

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Beeronomics: How Beer Explains the World**

**By Swinnen, J. and Briski, D.**

**Oxford: Oxford University Press**

**2017, Pp.192, £16.99**

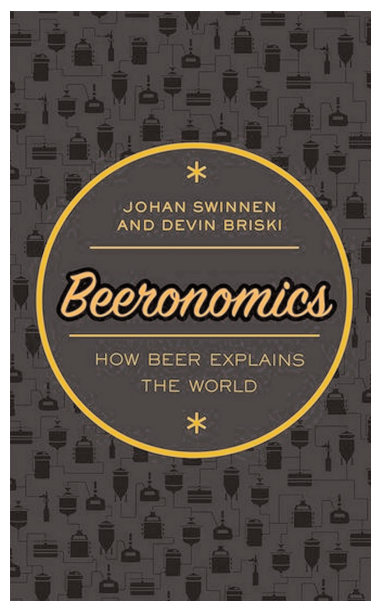
**ISBN 978 0 198 80830 5**

While economists have long studied the wine industry (it has its own associations-American Association of Wine Economists and European Association of Wine Economists - and its own journal, *Journal of Wine Economics*), brewing has not received a commensurate amount of scholarly attention. This is particularly surprising since in most countries, and overall in the world, beer is by far the more important market by volume and value. To be sure, many economists have examined various parts of the market for beer, but overall, attention has lagged far behind wine. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that it was a Belgian economist, well versed in his own country's unique contribution to beer and brewing history, who set about to correct this imbalance. In 2009, Jo Swinnen, Professor of Economics at the University of Leuven, helped found a new interdisciplinary group called Beeronomics consisting mostly, though not exclusively, of faculty from economics and business departments. He convened the first meeting in Leuven, Belgium and the group has been meeting regularly ever since. Swinnen has edited or co-edited two previous books on the market for beer: *The Economics of Beer* (2011) and *Economic Perspectives on Craft Beer: A Revolution in the Global Beer Industry* (2017). Both of these volumes found inspiration in the Beeronomics conferences that Swinnen founded.

Swinnen's latest book, *Beeronomics: How Beer Explains The World*, is co-authored with Devin Briski. While not an edited volume, it is similar to Swinnen's earlier books in presenting a number of essays linked more broadly by the interconnecting themes of beer production and con-

sumption than by a single, linear narrative. Like the Beeronomics meetings themselves, this collection covers a lot of territory, ranging from regulation and taxation, to the impact of the industrial revolution on beer production and consumption patterns, to the recent rise of craft beer in Europe, the US, and points beyond. Clearly, a book totaling only 150 pages is not intended to be an exhaustive coverage of the Economics of Beer. Rather, over 17 brief chapters (none totaling more than 20 pages), Swinnen and Briski apply basic economics principles to illuminate connections across a series of seemingly unrelated beer markets.

The essays can broadly be grouped into three chronological periods: historical (pre-20<sup>th</sup> century), modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) and contemporary (1990-present). Several essays reference previously published studies by other



economists and economic historians; however, I personally found the chapters that were inspired by Swinnen's own research and perspective as a Belgian academic to be the most interesting.

Chapter 11 is titled 'The Great Convergence: The Fall of the Beer-Drinking Nation and the Rise of the Beer-Drinking World' and it draws on some of Swinnen's earlier work with Liesbeth Colen. This essay challenges some widely held but ultimately incorrect notions regarding the types of alcohol nations drink and it shows how country-level drinking patterns have changed in unanticipated ways. Table 11.1 illustrates how the geography of beer consumption has been upended over the past 50 years: in 1960, the five largest beer consuming countries were the US, Germany, the UK, the USSR, and France. By 2010, the top-five list consisted of China, the US, Brazil, Russia and Germany, with China alone accounting for 25% of world consumption! More recent data indicate that Mexico has overtaken Germany and that Vietnam and Poland may soon overtake the UK. This chapter highlights two equally important trends. First, traditional beer drinking nations such as Germany and the UK have seen their relative importance fall dramatically, replaced by emerging market countries such as China, Brazil, and Mexico. Beer sales continue to grow globally, but they are increasingly driven by thirsty consumers in Asia, Latin America and Africa, not the handful of northern European nations long associated with beer drinking. The second insight here concerns the decades-long convergence in drinking patterns across countries:

The concept of the beer drinking nations (like Ireland and Belgium), wine drinking nations (like Spain and Italy) and vodka-drinking nationals (like Russia and Poland) is a thing of the past. Globalization has made the world's alcohol consumption patterns much more homogenous ... (p 110).

The discussion of this convergence in drinking preferences is tremendously interesting and important for a wide range of scholars.

