



November 2008

**White Christmas Spiced Winter Lager**  
**Moylan's Brewing Co., Novato, California**  
**6.0%abv     \$5.50/22oz**

Brendan Moylan got his start as a brewer in the same way as many other American microbrewers, as a dedicated home brewer. Just one year removed from high school, and before he could actually buy beer, Brendan bought his first home brew kit. After many years of brewing as an amateur, it was a visit to Buffalo Bill's Brewpub in Hayward that convinced him to take his hobby professional. After taking extension classes in Fermentation Science at UC Davis, Brendan became a founding partner and the brewmaster of Marin Brewing Company in 1989. By 1991, though, he was ready to expand his horizons and pursue other possibilities in brewing, so he began working on designs for a state-of-the-art brewing facility that would eventually become Moylan's Brewery. By the time building began, Brendan had secured some \$3.5 million in seed money, and the brewery was built with room to expand in mind, even though production started at very low levels. The brewery and attached restaurant finally opened to the public in 1995, and has become a Novato institution over the past decade plus. Since that time, Brendan and his partners from Marin Brewing Co. have added a third restaurant to their lineup with Noonan's Bar and Grill, where one can enjoy the products of both breweries, but no beer is brewed on site. Also, in 2006, Brendan became one of California's newest micro-distillers, and he is now producing vodka, fruit eaux-de-vie, grappa, and – eventually – single malt whiskey at his new distillery in Petaluma, Sonoma County.

The White Christmas is loosely based on the Belgian Witbier (or white ale) style of spiced wheat beers. The past few vintages have been even closer to the traditional style, but Brendan and his team of ace brewers changed things a little this year, both in terms of the spices used, and the fact that this year's version was fermented with a lager yeast, whereas past versions have been top-fermented ales. This beer does use a higher proportion of barley malt than the traditional Belgian style, as well as a touch of rye, to make for a richer, more winter-friendly style of wheat beer. They begin with Pilsen, Vienna, and Munich barley malts from German malters Weyermann, and add Crisp Torrefied Wheat malt, Flaked un-malted rye, and a touch of honey for extra fermentable sugars, in the boiler. Hops are used only in the boil – no dry-hopping – and include the German Hallertauer, Hershbrucker and Saaz hop varieties. Also going into the kettle is a selection of spices meant to bring about olfactory memories of Christmases past: Curacao orange peel, nutmeg, mace, cassia bark, coriander and white pepper. Only the Curacao and coriander are common to true Belgian Witbiers. The beer is then cold-fermented using two Munich lager yeasts for extra complexity. Their goal from the outset was to produce a Christmas-style beer, but without venturing in to the sweet and pumpkin pie-spiciness that so many Holiday beers demonstrate, and I think they've done this exceedingly well, as this is quite drinkable. Being a lager, you'll want to serve it fairly cold (35-40°F) to enjoy its lightness and freshness, but allow it to come up in temperature as you drink it, and you will find the spicy flavors will come more to the forefront. Drink it from a tall Pils-type glass, or traditional pint glass.

White Christmas pours into the glass a lovely apricot-golden color, with a big, pillowy white head. The nose has an intriguing mix of malt and fruit notes, with a touch of piney hops, and whispers of the spicy flavors soon to follow, especially the white pepper. It is much fuller in body than a classic Belgian Witbier, but you still get that crisp wheat beer flavor. Of the spices, the Curacao orange peel is the most noticeable, with the rest of the lot just adding to the whole, without becoming dominant at any time, other than a quick burst of pepper in the finish. The malt and hops are perfectly balanced off of each other, with just enough hop bitterness to offset the sweeter malty notes, but you never really get any strong hop bitterness at the same time. This is certainly much more drinkable (as in, sit down and drink a couple sort-of-way) than 99% of the spiced Holiday ales on the market, and we love it for that. I come from a family of butchers, so Christmas dinner at the grandparents' always meant Prime rib roast and copious fixings. Consequently, grandma never liked to cook on Christmas Eve, and our family custom was to sit around a newspaper covered table with cold, cracked fresh Dungeness crab, making a huge mess in the process, and this would be the perfect beer for such a feast.



