

# LET'S GET TOGETHER!

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Collaboration between breweries resulting in the special release of beers into one or more markets with two, three, up to even – yes – seven brewers from different breweries working together on a single batch of beer is a huge and growing trend in

the craft beer universe.

Amongst craft beer drinkers, the concept of novelty is one of the major factors influencing their choice of beer. Of course, many craft drinkers have their favourite beers that they will return to ever so often. But, very often, the ‘What’s new?’ question is either consciously or unconsciously the one that decides what the next beer of choice will be. And, in the ‘What’s new?’ question, it’s not only the beer style or brand name that is in play. Anything unusual and thought-provoking, such as an unexpected combination of two different breweries’ names on the bottle or draft list, will make these consumers – myself included, for that matter – go ‘Whauw, that sounds interesting – definitely worth a try!’

The art of collaboration is one of craft brewing’s coolest dimensions. While finding two brands of macrobrew, spirits, or wine sharing the same label would be well-nigh impossible, the opposite is true in craft brewing. There are some 3,500 breweries in the US and the number in all western countries is currently either exploding or already as high as it has ever been historically. But, despite this fact, which would seem to indicate some very fierce competition, it turns out that these companies and brewers seem to love developing and releasing beers of many styles together, with hybrid recipes, shared equipment, and an open-minded search for innovation, no matter the geographic distance between them – even an entire ocean.

Coolness is, in my view, at the heart of the secret of the popularity of collaborative brewing. If one brewery is cool and another is cool too, isn’t a collaboration between those two even cooler? The coolness of craft brewers is, however, not a

result of a strategy or marketing plan. Instead, it is the result of doing the right things in the eyes of the consumer: being focused on the beer, being innovative, showing true passion and being local with the locals. So, if achieving even more coolness is not the main driver behind these collaborations, then what is? Is it a way to utilize spare capacity? No, because those brewers who are most active in collaborations utilize 100% plus of their capacity for their own brands, meaning that they have to postpone brewing their own beers that are in excess demand. But is it then down to a short term aim to sell more beer, stealing some sales from the loyal customers of the other collaborating party? No, it’s exactly the opposite: It’s about having fun and broadening one’s own experience with and knowledge of brewing, and it’s about signalling the ethos of friendship and camaraderie within the craft brewing community. Besides, the brewers and other staff involved in a collaboration not only have a great time and quite often get to drink a beer or two together, they also get to feel the spirit of craft brewing directly in their bones, they get what often is considered a break from a very hard and tedious work life, they make new friends, and they learn.

Admittedly, yours truly is personally not just a huge fan of collaborative brewing, but also extremely active as a participant in collaborations. Over the past 5 years, I have done at least 5-10 collaborations each year. Where this puts me on the list of the most active ‘collaborators’ in the world of brewing, I do not know, but I’m pretty sure that it’s somewhere in the top 1 or 2%. For me, this is actually an important part of my business model for my one-man beer label, ‘Kissmeyer Beer’, as much of the beer I make and sell is collaboration beer. Thus, I would claim to know more about the true motivations for doing collaborations than most other brewers. And these are precisely the factors mentioned in the paragraph above. In spite of my Master Brewer education and my 16 years of working for Carlsberg and then subsequently starting and running a microbrewery for almost 10 years, I will not hesitate to claim that I’ve learned more about beers and brewing through my numerous collaborations than through any other aspect of my brewing career. Already after having been involved in the first few of my collaborations, I had one of those ‘Ahaa...!’ moments when I realized that collaborative brewing has a magical aspect to it. Yes, in contrast to my education and

personality, I had to realize that, when you do a collaborative brew, magic always happens, in the sense that the equation '1 + 1 = 2' stops being true. The result is always more than 2, in the sense that the character of the beers created through collaborations is better and more than the combined talents and capabilities of the individuals creating it can explain.

How are collaborative beers created? Well, there are probably just as many ways as there are collaborative brewing projects. In theory – and I'm sure this may have happened on more than one occasion – one brewer may just drop by another on the morning of the brewday, after which the two brewers check out the host brewer's malt storage, his hops in the cold room, the yeasts in his tanks, and, based on what they find, they note down a recipe on a napkin and start brewing. Most

often, however, and this is true of all the collaborations I've been involved in, the collaboration starts a number of months before the agreed brewday. First, the brewers involved start exchanging ideas about which style – or extension of a style – of beer they want to brew. This dialogue slowly and gradually develops into an amazingly fascinating 'ping-pong' about the raw materials, flavourings and processes to be used, and this eventually results in a detailed recipe for the beer. This process alone is so enlightening and so much fun that I wish for all of my colleagues that they will get the chance to take part in it.

Above, I have called it 'impossible' for megabrewers to release beers that are co-branded, although I find it highly amusing to play with the thought: What about a Carlsberg-Heineken Molotov Imperial Russian Kvass? Would that not be something?

# COLLABORATION

We are on a journey through the world of malt and beer, and we want you to come along. Tell us how we can help you make beers that people tell stories about.

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In one sense, one could claim that the megabrewers are already now collaborating 'per proxy', i.e. through those craft breweries that they are currently buying up left, right and centre. I'm not aware of any collaboration directly between, for instance, SABMiller-owned brewers and ABInBev-owned ones – but, then again, I would not claim to have any sort of even the vaguest hint of an overview of craft brewer collaborations, past and present. And I sincerely doubt whether anybody else would make such a claim. Be this as it may, the more interesting question is, of course, whether collaborations between the megabrewers' main brands are an unthinkable thought for all eternity? As the market shares of the big brewers in the mature markets keep on declining and the share of craft continues to soar, the temptation for the megabrewers to not only take inspiration from the craft brewers with respect to products but also begin looking at the differences between the business models applied in the two segments must be growing day by day. Maybe such a look would also involve the brand-building and image-building aspects? And maybe one or more of the big guys will realize that the fundamental model from the 1950s and 1960s – in simplified form, that all consumers in the target groups are basically the same and that they feel comfortable being communicated to via huge and impersonal ad campaigns that have no focus on the beer (sorry... 'liquid') – is not really in tune with the trends in our societies. What the craft brewers are doing differently in this respect is, of course, to communicate directly to the individual consumer on his or her terms with unique messages that focus on good beer, on the values of the brewery and on being 'anti-mainstream'. In short: Alternative beer for alternative consumers. Maybe with things having already moved so far into dangerous and, for the big guys, uncharted territory, it would make one or two of them think the unthinkable: 'Why don't we team up with another big brewer and brew a beer together for a market where we both could use some "leverage"? Or what if we invited a local craft brewer to come brew a collaboration beer on our huge brewing system? Or – to take it to the extreme – what if we were to invite the winner of the local homebrew competition to brew his winning recipe in our brewery? Could we hereby, apart from getting extra sales in a segment we are not represented in currently, regain just a little of the coolness that we lost decades ago?' Just a thought...

As usual, drop me a line at [anders@kissmeyer.dk](mailto:anders@kissmeyer.dk) if you have comments on or opinions about this editorial. For instance, if you're a cool – or wannabe cool – brewer/brewery who'd like to do a collaboration with 'Kissmeyer Beer'... ☺

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