



By Sue Griskonis

# BEER BEACON

Without sunshine and temperate consistency, Western New Yorkers are feeling a bit fenced and confused. Somewhere between spring and winter, with Buffalo grays and whites draping the sky, the Pearl Street Grill and Brewery offered a select group of local brewers, tasters and beer lovers a brick cove laced in white holiday lights, beneath the first floor. The chosen few gathered just beyond Bill Metzger's brew basket--a mix of assorted seasonal selects; labels concealed, glasses glistening and waiting.

## The Tasters

**Loretta** - Snow Queen in a VW, Loretta appreciates good beer like good slopes: smooth and dark underneath a fluffy white top. Guinness tends to taste too smoky, so she leans towards porters, ambers and malts.

**Hop Jack** - A Hop Head from the hills, Jack prefers his beer the way his name implies. Long time brewer, Jack's rating system is essentially the number of glasses of the respective brew he would actually drink.

**Magistrate** - Magistrate honors good malt and hop beers alike with the quiet confidence of a man who's enjoyed years of home brewing solace.

**Evil** - Returned from Canada, having dodged charges for possessing an evil Axis, Evil has a nose that would make any beer or wine drinker envious. Hophead by birthright, Evil enjoys hoppy west coast brews and generally making people nervous.

**Vinny** - Specializing in a quality selection of good beer and pizza, Vinny owns a local pub, keeping his beer cooling in the stream of commerce. Like Evil, he has a sharp nose, but tends to be fair to both sides of brew, enjoying all good beer.

**De'** - Retired Drug Lord from the 70's, De' typically enjoys 6 to 10 Amstel Lights after a long day as a DEA advisor. Though when it's a microbrew, he'll have a pale ale.

**Lumber Jack** - Bearded God from the North, Lumber Jack took his seat at the head of the table, with a stash of tasty brews to share. From a long line of woodland bluegrass brewers, he spends his Sundays at the Pearl Street bar, meeting new folks and sharing backwoods brews.

## The Brews

**The Shipyard Brewing Company, Winter Ale, Portland Maine, 5.9%**

Shipyard, which is entering its 10th year of production, shipped an astonishing 45,255 barrels (623,514 cases) in 2003.

"Not a bad balance of malt and hops," Lumber Jack offered while Evil's nose pointed Northeast.

"Well made, hangs on well, not to my taste though," summarized Hop Jack.

"Caramel spice and sharp malt in the nose but it dies on the tongue," noted Vinny.

Loretta and De' found a clean, glycerin-free finish.

**Odell Brewing Company, 90 Shilling Colorado Ale, Fort Collins, Colorado, 5.3%**

"Same as the other," Evil said as he detected Northeast in the nose.

"Nice in the nose, but doesn't produce," agreed Vinny, De' and Lumber Jack. Hop Jack and Magistrate found a breadly malt and empty finish.

"Saranac Winter," Vinny predicted as Loretta disagreed, noting Saranac Winter's more pronounced flavor. Interestingly, the name of this beer comes from the traditional Scottish method of naming beers for the amount of government tax paid. Taxes due were based on a beer's original gravity, which is an indicator of potential alcohol content. A light ale was taxed at a rate of 60 Schillings, while premium ales were taxed at 90 Schillings.

**Lagunitas Brewing Company, XS Ale, Petaluma, California,**

Lagunitas Brewing Company's website totes the message, "capable of making great beer out of goat's milk, brambles, and asphalt on the surface of the Moon, if need be."

"Smells better than it tastes," Magistrate and Lumber Jack frowned, and Hop Jack added, "malty sweet in the nose, some oxidation; not more than one."

"Smells like olives," Loretta said, "likes to hang out in the back of the mouth." Vinny appreciated the stronger finish, while Evil shook his head in disappointment, not getting a lot out of it.

**Otter Creek Brewing Company, Wolaver's Oatmeal Stout (Certified Organic), Middlebury, Vermont**

"Ah. Now that's a good beer," Magistrate announced.

Loretta, De' and Lumber Jack picked up coffee in the nose and a smoky hickory finish.

"West Coast." Evil's nose predicted as Hop Jack narrowed the scope to Alaska Smoked Porter.

"Heavy though not as strong as German beers," Vinny offered.

"Yep, it's a bread dipper," Evil said.

**Primator, Double Bock Beer, Czech Republic, 10%**

Loretta picked up licorice root and molasses in the nose. "It's like a 9 volt on your tongue. What I call a 'kitty cocktail.'"

Hop Jack finished gagging and set his glass down.

"Definitely made with sugar cane and not for the diabetics among us," Evil said.

"My kids would love it," Vinny chuckled as Lumber Jack and De' guessed Belgium, England and ribbon candy.

Magistrate suggested this beer be cooked down and used as a ham glaze.

**Sierra Nevada, Big Foot Barley Wine Style Ale, Chico, California 9.6%**

"Hop, hop, hop," Loretta chimed as she set her glass down. "I'm too girly for this one."

Hop Jack poured another glass and simply said, "very nice."

Magistrate recommended drinking this beer slowly, to enjoy the muscle in it. "West Coast Crusher."

Vinny found the nose sharp, like a stone barley wine, and guessed "Old Guardian."

"Alcohol's too evident," De' offered.

**Mad River Brewing Company, John Barleycorn Organic 2004 Harvest, Blue Lake, California**

"Toe jam in the nose," Vinny announced.

"No," said

Loretta, "pez."

"This is one you have after an hour of shoveling," Hop Jack said while De' found baby aspirin and apples on the tongue.

Lumber Jack found oxidation in the taste, though disagreeing with Evil's barley wine prediction. "Too big to be a barley."

"Yeah," agreed Magistrate, "smells like funk cheese."

"Ah. Now that's a good beer," Magistrate announced.

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