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CHOW



PHOTO BY JEAN-MARC ROSIER (ROSIER.PRO)

What's in the bucket?

beer diversity and quantity at beer tasting events has given rise to the use of beer dump buckets. He says even spitting out a beer already in your mouth is becoming acceptable in the beer sampling culture, too. “When you have hundreds of beers to taste, why shouldn’t you spit some out, especially if you don’t like it?” he says.

One reason people might not spit, or even dump, their beer is that they have paid a price to enter a festival and therefore feel a compulsion to consume as much as they can to get their money’s worth. Another reason is that it, frankly, looks kind of gross, and indeed is considered a vulgar act in our culture. Thus, it’s remarkable that the wine culture has made the sound and sight of expelling wine from the mouth into a mark of class.

The beer culture, I believe, is working its way there. Tom McCormick, the president of the California Craft Brewers Association, says dump buckets are typically for dumping beer into only from one’s glass but that this could change as attitudes and customs shift. “I suppose people should feel comfortable about spitting into dump buckets as well rather than swallowing,” he said.

On the other hand, there is a case to be made for swallowing a beer to more thoroughly taste it. Deschutes Brewery explains on its website the importance of putting beer in your belly in order to adequately assess and experience its flavor.

“Unlike wine, beer has carbonation (CO₂), and as you take a sip, CO₂ escapes the liquid as gas and rises from your throat to your nasal passage, carrying some flavor of the beer. Thus, the sense of smell combines with taste to get an overall flavor of the beer in a different manner than uncarbonated wine. To get the full flavor experience of beer, one must swallow.”

With the festival season upon us—and beer weeks and beer fests happening all over California, culminating with the California Craft Beer Summit (Sept. 12-14) in Long Beach—and hundreds of beers to sample in the sun, pace yourself, remember those dump buckets and take the opportunity to safely sample dozens of new beers that you’ve never had before.

Because getting drunk at a tasting is a total rookie move. □

It's time to spit out your beer, just like the wine-drinkers do

What’s your best spit bucket story? Mine takes me back a decade or so, when I was at a pinot noir tasting in San Francisco and, upon stepping up to a booth to try the wine, I emptied my glass into a tall metal vessel on the table. The winemaker politely told me I had just poured my wine into a prized single-vineyard release, which he was decanting in a steel vase.

Mortified, I slunk away, hoping we wouldn’t meet again. My second best spit bucket story took place in 2010 at the Boonville Beer Festival, and didn’t actually involve a spit bucket: I dumped a generous pour of some high-alcohol stout into the grass, rather than guzzle it, as I approached the next beer table. Almost immediately, I saw a nearby man smirk, look from

me to his friend and say, barely audible under the noise of the crowd, “Total rookie move.”

It was 30 minutes into a day-long, all-you-can-drink beer extravaganza, and this guy was giving me a hard time because I was pacing myself?

Anyway, the last laugh is on him, because nine years later, dumping beer—even good stuff—is standard practice at tastings. Rare is the beer table where there isn’t a dump bucket. Indeed, the handsome steel vessels have become an ordinary piece of beer festival table décor, whereas a decade ago they were scarcely seen, recalls Brendan Moylan, owner of Moylan’s and Marin brewing companies. “In the old days, you had maybe 20 beers to choose from at a festival,” Moylan said. “Now, there might be hundreds.”

He says the overall increase in

by
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