

Beer Is Coming to Dinner

Ales, stouts and lagers go from the bar to the dinner table in Honolulu's latest foodie brewhaha, the beer dinner.

“With beer dinners and tastings, we try to get beer and beer drinkers to transcend Homer Simpson and Duff Beer to something that is sophisticated and can be consumed in a sophisticated manner,” says Andy Baker, an admitted beer geek and the founder and vice president of sales of Hawai'i Nui Brewing, which crafts Mehana and Hawai'i Nui (formerly Keoki) beers.

Baker started a monthly Hops and Grinds event at the Willows in 2004, and now hosts it every month at Don Ho's Island Grill at Aloha Tower Marketplace.

Other restaurants around town have come up with their own tasty takes on beer and fine cuisine.

Formaggio Grill in Kailua, for example, is taking beer in a more formal direction. Last month's Red, White and Blues dinner featured bright flavor combos: A Brew Moon Belgian White ale was teamed with a blue crab stack topped with spicy orange aioli, and a Rogue's creamy Shakespeare Stout turned a flourless chocolate cake into an even more decadent dessert.

This month's Belgian-beer dinner on Aug. 25 promises even bigger flavors, with possible suds including Chimay Cinq Cents and Unibroue Blanche de Chambly, a fruity-citrusy white ale. Baker is also working on a weekly Hops and Grinds dinner concept featuring Hawai'i Nui's brews that he hopes to launch in the near future.

The beer dinner at Sam Choy's Break-



■ Chef Zachary Most, of 12th Ave. Grill, takes pairing beers to his cuisine very seriously.

fast, Lunch, Crab and Big Aloha Brewery is one of the oldest in Honolulu—it's now in its 11th year. The dinners, hosted by brewer Dave Campbell and executive chef Aurelio Garcia every third Thursday of the month, include five courses plus a pre-appetizer tasting. Each course is prepared especially for the event, and paired with one of Big Aloha's six brews, including Kiawe Honey Porter, the light-bodied Kaka'ako Cream Ale and 'Ehu Ale.

“It gives the chef the added advantage of creativity because he's going through stuff that's not on the menu,” says Campbell. “It's a good value. Good beer. Good food and there's lots of it,” says Campbell.

Another good deal can be found at 12th Ave. Grill's summertime beer dinners, held at the end of the month. Foodies feast on four courses, each accompanied by beer selections chosen by executive-chef-owner Kevin Hanney, chef Zachary Most and Donato Loperfido, of wholesale beer-and-wine business Flavors of Italy. “We feature unique beers that you can't find on the shelves,” says Hanney.

A recent dinner favorite was a pan-roasted pork loin stuffed with poblano chiles and taleggio cheese on a crispy polenta cake paired with the hoppy Ballast Point Big Eye IPA and De La Senne Taras Boulba, a Belgian blonde ale. “There are a lot of beer drinkers out there and they don't always get a chance to have their day,” says Hanney. “It's a serious drink with food.”

—JENNY QUILL

For more information about Hops and Grinds and the monthly beer dinners at Formaggio Grill in Kailua, visit www.beer808.com, or call the restaurants directly: Don Ho's Island Grill, 528-0807; Formaggio Grill in Kailua, 263-2633; Sam Choy's Breakfast, Lunch, Crab & Big Aloha Brewery, www.samchoy.com, 545-7979; 12th Ave. Grill, www.12thavegrill.com, 732-9469.