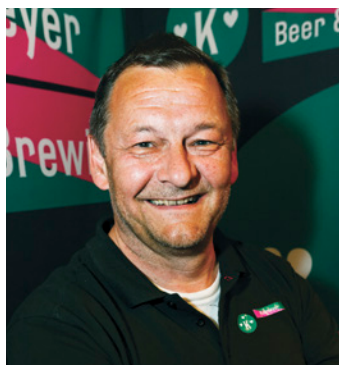


MASTER BREWER, BREWMASTER OR JUST BREWER?

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On a quiet, peaceful and – would you believe it? – sunny day in February 2016 in Copenhagen, it can be hard to find a revolutionary and earth-shattering subject for the editorial in the SBR. The most sensational news for a long time in our industry is already covered in depth in a separate article in the issue you're currently holding in your hands. I'm, of course, referring to the MegaBrew merger of the world's two hitherto largest brewing companies, AB InBev and SABMiller. The promised review of this merger, including some insights into the consequences for the industry at large and commentary by several people with insight into the industry, can be found on the following pages. And it is as apparent, as it is probably also expected by most, that this is more than generously spiced up with my own personal views and opinions. So what's left as fuel for the editorial in the same issue? Well, as subtly indicated in the first sentence above, I've simply chosen to go to the other extreme: I've chosen a subject which is not new, not particularly important except to a few dozen people out there, and not, by any standard, controversial. I hereby apologize to those of my faithful followers who have come to expect and appreciate my often provocative views publicized in my editorials – you'll have to jump to the MegaBrew article or wait for the No.2/2016 issue of this magazine!



A short while ago, I read a short piece by the MBAA (Master Brewers Association of the Americas) Technical Director, Mark Sammartino, kindly sent to me by a good friend who has, for many years, been active in the

MBAA. Mr. Sammartino reflects in his piece on several issues pertaining to the nature, the purpose, the members and the activities of the MBAA – including a very subtle criticism of the Brewers Association's rather constructed and bizarre definition of what a craft brewery is. My somewhat less subtle criticism of this can be found in the editorial 'Beer is Beer!' in the SBR No. 2, 2015, so I'll not go there again. But Mark inevitably in this context also reflects on our titles as Master Brewers,

Brewmasters and Brewers and comments on how these relate to our physical jobs, our formal positions and our prestige within the industry. Reading and wondering about this, I found the topic for this editorial!

Before heading into my own observations, analyses and opinions in relation to the topic, I would like to share a selection of Mark Sammartino's very relevant and interesting thoughts with you:

THE MBAA: WHO ARE WE? – BY MARK SAMMARTINO, TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, MBAA
In the early years, the MBAA was an association of brewmasters. A small group of these industry leaders got together in Chicago in March of 1887 and set out to form an association of brewers. In April of 1887, the Master Brewers Association of the Americas was chartered... The MBAA was formed as a forum for education and the sharing of methods, information, ideas, techniques, →

etc., in the art and science of brewing. It was and is still an all-inclusive organization. ... (W)hat is a brewmaster? Who sets the basis of what level of knowledge is required to be given the title brewmaster? Is it a person who spends six months at VLB Berlin and receives a diploma, or one who attends a 12-week course at UC Davis, or a person who spends four years at Weihenstephan, or just the guy who sits in the chair after working on the floor for 40 years? Are any one of these better than the others?

... As we look back at the foundation of the MBAA we see a bunch of people focused on helping each other understand the art and science of brewing... They were an eclectic mix creating their various beer styles, learning, experimenting, and sharing. The unique part of this was that there was no selection of who was different or better...

The point I am making is they all were one industry and all appreciative of each other's styles, methods, and need for knowledge. No one was selected out of the group because of their choice of style, raw materials used, size of operation, etc. Today, the MBAA remains the same... but I am a little worried about the greater industry. Within the structure of the U.S. beer industry there are those who appear to seek a difference and to establish that some brewers are defined differently (i.e. implicitly better) than others.

Each day I learn something new in brewing. I recently attended a sour workshop at an ASBC meeting that opened the door for me to a whole new style of brewing. That style, by the way, has been around for longer than the U.S. beer industry...

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My point is that sharing in this manner supports the ideals of our industry as well as fitting in directly with the mandates of the MBAA. We have brewmasters with diplomas, brewmasters who have worked on the floor for 40 years and possess a high school education, maltsters...all as full members.

