

NORDIC BEER — A MANIFESTO!

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My editorial in the previous issue of this magazine was on Nordic raw materials for Nordic beer, and it was clearly meant as a prelude to a more substantial coverage of the topic of Nordic beer. Logically, in this issue, I have therefore dedicated the editorial – as well as two specific articles and some feedback on the last editorial – to this topic.

Some might argue that the purpose of editorials is to comment on important themes, trends and overall conditions regarding the realities the readers are living in. In the case of the SBR, this of course is the world of Nordic beer and brewing. Thus, the term ‘Nordic beer’ very truly hits the nail on the head, but the term could obviously mean literally anything, and I have to admit that the way I use the term is very unusual. My ‘Nordic beer’ term does not cover the existing beers brewed here, but rather a vision for an entirely new approach to brewing in our region. This fact makes the choice of the term as the topic for an editorial a bit questionable, since it is not yet a reality the readers face. But my justification for still doing so is that Nordic beer in my definition of the term is about to become a reality. As I will explain in the following, I intend to inspire an acceleration of the development of an entirely new brewing concept under the ‘Nordic beer’ headline, but I also very strongly believe that such a development has already begun and that it will become a very important trend in the industry in our region, regardless of whether my endeavours in the field will succeed or not. In my view, it is the responsibility of the editorship of any medium to sometimes not only focus on the existing realities, but also to peek into the future and deal with the potential developments and to point at possibilities and consequences of these – also if this ‘peek’ is in the form of an attempt to push and promote a very specific future development. In the hope and belief that you, our readers, agree that my initiative is both relevant and interesting, I hereby launch my new crusade – the Nordic beer concept.

The purpose and objectives of the Nordic Beer Project are:
To create one or more unique and novel categories of beers that owe their distinct aroma, flavour and taste to both novel

ingredients as well as novel techniques applied in the production of the brewing ingredients, from the selection of cultivars, through breeding, growing and processing of these to their final use in the brewing processes.

This objective shall be met by mobilising the joint efforts of the excellent human and institutional resources in the Nordic region that are involved with plant breeding, farming, crop processing and brewing, while also utilising the unique Nordic ‘terroir’ – soil conditions, climate and hours of daylight – as well as the indigenous biology as conserved in gene-banks.

These are very, very broad and general terms that might be necessary in order to encompass the scope of something that is new and unknown from the start. But how could you get anyone excited reading such a ‘fluffy’ declaration? Why not try to look at it in a completely different way...

Let’s jump five years forward to 2017 and look at a verbal flavour description of the beer winning the first annual ‘Nordic Beer Competition’ in the category for ‘Nordic Pale Ales under 5.5% ABV’:

KISSMEYER/KØLSTER PALE NORDIC SPRING ALE
A pale, orangy golden, slightly hazy beer with a floral and fruity aroma giving clear hints of nuts, spicy orange and pine forest. A smooth, slightly prickly and light mouthfeel, tingling and pleasantly tart with a medium sweetness – satisfying, but not filling. The first flavour impressions are of red berries with very subtle notes of elder and camomile flowers, in the middle of the flavour, some biscuity maltiness and a nutty sweetness are balanced discreetly by a soft lemony tartness, more of the spicy orangy notes from the aroma and a complex, earthy and pleasantly herbal bitterness. The taste and aftertaste are both light and rather short and crisp, the sweetness quickly giving way to a unique woody touch.

Sounds nice, absolutely! But anyone can write a verbal description of his or her dream beer. How does it relate to reality and to the ‘fluffy’ description of the purpose of the Nordic Beer Project? Let me try to illustrate this by explaining where these poetically sounding beer characters come from:

'A pale orangy golden, slightly hazy beer...' this comes from the blend of slow malted and sundried oat and spelt malts in the grist and from the hawthorn and lingon berry additions.

'... a floral and fruity aroma...' comes partly from the use of the specifically isolated Danish *Saccharomyces* strain used in primary fermentation, partly from a small dose of dried heather, elder and camomile flowers added at the end of the boil.

'... clear hints of nuts...' from the caramelised barley malt, locally micro-malted, with a process adapted specifically for the actual barley variety and precisely this style of beer.

'... spicy orange and pine forest' from the hawthorn syrup, frozen baby Nordic spruce tips and the roasted juniper berries added.

'... pleasantly tart...' mainly from the hawthorn syrup, as well, but some from the lingon berries, too.

'... red berries with very subtle notes of elder and camomile flowers' – yes, you're right: from fresh lingon berries, dried elder and camomile flowers, selected and grown specifically for their brewing properties.

'... complex, earthy and pleasantly herbal bitterness' from locally grown hops of an old, and sturdy variety able to thrive in the Nordic climate, and from the dried sloe and yarrow added to the kettle, as well as from the 'trick' mentioned below.

'... a unique woody touch' from a short, high temperature maturation on a bed of toasted birch spirals.

This is obviously an 'over the top' exemplification, in terms of the number, of the many imaginable novel approaches to both ingredients and processes for one single beer. But with it, I only wanted to prove a point: Even before we have begun the work of mutual inspiration and development of these 'novelties', a bit of imagination stretches a long way and hopefully indicates the myriad of possibilities that we may play with.

This should hopefully excite politicians, scientists and academics, commercial plant breeders, farmers, 'processors' – maltsters, hop processors, producers of commercial herbal, fruit and other relevant products – as well as finally, of course, the brewers who will synthesize the efforts of all the others into great beer. Those stakeholders are all essential members of the 'supply chain' for the Nordic Beer Project.

How do we get all these people and institutions beyond mere excitement and make them practically jump on board while they are all busy doing other stuff? Surely, they are all busy, but I believe that they will quickly realise the high probability of 'spin-offs' of significant commercial value to them from the project, and that they will also realise the value of the new insight into their markets and the needs of their customers to be gained from joining in.

Why is the concept of Nordic beer destined to become a reality within a very short time? Well, for exactly the same reasons that your favourite foods are local, the reasons that you are a fan of your local football team and definitely of your national team, and the reasons that local literature, drama and art is of particular interest to you. It quite simply strikes a deeply rooted, emotional cord within us all because it to a very large extent defines our identity. So, the ability to work and act in accordance with these feelings, while at the same time being unique and world-class – who would not jump at that?

I have personally become extremely determined – or call it obsessed, if you will – that the Nordic Beer Project should fly. This obviously means that I will also take it upon me as a personal responsibility to pursue all the possible inroads to achieve a 'lift-off'. And I have already at this time found my first 'soul mate', the famous, Danish 'dogma' grower, maltster and brewer Per Kølster. Per has promised to be my sparring partner along the way.

Join the crusade! It's going to be an extremely inspiring journey with some groundbreaking results. We're proud of our 'terroir', of our natural and human resources, of our agricultural skills and heritage, of our flexibility in processing our crops, and – not least – of our history and current excellence as brewers. Let's put all these tremendous resources to work and create miracles!

If you are already sold to the idea, or if you are just curious about how these maniacs have come up with their idea and how they intend to have it realised, please read on in the articles on Nordic beer by Per Kølster and me in this issue of the SBR. And be prepared for much more on this project in many, many issues of the SBR to come!

Enjoy your reading,
Anders Kissmeyer, technical editor