

Beer

Related articles, background features and opinions about this topic.

11/28/2012

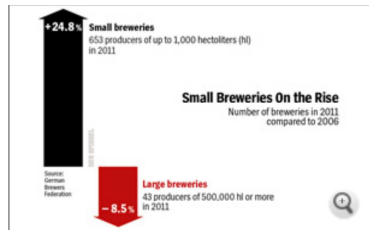
Print | E-Mail | Feedback

RELATED TOPICS

Food

REPRINTS

SPIEGEL ONLINE Find out how you can reprint this SPIEGEL ONLINE article.



Click to enlarge.

DER SPIEGEL

Emerging Craft Breweries

Breaking Out of Germany's Stodgy Beer Traditions

By Renuka Rayasam



Getty Images

Germany is famous for its beer, but centuries-old traditions have put it well behind the US and other countries at the forefront of beer experimentation. Thanks to changing consumer tastes and some maverick brewers, though, the country is slowly catching up.

Tweet 54 Recommend 186 7

RELATED SPIEGEL ONLINE LINKS

- Photo Gallery:** Craft Beer in Germany
- Oktoberfest in Numbers:** Wedding Rings Lost, More Brawls Found (10/08/2012)
- Weisswurst and Beer:** Tourists Flock to South Korea's 'German Village' (07/12/2012)

GET MOBILE WITH OUR NEW APP



Download It Today: 'DER SPIEGEL in English' Now Available for iPhone

EUROPEAN PARTNERS

Presseurop

Unemployment: The Neets, a generation in need Do we need to continue to devote such a substantial budget to European agriculture?

Politiken

DK to vote yes for Palestinian UN upgrade Cons-Liberal call to upgrade Palestine

Corriere della Sera

"I don't really like German beer," said Robert Canwell, a Washington native who now lives in India. He and the 23 other students were toasting their graduation from a two-week craft brewing class at the German capital's Research and Teaching Institute for Brewing (VLB). Like others in the class, Canwell is an enthusiastic home brewer who came to Germany to learn new craft brewing techniques. But, oddly enough, the kinds of beers the class focused on are rarely, if ever, sold by German breweries.

ANZEIGE

That's because German brewers are bound by regulations based on centuries-old restrictions known as the Reinheitsgebot, or purity law, on what can go into beer. And though these rules have cemented Germany's reputation for high-quality beer, the tradition has also hampered the sort of experimentation taking place at breweries in America and elsewhere in Europe.

Marc-Oliver Huhnholz, the spokesman for the German Brewers' Association, argues that the regulations boost Germany's beer-brewing reputation. "We have excellent beer in Germany," he says. "This tradition is a competitive advantage because people know exactly what's in it."

If Oktoberfest is any barometer, then German beer does indeed still maintain its mythic appeal. At this year's festival, visitors guzzled some 6.9 million liters of Bavarian beer over the course of two weeks.

Riccardo Berenato, 26, a biology student from Milan, also feels the pull of Germany's beer-making tradition. He wants to open a brewery in Italy serving American ales, Belgian brews and an India Pale Ale. Despite the lack of such beers in Germany, he came to VLB because of the country's high beer-making standards. "In Italy, we need some science in beer," he says.

Chamber of Deputies Gives Natural and Legitimate Children Equal Rights

ILVA Shuts Down Following Further Arrests

NEWSLETTER



Sign up for Spiegel Online's daily newsletter - and get the best of Der Spiegel's and Spiegel Online's international coverage in your In-Box everyday.

SPIEGEL ONLINE

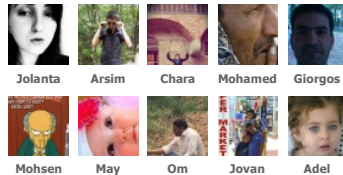
FACEBOOK



SPIEGEL International auf Facebook

Gefällt mir

81,059 Personen gefällt SPIEGEL International.



TWITTER

StriFri RT @SPIEGEL_English
Endangered Christmas Tradition: Birthplace of the Nutcracker Seeks New Recruits bit.ly/11j3tJQ
4 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

EurAlmanac Emerging Craft Breweries: Breaking Out of Germany's Stodgy Beer Traditions feedly.com/k/U2N9q9
[@Spiegel_English]
yesterday · reply · retweet · favorite

EurAlmanac Anti-Semitism in Parliament: Hungary's Far-Right Rhetoric Reaches New Dimension feedly.com/k/112N0mR

Follow SPIEGEL_English on Twitter now:



With only one German student in attendance, the class could be seen as a sign of how Germany's exacting beer tradition has been a mixed blessing for the beloved alcoholic beverage. But its mere existence also signals an emerging interest in greater experimentation in Europe's largest beer-producing country, though it still has a long way to go in catching up to the creativity of its competitors.

Craft Beer Renaissance

In the United States, craft beer sales increased by 14 percent in the first half of 2012, compared to the same period the previous year, with the total number of breweries at a 125-year high, reports the country's Brewers Association. From 2010 to 2011, American craft beer exports were also up 86 percent by volume, says the group, which defines craft brewers as small, independent and innovative.

In the United Kingdom, the number of breweries mostly classified as small or craft-oriented has almost doubled in just over a decade to reach around 945 at the end of 2011, with some 7,000 beer brands available, according to the British Beer and Pub Association.

