

A Note on Selected Craft Beer Brand Names

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This note addresses selectively the names of craft beers produced by U.S. microbreweries. It considers the following points: (1) a brief history of beer, (2) the rise of the microbrewery in the U.S., (3) a definition of microbrewery, (4) a brief discussion of beer and craft beer in popular culture (film, television, collecting beer paraphernalia), and (5) a selected list of craft beer brand names to illustrate their referents.

KEYWORDS branding, brand names, collecting, craft beer, craft brewing, microbrewery, popular culture.

Introduction

The drink that we call beer (a mixture of water, wheat and barley) dates to at least 10,000 BCE (Standage 2005, 10; see also Elzinga, Tremblay, and Tremblay 2015; Oliver 2012c). By 4000 BCE, its production and consumption were widespread in the Near East. Over time, and by trial and error, its preparation was refined and enhanced. Cuneiform writing (the earliest manifestation of inscriptions on clay tablet) date from 3,400 BCE, and they contain pictographic allusions to beer (Standage 2005, 32). Oliver (2012e, ix) states that “[a]fter water and tea, beer is the third most popular drink in the world.” To be sure, beer comes in many styles as Oliver (2012a, 115) notes “[a] beer’s style will encompass its color, its level of carbonation, aroma, aspects of its flavor, the brewing techniques used to make it, and the often rich history from which it derives.”

The term “beer style” is now ingrained in the culture of beer enthusiasts. Several essential reference works address these beer styles (Beer Styles Study Guide 2018; Eckhardt 1989; Jackson [1977] 1982). Beer styles include the following categories (Beer Styles Study Guide 2018): Pale ales, dark lagers, brown ales, India pale ales, wheat beers, strong ales, Belgian styles, hybrid beers, porters, stouts, bocks, Scottish-style ales, wild/sour beers, pilseners and pale lagers, specialty beers flavored, e.g. chocolate, coffee, fruit and field, gluten free, herb and spice, honey, pumpkin, rye. Other dimensions of beer include ingredients, taste, alcohol content, and so forth.

Originally called microbreweries, these small independent companies are now known as craft brewers (Brewers Association 2018c; Oliver 2012b, 2012d). The number of craft brewers has increased exponentially in the past four decades from eight in 1980 to over 6000 in 2018 (Brewers Association 2018c). The history of craft beers in the United States shows that the movement began in 1942 with an organization called The Small Brewers Committee. Subsequently, the Association of Brewers was established in 1983 in Boulder, Colorado, and it merged with the Brewers Association of America in 2005 (Brewers Association 2018a; Hindy 2012, 160).

Oliver (2012b, 273) cites the Brewers Association (2018b), which defines a craft brewer in the following way:

An American craft brewer is small, independent and traditional.

Annual production of 6 million barrels of beer or less (approximately 3 percent of U.S. annual sales). Beer production is attributed to the rules of alternating proprietorships

Less than 25 percent [of] the craft brewery is owned or controlled (or equivalent economic interest) by an alcoholic beverage industry member that is not itself a craft brewer.

A brewer that has a majority of its total alcohol beverage volume in beers whose flavor derives from traditional or innovative brewing ingredients and their fermentation. Flavored malt beverages (FMVs) are not considered beers.

Manifestations of Beer and Craft Beer in Popular Culture

Craft beer appears in various popular cultural venues. This section addresses film and television. It also considers collecting, which is a popular culture mania that includes the collection of real and created beer artifacts (“breweriana”). Film and television programs seek to avoid lawsuits and copyright infringement by inventing names. It should be noted that Early Hays Press (2018) provides props to the film and television industry (Brooks 2018). A few of their fake beer names include “Ayythaya Beer”, “Balter’s”, “Diamond Back” and “Grandville”. It must be further noted that some companies engage in the practice of “product placement” (Danesi 2009, 241), i.e. they may pay to have their products prominently placed in a film or television show. This procedure dates back to author Jules Verne (1828–1905) when transport and shipping companies petitioned to have their service included in his novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). Finally, beer appears in artwork throughout history as far back as early civilizations such as the Sumerians and the Egyptians. More recently, well known artists have included beer in their paintings (Brooks 2012, 65), e.g. Rembrandt (1606–1669) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973).

Film

Imaginary beer brands abound in film (Brooks 2018). Selected examples include “Aspen Beer” (*Alien* (1979)), “Blunt Beer Big Red” (*Far Cry* (2008)), “Fish Hook Ale” (*Big Trouble* (2002)), “Spunk Beer” (*Tank Girl* (1995)), and “Willer Beer” (*Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977)).

