



CRAFT BREWERS CONFERENCE 16-19 APRIL, 2008, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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As it has turned out to be a tradition that I give the readers of SBR a short report on the annual Craft Brewers Conference, I trust that most of my readers will by now be familiar with the concept of the conference and with the organisation, Brewers Association (BA), who organises it. If not, all relevant information can be found at the BA website: www.beertown.org.

This year's CBC was the 23rd of its kind, and it revisited the location where it was successfully held in 2004, namely the Town & Country Resort in San Diego, California. Again, this year the conference broke the record with a stunning attendance of more than 2,600 representatives – brewers, suppliers, wholesalers, media people, and beer lovers – from the US and many from overseas.

As always, the headlines of the contents of the conference can be summarised as brewery visits, professional training,

open discussions, idea sharing, networking, socialising, and beer sampling. But this year, the contents of the conference sessions had been broadened, both to reflect new trends and areas of interest, but perhaps even more to guide the attendees in their difficult choice of always at least four parallel sessions, taking place simultaneously during the three full days of the programme. This year, these 'tracks' comprised: 'Technical Brewing', 'Brewery Start-Ups', 'Brewery Operations', 'Sustainability', 'Beer and Health', 'Selling Craft Beer', 'Export Development Programme', 'Brewpub Management and Marketing', and 'Micro/Regional Management and Marketing'. And if one can find a small window, which is obviously quite difficult, the trade show, BrewExpo America, is open for two and a half out of the three conference days, with close to 200 different stands, representing suppliers of everything from raw materials and brewing equipment to glassware, signs, tap handles, and insurance providers. →



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For a comprehensive overview of the titles of all CBC sessions, go to the BA website. I will just try to illustrate the variety by mentioning a small handful of titles: 'Brewing Weissbier', 'Energy Opportunities for the Craft Brewer', 'Thinking Outside the Pumpkin – Creative Ideas to Market your Brewery Restaurant', 'Hop Aroma Fingerprinting', and 'Beer and Health – Perspectives from Alcohol Studies'. Definitely, the days where the focus was just on beer and brewing are over! Not that this is not still the main focal point of the CBC, but all the other aspects of establishing and sustaining a successful existence as craft, or specialty beer, brewer are covered. This demonstrates, of course, the maturity of the US craft brewing industry in general, but, specifically, it shows the professionalism by which the BA supports its members and the industry at large. Something that I cannot help as a Dane and Scandinavian to be immensely envious of!

This broadening of the CBC topics and the increase in the number of tracks was, with a view to optimising the professional benefits from attending the CBC, a very big progressive step as compared to previous conferences. And for me, it was an important contribution to the impression that the professional quality of this year's CBC, as measured by how



many relevant new things you feel you have learned when returning home, was significantly better than at any of the other six conferences I have attended.

On the social side, many great events could be mentioned, but let me limit myself to mentioning those that I personally found most enjoyable. First, the welcome reception. Held at the fabulous, new Stone Brewing facility in Escondido, about half an hour north of San Diego. This state of the art 50,000 hectolitres brewery has been built with a breathtaking restaurant and garden, The Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens, at one end. A fantastic achievement based on the vision of the owner Greg Koch, whom I am proud to call my friend. The second was a daily event that occupied the thirsty and curious attendees nightly, from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.: A free beer bar featuring no less than 100 (!) taps of draught beer representing mainly the local San Diego area breweries, but also the crème de la crème of breweries from the rest of California. All made possible by a gigantic effort by volunteers from the local brewing community, who constructed the bar and cold room, on site, and dismantled it again after the conference. Absolutely amazing and a true beer lover's heaven! Lastly, I have to share with you





one 'side event', even though this event was not open to all attendees at the conference, but by invitation only: a beer dinner at the Port Brewing/Lost Abbey (<http://www.lostabbey.com/>), home to one of the most talented and visionary of the SoCal brewers, Tomme Arthur. As this brewery exclusively matures its beers in wood, the setting for the dinner was the production areas, which means oak barrels from floor to ceiling all over. This evening, only candlelight lit up the tables and a fabulous five course dinner was accompanied by some of the most spectacular beers in the world – including a world premiere of a beer, Veritas 003, brewed as a joint venture by 'The Brett Gang' – Tomme Arthur, Vinnie Cilurzo (Russian River), Rob Todd (Pizza Port), Tom Avery (Avery Brewing Co.), and Sam Calagione (Dogfish Head). An absolutely unique night and experience!

The Scandinavian delegation to the CBC this year was rather limited (none mentioned, none forgotten!), still quite incomprehensible, so let me finish by quoting what I wrote in my article about last year's CBC: 'There is absolutely no event in the world that offers an equal opportunity to learn, get inspiration, and form professional and personal relationships specifically within the craft beer scene. With the development we are currently seeing in Denmark, one which we all hope will spread to the rest of Scandinavia soon, it seems equally necessary and inevitable that the Scandinavian attendance at the CBC should increase dramatically in the years to come... I can safely say on behalf of the entire 'delegation' this year that we encourage this as strongly as we possibly can!' ☺

