



TOP SUDS

PHOTOGRAPHER-CUM-BREWMASTER BILL OWENS PICKS AMERICA'S BEST BEERS. BY RUSSELL HART

All cameras and no beer makes Jack a dull photographer. We've often noted that people who love to take pictures are just as passionate about other things—travel and food, for instance. So for our third Editor's Choice issue, we invited Bill Owens, the best photographer-cum-brewmaster we know, to choose his favorite ten beers. Those who recall Owens' virtual photo diary of his gastronomic adventures (Digital Spotlight, November/December 2000) know that he likes everything from Cheez Whiz to champignons. Limiting him to ten beers worldwide seemed unfair, so we had him stick with the domestic microbrews he knows so well as publisher of *American Brewer* magazine. And since we take our job as editors seriously, we felt obliged to "vet" Owens' choices, sampling them at a lunch-hour tasting. In the interest of full disclosure, some of us find the flavor of handmade beer a bit exotic, and would just as soon drink Bud.

Owens' beer credentials are impeccable. When he quit photography nearly 20 years ago, ten years after the publication of his cult classic *Suburbia*, he founded America's first brewpub, Buffalo Bill's Brewery, in Hayward, California, not far from

where he'd made the book's sardonic portraits. Among his influential beers were the pie-like Pumpkin Ale and the hop-bittered Alimony Ale, which helped pay for his sons' college. Now Owens is back in photography with a vengeance—and lots of shows, including one last spring at New York City's Paul Morris Gallery. And he's shooting digitally, lately with a four-megapixel Olympus E-10 SLR that we sent him to field test. Pixels may be replacing silver crystals these days, but there's simply no substitute for well-mixed barley, hops, and yeast.

PranQster (North Coast Brewing, Fort Bragg, California, 707-964-2739, northcoastbrewing.com). This complex Belgian-style ale is made with "antique" yeast. "A must-have with dinner," says Bill. "Nice, fruity finish," said one editor. "Terrible aftertaste," said another. Shows you what we know.

Adam (Hair of the Dog Brewing, Portland, Oregon, 503-232-6585, hairofthedog.com). An "old world" beer that gets its garnet hue and malty flavor from roasted barley. "Great with chocolate or cigars," says the beer's brewmaster.

Two Hearted Ale (Kalamazoo Brewing, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 616-382-2338, bellsbeer.com). Copper-

colored with a dense, creamy head, this beer is dry-hopped. There's nothing lewd about that: It just means unboiled hops are added to the beer as it ferments, for extra bitterness.

Alpha King (Three Floyds Brewing, Munster, Indiana, 219-922-3565, threefloyds.com). Deep orange and dry-hopped. "The bitterest beer in America," says Bill. "Nutty, flavorful, good but not overwhelming hops," said one editor, on his sixth test glass.

Racer 5 India Pale Ale (Bear Republic Brewing, Healdsburg, California, 707-433-BEER, bear-republic.com). India Pale Ale (IPA) got its start as an English sailor's brew, with extra hops to keep it from spoiling. "The biggest IPA you can find!" says Bill. "Bitter, dry, intense. Yippee!" said one editor. "Smells like old pennies," said another.

90 minute IPA (Dogfish Head Brewing, Lewes, Delaware, 888-DOGFISH, www.dogfish.com). Supplied in a cork-topped champagne bottle, this India Pale Ale is named for the addition of hops throughout the boiling of the beer mash. "Feel the burn?" asks its brewmaster. "That's the sickness, and the cure."

Hop Devil IPA (Victory Brewing, Downingtown, Pennsylvania, 610-873-0881, victorybeer.com). Yet another IPA, from the brewery that

also makes St. Boisterous Hellerbock. "It has the character that beer lovers love," says Bill, solipsistically. "Sneaks up like a devil," said one editor. "Lovely and smooth," said another. "A nice beer for beer wimps."

Poleeko Gold (Anderson Valley Brewing, Boonville, California, 800-207-BEER, avbc.com). Dry and light—call it a California-style beer. "Golden ale that you can drink every day," says Bill. "Very soft and clean," said one editor. "A nice balance of bitter and sweet," said another. "Kind of a dessert beer."

Black Butte Porter (Deschutes Brewery, Bend, Oregon, 541-385-8606, deschutesbrewery.com). Named for the 18th-century English baggage handlers who favored it, porter is a dark and malty brew on the lighter side of stout. "This one will shock you it's so good," says Bill. "Smoky, like an ashtray," said one editor. "Chocolatey," said another.

Old Numbskull (Alesmith Brewing, San Diego, California, 858-549-9888, alesmith.com). Way more potent than normal beer, this barley wine earns its name, as our tasters discovered. "Strong ale, wins many awards," says Bill. "Full, rich flavor. The best," said one editor. "A meal of its own," said another. "Holy Moley! Big," said a third. ■