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MINDBENDING FLAVORS SOLELY THROUGH HOPS



Brewmaster Matt Brynildson on the evolution of Firestone Walker's Luponic Distortion IPA Series—and how newer experimental hops continue to push the envelope of possibilities.

AT A TIME WHEN fruit additions and other adjunct flavorings were making their mark on craft beer, Firestone Walker went the other way when it launched its Luponic Distortion IPA Series two years ago. Always made with the same base beer, each Luponic Distortion release has featured a new hops blend with a focus on emerging and experimental cultivars—all to showcase the remarkable flavors derived from 100 percent natural hops. Now, with its milestone tenth release in the series, Firestone Walker is rebooting the packaging and doubling down on Brewmaster Matt Brynildson's founding mantra for Luponic Distortion: "Mind-bending flavors solely through hops."

You've remarked that a beer like Luponic Distortion wouldn't have even been possible a few years ago. What do you mean by that?

A lot of the hops we're using weren't available until recently. We're in this perfect window now, where all of these experimental hops cultivars that breeders and growers have been working on for so many years are starting to come on line.

When I was working as a hops chemist back in the early 1990s, Cascade was this racy hop that was like, "Whoah!" It's what made Sierra Nevada Pale Ale so different. When we first made Union Jack ten years ago, Simcoe and Amarillo were the racy new hard-to-get hops.

But in the past couple of years, it just blew up, and Luponic Distortion is our opportunity to plug into it. It's like being a kid in a candy store. We're pushing flavors forward in this beer that might make you swear there's a fruit addition in there, but we're doing it with pure hops.

We know that individual hops deliver specific aromas and flavors. But can you bend, distort, or amplify those flavors by blending them together?

Yes, I think we've proven that, and in many ways that's what Luponic Distortion is all about. For example, there's this "keystone" hop that we absolutely love, and that has made it into several Luponic Distortion releases. It has this broad, round, fruity characteristic. And when you combine it with other hops, it has this rebound effect and actually amplifies the tropical notes of

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these other hops. It’s not totally scientific, because I can’t always take a GC (gas chromatograph) and prove to you, “Oh, combine these hops, and it creates this new peak of flavor.” But we’ve been doing as much analytical and sensory work as possible, so that we’re actually collecting real data. We aren’t bullshitting on this because we’re actually seeing a pattern here.

Luponic Distortion No. 10 has some interesting flavors called out right on the package. Can you elaborate on those?

Across the first nine releases, we bounced around quite a bit, using hops from all over the world, covering a wide spectrum

of flavors from the fruity to the dank. With No. 10—which is led by three distinct hops cultivars—you can expect to taste some really electric fruit flavors, which is also what you can expect from future releases as well.

For No. 10, we have a hop from the Northern Hemisphere that is just so tropical, it has this intense mango character, almost like mango creamsicle. Another hop that we found in Germany has this peach character, to the point of Peach Gummy Rings. This is a hop the blew our mind back when we were in Hallertau sourcing hops for Easy Jack. It was an experimental cultivar known only by a numeral, and we kept a close eye on it, and as soon as



it became available, we pounced. Lastly, we went to the Southern Hemisphere and found this hop that is really tropical but also reminiscent of ruby grapefruit.

What was the thought behind the new package change?

Luponic Distortion was well received right out of the gates and immediately became one of our top beers. That said, over time, we realized that a lot of consumers were still confused by it—they didn’t know that it rotated or what style of beer it was. We needed to communicate these things better at the point of purchase. We wanted to make sure that people know it’s an IPA, that it changes with each release, and that we’re really trying to focus on these tropical, New World hops flavors because that’s what’s available to us now. Union Jack remains our true-to-style West Coast IPA, and Luponic Distortion is our next-generation IPA. The new packaging gets all of this across more clearly, and it’s a fitting touch for our milestone tenth release in the series.

So what lies ahead for Luponic Distortion?

With Luponic Distortion, the only constant is change! The base beer is always the same, and it’s fairly dry and neutral, which really allows the hops to explode off of it. From there, the hops blend is always changing with each release.

That said, I think you’ll see less bouncing around from one release to the next in terms of the overall hops profile. What we’ve learned is that people are really digging the hops with these New World tropical characters. And those are also the hops that are exciting us as brewers.

So while we’re still going to evolve this beer using a bunch of different hops, we’re tightening the stylistic bandwidth and focusing on hops that really pop with these different fruit flavors. In that sense, No. 10 is the start of a new chapter for Luponic Distortion.

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LUPONIC DISTORTION IPA SERIES No.10

HINTS OF:

**MANGO CREAMSICLE
PEACH RING
RUBY GRAPEFRUIT**



FLAVORS THROUGH HOPS

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