

Txotx in the American West

Nestled in an unassuming warehouse in the small riverside town of Cascade Locks, Oregon, the Son of Man cidery brought a piece of the Basque Country back to the American West through their take on the classic Basque cider.

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Located 50 kilometers East of Portland, Son of Man is a pioneer in the American cider world not only due to their adoption of crafting Basque cider in the traditional and natural method, but in their celebration of the culture itself. Few others in the United States produce their own Basque style cider, but Son of Man is the only producer who commemorates a successful batch with their own “txotx berri”.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Son of Man was not able to perform such an event. However, 2022 is the first year (of hopefully many) in allowing the attendees to be attracted from all over the country and the world. Son of Man split their “txotx berri” over the course of two weekend events; the first attracting a foundation cracking number of guests, while the second provided a much more intimate experience for their local clientele. We were given the unique opportunity to experience Son of Man’s txotx at their second weekend event. Which, while reduced in its size, remained to be a wonderful evening for those who were both familiar with the Basques as well as those in which this was their first interaction with the culture.

The delightful Pacific Northwest rain helped all of us when walking into the warmth of Son of Man. Our senses were delighted with the aromas from the makeshift kitchen in which the evening’s primary meal pairing, a massive 1.5kg bone-in steak, was prepared. Attendees would shuffle in and take their seats right next to the towering vats and oak barrels where the cider has been aging in the previous months. To much delight, the pre-txotx meals came out almost as soon as the famished guests had taken their seats. The scents from a cornucopia of local dishes filled the room, ranging from fish caught straight from the river that was less than a hundred meters away to a wild mushroom pate served with a still warm baguette from the bakery up the road. I personally had the fish, a smallmouth bass that had been masterfully grilled over an open flame with a lemon and herb garnish.

All the dishes were delectable, as evidenced by the countless cleaned plates and faces of delightful satisfaction. Unfortunately, many of the American guests were noticeably uncomfortable eating side by side with strangers with the family style seating arrangement as they bumped their elbows and gave their awkward apologies. However, soon enough the owner climbed up a ladder to reach the tallest barrel and to give his welcoming speech, the end of which was concluded with him screaming “TXOTXI!” at the top of his lungs to a very confused American audience as he let the cider flow from the mighty casks.

What ensued was a mad dash to get in line to catch the flowing nectar as dozens of amateurs caught their drinks for the first time in their lives. The first pass, as expected, was plagued by constant spills, however as the attendees became more practiced, those spills became a rarity; that is until the end of the night when bellies were filled to the brim with food and cider. As the night drew on, any awkwardness between tablemates had disappeared as boisterous laughter drowned out the music (unfortunately no bertsoaritza) and many had gained newfound friendships through the magic of Basque cider.

Despite being 8,500 kilometers away from the Basque Country, the Son of Man cidery has been able to emulate a portion of the soul that is Basque culture. After one night of drinking and merriment with the gracious members of the brand, one may believe they have been transported to the Basque Country itself; and to bridge the gap between cultures is nothing short of magic itself, and Son of Man has done just that, a *Sorgindantza* (*Hexentanz*). There is no doubt that the attendees of the night's festivities have had their eyes and hearts opened to the beauty of not only Basque cider, but the culture and the soul of the Basques as well.