Years ago the MBAA defined membership levels based upon who worked in a brewery and who didn't, who was a manager and who wasn't, etc. The MBAA had full memberships, associate memberships ... At that time, the MBAA collective leadership saw this as an issue in defining who had more going for them than others within the organization, when in fact all of the members had the same passion about beer and the willingness to share knowledge. These membership levels have since been done away with and we... (now) all share inside and outside our organization. We focus on the greater aspects of brewing knowledge, always working hard to eliminate the appearance of and actual differences within the industry... However, as a brewer, I am focused on understanding the art and science of beer making first, which, again, by the way, is the easy part of what makes a successful beer or brewery.

The point I am trying to make is that embracing the variety and the numerous styles, techniques, and people within our industry is a rewarding part of being a brewer.

With that I close with the hope that we all come together in the common knowledge that it is right and good to share. Share not only a pint of your best or the best of your neighbor, or for that matter something different, consistent, rich, fruity, full, thin, or sour; it's all beer. As beer, it is art in liquid form: a passion in a glass and something worth sharing. I never met a beer I did not appreciate; I may not like it, but I know that someone worked hard in many ways to fashion that product. ... We are a forum to share ideas, and hopefully ideals, that bring our community together as one, each different, yet the same.

These eloquent, but still simple words, as easy to understand as they are to read, contain so much wisdom. I would go as far as to say that they encompass the ethos of working as a brewer in our industry. Thus, I chose to bring you all of them, although they only sporadically and implicitly underline the message I'm intending to put across in this editorial.

In our daily lives here in the Nordic region, we are even in more trouble than our English-speaking friends and colleagues in and around the brewing industry. In our languages, we only have two terms for our sort: 'Master Brewers' and 'Brewmasters'

are, in our languages, the same, as they are both called 'Brygmester/Bryggerimester/Bryggerimästare/Panimomestari' in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish, respectively. 'Brewers' are called 'Brygger/Brygger/Bryggare/Oluenpanija' in the 4 languages. Be this as it may, the critical fact in this regard is that none of these terms are so-called protected titles, i.e. anybody may, in practice, use them as they wish. And the problem, seen from my point of view, is that they do!

As a Diploma Master Brewer from the Scandinavian School of Brewing, I have to admit that I have many, many times been both offended and frustrated by the frequent references to people with a home brewing background, no formal brewing education and only a short experience in a craft brewery as 'Brygmester'. With my own academic background, I can't help feeling that this title should be reserved for those of us who have a formal, educational claim to it. But, then again, when I summarize the learnings of now around 16 years (I just realize that I'm, after having served the first 16 years of my brewing career with Carlsberg, exactly now at the crossing point with an equal amount of time in the big brewing and the craft brewing segments of brewing) in craft brewing, there's one thing that stands out as the most significant: The quality of the beer brewed by any brewer and brewery is, to an almost negligible extent, the function of the formal education of the brewer (or the quality of the brewing plant he or she works on, for that matter), but so much more a function of the passion, dedication, talent and meticulousness of that brewer! However much it pains me – taking my own background into account – to admit it, the vast majority of the best beers I've tasted over the years have been brewed by amateurs!

So, I guess what I'm trying to say is that part of my intellect and my feelings are totally in favour of fighting what I feel is an abuse of the term 'Brygmester', as it ought to be a reserved title for people with a certain educational background. The other part of me realizes that this is both a lost battle, as I see no way of fighting this abuse without coming across as a snobbish academic (and it would, at the same time be yet another battle I could never win). And that same part of me also says 'Why bother?' since it is not what's really important in our careers and daily lives as a whole. Certainly not in the eyes of our peers or our consumers... They are rightfully more occupied with the quality, the innovativeness and the distinction of the beers we brew. So, damn it, let's accept that we as individuals, regardless of who we are and what our educational backgrounds are, may randomly be called Master Brewers, Brewmasters or just Brewers. As long as we all live up to the ethos expressed by Mark Sammartino, we can still rest assured that we work in the greatest industry on the planet, and that we on a whole contribute to a better world by making a lot of thirsty people out there happy!

As usual, drop me a line at anders@kissmeyer.dk if you have comments on or opinions about this editorial. Or any other suggestions for or thoughts about the SBR. ☺

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