

Adventures in Beer School (Part One):

Some folks go to school and learn that beer is a good thing, others learn that beer is a good thing and then go to school, and then there are those who do both. I am a recent graduate of the World Brewing Academy (formerly the Siebel Institute) International Diploma Course. This course is a twelve week program, divided into 6 different modules, with the first 4 modules being in Chicago and the next two being in Europe. The first module deals with everything about the production of beer, right up to adding the yeast. The second module is “everything you ever wanted to know about yeast, but were afraid to ask”, and fermentation. The third module deals with packaging, Brewhouse maintenance and the like. The fourth shows us how difficult it is to make money brewing beer and a case study to see if we actually learned anything while in Chicago. At the end of each week, in Chicago, there was an exam to see if we retained the knowledge that has been taught, so it was not just beer here. Following these 7 weeks (4 modules) we flew to Munich, where the first 3 weeks was additional classroom work as well as practical brewing. Where we brewed 2 beers, a traditional Pilsner and a traditional Bavarian Wheat, we proceeded to filter the beers, when the time was right as well as bottle the beers. The final two weeks was a study tour of various breweries, hop producers (farms and a manufacturing plant), and other equipment manufacturers. What I hope to do in the next couple of newsletters is talk about the program and then follow it up with what I learned, and things that might be helpful to us home brewers as well as anyone else who happens to read the newsletter.

So let me begin with the overview (this overview is collected from a series of emails that I sent home each week to various friends for their reading pleasures, and also so I did not have to repeat the same story numerous numbers of times.)

Week 1:

I left for the course right before that big snowstorm that shut down the northeast around Valentines Day. I was supposed to leave on Sunday, but switch my flight at the very last minute to leave on Saturday, and it was a good thing that I did. On Sunday nothing was leaving New England what so ever and I would not have gotten in until possibly Tuesday or Wednesday. Class began on Monday Morning. It was a rather international class, several Brazilians, and folks from Argentina, Trinidad and Tobago, Santo Domingo, Taiwan, and Korea (among other countries.) The classes are held at the Goose Island Brew Pub in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago (about a 40 minute walk from my hotel. Goose Island allows Siebel to hold classes at the brewpub, and Siebel's pilot plant is in the Goose Island brewery. The classes are held in a large room at Goose, with pictures lining the walls of all the past people to take the course. There names like Busch, Stroh and even a Koch. In the back of the brewpub there is a small room called the bier stube. This room is a hold over from the previous school location. This is a bar that was built by the students over the years and was moved to Goose Island. It is a bar where the students gather at the end of the day to enjoy a pint or two and just hang out. The week was spent discussing both malts and hops, and was capped off by a field trip to Briess. We left the school/brewery at 6:45 in the morning, and headed up to the frozen tundra. It had snowed the night before, and the weather was a bit chilly out. We arrived at the malt

house for a lecture and a tour. The tour was very interesting, and it was a fun ride home where we got to really meet everybody, amazing what a few beers will do. I did not take any pictures, as they were not allowed.

Week 2:

This week we took the raw materials we studied from the previous week and began to make beer (well make it in theory, no beer was actually made, except on paper.) We studied right up to the point of adding the yeast, and the theories behind the practices. We ended the week with a sensory evaluation. Now I know you are thinking, wow... that mean you get to drink beer... well yes I do get to drink beer during this. But this week was Miller Genuine Draft spike with chemical to see what they taste like. What I did learn from this Sensory evaluation (and there was one every week after this, as well as a sensory exam) is that MGD is not a bad beer, it has no strong tastes, but it tastes the same every time. Needless to say I will not be drinking much of it from this point on, as I have had far too much of it.

Week 3:

This week is everything you ever wanted to know about yeast but are afraid to ask. Does anyone out there remember Biochemistry? Well I tried to forget everything I learned and now it is all coming back to me. Of course I am not learning things like the Krebs cycle (which I forgot in Biochem, fortunately) I am learning Fermentation, and all the flavor compounds that come from yeast. Land Sakes... how did we ever brew beer before biochemistry! Every "professor" (and some of the instructors are professors) has their own take on beer. The Maltster says that Malt is the most important ingredient, the Hops person says the same about hops, and the water guy talks about water. But this week Yeast is the most important part of beer. We are learning not only the "off-flavors" that yeast produces (that is right more spiked MGD, I don't think I have had this much MGD in years!) but the flavors and mouth feel that we associate with the various beers. It is very interesting, but at the same time it is a lot to learn (especially for a chemist who is not a microbiologist or even a biologist!) I will say that all of microbiology that people do today have it's beginning in beer (after all the word Enzyme can be translated to "From Yeast".) Pasteur was a brewer, as well as all of the other founders of microbiology. So I think all of you microbiologists, and you know who you are, should get into the beer industry!

Week 4:

A continuation of week 3, with even more sensory evaluation. On a side note I had begun to know my classmates a little bit better, so we headed on down to Flossmoor, IL to go to a brewpub there. One of the plus sides with taking a course like this is the tours you get. You run into the brewmaster and mention to him that you are taking the course and presto, you get the grand tour and a half. I was needless to say much fun. Of course the class is not just fun and games, this week covered the maturation of beer and the flavors that can be derived from this. It is amazing how many flavors that yeast put out.

Well this is a good spot to end this month's article. Tune in next month for the continuing story of "So You Want to Brew Beer for a Living... What Are You NUTS!"