



The genius of craft beer

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

Craft brewers have long been recognized for their creativity. Still, no matter how adept they are at resurrecting forgotten beer styles, or at combining seemingly unmixable ingredients, the uniqueness of individual new brands is often short lived.

For every brewery that was the first to bring back the colonial Poor Richard's Ale or add chili peppers to their amber lager recipe, there are always other breweries not far behind looking to capture a percentage of a "new" beer style's popularity.

Although each brewer places their individual signature on a brand, stand alone beers like Samuel Adams' Boston Lager, Stone's Arrogant Bastard, or Dogfish Head's Midas Touch, are few and far between.

A trend in the making, we predict that the evolution of brewer-farmers and brewer-distillers is set to be the next step in ensuring the distinctiveness of craft beer and perhaps ending the rarity of standalone brands.

Bottling up brewery DNA

Proprietary yeast strains, classified ingredients, and secret brewing processes, are all child's play compared to where craft beer is going to protect its unprecedented growth.

For some time now brewer-farmers have been growing their own ingredients and producing signature beers with their yields. Grab a bottle of Sierra Nevada's Estate Ale or Chatoe Rogue Pumpkin Patch Ale and you are met with the unmistakable, distinguishing flavors of brewery farm grown ingredients that make these brands stand out.

Aside from the draw of (in many cases) organic ingredients, these brands also have the benefit of being in high demand because of their seasonal availability. For your store, this translates into beer that quickly moves and is bought in larger quantities because consumers want to stock up on limited, seasonal brands.

Brewer-distiller

Still in a growing minority, brewers have expanded their footprint and are applying their creativity to distilling various spirits including rum, gin, and whiskey, resulting in beer and spirits that are one-of-a-kind. The ability to use beer wash to make whiskey and rum, and then use the same whiskey and rum barrels to age

beer, means unique brewery specific flavor profiles for both their beer brands and their spirits.

Brewers like Rogue, Victory, Dogfish Head, Mc Menamins, Anchor and New Holland to name a few, have all been distilling for quite a while, and in June of this year, even Boston Beer Company announced that it was taking the distilling plunge.

Partnering with Massachusetts' Berkshire Mountain Distillers, the two will be producing two different whiskeys: Sam Adams Boston Lager and their limited-edition Cinder Bock. The wood aged spirits will be ready in about two years and should sell for about \$40 per bottle.

In the spotlight: Ballast Point Brewing

San Diego based Ballast Point Brewing is a great example of not only craft beer creativity but also how individual breweries have an incredible opportunity to craft beer that is not easy to replicate. Ballast Point brews and distills, and we recently spoke with Yuseff Cherney (YC), Head Brewer and Head Distiller at Ballast Point, to get a better idea of how being a brewer and distiller has influenced their business.

MK: How is Ballast Point being both a distiller and a brewery influencing both product lines?

YC: We are currently using our brewer's malt to produce our whiskey products. We also employ strict temperature control in cylindro-conical fermentors as a brewery would for beer production. The fact that yeast produces off flavors and esters when stressed at high temperatures in beer fermentations translates to wash production, so we keep our yeast happy at much cooler temperatures than most distilleries. We also employ our proprietary liquid house ale yeast, which also contributes to the final flavor of the whiskey.

MK: Are you using a Ballast Point signature beer as the beer wash for the whiskey in development?

YC: We brew a beer wash recipe that is solely for whiskey production. However, both beer and whiskey use the 50 barrel brew

house to produce our beer and beer wash.

MK: Are you aging your beer in your rum barrels?

YC: We have had excellent results aging our beer in our rum barrels. A cask of Victory at Sea Coffee Vanilla Imperial Porter aged for 18 months in our rum barrel was just kegged, oh my goodness...tastes like mother's milk.

MK: Are your growing or working with a farm to grow any of your own ingredients?

YC: We don't grow our own ingredients, however we use Coriander from a local farm in Indio for both our wheat beer and our gin.

MK: How have retailers/consumers responded to your brands?

YC: People who gravitate toward our beers see the spirits as a natural progression and are eager to try them, especially based on our beer's reputation.

MK: What are some of the creative projects you are eyeing for future releases?

YC: We are working on an absinth, a peat smoked whiskey, and a plethora of barrel aged beer-finished spirits. The absinth will be black licorice forward with hints of bitterness. The smoked whiskey will be aged in new oak and therefore have more pronounced vanilla/caramel notes along with the strong peaty smokiness.

Are You Thinking Out-of-the-Box?

E-mail me at mkuderka@mcbasset.com with your ideas. If we write about your program in our column we will send you a free copy of *The Third Edition of The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.

WHAT'S BREWING?

HBO partners to bring crafted brews to market

Brewery Ommegang and HBO are partnering to craft a series of beers inspired by the critically-acclaimed drama *Game of Thrones*. Launching in tandem with the season three debut on March 31, Iron Throne, a blonde ale, is the inaugural beer in the series. Unlike previous efforts by brewers which were typically executed as 'brewed under license' arrangements or straightforward product placement pushes, the collaboration between Ommegang and HBO is focused on developing unique beers that are named and crafted to directly tie into themes and nuances of the HBO series. Iron Throne will be nationally available on draft and in 750ml bottles, for the suggested retail price of \$8.50 per bottle.



Introducing Beck's Sapphire

Beck's German beer has introduced Beck's Sapphire, a smooth and distinctive golden pilsner brewed with German Saphir hops. It is brewed to six percent ABV and served in an exclusive sleek black glass bottle. Beck's Sapphire will be available to high-end clubs, bars and restaurants as well as grocery and liquor accounts nationwide. The brand launch will be sustained with a multi-faceted national advertising campaign throughout 2013.

New Belgium Brewing becomes employee-owned

New Belgium Brewing company's Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) has purchased the balance of company shares,

making it 100% employee-owned. New Belgium has been a partial ESOP since 2000 with a controlling interest held by co-founder Kim Jordan and her family. Jordan plans to remain CEO for the long-term. The Fort Collins brewer is currently building a second facility in Asheville, North Carolina. More than 150 additional hires are expected by full build out in Asheville.

Green Flash Brewing Co. rollout

Now available nationally is Green Flash Brewing Double IPA, Palate Wrecker. The name was inspired by the strong effect the brew has on the palate and its likelihood to cause "palate fatigue" because it is so intensely hoppy and flavorful. It was first brewed in 2008 through an innovative double brewing process developed by Green Flash's Brewmaster, Chuck Silva. Palate Wrecker will be available for a limited time until late March/early April in 12 oz/4-packs, 22 oz bottles and on draft. Green Flash Brewing Co. is upping 2013 production of the brew to support demand.

Budweiser Black Crown unveiled

One year ago, Budweiser asked its 12 brewmasters to envision their own unique version of one of the world's most iconic beers. The experiment has resulted in a new golden amber lager: Budweiser Black Crown. The winning recipe from Budweiser's "Project 12" will be sold nationwide to both on- and off-premise accounts. Budweiser Black Crown retains the key characteristics of Budweiser with its clean taste and high drinkability. Featuring more body, color and hop character than the flagship lager, it also has a slightly higher alcohol content at 6% ABV.