



From left: Wayward Black Beer, Bonne Nuit and Golden Lager at Holy Mountain Brewing

NEW AGE ALE

A new brewery brings a new taste to Seattle

BY KENDALL JONES

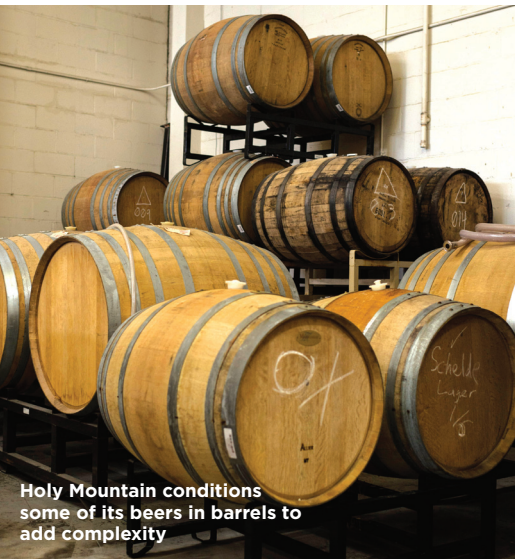
IT WAS THE MOST highly anticipated local brewery launch in recent memory, generating the kind of buzz that often leads to bitter disappointment and the inevitable aftertaste of unrealistic expectations. However, after three years of careful planning, **HOLY MOUNTAIN BREWING** (1421 Elliott Ave. W; holymountainbrewing.com) exceeded expectations with the very first beers it poured last October, instantly impressing local beer connoisseurs with an exciting array of uncommon, buzz-worthy beers.

Located in Interbay, near the Magnolia Bridge, and started by three friends who worked in the local beer business and dreamed of a brewery to call their own, Holy Mountain is conveniently located on the road home for growler-toting Ballardites and Magnolians and others in the city's northwestern 'hoods. But what separates this brewery from the crowd is its uncommon commitment to barrel-aging and barrel-fermenting to build exceptionally bold and adventuresome beers. Brewing a regular, predictable lineup of IPAs and pale ales is just a part of this brewery's plan.

Creating "barrel beers" involves fermenting and/or conditioning beer in oak barrels, often salvaged from wineries and distilleries, to add complexity and unexpected flavors to the beer. Typically, beer is fermented and conditioned in stainless steel tanks.

More than oak flavor, much of the character bestowed upon the beer depends on the barrel's previous contents, such as notes of vanilla and toffee added by bourbon barrels, pine and juniper added by gin barrels, fruit and tannins added by Chardonnay barrels, and so on. The intensity of flavor can be affected by how long the beer is aged, and there is no standard duration, so the brewer must babysit each batch of beer to see how things are coming along.

It is a time-intensive process, one that involves some risk because there is no guarantee how the barrel time will affect the beer. It's also an approach typically reserved for more mature breweries with reliable, established revenue streams, and involves the kind of risk that causes brewery accountants to lose sleep. But for this upstart brewery, playing with barrels was always part of the plan.



Holy Mountain conditions some of its beers in barrels to add complexity

"We critically evaluate every part of the process to achieve the end product that we desire," says Colin Lenfesty, head brewer and co-owner of Holy Mountain. "We rely heavily on wood for long- and short-term storage and fermentation, but the barrel is there to complement the beer and coax out nuances in a different way than stainless steel."

Lenfesty explains that the flavors are produced by the barrels rather than with bizarre ingredients. "We're brewing a lot of different styles off the bat, but when it comes down to it, they are all somewhat traditional. We're not into using crazy adjuncts and wacky ingredients to create over-the-top, extreme flavors. We source the best ingredients possible, and don't cut corners. We want you to taste each of those components. When they all come together in balance, and you order a second [beer], we've done our job."

Some of Holy Mountain's initial offerings were showstoppers and immediately earned the allegiance of beer aficionados, such as the Holy Mountain Gose, a barrel-fermented wheat beer that attacks the palate with a vibrant citrus character that challenges you to reconsider how beer is supposed to taste. The brewery's beers range from quaffable lagers, such as the aptly named Holy Mountain Lager, to uncommon ales, such as the King's Head double oatmeal brown ale, a big and bold beer that is aged in whiskey barrels.

Typically a brewery builds a reputation by offering a predictable selection of beers to cautiously introduce itself to the world, but Holy Mountain is different. Instead of ascending slowly into the rarefied air of barrel beers and other uncommon creations, this brewery started at the pinnacle, bravely shouting from the mountaintop, "We have arrived!"

EASTON RICHMOND (2)

KENDALL'S HOLY MOUNTAIN PICKS

Holy Mountain beers are available at the brewery's tasting room (adults only; open Thu.-Sun, afternoons and evenings), where 5-ounce and 13-ounce pours are served. Prefilled, grab-and-go 32-ounce growlers are available for \$7-\$9. Also look for Holy Mountain on tap at better beer bars around Seattle. In the coming months, bottled beers will be available at area bottle shops.



Holy Mountain brewer and co-owner Colin Lenfesty

HOLY MOUNTAIN LAGER

The aroma brings to mind whole-grain bread, and the sparkling clean, light golden appearance is a prelude to the beer's crisp, bright flavor, which features a pronounced but not overwhelming hop bitterness. Dry and light-bodied, with a faint metallic sweetness, this beer goes down easy, especially when accompanying seafood, such as fresh oysters. Clocking in at 5 percent alcohol by volume, this quaffable beer begs you to have another.

HOLY MOUNTAIN GOSE

At its core, this is a light wheat beer, lemony yellow in color and low in alcohol (4.6 percent alcohol by volume), but on the palate it isn't light at all, with a distinct citrus character dominating the aroma and flavor, which are accompanied by significant notes of coriander. This beer, whose name rhymes with "Rosa," is fermented in oak

wine puncheons, a particular style of barrel. Pair it with a dinner salad, dressed with a light balsamic vinaigrette, or sip it alone on a warm summer day; this beer is reminiscent of lemonade without the tartness.

KING'S HEAD DOUBLE OATMEAL BROWN ALE

The smell of dark chocolate and coffee entice you to explore this complex, nearly opaque brown ale, which drinks more like a stout because of its rich flavor and significant alcohol content (8 percent alcohol by volume). On the palate, this beer is dry, lacking the sweetness that the aroma suggests, with very slight hop bitterness and hints of stone fruit adding a luscious roundness to the overall flavor. In addition to the non-barrel-aged version, expect to see a bourbon-barrel King's Head in the coming months. The beer begs to share the table with: chicken in a rich mole sauce, or serve it alongside a chocolate dessert, such as German chocolate cake.

HOLY MOUNTAIN DOUBLE IPA

Whereas most beers of this style tend to be a deep golden color, this one is light brown, almost caramel in color. The smells of pineapple, mango and Juicy Fruit gum waft from the glass, and the flavor mirrors the aroma—rich, complex, fruity and oddly reminiscent of a blue Dum Dum sucker. Although it weighs in at 9.2 percent alcohol by volume, the alcohol is dangerously well-disguised. This is a monstrously flavorful beer and would likely overpower most foods, but for some reason you'll find yourself craving bananas Foster.




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