

THE 31ST GREAT AMERICAN BEER FESTIVAL 2012

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From our US correspondent, Finn Bjørn Knudsen – a loyal and regular contributor to the SBR – we have received the following article, subsequently elaborated on by your technical editor, on the 2012 version of the mother of all beer festivals, The Great American Beer Festival, which took place in Denver, Colorado, from the 9th through the 13th of October 2012. Finn and Anders Kissmeyer made up the Danish contingent in the judging panel of the completion this year.

The public part of the annual Great American Beer Festival in Denver is a major and popular 3-day event and, this year, the fact that an amazing 49,000 tickets were sold out within 45 minutes supports its popularity. Last year it took about a week!! It took even the organizers by surprise.

THE GABF BEER COMPETITION

Yet again this year, the GABF broke the record and became the biggest ever commercial beer competition ever held. Both authors participated again as judges this year, and it was a relief that instead of the original panel of seven judges back in 1982, now, with the enormous amount of beers to be judged, 185 beer experts from 11 countries handle it. This year, the judges faced the task of judging 4,338 beer entries from 666 breweries representing 48 states, Guam and Washington DC. The beers entered were divided up in 84 categories with 134 beer styles, and the GABF Pro-Am. Once again, the largest category was the American Style India Pale Ale with 203 entries and the

average number of beers entered in each category was 51. The number of medals awarded was 251 plus 3 in the Pro-Am. The judges could not have handled this task without the expert guidance by Competition Manager, Chris Swersey, and his 120 volunteers, arranging and serving the beers in good time and perfectly at the judging tables.

Being a judge is always a privilege and so interesting being part of a group of six or seven judges sharing a round table guided by one judge being a designated judge captain. The judge captain has an important role in ensuring a pleasant social interaction between judges around the table, keeping the integrity of judging and not permitting any bias during the judging. In addition, the judge captain will ensure the mechanics of the judging will flow smoothly and make certain the administrative portion – the collection, sorting and stapling of the judging sheets – is done correctly. The latter is very important, since the judging sheets, filled out for every beer



by every judge during the first round of judging of each beer style, is where the judges will give their specific feedback to the brewer about each individual beer entered. Through the judging sheets, the brewer will have information from all judges about their beers within the framework of the GABF judge tasting notes. In addition, the brewer will also have the final information from the consensus sheet if selected as a potential winner, or the reasons why not selected. That is all very valuable information for the brewers who entered their beer(s).

As usual, the special receptions – Tuesday evening for the judges at Breckenridge Brewery, and Wednesday evening for the brewers at Wynkoop – were also well attended with almost standing room only.

With the number of medals to be awarded at this year's GABF Beer Judging Awards ceremony, usually taking place at 01:30 pm inside the Convention Hall, it was moved to now taking place at 10:30 am in the Wells Fargo Theatre in the Lower Level of Colorado Convention Center. Access was restricted to this event, allowing only the breweries, which had entered their beers, judges, media, etc. to participate. The event lasted about two hours and the theatre was rather full as can be seen on the photo. It definitely worked better than having the ceremony in the Convention Hall, being set in more quiet surroundings, all attendees could be seated and actually hear the comments made by Chris Swersey. It was a real festive ceremony with a bit of the feel of the Oscar's – only for beer instead of movies!!

THE OPEN GABF BEER FESTIVAL

This year, all the public sessions – the 49,000 attendees spread over four sessions, Thursday and Friday nights, Saturday morning and afternoon/night – also went well, and it really helped with the extra room in the Convention Hall, provided by moving the stage area used for the medal or award ceremony

Saturday AM to the Wells Fargo Theatre elsewhere in the convention building complex.

The statistical facts of this year's GABF were:

- 2,700+ beers in the festival hall – the biggest selection of American beers ever served.
- More than 36,500 gallons of beer.
- 49,000 attendees (includes ticketed attendees, brewers, judges, volunteers and journalists).
- 578 U.S. breweries served in the festival hall.

But attending the GABF always offers so much more than just wandering around the hall, tasting beers and indulging in the unique, positive and invigorating atmosphere on the floor, as if the 2,700 beers should not easily be somewhat more than the capacity of even the most enthusiastic attendee! Over the years, a number of other activities have been added to the public festival in order not only to provide diversions for the festival audience but also casting light on some of the less well known aspects of American craft brewing and activities of the Brewers Association, all aimed at informing and educating the craft beer drinkers under the headline “The Great American Beer School.”

