

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Craft Breweries and Local Culture: What's in a Name?

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, February 17th, 2016

How do we define culture when it comes to food and drink?

In 2013, my city was excited to see a new addition to our lively food and drink milieu. 10 Barrel Brewing was set to open in a high profile location downtown. The brewery had originally opened in Bend, Oregon, with a level of success it promised to bring here to Boise, Idaho. This would be a new addition to Idaho's culture. A craft brewery setting up shop and brewing locally. A restaurant with a rustic décor mirroring our state's scenery.

Many people in Idaho view Boise as the cultural hub of the state—diversity of entertainment, artists and writers, top restaurants and breweries; all of these contribute to the reputation.

With that, there's an emphasis on local. We love to "Buy Idaho" as the slogan goes. Since 10 Barrel was going to be brewing right here in our front yard, and was an independent, small business, it would easily fit in.

Then, 10 Barrel sold out to Anheuser-Busch Inbev. A multi-national conglomerate, AB Inbev is anything but local. Right now they're in the process of acquiring SAB Miller, for which they'll face an [antitrust review](#). The deal would see a mega-corp producing a third of the world's beer and making half of the beer market's profit.

To provide some context, AB Inbev's quest to take over is not new. Over the last decade, [craft brewing](#) has been surging, and Anheuser has bought out breweries like Chicago's Goose Island, which they picked up in 2011.

Craft breweries—as defined by the Brewer's Association since 1976—are small, independent, and traditional. Independent means at least 75% of the company is owned by somebody who does not work for a company like Anheuser.

Breweries such as 10 Barrel and Goose Island aren't independent, so they're not "craft breweries" anymore. However, they still craft the same beer.

Here in Idaho, when Anheuser took over 10 Barrel it sparked [controversy](#) over the brewery's license. 10 Barrel wanted to continue being classified as a craft brewery, in which case it could continue to brew and sell beer out of its downtown location.

Idaho's system attempts to help craft breweries by prohibiting Anheuser, and big breweries like it, from operating a brewpub like 10 Barrel's. To put it simply, we try to keep them from monopolizing the system. But 10 Barrel won out and [secured an exception](#) to the law.

Isn't this cultural appropriation? 10 Barrel is operating as a Trojan horse. First, it inserts itself into the local culture, something it couldn't do if it weren't a craft brewery. Then, it insinuates itself in the culture. But it is not, truthfully, part of what makes for local craft culture, because its owner(s) are not independent.

The fight for sustainability

This returns me to my original question. What makes for local food culture? 10 Barrel still puts out

the same product, it still uses local and regional ingredients, it still employs locals, its brewpub still fits the downtown milieu—but it's not actually local in the true sense of the word.

Sustainability is the rallying cry for lovers of local foodie culture. Interestingly, it's not a locals-only thing, as you can see [here](#). On a global scale, it's an effort to promote practices that sustain the environment, instead of degrading it.

Locally, we want to sustain the members of our culture and our economy by supporting them. They add color and individuality, as opposed to the homogeneity we see from corporate establishments. And their efforts go directly back into supporting our culture. It's a symbiotic relationship.

10 Barrel and other craft breweries that sell out make the sustainability waters murky.

The deal with AB Inbev's appropriation

Sheila Francis, president of Idaho Brewer's United, has this to say about the Anheuser [buyout](#):

The local movement is great, but when anything like this happens, I think people forget that 10 Barrel still pays local taxes. They still influence the local economy, they're still employing people on the local level and buying from local producers. While the ultimate profits are not necessarily staying here, they still have a positive impact.

I guess the answer to my question is another question: how big of a purist do you want to be? If "ultimate profits" don't support our local culture but there is still a level of support, do you want to rule out the establishment as being part of our local culture?

I think, ultimately, there's a sense in which a sellout's offering to the culture is tainted. We're just talking about something less pure. 10 Barrel now gets access to an Idaho resource, the largest hops farm in the country—Elk Mountain. But they only get it because of Anheuser's money. Isn't that twisted?

Yes, Anheuser-Busch is appropriating craft brewery culture. They're doing it in the most insidious (and strange) way possible—during the last Super Bowl they aired a commercial [that made fun of craft beer](#).

But at least the craft beers they appropriate will stay the same.

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