

BEER IS BEER!

 ANDERS KISSMEYER, TECHNICAL EDITOR, E-MAIL: ANDERS@KISSMEYER.DK



The statement that ‘beer is beer’ should be one of those that is easier to gain support for than perhaps so many other of those opinions I have aired in my editorials over time. But I feel certain that this general agreement will only last

until I start elaborating on the statement. My point is, namely, that the historic - and also current to a large extent - clear distinction between ‘industrial beer’ and ‘craft beer’ is making less and less sense as time goes by, and that we will have to consider simply abandoning it all together sometime rather soon.

In the everyday talk about beer, most people talk about two entirely different types of beer: ‘industrial beer’ and ‘craft beer’. Or - let’s be entirely honest about this - when this distinction is made, it translates directly into ‘bad beer’ and ‘good beer’, but let me stress that this is by no means my opinion, but my interpretation of the word on the street in this respect. My reasoning behind the prediction that the distinction is becoming more and more blurry is based on the observation that the distinction between the breweries making these beers, the large industrial breweries and the small and independent craft breweries, is starting to disappear and will continue to do so at a speed that will only increase in the years to come. Let me explain why I hold this, perhaps on the surface, rather controversial opinion:

In the SBR No. 1, 2015 editorial, I started scratching the surface of the relationship between the major brewing groups and the craft segment of the brewing industry with a focus on the recent takeover of a number of smaller, regional American craft breweries by AB InBev - a move that created a lot of uproar and a lot of ‘heat’ on the social media. Since then, a San Diego-based craft beer consumer has filed a lawsuit - one of the many wonders of American culture - against MillerCoors because they have used the term ‘craft beer’ on one of their ‘Blue Moon’ products, which all have very heavy craft beer inspiration and are aimed at the ‘transitional drinkers’ who are

cautiously moving into the universe of beers different from the US standard lagers. The claim is that the consumers who buy these beers do this partly because they wish to support a small and independent craft brewery, and therefore they are tricked by MillerCoors. This, in combination with a series of very interesting discussions of the topic with colleagues from the industry - craft brewers as well as representatives for ‘the big guys’ - during my recent trip to the US and Canada, made me decide on and announce a future series of articles about succession in the craft segment of the brewing industry. This editorial is the first of these follow-ups on that previous editorial, and it looks like a highly interesting and relevant Pandora’s Box I seem to have opened, as it is not only succession that should attract interest, but the whole relationship in general between smaller and bigger breweries. Which different types of relations exist, why, what are the structural challenges facing big and small breweries, what were the deliberations of those players that already have engaged in ownership dealings with other players, what are the experiences of these players thus far, what will happen in the future and how will that shape the face of our industry in the longer term? All these questions are, in my view, essential, and I shall do my best to address all of them - plus most certainly quite a few more - in coming issues of the SBR. A very large elephant to eat, and, as they say, ‘the only way of doing that is to take it bite by bite’, so the total number of these articles cannot be determined as yet - I shall go with the flow!

Let’s have a look at what we are seeing currently in the sense of structural changes: the bigger breweries are buying up craft breweries at an ever increasing rate, some craft breweries are growing so large that the strategic logic applying to large breweries also starts applying to them, so they start buying up smaller craft breweries, merging with other similar size companies, or they simply sell the majority of their ownership to a major brewer. Like it or not, these are the facts!

In the interest of staying focused on the ‘beer is beer’ statement heading this editorial, I shall refrain from discussing all the reasoning, all the pros and cons of these structural changes, and the choices that the players in our industry must consider in respect to them. But I promise you that all these issues will be dealt with in the coming series of articles on the overall topic of →



Big for small and medium-sized breweries

The KHS Innofill Glass Micro:
For up to 25,000 bottles per hour



- Low-maintenance computer-controlled filling technology
- Multiple evacuation for low O₂ pickup
- Hygienic design for optimum cleaning

Learn more at www.khs.com
or scan the QR code.



the relationship between the smaller and the bigger breweries in this world.

No matter what one might feel about these changes in the overall picture of our industry as a whole, I find it beyond discussion that these changes are unavoidable, as they are basically fundamental consequences of the development in any industry – not just the brewing industry. In our industry, however, these consequences are fired by the development in the beer markets that any responsible owner or board member in any brewing company must face: the volumes for ‘standard lagers’ are diminishing and the volumes of craft and specialty beer are growing, and nobody anymore believes that this will change anytime in the foreseeable future

The Brewers Association in the US is an organization for home brewers and craft brewers exclusively. Thus, they have had to adapt their definition of what a craft brewery is over time along with the structural changes in the craft segment. Over the years it has been a very openly known fact that the definition of the maximum size of a craft brewery has very closely followed the growth of one single company, namely the Boston Beer Company, brewer of the Samuel Adams range of beers. Currently, this upper limit stands at 7.5 million HL annually (!), and here’s the definition in its full length:

DEFINITION

Craft Brewer Defined

An American craft brewer is small, independent and traditional.

