In English

WISH YOU WERE BEER

WISH YOU WERE BEER - The story of Finnish beer

The recipe for beer is simple: fresh water, malted grain, yeast and hops. Just a few ingredients to make a drink that has countless meanings.

For centuries in Finland, beer has served folk both in their daily lives and on their annual high days and holidays, while contributing to the economies of kingdom, empire and republic. Bog myrtle has sometimes been replaced by hops, the primitive beer trough by brewery equipment, and wild yeast by pure-culture beer yeasts.

One ruler after another has likewise had an interest in beer. During the era of Swedish rule (up to 1809), beers were made at different strengths to suit each type of consumer. For decades after World War II, Finland's beer culture was dominated by a ubiquitous medium-strength type.

At grass-root level, beer has also been a mark of rebellion. Surely no other sound better signals time out than the hiss of a post-sauna beer bottle being opened on a Saturday evening? The association of beer with freedom is also familiar in marketing.

The beer sold by retailers nowadays accounts for the bulk of alcohol sales in Finland. The downsides and upsides of drinking, its sorrows and joys, are possibly most strongly evident in the city park and the living-room at home.

The exhibition ***Wish you were beer*** looks at beer from different angles.

Finnish has two commonly-used words for beer: *kalja* and *olut*. In literary Finnish, *kalja* refers to weak beer, but in spoken Finnish its meaning varies from one locality and generation to another. To some, it refers to a non-alcoholic home-made drink, to others beer in general. The origin of the word is not known. Both *kalja* and *olut* are mentioned in the archaic Finnish poetry such as that of the epic *Kalevala* and in the earliest Finnish texts written some 500 years ago.

According to the dictionary, *olut* is an alcoholic drink made from yeast-fermented malt. The word is either a Germanic or a Baltic loan and related to Lithuanian *alùs*, Estonian õlu, North Sámi *vuolla* and Swedish *öl*.

The essence of beer

FAMILIAR METHODS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS

The art of brewing emerged with the development of agrarian culture and as people began to settle in one place. It has even been suggested that cereal crops began to be grown so that beer could be made. The oldest known archaeological beer-related find is a brewery dating back 13,000 years in what is now Israel.

Beer was, so far as is known, drunk in Finland from the Iron Age onwards at the latest, maybe earlier and even in the Stone Age. Finland is also known for another rare, ancient type of beer, *sahti*.

The beer-making utensils have changed from simple open vats to automated brewery equipment. Many ways have been invented to improve the hygiene of the production process and the taste of the beer. Basically, the stages in the process and the ingredients have not, however, changed.

Ingredients

Malt

Malt is germinated grain. It gives the beer colour, aromas and a source of fermentable sugars. Before the advent of industrial production, brewers had to germinate the malt themselves. Nowadays, they are supplied by malt houses.The best and commonest grain is barley for it has a hard husk that helps to keep the grain mass loose. Barley is one of the world's oldest crops. Archaeologists have found signs that barley was being grown in Finland more than 6,000 years ago. Wheat has been used as well, and in Finland rye.

Malting requires good-quality barley, which is easily affected by drought. Global warming is impairing the malt barley harvest and the availability of beer.

Water

Beer is more than 90 per cent water. The water for beer must meet the same standards as good drinking water, but the taste can if necessary be improved. In Finland, tap water can be used as such to make beer.

The hardness of the water varies from one region to another. Hard water enhances the aroma of the hops, soft Finnish water that of the malt.

The taste of the local water has also influenced the types of beer made in a region. The mineral flavour of its calcium-rich water is, for example, one feature of the dark British stout. Nowadays, breweries adjust the water chemistry to suit the type of beer.

Yeast

Yeast is a single-celled fungus that gives the beer its alcohol content. There are yeast cells everywhere in nature. For a long time, beer was fermented solely with wild yeasts, absorbed from the bottom of the fermenter or the environment, for example. To be successful, wild-yeast fermentation requires a cool climate. The production of Belgian lambic, for example, one of the world's oldest types of beer and fermented with wild yeasts, has become difficult as a result of climate change. Present-day beer yeasts are 'pure' cultures obtained by a method developed by Emil Christian Hansen at the Carlsberg Brewery in 1883. Using this method, he could grow colonies of yeasts from a single cell, and each cell would be the same. Beer yeasts are either top- or bottom-fermenting. Top-fermenting yeasts require a warm environment and produce fruity, aromatic beers such as IPA; bottom-fermenting yeasts, requiring a cold environment, are used to make lager, for example. Wild yeasts are still used in traditional Belgian and other beers.

