

# CREATING THE “OXFORD COMPANION TO BEER”

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Last year a new book on beer saw the light of day. In itself not really breaking news, but this particular book was the “*Oxford Companion to Beer*” – the most comprehensive book on all things beer related ever published. Garrett Oliver became the editor-in-chief with the main responsibility for the enormous task of compiling the material for the book. This job can be carried out in many ways, but Garrett, being the perfectionist he is, approached it in an admirable fashion. So I am very proud to have been able to persuade Garrett to write about his work specifically for the SBR. Garrett’s article is in three parts: In this issue of the SBR we present the first part, covering the planning phase of the task. Part two of the article will be published in the next issue, No. 2, 2012, and will cover the practical process of compiling the book, and we end up in No. 3, 2012, with an actual excerpt from the OCB on ‘Barrel Aging’.

One of my favorite book titles is “The Compleat Brewer or The Art and Mystery of Brewing Explained”, written by George Watkins in 1760. Of course, neither Mr. Watkins nor anyone since has fully explained the art and mystery of brewing. Perhaps this is one of the things that makes beer and brewing so continually fascinating. Though I am a brewer by trade, not a writer, I have written extensively about beer in the past. In 2003, my book “The Brewmaster’s Table” explored beer from a number of angles, all of them converging around food. It is a theme that has only gained in currency over the last several years, and it is now rare for a brewery to ignore the world of cuisine. “The Brewmaster’s Table” was warmly received and a commercial success, but I swore I would never write another book again. If brewing is hard, writing is even harder, and 120,000 words seemed more than enough to me.

