

Figuring Out Your Right Temperature

By Brad Probert

Nobody likes the 'Fun Governor'- someone interfering with your fun because you aren't following the rules as they've defined them for whatever you're doing. I always felt the same way about beer temperature guidelines. It seemed whenever I read something on the topic or listened to someone talking about it, they were telling me if I were a true craft beer fan, I wouldn't like cold beer. So I generally ignored the whole discussion on beer temperature because I do like cold beer. But the topic is more complicated than it seems, and there's something to be learned about whether you like cold beer, cellar-temperature beer, or straight-out-of-the-closet-temperature beer.

An obvious but important thing to keep in mind when you start investigating beer temperature is that everyone's tastes are different. So not only is the ideal temperature different for each beer, it's likely to be different for each beer drinker. Style guidelines provide some reference info to get you started, but you may find that you like a particular beer at a different temperature, so be sure to explore the full temperature spectrum to see what a particular beer or beer style has to offer.

There are physiological effects of temperature on the tongue and its nerves, but in addition to what's going on with your tongue, there are also things going on with your beer. The most specific thing going on has to do with carbonation in your beer. At very cold temperatures, the carbonation stays trapped within the liquid. As a result, you have flavors and ingredients trapped within that aren't bubbling up to the top of the beer and being released. The other effect of carbonation being trapped in the liquid is that it doesn't get released until it gets into your stomach and warms up. Bar business manuals advise against this, as from a barkeep's standpoint, a customer with a



bloated stomach isn't ordering several more rounds. From your own perspective, you can figure out the downsides of a gassy stomach.

On the flip side, if the beer gets too warm, then the carbonation wants to hurriedly escape the liquid. As a result you get foamy beer that turns flat quickly, and in contrast to beer that's too cold, releases all of its hidden flavors and aromas freely. Draft beer equipment manufacturers suggest a universal temperature for storing and

perature at 71°F, and 300 days for beer stored at a temperature of 33°F.

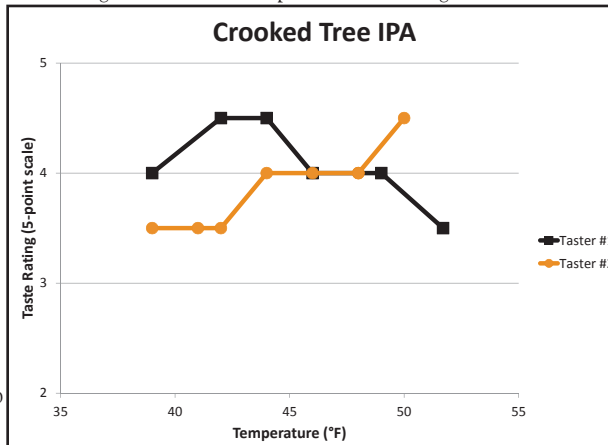
To explore people's taste preference diversity with temperature, I conducted my own experiments. I had 8 volunteer 'lab rats' and a collection of 6 different beers to get a mix of different styles. I set up the experiments with the lighter flavored beers first and ended with the stronger flavors. All beers started cold from the fridge (about 35°F) and then warmed up over the sampling period of about 30 – 40 minutes. Each lab rat was limited to 4 beers so as not to skew the results too much from the

alcohol effect. Everyone was given a common 5-point overall rating scale, and we passed around the digital thermometer to take the readings. What follows are some general trends I found in the data.

The Kolsch tended to improve after 40°F, and maintained good ratings out to around 50°F. This compared to a recommendation from the brewer of 43 – 45°F being the ideal temperature for this particular beer. The Wheat ale maintained good flavor ratings up until around 50°F, then it started to drop off. The Pale Ale was favorable from the start at 35 – 45°F, then for different drinkers started to drop off between 45 – 55°F. The IPA had the most variety of taste trends of the styles we sampled,

although all thought the flavor improved above 40°F. Taste started to drop off for some in the 45 – 50°F range, while for others it got better above 45°F. With the Porter, most people said taste improved in the 40 – 45°F region, and maintained good flavor ratings up to 55°F, which was the temperature recommendation from the brewer. The Stout generally had pretty even taste preference across temperatures, particularly at 45°F and above.

