

Ryan's Picks: November 2008 Michigan Beer Tour

Most Overall Unique Brewpub/Brewery:

- 1) Jolly Pumpkin Brewery; Dexter, MI
- 2) Dark Horse Brewery and Tap Room; Marshall, MI
- 3) The Eccentric Café; Kalamazoo, MI

Best Atmosphere In Which To Imbibe:

- 1) Dark Horse Tap Room
- 2) The Eccentric Café
- 3) The Livery Brewpub; Benton Harbor, MI

Most Knowledgeable Staff:

- 1) Jolly Pumpkin
- 2) The Livery
- 3) Founders Brewery/Brewpub; Grand Rapids, MI

Friendliest Staff:

- 1) Jolly Pumpkin
- 2) Dark Horse
- 3) Founders

Coolest Location (in terms of surrounding neighborhood):

- 1) Founders
- 2) The Livery
- 3) Dark Horse

Coolest Location (in terms of physical housing structure):

- 1) Dark Horse
- 2) The Livery
- 3) The Eccentric Café

Best food:

- 1) Arcadia Brewpub; Battle Creek, MI (edit note: I had the 3-meat BBQ sampler, which included pulled pork, chopped beef brisket and shredded chicken. It was outstanding.)
- 2) The Livery (edit note: I had the Beef dip sandwich and chips. The beef was juicy and tender, and was very good on a cold and rainy Michigan fall evening.)
- 3) The Eccentric Café (edit note: had a brat cooked in stout with all the trimmings; good sandwich)

Best music:

- 1) Dark Horse (cool jukebox)

- 2) The Livery (listened to the full new Metallica album, followed later by the bartender's iPod selections, which included Portishead)
- 3) The Eccentric Café (classic Springsteen piping in through the house P.A., but got even better when the Clash took over)

Best beer:

- 1) Founders (of note, I enjoyed the Black Rye, the two bastards brothers ('Dirty' and 'Backwoods') and the Kentucky Breakfast stout)
- 2) Jolly Pumpkin (the Fuego de Otono and the Oro were outstanding, and the rest of the tasted repertoire was pretty darn good, too.)
- 3) Dark Horse (The Perkulator Bock was nearly my favorite beer on the trip. The other beer I tried was a stout, and it was up high on the list, too.)

Favorite Brewery/Brewpub Experience:

- 1) Founders (edit note: I absolutely loved, not merely enjoyed, every beer of the six samplers I tried. Also, the surrounding 'hood, the visual aesthetic of the brewpub, with the cathedral-like ceilings and large display windows showing the brewery, and the brewpub staff added to the whole effect of my overall favorite experience)
- 2) Dark Horse (edit note: what's not to love about a truly DIY attitude, a no-nonsense approach to housing a tap room in a grown-up version of a childhood club house, and suspending over 1,000 clay mugs from the ceiling while the rest of the walls are covered in brewerania? All this and it thrives in a town about the size of Lyons, IL. Yeah, this is the real deal.)
- 3) Jolly Pumpkin (edit note: Dexter, MI?) J.P. is reeeeaally out there on a limb. They are the craft brewer's craft brewer. Fermenting in open vessels, and maturing beer in wooden vats? And that is their standard operating procedure? Are you kidding me? The product they turn out is wonderfully unique to American craft brewers, and this place should be a shrine to the guild.)

Coollest non-Brewery/Brewpub stop on the tour:

- 1) Siciliano's Deli; Grand Rapids, MI (edit note: one of the most comprehensive beer selections I've ever seen, and reasonably priced. Additionally, they sell locally manufactured coffees and teas, and homebrewing and wine-making equipment. The staff was very friendly and knowledgeable. I could've done some serious damage to my child's college education fund here had I been so inclined.)
- 2) Hagar Park; Somewhere along rte. 63 on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan (edit note: cold, rainy, whipping 45mph winds, near dusk...and we stop to go look at the beach! Seriously, it all added up to an enjoyable 5-10 stop to look at the white caps on the big lake on this chilling autumnal Michigan day. Got some cool video of it.
- 3) Hampton Inn; Marshall, MI; (edit note: Presciently, Marc chose this hotel for us for our overnight. Located just about 2 miles from our last pub stop on our first night, this place was quite relaxing with killer queen beds, and a warm, tasty breakfast next morning. Good base to explore from).