

Pale ales suit the tastes of spring and summer

By Matthew P. Clements

The term Pale Ale has been around the beer lexicon for hundreds of years. American Breweries have been creating a myriad of styles of pale ales to satisfy the thirst of legions of beer aficionados with combinations of water, malted barley, yeast and hops. The history of this beer style parallels the American experience from origins in England.

Pale ales first started being brewed in the 1700's as commercial preparation of the barley using coke in the malting process produced a lighter and less smoky or roasted malt. One of the most popular styles of British pale ales in the 19th Century is the use of the term 'Bitter' or 'Extra Special Bitter' to describe the difference in hops from 'Mild' or other styles.

Another popular variant of British Pale Ale is from Bass Brewery which has an interesting flavor characteristic from the very hard water from Burton upon Trent. Hard water in this case has a high proportion of dissolved salt from the gypsum in the hills around the Trent river. The local acreage is also protected from

chemical treatment to keep their water supply pristine.

The United States had a thriving local brewery industry prior to the passing of the Volstead Act and the institution of Prohibition from October 28, 1919 to December 5, 1933 changed the landscape for beer in the United States into a breeding ground for homogenous fizzy yellow lager.

One classic example of the pre-Prohibition variety of beer in the United States is in the case of the Ballentine Brewery which was the 5th largest brewery in the country in 1877. Their flagship beer was a Pale Ale that is that later fell into stagnation in the post-Prohibition move towards light lager beers that still dominate the mass market to this day. Ironically, Ballentine Ales are now brewed in Eden, NC by Miller Brewing.

Director of Brewing Operations of the Carolina Brewery, Jon Connolly, has created two different pale ales for the spring and summer seasonal rotation for wholesale deliveries and for beer fans to enjoy at either of their brew pub locations. "Pale Ales remain the most popular of craft beer styles," Connolly stated. "Firecracker Pale Ale and

Bullpen Pale Ale don't fit neatly into either the English or American Style Pale Ale, both are hybrids combining the best features of both categories. These two beers contain rich European malts and citrusy American hops and both have a moderate ABV of 5.1%."

For those of you who enjoy drinking a cold refreshing pint but are unfamiliar with the beer lexicon, "IBU's are international bittering units, the higher the number the more perceived hop bitterness, this is what we use to measure the bitterness in beer," elaborated Connolly. "The Firecracker is the hoppier of the two with an IBU of 61 while the Bullpen has less hops and more caramel malt flavor and rings in at a more subdued 43 IBU's."

Both beers are designed for enjoying a session beer where you could enjoy a couple of pints with excellent flavor and refreshing flavors without worrying about the high alcohol of the very popular India Pale Ales that can range in the 7.0 ABV or higher range.

Jon Connolly created the recipe for Firecracker Pale Ale to help to celebrate American Beer Month in 2004 and to add another option to the summer beer rotation. The Firecracker comes on tap by July 4th every year, "When I decided to make the Firecracker Pale Ale my main goal was to create a bright and snappy beer that would fit a special niche," Connolly described. "Specifically, I wanted a beer that would be thirst quenching and not too heavy in the warmer weather. I wanted this beer to have just enough of a malt backbone to support the relatively heavy hop character while at the same time remaining more dry than sweet."

The Firecracker has a lovely snap of

floral hoppiness featuring North West Chinook hops which can be refreshing with some Buffalo Wings or to cut the spice of local favorite Cackalacky sauced grilled chicken or pork.

Then a couple of years ago the Durham Bulls and the Carolina Brewery partnered on a new pale ale to be served at the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, some very special draft accounts and at both brew pub locations, "The design of the Bullpen brought its own unique challenges," Connolly confessed. "My thoughts here were to produce a beer that would bring a pleasant mellowness, but without any somber or brooding characteristics. This beer needed to be crisp enough to slake a summertime thirst but also be a beer with rich enough malt flavor so that it can be sipped slowly over a few innings while enjoying a day at the ballpark."

The Bullpen Pale Ale goes great with pretzels, chili dogs and other summertime fare at the ball park or featured while you are grilling bratwurst, steaks, burgers or hot dogs. The Bullpen is also an excellent beer for beer braising sausages before putting them on the grill or to use to help prepare ribs or boned chicken for easy grilling. The Bullpen Pale Ale is on tap now at both Carolina Brewery locations and we are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Firecracker Pale Ale on April 30th! Come see how our talented brewers have taken the history of this versatile beer style and adapted it to make two unique and refreshing beer styles. Cheers!

Matthew P. Clements is the Director of Food and Beverage for the Carolina Brewery.

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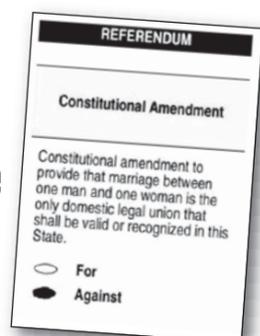
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