

Gigantic celebrates the art of brewing

Portland brewery brings artistry to its beer and its labels ▶ DON TSE

INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN COMIC artist Rob Reger (*robregger.com*) was one of the early investors in Portland, Oregon's Gigantic Brewing Co., and that set the brewery up to have tight connections to the visual arts community, which provides the one-of-a-kind artwork for its beer labels.

Gigantic has only one regular beer — its IPA — while the rest of its brews are one-time, limited releases, including some draft-only seasonals. "There are beer bars that feature a constantly rotating list of beers, so I thought that idea would be good for a brewery," explained Gigantic brewmaster Ben Love on a recent trip to Calgary to launch the brand here.

Each of the 18 (so far) bottled beers features label art commissioned from a different artist, chosen by Gigantic, working with Reger and local Portland galleries. So tight is the connection between Gigantic and the arts community, according to Love, that when Gigantic supplies beer for gallery openings, patrons often ask for the beers by the artist who created the label, rather than the name of the beer.

Love similarly takes an artistic view to his brewing — each brew is a unique creation reflective of his whim of the day. The beers do not necessarily conform to what others are brewing or to traditional beer styles.

Due to the nature of Gigantic's business model its beers are fleeting, so if you see something on the shelves of your favourite liquor store, or on tap at your favourite beer bar, grab it while you can. Here are some of the beers that recently came to Alberta, which you may be able to get if you rush to the store soon. Otherwise, be on the lookout for new and exciting art from Gigantic in the coming weeks and months.

• **TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN** — Named after an online comic character created by artist Shannon Wheeler (*tmc.com*), this beer is made with cold-pressed coffee. The base beer is an imperial black saison, which Love admits is a completely made up beer style, but says it describes the beer he envisioned would best support the flavour of coffee. The coffee contributes not only roasted flavours, but also a gently fruity acidity that complements the spiciness of the saison yeast well.

• **PIPEWRENCH** — Barrel aging beer is all the rage these days, so it is no small feat for Gigantic to take home the gold medal at the 2014 World Beer Cup for Wood- and Barrel-Aged Beer. To make Pipewrench, a draft-only seasonal (hence no label art), Gigantic took its IPA and aged it in gin barrels (which held wine before they held gin). Look for botanical flavours from the gin, tea-like flavours from crystal malt used in the IPA, ripe oranges, pepper and wood from the oak, and a touch of wine.

GIGANTIC
BREWING COMPANY



SMOKED HEFEWEIZEN

• **FIRE BIRD SMOKED HEFEWEIZEN** — Wheat beers like hefeweizen are delicate, complex beers. But when smoked malt is added sparingly, it can add further complexity without overwhelming the intricacies of the style. It's a feat rarely accomplished, but Gigantic makes it seem easy, or at least the beer tastes like it was easy. Firebird's label features the art of Heiko Muller (*HeikoMuller.de*). ▶

BOOZE