

Great beer? Czech!

Big Rock's latest experiment might be its best ever

DON TSE

Last week, Big Rock Brewery officially launched its latest offering. SAAZ Republic is the fifth of Big Rock's Brewmaster's Editions. If you are fortunate, you may have had a preview sample of it at the recent Taste of Calgary food festival at Eau Claire, where the beer made its unofficial debut. Now that it has officially launched, SAAZ Republic should become fairly easy to find at your favourite store, bar or restaurant.

SAAZ Republic is a Czech-style pilsner, the original golden lager. Pilsner was invented in 1842 in the

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town of Pilsen, in the Czech Republic. Real pilsner — traditional Czech pilsner — is brewed solely with pale malt and Saaz hops, one of the five “noble” hops cherished for its soft, aromatic characteristics.

Many breweries, including a lot of bad ones, have abused the term “pilsner” and use it merely to designate their lightest beer. But Big Rock's SAAZ Republic is the real deal. It is brewed solely with two-row malt and Czech Saaz hops. The beer has a firm but gentle malt foundation supporting a sturdy structure of hops — which contribute a gentle, pleasant bitterness and an assertive, but not overpowering, hop flavour. The emphasis is on flavours similar to freshly cut grass.

This is a fantastic example of

traditional pilsner, but if you have doubts and want to do your own comparison tasting, try one of these other Czech-style pilsners available at Calgary's finer liquor retailers. You will note there are no rabbits hidden on the labels of these beers.

• Pilsner Urquell — “Urquell” means “original source” and Pilsner Urquell is as authentic as it gets — the first pilsner ever, brewed since 1842. This is the pilsner against which all others should be measured. The beer is available in bottles or cans, but seek out the cans. Cans protected the beer better over the long voyage from Europe. Golden. Crystal clear. Crisp, firm malteness. Sharp, grassy hops. Perfection.


• Paddock Wood Czech Mate —

Czech Mate isn't just a great pun, it's a great beer. Brewed with tradi-

tional ingredients, this is another fine example of traditional pilsner. Water in Saskatoon, where Paddock Wood Brewing is located, is substantially harder than the water in Pilsen, which is famously soft. As a result, Czech Mate has a slightly mineral-like quality and a slightly sharper hop flavour.

• Lagunitas Czech Style Pilsner — Lagunitas Brewing Company is located in northern California where they are familiar with using green herbs, though smoking them might take priority over brewing with them. Still, Lagunitas' pilsner is fantastic. It has a slightly earthier bitterness and a softer, more grassy hop flavour than Pilsner Urquell, but is still a fantastic example of the style.

Prost!

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