



September 2007

Reunion Imperial Brown Ale

Bison Brewing (with Special Guest!), Berkeley, California

7.5%abv \$5.50/22oz

Way back in the dark ages of the 1980's, Pete Slosberg was an engineer at Rolm Corporation, in the Silicon Valley. Pete was a beer lover and home brewer, and one of his earliest creations was a very malty, very hoppy brown ale that he and his friends thought might have commercial appeal. Thus was born Pete's Wicked Ale, one of the early superstars of the American craft beer movement. Two of Slosberg's early employees were Alan Shapiro, who now owns SBS Imports, a specialty beer importer; and Virginia MacLean. Pete went on to sell Pete's Breweries to the Texas company Gambrinus in 1998, for \$69 million, and then went into the chocolate business (Coco Pete's). Late last year, Shapiro heard that Virginia had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable form of bone cancer.

Heartbroken at the news, and unable to do anything about it, Shapiro approached his old friend Slosberg about the possibility of collaborating on a beer, the proceeds of which would go toward myeloma and bone cancer research. Slosberg loved the idea, but no longer owned a brewery, so the two of them next approached Dan Del Grande, owner and brewmaster at Bison Brewery in Berkeley. When Dan whole-heartedly signed on to do the brewing, Slosberg approached the folks at Gambrinus, and secured their permission to use his own, original recipe for Pete's Wicked Ale. When all of the particulars had been sorted out, Pete and Dan got together at Dan's brewery, and began tinkering with the recipe. The final recipe that the two agreed on is basically a jazzed-up version of the original Pete's, with additional malt and hops to bring it into the 'Imperial' category, albeit made entirely from certified organic ingredients, as are all of the beers from Bison. Sadly, Virginia passed away this past June, but the story of 'Reunion – A Beer of Hope' will continue into the future, with a new batch released each year.

When Pete Slosberg first conceived of his Wicked Ale, his prototypes were the classic brown ales of Scotland and northern England, but he decided to use more and darker malts, to give the beer a bit more body and sweetness than the predominately dry brown ales of Britain. Also, to balance the heavier malt bill, he had to use more hops, and the resultant beer was truly one of a kind at the time. The Reunion, then, is the 21st Century version of the original Wicked Ale. It is brewed using a blend of pale barley malt, dark barley malts, and roasted, un-malted barley for extra color. During the brew, Brewer's Gold (from Britain) and German Select (from Germany) hops are used for their inherent bitterness. During the fermentation, the beer is dry-hopped using Pacific Gem hops from New Zealand for aroma. All of the barley, malt and hops are certified organic. Pure Berkeley tap water is used in the brewing (and I kid you not here – Berkeley is famous for the quality of its tap water, a key reason why Trumer opened their second brewery in Berkeley after brewing in Salzburg, Austria, for over 400 years!), and Bison's house yeast is used for fermentation, as the original Pete's yeast no longer exists. The Reunion will show best if it is not served too cold, say about 45-50°F, to allow the hops to blossom in the glass. It is best enjoyed from a traditional pint glass.

The Reunion Imperial Brown Ale pours into the glass with a nice, rich chocolate color. The head is amazingly active, practically jumping from the glass, but it settles into a nicely rocky beige head with a little time in the glass. Aromas of roasted malt, bittersweet cocoa and dark fruits are balanced by a nice citric note from the Pacific Gem hops. It is very full on the palate, with a blast of roasted grains, bitter chocolate, and hints of dried fruits. The hops kick in at the finish, providing a nice balance to the rich malt notes. I think this would be a great dessert beer, but it should also pair nicely with classic autumn dished featuring root veggies, squashes and/or wild game.



Hop-15 Ale

Port Brewing Company, San Marcos, California

10.0%abv \$6.00/22oz

Vince and Gina Marsaglia opened their first Pizza Port restaurant in Solana Beach – just north of San Diego – in 1987. Both Vince and Gina were avid home brewers, perhaps a bit too avid. Before long they were experimenting with so many different styles of beer, and brewing so much, that they and their friends could no longer consume everything that came out of their small kitchen. So, in October of 1992, they installed a small seven barrel brewing system in the back of their pizza parlor, and by 1993 were serving their first hand-crafted ales directly to their customers. Even though they added a second Pizza Port in Carlsbad, California in 1997, and a third in San Clemente in 2002, both with their own on-site breweries, their beers were so popular amongst their dining patrons that there was never any extra beer available for sale to the general public. Then, in early 2006, when their friends at Stone Brewing completed their new, state-of-the-art brewing facility in Escondido, the Marsaglias purchased Stone's old facility in San Marcos, which finally allowed them to increase production to the level needed for outside sales. Their new company, Port Brewing LLC, officially opened on May 5, 2006. Even with the new brewing facility, though, it has taken them over a year to get their production to a level where they could explore the Bay Area as a market for their ales, and we just got our first shipments in over the last two months. Actually, shipment is a bit grandiose – they rent a U-Haul once per month, and drive up here themselves, just to supply PlumpJack and a few other specialty beer retailers and pubs. They are producing an amazing array of beers, most of them extreme. The ales modeled after traditional British or American styles are bottled under the Port Brewing label, while their Belgian-style and experimental beers are bottled under the Lost Abbey label. All are worth searching out (or, call us!).

Brewmaster Tomme Arthur and Head Brewer Jeff Bagby have long been known for their mastery of the hop-driven West coast style of ales, but they may have finally outdone themselves, if not the Hop Heads that frequent our shop. Now that we have brewers using terms like Double IPA and Imperial IPA, I guess we'd have to call the Hop-15 an Über-IPA or Mega-IPA. The '15' in the name refers to many of the beer's attributes, not least that it was first brewed to celebrate Pizza Port Solana Beach's 15th anniversary, in 2002. But the symbolism goes on from there.... The Hop-15 is brewed with just two different malts, Two Row and English Light Crystal. Where things get really interesting, though, is in the fermenting tank, where the *fifteen* different hop varieties come into play. Or, as they told me, "We use fifteen of our very favorite hop varieties on a strictly don't ask – don't tell policy". The hops are added to the fermenter (the process known as 'dry-hopping') in fifteen different additions, at fifteen minute intervals, until the beer is off-the-scale hoppy. You stand forewarned! The fermentation itself takes place using their own proprietary house yeast strain and White Labs California Ale yeast. The beer is lightly filtered after fermentation, then bottled with a dosage of sugar and yeast, to promote secondary fermentation in the bottle. This will leave a light sediment in the bottled product, but the superior natural carbonation more than makes up for the cloudiness of the beer. Drink your Hop-15 slightly chilled (once again, around 45-50°F is ideal), from a traditional pint glass, or, if you really want a blast of aromatic hops, try a small brandy snifter.

The Hop-15 pours into its glass with a dark copper-orange color, with very fine bubbles and a very thin, lacy white head. The aromas are, as expected, hugely hoppy, with big whiffs of pine resin, citrus zest, even something somewhat akin to that 'cat pee' aroma that some New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs possess. It is very full-bodied on the palate, and very dry, with even more of that pungent, piney hop character. The malt remains fully obscured in the background. While I usually find that huge hop monsters such as this can overwhelm food very easily, you might try this one with a seafood dish with lots of citrus and fresh herbs.