

# Fat Head's Matt Cole

**With brewpubs in Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Fat Head's is opening a location in Portland, Ore. What led to the decision to open another brewpub on the other side of the country?**

Portland is uncharted territory for us, but it has so much to offer in the way of food and, of course, great craft beer. Portland has such advanced and educated beer consumers. We're just really excited to open our doors later this year and hopefully make an impression. Fat Head's is a very hop-forward brewery, so I'm really looking forward to the close proximity we'll have to the growers out there—helping us continue to build relationships, evaluate the growing season, and stay on the cutting edge of the hop industry. Plus, I'm a cyclist and it's an awesome city to ride in!

**Fat Head's has won several awards for Head Hunter IPA. How did that brand develop?**

Head Hunter was one of our flagship beers when we opened our doors in 2009. Three months later I sent some to the Bistro IPA Festival in a suitcase and it won a gold medal. The accolades have definitely helped put us on the map, but we need to continue to stand out in an increasingly crowded craft beer scene. Since that first win, I've worked continuously to keep evolving the beer, implementing new hop varieties and hand-selecting the juiciest, most citrusy hops. We've also begun late-hopping with whole flower hops in our hop back, which allows Head Hunter to display a crisp, clean hop character without as much raw bitterness.

**What are some keys to making a great IPA?**

Minimize the use of crystal malts. Mash lower for a drier finish. Reduce solid mass to fermenters. Keep dry hops in suspension with the beer during conditioning. Don't filter...filtration strips color, body, bitterness, mouthfeel, and aroma, and reduces shelf life. Avoid oxidation. And drink fresh!

**You released your first canned beer this year. Any plans to package more brands in cans?**

The release of Trail Head Pale Ale in cans is something I'm really proud of. It was initially a limited, draft-only release in the summer of 2013 with a portion of the proceeds going to the Cleveland Metroparks Trails Fund. The response was unbelievable, and we quickly ramped up production and extended the release through November. Through Trail Head sales and fundraising, we presented a check (hopefully, the first of many) for \$10,000 to Cleveland Metroparks. In 2014 we put Trail Head in a can for large-scale commercial release, and we're releasing Wet-Hopped Hop Stalker IPA in 16-ounce cans this fall.

**What advice would you give to someone who is thinking of opening a brewpub?**

A brewpub is a complex hybrid of a restaurant and a brewery. First and foremost, do your homework. Read as much on the subject as you can, be realistic, find enough capital, embrace your market, and visit as many breweries as you can. Talk to people who know more about the subject than you—if you don't know anything about the restaurant business, either don't build a brewpub or partner with someone who knows the business inside and out.

**What beers (other than your own) are you into these days?**

Bale Breaker Brewing in Yakima, Wash, is producing some amazing beers. Topcutter IPA is super well-balanced and dangerously sessionable. It doesn't hurt that their family produces some of the choicest hops in the Yakima Valley. Barley Brown's Pallet Jack IPA is another one of my "go-to" brews. Tyler Brown is one of the nicest guys in the brewing business by far. ■



Photo courtesy of Matt Cole