

Asher Brewing's All-Organic Brews

By Jennifer M. Brauns



Asher Brewing is another Boulder first, the only all-organic brewery in the valley. In fact, Asher pioneered certified all-organic brewing in the state of Colorado. Knowing how in-tune Coloradans are with their health and healthy foods, especially organics, it is a bit surprising that there aren't more organic beer options on the market. In a recent interview, Asher made a very compelling case for drinking organic beer.

In early 2009, Chris Asher and Steve Turner were introduced to each other by a mutual friend, Fin Knudsen, whom they both knew through the Master Brewers Association. "I was in my tenth year as Head Brewer at C. B. & Potts and Steve had been Head Brewer at Redfish in Boulder for six years, which closed its doors in 2008," said Steve. Chris, a long-time brewer, had an MBA from the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado at Boulder where he had studied organic trends extensively. He also had a solid business plan for an organic brewery and a motivation to go into business for himself, although he needed a partner. With both men serious about starting their own brewery, they had a meeting to discuss their respective ideas.

"We had a remarkable first meeting. Chris told me all about his business plan, including a full market analysis and how to brew with organics. Amazingly, our ideas were very similar. It seemed like we had only been talking for an hour or so, but it was 9:00 p.m. and we had been at it since 5:00 that afternoon. It took me about two weeks to read the entire business plan, do some research and talk to my wife," Steve recalls.

Next, Chris and his girlfriend and Steve and his wife went out to dinner to see how the four of them would get along. They needed to be sure that the ladies agreed with their plans. The dinner went very well and they decided to begin Asher Brewing.

Steve and Chris had over 25 years of brewing experience between them, but didn't have enough money to start their brewery without some financing. The economy in early 2009 was horrible with the country near financial collapse. Banks wouldn't even talk to the pair, so they used all the money they had and opened up on a shoestring. Once they started the business, they kept getting credit card offers and decided to take advantage of a several cards to purchase the equipment they needed to get off the ground.

Steve decided to keep his day job until mid-July, when the equipment was scheduled to arrive. Before then, it was mostly

painting and market research. The build-out on their brewery space was done in early July and soon after the tanks arrived. They constructed a small tasting room bar and waited for their federal and state licenses to be approved. As the wheels of progress often move slowly, it took until October to receive their license to brew and they didn't get the license to sell their beer until November 4th. "It seemed like an eternity. The credit card bills were mounting and while we had been given the first four months rent-free, we were now paying rent as well. Asher Brewing opened their then small and humble tap room on November 5th of 2009. They were confident that if they could stay in business for two years, that they would make it and make it they have.

Fast forward, Asher Brewing will be celebrating their second anniversary on November 5th and business is booming. Last year Steve and Chris rented the space next door and expanded their tap room. They can now seat 80-100 people indoors with another 20 in the beer garden of their 100 percent wind-powered operation. It's quite a step up from the original tap room which had a four foot bar and three tables.

Steve and Chris recently stumbled onto an opportunity to purchase some really rare 50-year-old cognac barrels which they snatched up on the spot. Rocky Mountain Barrel Company, had ordered these barrels for Stranahan's Colorado Whiskey, but when the barrels finally came in, they were no longer wanted. Steve and Chris bought all they could fit into their full-size van, which was four 92-gallon barrels. They each had about a quart of cognac at the bottom which had seeped out of the wood. Steve and Chris tasted the cognac and then filled the barrels with their precious Belgian Pale Ale for aging. They are planning to get purchase some additional cognac barrels this year and are currently using wine barrels from Boulder Creek Winery.

Asher Brewing's mission is to produce world-class certified organic beer, while utilizing environmentally sustainable and socially responsible business practices. Those are lofty goals, but they are doing a tremendous job of meeting their mission.

"Most people are not aware that organic hops are only grown in five locations in the world. Asher currently gets their hops from New Zealand, Germany and Washington State's Yakima Valley. Local Niwot Hops, however, is currently growing five strains of organic hops, including one just for Asher. Niwot Hops is in its third year and will be certified organic next year. It is really important to Chris and Steve to lower their carbon footprint and

they are thrilled that local organic hops will soon be available. Asher is also working with Colorado Malting Company in Alamosa and hopes to soon source organic Colorado grain from them.

When asked about the difference organic makes in beer, Steve said, "We think that our beers have a bigger and fresher taste. The main thing is that our ingredients are not processed with chemicals. There are an incredible number of insecticides and fungicides used on hops. They are really susceptible to powdery mildew and aphid infestations. Non-organic hops are heavily sprayed and it is well-documented the effects that these agents have on humans. New studies show that insecticides cling to natural antioxidants and make them oxidative. Not a good thing.

"Another factor is that fungicides interfere with yeasts. Yeast has a really hard time doing its job when these chemicals are present. Shockingly, 50 to 80 percent of these agents remain in finished beers. Yeast is a fungus and there are many chemical agents used in barley and hops. It's like the Romans eating off of lead plates, said Steve. "The bottom line is that these chemicals impact a beer's flavor. People choose organic because it's good for them with the effect on the environment being secondary," he added. Organic beer can be twice as expensive to make. Asher Brewing has to work with much smaller margins, but they don't charge much more than other breweries for their beers.

Asher's current beer offerings include:

Greenade Organic Double I.P.A. - A hopped-up brew, designed for hop heads, coming is at 55 International Bittering Units (IBUs) with a Alcohol by Volume (ABV) of 9.0%. The tap room was out of Greenade when I visited, but I look forward to tasting it soon.

Green Monstah Organic Strong Ale - A sturdy malty ale, Green Monstah is nice and toasty with lots of caramel and raisins and medium hoppiness. With an IBU of 40 and a ABV of 9.2%, this will make a great cold-weather warming beer.

Green Bullet Organic I.P.A. - This beautiful amber-colored ale is not only organic, but also vegan-friendly. Green Bullet has a nice citrusy hop and pine nose. The pine and hops come through on the palate, but not so much the citrus. This one appealed to my hoppy tendencies. It has an IBU rating of 40 and a ABV of 7.2%.

Green Lantern Organic Kolsh - Green Lantern, another vegan-friendly offering, is a light-bodied, easy-drinking light golden ale with a slight malty sweetness. A tap room favorite, Green Lantern is a great session beer. It has an IBU rating of 25 and a 4.8 % ABV.

Tree Hugger Organic Amber - This amber-colored beauty has a definitive maltiness and slight sweetness that lingers. It is full-bodied and is light on the hops, but gets your attention with a bit of bite mid-palate. Tree Hugger has a IBU of 25 and an ABV of 6%.

We hope you'll stop by and get to know Steve and Chris at Asher Brewing. The brewery and tap room are located at 4699 Nautilus Court, Suite 104 in Boulder's Gunbarrel area. The tap room is open from 3:00 to 9:00 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday and 3:00 to 10:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. For more information, please visit www.asherbrewing.com.