

BOTTLES

Lynn, Lynn, city of unique Bent Water beer



By **Gary Dzen** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 17, 2016

It only takes one sip of Bent Water Brewing Company's Viskiss Pale Ale to spawn an existential crisis.

Here is a beer — golden brown in color — that drinks like you'd sketch a rough outline of the style: crisp, piney, balanced. Like other variants brewed across the country, Bent Water's pale isn't too anything, designed for drinking several without inciting palate fatigue.

Where Viskiss Pale Ale differs is in the use of an English malt that imparts toasted flavors of toffee and caramel, like a brown ale but more subtle.

“It’s what I like best about this beer,” says John Erik Strom, head brewer at Bent Water, which opened in Lynn last November.

It’s also a tweak that further jumbles the definition of an American Pale Ale, a category inclusive of Viskiss but also beers like Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and Trillium Brewing’s Fort Point Pale Ale.

The former is a classic example of the style known for its dank, resinous bitterness. The latter tastes like a mashup between a brewery and an Orange Julius stand, liquid citrus peel in a glass. Neither beer has any hints of toasted, caramel sweetness.

Is any one of them more rightly a pale ale?

“One of the great things about pale ales is the amount of variation you can find within the style,” says Strom, who doesn’t quibble with how other breweries are making them.

Strom calls malt “the unsung-hero ingredient of the craft beer scene,” but there’s another ingredient that Strom thinks differentiates the product: water. Lynn has its own water source, and since beer is composed of about 95 percent water, the quality matters. Bent Water is also one of only a few breweries using concrete fermenting tanks, similar to ones the Romans used to make wine.

“We are learning what the concrete can do for our beer,” says Strom, who has supervised the making of a German-style altbier and a tart blonde with rhubarb in the tanks. “That kind of experimentation is one of the reasons I got into making beer in the first place.”

Other beers in Bent Water’s regular rotation include Thunder Funk IPA and Lynn Light, an “easy drinking beer for hard working people.”

“It’s important to nail the flagships, because they are often the first experience people have with our product,” says Strom. “We want that first sip to be a great experience, so we have put a lot of consideration and work into our year-round offerings.”

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