Another particularly thought-provoking essay is number 14: 'Craft Nation: How Belgium's Peasant Beers Became the Best in the World'. This chapter seeks to explain how and why Belgium became associated with craft beer and why these beers became so popular abroad. As the title suggests, for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a steadily decreasing number of Belgium's beer

drinkers seems to have fully appreciated its wide range of beers and brewing styles. According to the authors,

the success of [Belgium's] high-value specialty brews is a relatively recent phenomenon within Belgium ... After German-style lager was introduced to the region in the late nineteenth century, all the unusual local styles that we revere today looked certain to die out. (p 132)

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Belgian beer drinkers began to favor lagers over the wide range of ales that many craft beer consumers today readily associate with Belgium. The number of breweries in Belgium declined from 3,223 in 1900 to only 123 in 1980 (Table 4, p.43). Given the recent popularity of these traditional Belgian beers and breweries, it is hard to realize that their continued existence over the 20<sup>th</sup> century was far from guaranteed: 'The styles and the breweries that survived did so thanks to the efforts of a few men who couldn't imagine a world without them' (p.133). The chapter highlights the pioneering efforts taken by a handful of brewers and breweries to keep alive traditional styles and brands. The discussions of Pierre Celis and Belgian White Ale (also examined in Chapter 8); Frank Boon and his guezue, kriek, and lambic beers; the Het Anker brewery and its Gouden Carlous brand; and the Duvel Moortgat brewery and its world famous Duvel brand are excellent summaries of how these and a handful of other breweries helped keep some of Belgium's unique beers alive. The authors conclude by noting that in the early 1990s, the market began to shift in favor of these and related beers:

The number of small breweries started growing again as consumers started getting bored with the taste of ubiquitous lager and began appreciating the taste of Belgium's native beers again (p.137).

The chapter does a great job in discussing the efforts taken on the supply side by key brewers and breweries, though it is weaker in explaining why these 'peasant' beers came back into favor in Belgium (and beyond).

A final essay to highlight is Chapter 8: 'The Belgian White: Reincarnation of an Old World Brew'. Organizationally, placement of this essay before Chapter 14 is a bit awkward, since it draws on and helps explicate some of the argument made in this later chapter. However, the story told here is fascinating. While many beer drinkers are familiar with the brand Hoegaarden and

the broader style that it represents, Belgian White Ale, the story here outlines the birth, decline, and ultimate revival of White Ale, focusing particular attention on the key role Pierre Celis played in this process. Like other key figures highlighted in Chapter 14, Celis both brewed the beer and acted as an evangelist for the style which by the mid 20th century had gone out of fashion in its home region and in Belgium more broadly. The story is somewhat bittersweet since the authors highlight some of the financial difficulties Celis encountered which ultimately led him to sell to a predecessor of ABInBev. Shortly after the sale, Celis moved to Austin, Texas and in the early 1990s started an eponymous brewery, Celis Brewery. I sampled these beers on several occasions, and they were an excellent addition to the burgeoning craft beer scene in the US. After a few years and despite great critical acclaim, Celis Brewery was also acquired by another brewing giant—this time, Miller Brewery. Though Pierre Celis ceded control of the breweries he started in the US and Belgium, his efforts to preserve the Belgian White style live on today through well-known brands such as Hoegaarden, Blue Moon, and Shock Top (all owned by large, corporate breweries) and by countless craft brewery interpretations in Belgium, the US, and many other countries.

Having waxed poetic about the book's many strengths, let me discuss two concerns I have with the volume. First, as an American most familiar with the US market for beer, I'm not entirely convinced of all the points the authors make regarding the US, and the chapter I'm least convinced by is Chapter 5: 'How TV Killed the Local Brewery'. The question isn't whether advertising beer on TV had some impact on the structure of the US market—it certainly did; however, the decline of the local brewery in the US reflected a wide range of factors—some were more narrowly industry-driven, but others were connected to a series of wider social, cultural, and economic developments that require a much broader perspective.

Second, while the authors do an excellent job describing the technical and scientific developments that redefined the supply side of the beer equation in the 19th and 20th centuries, they are less convincing in their analysis of the demand side. In their discussion of the rise of lager the authors assert that 'Imbibers preferred it to the inconsistent ales being brewed by local publican breweries' (p.46). Perhaps—but, Guinness was the largest brewery in

the world, England had some of the largest and most modern (and best?) breweries, and Belgium brewed a number of outstanding and unique ales. Given the skill with which Guinness, Whitbread, Bass, and many other ale producers adroitly adopted the new scientific and technical advances of the age, I'm not convinced that the reason for lager's ascendancy was simply due to ale inconsistency. Economics is about supply and demand, but this book is ultimately much stronger on the former than the latter. I think the reason is that whereas supply shifts emanating from science and technology impacted breweries and brewing everywhere, the factors behind changing consumer preferences from ale to lager (and back again?) are much more nuanced, complex, and country-dependent. The authors of course know this, and they offer some tasty morsels on the demand side. For example, in discussing the move from ale to lager in Belgium, they write that 'By the end of World War II, German-style lager had come to dominate Belgium's beer market, a trend that began with Germany's occupation of Belgium during World War I'. As this passage suggests, each country has its own history, its own set of explanations regarding the ebbing and flowing of beer styles and preferences and it would have been helpful to have more demand-side examples like this.

