



How Mosaic Became Beer's Hottest Hop

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Punch Drink
By: Megan Krigbaum

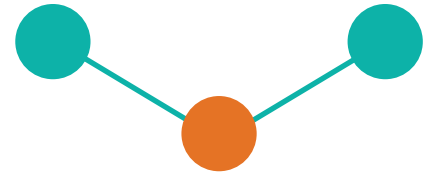
After a night of drinking around Seattle last spring, my sister and I wound up eating remarkably terrible pizza at one a.m. in a bar helmed by two bartenders who'd organized their own '80s dance party on top of the bar.

We weren't alone; the sketchball who'd been hitting on my sister in the last bar had tagged along and crammed himself into our booth. At a moment when I probably should have been running interference, I took a gulp of Stoup's Mosaic Pale Ale. And just like those old Hawaiian Punch commercials, a wave of heaven-sent mango juice splashed me in the face.

That's how I met the Mosaic hop.

A darling of the craft beer world of late, Mosaic gets top billing in many single-hop beers—often in IPA or Session styles—thanks to its unmistakable aromatics, which range from tropical fruit and yellow flowers to pine needles. In the past two years, the popularity of Mosaic-forward beers coming to market has been meteoric. A recent count at my local Whole Foods revealed over a dozen beers that incorporated the hop—and that was only counting the bottles that listed it on the label.





Mosaic first entered the hop market in 2012, thanks to Jason Perrault, a fourth-generation hop farmer—and hop breeder—in Washington State’s Yakima Valley, where his family owns nearly 1,500 acres of hopyards. Perrault’s breeding company, Select Botanicals, is responsible for creating some of the more popular hops in the States these days, including Simcoe (impressively bitter, deeply floral), Citra (citrusy, as the name suggests, and grassy, too) and the more recently released Equinox, which one brewer adoringly described as “dank and weird.”

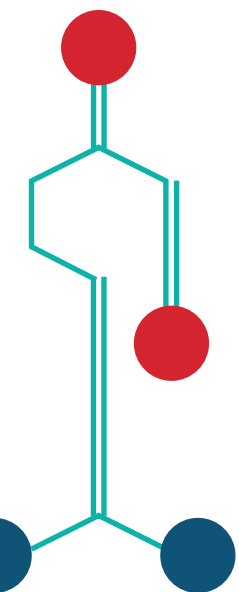
The widespread affection for boldly bitter pale ales and IPAs that has blossomed over the course of the past decade and a half has made Perrault an improbable rhizome superhero. But what I found so compelling in my first sips of Mosaic (and sure, in my second pint, after we convinced my sister’s creepy admirer that it was past his bedtime) wasn’t its antiseptic bitterness, but that it somehow had the impression of being juicy and fruity but not at all sweet.

Perrault started working on Mosaic in 2001, with the goal of producing something that had similar aromatics to Simcoe, but that offered higher yields. He crossed a female Simcoe YCR14 with a Nugget male and, over the next ten years, selected the ones he liked best. Russian River Brewing, Odell and Lagunitas were early adopters of Mosaic, experimenting in all sorts of styles. Since then, the hop has become so popular amongst brewers that, Perrault says, nearly all 42 farmers he works with are growing it. In 2016, there will be 2600 acres of Mosaic planted, 800 acres more than 2015.

“I really like that you can create sweet, fruity aromas with Mosaic but still have a dry beer. It’s sort of like gewürztraminer in that way,” says Jesse Friedman, co-founder and brewmaster for Almanac Beer in San Francisco. New Zealand and Australian hop breeders had been attaining this tropical fruit quality with varieties like Nelson Sauvignon and Galaxy, but Mosaic charted a new course in American-grown hops—one that symbolizes a shift away from the dominance of citrus-forward flavors and toward a more luscious, tropical profile.

“Mosaic’s an impact hop,” says Sam Richardson, brewmaster at Brooklyn’s Other Half. “A lot of hops can’t be made into single-hop beers because they’re not dynamic; they come off too soft.” Richardson makes a Mosaic-only Double IPA, but also likes to blend it into other beers. His most recent release is an IPA that’s made with Mosaic mixed with Motueka, a hop sourced from New Zealand.





