A Beer Named Melissa, a Kvek Grisette, and Other Things I Loved at Pike's Women in Beer Event

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Two things came to my mind as I walked around Pike Brewing on Monday evening for their annual Women in Brewing event. First off, that place is way fucking bigger and full of way more beer kitsch than I imagined. Just when I thought I had reached the end of Pike's beer memorabilia maze, I'd find another backroom with its own backroom full of even more beer signs.

The second thing I thought as I wandered around the halls of beer kitsch was something Leslie Shore, the head brewer at Rueben's Brews told me last month. "The reality is that there are so many females that are in brewing... It's not just that females are scenery backdrops, we're pretty much permeating every aspect of the industry," Shore told me over beers at her Ballard brewery.

As I walked between booths at the event, I noticed that Shore was entirely correct—many of Seattle's most interesting and exciting breweries are owned or operated by women. And many of those women were there Monday night. Leslie was there representing Reuben's, of course. Robyn Schumacher—the scientist-turned-brewer who co-owns and produces some of Ballard's best beer at Stoup Brewing—was there with a Kvek fermented Grisette (a type of low-alcohol saison made with ancient yeast from Norway). Co-owner of rapidly expanding Fremont Brewing Sara Nelson was there. And of course Rose Ann Finkel, one of Pike Brewing's founding owners and a craft beer evangelist since

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she started importing European beers to Seattle in the 1970s, was also in attendance.

The event reminded me that drinking women-made beer isn't about checking some kind of social justice box, but about drinking some of the region's best beer, period.

Take for instance Melissa, a beautiful Saison from Port Townsend's Propolis Brewing that brewery owner Piper Corbett was pouring Monday evening. There was something deceptively enjoyable about Melissa. After a burst of Champagne-esque bubbles, Melissa turned to an overwhelming sweetness, like a lemon candy dipped in honey. But unlike an actual candy, Melissa's sweet flavor didn't linger and coat your teeth with sugar; instead it faded into a completely dry finish. It's an impressive beer from an impressive brewery. Propolis extensively uses locally foraged ingredients in their beers, including the yeast they ferment with and the lemon balm that flavors Melissa. Corbett told me this practice comes from her own upbringing on the northeast corner of the Olympic Peninsula.

"These are all the flowers and trees and herbs that are part of my story, it's something that we did in Port Townsend in the spring. We'd go out and pick wild nettles and other wild flowers," Corbett said.

After tasting Melissa and then getting a second glass because it was so good, I kept walking around and found Ariel Klein, the head brewer of Outer Planet Brewing, serving a British mild that was impressively soft and watery. If you know the style you'll know that is a compliment, not a critique. Klein seemed to appreciate my use of the word 'watery.'

"It's a British mild so it's meant to be easy to drink, you can have five pints of it without feeling heavy. It's really sessionable, and that's what it's supposed to be," Klein said.

Just around the corner from Klein's mild was Audra Johansen pouring some of the beer she makes at Big Time Brewing. She was serving a mango guava sour and a juicy IPA, two styles that are distinctly modern compared to the more staid offerings that Big Time, Seattle's longest continually running brewery, is known for. And that's largely because of Johansen. She used to work at Magnolia's Urban Family Brewing but took a job as a brewer at Big Time around a year ago. One of the first things she did was start advocating for newer beer styles like kettle sours. "We didn't start doing them till I got there, I kind of pushed for it," Johansen told me. It's just one more example of women not only making Seattle beer, but making Seattle beer better.

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