Television

Fictional beer brands flourish in television shows also (Brooks 2018). *The Simpsons* (1989–) features a line of beers with the name “Duff” (“Duff Beer” “Duff Lite”, “Duff Dry”, “Duff Dark”, “Future Duff Beer”, “Henry K. Duff’s Private Reserve”, “Lady Duff”, “Raspberry Duff”, “Tartar Control Duff”). Likewise, there are “Duff Beer” competitors (“Billy Beer”, “Blitz”, “Fudd Beer”, “Red Tick Beer”, “Skittlebrau”, “Strolling Rock”). *Futurama* (1999–2002, 2010–2012) features its own artificial brands (“Flying Blue Magic Dog’s Mega-sucky Microbrew”, “Heffershessenheisenbrausendeuselbach”, “Livermush Ale”). The number of fictional beer names in television series is plentiful, and an analysis of these names would require a separate study. A few additional examples suffice, e.g. “Black Forest Beer” (*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), “Fielding Beer” (*Mad Men* (2007–2015)), “Jeckyll Island Beer” (*Dexter* (2006–2012)), “Polar Beer”, “Dharma Initiative Beer” (*Lost* (2004–2010)), and “Yeast ‘n Stuff” (*Married with Children* (1987–1997)).

Collecting beer related paraphernalia

Collecting beer memorabilia attracts many craft beer fans (Nuessel 2007). These aficionados accumulate all sorts of beer related objects, e.g. packaging (bottles, cans, labels), and promotional materials (bar statues, clocks, coasters, glasses, signs, lighted signs, tap knobs, trays, bottle openers (*Collector’s Weekly* 2018; see Glover 2012).

Craft Beer Names

The ever-increasing number of craft beer companies and the names for their products continues to proliferate. The creation of a unique craft beer brand involves finding a unique name and acquiring a trademark for that name (Gerben Law Firm 2018). Since there are currently 6000 craft brew manufacturers (Brewers Association 2018c), creating unique brand names can pose a challenge. In fact, Breslouer (2016) wrote an essay entitled “Craft Beer is Officially out of Names”. Fortunately, this is not true because individual entrepreneurs are creative and resourceful. Moreover, there are several online sites that provide a random generation of names, e.g. Wordlab (2018), which states that it can generate 2,474,160 craft beer names. A test of this site generated the following five names: (1) “Orange Manifesto”, (2) “Castleton Redwood”, (3) “Square Island”, (4) “Null Luster”, and (5) “Bittersweet Stagecraft”. It is possible that none of these five names will appeal to a craft brewer. However, the site can create several million more names.

Beer labels in the United States are required to have certain information, namely, the brand name, the class (type) of beer, the name and address of the bottler/packer, the alcohol content by weight or volume (Evans 2012, 527; see also Lincoln and Dornbusch 2012). Furthermore, each bottle or can must contain official U.S. health warnings that relate to possible birth defects, other negative health effects, and the impairment effects when driving a motor vehicle (Evans 2012, 527). Breweries are now providing additional information, which includes ingredients, allergy advice, history of the brewery, beer style, units of alcohol, and tasting notes.

Krutulyte, Costa and Grunert (2009, 307; see also Stevens 2018) note that quality markers of consumable products are related to “brand name, price, store type, label information, information on origin, etc.” and they all influence a buyer’s choice.

Semiotician Marcel Danesi (2009, 47) defines brand name as a “product name that is designed to convey a specific IMAGE with which consumers can identify or relate to”. Likewise, he (Danesi 2009, 46) characterizes the notion of “brand image” in the following way: “[it imbues] a product with an identity or distinct ‘personality’ by giving it an appealing name, designing a distinct logo for it, devising appropriate pricing (for a specific market segment), associating it with a certain lifestyle through advertising and so on.” A brand image encapsulates the connotative meaning of the brand name by invoking and evoking specific cultural meanings, which Danesi (2006, 37) calls a “connotative index”. Branding is, thus, a complex semiotic strategy designed to call to the consumer’s mind a set of associations intended to entice and persuade the consumer to purchase a particular product through this web of latent meanings (Danesi 2011; Nuessel 2010, 2014, 2016, 2017). In the case of craft beer names, it is possible to create a chain of signification that alludes to specific referents and implied meanings. Table 1 contains a specific example of the craft beer *Flower Power*®, # 25 on Pomranz’s (2018) list of the 25 best craft beers.