Meanwhile, in Germany, where the craft-beer scene is still in its infancy, general beer output by large breweries has dropped to its lowest levels since reunification in 1990, a fact that brewers blame on an aging population. Two centuries ago, Berlin boasted some 700 breweries. But now the German capital only has about a dozen.

As the number of breweries has declined, though, beer-making regulations -- likely based on a Bavarian edict from 1516 that proclaimed beer may only contain water, barley, hops and yeast -- have remained in place, albeit with some modern adjustments. This has largely kept German breweries from experimenting with new ingredients and flavors now standard in other countries, such as Belgium, where brewers throw things like ginger and cherries in the mix.

"When you look at the regulatory landscape across Europe, Germany occupies a very specific place," says Pierre-Olivier Bergeron, secretary general of the Brussels-based Brewers of Europe. About half of the European Union's member countries have some definition of beer, he says, but Germany's rules are among the most rigorous.

In countries with less entrenched beer traditions, experimentation is blossoming into all kinds of new brews, says Bergeron. "In the middle of France, for example, you have lots of chestnuts, so brewers are making chestnut-flavored beers that appeal to customers."

The fact that such beers aren't an option in Germany surprised many in the VLB class who were accustomed to beer variety. "I always thought that it was bullshit," said VLB student Pete Lafrance, a 35-year-old teacher and hobby brewer thinking about making brewing his profession. "I thought: 'Come on, Germany! You can't be that uptight.'"

'A Big Upheaval'

But, within the bounds of these stringent rules, German beer can still be creative, says Kurt Marshall, the American brewmaster who leads VLB's craft brewing class. "German brewers are capable of making craft beers, but it's consumer-driven," he says. In other words, once Germans start asking for new types of beer, German brewers will follow.

And that's exactly what appears to be happening. According to a SPIEGEL report this week, resistance is growing to the uniform tastes of the country's beer industry. While big breweries are on the decline, with the number down by 8.5 percent between 2006 and 2001, small breweries have spiked by 24.8 percent in the same time (see graphic).

"We are in a big upheaval," says Philip Bollhorn, a brewmaster at the craft beer-oriented Ratscherrn Brewery, in Hamburg, who has observed a change in the past few years as German beer drinkers have begun to branch out. He has been working with other German breweries and restaurateurs to encourage new ways of thinking about beer. In late September, he organized the first craft beer day in Hamburg with 28 different brews from seven international breweries. Featuring Belgian brews, American pale ales and even a pumpkin ale, the event drew 1,800 guests. Bollhorn says he'll repeat the event next year.

Bollhorn also studied beer making at the VLB in Berlin, but then spent a year working at a brewery some 50 kilometers (30 miles) outside of Moscow for a brewer who was a Belgian beer fanatic. "There, I had beer made with fruit, cherries," he says. "For a German brewmaster, that is of course completely new."

Now he's experimenting with all kinds of brews, some that adhere to German purity laws and some that don't, including a beer using Christmas spices that he'd like to sell but can't legally market as beer.

Despite its challenges, Bollhorn doesn't think that the *Reinheitsgebot* should be eliminated. Instead, he believes Germany can have it both ways: a rule that preserves tradition alongside looser restrictions that allow for experimentation.

Until then, German brewers will have to leave edgier beer to foreigners, which may be just fine for some. "Germany is everything you think of when you think of beer," says J.P. Caudill, 34, an IT consultant from Virginia Beach who completed the September course. "But no one can tell you how to be creative in the end."

ANZEIGE

Karrierperspektiven im Finanzsektor gesucht?

eFINANCIAL CAREERS.DE
DIE FINANZ-JOBBOURSE

ANZEIGE

WWF

Gestern war sie noch da.
5 Euro helfen, die Wilderei zu stoppen.

wwf.de

Jetzt spenden!

ARTICLE... Print | E-Mail | Feedback

Recommend You and 186 others recommend this. [Add a comment](#)

Tweet 54

[+](#) Post to other social networks

ADVERTISEMENT

Ads by Google
Leuchtturm: € 5,95 Rabatt
 Nur für kurze Zeit: Jetzt bestellen und € 5,95 Versandkosten sparen!
www.leuchtturm.com/

KEEP TRACK OF THE NEWS

Stay informed with our free news services:






All news from [SPIEGEL International](#) [Twitter](#) | [RSS](#)

All news from [Germany](#) section [RSS](#)

© SPIEGEL ONLINE 2012
 All Rights Reserved
 Reproduction only allowed with the permission of SPIEGELnet GmbH



MORE FROM SPIEGEL INTERNATIONAL

<p>GERMAN POLITICS</p>  <p>Merkel's Moves: Power Struggles in Berlin</p>	<p>WORLD WAR II</p>  <p>Truth and Reconciliation: Why the War Still Haunts Europe</p>	<p>ENERGY</p>  <p>Green Power: The Future of Energy</p>	<p>EUROPEAN UNION</p>  <p>United Europe: A Continental Project</p>	<p>CLIMATE CHANGE</p>  <p>Global Warming: Curbing Carbon Before It's Too Late</p>
---	--	--	---	--

OVERVIEW INTERNATIONAL [▶](#)