

What is Greg Drinking?

Editorial and photo by Gregory Post

When September arrives, the stored memories of Oktoberfests long past appear like a meter of schnitzels to a table of famished friends. Welcomed, certainly, but with admitted trepidation. There is a beer for just this moment: Hedwig, an offering from Alvarium Beer Co.

Alvarium Beer Company certainly did not exist when I was bouncing between double shifts at East Side Restaurant and spending the hard-earned tips at exotic locations like the Dug Out Cafe (all in New Britain.) What did exist was my fondness of a childhood book series that was actively releasing volumes well into my twenties. That, combined with a trial by fire training regiment regarding beers from the Deutschland, created fertile ground for choosing this Connecticut concoction so many years later: Hedwig Festbeir. As far as beers go, you need to give yourself room to build on things you have already tried and enjoyed. So if you are the type of person that doesn't get an anxiety attack when CVS starts rolling out Halloween decor, do yourself a favor and prioritize finding a pint of this fabulous beer.

If you came into this style of suds during the peak Sam Adams era, you are ready for an upgrade. Fear not, this festbeir fits everywhere it needs to. Slightly sweet, with malt that could carry you the entire nine miles from where the Rock Cats were to where the Yard Goats are, and is surely a home run. It differs from the Boston Beer Company offering in the best ways, being closer to what is currently being poured in Munich than Massachusetts. The guidelines for this are spelled out explicitly in German beer circles, so Alvarium had as much guidance from abroad as they needed. What makes this beer unique is that they really never shortchanged what makes this style so successful. The color is rich yellow, not unlike the New Britain flag and seal. Smells invitingly of warm fresh bread, enough to wonder if this is a collaboration with Sift (bakery) here in Mystic/Watch Hill. Just the right balance of sweet and savory. Sure you can lean into the obvious cuisine of wursts and pretzels, but find a pizza or sandwich this beer couldn't make better and the next one is on me!

There was a time in my life when in four to six weeks at a certain Connecticut culinary landmark, one had to make the most of a

precarious situation: being a server/bartender at The Eastside Restaurant in New Britain during Oktoberfest. It was there in my post-UConn years that I learned, for one thing, that Oktoberfest actually begins in September! Other lessons were more nuanced, regarding German beer pouring laws and what made spaetzle worth adding as a side. They had just completed a lovely upper 'Bier Garden' area and needed staff. I was the only one who would be ordering a lederhosen instead of a dirndl. Suffice to say: I was worried that maybe I had missed my mark

with this particular employment posting (on Craigslist of all places). All I knew was that I had a '92 Volvo station wagon that needed work, so hoisting a few mugs to get through emissions was the path of least resistance. It is with great pleasure that I circle back to those years when in a Polish city, at a restaurant owned by Italians, I found German beer to be beautiful.

New Britain, like so many industrial towns, relied on manufacturing and close-knit communities to keep the city alive. What seems to separate it from so many others in outright disarray in current conditions is the latter more than the former. New Britain is a lot of things, and tough is foremost. Alvarium Beer Co., founded by Brian Bugnaki and Mike Larson, embodies the relentless spirit of the city with every can it fills. The logo they chose is an homage to the city motto which proudly boasts that "Industry fills the hive and enjoys the honey." I keep a few beehives with

my family here on the coast, and their use of our embattled tenants both in imagery and in ingredients is more than enough reason to applaud their authentic approach. Even the name Alvarium itself means 'beehive' or 'apiary' in Latin, so the buzz is not just a side effect of the beverages! Everything from their creative art on the cans, to the emphasis on a stronger female presence in the company is as refreshing as the products they brew with great passion and consistency.

Hedwig is a reference to the loyal feathered friend of one Harry James Potter. Much like the bird in the book, Hedwig as a beverage is not going to let you down! Whether centered around a charcoal grill debating college versus professional American football, or taking a glorious late summer/early fall boat trip around the Sound, this beer is the kind of refreshment that is ideal for, and thankfully from, New England.

