

I Love You Beer, Worts and All



A year after I started all-grain brewing, as I was diagnosing a string of curiously hazy homebrews, I found that my thermometer had developed a bit of a negative bias. Advantageous, perhaps, for a future in politics, but of little use to the serious brewer. I discovered modest, yet tolerable, inaccuracy at water's boiling and freezing points, and splendid, glorious unreliability in the range of temperatures critical to mashing. Bother. An optimistic scale I might indulge (more hops!), but a dishonest thermometer I would not tolerate. So I went out and purchased an obscenely accurate and marvelously expensive model.

My beer cleared up straight away. But I began thinking: friends, family, and I had enjoyed with absolute sincerity every one of my murky, mis-mashed beers. Had

our naïve appreciation been wrong? Did a new thermometer and bright beer suddenly invalidate our earlier experiences?

Of course not. Taking pleasure in a hand-crafted, artisan product is the essence of our obsession, and infectious enthusiasm for our own little *objets d'art* can compensate for many a technical flaw. We enjoy myriad approaches to our hobby but share a common desire to create and savor. Sure, we'll endlessly debate how to get there, but I think we're all ultimately in it to quench a primal thirst for something satisfying, distinctive, and uniquely ours.

When I brewed my very first Belgian dubbel, I broke every rule of fermentation (I didn't know there *were* rules) and turned out something so lavishly fruity that I

promptly christened it Carmen Miranda's Hat. But, you know, my girlfriend, my buddies, and I downed every last bit of it. It was neither what I'd set out to brew, nor a remotely faithful representation of the style, but it was beer, and something to be proud of. I delighted in those initial batches of stovetop extract beer every bit as much as I do the triple-decocted, first-wort-hopped exercises in madness that I create today with the help of assorted Rube Goldberg contraptions.

I don't suggest that we stop improving *how* we brew, but rather that we always honor *why* we brew. And there are as many reasons as there are brewers. For some, it's a way to relax on the weekend, a few hours spent not worrying and savoring several of one's past efforts. For others, it's an endless pursuit to nail the perfect example of a BJCP description. It's even rumored that some save money by crafting their own beer, though I firmly believe Sasquatch will be positively identified well before these individuals. But we all brew to create something unique, and regardless of our particular approaches, we share a most satisfying goal.

So enjoy the journey. When next you lie awake, obsessing over yeast or hot side aeration, try visualizing and counting air-lock bubbles. You're a homebrewer, and a little uncertainty is OK.

Unless it's a Bavarian lager. The Reinheitsgebot allows a handful of ingredients, and imprecision isn't one of them.

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Photo courtesy of Dave Carpenter