

Pour Man: Refreshing beers for the warm season

By Michael Austin Apr 28, 2011 5:12AM



A taste of spring: the citrusy, faintly spicy Citrine Bombshell at the James Hotel, 616 N. Rush. (Courtesy the James Hotel)

I tried a new beer recently and it reminded me of spring. One sip of the Citrine Bombshell at the James hotel in River North sent me to that enchanting Chicago season, the one that lasts anywhere from 72 to 96 hours, bridging the cold weather and the hot. It's just around the corner, don't worry - I tasted it.

The Citrine Bombshell is a collaboration between Goose Island Brewpub brewmaster Jared Rouben and Rick Gresh, the chef at David Burke's Primehouse, 616 N. Rush, in the James.

Rouben created a Belgian blonde ale and Gresh gave it a chef's touch by adding 45 zested, sectioned and dried blood oranges. The result is a medium-bodied, lightly spicy, refreshing beer with a hint of citrus at the end - spring in a pint glass.

I had a few of those, one paired perfectly with the chef's venison tartare, which was served on a crostini with blood oranges, salt-cured capers, chives, parmesan cheese and black truffles. Tasting that food with that beer, I was hopeful about the seasons and the passing of time.

Three days later, the temperature soared into the 80s, and I jumped directly to summer and Quilmes.

The crisp Argentine lager will forever remind me of the warmth of summer because the first taste I had of Quilmes was a few years ago, in late December. But I was in Buenos Aires, see, and it was the height of summer down there.

I had just strolled through Recoleta Cemetery, the concrete, walled city of the dead packed tightly with the ornate mausoleums of Argentina's famous and wealthy (including Eva Peron). Stepping lightly, squeezing between tombs and perching on wrought iron fences are the living residents of Recoleta - los gatos.

Dozens of them slink through the cemetery with searing eyes and curling tails, reminding you in a way that only cats in sultry Buenos Aires can, that your time will come and you had better pay attention to living in the meantime.

If you are not at least sometimes reminded of death, I suggest that you are not fully living. And if certain beers do not remind you of certain seasons, and vice-versa, well, friend, with all due respect, you are not drinking enough beer.

Where to find Quilmes

CHICAGO
SUN-TIMES

410

w.

Huron.

I exited Recoleta and took shelter from the sun under the fattest tree I had ever seen before continuing a few steps more to the famous cafe La Biela. There, I sat outside and ordered my first Quilmes.

The beer arrived, ice-cold and sweating in the heat, with a small bowl of thin, crispy potato chips. It was as if the two were made for each other: the crunchy, salty chips and the dry, refreshing, multi-grain lager.

I had my waiter refill my glass and that bowl at least a few times over the course of the next two hours as I sat in the Southern sun reading and enjoying the simple pleasure of being alive.

That night, and every other night I was lucky enough to walk the gorgeous streets of Buenos Aires, I drank red wine (Malbec from Mendoza, of course) with my grass-fed beef.

But sitting out in the summer sun with a bowl of snacks, I could not imagine another option. A light, clean, thirst-quenching beer was the perfect complement to everything around me.

If you want to taste spring, get yourself to the James soon and order a Citrine Bombshell, either at the bar in the lobby or in David Burke's Primehouse. Do not hesitate. Like spring, the beer will not be here long.

When the sun begins to bake here, and summer finally arrives (and the chill of winter descends upon Buenos Aires), pick up a six-pack of Quilmes and head to the delightful BYOB restaurant Tango Sur, 3763 N. Southport. Sit outside.

It's not La Biela, but the sidewalk of Southport Avenue is a picturesque place to enjoy a great crisp lager in the sun. If you ask me, summer in Chicago is the best summer in the world - no matter the month.

Michael Austin is a Chicago free-lance writer. E-mail him at thepourman@suntimes.com.