

REVIEWS

DRAFT PICK

Schmohz Zingiberene Ale

Before beer, there was gruit—hopless brew that gleaned its bitterness from wormwood, juniper, yarrow or whatever happened to be sprouting in the brewer's yard. Then, in the early part of the last millennium, brewers discovered hops' antiseptic quality; later, Germany sealed hops' fate as the ideal beer herb when the Reinheitsgebot made it illegal to brew a beer without them. Gradually, gruits became the lowly stepchildren of the brewing world as hopped beer's sedative properties were favored over sometimes hallucinogenic gruit, and it was rumored the stuff was only crafted by witches.

But if gruit truly requires an eccentric creator, it's no surprise, then, that Schmohz Brewing's Chas Thompson has revived the style. Loud, uproarious and a mad-genius brewer, he shuns residual sugar and harvests huge flavor returns from raw ingredients. Such is the case with 5.3%-ABV Zingiberene Ale, Thompson's ginger-infused, sans-hop power ballad, touted as a natural energy beer by the night brewing staff.

One whiff tells you this beer is no joke: With 20 pounds of fresh ginger in each 20-barrel batch ("I stick fresh ginger in the blender and press 'annihilate,' then leave it in the entire boil," Thompson says), the hazy, cider-color beer's aroma is decidedly ripe, but soft and rounded rather than tangy. Smells of fresh ginger and a bit of toast carry through to the sharp, zippy taste, where sweet, tart ginger explodes on the tongue and extends through the entire swallow. The ginger could easily hijack the palate, but chocolate malt helps tame the beast, as does a tight, crisp mouthfeel that wards off cloying sensations and washes away all but a bit of ginger in the finish. Hop loyalists might need a sip or two to warm up to the absence of bitterness, but will appreciate the root's ability to dry the drink and boost flavor; Farmhouse ale fans will notice the gruit's similar sourness, with an earthiness replacing a traditional sour ale's musty barnyard notes. Sushi lovers will simply make quick work of a bottle.

Price: \$2 for a 12-ounce bottle

Glassware: Tulip

Pair with: Sushi, or a warm slice of mushroom tart

Age: Up to one year