But take a cruise down the beer aisle and it becomes very obvious that blending hops isn't where it's at these days; we are in the midst of a single-hopped beer boom. Practically every week, another brewery announces its new single-hop series, and Mosaic nearly always makes the cut. On its own, Mosaic's flavors—especially the earthy, resinous character that can easily be upstaged by top notes of fruit—are more apparent.

Friedman recently used Mosaic in his line of single-hop Hoppy Sour beers, with results that reinforced Mosaic's dominating character. "Hops express themselves in context depending on when they're added, what kind of yeast you use and how the beer is fermented," says Friedman. "Sour beers can pull out unique qualities in a hop, but Mosaic came through as classic mango."

Friedman has such a large contract for Mosaic that his purchasing power has earned him the luxury of choosing specific lots of the hop. Like with vineyard plots, each hopyard lot expresses different aromas, which is partly why you'll hear the flavor and aroma of the hop described in so many ways.

If there is anyone, however, that might be properly positioned to describe its flavor profile definitively, it's Perrault. "It has a big, fruity punch to it," he says. "It's tropical, but has a fruit punch note. There's a little bit of bubble gum in there, some blueberry, but it also has really nice earthy quality. It's definitely distinct."

Five Mosaic Beers to Try

As a newly devoted Mosaic lover, I was curious to know: Because the hop has such an uproarious and dominating personality, do all the dozens and dozens of beers made with it end up tasting the same?

The only way to figure this out was to pull together 20 Mosaic-forward beers—and a few made with sister hops Citra and Simcoe. For the tasting, I was joined by PUNCH's beer guru, Aaron Goldfarb, Editor in Chief, Talia Baiocchi, and Associate Editor, Lizzie Munro.

Overall, the hop shows an almost growling funkiness, a deep-set note that was hard to pin down. At times it reminded us of petrol, other times overripe fruit and in one case, ester-y Jamaican rum. What was uniform, however, was a laughable consistency of tiled mosaic labels.



Out of more than 20 beers tasted, here are our top five:

Founders Mosaic Promise | 5.5 percent ABV

This Michigan brewery makes this purebred single-hop IPA using only Golden Promise malts. Incredibly gulpable, this ale represents the hop in its most overt form. It's full of mango juice, pine needles and topsoil and has a neat mint chocolate chip edge. It's widely available, to boot.

Prairie Artisan Ales Funky Gold Mosaic | 7.5 percent ABV

This dry-hopped wild ale is remarkable in its tropical, lemony juiciness. "This way of using fresh hops in a sour is cool because it's flipping the Belgian tradition of using old hops in sour beers," says Goldfarb. "In Belgian sours, they don't really want hop flavor, but this is the opposite."

Trillium Mosaic Dry Hopped Fort Point | 6.6 percent ABV

This cult Boston brewery's keystone beer is its Fort Point Pale Ale, but they've been playing around with the recipe, making different versions that spotlight specific hops. The Mosaic version is earthy and green, super dry in an almost mineral way, all topped off with ripe and honeyed mango and papaya fruit. "I think this one shows the purest flavor of this hop," says Baiocchi.

Crux Half Hitch | 10 percent ABV

At 10 percent alcohol, this Bend, Oregon, Imperial IPA demonstrates how textural complexity really amps up Mosaic's flavors. Here, there are vegetal bass notes and then bright candied orange peels against a backdrop of tart, fleshy fruit.

Other Half Double Mosaic Dream | 8.5 percent ABV

Of the three excellent Other Half beers in the tasting, we had a hard time picking just one, but we settled on the Double Mosaic Dream for its outrageous complexity. "It smells like Sour Cream & Onion Lay's, and I'm not against it," said Goldfarb. This oniony start gives way to intriguing green pepper notes and an earthiness that reminded Baiocchi of "rain on asphalt."

