

FREDERICK

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# GORILLA

BUSINESS LIFE POLITICS







**Hey, you. What's your favorite vice?** No, we're not talking about reruns of *Miami Vice*. From beer and boats to shopping and sports, most of us indulge in at least one leisure activity subject to being labeled a "vice." Beginning with this issue of the *Frederick Gorilla*, we'll explore some aspect of popular vices through our AddVice department.

In this issue, we investigate the world of artisanal craft beers with Brian Strumke, founder of Stillwater Artisanal Ales. Strumke has been described as the "gypsy brewer" of the beer domain; his creations are crafted in breweries across the world — no small feat for this self-taught brewmaster. Strumke's influence on beer and brewing has attracted the attention of individuals who have set aside their six packs of Bud, Coors and Miller in favor of ales laced with the flavors of chamomile, oak chips, violets, and, yes, even Old Bay Seasoning.

Strumke recently sat down with the *Frederick Gorilla* at Frederick's Volt Restaurant to discuss his brewing philosophy at Stillwater Ales.

# GOOD FOR WHAT ALES YOU

## CRAFT BEERS ARE GROWING IN POPULARITY, BUT WHAT IS THERE TO LIKE ABOUT THIS ARTISANAL STYLE OF BREWING?



Stillwater Artisanal Ale's Brian Strumke with Graeme Ritchie, Executive Sous Chef, Volt Restaurant

A caramel color rises in the glass, erupting in a sea of foam at the mouth. Beyond that malty flavor is something quite peculiar — a hint of rose hips, hibiscus and *Schisandra* berries. These ingredients make up the alchemy that is A Saison Darkly, a craft beer formulated by master brewer Brian Strumke of Stillwater Artisanal Ales. These craft beers are in a class of their own, elevated beyond the canned classics commonly available at liquor stores and the discount beer warehouses.

Described by some as the gypsy or vagabond brewer (he doesn't own his own brewery) with a desire to work with brewers across the country and the world, Strumke, 35, of Baltimore, has produced beers that could rival ales produced by Belgium's best breweries. In the span of 2 1/2 years, Strumke has created a virtual cult classic of sorts for those who seek to imbibe in a vice of luxury with a bottle of one of his brews.

While this might seem unusual given the recent economic recession that's plagued the country for the past several years, Strumke feels that beer has become "the affordable luxury."

"Wines became pricey. If you want the very best bottle of wine, you're not going to get that for \$20," he says.

And the beer industry has capitalized on serving a growing market of craft beer. According to the Brewers Association, an organization representing craft beer producers and distributors, craft brewing grew by 13 percent in volume and 15 percent in revenue in 2011. An estimated 11,468,152 barrels of craft brews flowed in 2011, the association reports.

Craft beers have also proven themselves worthy of making their way to the dinner table, says Graeme Ritchie, Executive Sous Chef for Volt

Restaurant. Ritchie notes that, much like wine pairings, the flavors of craft beers can be used to either complement or contrast the flavors in foods.

And Strumke, for that matter, approaches a beer much like a chef approaches a recipe – with careful consideration of the ingredients being used. This connection has prompted a rise in beer and food pairings (see sidebar), a trend noted by Megan Krigbaum, an associate editor at *Food & Wine*. “Finally people are coming around to this idea that beer has a place on the dining table,” Krigbaum notes.

Strumke’s Stillwater beers are complex creations of beermaking alchemy. While some, like his Existent – a dark ale redolent with the bittersweet tones of earthy hops and a roasted coffee-like flavor – are brewed fairly locally (DOG Brewing in Westminster), others like his A Saison Darkly are brewed at places like the Huisbrouweij Sint Canarus in Gottem, Belgium.

The idea, Strumke notes, is to make each beer its own art form, a unique expression from him. “I make beer for myself first, and then I share it with other people,” Strumke says of his products.

Take Strumke’s Premium, for example. Brewed with Pilsner malt, corn and rice with Cluster, Northern Brewer and Saaz hops, it’s fermented with a farmhouse strain of yeast and two strains of *brettanomyces* (a type of yeast strain) to yield a “post Prohibition” style of beer that weighs in at 4.5 percent ABV (alcohol by volume).

The mélange of flavors, colors and aromas creates a brew that is unlike any mass-produced beer on the market. Yet the acquired tastes of these craft beers can take some getting used to.

For those uninitiated to the styles of these craft style beers, Strumke suggests attending beer events and beer tasting venues.

“Find out where your palate is at and what you like. Even I have some I like more than others,” he says. 🌙

–*The Frederick Gorilla’s Mike Beatty, Troy Dean and Matt Livelsberger contributed to this story.*

Learn more about Brian Strumke and Stillwater Artisanal Ales in the Web Exclusives section of [frederickgorilla.com](http://frederickgorilla.com).

## INDULGE YOUR VICE

The *Gorilla* asked Stillwater Artisanal Ales owner Brian Strumke and Volt Restaurant Executive Sous Chef Graeme Ritchie to create their ideal pairings of Stillwater brews and food.

### **Appetizer**

**Table Beer** - 4.7 “Dry, hoppy, not too bitter”; pairs well with goat cheese, sashimi and ceviche

### **Dinner Courses**

**Cellar Door** - boasts a base of German wheat and pale malt with accents of Sterling and Citra hops and white sage; pairs well with almost any dish, including salads and poultry

**Stateside Saison** - Stillwater’s flagship ale brewed with European malts and hops from the United States and New Zealand and fermented with classic farmhouse style strains of yeast; pairs well with creamier-based dishes such as foie gras

**Existent** - dark farmhouse beer that “looks like one thing, smells and tastes like another” and contains an earthy hops flavor with a mildly roasted aroma; pairs well with red meat dishes, particularly game

### **Dessert**

**Folklore** - big Belgian stout flavor with aromas of Belgian yeast and earthy-flavored hops; pairs well with decadent desserts like chocolate torte

**Debutante** - contains a combination of spelt rye with accents of honeysuckle, heather and hyssop; pairs well with desserts such as panna cotta



## BREWS AND THE FAMILY MEAL

Chef and restaurateur Bryan Voltaggio is bringing another restaurant to Frederick. The diner will be called Family Meal and will offer a modern take on the classic diner. Located at 880 N. East St., the establishment is slated for opening in early June.

Check the Web Exclusives area of [www.frederickgorilla.com](http://www.frederickgorilla.com) for updates on the opening, dinner specials and the beer selection on tap at the Family Meal.

### **Purchasing Stillwater Ales**

Of Love & Regret  
Stillwater Artisanal Ales  
1028 S. Conkling St., Baltimore  
<http://stillwaterales.blogspot.com>  
*Opening this summer*

Frederick Wine House  
Clemson Corner Shopping Center  
7820 Wormans Mill Rd., Suite L, Frederick  
301-378-0409  
[www.frederickwinehouse.com](http://www.frederickwinehouse.com)

Ye Olde Spirit Shop  
1005 W. 7th St., Frederick  
301-662-4803  
[www.yeoldspiritshop.com](http://www.yeoldspiritshop.com)