

LET'S EAT

Hard cider gaining in popularity with craft beer drinkers

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Listen: Hard cider gaining in popularity, especially with craft beer drinkers

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Reverend Nat's Hard Cider is among the craft ciders sparking a resurgence in the alternative to beer and wine. (Reverend Nat's Hard Cider image)

If an apple a day can keep the doctor away, what can a bottle of hard cider do for you? A lot more drinkers are starting to find out as craft cider continues to show up in more and more local bars, restaurants, and stores.

Among those sparking the cider resurgence is Nat West, the founder of Reverend Nat's Hard Cider in Portland. And the flavors he concocts are far from what many have come to expect from cider.

"I make dry and off-dry ciders only and in small batches. If you've had cider in a 12-ounce bottle, don't expect the same taste here," West tells KIRO Radio's Let's Eat.

Co-hosts Terry Jaymes and Providence Cicero have plenty of praise for several of West's creations after doing a little tasting of their own, including Deliverance Ginger and Hallelujah Hopricot, the cider maker's best seller. And while ciders can be made to resemble either beer or wine in style, West says craft beer drinkers tend to gravitate most to ciders.

"It's a bit of a cross over for craft beer drinkers in that it is dry. There are a lot of sweet ciders out there," says West. "We only make dry ciders, it's hoppy, we use Cascade hops, which is a pretty floral, pretty fragrant hop."

West also uses a French saison yeast in Hallelujah Hopricot, a popular ingredient for many craft brewers.

"I think craft beer drinkers are more apt to try new things than wine drinkers," he says. "We see cider as becoming a complement to other great craft beer being made."

Making a fine cider can be as complex as the best beers and wines. West uses a variety of ingredients, including raisins, dark brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg to make a spicy, wine-like profile for his Providence Traditional New England hard cider. The Hallelujah Hopricot marries coriander, bitter orange peel, and paradise grains with its yeasts and hops. But the one constant in all his ciders is apples.

West tries to use a special apple grown specifically for cider, but they're much rarer than traditional culinary apples.

"These apples are generally inedible. They're dry, small, pithy, have thick skins, and are extremely strong flavored. Oftentimes, they're called spitters, i.e. you take a bite and spit them out," he says.

But West also puts Washington's best apples to good use. His flagship Revival Dry features equal measures of American heirloom eating apples along with English bittersweet apples. And he prides himself on sourcing all of his ingredients locally.

"They're a really great price, very high quality all year long because we have such great access to Eastern Washington packing houses. I wouldn't be making hard cider if I lived in

Oklahoma," he says.

The process is painstaking.

"Some of our ciders are aged for many, many months or as much as two years." Some are aged in oak, others in food-grade plastic. And while most end up in large wine-sized bottles, demand is growing for kegs. The founder of a newly opened bar dedicated to ciders called [Capitol Cider](#) on Seattle's Capitol Hill recently drove to West's Portland distillery just to pick up a few for his place.

"He is one of the only people to ever have kegs of Reverend Nat's at his bar," says West.

But given the growing popularity of ciders, like Reverend Nat's, that's likely to change in the not too distant future.

[Let's Eat](#) with Terry Jaymes and Providence Cicero can be heard on KIRO Radio every Saturday at 4:00 p.m. and Sunday at 12:00 p.m. or on demand at [KIRORadio.com](#).

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