

Celebrating the Dark Arts

BY WILLIAM DEAN

When the weather turns dark and stormy, there's nothing like a pint of something dark and delicious.

February is Stout Month, after all. Time to pay tribute to the "dark arts."

Local craft breweries are offering special stouts guaranteed to take the chill off a winter day. Some are luscious and creamy, with hints of chocolate, cinnamon and vanilla. Others hit your palate with an espresso-like roast before finishing with bourbon and oak notes.

"Most people think of stout as Guinness, but stouts have a multitude of flavor profiles," said Michal Frankowicz, head brewer at Fort George Brewery.

Here are some of the best locally brewed options:

Fort George

Among the 15-plus dark beers Fort George plans to release this month is a series of Russian imperial stout "variants" built off the brewery's Matryoshka base. Batches are aged for nearly a year in bourbon barrels, gaining potency (14.0% ABV) but retaining smoothness. The trio below is definitely worth sampling:

- Matryoshka with Vanilla and Cardamom. Cardamom is added during fermentation along with a generous dose of vanilla. Besides underlying dried fruit and whiskey tones, there's an enticing aroma of spring flowers.

- Matryoshka with Vanilla and Ginger. Ginger peps up this stout, providing intense aromas and a tongue-tickling sensation. The spice merges nicely with vanilla, fruit and whiskey flavors.

- Matryoshka with Vanilla and Cinnamon. Cinnamon and vanilla combine to produce a cinnamon-roll sweetness. Then the aged stout's warming alcohol core kicks in.

(Other special beers to ask for include the Mint Chocolate Stout, Vegan Chai Latte Stout and Pecan Praline Stout).

Buoy Beer

Baltic Porter: Coffee, toffee and chocolate notes soothe the palate first, followed by a dry lager finish. Brewed with



Reach Break Brewing co-founder Josh Allison is proud of his stouts, which are barrel-aged to perfection. Pictured: Coconut Coffee Stout.

Brews & news

There's no festival this year, but Fort George Brewery will be ringing in Stout Month with live music and other entertainment every weekend in February. Guest brewers will come to Astoria to collaborate on unique stouts for 2023. Check the brewery's social media pages for details.

Captain Phantasmic, a Fort George collaboration with ForeLand Beer of McMinnville, is slated for release Feb. 20. It's a special IPA made with powdered sauvignon blanc grape skins that merge with hops for a unique citrus finish.

Love a challenge? Try navigating the North Coast Craft Beer Trail. The idea is to visit breweries and brewpubs from Astoria to Cannon Beach. Check out enough of the locations on your "passport" to get a free souvenir glass mug.

German malts and hops. Head brewer Matt Jones calls it a "nice, warming beer" (7.8% ABV).

Decapitator: Mahogany-hued doppelbock with cherry and vanilla tones, and aromas of oak and bourbon drawn from the aging barrels. Smooth lager finish. (11.8% ABV).

Industry Standard: Easy-drinking oatmeal stout described by the brewer as "roasty, rich and velvety." Very true. Pale

chocolate malt and malted oats combine nicely. (6.9% ABV).

(Due for release on Valentine's Day is Love, Lost at Sea, a barrel-aged barley wine. Buoy has been making the taproom favorite for five years and will be pouring from the reserve of each batch for special tastings).

Reach Break Brewing

Coconut Coffee Stout: Silky-smooth

stout with tones of vanilla, espresso and toasted coconut, plus chocolate from the roasted malt. (9.6% ABV).

Postscript: Don't miss your chance to taste this stout, aged nearly four years – in both red wine and bourbon barrels. Notes of cherry and wine, as well as bourbon and oak. (11.1% ABV).

Clap o' Thunder: This powerful stout is made with Jamaican molasses and aged 10 months in rum casks. Besides molasses sweetness, there are tones of dark fruit, rum and spice. (11.2% ABV).

Astoria Brewing

Bad Ass Stout: A refreshing small-batch stout made with rolled oats and eight different malts. Chocolate and coffee tones. Finishes with a hint of smokiness. (7.0% ABV).

William Dean is an author with a passion for craft beer. His suspense novels, "The Ghosts We Know" and "Dangerous Freedom" are available at Amazon and in bookstores. Column ideas? Contact him at williamdeanbooks@gmail.com.