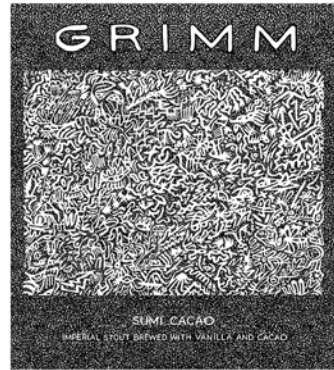


Beer Bellies



The ultra-light beer flowed smoothly into the glass, whereas the imperial stout practically had to be spooned out of the bottle. This difference was hardly a surprise, since the ultra promised a mere 96 calories and the stout weighed in at a whopping 306. For a dedicated dieter there was no contest here, and there wasn't one for a pair of dedicated beer lovers, either. The ultra-light came across as recognizably a beer, but little more. The stout, by contrast, blew us away with its density, complexity, and long, lingering finish. Was the difference worth the calories? We knew what we thought.

Beer is delectable, and in moderate quantities it has entirely satisfying effects on the brain. But the chemicals and molecules that the brew brings into our bodies must also, alas, be metabolized. And the sad news is that most of the chemicals involved don't belong