — a beer flavor I never knew I wanted until I drank some.

The one-stop-shop aspect continued into the Pumpkin Patch Ale (yes, Rogue harvested the pumpkins). It's a dark, sweet, decidedly fall ale that I had difficulty putting a finger on. The Issaquah Brewery Menage A Frog was clear: a beast of Belgian inspiration with a dry finish. The Fruit Salad Cider — again, made with a melange of berries and fruits grown in part on Rogue's soil (and otherwise in Oregon) — was a crisp pivot from the rich beers.

At \$8 for four samples (or \$13 for 7), I found Rogue's samplers appropriately priced. (I also

ROGUE ALES PUBLIC HOUSE

100 39th St., Astoria

PHONE: 503-468-0923

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Sunday to Thursday; 11 a.m.
to 10 p.m. Friday and Satur-
day.

SERVICE: Casual and capa-
ble.

DRINKS: Beer and house-
made spirits.



PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

appreciated the same-sized pours for some of the stronger, barley-wine-ish varieties.) I did scoff a bit at the \$6 price per pint. It reminded me of Rogue's soaring prices in the grocery store, well outpacing their competitors.

Surely quality comes at a cost, but over the years I've essentially been priced out of Rogue at the supermarket. That led to a gap in my enjoyment of the brewery's craft that I've reinvigorated at the Astoria public house.

After all these years, Rogue remains my favorite.

*Tune in next week for
a review of the food.*