

Why we're all drinking craft brew today

By R.J. MARX
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Hood River, move over. Cannon Beach is vying for the No. 1 brew town in Oregon. With Public Coast, Bill's and Pelican open for business and a spirited citizenry behind them, Cannon Beach is a must on the Oregon beer trail, along with Bend, Ashland and Eugene for starters.

What Cannon Beach has going for it is the *fin-du-monde* quality that would have intrigued Ernest Hemingway. Add to that a foodie culture, peerless local ingredients and proximity to Destination Portland.

Hayday, what organizers hope will be an annual beer festival in Cannon Beach, is the latest invocation of this fast-growing scene and, as a summer party, this was one of the best.

"I'm like a coyote in the sheep pen," author and Hayday attendee Peter Lindsey nudged after teaching me how to walk comfortably with a full glass of beer hanging from a lanyard around my neck.

Martin North Hospitality President Ryan Snyder invited about 150 of his closest friends to sample lagers and IPAs in the cool comfort of a tented midtown spot.

I met with Snyder before I'd sampled my first Pilsner. Snyder, who opened Public Coast last year, described himself as "a food, beverage and hospitality person."

Snyder worked with Holy Cow Casino and Brewery in Las Vegas in the early 1990s. Before that, he drank Coors light. "Then you realize there is something more to it," Snyder said.

"I've been in business my whole life," Snyder told me. "To be in the brewing business is more like a brotherhood than a business. People are very open and very supportive. It's been an amazing experience."

Standing out

Snyder landed in Oregon in 1995 and found a welcoming atmosphere to broaden his experience. Public Coast, a brewpub and eatery on East Third on the site of the former Lumberyard, is his latest Cannon Beach location. With the ingenuity of brewmaster Will Leroux, Public Coast is producing an inventive and palate-pleasing array of beers, including Stephen's Root Beer, a product of Leroux and his assistant Stephen Snyder.

Hayday celebrated its inaugural event with 47 beer-pouring stations. Four of them



Will Leroux and Ryan Snyder

PHOTOS BY R.J. MARX

were brewed by Leroux, including two "VIP" entries: "La Barrel-Age Blonde," a pinot noir barrel-aged imperial blonde ale, and "Cannon-tucky Campfire," a bourbon-barrel weizenbock — a German-style wheat beer.

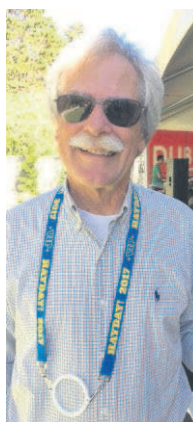
"We are very small players, but we are hoping to celebrate what is happening in our backyard in Oregon," Ryan Snyder said.

Familiar names on the chalkboard included Oakshire, Ninkasi and Breakside, and local standouts Bill's Brewhouse, Pelican, Fort George, Buoy Brewing, North Jetty and Seaside Brewing. "What you're seeing now is everybody is trying to continually reinvent the craft beer culture, finding new ways to stand out," Snyder said.

The regional craft brew scene originated in Portland in the 1980s, he said, inspired by "a gentleman named Fred Bowman."

Bowman is the former owner and co-founder of Portland Brewing Company, one of Oregon's first post-Prohibition microbreweries.

Bowman was active in the late 1970s and



Fred Bowman, a founder of Portland Brewing.

early '80s, along with Art Larrance, Dick and Nancy Ponzi of BridgePort, Kurt and Rob Widmer, and Mike and Brian McMenamin in lobbying to legalize brewpubs in Oregon.

Today he serves as a consultant to Public Coast and a mentor to both Snyder and Leroux.

Craft-beer pioneer

I started my Hayday experience sampling the Alameda Lobo Amarillo, a tequila barrel-aged imperial IPA that really did taste of tequila. My companion tasted "The Bees Knees" Honey Strong Ale and Pono Brewing's Black Hole Sun.

I snacked on a brat, hot from the grill, before sampling Block 15's Summer Knight's Kolsch.

Then Lindsey gave another tug on my sleeve. "You want to meet Fred Bowman?" he asked.

Upon introduction, Bowman unfolded his story, back to the time when he and other brewpub pioneers entered the world of zymurgy.

With childhood friends Jim Goodwin

and a third former classmate, Art Larrance, Bowman produced test batches in the basement of his Beaverton home.

Changes in state law brought the founding of BridgePort Brewing in November 1984 and Widmer in March 1985. Portland Brewing was the city's third craft brewer, entering the market in January 1986.

Financial success seemed uncertain. "We were wringing our hands wondering if there would be enough of a market for the three of us," he said. "Those three breweries are 100 times bigger than the size they were, and there's hundreds more breweries. It was pretty shortsighted of us."

Oregon beers come of age


Today, by raw numbers, Portland has more breweries than any city in the world, overtaking Cologne, Germany, 15 years ago, Bowman said.

MacTarnahan's Pale Ale, named after an original investor, debuted in 1982 and became the Portland Brewing's flagship brew.

Portland Brewing's IPA was produced when few were familiar with the style in America. India Pale Ale had its origins in England before the advent of pasteurization and antiseptic packaging, Bowman said. After a long sea voyage, most beers ended up tasting like "pickle juice." The strength and hoppiness of the pale ales kept the beer drinkable for English civil servants overseas.

"We were trying to make a beer that wouldn't make somebody used to drinking a light lager spit it out," Bowman said. "We were trying to make something fairly mainstream."

His success at Portland Brewing came with international awards and accolades. Bowman served as a consultant after Portland Brewing Co. was sold to Pyramid Brewing in 2003, before turning to a role as an industry consultant. Portland Brewing became known as MacTarnahan's until reverting to the Portland Brewing Co. name in 2013.

"I'm amazed that we can almost get any style of beer in the world made locally in Oregon," Bowman said. "It used to be Belgium which had the greatest variety of styles, and we have pretty much all of those beers. I think small beers in the U.S. now influence what is going on in Europe." 

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