

Tanks & Pumps Issue • October 2014

# BEVERAGE MASTER



CRAFT SPIRITS & BREW MAGAZINE

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**Glenn Foster**

Owner of  
Meadery of the Rockies  
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# Meadery of the Rockies - Back to the Future

By: Nan McCreary

**M**ead, or honey wine, is believed by many to be the oldest alcoholic beverage known to man. In Ancient Greece, mead was called “Ambrosia,” or “Nectar of the Gods.” In Norse mythology, it was the favorite drink of the Norse gods and heroes, and the reward for warriors who reached Valhalla. During the Middle Ages, mead was believed to boost virility and fertility. Back then, it was customary to give newlyweds a month’s worth of honey wine to ensure a fruitful union, hence the term “honeymoon.” Eventually, mead fell out of favor, replaced by wine from grapes and other fruits and ale created from barley and wheat.

Fast forward 9,000 years to a custom-designed tasting room in Palisade, CO, on the State’s Western Slope, and you will find Glenn and Natalie Foster of **Talon Winery** serving up their award-winning meads to eager customers who want to know what this ancient beverage is all about. Their establishment, **Meadery of the Rockies** ([www.meaderyoftherockies.com](http://www.meaderyoftherockies.com)) is not a remnant of mead’s historic past. Rather, it is a sign of the future in an industry that, according to the American Mead Makers Association, has increased sales 130% from 2012 to 2013, exceeding growth rates for beer, wine, distilled spirits and hard cider.

“People are looking for something different and ancient, and mead falls into that category,” winemaker Glenn Foster told

*Beverage Master*. “It’s part of a trend, along with craft breweries and distilleries. There’s a big, national push toward local products.” Meadery of the Rockies is just one of 194 domestic meaderies today, up from 60 just three years ago, and accounting for 2.5 percent of American wineries. “Mead is unique,” Foster added. “It’s not like a standard fruit wine. It has a character of its own.”

Foster, with a long history of winemaking—his father founded Ravenswood Winery in Sonoma — owns what he calls a “three-headed winery” in the Grand Valley that includes Meadery of the Rockies, Talon Winery and St. Kathryn Cellars. Talon Winery specializes in traditional vitis vinifera varieties, made as much as possible from locally grown fruit, while St. Kathryn Cellars produces fruit wines, including Cranberry, Pear, Apple, Peach, Cherry, Blueberry, Pomegranate, Strawberry Rhubarb and Lavender wine.

With 45 years of family winemaking experience—and a sense of entrepreneurial adventure—Foster and his wife bought Meadery of the Rockies (formerly Rocky Mountain Meadery) in 2008 with a commitment to produce the highest quality, award-winning meads on the market. Today, they make 14 different meads: four traditional-style meads, known appropriately as King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot and Camelot; and six Fruit ‘n Honey wines (known as melomels) that are blends of mead and fruit wines such as blackberry, strawberry and peach.

Foster's proprietary process of creating mead begins with 100% pure, raw orange blossom honey sourced from California or Florida. The color and flavor of honeys differ depending on the nectar source (the blossoms) visited by the honey bees, and, according to Foster, the original owners of Meadery of the Rockies tried many of the 300-plus types of honeys available in the U.S. before determining that orange blossom honey was the best. The National Honey Board describes orange blossom honey as "usually light in color and mild in flavor with a fresh scent and light citrus taste."

To make the mead, Foster initially dumps the honey into dairy tanks, and then adds Rocky Mountain water to bring the sugar level down to 22 percent (honey is 85 percent sugar). A 2800-gallon batch of mead may contain eleven 55-gallon drums of honey, or one-half a pound per 750ml bottle. Once the honey is diluted, it is pumped off into tanks, and yeast is added to start fermentation. "This is the tricky part," said Foster, "Honey is not friendly to yeast. It doesn't spoil, so it's hard to convert the sugar to alcohol." Foster won't divulge his "trade secrets," but explains that the key to producing clean, fresh mead with great aroma, flavor and mouthfeel is to carefully monitor the fermentation process to ensure that sugar and honey are metabolized in a timely manner. "A lot of folks spend a year trying to ferment honey," Foster noted. "We do it in 15 days."

Meadery of the Rockies wine styles range from off dry, with an alcohol-by-volume (ABV) content of 12 percent, to a port-style dessert mead fortified with neutral grape spirits to 18.5 percent. To produce the melomels (meads that contain fruit), Foster ferments the honey wine and fruit wine separately, then blends them post-fermentation. While some mead makers age their brew, Foster does not. "There are no tannins or anything in the fruit or honey that need to age," Foster explained. "Our meads are ready to bottle as soon as they are blended."

The Fosters produce wines that are light, crisp and full of flavor. "Our approach to mead is more akin to wine because we are a winery and that is how the owners originally conceived it," Foster told the *Beverage Master*. "Our mead is unique to us, I believe. Mead is one of those categories that's all over the board. Just because you've tasted 25 meads doesn't mean you've tasted every kind there is. There are lots of styles. Some are blended with fruit, some are still and some are carbonated. There's a big upswing in meads nationally."

While Meadery of the Rockies is not the largest meadery in the country, it is by no means the smallest. Mead stock is created in 250-gallon and 500-gallon stainless steel dairy tanks.

Fermentation takes place in standard cylindrical wine tanks, ranging in size from 160 gallons to 3,000 gallons. The Meadery is equipped with 21 wine tanks, some for fermentation of fruit wine and others for fermentation of traditional mead. The winery produces approximately 4,000 cases of mead per year. Foster said that a large proportion of the wine is sold in the tasting room in Palisade, with additional sales

coming from distribution in Colorado, Wyoming and Texas. Foster, ever the entrepreneur, is always looking for new ways to enhance his wine and mead-making enterprises. For example, he is thinking of making Lavender Mead out of local honey. "Lavender Wine is our number one seller at St. Kathryn Cellars," he stated. "Colorado grows lots of lavender. Basically, we grind up the lavender flowers and put them into the wine. People love it." He's also toying with making mead out of local honey, which would derive from wildflowers and clover that grow in the area.

The Fosters, eager to share their love of mead, invite people to visit their tasting room at 3701 G Road, Palisade, Colorado. Visitors can enjoy free samples, and shop in the gift shop. Winery tours are available by appointment.

Nearby is the Foster's distinctive Victorian-style building, home of the Meadery's sister wineries, St. Kathryn Cellars and Talon Winery. Each has its own inviting tasting room offering a big selection of wines, wine-related gifts, a large variety of locally produced foods, home décor items and souvenirs.

All three tasting rooms are open daily year 'round, hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed major holidays.

For more information on the Fosters' three wineries, visit

[www.meaderyoftherockies.com](http://www.meaderyoftherockies.com)

[www.talonwines.com](http://www.talonwines.com)

[www.stkathryncellars.com](http://www.stkathryncellars.com)



**Winemaker  
Glenn Foster**

**37 Medals**

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# Meadery

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Meadery of the Rockies: 3701 G Road - Palisade, Colorado 81526 970.464.7899  
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