At the 2012 version of the GABF these additional activities on offer inside the festival hall were:

- Craft Beer & Food Pavilion – Enjoy multiple demonstrations throughout the festival, in which chefs and brewers alike discuss the art of cooking with craft beer as well as how to pair with beer to make the perfect meal. The topics covered at Pavillion this year were, among others: “Sweet and Smokey Chicago Style” by Top Chef winner and owner/chef of the Girl & the Goat, Stephanie Izard, and Jared Rouben, brewmaster at Goose Island's Clybourn pub; “The Great American Beer & Food Pairing Challenge – The Homebrew



Chef” by homebrew chef Sean Paxton; and “The U.S. – Italy Craft Beer Connection” by Lorenzo Dabove, the Italian beer expert and champion of craft beer, and brewers Sam Calagione of Dogfish Head Craft Brewery and Eric Wallace of Left Hand Brewing Co.

- Farm To Table Pavilion – Join chefs, and small and independent brewers as they discuss and pair craft beer with dishes created with locally grown ingredients. Additional ticket required.
- Brewer’s Studio Pavilion – With beer that tastes so good, there must be an even better story behind it! The Brewer’s Studio gives festival goers the opportunity to listen to the brewers themselves as they wax philosophical on a variety of subjects as well as share their stories and beers.
- The Sixth Annual GABF Pro-Am Competition – Entries are brewed by professional craft brewers based on award-winning homebrew recipes from American Homebrewers Association (AHA) members. Homebrew recipes are scaled up and brewed at a craft brewery for submission into the GABF Pro-Am competition.
- Support Your Local Brewery Pavilion, sponsored by CraftBeer.com – Learn about individual states’ beer culture and try the rare beers showcased by the guilds, which are unavailable anywhere else at the festival. Nine states will be represented. Enjoy displays of malt, hops, brewing equipment and more!
- Brewers Publications Bookstore – This area features books on every aspect of brewing, from style, technique and history to cooking, pairing and serving beer with food. Sample copies will be available and special book signings will be offered.
- You Be The Judge Booth – Evaluate a beer with a BJCP (Beer Judge Certification Program) or GABF Competition beer judge. Anders Kissmeyer participated as a judge in this educational activity for the second time.
- The Silent Disco – Always a crowd favorite, the Silent Disco gives dancers the chance to dance to music only they and the other disco dancers can hear through wireless headphones. Fun for dancers and spectators alike!

With an attendance of nearly 50,000 people and a huge number of volunteers manning the stands and organizing all the other activities, an event like the GABF will inevitably have a certain environmental impact, so, over the years, the organizers have been focusing on trying to reduce the negative impacts by embarking on a number of sustainability initiatives. By partnering with ZeroHero (www.zerohero.com) and others,

the GABF’s goal is to recycle or compost 70 percent of waste produced at the event. Compost will be processed by “A1 Organics” located in Platteville, CO. Within 90 days of the festival, this compost will become a rich soil amendment. House lights will be kept at 50 percent during the festival, bottles used in the competition are recycled and beer in the hall is served in reusable drinkware from kegs or recyclable bottles to reduce the event’s footprint. Flatware and utensils used in concession areas and presentations are recyclable or compostable. Educational and interactive area showcasing sustainability initiatives within the brewing industry and at GABF, including calls to action for attendees to support the efforts.

Learn more about the sustainability initiatives on www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com/about/sustainability

It is interesting to note that the GABF is the largest ticketed beer event in the US and, I believe, in the world. The local business impact should not be forgotten since millions of dollars in beer-related commerce is going on around the GABF every year. Numerous Denver-area restaurants and breweries held special events and tastings to take advantage of the 49,000 attendees, and the downtown hotel rooms were fully booked during the week at high room rates. Briefly, it should be noted that GABF sells tickets to the public for about \$2 million for the tasting sessions, and a special study made by “Visit Denver” shows that the spending in Denver exceeds \$7 million by the participants. Therefore, as this event has grown over the years, it has become a really great business deal for the City of Denver as well as a great promotion for beer. A small example of the business impact on a brewery during the GABF, the Wynkoop Prewpub – the first brewpub in Denver started by former mayor of Denver and now Governor of the state of Colorado, John Hickenlooper – reports a 70 percent spike in beer sales during the GABF week as compared to normal weeks.

So, if you have not had a chance to experience the GABF, permit me to encourage you to plan to participate next year October 10-12, 2013, but do keep an eye on their website, and purchase the tickets as soon as possible after they are offered on-line, since they surely will be sold out in about ½ hour in 2013!! ☺

More detailed information about the 2012 GABF and winners are available at www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com