

# BEER BUZZ:

## A LITTLE RESTRAINT

by Joey Williams



work within helps to focus, spawns creativity and results in a more impressive and interesting product.

A trip down to Saint Arnold's would demonstrate the limitless possibilities that brewers have in their craft. Using reverse osmosis, the brewers at Saint Arnold's (and most every other craft brewer) can strip their brewing water of all minerals and impurities, before precisely adding back the minerals that they desire to enhance the flavor of the final beer. This sort of control was not always the case, and the lack of this ability gave birth to many of the world's best known and most popular styles.

In the town of Plzen, in the Czech Republic, brewers sought to craft a light golden beer with a pronounced, but not sharp, bitterness and delicate hop aroma. The resulting beer, Pilsener, was an instant success, but could not have been what it was without the naturally soft water from the local supply used by the brewery. The water chemistry of Plzen is now prized worldwide and is commonly replicated by craft brewers. It can be argued that without this particular water type in Plzen, that we would have a completely different Pilsener beer today. The brewers in Munich, in response to the popularity of Pilsener, did their best to craft a beer that was similar. Munich Helles, a rich malt-driven style is as close as they could get because they did not have the water that allowed the hops to shine without being aggressive.

Modern brewers also have the gift of refrigeration, making brewing seasonally or gathering ice a thing of the past. But, before commercial refrigeration was available, brewers had to brew in cooler weather and brew enough, at times, to make it through the warmer months. Oktoberfest is a celebration surrounding the drinking of the last stock from the previous brewing season's March beers, Marzens, and the commencement of the new brewing season. Without the need for this seasonal brewing schedule, we would be without this tradition and many other styles of beer.

Steam Beer, also called California Common, is a style born from such limitations. During the Gold Rush in California there were no willing workers to harvest the ice that wasn't forming in the first place. In order for German brewers to make beer for the miners and others, they had to cool the beer overnight in shallow vessels, called coolships, similar to those used by lambic producers. These large, shallow vessels increased the surface area and opened up more of the beer to the outside air, which at night reached a comfortable 60-70F. The brewers could then use the lager yeast that they used in traditional German brewing and get beer. The yeast, much more suited to colder fermentations, would work noticeably faster and less efficiently with some ale yeast fruitiness, but the end result was beer.



Ingredients weren't always as easily attainable as they are now either. Putting in an order for Canadian Malted Barley, Czech Saaz hops, Madagascar Vanilla Beans or Ethiopian Coffee Beans was not as easy as calling a local supplier. More often than not, brewers worked with what was on hand or easily attainable through common trade routes. This meant that if you desired a certain flavor that you didn't have access to, then you had to find a way to coax that flavor out of the ingredients you had. Trappist ales are renowned for the plum fruit character that they get from the yeast used, no plums are used in the brewing process. The sour red and brown ales have an amazing cherry and berry fruit character, an almost wine-like complexity, with no addition of fruit in standard versions. The usage of roasted barley in Irish Dry Stouts have many referring to them as "cold coffee", when no coffee beans have made it to the brew kettle.

I am of the belief that our current fortune has hindered brewing creativity more than it has helped. The recent norm of adding a laundry list of non-traditional ingredients in order to attain a flavor profile desired has many beer description reading like a soup recipe rather than a beer. Modern brewers could use some pruning to nurture their creativity.

The "house character" many heirloom breweries speak of could do some modern brewers real good. Using local water sources, one "house" strain of yeast and local non-traditional ingredients would provide a healthy dose of limiting factors for a brewer to work within. In order to obtain the flavors, textures and experiences desired, the brewer would have to utilize equipment, procedures and a lot of brewing "know how". It isn't the easiest way to do things, I imagine that past brewers would have loved to work outside of their limitations, but it would help to slow the Vanilla Molasses Bourbon Barrel-aged Coffee Oatmeal Imperial Stout trend.

I don't dislike this trend of "extreme" brewing where the local grocery is a market of possibilities. But as an outsider looking in, it would seem that brewers are overwhelmed by all of the possibilities and are lost on where to go from here. In order to create something new and different, many are creating things that almost aren't beer. With a bit of restraint and some healthy limitations, we may just witness the birth of the next Pilsener or IPA. ☺



E-mail me: [jwilliams@specsonline.com](mailto:jwilliams@specsonline.com)

### NEW ON SHELVES AT SPEC'S DOWNTOWN:

Great Divide Rumble Oak-aged IPA 6pk

Hacker Pschorr Oktoberfest 6pk

Leinenkugel Oktoberfest 6pk

Breckenridge Avalanche 6pk Cans

Warsteiner Oktoberfest 12pk

