



August 2008

### Ale to the Chief!

**Avery Brewing Co., Boulder, Colorado**

**8.75%abv \$8.50/22oz**

Just in time for the political season comes...Ale to the Chief!

Adam Avery thanks his parents' enlightened, 'European' sensibilities for his love of beer. As he tells it, his aunt used to put a few drops of beer on his pacifier to soothe his teething as an infant, and during his teen years he was often allowed a small beer at special dinners and family functions. By his late teens, Adam was coming to the realization that the beers available on the market at the time (mid-80's) were not sufficiently engaging to his palate, and he figured that to drink beer with enough flavor to excite him, he'd have to brew it himself. So, in what has become a common story among American brewers, Adam began as a home-brewer. By the early 1990's, he had honed his skills to the point where friends and family were beginning to insist he start his own commercial brewery. Adam's father Larry, a research chemist for the previous thirty years, promptly retired and invested everything he had – including his labor – in Adam's new project. In 1993, Avery Brewing Company was born in the small college and resort town of Boulder, Colorado. Their initial brewing system was a pieced together seven-barrel brewhouse, and they began production of their three core draft brands: Redpoint Amber, Ellie's Brown Ale (named after the family dog, a chocolate lab), and Out of Bounds Stout. The following year, in his first year entering the contest, Adam's Out of Bounds Stout won a gold medal in the dry stout category at the Great American Beer Festival, the US's premier brewing competition, his first of many, many awards over the succeeding fifteen years. The brewery had to undergo expansion in 1996 to meet rapidly increasing demand, and added a bottling line that year so they could begin selling packaged beers. The brewery underwent further expansions in 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2006, and now has a capacity of 13,000 barrels per year, and produces some two dozen different ales annually, distributed to over thirty states and select export countries. Only thirty cases of this beer came to the Bay Area, and we are using half of that allocation for our Beer Club, so this is very exclusive.

Ale to the Chief! is described by the brewery as a 'Presidential Pale Ale'. Basically, it would be considered an 'Imperial' Pale Ale, had it come from an Empire, but this "bipartisan blend of malt and hops" is democratically American all the way, hence 'Presidential Pale Ale'. It is brewed using that old cliché of brewing, Rocky Mountain spring water, along with C150 (a caramel malt), Dark Munich, Honey and Pale Two-row malts. During the boil, Magnum hops are added for bittering, Cascades for flavor and aroma. The beer is then dry-hopped in the fermenter with another dose of grapefruity, whole flower Cascade hops to further enhance its aroma and bitterness. A special yeast strain developed by Adam over the years allows this high-gravity beer to ferment totally dry at 8.75%, but without any sense of heaviness or overt flavors of alcohol. Ale to the Chief! is filtered before bottling, and although the high alcohol content of the finished product will ensure good shelf stability, really hoppy beers are generally at their best within six months or so of bottling, so you don't lose any of the freshness of hop character that the beer is intended to convey. Serve your Ale to the Chief! in a classic pint glass, or large-mouthed red wine glass, and don't drink it too cold, or you'll miss out on some of the complex flavors – about 40-45°F would be ideal.

Your Ale to the Chief! will pour into the glass a bright, golden-copper color. The cream-colored head is big and rocky, and leaves a substantial lace in the glass as you drink the beer. The aromas here are mildly grainy and nutty, but are mainly all about pungent Cascade hops: pine sap, spruce tips, and grapefruit pith. It is surprisingly light on the palate, though, with a brightness of fruit (lemon, mango) and crisp grainy notes easily balancing the assertive hop character. The alcohol is never noticeable, and this beer's drinkability belies its almost 9% strength. This is so drinkable it would be a fun session beer – but be careful, because that alcohol will sneak up on you quickly! It would also be suitable with all manner of summer barbecue and/or pub grub, especially a hearty, meat-and-potatoes kind of meal.