### Rising Sun Pale Ale

**Baird Brewing, Numazu, Japan**

**5.0%abv \$5.00/12oz**

Bryan Baird, an American by birth, has been fascinated with Japan from a very early age, and has studied both the country and the language since his teens. Upon finishing college, in 1989, Bryan moved to Japan for the first time. He returned to the US a couple of years later to attend graduate school in Washington, DC, where he was first introduced to fine craft beers at the infamous Brickskeller beer pub. While he had never been a home brewer or major beer geek, his exposure at the Brickskeller to the great craft beers of America and the rest of the world changed his attitude toward beer, and he became more fascinated as time went by. After Grad school, Bryan moved back to Japan in 1995. He took a job as a 'Japanese Salaryman', which he did not find very fulfilling, although he did meet his future wife, Sayuri, during this time. After little more than a year, he became disenchanted with his new career, and decided to return to the US to learn the art of craft brewing. He signed up for an intensive 11 week program run by the American Brewers Guild Craft Brewers Apprenticeship Program, which included six weeks of laboratory training followed by a five week apprenticeship at Redhook Brewery in Washington State. When he returned to Japan for the third time, he married Sayuri, and set out to open his own brewpub.

Baird Brewing Company opened in 2000, in the small seaside town of Numazu, on the coast of Suruga Bay, just at the foot of Mount Fuji. The brewery is joined to an adjacent public house, called the Fishmarket Taproom, where his wife, Sayuri, is the chef, preparing expertly crafted Japanese cuisine to accompany Bryan's beers. The operation was truly 'micro' at first, with just a 30-liter (that's eight gallons – not much bigger than your typical home brewer's setup) brew system. At first, the beers were available only in their taproom, as they simply had no excess to sell to other pubs or at retail, but the Japanese are great admirers of fine craftsmanship, and Bryan and Sayuri found a fan base very quickly. Over the years, they have slowly grown, although they are still quite a small operation. Though they did eventually open a second taproom in Takemeguro Train Station, in Tokyo, it wasn't until just recently that they began bottling beer for retail sales at all, and that already accounts for more than 50% of their entire business.

The Rising Sun Pale Ale is patterned after the great American Pale Ales that Bryan first experienced during his grad school years – Sierra Nevada, Deschutes, Brooklyn, and others. He uses exclusively European malts for this beer, however, because they are easier and cheaper to obtain in Japan: Crisp Maris Otter and Baird Amber (a malt created just for Baird) malts from Britain are combined with Weyermann CaraHell from Germany in the boil. No matter the expense, Bryan will only use American hops, as he finds that he cannot achieve the familiar flavors that he was originally trying to create without them. Simcoe, Centennial, Amarillo, Cascade and Ahtanum hops are used in the boil for bitterness, and the ale is then dry-hopped in the fermenter using a combination of Centennial, Amarillo, Cascade and Ahtanum for aroma. He uses pure mountain water that runs from nearby Mount Fuji, and an American ale yeast that he will not reveal the source of. His beers are never filtered, and this one, at least, is bottle-conditioned, meaning that a dose of yeast and Japanese candy sugar are added to each bottle to promote a natural second fermentation, which is where the carbonation comes from. Like any great West Coast Pale Ale, the Rising sun is best enjoyed from a traditional pint glass or ale chalice, and should be served at least a bit warmer than refrigerator temperature, say 40-45°F.

Your Rising Sun Pale Ale pours a slightly cloudy golden-copper in color, with a big, rocky head that leaves substantial lace in the glass. The first impressions in the nose are all about hops. From the spicy, to the piney, to that slightly cannabis-like smell that some hops have; they are all here, with just a hint of malty sweetness in the background. The palate is a different matter, however, where the malt leads the way, and the hops are there to provide balance. Notes of toasted grains and fruits are balanced by sappy hop spiciness. The finish is very well balanced, as well, and lingers pleasantly for quite a while. This is another beer that works either on its own, or with a wide variety of foods. At the Fishmarket Taproom attached to the brewery, Sayuri Baird (who is also the chef) pairs it with traditional Japanese cuisine to great response from both locals and critics alike.