

# CRAFTY KNOWLEDGE

Beer director at Pickled Pig Pub shows off his expertise in brews

## WHAT HE'S READING

Cowell said he has about 10 beer books he browses regularly for information, but three stand out for him.

» "The Brewmaster's Table" by Garrett Oliver

"The whole concept of this book is explaining how to pair beer with food and how to get these dinners to elevate both elements."

» "Tasting Beer" by Randy Mosher

"This one is sort of great for understanding flavor profiles of beer."

» "The Oxford Companion to Beer" edited by Garrett Oliver

"When I'm looking for the history of a specific style or brewery, this book is phenomenal for stuff like that. It's basically the Oxford dictionary for beer. It works much more like a reference book. Everything's labeled alphabetically and basically you're going through it like you would an encyclopedia."



Pickled Pig Pub beer director Ben Cowell takes notes inside the restaurant on Route 1 in Rehoboth Beach. STAFF PHOTOS BY JOE LAMBERTI

**By Jon Bleiweis**

Staff Writer

**REHOBOTH BEACH** — The back corner of the bar at The Pickled Pig Pub contains a stack of books and plenty of paperwork on a recent Wednesday afternoon, but it's all there for a reason.

Wednesday's the first day of the

work week for Ben Cowell, the Rehoboth Beach gastropub's beer director, and he's taking inventory and catching up with what happened on his two days off. He goes through his hand-written "if it kicks" list, which details what should replace what on the pub's 14 draft taps when a keg runs out of beer.

"This one's already on, this one's

already on, one more spot, then we have to print new drafts,” he said.

He’s referring to the pub’s draft menu, which has evolved since it opened in 2009. Cowell said 10 of the pub’s 14 taps change consistently — the four taps that usually remain more static typically have Dogfish Head’s 60 Minute IPA, 16 Mile’s Old Court Ale, Twin Lakes’ Route 52 Pilsner and a hefeweizen by German brewery Paulaner which he compares to a Blue Moon — so the beer menu is constantly being updated with what’s new and what’s in.

Originally being printed on a daily basis, the beer list now features a checklist of nearly 30 beers under a laminated coating, with 14 of them checked off at a time in black marker. Each list lasts about a week before he needs to write out another one.

“The sort of old school (mentality) of you just put a beer on and it stays on until you close is gone,” he said. “It’s all about trying something new and something exciting and something you’ve never had before. I think my customers expect it from us now. They want to be surprised on what’s on draft now and we keep it exciting and fun for our regulars who are in here every few days.”

One particular beer he has been eager to put on tap is a keg of Enjoy By 4.20.14 by Stone Brewing Co. in Escondido, Calif. While Cowell is all for aging beer — he has a cellar of about 200 bottles at his home that he has maintained for years — he says some are just meant to be had fresh.

Cowell, who also manages the pub’s social media feeds, tweeted that the 9.4 percent alcohol by volume beer was tapped March 30.

“That series has been phenomenal,” he said. “With hoppy beers and IPAs, especially, it’s a style you want as fresh as possible.”

### An ed-brew-cation

Cowell, 31, didn’t know much about craft beer before he and his fiancée moved to Sussex County in 2008. He enjoyed it, he said, but he didn’t know about the people who made it or the community behind it.

But after getting a job at Atlantic Liquors, he began to take an interest in it. He started to study up on craft beer and quickly knew he wanted to become a part of the community.

“The whole business is filled with people who are just so passionate about what they do,” he said. “They love talking about it and they love sharing their information and their love of what



Pickled Pig Pub beer director Ben Cowell draws inspiration from a select few brew books.

they’re doing.”

After working at Atlantic Liquors for three years, Cowell got a part-time job bartending at the pub after falling in love with it one day when he stopped there for lunch. Less than a year after that, he got the position he has now.

The pub’s co-owner Doug Frampton said the right person for the beer director position is someone who shares an excitement for craft beer and can connect with guests to keep them interested and on the hook for whatever comes next. To him, Cowell is that person.

