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DRINK

Mid-winter chill

Industry experts dish on which beers pair best during the cold weather

BY MITCH BARBER

Peter Hoey, brewmaster at Urban Roots Brewing & Smokehouse, compares the malapropos drinking of a pilsner on a cold, rainy day to drinking a stout or a hot cup of coffee poolside in the summer. He says he tends to drink seasonally. So what styles are best to drink on the days when you bundle up before going outside?

You've likely heard the pat answer to this question: a stout, a porter, or an offering with a high ABV. I recently decided to dig deeper into the inquiry with some key players in Sacramento's beer scene.

Grocery manager at Taylor's Market in Land Park, Troy Durfee, likens winter beer to anti-session beer. "You drink one or two by the fire with a blanket," he says. "They're warming. They're good with comfort food like prime rib and stuffing."

Durfee mentioned barrel-aged beers and those with spices or cocoa nibs added as being especially delicious as an accompaniment to cold weather.

Dave Gull, owner of New Helvetia Brewing Company on Broadway, says he adds cocoa from Ginger Elizabeth Chocolates in Midtown to his imperial chocolate porter formula. It's a beer that combines the darkness and the higher alcohol content of many winter-focused beers, and it received a gold medal at the Great American Beer Festival in the experimental beer category in 2015. It's part of New Helvetia's curiously named Mystery Airship series, and it's an intriguing Valentine's Day alternative. Although he produced

such a season-specific beer, Gull opined that the whole concept of winter beer is rather subjective.

Back at Urban Roots, Hoey says he believes in malt-forward beers such as the Mercury Drops. He brews a black lager called Nothing is Certain with tasting notes of chocolate and roasted malt.

"It drinks like a porter, but it finishes like a pilsner," he says. It's an ideal brew for one of those mildly chilly Sacramento nights.

Sara Crocker's favorite beer to drink during the winter is one of Libertine Brewing Company's dark rye saisons. A specialty manager at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op, Crocker makes her rounds in the beer and wine section daily.

"It's a dark rye beer, it's kind of sour and it's ABV is 5.8 percent," Crocker says. "It's aged in French oak and it's good with comfort food."

Brewed in San Luis Obispo, it's sealed with a cork, and aesthetically, looks like a bottle of wine. It's a creative option for a Groundhog's Day dinner party without being so alcohol heavy.

Recall Hoey's stout-and-hot-coffee-by-the-pool analogy? Well, Insight Coffee Roasters' Southside café location stocks Bike Dog's Milk Stout. And a stout paired with a cup of hot coffee isn't a bad idea on a crisp, winter morning. A barista, tongue-in-cheek, suggested, "It's like a warm blanket for your mouth." I agree. □

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