

Seriously. Another Beer Series?

By Barb Miller

Inspired by our Fallen Angel Belgian-style Golden Strong Ale that was brewed on 6-6-6—or June 6, 2006, we created our first beer series—2007 Deadly Sins—in, well, 2007. Seven beers. Each named after the infamous sin bucket list. At the time, there were seven of us in the company and, early in the design process, we assigned a sin to each of us. Needless to say, some correlations were more apropos than others. But designing and crafting each of these beers during that year elevated our skill set to a much higher level. We procured a diversity of oak barrels. We brought Brettanomyces into the house. We experimented with additional Belgian yeasts, bottle conditioning and second runnings. The results were amazing and we continue to re-produce a few of these beers, specifically Pride, Gluttony and Wrath [recently renamed Mayhem]. The success of this series as a whole brought much attention to Midnight Sun and put us on the proverbial beer map.

The pressure to do another series was just as self-inflicted as not. We loved the concept and excitement surrounding our sin beers. Our GM came up with the 2008 Planet Beer series and I advocated ardently to include Pluto. Understanding the difficulty in making all of these “extra” beers while keeping up with increasing production, I still could not leave Pluto out. We called Pluto—Roman god of the underworld—the Fallen Planet; we brewed our Fallen Angel recipe but aged it in French oak Chardonnay oak barrels. This was the one beer that had a story from the get-go so we did, after much debate, include it in the series. Except for Earth, we found our inspirations with the Roman gods after which the planets are named. Our design sessions were a bit heady and the resulting series was a little too aggressive. The proof? Jupiter, our Champagne-style Tripel, was finished and released on DEC 01 2009. Aside from being a year late, Jupiter actually underwent a modern-day Champagne process and, while we may never repeat these laborious [read: expensive] steps again, we are extremely proud of this beer. And our last planet beer Neptune, the sour beer, remains in oak today. The lesson [almost] learned from this series is that—for beers in an annual series—we need to keep away from designs that cannot possibly be brewed, aged, oaked, bugged, soured, finished—whatever—and released in the course of a year.

Heading into 2009, we were working on build-out at the new building while still executing all production, retail and administrative operations at the old location. There were nine of us so I proposed a 2009 Crew Brew series. Each of us would name, design and help craft a beer, using a specific song as inspiration, and then pose for the label photo. These nine songs form an eclectic song track just as our nine beers offer a wildly wonderful range of flavors. This series is very personal—a great way to celebrate and freeze a specific time in the history of our company. A year later we are happily situated in our new place with 27 in tow.

This year’s series is based on pop culture—a Top Ten list of sorts. This 2010 Pop Ten series is mostly on paper although two of the beers have been brewed. Nine of the ten are named and defined. Still a few details to tighten down. However, we do agreed that this will be the last time we use the year itself to dictate the number of beers in a series. Whew!

All in all, selecting a theme for a series and then conceiving and producing beers that represent the parts of the whole is a challenging yet exhilarating process.

The worst part? Hitting projected release dates amidst demanding production schedules. The best part? Working with an amazing, earnest, diligent, creative crew. The best part deux? Hearing customers order a goblet of Gluttony, a sample of Uranus, a case of Brewtality. Happy New Year Beer!