

In recent years, the term “rock star brewer” has been bandied about in the beer world. It’s one that few brewers are fond of, being for the most part rather humble sorts. Yet one of the more intriguing aspects of today’s craft beer revolution has clear parallels with the music industry.

From Norway to New Zealand, America to Abbotsford, brewers have been joining forces like Plant and Krauss, Cave and Kylie, and Eminem and Elton to create one-off brews. They are often as inspired as the coming together of The Flaming Lips and The Chemical Brothers, and occasionally as downright weird as Bing Crosby’s dalliance with David Bowie.

The trend for collaborative brews is relatively new to Australia, but here and elsewhere it has already sparked multinational ventures, all-female brews, partnerships between breweries and beer writers, and even one beer that brought together an entire nation’s brewers.

According to Danish brewer Mikkel Borg Bjergsø from Mikkeller, such collaborations are an opportunity to learn from and be inspired by the best brewers in the world. “I think putting creative minds together often sparks the creativity,” he says. “I often come up with ideas I would never have thought of by myself.”

Mikkel is what’s termed a “gypsy brewer” – one without a brewery who uses others’ equipment. The fruits of his joint ventures have included Belgian-style ales, rye wines and spiced stouts in the US, an oak-aged barley wine with Scots BrewDog, and all manner of unusual concoctions with fellow Scandinavians.

IT TAKES TWO TO BREW

Sharing a beer is no longer enough – brewers both big and boutique are now going all ‘rock star’ and sharing ideas and brewhouses.

WORDS JAMES SMITH

Mikkel will soon arrive in Australia for the first time and appear at the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. He will also head to Mountain Goat in Melbourne’s Richmond to create a one-off brew with the brewery’s co-founder Dave Bonighton.

Mountain Goat had been operating for 13 years before dipping its toes in collaborative brewing for a joint effort with Canberra’s Wig & Pen. Since then, they have brewed the Thorny Goat, a version of leading UK brewery Thornbridge’s Raven in which the original’s hops were replaced with southern hemisphere varieties, and also teamed up with coffee roasters Seven Seeds for a coffee-infused India Pale Ale (IPA). Perhaps the unlikeliest of all has been their unholy suburban trinity with Carlton United Brewers (CUB)

and newcomers Moon Dog to create the Abbey Collabbey (Abbotsford Collaboration) for the inaugural Good Beer Week in May 2011. “They came about because we’re all friends and the main thing we have in common is we love beer and make beer so it makes sense to get together to brew,” Dave Bonighton says. “Having the three breweries together who were at very different stages of their lives [multinational giant CUB, established microbrewery Mountain Goat, and Moon Dog, who were yet to open their brewery] was great as we all learned so much from each other. When you’re brewing, you do the same thing over and over again, and while you change the ingredients and might use slightly different processes, having another brewer involved gives you a whole



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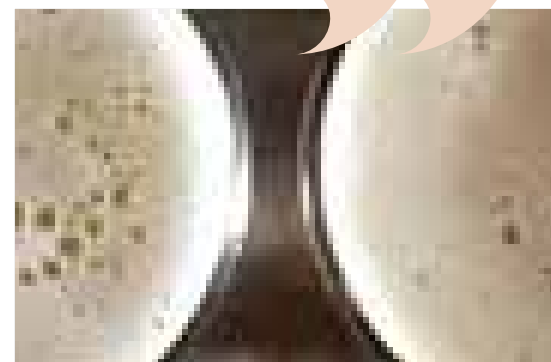
(people, clockwise from top) Gypsy brewer Mikkel Borg Bjergsø from Denmark; Sam Fuss, head brewer at Melbourne’s True South; Mountain Goat and Moon Dog in action; the all-female team behind Ninkasi’s Angel; the Abbey Collabbey was a team effort.

