



Romancing the Foam No. 96

A great long while ago, as the 1970's were wheezing their last gasp, perched on a stool at the bar in Dulles while waiting for a flight home, I bumped into a Lector - a cigar reader. He reads to cigar workers while they roll cigars – rolling cigars is a hideously boring task that requires sharp concentration. We were the only two people sitting at the bar at that hour. His English matched



my Spanish so we conversed using phrases out of a first year language textbook, hand signals, confused looks, shoulder shrugs and generous doses of alcohol. I enjoyed his immense charm but our mutual language barrier prevented us from learning too much about each other. A cigar factory paid him for reading – Trabajo en la fábrica de cigarros y leo periódicos en la mañana y libros en la tarde (I work in a cigar factory and read newspapers in the morning and books in the afternoon). That's all I remember.



I think of El Lector – the cigar reader – those two or three times a year I rummage through my humidor for something special. Today is the first hot, humid sweltering day of the year, my tulips are on their last legs and I find a Partagas, hand rolled from a special selection of tobaccos from the Vuelta Abajo region in a factory founded in Habana by Don Jaime Partagas in 1845. In honor of El Lector I have Compay Segundo blaring on my tablet to enhance my mood and put my Panama hat on my head for protection from the ultra violet.

What do I drink with the cigar? Normally it's bourbon or rum but it's hot and I'm thirsty. I need hydration. Generally the rich, earthy flavors of the Partagas pretty much wipe out anything a beer might have to offer. I find a barrel aged Fulton Maitrise. The regular Maitrise is a 9.5% alcohol by volume (abv) Imperial Farmhouse Ale with big tropical fruit flavors with a little overripe fruit action and a dash of tart from the saison yeast. The barrel aged Maitrise pours a little darker, with a hazy copper amber pour



that supports a persistent white to 2" cream colored lacy foam cap. Vanilla, oak, a trace of tart, tropical fruit, citrus and some grape aromas rise from the glass. Barrel aged Maitrise has obviously spent some time in an oak Sauvignon Blanc barrel and has spent its time very well. The experience has knocked off some rough edges and added complexity deepened by new tastes. Rich layers of flavor start with Sauvignon Blanc and oak and then malt rises up leading to a grapey, hoppy finish lightly graced by tartness. In the finish, big white wine flavors weave in and out with the rich malt, hop and fruity yeast flavors backed by assertive hop bitterness and alcohol and a trace of winery tartness. The texture blends wine and beer with a medium to medium full body and average to a little less on the carbonation. With the cigar this is an absolute delight. The two together evoke a Napoleon pastry with alternating layers of puff pastry and cream with the cigar providing layers of rich earth notes and Maitrise sliding in between with fruit, grape and malt. The oaky barrel notes

play well with the cigar's vibrant earthiness. The two complement and enhance one another rather than competing with or blotting each other out and create the realization of "oh – this is what it's all about." I rate the beer 95.

I liked the Barrel Aged Maitrise so well with the Partagas, I wondered how the cigar would go with something really big. I first had the Evil Twin Molotov Cocktail Heavy on tap at the Butcher and the Boar with my friend Bill Huth and liked it so well I foraged my neighborhood liquor stores for a bottle. I found and bought six. This monster beer has 17.2% abv. It pours hazy peach with a thin, very finely beaded, quickly dissipating cream colored foam collar. A stone fruit and alcohol nose has an almost dark rum-like sugar smell, light dried fruits and a variety of mild esters. Molotov Cocktail Heavy has layers of flavor that grow more distinct as it warms. A very creamy texture enhances big alcohol and stone fruit flavors up front balanced by bitterness on the finish and a little drying. I taste some golden raisins. This is something you drink instead of an Old Fashioned or a Manhattan, and when you do, you are much happier with it. Molotov Cocktail Heavy is well attenuated so it does not have a residual cloying



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sweetness. The beer is warming like a mixed drink but surprisingly light for the amount of alcohol – this is not a syrupy beer and is moderately carbonated. This interacts with the cigar more like a mixed drink or a glass of rum. Big hops meet big alcohol with just enough malt to hold things together and between the two of them are big enough to complement the cigar. Molotov Cocktail Heavy gets an 86 on Beeradvocate.com – I rate it 95.



It's a few nights later and I am with 10 year old Eva and she is making S'mores. There is a very definite process to this. First you line up six graham crackers and carefully break them in half. Then you open up the Hershey's chocolate bar and first you have to taste the chocolate to make sure it is up to the task. Likewise you need to taste the marshmallow. Next, break off six pieces of Hershey bar that each contain 3 segments and place them on six of the graham cracker halves. These are the bottoms. Put only

one marshmallow on each roasting stick. Gently roast the marshmallows over the fire and when done – just short of bursting into flames – place them on top of the chocolate, carefully position the graham cracker tops, press down gently, pull the marshmallow stick out, and voilà! You have a S'more.

It's a no-brainer to drink a rich, chocolaty porter or stout with your S'more. At the 2014 Minnesota State Fair at the Giggles' Campfire Grill booth, Flat Earth sold their Cygnus X-1 Porter in a shredded graham cracker rimmed cup with a marshmallow floating in the middle. Michigan's Short's Brew puts out a stout brewed with graham cracker, milk chocolate, marshmallow and smoked malt. I defied convention and ate my S'more with a Squatter's Hop Rising Double IPA. It's packed with 9% abv and 72 International Bittering Units (IBU) of hops and is nothing like a porter or a stout. This is a very good 85 out of 100 beer. I buy it because I get six cans for the price of four cans or bottles of some Double IPAs of similar quality. A brilliant copper gold pour kicks up a 2" cream colored foam cap that takes 5 minutes to reduce to a thick, lacy film. The aromas are herbal, melon and grass with some biscuit. This goes surprisingly well with the S'more. The biscuit malt flavors and traces of caramel



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complement the graham cracker of the S'more while the rich melon, tropical fruit and citrus coupled with a herbal, almost gentian like bitterness tame down the marshmallow and chocolate while providing a welcome contrast. The alcohol also pairs well with the chocolate and marshmallow. It has a very creamy texture. The alcohol and moderate carbonation cleans the palate allowing for a clean, lingering bitterness and permits a grandparent to honestly say: "yes Eva, these are the best S'mores ever."



I've found when trying to understand pairing beer with food, sometimes unusual pairings turn on light bulbs and illuminate new relationships. Identifying beer-food pairs that don't fight with each other is a first step. Likewise, most beer goes with anything but discovering that the beer and food just don't work can teach a lot. The Barrel Aged Maitrise and the Partagas join together in completely unexpected alternating layers. The Molotov Cocktail Heavy acts together with the Partagas like a bourbon and they work very well together. The Squatters Hop Rising IPA and S'more pairing brings together elements that complement, elements that contrast and elements that tone down rough edges. All three pairings bring out qualities that are not in either the beer or the partner alone.