



# Romancing the Foam No. 119



For the past several months the medical profession has had me on a series of diets designed to undermine my eating and drinking happiness. For most of the summer – as my garden was in full glory – banned foods included most of the produce I had so carefully nurtured along with dairy products. When that had no effect, they imposed a gluten and dairy free diet which eliminates most beer. I managed the dairy free part without too much whining when I realized that most of the cheeses I liked were OK because during their processing all of the lactose is converted to lactic acid which is

fine for me to eat. Last year I reviewed 27 gluten free and gluten reduced beers

<http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Gluten-Free-and-Gluten-Reduced-Beer.html> and they are all reasonable beverages but like gluten free bread, they are missing something. If I didn't like beer so much, I would like gluten-free and gluten reduced beers a lot more. Instead of beer, my tastes have shifted to cider, mead and sake and have found things that I actually enjoy drinking.

I often order Sake when I am in a Japanese restaurant because their beer selection is usually bad. Like beer Sake is made from a grain – gluten-free rice. To make beer barley is malted to create enzymes that convert the starches in the barley into fermentable sugars. Sake brewers cultivate a fungi (koji) on steamed rice. The fungi create enzymes that can convert the starches in the rice into fermentable sugars. Sake packs more of a punch than beer with alcohol by volume between 15 and 16%. While it drinks like wine, it lacks the acidity of wine but has more texture and a variety of flavors. The grades of Sake vary with the type of rice



September 30, 2018



and how much the rice is polished. **Junmai** is made with just rice, water and koji and has no added alcohol. **Ginjo** is a premium grade sake made with a minimum 40% rice polishing ratio with some distilled alcohol added to bring out the aroma and flavor.

**Daiginjo** is a super-premium sake with at least a 50% rice polishing ratio and **Honjozo** has a minimum 70% rice polishing ratio. Both Daiginjo and Honjozo have distilled alcohol added to increase flavor and aroma.



Armed with this minimal knowledge I head off to South Lyndale liquors to find a bottle of Junmai – which I assume is the least expensive. Tozai Snow Maiden Sake is a Junmai Nigori Sake (14.9% alcohol by volume) which is unfiltered, so it has yeast and very fine particles of steamed rice in it. I see a milky, murky white haze floating in the bottom of the bottle, so I roll it around a bit like you might do with a Hefeweizen and what pours out of the bottle looks like thin, white rice milk. A swirl of the glass shows some legs. The fragrance is medium low. It smells like rice and fruit and I can pick out some melon and some root vegetable. It tastes like fruit, melon, rice, with some hints of vegetable that give it a mild earthiness. There is a hint of anise and some alcohol flavor. It starts mildly sweet, but it dries a bit by the finish. The acidity is medium low and soft but helps balance the sweetness. The texture is not quite pulpy but the fine rice particles border on chalky or grainy. The alcohol is

warming but not hot. The body is full. The overall impact is medium high, and its complexity is moderate plus. It has a lingering tail with melon, a hint of tart and traces of rice milk. This is quirky as hell, but it works. I will try it with spicy food, oysters, crab, tuna poke and I would especially like to try this with some spicy specialty rolls. Sakana has a Dewatsuri Junmai Nigori that I will try the next time I am there. I rate this 80.

Cider is another marvelous gluten-free option but there is a lot of crap industrial super market ciders out there focusing on soft drink consumers parading as a legitimate beverage. When looking for a cider, look at the list of ingredients on the label. If the ingredient lists contains things like sugar, glucose, fructose, dextrose, apple juice from concentrate, caramelized apple juice concentrate, apple essence, water, carbonated water, malic acid,



September 30, 2018

ascorbic acid, sodium citrate, potassium sorbate, sulfites, natural flavor, natural color, caramel color and anything other than apples, put it down and look for something that lists 100% pure apple juice or 100% apples.



Mesh & Bone scours the globe for obscure and interesting drinks, repackages them and delivers them to the American market. Some of their products include Shochu, a Japanese spirit distilled from barley and Hita water, Sotolis, a distilled spirit from Mexico, and Arakku, a distilled spirit from Sri Lanka. Mesh & Bone Cidre Pomme & Poire is a sparkling Norman cider brewed from apples and pears. The cider blows me away with its 2.5% alcohol by volume. I have never had anything with this little alcohol packed with this much flavor, aroma and character that is so enjoyable to drink. It has rich apple and pear aromas, some spice and a mild funky earthiness and traces of bacon from a malolactic fermentation. It pours brilliant gold with a thin white cap that quickly dissipates. Just a touch of sweetness makes it off-dry filled with apple and pear flavors, traces of earthiness and spice and the pears hint of honey. The flavors are rich, complex yet well balanced. Tannins from the apples boost up the body and provide a pleasant astringent touch on the finish. The flavor intensity is

medium high and the carbonation suggests Prosecco. The flavors pleasantly linger. This is something where you want to grab a book, some cheese – maybe an Irish cheddar or a Humboldt fog, a couple of hard sausages or a few slices of mortadella – find a nice park bench and sit with the warm autumn sun warming your forehead while enjoying a bottle or two of this cider. I rate it 78.

Prairie Rose Meadery's Susan Ruud has won awards for her mead since 2013. I listened to her discuss the impact of different oak treatments on mead to a room full of beer judges. She had half a dozen meads, each with several different oak treatments and many in the room wished her half hour presentation extended 3 or 4 four hours longer. Her Chokecherry Mead (12.5%) is a melomel (fruit mead) brewed with North Dakota Chokecherries, honey and water. Its still, standard strength and semi-sweet. The aroma is medium intensity but rich, featuring cherries and honey with traces of floral. Alcohol aromas are clean with



September 30, 2018



no hot or harsh qualities and there are no off-fermentation aromas. It pours brilliant cranberry red with persistent and well-defined legs. The flavor intensity is medium plus. The flavors start with honey and then the chokecherry comes on big with a pleasant tartness to balance the honey sweetness and it finishes with a dab of astringent tannin from the chokecherries. The flavors all balance nicely as does the sweetness, tartness, tannins and alcohol. While this is not in your face, it does have an astounding presence and the chokecherry flavors are incredible. As I am enjoying this I wonder if I should wake my wife up from her nap but I am too absorbed enjoying this mead to move. Discovering a mead this nice transforms my gluten free diet from a burden to an adventure. I rate it 95. You can order this over the internet from Prairie Rose Meadery at: <http://www.prairierosemeadery.com/index.html>.

My enforced gluten freedom has opened new doors and lead me back to old ones and there are a lot of very good Sakes, Ciders and Meads out there to explore. While I can probably get off the diet in a few more weeks, I will continue to enjoy and report on these beverages.