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HAVING ANOTHER BREWER INVOLVED GIVES YOU A WHOLE DIFFERENT SET OF EYES ... YOU PICK UP LITTLE DROPLETS OF WISDOM

DAVE BONIGHTON, CO-FOUNDER, MOUNTAIN GOAT



5
COLLABORATIVE
BREWS TO SAVOUR



NINKASI'S ANGEL

Brewed with cassia bark, cardamom, Tasmanian pepperberry and grains of paradise, this all-female brew is strong yet subtle and spicy. Sold in wax-sealed 750ml Champagne bottles, all profits go to the McGrath Foundation / 7.8%



NØGNE Ø / BRIDGE ROAD INDIA SAISON

Two versions of this beer, which mixes spiciness with tropical fruit aromas, have been released: the original brewed in Norway and another using the same recipe at Bridge Road in Beechworth, Victoria / 7.5%



SEEDY GOAT

Freshly roasted coffee from Melbourne's Seven Seeds is added at three stages in the brewing of this beer by Mountain Goat to capture its fruity and bitter characteristics / 5.9%



BLACK TOKYO HORIZON

A collision of three North European brewers – BrewDog, Mikkeller and Nøgne Ø – in a beer based on each of their big stouts. Not for the faint-hearted / 17.2%



NZ MASH UP

The combined thoughts of an impressive 44 Kiwi breweries have gone into the one hoppy beer / 6.0%

different set of eyes. The great thing is to let them use your brewery and follow them around to see how they do things; you pick up little droplets of wisdom.”

The results are often fairly outlandish – the Abbey Collabbey was a rich, malty, Belgian-style ale brewed with dark muscovado sugar, raisins and waffles (yes, waffles). But when Victorian breweries Red Hill and Hargreaves Hill came together for the Great Australian Beer SpectAPular, held at The Local Taphouse venues in Melbourne and Sydney early in 2011, their resulting beer reflected their preference for traditional styles: a delicate German maibock – a lighter, more hopped take on the strong German lager called bock.

Elsewhere, cross-border partnerships have allowed brewers to lend a taste of one country to another. A recent collaboration between Norway's Nøgne Ø and Australia's Bridge Road saw Australian-grown hop varieties not available in Europe shipped to Grimstad in Norway to allow the two brewers to create a unique take on the saison-style (see our suggested brews above).

Another project attempted to cram an entire country's brewing knowledge into one beer. It saw Kiwi brewers Luke Nicholas and Kelly Ryan from Epic tour their homeland, filming at dozens of breweries in an attempt to capture the essence of the vibrant New Zealand brew scene.

“We wanted to develop a recipe that took in a lot of the ideology of what brewers are doing here, yet capture the internationalism of brewing,” says Kelly. “After we finished the trip, we wrote a basic recipe and sent it to all of the brewers involved, asking for their feedback. Then we invited them to be a part of the brew day.” Profits from the beer – a pale ale called the NZ Mash Up – were used to turn the footage into an online show, NZ Craft Beer TV.

Kelly was first involved in collaborative brews when working at Thornbridge in England. “For the customers, it's about trying something a little different as collaborations often involve brewers pushing concepts to the extremes

and egging each other on to brew something a little off-kilter,” he says. “With something like Mash Up, we really hoped people would pick up the bottle, have a taste, love the beer and take a look at the label. So many people wouldn't even know there were 10 breweries in New Zealand, let alone the number that jumped on board for this.”

In October 2011, another unlikely Australian collaboration launched, which highlighted an aspect of the brewing industry that's starting to gain wider recognition – the role of women. Ninkasi's Angel, a spiced Belgian-style ale named after the Sumerian goddess of beer, was created by a group of female brewers, brewery owners and beer educators who also invited female beer-lovers along to assist on the brew day.

Sam Fuss, head brewer at Melbourne's True South, was one of the women involved. “It gave us a good platform for exposure of the craft beer industry and also the women who are involved,” she says. “Most importantly, we wanted to have a bit of fun. We'd had a great time doing a stage show during the 2011 Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and found we had this common bond, and also that there were a lot of female consumers out there.”

Like her counterparts, Sam believes collaborations are here to stay. What's more, with US brewery Dogfish Head recently brewing a beer to mark Seattle band Pearl Jam's 20th anniversary, it seems the line between rock and beer could be blurring further still. 🍺

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