### Siamese Twin Ale

Uncommon Brewers, Santa Cruz, California

8.5%abv     \$9.99/4 x 16oz cans

Last month, almost six years after the launch of our Beer of the Month Club, we sent out our first canned beer. While I haven't heard any reaction from those of you scattered around the country, the response among our local Club members has been fantastic – we can hardly keep the Hell or High Watermelon (or its accompanying Brew Free or Die! IPA) on the shelf. And now, we follow up with...another canned beer! Cans actually make a lot of sense, especially for high-quality craft beers. They protect the contents from light, they are cheaper and easier to fill and transport, easier to recycle and better for the environment in general. Now that cans can be made with special interior liners that keep the beer from contacting the aluminum itself, I think we'll be seeing a lot more small craft breweries follow suit.

Uncommon Brewers are uncommon in more ways than just using cans for their products. Like Adam Avery, founder Alec Stefansky began brewing while in college, honing his skills for a future in the brewing industry. Then, in 2002, Alec met Skot Colacicco, a like-minded home brewer, and they began working together on their unusual beers. Their initial goal was to brew entirely without hops, embracing brewing's long history of using other herbs, roots and spices (hops have really only been common in brewing for a couple of hundred years). As Alec has said, "That was our first mistake – hops taste good!" Hops also have a preservative effect on beer, although that is certainly less important today than it was in the days before refrigeration. After five years of perfecting their uncommon beer recipes, the two were finally ready to set up shop, and built their brewery in Santa Cruz's Old Sash Mill, a former lumber mill now divided into a mixed-use facility housing artists, wineries, a cafe, a movie theater, and, now, a brewery. Embracing the uncommon, their first beer was sold in plastic, recyclable kegs for local distribution, and was made entirely from organic ingredients. Now, the brewery is one of only a few 100% certified organic breweries in the country, and when they decided it was time for packaged beer sales, their obvious choice was to buy a hand-operated canner, and avoid bottles altogether.

Due to the use of unusual spices and other ingredients in their beers, the Uncommon Brewers have had a bit of a tough time getting government approval for their labels. The Siamese Twin has passed muster, but their Golden State Ale, which is brewed with poppy seeds; and their Baltic Porter, brewed with licorice root are both held up at the moment, waiting to be proven "non-medical". I guess the feds are worried that poppy seeds may leave some residual opiates or something – certainly, they have nothing more pressing to tend to! The Siamese Twin Ale is based on a Belgian Abbey Double in style, mostly accentuating the rich, sweet malt flavors. Using an old trick of Belgian brewing, the duo decided to spice their ale with whole coriander seed, which is fairly common in Belgian brewing, but also added kaffir lime leaf and whole lemongrass, to give it an exotic, Southeast Asian flair. The spices are used whole – no dried herbs, powders or extracts – and are added to the Breiss caramel and Gambrinus Pale malts during the boil, along with Goldings and Saphir hops for bittering and preservation. They use a special yeast of Belgian origin that they are understandably secretive about and filtered water from the Santa Cruz Mountains. All of their raw ingredients are CCOF certified organic, and the brewery itself operates carbon-neutrally. After the initial fermentation, the beer is canned by hand, and given a small dose of candi sugar and fresh yeast at the time of canning to promote secondary fermentation in the can. This gives us a beer that will pour slightly cloudy, but will also evolve and improve with further aging in the can. Drink your Siamese Twin from a red wine glass or Belgian ale chalice to get the most of its exotic aromas, and don't drink it too cold (45-50°F), or you will cover up some of those exotic flavors, as well.

The Siamese Twin pours into the glass with a very rich, dark copper color, slightly cloudy appearance, and a fluffy, cream colored head. The nose is quite sweet, showing both malt and various fruits, with just a hint of kaffir lime and lemongrass. The palate, while still very malty, is drier than the nose would indicate, with a burst of pepper following the notes of fruit, spice and malt. The finish is quite dry and moderately bitter, making this an ideal accompaniment to Thai curries and other exotically flavored dishes.