

High Points of the GABF

by Marty Jones

This year's Great American Beer Festival was incredible. In Denver there were over 3,000 tasty, intoxicating pleasures from about 700 different suppliers, in nearly 100 different varieties, all available in 1-ounce portions. And if all of that pot wasn't enough for you, there was also the beer at the GABF.

Yes, this year's GABF was the first since the war on weed ended and "recreational" marijuana was made legal in Colorado. It created new thrills for fans of recreational beer in the especially Mile High City, where in some parts of town the aroma of Channel Number 5,280 wafting from grow houses blends with the smell of hops emanating from breweries.

The tartan-clad bagpipers who've always welcomed attendees into the fest hall? Replaced with a tie-dyed quintet playing a gurgling refrain on water pipes. At brewery tables all dump buckets had lids (to avoid anyone drinking their contents) and the newly required bowls of Chips Ahoy cookies and Doritos were a big, ahem, hit.

True, dreams of a free contact high in the outdoor porta-pottie/cigarette smoking area were dashed. But like smoke, rumors swirled regarding experimental brews like Pliny The Stoner and the Toked Porter from Alaska. Some even spent time fruitlessly searching for the Colorado-only line up from Stoned Brewing.

Big beer insiders could be overheard on the floor discussing A-B/InBev jumping on the CO opportunity with Budsmoker, Kusch ("Heads for the Mountains") and a green-labeled Bud Light with a new slogan to replace its "Here We Go!" tag line: "Uh, Where Are We?"

On a more longstanding beer front, the big breweries continued their pseudo craft beer push, with some of them heavy on the IBSUs (Intentional Brewery Stealth Units). Gnu Belgium? Amy Adams Boston Lager? Too much!

Some craft brewers fought back with a new style of GABF beer – "craft-made crafty beers" – aimed at

beating Big Beer at its own game. Boston Beer's Kochtop Wheat was hot and the ever-clever Schmalz Brewing's Hebrew Moon was a crowd favorite.

The GABF's all-time favorite is American Homebrewers Association and GABF founder

Charlie Papazian. But glad handing for Papazian is an OSHA violation for his right hand, due to crushing grips from fans and ecstatic medal winners at the fest's awards ceremony. To avoid pain this year, Charlie stood inside a glass booth that was fist-bump-proof. Winners could high-five their hand against his on the other side of the glass. Smart!

(Two dumbest things said to Charlie at GABF: "Thanks for making my drinking problem so tasty and hands on." And, "I'm a huge fan of your work, Mr. Grossman.")

Boundary-pushing topics at GABF seminars included "Enough Already About Sam, Vinnie and Greg" (led by a panel of brewers still waiting for a press mention) and "I'm Serious, Cans are Not Good for Beer" put on by the glass bottle folks. "Proper Care for Ostentatious Mustaches" was packed with millennials, some of whom were pulled over on the floor for TUI (Tweeting Under the Influence). The seminar on "Medals Aren't Really That Important to Me" (by brewers yet to click knuckles with Papazian) was sparsely attended as was "What Charlie Really Thinks of Your Homebrew."

All in all, it was a smoking year for the Greatest Beer Show on Earth. Be sure and buy your tickets early next year (in the first two minutes on sales day) if you plan on attending. A beer dispensary of the headiest kind, the GABF is highly recommended for all beer lovers.

