



The Top six

In early October I brought together a panel of five judges representing a diverse range of Wellington beer people – beer writers, retailers, distributors and brewers. We judged our way through more than 100 beers and came up with our top six.

The standard of beer available in this town continues to rise, with 53 beers earning three stars or more out of five, compared with 32 last year.

For the first time this year we ran two tables, so that no brewer judged their own beer. This year we added two categories which are growing in popularity, Sour Beers and Low Strength Session Beers.

Pale Ales, IPAs and flavoured/spiced beers were the three most heavily contested categories. Fittingly, the top six, our six-pack, includes three hop-forward pale ales, one sour, one flavoured, and a now-rare example of a traditional wheat beer.



8 Wired Feijoa

Warkworth's 8 Wired Brewery runs New Zealand's largest barrel-aging programme fermenting and maturing different beers in various kinds of oak barrels ranging from 200 to 2,000 litres in volume. Wild Feijoa is always a favourite at beer festivals, and flies off shelves whenever it is released for sale. The judges found Wild Feijoa to be packed with tart exotic fruit notes, and hints of Rose's Lime Cordial, over a lean dry body with a well balanced complex acidic finish.



Wigram Hefeweizen

The Wigram Brewery in Christchurch consistently produces characterful examples of classic styles of beer. The Hefeweizen is a striking example of a Bavarian-style pale wheat beer. The judges found it to be lightly hazy with a healthy white head. Aromas of fruit salad, light caramel and spice led into a lightly malty palate and a tart finish.



Good George APA

Good George is a rising force in Hamilton. The brewery is a large brewpub housed in the old St George's Church. The APA is a wonderfully aromatic American Pale Ale, which the judges found to be packed with zesty aromas of tangerine, peaches and nectarine, all backed up by a wonderfully clean lean malt backbone.



Panhead Vandal

In the industrial backblocks of Upper Hutt, Panhead is building a craft beer empire based on big assertive hop-forward pale ales. The Vandal is an expertly brewed example of a New Zealand hopped India Pale Ale. The judges found it a gorgeous combination of tropical citrus and, over-ripe pineapple, all backed up with a sweet malt backbone.



Panhead Johnny Octane

In an unprecedented turn of events Panhead has managed to produce two beers in the top six. Johnny Octane is one of the Panhead range of beers, which Panhead released this year in 440ml cans. Johnny Octane is a red IPA in the classic American tradition. Assertive aromas of citrus and pine resin give way to an expertly balanced palate where rich caramel-laced malt carries and balances the hop flavour.



Mike's Vanilla Coffee Porter

Mike's in Taranaki are one of the nation's oldest craft brewers. The brewery has an iconic flagship mild ale in its Organic Ale, but it also excels at stronger styles of dark beer. VCP is an imperial porter flavoured with coffee and vanilla. The judges found VCP to be redolent of coffee, chocolate, and vanilla. On the palate rich malt, roast malt, espresso and sweet vanilla culminate in a gloriously balanced finish.



LOW STRENGTH / SESSION / MILD

Typically: Session beers are lower-alcohol versions of existing styles of beer. Increasingly these beers are hop-forward pale ales brewed at reduced alcohol levels. Dark Milds are traditional session-strength nutty chocolatey ales.

Renaissance Clipper

A wonderful example of the style, complex citrus layered over husky whole-grain malt with a lean dry finish.

Mike's Organic Ale

Complex nutty chocolate notes layered over a lean malt backbone with a dry finish.

Renaissance Empathy

A crystal clear beer with sweet citrus hop aromas, a lean body and a bitter finish.

Croucher Low Rider

Earthy hops, layered over a decent malt body and a sweet full finish.

Regent 58 Session IPA

Bright citrus hop aromas layered over a whole grain malt body and a clean finish.

8 Wired Semi Conductor

A lovely citrus hop aroma leads into an earthy hop flavour and a strident hop finish.



WHEAT/ SAISON

Typically: Wheats can take a range of forms from hoppy modern versions that combine tart wheat with fruity hops and sometimes spicy yeast characters to traditional banana and clove-laced German-style versions. Saisons are dry spicy farmhouse ales.

Wigram Hefeweizen

Lightly hazy with a healthy white head. Aromas of fruit salad, light caramel and spice led into a lightly malty palate and a tart finish.

Panhead Whitewall

A striking golden hue with aromas of lemony hops, melon fruit and pineapple, and a lean dry malt backbone.

Panhead Hermann Holshot

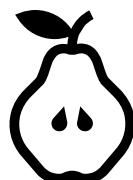
A complex combination of lemony hops and fruit salad esters resulting in a tropical cocktail.

8 Wired Saison Sauvin

An inviting combo of fruity hop character and exotic spicy yeast notes. On the palate earthy hops and sweet malt lead into a dry yeasty finish.

Spark Prospector

Clear gold with a yeasty hit of spice, candy-sugar sweetness and a rounded finish.



GOLDEN LAGER / PILSNER

Typically: Crisp clean and pale golden hued, with clean hop aromas that sometimes take on a big fruity hop character.

Panhead Port Rd Pils

Clear gold with a ripe, overt citrus aroma, a well balanced palate of hop flavour and sweet malt.

Croucher Pils

A complex aroma of wholegrain malt, candied orange oil, sweet malt and citrus hops on the palate with a lingering hoppy finish.

Wigram Bavarian Pils

Light wine-like esters and subtle hops lead into a sweet malt-accented palate.



GOLDEN ALE/PALE ALE/ BEST BITTER

Typically: Golden ale and pale ales combine pale malt character with sometimes overt fruity hop characters. Best bitters combine richer copper-coloured malt character with some fruity yeast character and a decent hopping.

Good George APA

Packed with zesty aromas of tangerine, peaches and nectarine, all backed up by a wonderfully clean lean malt backbone.

Stoke Recognition DDA

A complex combo of New World hop character and light esters, fruity hops and sweet malt lead into a bracing bitterness.

North End Super Alpha

An enthusiastic head gives off citrus and stone fruit hop notes which leads into a crisp well balanced palate with a dry finish.

Stoke IPA

Earthy hops and marmaladey esters leads into a lean mouth feel with a mineral finish.

North End Amber

Copper coloured with a white head, aromas of stonefruit, caramel, jammy fruit and toasty malt leads into a rich malt palate.

Fork Brewing Godzone Beat

Tropical fruit, and fresh malt aromas lead into a ripe fruity palate with a well balanced finish.

Panhead Quickchange

Aromas of mandarin, passionfruit and a hint of grass gives way to a lean austere palate.

Emerson's Bookbinder

Some earthy hops and light fruit notes lead into a lean malt body with some cereal notes.

Panhead Supercharger

Tropical hop aromas lead into a lean malt body and a firm dry finish.

Croucher Pale Ale

Sweet citrus hop notes and toasted malt character leads into a lean body and a dry finish.

Emerson's 1812

Mandarin and whole grain malt aromas lead into a lean malt body and an assertive finish.