Frampton said Cowell has developed the beer culture at The Pickled Pig Pub to the point where new hires essentially go through beer academy training before they officially start. And when Cowell’s on the floor, he’s active with patrons about the craft.

“Ben just brings a lot of passion to his job every day,” Frampton said. “He’s just very creative in trying to make sure beer isn’t just something that people say ‘I’ve had it before, I don’t like it.’ He’s going to find a way for people to like it.”

### Winner winner beer dinner

One of Cowell’s first assignments in his new position was to help arrange a beer dinner — something Frampton said has become very successful for the pub and something Cowell continues to have significant impact on.

“He’s always trying to find new ways to present beer to our customers and make our beer dinners a success with the brands he’s bringing in,” he said.

Cowell said he’ll receive the plan from pub chef Ian Mangin once the prior dinner ends, with beer pairings listed as “TBA.” It’s his job to begin to make matches for each of the planned courses. It will take a few weeks for Cowell to pick the beer, but a matter of hours to start scribbling all over the blank canvas.

“The second he gives me the menu, my mind starts running,” Cowell said.

The next beer dinner on the docket, set for May 14, has a clam bake theme. The tentative third course is lightly breaded Ipswitch clams, prepared with a lemon aioli, chervil, paprika oil and sea salt.

“The important thing to note when you’re pairing beers to food is you have to pair it to how it’s prepared, more so than just the item itself. These are fried clams. If I was doing raw clams, I would pair a completely different beer. The way you’re preparing the food really changes the way your palate perceives it.”

### Delaware Beer Week

Delaware Beer Week has been celebrated in conjunction with The Pickled Pig Pub’s anniversary every April. Frampton said it has evolved from a small undertaking to a week-long celebration in the five years the pub has been open. This year it takes place April 7 through 13.

Over the course of his typical day, Cowell meets with sales representatives and brewers to talk about what’s new and what’s to come. Delaware Beer Week is no exception.

### WHAT’S HE DRINKING

#### BEN COWELL’S TOP FIVE DELAWARE BREWS

- » Dogfish Head Craft Brewery’s Midas Touch; Milton, Del.
- » Twin Lakes Brewing Co.’s Greenville Pale Ale; Greenville, Del.
- » Old Dominion Brewing Co.’s Double D; Dover, Del.
- » Stewart’s Brewing Co.’s Stumbling Monk; Bear, Del.
- » 16 Mile Brewery’s Peter’s Depford Addiction; Georgetown, Del.
- » Honorable Mention: Mispillion River Brewing’s Double Chin; Milford, Del.

#### BEN COWELL’S TOP FIVE BEERS FROM EVERYWHERE ELSE

- » Brooklyn Brewery’s Black Chocolate Stout; Brooklyn, N.Y.
- » Troegs Brewing Co.’s Nugget Nectar; Hershey, Pa.
- » Samuel Smith Brewery’s Imperial Stout; Tadcaster, North Yorkshire, England
- » Sierra Nevada’s Torpedo; Chico, Calif.
- » Rodenbach Brewery’s Grand Cru; Roeselare, Belgium
- » Honorable Mention: “The next beer I get to drink!”

Delaware beers will be on all 14 taps for the entire week, including a tap takeover by Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, which Cowell hopes to include beers from the brewery’s Ancient Ales and music series.

“This is our fifth anniversary, so I’m really going over the top with the takeovers,” he said. “I’m giving everyone the opportunity to come to us with everything they’re doing to make them stand apart.”

It’s all a part of Cowell’s mission to promote what’s new and exciting in an ever-evolving industry. He said he makes it a goal to try to stump those in the local brewing scene with a beer they have never heard of, and when something comes onto the market he wants to be the first to get it on draft and pour it for the world to enjoy.

“I love it, it’s just so much fun,” he said. “It’s a really great time for this industry because it’s evolving as we speak. There’s always a new brewery to learn about, there’s always a new style that’s coming about. It’s just a really exciting time to be involved in craft beer.”