

Astoria Brewing Co. retires an iconic mascot

BY WILLIAM DEAN

The snarling dog that has served as Astoria Brewing Co.'s mascot for more than 20 years is now being retired.

Bitter Bitch Imperial IPA, a triple-hopped, dark-malted brew that has been one of the downtown brewery's mainstays, is no longer being produced.

The last kegs ran dry in late August, signaling a new direction for the family-owned brewery that began as Pacific Rim Brewing and Wet Dog Cafe in 1997. All the original beers were named after dogs. Bitter Bitch was the last of the pack.

Brad Kenoyer, who is in charge of brewing operations, began the evolution by giving Andrew Brown, previously of Buoy Beer Co. and now Astoria Brewing Co.'s head brewer, free rein to update recipes, collaborate with other breweries and introduce new beers better suited for modern palates. More small-batch seasonal releases are also in the works.

In the past year, the brewery has also revamped its taproom and began canning popular beers more aggressively, with an eye on wider distribution. New labels feature a misty Oregon forest scene.

As for Bitter Bitch, Kenoyer says the decision to pull the plug was difficult, but had everything to do with rebranding.

"We all knew it was time," Kenoyer said. "It's hard to not brew a beer that we've made for so long ... but it was just a dated beer in a lot of different ways."

That includes the potent brew's considerable bitterness and, of course, its name. Other local breweries have had to make their own retirement decisions.

Only two of Fort George Brewery's original beers remain in year-round production today: Vortex IPA and Cavatica stout. That means there have been a lot of tough calls over the years to drop some of the brewers' favorites.

Fort George's 1811 lager, for instance, had sentimental value. The brewery's first beer to be canned, it was introduced amid fanfare in honor of Astoria's Bicentennial.



Photos by William Dean

LEFT: Brad Kenoyer has been busy rebranding Astoria Brewing Co. and its selections. RIGHT: Updated beer can labels feature a forest scene.

"It was exciting," Brian Bovenizer, the brewery's marketing and sales director, said. "The first beer off our line."

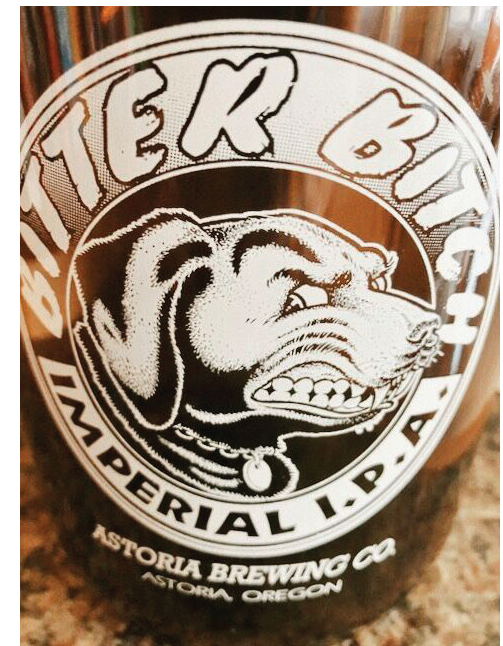
But the lager's popularity soon waned, leading to the painful decision to retire it after a few years. It was brought back for a limited time in 2021, helping to kick off Fort George Brewery's seasonal lager series.

Bovenizer says the decision to pull a

year-round beer is typically based on sales and changing tastes. "We're always trying to innovate and come up with new things," he said. "We want to create beer that evolves with the palate of our drinkers."

When Buoy Beer Co. retired its oatmeal stout, one of the brewery's originals, it had little choice.

Bars and taprooms closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, shutting off the mar-



Astoria Brewing Co.'s snarling dog mascot is a favorite of local beer fans.

Brews & News

Fort George Brewery's Beer Pier will be open during Labor Day weekend. Live music is scheduled to accompany brews on tap. A food truck will be available.

Buoy Beer Co.'s Oktoberfest celebration will be held from Sept. 23 to 25 at its downtown pop-up taproom in the Astoria Food Hub building. Expect a selection of German-style beers alongside food and music.

ket for the draught-only beer. Production ended, often never to resume. But old recipes never die. Beers with a following can be always be brought back for a limited time.

As for that snarling dog, the cartoon-style art isn't going away. It's emblazoned on everything from the taproom's rotating sign to pint glasses and growlers. It's part of Astoria's brewing lore.

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



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