TABLE 1
CHAIN OF SIGNIFICATION OF ONE BRAND NAME OF A CRAFT BEER

Brand name	Referents	Implied meanings
<i>Flower Power</i> ® #25 on Pomranz’s (2018) list	An expression coined by Beat poet Allen Ginsburg (1926–1997) to transform Viet Nam war protests into peaceful and positive happenings. The expression “flower power” alludes to the bright colors and flowers stitched into their clothing, but also to engagement in peaceful manifestations	Reference to the flower power movement of the 1960s in Berkeley and San Francisco, CA. It was emblematic of the counter culture movement Reference to other manifestations of the movement (psychedelic music (Beatles, <i>Day Tripper</i> , 1965), art (Peter Max [1937–]), and social permissiveness

The *Flower Power*® brand of craft beer produced in the college town of Ithaca, New York (Cornell University) intentionally seeks to evoke the flower power movement of 50 years ago with its name and the distinctive psychedelic colors on the label. Moreover, it would appeal to baby boomers (born 1946–1964).

It must be noted that a significant component of the branding process of craft beer involves its name. However, the container (bottle, can), the label and its visual icons and the colors used play an important role in the branding in the synergistic assemblage of factors that contribute to a brand’s uniqueness through the use of a name and image to evoke a desirable sensation in a pleasant setting. In this sense, branding of a craft beer encompasses a constellation of meaningful cultural markers that generate an appealing product that satisfies not only the consumer’s palate, but also his or her subliminal needs and desires.

Methodology

Many lists of craft beers exist. They range from individual, arbitrary, and subjective rankings (Averill 2014), or funny and absurd names (Layer 2016) to name but a few. The list of selected craft names used in this note is the one prepared by Pomranz (2018) because the author devised a scientific survey. The guidelines for his survey research project are reproduced here:

To help better appreciate the history of American craft beer, we reached out to 21 experts from across the American beer scene, including legendary brewers like Ken Grossman and Jim Koch, industry representatives like Julia Herz, and veteran writers like Aaron Goldfarb and Joshua Bernstein. We asked each voter to nominate five to seven American beers that they consider to be the “most important of all time.” The only stipulations were that the beer must have started production after 1960, and it must have met the generally-accepted definition of “craft beer” at the time it was introduced. Voters were limited to two beers from any one brewery and encouraged to diversify their choices across years, states and styles. In the case of brewers, they were allowed to vote for themselves; however, every single beer on this list received multiple votes, meaning a brewer’s self-endorsement only counted if it was seconded by another voter. The final order was determined strictly by the votes received, with the exception of any ties, at which point we used our editorial judgment to determine ranking. The final list, like any list of this type, is sure to spur debate. However, thanks to the collective knowledge and expertise of our 21 voters, we think it’s an exceptionally telling look at the beers that have shaped American craft beer history.

Discussion

Because of the limited nature of a note, this essay focuses on the Pomranz’s list of the top 25 craft beers ever produced. The Appendix contains a table of the top 25 craft beer names together with a description of images contained on the label, beer type, and brewery name and location (Table A1 in Appendix). In the database for this study, there are four breweries that had multiple representatives. First, Anchor Brewery has four craft beers (*Liberty Ale*® (# 6), *Anchor Steam*® (# 11), *Anchor Christmas Ale*® (# 17), *Anchor*® (# 21)). Second, Victory Brewing has two craft beers (*Prima Pils*® (# 9) and *HopDevil*® (# 24)). Third, Sierra Nevada Brewing Company has two listings (*Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale*® (# 12) and *Sierra Nevada*® (# 1)). Finally, Allagash Brewing Company has two (*Coolship Resurgam* (# 16) and *Allagash White*® (# 4)).

Some general observations about the remaining 24 brand names of the craft beers in Pomranz’s (2018) list are in order. *HopDevil*® (# 24) is a religious allusion that may refer to the potency of the brew named for the demon. *Dogfish Head*® (# 23), and the name derives from Dogfish Head, Maine where the owner (Sam Calagione) spent his summers. The artwork on the label features the dogfish shark, a type of carnivorous shark, which may refer to the potency of the drink (9% alcohol content). *Geary’s*® (# 22) is the family name of the owners (David and Karen Geary, incorporated 1983). *Anchor*® (# 21) refers to the original brewery established in San Francisco, California in 1896 which shut down during prohibition (1920–1933) but had a new startup subsequently. The current brewery wants to appropriate the mystique of the original company. Its iconic anchor symbolizes San Francisco’s location as an important port for ships.

