

Big Rock and Brewsters rolling out wet-hop beers

► DON TSE

IF BEER WAS music, the malt would be the rhythm, providing structure to the music, while hops would be the melody, the catchy part of the tune built upon the structure provided by the malt. Hops get all the glory. Hops are what gets Miley Cyrus twerking.

Hops are valuable because of the acids and oils found within them. Unfortunately, these are delicate and volatile, so to make hops last, the vast majority of them, once picked, are dried in an "oast house," or kiln. Some will then be baled into large sacks and some will be squeezed into uniform-sized "plugs," but most will be "pelletized," a process of pulverizing the hops before squeezing them into small, hard pellets.

The process of drying, bailing, plugging and pelletizing preserves the fragile elements of the hops so they can be used for brewing throughout the year. Also, hops are often sealed in vacuum packets and kept refrigerated for further protection.

The point is, hops are precious.

As an agricultural product, hops have a season. That season is now. It is only at this time each year, as the hops are being harvested, that there is an opportunity to brew a special beer made with wet hops, before they are dried and processed.

Fresh hop beers are quite popular, but are logistically difficult to brew and, as a result, fairly rare. Such beers are cherished for fresher, fruitier, livelier flavours, while their bitterness is more rounded and less sharp. Put simply, wet hop beers taste brighter.

To make Anthea Wet Hop Ale, Big Rock Brewery flew 60 kilograms of Cascade hops direct off the vine from the Yakima Valley to Calgary, according to Paul Gautreau, brewmaster and vice-president of operations.

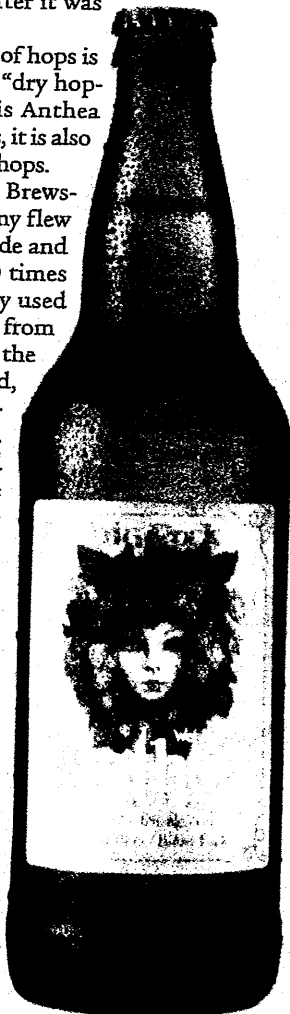
He says it took under 20 hours from the time the hops were picked before they were used in the brew. A second shipment of wet hops was sent later to be added to the beer after it was fermented.

The later addition of hops is ironically known as "dry hopping," so not only is Anthea brewed with wet hops, it is also dry hopped with wet hops.

At the same time, Brewsters Brewing Company flew 150 pounds of Cascade and Centennial hops (10 times the amount normally used for a Brewsters brew) from British Columbia on the day they were picked, according to brewmaster Rob Walsch. The hops were used the next day to make Harvest Wet Hop Pale Ale.

Big Rock Anthea Wet Hop Ale will be packaged in 650 ml bottles and should be available starting October 15. Brewsters Harvest Wet Hop will be available at all Brewsters locations in November.

By necessity, these are a limited edition products, so get some while you can. The beers are guaranteed to get your taste buds twerking. ▶▶



BOOZE