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< Back to front page

Text size

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## Q&A: Sam Adams brewer Jim Koch discusses 2nd Infinium batch

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

This week at its Jamaica Plain brewery, the Boston Beer Company, will hold an early tasting of its second annual batch of a champagne-like beer created through a partnership with the world’s oldest brewery.



(Boston Beer Co.)

Jim Koch, founder of the company best known for its Samuel Adams beer brand, spoke to Boston.com this week about the 2011 batch of [Infinium](#), which will be previewed at a public, but “sold-out” reception Thursday from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at the Germania Street brewery.

Following Infinium’s [inaugural release last holiday season](#), this year, “The brewers enhanced the beer by dry hopping with fresh Hallertau Mittelfrueh hops late in the brewing process, imparting a fresh yet delicate citrusy hop character,” an e-mailed release from the company said. “We’re also mixing it up a bit (literally). Given Infinium’s champagne-like characteristics, we’ve invited 3 local mixologists to design signature Infinium cocktails. They will be at the tasting, pouring their final recipes, and we’re asking attendees to vote on their

favorite.”

Infinium was created over a two-year span with German brewer [Weihenstephan](#), which was founded in 1040.

[Boston Beer Company](#) calls it, “a groundbreaking brew, made with only the four traditional ingredients: malted barley, hops, water and yeast. Infinium is a crisp champagne-like beer with fine bubbles and a fruity, spicy aroma. The crisp clean malt character and delicate fruit notes in this beer are complemented by a slight citrus flavor from dry hopping with Bavarian Noble hops. Bottle conditioning adds another layer of complexity and light spice notes.”

[Boston Globe beer blogger Steve Greenlee said today](#) access to Thursday’s early tasting is “sold out,” but the company will begin selling its 750-milliliter bottles of Infinium at the brewery Thursday. The price is \$19.99.

Infinium should be in stores “in a week or two,” Koch said in a phone interview yesterday.

“We haven’t shipped it yet because it a little bit of time in the bottle before it

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leaves the brewery,” he said, adding that despite some tweaks from last year’s Infinium batch, this year will contain the same 10.3 percent alcohol by volume and around 15,000 cases will be produced again this holiday season.

**What did you think of the feedback you heard about last year’s inaugural Infinium batch?**

**Koch:** I was very happy with it. I think for me the most important feedback is – do I like it, do I think it’s a great beer, do I enjoy drinking it. And, for something like Infinium, it’s limited. It’s not going to be in every bar or package store. It’s a unique beer. ... It’s always been part of Boston Beer Company is to do these unique things that are for a limited audience that really understands what we’re trying to do with beer.

**What tweaks were made to the second batch that’s about to be released?**

**Koch:** I think they are subtle. They are what you would get from one vintage to another. We wanted to amp up the sort of fruitiness of it, particularly the tropical fruit notes in it. It’s got a lot of pear, apple and we wanted to bring some sort of mango maybe. We wanted to bring up the fruit notes, while still keeping it very dry. So it’s a very dry taste. But it’s interesting. It’s dry without being thin and it has to do with using malt rather than grapes because malt will give you that body and texture while at the same time giving you that acidic dryness and then we wanted to get more of the fruit notes in it again because as a brewer the yeast seems to expect more fruit notes from a malt and we have the ability to use both beer yeast and champagne yeast.

**Did you hear criticisms about the first batch of Infinium?**

**Koch:** I do read blogs and things like that but they are just opinions and often not very informed ones, which doesn’t mean they’re not valid. But, frankly, I know more about what’s right and wrong with a beer than just about anybody because I know exactly what went into making the beer, how it was constructed if you will, how it was brewed, the ingredients, so if anyone is going to know how to improve it, I’m going to be the one.

**What was it like to work with the oldest brewery in the world for a second time?**

**Koch:** At this point it’s a very strong and comfortable relationship. The first efforts, everybody was calling each other professor and heir this and doctor that and now it’s Martin and Joseph and David and Bert and Grant and so on and so forth. So I guess we went from a professor and doctor and mister to a first name basis.

**As a brewer, is Infinium among your proudest creations?**

**Koch:** Well yes. Because it required almost three years of work. It showed that an American brewer like Sam Adams can be equal to the best brewery in the old world. I would consider, and I think most people would consider Weihenstephan as one of the most significant breweries in the world with the university and the brewery and the research institute. That is among the best breweries in the old world, and Sam Adams was an equal partner in this. And that’s pretty cool. It really says that the new world has arrived on the world’s brewing scene, and the inferiority complex that American brewers had for many years is over. We’re the center of creativity in the world’s brewing scene today.

**Will there be more Infinium batches to come?**

**Koch:** The intention was also to make it on some repeated basis. Annually seemed to make sense – something around the holidays seemed to make sense. It was always meant to have an annual release ... I very much look forward to continuing to make it. I’m already thinking about what will be done next year -

- what would be interesting, how we can tweak it and improve it. One of the hallmarks of Boston Beer Company has been this constant dissatisfaction with the status quo. That no matter how good it is, we've got to find a way to make it better. And to me, that kind of challenge is one of the fun things about being a brewer, that you can always find a way to make it better. Because if we ever made the perfect Infinium, I'd probably stop making it because there'd be no more challenge ... To me it's pretty cool that after 27 years of innovation and pushing the envelope, that this is something that I still get to do every day.

### What other new brews are you working on?

**Koch:** Well we've always got beers in the pipeline. One that's about ready to go, I'm actually going to be taste testing the final blend [Tuesday], is a pretty cool beer that I've been working on for about a year. It's [called "White Water"] a white IPA and it's made with coriander and orange zest and includes cole apricots.



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[◀ Previous entry](#)

[Next entry ▶](#)