Ich bin ein Berliner® (# 20) depicts a man shouting with the colors associated with the German flag (black, red, gold) prominently displayed. The allusion to John F. Kennedy's now famous words in Berlin during the Cold War and its significance as a pledge of solidarity are obvious. *Hefe*® (# 19) is an abbreviation of a style of beer (hefeweizen) and a typical colloquial shortening of the name that one might hear in a bar. Brothers Kurt and Robert Widmer founded their brewery in Portland, Oregon in 1984. *Cuvee de Tomme*® (# 18) whose English translation is "Tomme's special blend" alludes to French word "*cuvée*" used in wine making, and it refers to a wine of a particular blend or batch, which derives from the French "*cuve*", or vat. This, of course, adds a certain mystique to this brand. Tomme Arthur created this craft beer and its name seeks to ally itself with the care and excellence associated with French vintage wine. *Anchor Christmas Ale*® (# 17) is a seasonal brew produced by San Francisco's Anchor Brewing Company. *Coolship Resurgam*® (# 16) refers to the vessel (coolship) used in the preparation of this craft beer, while *resurgam* is the Latin future tense meaning "I shall rise again". The Latin word is also the motto of Portland, Maine where the craft beer is produced. *Dale's Pale Ale*® (# 15) is a reference to the first name of Dale Katechis, who began brewing this canned craft beer in the basement of his restaurant in Lyons, Colorado. *Celis White*® (# 14) is the name of the creator of this wheat beer, the Belgian Pierre Celis. Its label depicts five people around a barrel. *La Folie*® (# 13) means folly or madness in French. Most of the artwork on the company's labels were designed by watercolorist, Anne Fitch. *Celebration Ale*® (# 12) is an India pale ale that is produced every fall from fresh hops, and its annual appearance is cause for celebration. *Anchor Steam*® (# 11) also seeks to align itself with the original Anchor Brewery in San Francisco established in 1896.

A discussion of the top 10 craft beers names on Pomranz's (2018) list is in order. *New Albion Ale*® (# 10) whose name refers to Sir Francis Drake's (c. 1540–1596) designation for California This craft beer has a label that depicts a clipper ship. New Albion Brewing Company is considered to be the first microbrewery whose owner, Jack McCauliffe was a former sailor. *Prima Pils*® (# 9) contains the word "prima", which means first and the word "pils", an abbreviation for "pilsner", a style of beer. *3 Floyds Dark Lord*® (# 8), a Munster, Indiana brewery that produces its potent (15% alcohol) craft beer in 22 oz bottles and celebrates and sells its annual production every spring in a one day sale. This year Dark Lord Day is 19 May 2018. The depiction of a humanoid monster may be an allusion to a powerful villain, e.g. the Dark Lord (Sauron) in J. R. R. Tolkien's (1892–1973) *The Lord of the Rings* (1937–1949). The use of a wax sealant on the bottle is reminiscent of *Maker's Mark*® Bourbon to give the consumer a sense that it is a special product. The color of the sealant indicates the vintage year. *Pliny the Elder*® (# 7) refers to the Roman writer and philosopher (23–79 CE), who died in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. He wrote about hops (*lupus salictarius* in Latin) two millennia ago. *Liberty Ale*® (# 6), produced by Anchor Brewing company, features its iconic anchor, but the American eagle and the U.S. flag also capture a patriotic and nationalistic sense of freedom associated with the United States. The brand name *Heady Topper*® (# 5) has two verbal allusions. The first is "heady" to designate its potency, and the second is "topper" to refer to the excellent quality of this drink. The icon on the can depicts a man drinking beer from a can. *Allagash White*® (# 4) is a Belgian style wheat beer with its cloudy white color. The artwork features a stream with trees on the left and right suggestive of its brewer's location in Maine where much of the state is wooded and

idyllic. Allagash (Penobscot for “bark river”) is an allusion to the Allagash River in that state. *Bourbon County Grand Stout*® (# 3) is a barrel-aged craft beer bottled in a brown container with a unique flag on its neck. Its producer, Goose Island Beer Company is named for a nearby island in Chicago, Illinois. *Samuel Adams Boston Lager*® (# 2) refers to one of the founding fathers of the United States Samuel Adams (1722–1803), born in Boston, Massachusetts the site of the brewing company. *Sierra Nevada*® (# 1) conjures up the famed mountain range mostly located in California. The English translation of this Spanish phrase is “snowy saw”. The depiction of a stream with evergreens on the left side and a single tree on the right with snow-covered mountains in the background suggests peace and tranquility.

Concluding Remarks

Brand names for craft beers are distinctive because they seek to evoke a specific association with a pleasant sensory experience by appealing to various senses, e.g. sight (use of colors on containers and the brew itself) and taste (salty, sour, bitter, sweet). Moreover, craft beer brands may allude to specific experiential phenomena or cultural beliefs, e.g. *Flower Power*® and the hippie movement of the 1960s. Further research on a larger corpus of names will provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of craft beer names.

