

Should We Cooperate?

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At the time of writing, I am in San Francisco attending the 2011 Craft Brewers Conference here, and before arriving to the city I spent a few days north of San Francisco in the Sonoma valley visiting breweries (... and a few wineries!), exploring the local beer scene. All under a travel grant from the Danish Brewers' Guild, meaning that my adventures will be documented in one or more articles for the SBR. But being in an area that so clearly offers both world class beer and world class wine inevitably gave rise to some thoughts that I will share with you in my debate column this time.



Sonoma Valley and Napa Valley... the names alone are mouth-watering to very many people. This is naturally because they think of Russian River Brewing Company, Lagunitas, Bear Republic, Moonlight Brewing, etc., isn't it?

Well, regardless of how much I wanted to answer this question with a yes, I know very well that the true

answer is a loud 'NO!' Because the names of these two beautiful valleys make people think Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir. And maybe even associated to wineries such as Mondavi, Kendall Jackson, Beringer, Beaulieu, Clos de Bois... I could go on.

When this fact and others like it are discussed amongst brewers and brewery people, we often find ourselves taking on either the apologetic attitude: 'Well, the wine industry is much bigger than us, it is much older than us, they get a lot of financial support from the EU and wherever, the media are all wine snobs that will only listen to them.' Or we adopt the aggressive attitude: 'Yeah, those spoilt, arrogant, snobbish wine geeks... We will come after them and crush them, because beer is universally much better for everything, including gourmet dining. Just they wait and see...!'

My point is that this does not help us achieve the status and the 'share of mind' that the wine people have, and that we, let's face it, are so deeply jealous of. What we should do is learn – humbly – from the wine industry. Study what they are doing and see how much we can adopt in a beer and brewery related form: Telling the great stories of how fine beers are made, creating more fascination and mystery around the product itself, lobby the political environments, nationally and beyond, in order to get the best possible taxation rules and support for our activities, join together

in associations – again, nationally and beyond – to achieve the muscle in terms of money to launch big, effective, generic image and marketing campaigns, liaise and lobby intensely with the scientific communities in order to make them spread the gospel that beer is healthy and not fattening in moderation, cooperate with individual restaurants and their organisations and educational institutions in order to raise the awareness of the universe of beer and the magic it can do for good food, etc., etc.

One sunny afternoon sitting outside the Copain winery in Sonoma, two brewers and two winemakers, enjoying both some great wine and some great beer, it was just so obvious that we are 'kindred spirits' that think alike. We share objectives; we cater to the same consumer base, and to the same elements of the minds of the consumers. While drinking and talking, we summarised this into a simple observation:

What does a winemaker drink after work? – Good beer! And what does a brewer drink after work? – Good wine!

Although this may not be universally true, there's definitely more truth to it than the opposite. And what do I wish to say by this? Well, it's simple: There is not only room for both of our industries and products, but we could do a lot better – both the wine and the brewing industry if we embraced each other and started cooperating and knowledge sharing. The similarities between what we do and what we want to achieve are just so overwhelming that it makes no sense not to work together.

This time, I really want some more voices in the debate than my own, so let us at SBR know what your take is on the issue, I have herewith put up for debate:

Should we in the brewing industry cooperate much more intensely with our colleagues in the wine world, and if yes, how do we get such a cooperation started?

I shall be politely tapping my little electronic finder on a few people's shoulders to get the debate going, but it would be so nice and encouraging if we also received some unprovoked contributions.