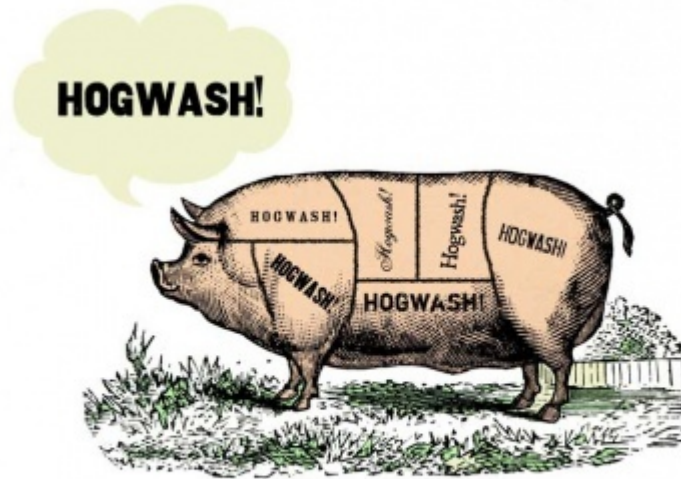


BBQ&A: Sean Wilson (aka Hogwash, The Beer with the Taste for 'Cue)

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HOGWASH! **HICKORY-SMOKED BROWN PORTER.**

Today's post deals with two things near and dear to my heart (and mouth), barbecue and beer. Several years ago Sean Wilson of Durham helped lead a well-orchestrated effort to overturn outdated laws in NC that prevented the sale of beer above 6% alcohol by volume (ABV). Two and a half years after its early 2003 formation, the [Pop the Cap](#) group Sean ran succeeded in passing new legislation to allow the sale of beer up to 15% ABV. This law overturned decades of conservative tradition in NC and opened up the state to a wealth of beers, including many classic American and international brews (double IPAs, various Belgian ales, and on and on). For that, Sean and other Pop the Cappers, including the good folks at [All About Beer](#) magazine, will always have my thanks.

Having handled the NC legislature, Sean is now taking on another, even more entrenched NC tradition—sweet tea.

Sean Wilson founded [Fullsteam Brewery](#) and set his sights on “plow-to-pint” brewing that features local flavors. One of Fullsteam's flagship beers is [Hogwash](#), a brown porter made with hickory-smoked malts. As its name implies, Hogwash is designed to wash down barbecue—its flavor is tailored to complement 'cue. It's an interesting concept, so recently Sean and I sat down over a cold pint and a hot tray to talk beer and barbecue... (actually, in truth, we sat at our computers and talked by email but it was fun anyway).

BBQ Jew: What inspired you to create Fullsteam Brewery?

Sean Wilson: I started Pop The Cap as a craft beer enthusiast with no plans to start up a brewery. However, after nearly three years of lobbying (PTC v1) and three additional years of promoting craft beer in North Carolina (PTC v2), I realized that I really wanted to make craft beer my career. I wasn't exactly making it in the corporate world, and my heart was in craft beer... not in a cubicle.

BBQ Jew: How did you settle on the idea of brewing a beer—Hogwash—that complements barbecue?

SW: The short answer is this: it just makes sense. We're crafting “Southern ag” beers, and no food is

more traditionally Southern than barbecue. We're all about pairing beer and food, so crafting a beer to complement the ultimate Southern food is a natural.

A slightly longer answer: Fullsteam's goal is to reach out beyond the beer geeks: to engage the foodie. The wine snob. Anyone who is intentional about what they consume — but who might not (yet) include craft beer in their list of passions. Next to basketball, barbecue is probably the most contentious and divisive topic in North Carolina...and we can't exactly make a Basketball Beer. We realized there's no definitive beer to go with barbecue, so we set out to make one. An adult beverage that's meant to go with our state's trademark dish.

The even longer answer requires us to share a beer or three in front of a pit. But it involves the concept of beer as a complement (and not contrast) to food, and the suggestion that beer is a unifier of people and a facilitator of community.

BBQ Jew: Inspiring words, I think I just cried and salivated at the same time. But how did you decide Hogwash should be a porter? Porters ain't exactly the easiest type of beer to sell, especially given the average beer drinker and barbecue eater probably grew up on Budweiser or other such lagers. Are you crazy like a fox or just plain crazy?