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Appendix

TABLE A1
THE 25 MOST IMPORTANT CRAFT BEER BRANDS EVER BREWED (POMRANZ 2018)

Brand name	Label image	Beer type	Brewery
1. <i>Sierra Nevada</i> ®	A stream running through a wooded area with mountains in background	Pale Ale	Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Chico, CA
2. <i>Samuel Adams Boston Lager</i> ®	Bust of Samuel Adams (Founding father of the United States, 1722–1803)	Lager	Boston Beer Co., Boston, MA
3. <i>Bourbon County Brand Stout</i> ®	Brown bottle with embossed lettering in the glass. Also features Constantia's unique flag label on the neck of the bottle	Stout	Goose Island Brewery, Chicago, IL
4. <i>Allagash White</i> ®	Trees on left and right with a stream in the middle	Belgian style wheat beer	Allagash Brewing Co., Portland, ME
5. <i>Heady Topper</i> ®	Male drinking a beer from a can. Can	Double India pale ale	The Alchemist Brewery, Stowe, VT
6. <i>Liberty Ale</i> ®	Anchor, American eagle, U.S. flag, and hops on either side	Ale	Anchor Brewing Co., San Francisco, CA
7. <i>Pliny the Elder</i> ®	No image. Reference to Roman writer and natural philosopher (23–79 CE)	Double India pale ale	Russian River Brewing Co., Santa Rosa, CA
8. <i>Dark Lord</i> ®	A horned humanoid monster in black and orange. Sealed red wax top	Russian imperial stout	3 Floyds Brewing Co., Munster, IN
9. <i>Prima Pils</i> ®	Hop in green and yellow	Pilsner	Victory Brewing Co., Downingtown, PA
10. <i>New Albion Ale</i> ®	Clipper ship	Ale	New Albion Brewing Co., Sonoma, CA (1976–1982)
11. <i>Anchor Steam</i> ®	Blue anchor	Steam beer	Anchor Brewing Co., San Francisco, CA
12. <i>Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale</i> ®	Log cabin in a snowy forest	India pale ale	Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Chico, CA
13. <i>La Folie</i> ®	Artistic rendition of foam	Sour ale	New Belgium Brewing Co, Fort Collins, CO

(Continued)

Brand name	Label image	Beer type	Brewery
14. <i>Celis White</i> ®	Five people around a barrel	Belgian style wheat beer	Celis Brewing Co., Austin, TX. Brewery now closed
15. <i>Dale's Pale Ale</i> ®	Lettering only in red, blue, and white. Can	Pale ale	Oskar Blues Brewery Co. Longmont, CO
16. <i>Coolship Resurgam</i> ®	No image. Lettering only	Belgian style Gueuze	Allagash Brewing Co., Portland, MS
17. <i>Anchor Christmas Ale</i> ®	Christmas tree	Ale	Anchor Brewery Company, San Francisco, CA
18. <i>Cuvee de Tomme</i> ®	Picture of a crucifix at the top with the legend "The Lost Abbey", a barrel, and container with ingredients. Bottle contains a cork with wire. <i>Cuvée</i> in French means "vintage"	Sour brown ale	Pizza Port Brewing Co., Solana Beach, CA. Now Lost Abbey Brewery, San Marcos, CA
19. <i>Hefe</i> ®	No image. Only the name <i>Hefe</i> ®	Hefeweizen	Widmer Brothers Brewery, Portland, OR
20. <i>Ich bin ein Berliner</i> ®	German for "I am a Berliner" a phrase used by President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) during a trip to Berlin. It depicts a picture of man shouting. Colors of German flag: Black, red, gold	Berliner weiss	Nodding Head Brewery, Philadelphia, PA
21. <i>Anchor</i> ®	Image of an anchor	Porter	Anchor Brewing Co., San Francisco, CA
22. <i>Geary's</i> ®	Image of lobster	Pale ale	D. L. Geary Brewing Co., Portland, ME
23. <i>Dogfish Head</i> ®	Picture of a dogfish shark	90-min Imperial India pale ale	Dogfish Head Brewery Co., Milton, DE
24. <i>HopDevil</i> ®	Image of devil made of green leaves	India pale ale	Victory Brewing Co., Downingtown, PA
25. <i>Flower Power</i> ®	<i>Flower Power</i> ® name appears in psychedelic colors and motif	India pale ale	Ithaca Beer Co., Ithaca, NY