



Bend Cider's Mandarin Juniper celebrates a sense of place. "That smell of juniper you get hiking Central Oregon, we wanted to get into a glass," said co-founder Tammy Roark. Submitted photo

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I picked up three popular ciders to profile from the first three, and reached out to the owners to find out more. (I hope to visit Legend in person at some point to learn more about its draft lineup.)

AVID CIDER WATERMELON RHUBARB, 6% ABV

Avid is the oldest cidery in the region, focusing on creative blends with all natural ingredients.

"We're really known for being fruit forward but still being off-dry," said owner Dan McCoy. Avid may be best known for its Blackberry Currant, as well as Acai Lemonade, Pineapple Mango and Watermelon Rhubarb.

Watermelon Rhubarb began as a seasonal, and its popularity spurred its release year-round. I asked if there was a particular inspiration behind this combination of fruits.

"We take the hard cider base, and we just have fun with different blends," McCoy said. "Ultimately we just want to have fun."

Watermelon and rhubarb might seem like an odd combination, but the flavors work well together. According to McCoy, watermelon juice makes up about 25 percent of the recipe, while the rhubarb varies depending on availability; recent batches have even omitted rhubarb entirely due to market shortages.

The melon character is prominent, with the aroma and flavor of freshly sliced watermelon lending a semi-sweet character.

The rhubarb is subtle, if present in the batch I tried, and evokes strawberry rhubarb pie. Overall, it's a crisp, refreshing cider that has a great balance.

I asked what food would pair well with Watermelon Rhubarb.

"I love it the most with spicy foods, you get that fruit flavor that cuts the spice," said McCoy. Lauranne Crooks, Avid's sales representative and tap room manager, suggested carne asada tacos and beet salad.

BEND CIDER MANDARIN JUNIPER, 6.9% ABV

Husband and wife team Kelly and Tammy Roark opened Bend Cider in late 2019, taking a botanical approach to craft cider.

"Being a botanically focused cider company, it stretches our mind and palates to explore new and creative flavor combinations," said Tammy Roark via email.

With a lineup including Huckleberry Ginger, Acai Berry Spearmint and Mandarin Juniper, that approach shines through. Mandarin Juniper in particular celebrates a sense of place.

"We wanted to dive into the botanicals in Central Oregon and create something reminiscent of walks through the forest and hiking here," Roark said. "That smell of juniper you get hiking Central Oregon, we wanted to get into a glass." The berries are harvested from their property.

The juniper is handled with a light touch and complements the sweet orange; there's just enough in the aroma to give the impression of the high desert after a

rain. On the palate, the cider is semi-dry with lightly tart apple flavor punctuated by a kiss of orange juice and a dusting of juniper berry—not enough to evoke gin, but an herbal note that's pleasant and well balanced.

I also posed the food pairing question to Roark.

"The Mandarin Juniper cider is super versatile in pairing with food. Pisano's Pizza has had the Mandarin Juniper cider specifically to pair with their pizzas. The acidity cut through the cheese well." She also suggested pairing with seafood dishes.

TUMALO CIDER HUCKLEBERRY LEMON, 6.5% ABV

Tumalo Cider opened its doors five years ago with a focus on balanced, dry ciders that often marry well with fruit.

"We really like the apples to play a central role in our ciders and the additional flavors are just there to support that," said owner Jeff Bennett via email.

Dry Cider anchors the lineup, and popular varieties include Raspberry, Huckleberry Lemon, and Prickly Passion. I asked Bennett about Huckleberry Lemon.

"I really love the combination of flavors that sweet berries and tart citrus produce," Bennett said. "I wanted something that was unique to the Northwest so huckleberries were a natural choice. The lemon rounds

Top 5 Beers of the Week

Pawsitive Pale Ale — Cascade Lakes Brewing

Phil's Pils Pilsner — Wild Ride Brewing

Topcutter IPA — Bale Breaker Brewing

Coastal Service West Coast IPA — Boss Rambler Beer Club

Alaskan Amber — Alaskan Brewing

out the cider and gives it a hint of refreshment."

Opening the can, I found a deep pink-gold colored cider that smells a bit like tangy lemonade with a bright berry chaser. The flavor is earthy and semi-dry, with light lemon zest and pith and some tart berry notes, and a savory element. I find it a little reminiscent of fruit bitters, which sends it in a bit of a culinary direction.

Bennett answered my food pairing question as well.

"It really can work like a white wine when you are considering what foods to pair it with," he said.

"Berries and meats like lamb and pork are classic combinations so that would work really well. Any seafood would also be a nice complement like salmon."

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