

WHAT'S BREWING?

If you think Israel's beer industry consists exclusively of Maccabee and Goldstar, think again. In the past decade, Israel has developed an impressive beer culture, with dozens of microbreweries producing premium ales **Dan Zeller**

Frank Zappa once said, "You can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline. It helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer." Well, Israel certainly has an airline, several football teams, and – well – no comment regarding the nuclear weapons. As for a beer, Israel now has many. In fact, in the past 10-15 years a veritable beer sub-culture has quietly emerged under the radar, largely overshadowed by the brashly successful local wine industry.

Dozens of amateur brewmasters have moved their hobbies out of their homes and have founded boutique breweries all over the country. These microbreweries produce a range of premium ales, stouts and lagers that have developed a loyal following among gourmet beer enthusiasts. Generally, the products of these small breweries – many of which have won prizes for exceptional quality – are available only in select restaurants and specialty stores.

The following microbreweries were all founded in the first decade of this century by devoted beer buffs who turned their passion into a profession. Frank Zappa would definitely have been very impressed.

Alexander Brewery

Alexander is one of the better-known boutique breweries, and its goal is to produce excellent Israeli beer. Like the best craft breweries in Europe and the US, it's success is based on knowledge

and a tradition of quality.

The Alexander Brewery was founded in Emek Hefer in 2008 by Ori Sagy, a former Air Force pilot who had been involved with beer as a hobby for about 25 years and decided to turn his hobby into a second career. His partners are Aviem Sela, also a veteran pilot, and the brothers Yoram and Ari Yarzin, who are well-known restaurateurs. Patrick Van Dam, a young professional brewmaster from Holland, also joined the brewery and is responsible for the current production process.

Alexander's beer is produced "by hand," in small batches with the traditional techniques used by European brewers for centuries, using modern equipment that ensures the utmost accuracy and quality. Their ale-type beer is characterized by rich and sophisticated tastes and smells.

'Alexander Black' is the brewery's first seasonal beer, following in the tradition of countries where it is common to brew a darker, stronger beer for the winter months. Dark and warming, it has a higher alcohol content, and boasts rich and complex flavors and aromas of dark chocolate and espresso. The basic style is porter, but Alexander Black is a Turbo Porter higher in alcohol, richer and more complex. It's an enhanced version of the Alexander beer that won a gold medal in the Porter category in 2009 in the Stout Challenge competition.



Negev Brewery

The Negev Brewery started out in 2005 as a home brewery whose beers quickly gained a reputation and won prizes. In 2009, it moved in to its current facility in the southern town of Kiryat Gat. It is one of the first microbreweries in Israel to brew craft beer. Every detail of the brewing process receives full and personal attention, and only top quality ingredients are used, such as malt and hops that are hand-picked. The brewing process – including bottling and lagering – is closely monitored.

In 2011, the brewery was bought by Norman Premium Ltd., a company that specializes in importing and marketing premium beers. In 2013, Negev Brewery was named the Best Brewery in Israel and its Porter Alon beer was crowned the Best Beer in Israel.

Negev Brewery produces seven different types of beer that are sold in bars and liquor stores all over Israel. Their flagship beer is Negev Amber Ale (4.9% alcohol) and their other selections include Negev Porter Alon (5%) and Negev Oasis (4.7%). In addition to its permanent range, the brewery also produces limited amounts of special seasonal beers.

Lela Boutique Brewery

Eli Becher is the man behind the Lela Boutique Brewery, and he brews and pours the beers with great pleasure. After having worked in the high-tech industry for 30 years, Becher travelled around the world



and tasted beers, which led him to think that Israelis also deserve to be pampered with quality boutique beers.

In 2009, he started to produce beer in his hometown of Maccabim, specializing in ales that are gentle and rich in taste. Today, Lela beers are produced at a brewery using the tasty water from the Beit Shemesh springs.

Lela's wheat beer is in the Belgian style and possesses touches of subtle fruit flavors, such as orange peel and coriander seeds. This beer won second place in the home boutique brewery competition "Longshot 2011" in the wheat beer category. Last year, it won first place out of 50 Israeli wheat beers in a competition in Jerusalem.

Lela's Admonit red pale ale has a spicy caramel flavor and a gently fruity aroma of orange peel and coriander seeds. A well-known Dutch brewmaster said about this ale: "I would like to drink this beer wherever I'll be in the world." It's kosher and contains 5.8% alcohol.



Lela Admonit won third place in the "Longshot 2013" competition in the pale ale category.

Lela's Smooth Stout has a pleasing bitter taste, with flavors and aromas of chocolate and coffee. It's kosher and contains 5.4% alcohol.

Malka Brewery

The story of the Malka Brewery began in 2006, born from the love of nature and a desire to boost the Israeli beer culture. Assaf Lavi, who was the owner of two pubs in Tel Aviv, left the big city and moved to the ecological community of Klil in the Galilee. He began brewing beer in small batches in Moshav Amka and chose the name "Malka," which means 'Queen' in Hebrew.

The first beers which Assaf brewed were tasted by culinary professionals, and after the recipes were perfected, he loaded his pickup with Malka Pale Ale, Malka Blond Ale and Malka Stout and



began selling his beers in Tel Aviv.

In 2008, the brewery was established at Kibbutz Yechiam, at the foot of a fortress and facing the sea. Since then, it has been producing ales in a traditional manner and in small batches. The process begins by using the finest ingredients and it involves the strictest quality control. The water used to brew Malka beers comes from the springs of the Ga'aton Stream adjacent to the Kibbutz and it is simply delicious.

Malka beers undergo two natural fermentation processes: the first in the fermentation vat and the second in the kegs and bottles themselves. This second fermentation contributes to the development of the beers' unique taste and their complexity as time goes by. In addition, the second fermentation provides the beers' gentle carbonation.

Malka Pale Ale is a classic

British pale ale characterized by a bready taste of barley and a deep reddish hue. This beer is brewed with large quantities of hops, which impart a certain bitterness but does not overpower the distinct malt taste. Its alcohol content is 5.5%.

Malka Blond Ale is a Belgian-style ale inspired by seasonal Saison recipes. This ale is characterized by notes of citrus due to the addition of orange peel and coriander seeds to the brewing process and the use of special hops. It has a 6.5% alcohol content.

Golan Brewery

The Golan Brewery, located in Katzrin on the Golan Heights, specializes in creating unique ales and lagers using the pure water from local sources. "All of our beers are fresh and handcrafted in small quantities. All ingredients are carefully selected and the brewing process is personally supervised," notes Golan's brewmaster, Omri Zilberman.

The brewery produces four different types of beer.



DOZENS OF AMATEUR BREWMASTERS HAVE MOVED THEIR HOBBIES OUT OF THEIR HOMES AND HAVE FOUNDED BOUTIQUE BREWERIES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

Bazelet Amber Ale has a complex and rich, medium-light body with a rich amber color. It was inspired by three styles of ale – German (Alt), Belgian and Irish – and the careful selection of ingredients together with the choice water combine to create a very special beer that portrays the Golan experience at its best.

Golan's Bazelet Pilsner is a light, fresh lager – a classic light-bodied pilsner beer with a well-balanced bitterness. The Bazelet Wheat Beer is a Bavarian-style fresh wheat beer with a medium body, unique fruity character and subtle refreshing sweet-sour taste. The brewery's Bazelet Double Bock Lager, a strong dark lager beer, is full-bodied with a malty flavor rich in shades of coffee and chocolate. It's considered a seasonal beer, produced toward the cold part of the year.

Le Chayim!