

“Brewing Revolution: Pioneering the Craft Beer Movement” by Frank Appleton, published by Harbour Publishing Company, Limited, 2016, Paperback, \$24.95, 216 pages, 8-page B&W photo insert.

Frank Appleton is an extraordinary man. And you may be forgiven if you have never heard of him. But I’ll warrant that you have drunk some of his beers. Ever heard of Humboldt Brewing, or Deschutes, the sixth-largest craft brewery in the US? Frank Appleton designed and built the original breweries for both of these. And, in BC, he and John Mitchell started Horseshoe Bay Brewing, Canada's first craft brewery, just NW of Vancouver in 1982.

Having introduced you to Frank Appleton, I must say that his book is a delight to read. He is a plain speaking Englishman, especially in his descriptions of early days working at Carlings in the 1960’s and 70’s. The first part of the book covers his career before he became a brewery consultant. He trained in his native Manchester in microbiology, milk processing and brewing technology, and then immigrated to Vancouver in 1964, landing a job as a quality control supervisor in the O’Keefe brewery (part of the Carling empire). To his surprise he found that the beers were brewed with 40 percent corn imported from a cornstarch plant in Lincoln, NE. Next he learnt that the O’Keefe dark beer (Gold Label) was their standard lager darkened with caramelized sugar. He also was surprised to see the giant pasteurizer, particularly since his lab showed no signs of spoilage organisms in the beer being delivered to the bottle filler. His comments to his management about these were not very well received!

During this time Frank had started writing, at first technical papers (which were not appreciated by his jealous supervisors), and then more general articles for Canadian news magazines. The Carling business was crumbling and eventually Frank finished up out of a job living on 20 acres in the heart of BC. In the late 1970’s a Canadian magazine called Harrowsmith devoted to getting back to living on the land was started. Frank wrote an article titled “The Underground Brewmaster” on the right way to brew good tasting beer. It was a condemnation of the “mega brewing factories” and included these paragraphs, which became quoted by other authors at that time:

“The stage has been reached where all the big breweries are making virtually the same product, with different names and labels. Accompanying this trend is a shift in power from the hands of the brewmaster to the marketing, accounting and advertising men.

Like tasteless white bread and the universal cardboard hamburger, the new beer is produced for the tasteless common denominator. It must not offend anyone, anywhere. Corporate beer is not too heavy, not too bitter, not too alcoholic, not too malty, not too hoppy, not too gassy or yeasty. In other words, corporate beer reduces every characteristic that makes beer beer.”

In 1981 Frank got a call from John Mitchell in Vancouver who had read the Harrowsmith article. John had Frank do the designs for a brewery and that led to the opening of

Horseshoe Bay Brewing. He also went on to design and build Spinnakers (Victoria), Swans (Victoria), Howe Sound Brewing (Squamish), Yaletown (Vancouver), Tin Whistle (Penticton), High Mountain Brewhouse (Whistler) in BC, several in the US, and the Ninkasi Ale House in Lyons, France. The second, and largest part of the book, consists of the stories of many of these start-ups. Not so much the events, but the people: he has a way of writing that brings these people alive. Particularly interesting is the background behind the Humboldt and Deschutes breweries.

The final part of the book consists of two important chapters. The first is a summation of Frank's lifetime experience in the things that make a good brewer, and good beer. The last chapter is his take on the recent history of the craft brewing industry, including blasting the false and misleading marketing used by some breweries. He always has had strong opinions on what is good beer, and what is not! Buy this book if you are at all interested in what makes a good, bad, or indifferent beer. Frank Appleton tells it like it is in a very entertaining book.

John Rowling