Craft Brewer Small

Annual production of 6 million barrels of beer or less (approximately 3 percent of U.S. annual sales). Beer production is attributed to the rules of alternating proprietorships.

Independent

Less than 25 percent of the craft brewery is owned or controlled (or equivalent economic interest) by an alcoholic beverage industry member that is not itself a craft brewer.

Traditional

A brewer that has a majority of its total beverage alcohol volume in beers whose flavour derives from traditional or innovative brewing ingredients and their fermentation. Flavoured malt beverages (FMBs) are not considered beers.

“

SO, IN CONCLUSION, IN MY VIEW, BEER IS BEER! CRAFT OR NOT CRAFT, CRAFTY, INDUSTRIAL OR WHATEVER... IT DOES NOT REALLY MATTER IN MY BOOK, BECAUSE I NO LONGER BELIEVE IN THE IDEA OF ATTACHING POLITICAL OR ETHICAL CONDITIONS ON BEER WHEN IT IS TO BE DECIDED WHETHER IT IS IN OR OUT.

”

And this is the latest, simplified version. I personally remember a previous, much more lengthy version that spent a full paragraph explaining how a craft brewery could use adjuncts in their brewing, as opposed to the ‘bad’ way of using adjuncts, namely to achieve less flavour and taste and to save money!

I am not ridiculing this definition because I think none is needed, assuming that the BA needs to defend its *raison d'être* as an organisation for the craft segment only. And I will just limit myself to taking the consumers’ – remember those people out there who drink our beer thus enabling our existence? – perspective on that definition. How many consumers think about the following condition when they drink beer: ‘Beer production is attributed to the rules of alternating proprietorships.’ To be honest, I have no clue as to what this actually means! And how easy is it for them to taste in the beer how much beer that brewery makes a year? Or how bitter is the taste of more than 25% ownership from a non-craft brewer? Or how dull and flat does it make the taste that this brewery makes FMBs and possibly also spirits to an extent that its ‘total beverage alcohol volume’ from the beer it makes drops slightly below 50%? To me, as a simple man, such a complex and detailed definition indicates that the object defined is more or less impossible to define in simple and meaningful terms.

So, in conclusion, in my view, beer is beer! Craft or not craft, crafty, industrial or whatever... it does not really matter in my book, because I no longer believe in the idea of attaching political or ethical conditions on beer when it is to be decided whether it is in or out. What matters at the end of the day is whether a beer is a good beer or not a good beer! And, essentially, there does not need to be any further definition of what this means, as that is an entirely subjective and individual



judgement. Every beer drinker is, and should be, entirely free to decide for herself or himself what good beer is to them. If anybody asks me what my personal definition of 'good' or 'not good' beer is – and the nice thing about being the editor is that I can ask myself that question rhetorically! – my answer is that a 'good beer' is either a fine example – above and beyond or just on par with my own personal favourites – of the style of beer it claims to represent, or it represents an exciting and tasty new interpretation of a given style of beer, or, finally, it breaks new ground stylistically while still being inviting in its aroma, flavour and taste.

I have, as you, my reader, will have noticed, a long time ago stopped begging for more debate input from you, as this has proved futile every time. But I have to admit that this issue should be so universally relevant to all people who are either active in the industry or have an interest in it that I take the chance on repeating my urge to you to let your voice be heard on the 'beer is beer' statement, other aspects relating to the relationship between the bigger and the smaller players in the brewing industry, or whatever you may deem relevant for our readers. Including labelling the undersigned as a big-time hypocrite, seen in the light of my active recipe formulating role as a consultant for Royal Unibrew in connection with the very recent launch of their two new specialty beer – or 'crafty' beers, according to the BA definition of good beer brewed by non-craft breweries – series called 'Lottrup' and 'Schjötz' respectively. A hypocrite perhaps, but a very proud and happy one, because those beers have definitely all turned out very 'good'!

Drop me a line or two to let me know your views at anders@kissmeyer.dk. ☺



You know that we know

In the summer of 1865, Søren Christian Fuglsang established his own brewery. A few years later he and his sons expanded the business with a malting. Since then our companies have combined know-how and experience within malting and brewing. We know what works. And our clients know that we know.

1865 **150** 2015

This year, the brewery is celebrating its 150th anniversary. It has become the oldest family-owned brewery in Denmark. Our brewery and one of our maltings are located next to each other. A substantial part of the malt used at the brewery comes from our own production – thus we are familiar with the origin and high standards of quality. And we have the know-how in the subsequent brewing process.

We run our maltings in Southern as well as in Northern Denmark. Our laboratories analyse all lots before we select only the best batches of barley for our maltings.

Most of the malt is shipped to overseas clients. Because our clients know that we know how to meet their requirements.



SOPHUS FUGLSANG
EXPORT - MALTFABRIK A/S

Ribe Landevej 12 · DK 6100 Haderslev · Phone +45 73 52 61 10
mail@fuglsang.dk