

Stepping away from the hops

In praise of malty beers ▶ DON TSE

IN AN ARTICLE in *Fast Forward Weekly* a while ago, I compared beer to music. The malt is the rhythm, providing structure to the music, while hops are the melody, the catchy part of the tune built upon the structure provided by the malt. Like melody in music, hops in beer are often the part people focus on. But as any music fan will tell you, sometimes the rhythm is the star of the show. And similarly in beer, sometimes the malt is what captures our attention.

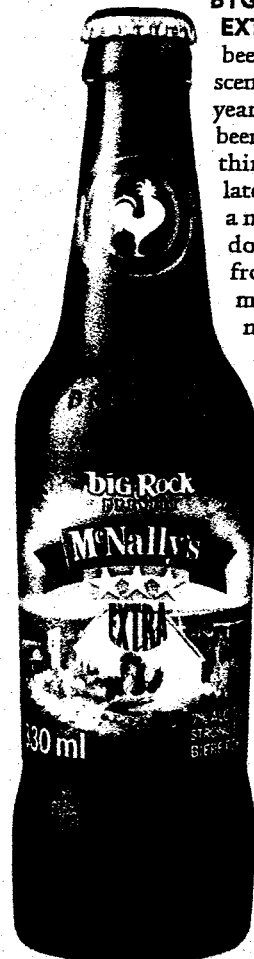
Malt is germinated grain, usually barley, but sometimes wheat, rye or others. Malt provides the carbohydrates that are fermented to produce alcohol. Malt is, quite literally, the beer; without it, beer would not exist.

There are plenty of beers out there in which malt is the dominant characteristic. Stouts, porters, barley wines and many others are malt-forward. But there are also beers in which the flavour is not merely malt-forward, but the malt has structure and character. Like funk or other rhythm-centred music, the issue is not the volume, but the structure.

Here are some local malty brews to get your rhythm going:

WILD ROSE REGAL LAGER // Regal Lager is Wild Rose Brewery's current seasonal release. It is a schwarzbier, a German style of dark lager. Although "schwarz" is German for "black," beers in this style tend to be dark brown, stopping short of actually being black. Schwarzbier is enigmatically light-bodied and easy-drinking, though full of malt character. Regal Lager is an excellent example. It is dark brown with some ruby influences when held up to light. The flavour is dry with a nice roasty maltiness and notes of toast — like toast that has been slightly burnt.

TOOL SHED RED RAGE // Red Rage is made with six different varieties of malt. While you won't be able to pick them all out, there is no doubt that this beer has raging amounts of malt character. Hints of molasses and tea tip the balance to the sweet side, though nice hops provide bitterness as balance, and a nice fruitiness.



BIG ROCK MCNALLY'S EXTRA // Big Rock Brewery has been leading the local craft beer scene for 35 years. In all of those years, its best beer has always been McNally's Extra. You don't think Big Rock founder, the late Ed McNally, would name a mediocre beer after himself, do you? McNally's is made from Canadian and British malts that provide nice sweetness to this deep amber beer.

As the beer warms, nice hop flavours emerge, but there is never doubt that this beer is all about the malt.

DANDY GOLDEN BROWN STRONG ALE

// Dandy Brewing may be the newest brewery in town, but when you taste its beer, you'll know you're not dealing with amateurs. Take the malty Golden Brown, for example. The malt foundation has notes of toast, making the beer taste drier than many malty beers, though the balance still favours the sweet side. This sweetness accompanies a light fruitiness very well. ▶▶

BOOZE

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