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Small beer best in the world, by a short head

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A TINY boutique brewery in Sydney has laid claim to making the best beer in the world, after winning the coveted Grand Champion award at the Australian International Beer Awards.

The Redoak Special Reserve is available only to patrons of the upmarket Red Oak Boutique Beer Cafe in Sydney's CBD and is served in 60ml amounts at the end of a meal. Master of ceremonies for the awards presentation, food and beverage writer Bob Hart, described consuming the Reserve as more like "taking communion than drinking beer".

The Redoak brewery was established in 2004 by brother-and-sister team Janet and Dave Hollyoak.

Dave, 33, said the win was the culmination of a life's dream.

"I began brewing ginger beer at 14, and at 16 I started to brew normal beers for my dad," he said.

"I've always loved beer and loved brewing beer. It is a mystery and an art. Every step is exciting.

"The Special Reserve was fermented for over 12 months and was taken through a very complex conditioning and maturation in oak.

"It's not like any normal beer. You have to taste it to understand. You swirl it in the glass. By coating the glass you open up the oak and alcohol aroma. On the palate, you get a slight carbonisation, which opens up the caramel, toffee and malt sweetness."

Judge Peter Mander said the "rich, succulent, very interesting" beer was much like port is to wine.

"It's a beer you would only drink to complement particular styles of cheese at the end of a sumptuous meal," he said. "It's not like a Tooheys New or a Carlton Draught, it's a sipping beer and is served in cognac glasses."

After 17 years, the Australian International Beer Awards is now the second-biggest beer competition in the world after the US's World Beer Cup.

This is the first time since the late 1990s, when Hahn Premium Lager and James Boag's Premium Lager both won, that the trophy has been taken out by an Australian brewery.

The awards are sponsored by the Victorian Royal Agricultural Society and the University of Ballarat, which offer the only brewing courses in Australia.

The Matilda Bay Brewing Company won awards for its Dogbolter Dark Lager, its Bohemian Pilsener and its Redback Original. The prize for Champion Stout went to Mountain Goats Surefoot Stout from Victoria. Little Creatures Brewing won best Australasian brewery.

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