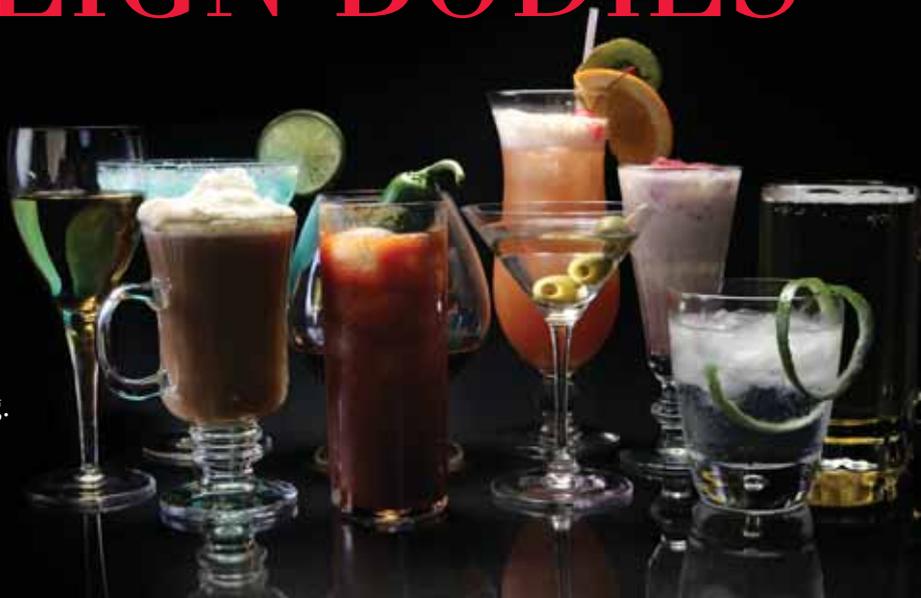


# COCKTAILS, COOKING AND FOREIGN BODIES

*Professor Charlie Bamforth continues his journey in the world of long drinks, seeking production and marketing insights that might be applied in brewing. Could it be that there are commonalities between cocktails and beer?*



I was with a bunch of people from Coors in town, at a simpler time when their name was not coupled with that of any other. We ordered a round of Originals, naturally. For once we also received glasses, seemingly clean ones and not frosted. Imagine the consternation, then, to find an olive in each glass. I inquired. "Oh, it's a poor man's cocktail," I was told.

We didn't throw the offending items at the server, despite my tongue-in-cheek advice to anyone served a slice of lemon in the top of their hefeweissen (It's truly NFL- and that does not stand for National Football League).

In the spirit of this series, I should (I guess) be questioning whether we really could learn something about boosting the presentation of beer by adorning it with diverse items, perhaps 'kebabbed' on a tiny umbrella. When I was courting my wife back in the early seventies I sure impressed her by ordering Pimms in the days when there was more than Number One. Never once, then, did I think that my pint of St Austell's finest would be improved by similar affectation. I still don't.

Surely, though, there are things we can learn from the cocktail

world: like a broader selection of mixed drinks founded on beer as the source of alcohol.

## Cock tales?

I have to hand it to Mardee Haidin Regan's *The Bartender's Best Friend*. The book includes the recipes for countless cocktails, martinis and mixed drinks based on the usual spirits, above all vodka, and with such irresistible names as Angel's Tit, Safe Sex on the Beach and Smurf Piss.

As for beer, there are fourteen entries. We all know about Black & Tan, Black Velvet, and (so exciting) Lager & Lime, Lemon-Top and Shandy. I guess we know about Snake Bite #1 (hard cider and amber ale in equal quantities) and Snake Bite #2 (hard cider with brown ale).

I daresay there are one or two of us used to a Boilermaker (two ounces of whisky chased with 10 ounces of beer). I confess that I have not tried a Black Velvet (a snake bite in which Irish stout replaces the amber or brown ale). Nor a Carrot Top (12 ounces amber ale with 2 ounces of ginger beer). Or a Dr Pepper (seven ounces beer, seven ounces cola, one ounce amaretto). Or a Stout Sangaree (10 ounces

stout, two ounces ruby port and freshly grated nutmeg to garnish).

But I guess 'Ugly' I should know: pour six ounces of beer into a mug and pour the tomato juice down the side of the glass so that it sits on the bottom. Sprinkle salt on top, causing the foam to rise. Before it cascades over the top drink all the contents and holler "Ugly!"

