

OFF THE GRID 92

Bucking the IPA Trend in Bend

BY SCOTT LINDEN

Bend, Oregon's tiny Van Henion brewery is on a mission to put traditional German beer styles back in the spotlight.

It's a heady goal (pun intended), worth the detour from a city awash in IPAs. Lagers, Pilsners and their cousins demand extra fermentation time, hard-to-obtain ingredients and refined brewing skills. But founders John Van Duzer and Mark and Dana Henion are convinced Central Oregon is ready for time-honored techniques and the subtleties of flavor and aroma.

With a combined 65 years brewing experience, the team understands zigging when others zag is good business. While many brewers cater to the lowest common IPA denominator, Mark Henion says "We're making beers that we like to drink."

If you know beer, you understand. After all, why do we drink beer? To be refreshed, slake our thirst, be pleasantly surprised, expand our palate—to find a little adventure in a glass. Van Henion beers are loving interpretations defined by what they can do with four simple ingredients, including just enough hops, and no artifice. The proof is in the pour: John draws a Pilsner artfully, adding a robust froth. Watch the bubbles rise, augmenting that creamy topping, admire the rich golden color. Inhale the rich melange of yeast-hops-malt in perfect proportion, sip and savor. It finishes cleanly with no lingering aftertaste to clutter the anticipation of another gulp.



Unsurprisingly, Van Henion's bucking the IPA trend seems to be getting traction in this hoppy hotbed. A loyal local clientele (including many of the town's other brewers) is augmented by adventurous tourists. Conviviality and easy banter permeate the cozy tasting room; even first-timers are included in conversations as is the occasional dog.

Van Henion is

turning heads among

beer aficionados who seldom have a chance to quaff German style beers. (A lager will spend up to 10 weeks in a fermentation tank, as compared to a couple weeks for most ales. That longer fermentation infuses the young beer with subtleties of flavor and aroma that are often described as "bright," smooth or crisp.)

At Van Henion the founder-brewers see



POUR

their work as more art than production, curating German ingredients, select domestic hops, malts, and yeasts into a true-to-style brew worth waiting for.

The brewery is hidden on a culde-sac in a light industrial park on the north end of town, the attached intimate tasting room more resembling a Victorian parlor than a tavern. Conversations glide from table to table; the noisome atmosphere of many brewpubs is absent; instead, a comfortable living-room vibe matches the beers that are refreshing and slightly familiar.

Van Henion's German-style lagers include a crisp Pilsner, bready Schwarzbier, and Helles, as well as a Kolsch ale. While each is distinct, in all of them crispness tickles the tongue without being overly effervescent, aromas are a balance of hops and malted barley. One's palate isn't assaulted by citrus or grassy hops, everything is in proportion.

Sure, if you just can't live without an IPA, Dana Henion will draw you their version, or even a Double IPA rich in pine and tropical overtones. They even pour a sparkling wine, rosé and a few ciders. But change-of-pace, palate-pleasing German style beers are hard to find in the IPA-dominated craft beer world. Finding them is an adventure worth undertaking. Oh, and they'll gladly sell you a six-pack for the ultimate Central Oregon memento.

Learn more at VanHenionBrewing.com. Plan your Central Oregon adventure at visitcentraloregon.com.



88 | March / April 2023 | NWTRAVELMAG.COM

NWTRAVELMAG.COM | March / April 2023 | 89