

cover story

1. Hibernation Ale

Great Divide Brewing Co., Denver

As big, bold and malty as holiday beers come. This English-style Old Ale is wildly warming, boasting a beautiful ruby color and balanced flavor.

- **Pair with:** Roast chicken or apple crisp
- **Cost:** \$9.50
- **Alcohol by volume:** 8.1 percent



2. Old Jubilation Ale

Avery Brewing Co., Boulder

Hints of toasted nuts spring forth from this winter wonder. Savor it slowly.

- **Pair with:** Roast beef
- **Cost:** \$8.49
- **Alcohol by volume:** 8.0 percent

3. Never Summer Ale

Boulder Beer Co.

A hoppy warmer made distinct by bright, piney accents. Can't head for the hills? This brings them to you.

- **Pair with:** Pear and Cranberry Stuffed Pork Roast (Recipe ▶ 12)
- **Cost:** \$6.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 6.0 percent



PHOTOS BY ELLEN JASKOL/ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

RockyMountainNews.com

What's your favorite Colorado winter beer? Vote in our poll at RockyMountainNews.com/extras

The 12 beers of Christmas

Some holiday traditions should never change, most especially those at the banquet table: cookies and eggnog, turkey and stuffing, gingerbread and candy canes.



Jay Dedrick

Other traditions, of course, deserve updating and upgrading. Think beer: Do you really want to celebrate the season with the same ordinary suds served at Martini's Bar in *It's a Wonderful Life*? No, the modern day George and Mary Bailey deserve something more — big, flavorful, warming brews.

With that in mind, here's my annual ranking of the 12 Beers of Christmas, a dozen December delights. Most are made right here in Colorado — is there a better winter wonderland? Think of them as being like Frosty the Snowman, because these seasonal releases won't last long.

Consider this a starting point for your own exploration, a first step toward establishing a new tradition worthy of holidays yet to come.

Note: Unless noted, cost is typical retail price of a six-pack of 12-ounce bottles. Thanks to Daveco Liquors in Thornton for helping us round up several of the beers. What's On Tap appears the first Wednesday of the month. dedrickj@RockyMountainNews.com

Recipes ▶ 12

4. Christmas Ale

Breckenridge Brewery, Denver
Smooth, malty and balanced. A classic example of a winter warmer.

- **Pair with:** Beef or lamb
- **Cost:** \$7.49; also available in a gift-worthy, limited-edition bomber bottle with swing-top cap, \$19.99.
- **Alcohol by volume:** 7.4 percent

5. Celebration Ale

Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., California
For those who hope for a stocking filled with hops, this is the clear choice. A festively full-bodied pale ale.

- **Pair with:** Sugar Mama Pecans (Recipe ▶ 12)
- **Cost:** \$7.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 6.8 percent

More holiday cheers

- **Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial Stout.** A big, malty, coffee-tinged brew you'll find in cans. From Lyons.
- **Full Sail Wassail.** Toffee and vanilla notes harmonize in this winter warmer from Oregon.
- **Widmer Brrr.** Hoppy red ale, also from Oregon.
- **Deschutes Jubelale.** Warming, with hints of caramel and honey. Yet another Oregon export.
- **Alaskan Winter Ale.** New to the state, but could pass for a Colorado native: It's brewed with spruce tips.
- **Leinenkugel Fireside Nut Brown.** Sweet with maple aroma. New seasonal from Wisconsin.
- **Michelob Winter's Bourbon Cask Ale.** Vanilla and oak meet in the Bud maker's seasonal from Fort Collins.

6. Samuel Adams Old Fezziwig Ale

Boston Beer Co.

Think caramel-dipped gingerbread man, melted into a smooth sipper. Brewed with cinnamon, ginger and orange.