This does not speak of sophistication to me. And, in truth, in my heart I feel pretty much the same way about mixing beer with other things as I do about putting beer into recipes intended to spend eons in a cooker.

But perhaps there is room for experimentation, especially with beers that are of formidable alcohol content. I know that Sink The Bismarck as a beverage in its own right is not to my taste. But perhaps melded with amaretto, or Triple Sec, Peach Brandy or even Crème De Cassis it might become a curious little number. Over ice. Shaken not stirred. I would call it a Torpedo, but that name's taken.

## Crafty cooking

Wandering about some of the other alcohol drinks out there, we do find some idiosyncrasies that

might at the very least give pause for thought when it comes to beer.

Consider, then, Madeira. To produce this drink, fermentation is not temperature controlled and 35°C may be exceeded. There is no pitching with a starter. There is fortification, of course, and sweetness is boosted by up to 9 Brix using either grape juice, concentrated grape must or hydrolysed corn syrup, before the estufagem process: using a stainless steel coil in the tank or by circulation through a jacket, the product is heated to 40-50°C for at least three months prior to aging in wood perhaps for more than 20 years.

I remember a few years ago Phil Torline advocating cooking beer in the brewery, arguing that it would then ensure that all the thermally induced changes that would otherwise change the flavour of beer in the marketplace over time would have been induced in the brewery. The ultimate flavour stability.

Most of us cringe, of course, at the thought of heating beer. Many technical folks were struck dumb when the folks at Sinebrychoff introduced short term heating of beer to maximise the breakdown of vicinal diketone precursors prior to a scav-

enger column incorporating immobilized yeast. The heating of beer for even the shortish period of time in a pasteurizer fills some with horror – and encourages dubious advertising practices from others.

The question, really, is this: might the flavours introduced in some beers (again, most likely the more alcoholic ones, perhaps after priming-up) with a substantive heating regime actually interest the consumer?

And it would certainly not be too gimmicky for brewers to borrow from the sake tradition of serving some of their exciting products heated. There would be nothing revolutionary about mulled beer, long a staple in winter times and a product in which even I might not criticize floating entities from apples to cloves and where I would positively welcome the mixing in of rum, and more besides.

### Spirit-uality

Venturing into a traditional sake brewery makes you realize that there is as much spirituality as spirit thereabouts. In these polarised brewing days, as the bigger become behemoth and at the other extreme sprats (welcome as they are) are hatched, I sense that we are at ever increasing risk of losing hold of traditions and history that surely could be tapped into more and more for genuine technical advantage but also for diverse marketing opportunities.

Other beverages celebrate their traditions, indeed base strident rules and regulations on them. In beer, of course, we have the much challenged Reinheitsgebot (and I have been one of the most vocal in challenging its place in a 21st century brewing scenario). But looking at matters from a rigid stance of tradition, indeed protectionism, rather than technical common-sense, there surely is merit in seeing what more opportunities there might be for beer along the lines of the appellations associated with products like Armagnac.

If we are to restrict ourselves to technical lessons from others, then how about something I have raised too many times in these pages, namely the lesson we could learn from the world of vodka insofar as

basing our processes on diverse raw materials?

No, it doesn't sound terribly appealing, I know, to try to make our long-standing premium ales from potatoes, as opposed to premium two-row. As you know, as flavour technology advances then I am sure that in time this would be possible (laws permitting).

But there is too much brewing capacity lying idle in plenty of places. And, again, with legislation and taxation rendering it feasible, just how broadly can we stretch our creative spleens in the pursuit of ever more novel and curious beverages made from who knows what? We don't just have to make beer in our breweries, unless the law insists that we do. And where it does, then surely it is an ass?

### Roll out the barrel

And just one more notion, drawn from traditions in the production of balsamic vinegar and from several alcoholic beverage industries, including some limited use in Scotch. I am talking a solera system, with a series of barrels of successively decreasing size and increasing age. Annually a transfer is made from one to the next, all the way down the line, with newly fermented product being introduced into the largest barrel and some or all of the contents from the smallest barrel being packaged for sale. A lot of work? Surely, but what a story.

And, of course, it has happened, at Cambridge Brewing in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They do say that there is nothing new in this world. Wherever I have trodden in this series, somebody will have gone before. It just seems to me that these paths need to be trodden a darn sight more. 

*Next issue: beer takes on soft drinks and water*

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