



BREWERY TOURS

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By Steve Bailey

Travel a few miles west from the Delaware coast on two-lane Cave Neck Road and you come to the town of Milton, an unassuming community with new subdivisions occupying land that once supplied a variety of vegetables to the local cannery. The cannery building still stands, extensively remodeled and abutting rows of new houses. It's now the home of the very up-to-date Dogfish Head Craft Brewery – the maker of extreme beers like 120 Minute IPA, Chicory Stout, Raison D'Être and Palo Santo Marron.

The brewery draws up to 800 visitors a week in summer and a smaller but steady stream the rest of the year. They come for the beer and to meet the people who make such oddities as Midas Touch, a drink akin to mead; Black & Blue, a Belgian-style ale fermented with blackberries and blueberries; Olde School, a barleywine fermented with dates and figs; and Fort, a raspberry beer with 18 percent alcohol by volume.

You may catch a glimpse of the founder and president, Sam Calagione, who turns 41 this spring. He started Dogfish Head in 1995 as a brewpub in Rehoboth Beach, 16 miles away. The name comes from a point of land on the coast of Maine near Boothbay Harbor, which Calagione, who is from western Massachusetts, used to visit with his parents. His wife, Mariah Calagione, is credited with bringing him and his ideas to Delaware, her native state.

The tour starts and ends in a large gift shop where a light-fare pub is to open by year's end. After a spiel about Dogfish Head's early days and Calagione's penchant for trying everything, no matter how weird or heretical, visitors go into the brewery itself. Bags of malted barley are on pallets, hoses snake across the concrete floor, and huge tanks loom around. Malted barley, water, hops and yeast are just a starting point for Calagione and crew, who toss in things like licorice root, maple syrup, raisins, honey, pumpkins, chicory and brown sugar. The spent grain, which some breweries simply discard, is used as cattle feed, and the cattle in turn become hamburgers at the brewpub.

The worts go into stainless steel and wooden tanks. The wooden tanks – and one in particular – are highlights of the tour. Two 300-barrel tanks are made of oak, just like those at wineries, and the third is made of palo santo, an extremely dense and fragrant wood from South America. The wood is rare and very difficult to cut because of its density. The tour guide explains that Dogfish Head invested \$150,000 in creating this unique tank based on what Calagione once tasted when he tossed palo santo chips into a wort.



A tour group takes in Dogfish Head's Milton, Del., brewery.

Today's Palo Santo Marron, which spends about 35 days in the tank, is an unfiltered brown ale with notes of vanilla and caramel. Dogfish Head compares it to an oak-aged cabernet – a complex Madeira might be a more apt wine equivalent – and it is a standout even among such well-received beers as 90 Minute IPA and Raison D'Être.

The oak tanks, said to be the largest wooden beer tanks in the country since Prohibition, are used for Olde School, 120 Minute IPA, Immort Ale, Red and White, Black and Blue, and Worldwide Stout. All of the other beers ferment in stainless-steel tanks.

After the tour, the bar in the gift shop is set up for tastings and pieces of very heavy palo santo wood are passed around. Each tour participant gets four generous tastes. Unfortunately, the brewery, which has over time produced almost 200 different beers, never offers its entire range at one time. (Go to the brewpub in Rehoboth Beach for a much wider selection.)

Though Calagione is as involved in making the beers as ever – a recent visit found him at the brewpub standing in a vat preparing a brown ale using plantains and pecanwood-smoked barley – these days he's supported by 78 employees at the brewery, which sold nearly 100,000 barrels last year.

With so many beers, which is Calagione's favorite? "The one in front of me," he said.

Tours of the Dogfish Head Craft Brewery (6 Cannery Village Center, Milton, Del.; 302-684-1000) vary during the year, but are generally offered Tuesdays through Saturdays at 2 p.m., 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. Go to www.dogfish.com to check a specific date and make a reservation. Tours are limited to 35 persons. The Dogfish Head Brewings and Eats brewpub (320 Rehoboth Avenue, Rehoboth Beach, Del.; 302-226-2739) is open for lunch and dinner seven days a week. Upstairs is the DFH distillery, which produces a very botanical gin, a honeyed amber rum, a spiced rum and infused vodkas, which can be purchased by the bottle or enjoyed in a variety of specialty cocktails.