

A Natural Born Keller

Wild Rose's latest seasonal is a mosaic of beer styles

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Wild Rose Brewery's latest seasonal beer is a California Keller Bock, dubbed Natural Born Keller. What exactly is a California Keller Bock?

"Style wise, it [is] like a strong, unfiltered steam beer," says Brian Smith, director of brewing operations. "It's more or less a made up [style of beer]; we incorporated a few different styles."

Great. So let's break this down. The name "California Keller Bock" implies three beer styles, all of which are lagers.

The first, California common, is also known as steam beer. The most famous commercially available example is Anchor Steam from San Francisco. It is a lager fermented at higher, ale-like temperatures. This reproduces beers first brewed in California during the gold rush, before the widespread use of refrigeration allowed for beer production at lower temperatures. The higher fermentation temperature produces a lightly fruity beer with pronounced toastiness and assertive hop bitterness, though hop flavours (such as citrus or pine) are minimal.

A kellerbier, also known as zwickelbier, is basically an unfiltered pilsner — as in a highly hopped lager, not a simple light lager with little rabbits hidden in its label. "Kellerbier" translates from German as "cellar beer" and historically underwent a long period of aging at cool temperatures.

Finally, bock is a high-alcohol lager

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with complex maltiness and gentle sweetness. A bock should lack hop flavours, though hops are used to provide bitterness to balance against the malt sweetness. The name "bock" is a German pun, since the beer style originated in the town of Einbeck, which in German sounds like "one goat." To this day, many bock beers feature a picture of a goat on the label, and Natural Born Keller follows this tradition.

To sum up, Natural Born Keller is an unfiltered, malt-forward lager, fermented at ale-like temperatures, with a bock-like six per cent alcohol. Wild Rose started with a blend of four varieties of malt to create the complex malt profile expected of a bock. Then, they added German and Czech "noble" hops, which are prized for their delicate flavours and soft bitterness. Such hops would be expected in a kellerbier and were chosen over the Northern Brewer variety of hops that would be expected in a steam beer. Finally, they used authentic steam beer yeast, fermented the beer at appropriately warm temperatures, and left the beer unfiltered.

Natural Born Keller has a firm malt foundation with touches of toast, wood and a hemp-like nuttiness. Still, there is a nice hop flavour, including a grassy note and a hint of citrus. A gentle level of carbonation gives the beer a soft effervescence in the mouth.

This unique beer demonstrates the



value of the Brewer's Tap program — using a test brewery, Wild Rose is able to create small batches of beer, flexing its creative muscle and trying out ideas. These Brewer's Tap beers are released about once a week in the brewery's taproom and typically only last a couple of days, but the best of the beers are considered for future release as a seasonal beer, as was the case with Natural Born Keller.

I'd take this goat over a rabbit any day.