Looking at trends in taster preference, I found 2 general temperature preference profiles. The first group was not as impressed with the light to medium bodied beer when it was super cold, but found taste peaked shortly after that before steadily declining as it got warmer. This group however found the dark beers got better after they warmed a bit, and then behaved



Example of taster preference for sample beer as temperature increased. For more examples, please visit the author's web site at <http://www.beersnobby.com/beertemperature/>

pouring draft beer of 38°F. This is to avoid the issues of an overly-bubbly foam beer head when pouring a pint, but also as a practical standpoint of shelf life of the beer. MillerCoors provides guidance to its distributors on the effect of temperature of beer storage on its taste longevity. They created a useful number mnemonic of 3-30-300. Beer stored in the trunk of your car at 90°F degrades in 3 days as much as beer stored for 30 days at room tem-



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came aboard full time as the Cranker's brewer.

"I feel incredibly blessed to have these two careers," said Adam.

He took us on a tour of the brewery where we met his assistant Andy Gallagher and their packaging cellar master Kevin Smitten. The beer is brewed on a 15-barrel Pacific Brewing System with 6 fermenters, four 15-barrel and two 30s. They have 8 serving vessels, four of which are visible on a mezzanine level above the tavern. They have a new, six head Meheen bottle filler for local distribution along with kegs.

We returned to the tavern which is one large open room with a long bar along the wall separating the Coney Island from the brewpub. The sidewalk dining area was still buried under snow.

We were ready for a sampler so I asked Adam to serve us whatever he wished. Raspberry Wheat was a hazy peach color with light pleasing berry flavor notes and full body. Irish Red was bright reddish amber with rich malt flavors. Old Siberian was big, 7.5%, bright



Cranker's head brewer Adam Mills

whisky color, clean caramel aroma, malty and warming, reminded me of Scotch Ale.

Oatmeal Stout was near black, tan head, with wonderful coffee roast aroma and flavor. Rich mouth feel. After sampling, Adam told us this batch has Roaster's medium roast beans added to it. I wish I had this with breakfast.

Professor IPA might well be Adam's signature product, made fresh to exhibit that wonderful hop aroma easily picked up as soon as you open the bottle. Great Cascade aroma, all late addition, no kettle hops. Made with 97 percent pale malt and 3 percent honey malt. Awesome beer.

Mary and I had to have our Coney fix, so lunch was a pair of Classic Detroit Coney dogs, Coney fries and a Greek salad, with Adam's IPA.

I would have loved to sit a spell and enjoy a couple more beers, but we had a four-hour drive ahead of us. The two-day outing was a wonderful Michigan beer experience. The problem with being a beer enthusiast in Michigan is not finding new beer; it is deciding which new beer. The great thing about being a beer enthusiast in Michigan is that no matter where or how far you travel, there are breweries near by. **MBG**

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pretty consistently across a broad temperature range. The second group thought all of the beers (light to dark) got better as they warmed up, and in most cases were still climbing in their ratings when they ran out of beer at around 55°F.

Based on warming rates of the beer after it came out of the fridge, you generally had about 15 minutes to enjoy a 5 degree tempera-

ture window. Beer cozies used on bottles or cans slowed down the initial temperature rise when coming out of the fridge, but they all started to climb at a similar rate after that. Pouring your beer into a glass from your cupboard quickly warmed the beer about 3-5°F. We did see trends that different pint glasses warmed faster than others. This could have been due to either the shape of the glass, or thickness/density of the walls.

There's a lot to this topic of beer temper-

ature. When you spend the time to really analyze the flavor as it goes through different temperatures, it opens your eyes to all kinds of consideration- ideal storage temperatures, the ideal drinking vessel, and most importantly what your personal palate tells you about your beer at different temperatures. Whether you go scientific with a thermometer and a pad of paper, or just some thought as you drink your next beer, I'm sure you'll develop a sense of appreciation of this topic like I have. **MBG**

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Several more women joined the discussion in no time: Wolverine State's E.T. Crowe, *Michigan Beer Guide's* Mary Halfpenny, The Whitney's Melanie (Fish) Roncovich, Michigan Brewers Guild's Shannon Kuchera, Witch's Hat's Erin Cottongim, Cicerone Annette May, and others.

Although the group's organizational structure is not yet finalized, plans were made to meet in various places across the state, at various times. Collaboration beers brewed by women in the group at a brewery owned by a woman in the group, are in the works.

We are now on the cusp of forming something great. A group whose mission statement

is: "committed to promoting equality, collaboration, education, and diversity within the craft beverage industry." A group where women in the industry, as well as those not yet in the industry, will get together to help write the next chapter in our collective brewing history.

If that doesn't keep the momentum of Unite Pale Ale going, nothing will.

For more information about the group, contact Pauline Knighton at pknighton@shortsbrewing.com. **MBG**

Griffin Claw Brewer Stacey Roth peering into the mash tun at Arbor Brewing Company on Unite Pale Ale brew day.
Photo by Patti Smith

