

SE Portland: Your new tasting room

If there's one thing that Portlanders love, it's beer. But we won't just drink any beer! Gone are the days where domestic brews like Bud Light and Coors were the predominant beers ordered throughout the city. Instead, craft beers and ciders from local Pacific Northwest Breweries have become the standard against which all other beers are measured.

Where's the hot bed of this scene? Right here in Southeast Portland.

"We want to be your tasting room," says Horse Brass Pub manager Joellene Piluso.

With rotating taps and an overwhelming amount of options, Horse Brass and other pubs in the area have truly become the best locations in Portland to sample craft beer and discover new and exciting trends.

You might expect that the Pearl District would have become the Portland hotspot for beer and cider. After all, large breweries like 10 Barrel have flocked to the area, and smaller spots like River Pig Saloon make great spots to catch up with a buddy over an awesome craft beer.

So why did the Pearl District not become even bigger in the craft beer scene? It turns out that there are a number of causes that have led Southeast to become Portland's Mecca for beer and cider. Ginger Vaadi, the owner of Bare Bones Café and Bar, believes that the strong social cultures of the Southeast Portland neighborhoods has a lot to do with Southeast's rise to craft beer prominence.

"Southeast is a social area, which gives it a bigger draw than other neighborhoods—there's a strong culture here," says Vaadi.

Others I spoke with agreed with this point.

"The Pearl District is filled with bigger companies, but Southeast has smaller breweries and operations that can push the boundaries of innovation, unlike large corporations," says Piluso.

Josh Johnston, co-owner of Produce Row, thinks that having smaller breweries is incredibly beneficial.

"In Southeast you're seeing a unique expression of innovation, and that's what makes this area different," says Johnston.

"Because of the economics and space, SE Portland will have more breweries than the Pearl, giving residents more options," notes Rogue Brewery President Brett Joyce.

Southeast Portland is also home to a diverse mix of long-time, older Portland residents and newer residents that are moving into the area. No matter their age, however, the residents of Southeast Portland are "always looking for something new," according to Portland Cider House' cider propagandist, Helen Lewis.

The next fad, the next trend, Southeast Portlanders are always searching for the next big thing.

"Southeast Portland is a trendy area, and our residents want to drink local," says Alex Kurnellas, one of the owners of local bottle shop Imperial. "The eastside is unique, it has character, and the drinking culture here reflects that."

This trendiness has done well to give a nice boost to the beer and cider establishments in the area. Several people that I spoke with highlighted one word that has created an even greater draw to Southeast Portland: "Airbnb." There are no large hotels here on the eastside of the Willamette River, but Airbnb has generated a greater level of tourism to Southeast Portland than anyone could have imagined. Travelers from around the world come to visit Portland, and local drinking establishments have capitalized on the opportunity to serve travelers some of the best beers and ciders in the world.

The next question centers around the continued growth of the drinking culture in Southeast, mainly "How can this growth continue?" Jennie Dorsey, the Chief Cider Curator for Schilling Cider House at 930 SE 10th Ave, believes that continued growth will hinge upon creating all-inclusive blocks.

"A community invested in one another that builds a shared experiences for all residents and businesses is what helps neighborhoods succeed," says Dorsey. "Creating a weekend destination that's still perfect for after-work happy hours is what makes us work."

Does this continued growth include food? After all, a greasy burger, delicious food just like mama used to make it, and other bar food staples sound pretty incredible when you're enjoying a craft beer or cider. But those I spoke with had mixed opinions.

"You can't compete without food," says Piluso. "Good food adds a lot to your drinking experience."

This sentiment was further echoed by Nour Hamieh, the owner of Rendez Vous at 817 SE 34th Ave off of Belmont.

"You don't want to open up a drinking establishment without food," says Hamieh. "Food isn't just part of the social experience, it completes it."

Others, like Kurnellas and Dorsey, believe that not carrying food or only having a small kitchen creates a "nice separation" between the two realms.

"We allow our customers to bring in whatever food they'd like. This promotes an inclusive and invested community, which in the end benefits all of us," says Dorsey.

Whether you need food with your beer and cider or not, Southeast Portland is definitely the place to go. Next time you're thirsty for a drink, you'll know exactly where to head.