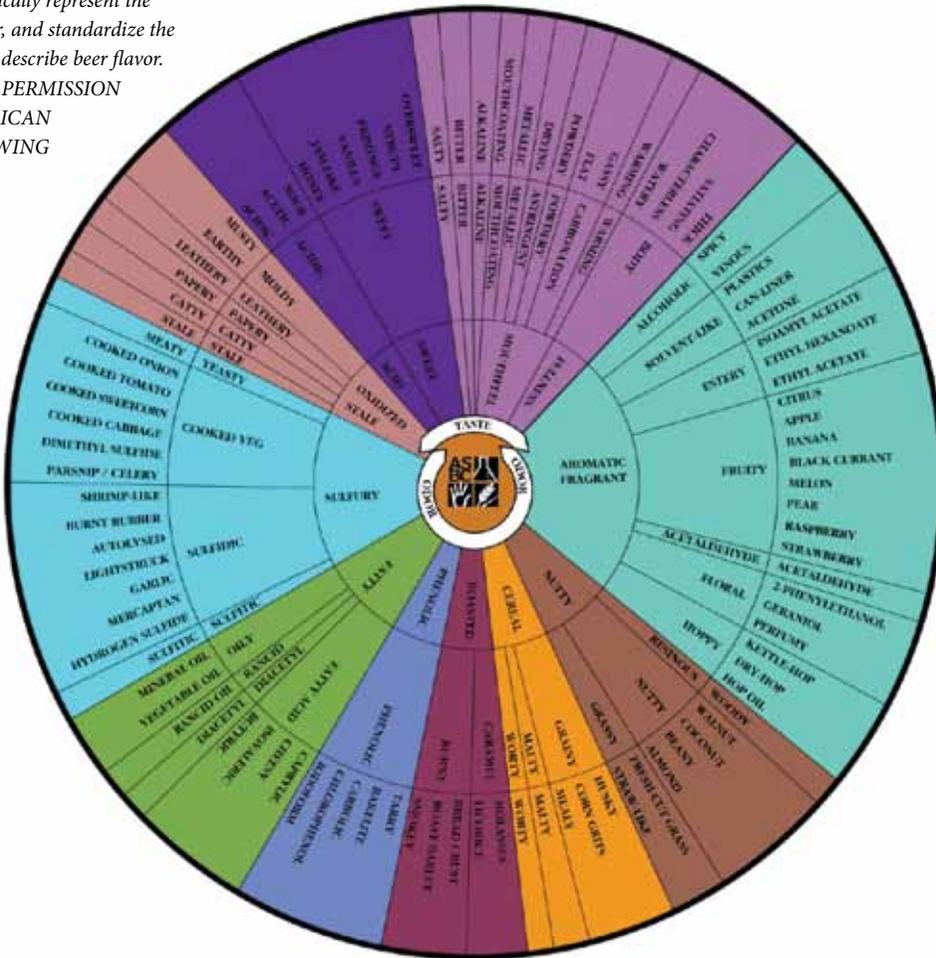
## HOW IT ALL STARTED

In late 2006, however, I received an email from Benjamin Keene, who was then an editor in the Reference Division of the American office of Oxford University Press. He said that the time had come for an “Oxford Companion to Beer”, and asked whether I would be

interested in originating the book as Editor-in-Chief. Mr. Keene’s email ignited a strange feeling of excitement blended with panic. I wrote back and told him that I was flattered by the question, but, in short, “no way”. I have owned a copy of “The Oxford Companion to Wine” for some years. Looking it over, I said to myself: “no one in their right mind would take on something like this.” I did, however, end up going out for a beer with Ben Keene.

He convinced me that there was much missing from the public literature of beer. And as I looked around, I found that it was true. The art and mystery of brewing remained far from explanation, despite the many hundreds of books written on the subject. As an example, we can look at the subject of dry-hopping. There are nearly 2,000 breweries in the United States today, and I think it would be fair to say that more than 1,500 of these practice dry-hopping. But in no book could you find more than a few words on dry-hopping in breweries – history, techniques, desired effects, problems, etc. I had lots of technical brewing books, but they covered dry-hopping in a sentence or two. Almost nothing on bottle-conditioning. At the last

Flavor wheels graphically represent the flavors found in beer, and standardize the terminology used to describe beer flavor. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF BREWING CHEMISTS



World Beer Cup Competition, the largest and most rigorous beer competition ever conducted, the #1 category (by number of entries) was “Wood and Barrel-Aged Beers”. Yet, there was nothing to be read in any book about the subject of barrel aging. Very little, except for one recent book, on recent developments in wild and sour beers. There was not even so much about the actual production techniques for mass-market beers, although technical journals have covered certain aspects very well over the decades. There was not enough, at least in English, about the beers of the rest of the world outside the U.S. and certain parts of Europe. So eventually Ben convinced me that the book needed doing, and that I should take it on. I formally signed on as editor-in-chief in August of 2007. It is not an overstatement to say that the prospect of taking on “The Oxford Companion to Beer” (OCB) was terrifying, and for good reasons.

**HOW TO APPROACH AN “OXFORD COMPANION”**

The Oxford Companion books are, in essence, small encyclopedias. The start of the OCB project was the assembly

of the “headword list”. This is the list of subjects that will appear in the book in alphabetical order. I sat down one day and put together a list of several hundred headwords. After I ran out of things I could think up on my own, I combed the indexes of many dozens of beer and brewing books, looking for subjects that the OCB should cover. Once I ran out of beer books, I looked through wine books as well. Once I had a large, credible list, I posted the first of many requests on the Brewers Association daily e-mail forum, asking for help in assembling a more complete headword list. The forum is read by over 1,000 people in the brewing industry and some journalists, amateur brewers, industry affiliates, and writers, not only in the U.S. but in other countries as well.

I got a very vigorous response from the community. Probably 100 people offered to help, and I sent them my original headword list. They added their own headwords to it in another color or font so that I could easily tell what had been added. Sometimes, as expected (and hoped), there would be a term with which I was entirely unfamiliar (Stuykmanden, →

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for example). I'd do a little research and decide whether the term seemed to merit inclusion. One by one, I went through everyone's lists and incorporated terms that I thought would interest both professionals and enthusiasts. When the first round was done, we had about 1,000 headwords and were ready for the second phase.