SW: I am crazy like a fox. (I shall now show my age and go [all 80s nostalgia on you](#)). With Hogwash, we didn't set out to make a porter. Chris Davis (Fullsteam's brewer) and I started with the concept of a subtle, smoky beer that complemented Eastern and Piedmont-style 'cue. Stylistically, our final recipe—the end result—happened to be a smoky brown porter. As for the notion that dark beers don't sell well, I'd respectfully disagree — look at the success of [Duck-Rabbit](#). Or Shiner Bock. Or Guinness, for that matter. Anyways, if we made Hogwash a light lager or worse, a “sweet tea” beer, it'd be looked at as gimmicky and trite. The beer we've created is a facilitator of conversation—about beer, about barbecue, about the South.

BBQ Jew: I see that Hogwash includes hickory-smoked malts. Are you crazy enough to consider smoking your Hogwash malts over an actual pig while its cooking?

SW: Wait, you're calling ME crazy like a fox? I hadn't thought of it, but we'll do it. Maybe we'll make a more extreme version of Hogwash called, I don't know, Swine Flu. Or maybe Swine Flue. Wow that's a bad name. Perfect. Let's do it. Of course, we'd have to ensure that, in the smoking process, no animal fats came in contact with the grain. Rancidity would be an obvious concern.

BBQ Jew: I see you chose to debut Hogwash in Wilson with famous Eastern-style pitmaster Ed Mitchell present. Any plans to make a trek to Lexington to introduce Hogwash to the other half of the state?

SW: Yes, when we can find a Lexington barbecue joint as supportive of North Carolina craft beer as Mitchell's The Pit is (and several other Eastern-style joints). The Lexington 'cue joints I've been to are traditional sweet tea places with no beer or wine in sight. I realize that's part of the charm. But I'd like to find a place that is willing to, as we say, go “beyond sweet tea.” Got any recommendations?

BBQ Jew: I'm headed to Lexington soon so I'll keep an eye out for a joint that'd fit the bill. Honestly though, I love beer and I love barbecue but I'm a stubborn traditionalist and I've always though 'cue goes best with sweet tea (or Cheerwine). Convince me that I should put my tea down and pick up a Hogwash.

SW: I don't believe you. What I mean is, if you're a stubborn traditionalist, you're already predisposed to not liking our beers. Or new ideas in general. But most barbecue enthusiasts I know AREN'T traditionalists. They may love the *tradition* of barbecue, but that doesn't mean barbecue is—or should

be—a uniform dish. If we were all Stubborn Traditionalists, there wouldn't be a rivalry between Lexington- and Eastern-style barbecue. There wouldn't be a debate over whole hog or shoulder. Wood or gas. Vinegar or tomato. Creamy or tangy slaw. Whether asking for “outside brown” makes you an insider or a tool.

There is no traditional North Carolina barbecue. There is a North Carolina barbecue tradition. That's why I don't get the monolithic fervor for sweet tea. There's nothing particularly Carolinian about the shrub *Camellia Sinensis*, lemon, or cane sugar. I love me some sweet tea, but I'm adventuresome enough to consider trying something else out. Especially if it's spelled with the letters B E (another E) and R. I'll put it this way: if I showed up to your pig pickin' with a home-baked bourbon pecan pie instead of banana pudding, would you refuse a slice? Beer deserves a place at the banquet, right along side sweet tea, Cheerwine, and North Carolina wine.

Lastly, since BBQ Jew touches on elements of faith and tradition, it'd be worthwhile to mention that this Pavlovian response of barbecue-and-tea likely originates from Sunday church gatherings, and the long and often sordid North Carolina tradition of mixing church and state politics. I'm not dismissing church barbecues—I'm an Episcopalian and recovering evangelical who thoroughly enjoys a good church barbecue. But let's not forget that the sweet tea and Cheerwine phenomenon likely has Prohibitionist roots. Personally, I'd rather celebrate a modern North Carolina that welcomes all beverages to the table than Puritanical teetotalism!

BBQ Jew: Okay, now I'm thirsty for a pint. When and where will the brewery open?

SW: Woot! We just finalized our lease last week! [726 Rigsbee](#), at the corner of Geer and Rigsbee in Durham's Central Park district. We're a block or two away from the Durham farmer's market and a block away from Manbites Dog Theatre. Fullsteam's 8,000 square foot space is located in an eclectic warehouse district that has a great mix of arts, industry, and food businesses. As for when we'll open, breweries are notorious for missing their opening dates, so I'm hesitant to commit. We're shooting for the end of this year!