

Craft brewing: The presentation

Dogfish Head



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Founder Sam Calagione, left, and graphic designer Tim Parrott show the labels and explain the design process behind them at Dogfish Head Brewery in Milton.



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Calagione and Parrott work together closely to develop a unique look for each beer.

By Jon Bleiweis

For the Beachcomber

MILTON — Dogfish Head Craft Brewery produced more than 32 million bottles of beer in 2011, according to its founder and president, Sam Calagione. That means more than 32 million labels were printed, each of which helps tell the story of what's inside the bottle.

Calagione said the labels and packaging of the beer itself is often the only place he can tell that story.

"We intentionally don't have a lot of continuity across our beers because we don't brew uniform beers," he said. "We don't want our packaging to be uniform either."

The design process started with Calagione hand-stamping each label.

"I would just sit with this paper and our stamp set and a whole set of markers for color," he said. "It couldn't be a more analog approach to label design than it used to be when I

used to do all that stuff by myself."

As the company has grown and become financially stronger, Calagione said the process at the artistic-minded brewery has evolved to include full-time artists and graphic designers like Tim Parrott.

Parrott, 34, joined the company in September and has a background in music packaging design and advertising. That combined with his interest in beer made working at Dogfish a great opportunity.

"I always really respected the brewery and respected the approach of the art, in particular," he said. "I was always really intrigued by it. There's a crazy amount of range on the shelf. Every time I'd see a new offering it was a completely new style I've never seen before. I think that was reflective of a mindset that I thought was pretty interesting."

The label-creating process starts well into the

beer's development, after the brew has been tested among locals and co-workers at Dogfish Head's Rehoboth Beach brewpub.

"We trust the locals' palates," Calagione said. "If they dig it, and we as co-workers dig it, then we'll say, 'Hey, let's extrapolate this recipe and bring it to market.'"

It's at that point when Calagione conceptualizes the name, logo and designs for the brew.

Calagione and Parrott have collaborated on different levels on various labels. The process of designing the label varies from a few weeks to a few months.

The labels for

Urkcontinent, which is coming out in March, and Noble Rot, which has just hit the shelves, started out as paintings created by Calagione and were transformed into label designs with Parrott's help.

"Knowing I had somebody strong here with me graphically, I could make my paintings even more simple and then collaborate after I did the paintings on the final label," he said.

The artwork for Tweekon'ale, a gluten-free beer, was a collaboration with artist Marq Spusta that took advantage of the paneling of the four-pack's packaging, as Calagione said a 12-ounce bottle



limits the special opportunity to tell a compelling story. The four panels of the packaging allowed him and Calagione to tell four separate stories of two characters — one to represent each season.

"To sort of do a graphic novella in a four-pack of beer is something we thought hadn't been done before," Calagione said. "We want to innovate as much on the packaging as done on the bottle. We really emphasized the graphic component of Spusta's artwork here where we have the big panel."

Calagione said there's no pre-meditated goal or ratio for how often a guest artist helps collaborate a label and how many are done in house, but it's about half and half.

Another aspect of the label of note is the unique descriptions of each beer underneath the Dogfish Head logo, which is written in a font Calagione invented and got

trademarked called Doggie. Calagione calls it an opportunity to simply state what the ingredients of the beer are.

"I think a lot of people are willing to take the risk of trying a new beer from Dogfish," he said. "They love the fact that we push the envelope, and it means that we don't have to be regimented with always describing every beer in the context of some existing beer style. They know that we're actually trying to brew outside the traditional beer styles. We're saying what makes it unique."

Calagione said when he sees a finished product, it represents all of his co-workers who worked together to create it.

"We get to have fun bringing the artwork of the beer to life, but when I finally see it, I think of the 140 people at our company," he said. "It's a great reminder that there's a lot of us making these bottles happen here."