But, these are relatively minor quibbles compared to the overall contribution here. Swinnen and Briski have produced a most readable and informative volume, and I recommend opening up a good 'peasant' beer from Belgium to accompany this fine book.

MARTIN STACK

**Session Beer: brewing for flavor and balance**

**By Talley, J.**

**Boulder, CO: Brewers Publications**

**2017, Pp.304, \$19.95**

**ISBN 978-1-938469-41-1**

*Session Beers: brewing for flavor and balance* by Jennifer Talley is a high quality handbook for both home and commercial brewers. Where the book falls short on historical research, it excels and achieves in scientific analysis, recipe formulation, all with an experienced brewer's easy-to-read narrative. Through chapters of well-written examination, *Session Beers* moves quickly and engages the reader throughout.

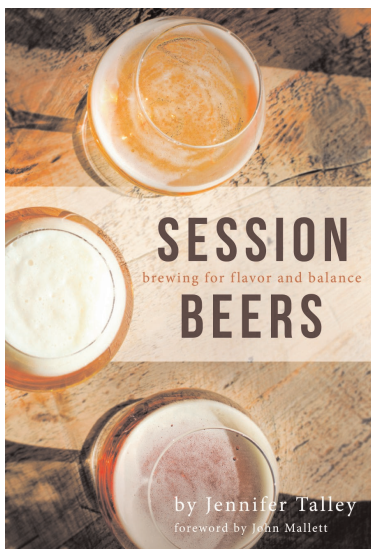
Talley began brewing at Squatters Pub Brewery in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1991. Given her pedigree, she is in many ways uniquely qualified to write *Session Beers*.

The state law, which still exists today, dictates that any beer served on draught in Utah must be no higher than 4% ABV. Session beer was all we brewed. Funny thing was, we didn't call it session beer at the time. We simply called it beer.(p.2)

Talley credits the term 'session beer' as being in existence in American brewing circles since 1982, though she acknowledges that session beers have been brewed globally for hundreds of years.

The book can be highly endorsed to brewers of all sizes because of its frank and honest discussion of brewing process, beers available in the current market, rising beer trends, and an economic analysis of brewing different strength ales. In her economic analysis, Talley differentiates the cost and efficiencies of brewing a session India Pale Ale, IPA, and Double IPA.

Craft brewers have always been concerned about separating themselves from the large brewing companies, and increasing the alcohol level has been one technique that has helped them to do so. With the birth of session categories in national and international competitions came a greater acceptance amongst craft brewers that craft beer does not always have to mean high ABV (p.81).



After each commercial beer recipe is a scaled-down recipe to make the same or a similar five gallons at home. The book culminates with the final three chapters providing a guide on how to take well-made and commercially successful beers and attempt them on a homebrewed scale. Talley points out that the best selling beers in America are in fact the large brewing companies', they wouldn't be the largest brewing companies if they weren't! But for as much great success as the largest breweries in America (and the world) have had in the last several decades, home brewing has garnered similar serious success.

Since it's federal legalization in 1978, when President Jimmy Carter signed Bill HR 1337, home brewing has upheld a mirror to craft brewers the world over. Many brewers who now own successful commercial breweries began their careers as homebrewers. What this has done is provide a larger audience to skilled brewers like Talley who might have a smaller readership if not for the quality and competency of the modern homebrewer. Still, there are key details only available to those in brewers' inner sanctums to which Talley passes along her stories and recipes in chapters 6, 7, and 8, from breweries like New Glarus, Russian River, Urban Chestnut, Sierra Nevada, Bell's, Brooklyn, and Firestone Walker amongst others.

Readers will learn a ton about session beer, but ultimately the homework is on you to internalize the information, put it to practice, and become a better brewer. That's not to say the book has little value aside from it's brewing scope, it just has less content when viewed through a strictly scientific or historical lens. On a comparative base, higher scores are earned on its scientific merit than historical.

Regardless of what the beer history reader wants from *Session Beers* - likely just more history (on the production, tax code, or changes) of the brewing of smaller beers - Talley is to be commended on her study and composition of beer recipes. From recipe formulation to ingredients, perceived body and bitterness, to pricing and financial considerations, Talley's analysis is thorough. Overall *Session Beers* is an enjoyable read, though likely more enjoyable for a brewer than for someone who lacks background knowledge into the brewers art.

MIKE STEIN