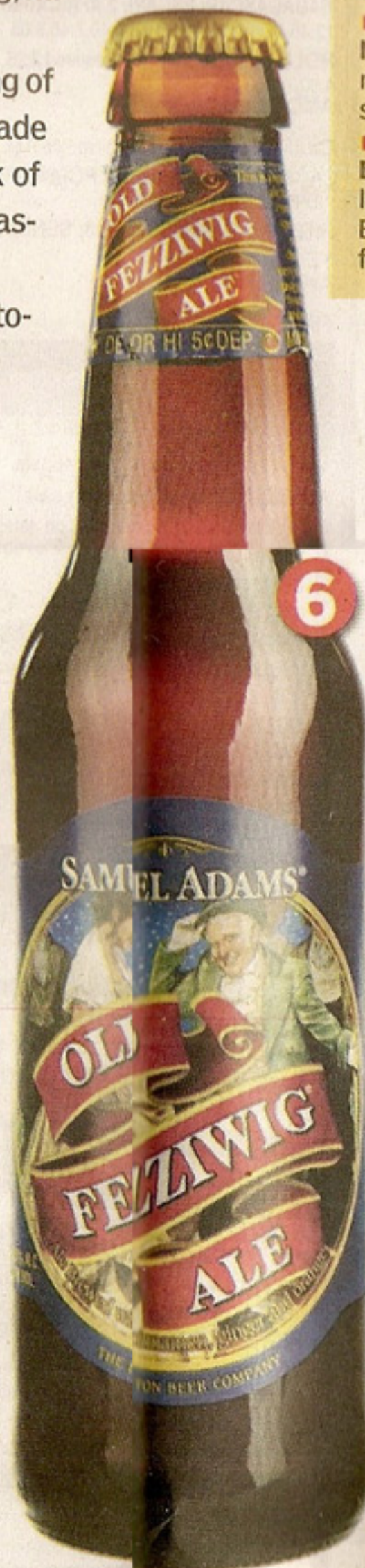
- **Pair with:** Roast turkey or ginger snaps
- **Cost:** Only available as part of the Samuel Adams Winter Classics 12-pack, \$13.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 5.9 percent

12. Snow Bound Winter Ale

Left Hand Brewing Co., Longmont

The spiciest selection on the list is loaded with clove, ginger, cardamom, orange zest and honey. Fruitcake in a mug.

- **Pair with:** Turkey or fruity desserts
- **Cost:** \$4.99, 22-ounce bottle
- **Alcohol by volume:** 7.6 percent



7. Isolation Ale

Odell Brewing Co., Fort Collins

English malt gives this copper-hued elixir the warmth of toffee and biscuits.

- **Pair with:** Fish and chips or Frosted Maple Walnut Cookies (Recipe ▶ 12)
- **Cost:** \$9.49
- **Alcohol by volume:** 6.1 percent



8. 2 Below Ale

New Belgium Brewing Co., Fort Collins

A cool cousin of Fat Tire, this amber ale is just hoppy enough, with a toasty, caramel aroma. New Belgium also brews Frambozen, a seasonal that's rich with red raspberry flavor.

- **Pair with:** Bread pudding, prime rib or rich pasta dishes
- **Cost:** \$7.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 6.6 percent



9. Cocoa Porter Winter Warmer

Tommyknocker Brewery, Idaho Springs

Close your eyes and breathe in deeply — yes, that's hot fudge sundae you're detecting. Credit the cocoa powder and honey in the recipe.

- **Pair with:** Warm Spinach Salad With Apples and Bacon (Recipe ▶ 12)
- **Cost:** \$8.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 5.7 percent

10. Shiner Holiday Cheer

Spoetzl Brewery, Texas

From the makers of Shiner Bock comes this surprising, Southern-accented seasonal. A wheat ale brewed with Texas peaches and roasted pecans.

- **Pair with:** Barbecue or peach pie
- **Cost:** \$7.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 5.4 percent

11. Winter Warlock Oatmeal Stout

Bristol Brewing Co., Colorado Springs

Mochachino lovers will be spellbound by notes of roast coffee and chocolate.

- **Pair with:** Cheddar cheese or chocolate cake
- **Cost:** \$8.99
- **Alcohol by volume:** 7.0 percent



Three Questions for Don Russell

Don Russell is better known as Joe Sixpack, veteran beer columnist for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and author of *Christmas Beer* (\$19.95, Universe).

Of all the subcategories of beer to choose, what led you to write a book on Christmas beers?

It's a favorite of mine — I love the Christmas and winter beers, and nobody's done it before. I've been writing about beer 12 years now, and I realized there was a gap there. Most beer books tend to focus on styles — IPA, porter. Christmas beer is not a specific style, so it did not lend itself easily to a typical beer book.

What are the traits of a good Christmas beer?

The biggest thing is strength. They tend to be big, full-flavored and generally a little higher in alcohol. They tend to have heavier body. These are special beers of the season, so brewers go all out, and that typically means they use more ingredients. They also tend to pair really well with the festive meals we have at Christmastime.

You ranked your 50 favorites for the book. Is there a least-favorite beer you tried over the course of research?

It's not in the book, but my least favorite ever was a Christmas beer that reminded me of Robitussin. It was obnoxious. I can't remember what it was called; I came across it in a deli somewhere. I suspect it's not made anymore.