

Fizzing Up

HARD SODAS OFFER NOSTALGIC FLAVORS WITH A MODERN TWIST.

BY KATHERINE DUNCAN

From pairing it with popcorn during movie night to pouring it over ice cream for dessert, soda is often associated with fond memories and favorite treats. Now, hard sodas are putting an adult spin on some beloved flavors from childhood. Root beer, ginger ale, cherry cola and more can be enjoyed with an added kick.

While the taste mimics soda, the alcoholic aspect links the beverages with the beer industry. Hard sodas are catching on with craft brew enthusiasts and non-beer drinkers alike. According to data from market research company IRI, sales of the boozy beverage have doubled over the past year. "I think the appeal of new products in general (variety seeking by consumers) combined with consumers' appetite for flavored products have

contributed to hard soda's success," says Dan Wandel, senior vice president of the Beverage Alcohol Market Insights Group at IRI.

The trend took off following the debut of Small Town Brewery's Not Your Father's Root Beer in spring 2015. The specialty ale combines notes of sarsaparilla, wintergreen, anise, vanilla and other spices with 5.9 percent alcohol by volume (ABV). The bold and sweet blend was a hit, and it quickly became the fastest growing new product in the craft beer industry. "We are grateful for the success of the brand, and we put that success right back into the business to continue to develop nostalgic flavors for modern tastes," says Small Town Brewery Founder and Brewmaster Tim Kovac. "Ultimately, I think consumers simply crave the



nostalgic, classic American flavors we offer; they also appreciate the quality and care with which we craft it."

The brewery has since released other versions of its popular root beer with different alcohol contents, as well as Not Your Father's Ginger Ale and Not Your Father's Vanilla Cream Ale. In March 2017, it debuted the Not Your Mom's lineup, featuring Not Your Mom's Apple Pie (5.5 percent ABV), Strawberry Rhubarb (5.9 percent ABV) and Iced Tea (5.2 percent ABV).

A growing number of other hard soda brands have also emerged, adding more flavors and varieties to choose from. In addition to smaller

breweries, some of the biggest names in beer are contributing to the trend. In early 2016, MillerCoors launched its Henry's Hard Soda line, featuring orange soda and ginger ale made with cane sugar and 4.2 percent ABV. It has since added grape and cherry cola. Anheuser-Busch also offers cherry cola and root beer with 5.5 percent ABV, along with apple ale, through its Best Damn Brewing Co. brand. Coney Island Brewing Co., a subsidiary of The Boston Beer Co. (best known for Samuel Adams beer), makes cherry cream ale, orange cream ale, hard root beer and more.

If your favorite fountain drink flavor is not already available on draft, it's likely that it will be soon. •

Top left: Small Town Brewery Founder and Brewmaster Tim Kovac; top right: Small Town Brewery's Not Your Father's Ginger Ale, Root Beer and Vanilla Cream Ale

Soda flavors are full of nostalgia. Capitalizing on this, hard soda sales have doubled over the past year.

