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In a similar vein, Crux released Banished Lost Love earlier this year, a rye imperial stout aged in rye whiskey barrels.

The focus on rye offers an interesting variation on the usual expectations of an imperial stout. Rye malt tends to add subtle spicy and peppery yet refreshing flavors (think of the taste of rye crackers or dark rye breads) that can complement smoky, roasty notes in dark beers.

A typical rye beer might consist of up to 10% to 15% rye malt in the grain bill. According to head brewer Cam O'Connor, Lost Love has 23% rye.

It can be a tricky grain to brew with, due to its relatively high levels of gluten and fiber. It's not uncommon for brewers to encounter a "stuck mash" when brewing with large amounts of rye, which happens when the sugary wort will not drain or filter properly from the grains after soaking. When this happens, the run-off of liquid to the kettle slows or even stops, requiring troubleshooting and causing headaches for the brewers.

I asked O'Connor if the rye presented any problems with Lost Love. "Not really," he wrote via email. "The runoff does take longer than other beers. It is expected to do so due to the really high gravity, rye malt and plenty of dark malts."

It also helps that Crux incorporates a

This week's top five beer picks

1772 Porter — Porter Brewing
Bare "Bottoms Up" Lager — Boss Rambler Beer Club
Burnside Skatepark IPA — Double Mountain Brewery
Wood Series: Hawaiian Imperial Stout — Sunriver Brewing
The Cryo IPA — Everybody's Brewing

The brewery provided me with a bottle of Lost Love, which I recently opened to review. It starts with a black, viscous pour into the glass with a brown head of foam that collapses quickly. The aroma is simultaneously simple and complex, starting out boozy, syrupy and spicy with pumpernickel notes, which unfold into rich layers of chocolate liqueur, rye whiskey, charred oak, Spanish coffee, and toasted grains.

mash press as part of its brewing process. This is a special type of filtration system that pumps the mash through a filter press rather than straining the liquid through the equivalent of a sieve—which can get clogged. This forced filtration is faster and more efficient and prevents problems such as stuck mashes. It's similar in concept to the difference between using a French press to

brew coffee versus a traditional drip brew that strains through a filter.

Of course, just brewing an imperial stout with rye malt was only the first step in the Lost Love experience. Crux's Banished series was named for the beers that are "banished" to barrels to age until they are ready for consumption. The brewery gave Lost Love the banished treatment, aging it in Woodford

Rye Whiskey barrels for 10 months.

The effect, as O'Connor calls it, is a "rye on rye" tour de force. The final beer tops out at a whopping 14.5% alcohol by volume, the strongest beer Crux has brewed to date, with 70 IBUs.

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The flavor offers up a bright, estery blush of alcohol that blooms into a complex interplay of licorice, dark chocolate malts, rum raisin, chocolate-covered espresso beans, toasted oak, and spicy rye whiskey. The rye is prominent, with dark bread spiciness, almost peppery, with grassy grain notes. It's sweet and decadent and offers up a boozy, lingering warm finish.

It's a dark, indulgent treat of a beer, perfect for sharing as a nightcap or pairing with dessert. It's also an ideal beer for aging, and would do well for a year or more — just be sure not to lose this Lost Love if you do.

■ *Jon Abernathy is a beer writer and blogger and launched The Brew Site (www.thebrewsite.com) in 2004. He can be reached at jon@thebrewsite.com.*

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