

Beer Peeves

By Don Tse

Good Beer Is Not Pretentious

A good friend of mine once accused me of trying to make beer pretentious. I may apply different criteria in choosing a beer than most consumers do. I may sniff my beer before tasting it. I may try to warm a beer that has been served too cold. But none of this makes me pretentious. And good beer is certainly not pretentious.

Through no fault of his own, my friend has fallen into the big beer marketing trap that beer must be highly-carbonated, yellow and clean (ie. flavorless) and must be consumed in quantity, with macho friends while watching testosterone-enraged sports and eating salty snacks. My friend has lost sight of the fact that beer is a beverage. It is

intended to have flavor. More specifically, it is intended to have pleasing flavor.

Choosing a beer because of its flavor is not pretentious. On the contrary, those who are loyal to a particular brand of beer because the related advertising most closely matches their lifestyle (or most closely matches the lifestyle they wish they lived) are the ones doing the pretending. It angers and frustrates me that beer has achieved such low standing in most of the culinary world that those of us trying to return it to its former glory are accused of pretension.

But lest we, as beer lovers, get smug in our passion for craft beer, we should occasionally remind ourselves that choosing a beer merely because it was made locally or far away, by a small brewer or in small batches, with only certain ingredients or based on a centuries-old recipe is being as pretentious as those who choose a beer because it is the "King of Beers".

While you may be more likely to find a good beer amongst those brewed by someone who refers to herself as an artisan, the fact that the

brewer wanted it to be good, and tried to make it good, does not make it so. Indeed, I have sampled many "craft" beers that I would have happily exchanged for a Silver Bullet.

Unfortunately, if beer snobs are too quick to look down their noses at those drinking low-IBU, contract-brewed, not-within-style-guideline beers, they will be just as guilty of sin as those who believe their choice of beer makes them youthful, sexy, sophisticated or smart. That's not to say we can't all have and express our opinions about each particular beer. But there are far too many self-proclaimed beer experts out there who spend too much time focusing on what goes into the beer instead of what flavor comes out.

At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is the flavor of the beer when you drink it. To judge a beer on any other factor is to make it pretentious. While it is not pretentious to like good beer, it is also important that good beer not be pretentious. Drink and let drink.

Got a Beer Peeve? Send it to Tony@alestreetnews.com.