



BY  
**STEPHEN  
BEAUMONT**

I first heard of the European Beer Festival when I was in Stockholm for that city's Beer and Whisky Festival in 2007. It was to mark the 10th anniversary in 2008 of the Danish beer consumers organization, Danske Ølentusiaster, and to be held at the soon to be decommissioned and demolished Carlsberg brewery in central Copenhagen. And if that wasn't enough, there was talk of it featuring over 2,000 beers from across Europe.

I decided pretty much there and then that I wanted to be there.

Oddly enough, though, it was not the European side of the event that seduced me, but rather the allure of having most if not all of Denmark's many breweries laid out before me in one place. For the buzz had already begun over the burgeoning craft beer scene in that country, and the little Danish beer present and tasted at the Stockholm event was enough to convince me this was not just idle gossip. Something was definitely going on in Denmark and it was high time I saw for myself what that something was.

And so, almost a year later, I boarded one creaky Icelandic flight bound for Reykjavik and another destined for Copenhagen, not to ride merry-go-rounds at Tivoli or gaze at the Little Mermaid, but to drink beer. Even so, I had little idea of the scope of what I was about to encounter.

I had a day and a half in Copenhagen before the fest was to kick off, during which time I visited a few local watering holes and toured



Fans clamor for more Mikkeller at Copenhagen fest.

the labyrinthine tunnels at the Carlsberg brewery, and was even treated to an in-person preview of the festival grounds. But really, that was all window dressing before the scene that greeted me as I entered the EBF around 1 p.m. on a sunny mid-September Friday afternoon for the two hour trade and media session, which was to lead straight into the lengthier evening session.

The first indication that this was beyond any ordinary beer fest arrived in the form of the program I was handed as I strolled into the admissions tent. No, "program" is not the right word; this was a book, and a 330 page book, at that. Never before had I seen such detail in a beer fest guide, and for those of us unacquainted in the native tongue, handily printed in English as well as Danish. Not only was each individual brewery listed with its address, phone and website, but each beer had its own one paragraph description. Forget the writing of it, simply the logistics of organizing such an encompassing guide struck me as more than daunting.

When I entered the main hall of the festival, all the chaos I witness the previous day had miraculously vanished, replaced by meticulous

booths offering everything from "out there" Danish brews — step forward Mikkeller, with your insanely unbalanced, 17.5% Mikkeller Black and your special cask version of Beer Geek Breakfast, "Poo Coffee Edition," made with the notorious ca phe chon coffee — to flavorful table beers — enter the delicious, 2.4%, smoked malt Skibsl from Bryggeriet Refsvindinge — to a remarkably wide range of British cask ales, numbering upwards of 80 in total. Oh, and Heineken, too.

While I will admit to eventually making a visit to the British Beer Exports booth, where I tasted and chatted with the affable managing director of Harveys, Miles Jenner, the vast majority of my time at the EBF was spent in search of Danish beers. In gloriously fruitful search, I might add.

Ask me what's happening in Danish beer these days and I'll tell you two stories, the first from Day One of the fest and the second from Day Two.

Contrary to popular view, my Friday at the EBF made me believe that the heart and soul of Danish brewing is not to be found there in the kind of exploratory, so-called "extreme" brewing popular on this side of the pond, but in solid interpretations of classic and not-so-classic styles. From the aforementioned Refsvindinge, I tasted a lusciously malty Pilsner that made more than a casual nod towards Pilsen; from the highly impressive Nørrebro Bryghus, I relished both a full-bodied London-style Porter and a spicy, apple-ish Ravensbrø Rod red ale; and from the always impressive Bryghuset Braunstein, I enjoyed both an Amber and a Dark Lager, half a percent of strength apart but equal in quenching, flavorful character. Contrasted with some of the ludicrously unbalanced experiments I sampled in between, I became increasingly convinced of the merits of conservative brewing in Scandinavia.

Then came Saturday.

Oh, what a difference a day makes! During the second, 11-hour session of the fest, I sampled greedily from the cup of innovation and loved it! London Porter meets Baltic Porter and becomes something

extraordinary in a one-off creation from Nørrebro: kafir lime leaves and lemon myrtle, plus a number of other spices, balance deliciously in the Utzon Blond from Søgaard's Bryghus; a local monastery provides the herbs and spices which, again, show brilliantly in the Esrum Kloster from Brockhouse Aps; and Champagne yeast ferments a citrusy, refreshing and only 3% Sejler Øl from Svaneke Bryghus, the same operation which also provides a rich, sweet espresso-ish smoked malt take on the Baltic Porter style, simply and modestly called Porter.

It was only with extreme reluctance that sometime around 8:30, I finally admitted that my palate had become worn to the point of no return. Directing myself towards the exit, I took one last survey of the thousands of earnest enthusiasts sipping and gulping and chugging the wares of some of Europe's and the world's finest breweries, and then peered behind the stands at brewers, importers and brewery reps still displaying great excitement at the prospect of sharing their best with the crowds. Surely exhaustion was beginning to take hold on both sides, but neither was flinching, neither bowing to the heat, crowds or cumulative effects of hours already spent on their feet.

This is the European Beer Festival, I thought, one of the world's best.

The Harpoon Leviathan Series surfaced at Harpoon in the summer of 2008. The series is an exploration in brewing big beers for adventurous palates.

### Imperial IPA

Our Imperial IPA is loaded with big, juicy American hop character and balanced by a strong, malty backbone. A massive hop profile dominates.

ABV: 10%

IBU: 120

OG: 22