



Beer and chocolate are a couple--s combo

June 20, 2007

Several years ago I volunteered -- make that begged -- to help a friend bottle Spinnaker--s ale.

This was the Victoria brew pub--s first venture into bottling their fine beers for off-sales, in what can only be described as a low-tech, labour-intensive operation.

But it was a labour of love as we wrapped the top necks of the bottles in special gold foil -- actually it was foil sheets used for wrapping baking potatoes -- and carefully counted each bottle: three for the house, one for us.

We were indeed happy bottlers.

We--ve all come a long way since then. During a recent visit to **Spinnaker--s Gastro Brewpub** " Guest House, my finance and I were shown how far one pub can go with good beer, fresh local produce and terrific BC wines.

After the long drive from Campbell River, on a miserable night, we were grateful to enter the warm charm of the waterfront pub in Esquimalt. After some harrowing encounters on the road, it was good to sit upstairs in the pub with our friends as we sipped on ever-popular Friday night cask of IPA and looked over the Victoria harbour.

Sufficiently relaxed, we joined Spinnaker--s owner/publican Paul Hadfield at the downstairs bar where he greeted us with a tray of chocolates and glasses of various beer.

--Beer and chocolate...before dinner?-- my partner asked hesitantly.

Ah well, when in Rome, as they say, as pastry chef Crystal Duck explained the beer and truffle pairings: white chocolate and lemon basil to Hefeweizen; dark chocolate with lavender and peppercorns to ESB; scotch and crushed coffee flavoured dark chocolate to Scottish Ale; stout infused dark chocolate with chocolate barley to Tsarist Stout; and orange and black currant dark chocolate to Fog Fighter Ale.

All we can say is, --yum!-- It was far tastier than we expected but before we raved for too long, Hadfield escorted us into the dining room for a dinner we won--t soon forget thanks to chefs Jeff Penner and Alison Ryan.

Our palates were cleansed with a light and refreshing saki caesar served with beautiful, tiny oysters from Cortes Island along with craft brewed IPA vinegar and golden beet mignonette.

As we sip our caesars -- the oysters were quickly devoured -- Hadfield explained the recent changes to the kitchen which resulted in more open space for the cooks and better service.

This wouldn't mean much, he adds, if they weren't finding new sources of local produce and vino to add to the menu. Simply put, fresh is best.

During the courses we were treated to organic greens from Saanich, goat cheese and organically farmed hazelnuts created by David Woods of Salt Spring Island, line caught sable fish, gallo mussels, wild chanterelles, Berkshire pork medallions from Metchosin, and artisan cheeses which included Natural Pastures of Courtenay.

And for dessert -- it was hard to believe we had room for more -- we had the house made basil ice cream float in Brazen Blackberry Mead from Tugwell Creek Meadery located north of Sooke.

Of course, each course was paired with some remarkable B.C. wines including a 2003 Sole from Giordano Venturi and Marilyn Schulze of Cobble Hill, a 2004 Orofino Vineyards Chardonnay from the Similkameen Valley, a 2004 Pinot Noir from Gary Oaks Vineyard on Salt Spring Island, and a 2004 Brandenburg #3 from Venturi Schulze Vineyards of Cobble Hill.

Ahh, so many wines, so little time as we suddenly noticed it was approaching midnight and the dining room had emptied. Fortunately we didn't have far to go as we swayed next store to one of the Spinnaker's excellent guest houses which feel like a home away from home.

The next day I bought some beer to take home and curiously wondered, --Who bottled this?--

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