The second phase was the assignment of word-lengths to each of the 1,000 headwords. Without assigned word-lengths, the writers could have no idea how to approach their subjects, and Oxford University Press (OUP) would have no idea how large a book they were planning to produce. Of course, assigning a pre-determined length to a subject you haven't even begun to explore is a very difficult task, especially when there are so many of them. Fortunately, OUP had a system for this, wherein each entry was set at one of five lengths – 250 words, 500 words, 1,000 words, 2,500 words, etc. This might seem random, but it really is not – it actually does make sense; you cannot have an infinite number of different lengths for the assignments. However, later on, when we approached writers, we made it known that the word lengths were targets, not edicts, and we would make room for any crucial information.

#### THE ADVISORY BOARD

From here, I assembled an Advisory Board (See box on opposite page). They would receive all entries first, before the

editor-in-chief (EIC). The Advisory Board is a group of peer reviewers who are tasked with reading through the entries, looking for inconsistencies, errors of fact, incompleteness, or other problems. Only after passing review by the Advisory Board would EIC begin work on the entries. I was asked to assign each subject for preliminary review by one of the members of the Advisory Board, based in many cases on their particular area of expertise. Later, when entries finally were submitted to OUP, members of the Advisory Board would sometimes send entries back to writers, asking them to do further work. Even when entries were passed through to EIC, they would often come with notes from the Advisory board member attached regarding something that needed curing.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garrett Oliver is the brewmaster for The Brooklyn Brewery, a regional craft brewery in New York City. His brewing career began in 1989, and in 2003 he wrote the award-winning book, “The Brewmaster’s Table.” He is a veteran judge of professional competitions, and has hosted more than 800 beer tasting events over the years. Brooklyn Brewery’s beers are sold in 16 countries.

As EIC, I had wanted to be the first one to see every entry, but my Oxford editors told me that this would be impossible. "Let them be the first line of defense", they said. "You're going to need it, because you have no idea how much more work you're going to have to do." Suffice it to say, I soon found out, as this massive project launched in earnest, the big ship set out to sea, and we lost sight of the shore. ¶

*In the next issue: Writing, editing and publishing a 1,100-subject brewing encyclopedia.*

### INTERESTED IN THE OCB?

The book may be found at bookstores with a good selection of English language books, but may also be purchased on-line. (<<http://www.amazon.com/Oxford-Companion-Beer-Garrett-Oliver/dp/0195367138>> or the Oxford University Press page<<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Reference/Subjectareareference/?view=usa&ci=9780195367133>>). The Amazon page is recommended as it includes a number of videos of Garrett and some other interesting content.

### THE ADVISORY BOARD

**Dr. Charles Bamforth**, who needs little introduction. He is, among other things, the Anheuser-Busch endowed professor of Brewing Science at U.C. Davis, and has spent his career in brewing research, brewery quality control, and many other pursuits, and is the author of several books.

**Dr. George Philliskirk**, before becoming the Co-Director of the Beer Academy, was head of the Technical Department for Carlsberg UK. He is a past Chairman of the Board of Examiners of the Institute of Brewing and an external examiner for the Brewing degrees at Heriot-Watt University.

**Dr. Patrick Hayes** is professor of Crop and Soil Science at Oregon State University in Covallis, which is in one of the centers of American hop farming, but also focuses on grain science. Most entries involving agronomy went through him.

**Dr. Keith Villa** is Master Brewer of MillerCoors, inventor of their Blue Moon brand among many others, a well-experienced judge of international competitions and a graduate of the brewing school at the Catholic University of Leuven. His career has focused on brewing innovations.

**Dr. Wolfgang Stempfl** is CEO of Doemens Academy of Germany, which also needs no introduction to those assembled here.

**Dr. Val Peacock**, before becoming president of Hop Solutions, was well known within brewing circles as Anheuser-Busch's Manager of Hop Technology. He is one of the most experienced hop researchers in the worldwide brewing industry. While he is not technically listed on the Advisory Board, he went through every hop entry and helped organize, verify and catalogue a huge amount of hop information.