

BEER BUZZ:

THE MYTH, THE LEGEND

by Joey Williams

I've been working on compiling information for the very first Beer Basics class being held at the Smith Street store at the end of this month and I've found myself more intrigued than usual with a lot of the misinformation and beer myths out there. Beer is a simple beverage made complicated by a lot of confusing labeling and marketing. Hopefully, by the end of this article, beer can return to being a simple and enjoyable drink.



One of the biggest myths and one we hear on almost a daily basis is that beer that has been chilled cannot be brought back to room temperature without destroying the flavor. This is simply untrue. Beer is a fairly stable liquid and can withstand a range of temperatures, and does on a daily basis. With all of the temperature changes during the brewing process, transportation, warehousing, more

transportation and further warehousing before making it to store shelves, all beer would be ruined by the time the consumer got it if this were true. Buying a cold six pack and allowing it to gradually return to room temperature before chilling it down and consuming it is perfectly fine. What you don't want to do is allow the beer to reach more extreme temperatures. Allowing beer to reach triple digits or drop below freezing will harm your beer and should be avoided.

Another myth that is brought up on a nearly daily basis is that ales are stronger and darker while lagers are lighter in both respects. A lot of the misconception stems from the way that beer is labeled in the state of Texas. According to the Texas Alcoholic Beverages Commission (TABC) all malt beverages under a certain strength are labeled "beer" and all malt beverages over that strength are labeled either "ale" or "malt liquor". The dividing alcohol content line sits around 5%. The difference between ales and lagers has nothing to do with color or strength and instead has to do with yeast and fermentation temperatures used. The thing to remember is that ales are fermented warmer and lagers are fermented much colder. This results in an ale having more yeast flavor, a fruit or spice character, and a lager being more crisp and lacking considerable yeast flavors. That's the only



difference between the two. Lagers can be dark and strong. Ales can be light and moderate in alcohol. Both can be hoppy or malty and both can be very heavy or surprisingly light.

One nasty myth that seems to show its head on occasion is that darker beers are produced when a brewer cleans a tank or burns a beer. Again, this is simply not true. A dark beer is produced when a brewer intends to produce a dark beer. The old rumor with American bock beers was that brewers cleaned their tanks in the spring and the darker color and richer flavors came from the leavings of the past years brewing. Can you imagine drinking something like that? I've heard people talking about stouts the same way. A beer is dark because that's how it was intended to be, not because of housecleaning or too much heat. Malt is roasted, much the same way coffee beans or cocoa nibs are roasted, to develop the dark color and rich flavors. Large additions of these heavily roasted malts results in a very dark beer with considerable dark flavors.

A more recent myth brought about by an interest in healthy living and eating is that dark beers are always higher in carbohydrates and calories. As it is with any blanket generalization, this just isn't true. People are always surprised to hear that Guinness, the "meal in a bottle", has about the same amount of calories as a full-strength American lager like Budweiser. Just like with the ale or lager designation, the color tells you nothing about the beer except some of the flavors to expect. A dark beer can be just as health conscious as a light-colored beer.

"There's a million and one myths out there regarding beer that add to the confusion, but the thing to remember is that if you like it, drink it. Most of the information out there about beer that is unbelievable, is. Try new things, drink it if you're interested and form your own opinions of what it's all about." ☺

Got beer myths or other questions you'd like some insight on? **E-mail me:** jwilliams@specsonline.com

**NEW ON SHELVES
AT SPEC'S
DOWNTOWN:**

**Real Ale Devil's Backbone
Tripel 6pk**

**Brooklyn Summer Ale
6pk**

**Brewdog 5AM Saint Red
Ale 4pk**

Brewdog Punk IPA 4pk