Hops

The hop (Humulus lupulus) is a climbing plant of the hemp family. It began spreading through Europe as a flavour for beer from the 8th–9th centuries

onwards. Hops contribute to the bitterness and aromas of beer. Different strains are divided according to flavour into spicy, piney, floral, grassy and citrus. As in growing vines, the terroir (habitat) affects the flavour of the hops. The Finnish hop varieties have had a mild aroma, a citrus and earthy flavour. Imported hops replaced the Finnish hop strains in the early 19th century. The hop plants did not, however, disappear and the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke) is now conducting research into indigenous strains.

Flavours ancient and modern

Beer was flavoured even before the spread of hops to make it keep longer, for reasons of taste, and for the medicinal effects it was believed to possess.
One of the best-known flavourings for ancient beer was a herb mixture known as gruit. Flavours would vary from one region to another, but they usually included bog myrtle, mugwort, yarrow, heather and marsh tea. In Finland, beer might also be flavoured with **nettle**, juniper, wormwood and pea. Nowadays, the flavours range from coconut to oregano, coffee and jam doughnut. The gruit tradition is also being revived.

The Exhibits (on the podium):

1. A malt shovel (Hartwall's Lahti brewery)
2. A beer barrel (Kotka Steam Brewery)
3. A yeast starter bottle (Fat Lizard Brewery, Espoo)

The beer-drinking community

A DRINK FOR ALL OCCASIONS

Beer was Finland's staple drink for as many as 2,000 years, until hard liquor began to spread in the 17th century. Beer continued to play a major role, however. People drank it to quench their thirst or to mark a special occasion, to pay their taxes, as a means of indicating their social status, and as a magical brew. It was present in all walks of life.

Beer was also an intoxicant. The alcohol content could not be measured, and according to folk belief, getting drunk resembled possession rather than intoxication: a person might be possessed by beer. Drinking was controlled by communal behavioural rules. From the 17th century onwards, the authorities also began intervening more and more in drinking habits.

A permanent change in the role of beer in people's lives came about in the 19th century. As the modern state emerged, beer became an industrial commodity and a question of alcohol policy. There was no return to the culture of home brewing. Could park and after-sauna home-sofa drinking nevertheless bear traces of the past?

Supernatural and mythical

Cereal crops were a vital, basic element of the Finnish diet in days gone by. They were surrounded by beliefs and protective magic. The beer made from grain also had supernatural power.

A myth is a story that explains the origin of the world and other major things in human life. There are also myths in ancient Kalevalaic poetry. Myths explaining the origin of artefacts have also evolved for things such as iron, skis – and beer. The poems about the origin of beer describe a time when divine beings discovered the first source of fermenting beer.

The chemistry of beer fermentation and intoxication was not know. The strange phenomena were explained by saying that beer was like an animate being. In one poem about the origin of beer, the barley calls from the field and the water from the well that they want to enter mortals as beer.
The ritual drinking of beer was part of the magic surrounding turning points in the working year. The master of the household would get seriously drunk at the harvest festival in order to ensure a good crop the following year. As late as the 20th century, beer was still being sacrificed in places in early summer to ensure rainfall.

Ritual beers were also needed for various rites of passage in human life, from weddings to funerals – as at the ancient feasts at which a hunted bear was accompanied to the other world. The special days in the annual round changed with the coming of Christianity, but the significance of beer remained.

Crown and Church

Grain growing, malting and brewing require raw ingredients and labour. The invention of beer and the birth of hierarchical societies went hand in hand. The price and availability of beer have also regulated social relations.

Beer was already a product of significance to Finland's national economy in the days of Swedish rule (up to 1809), and its production and prices were subject to political control. In the 16th century, King Gustavus Vasa began supporting domestic hop growing as an alternative to expensive imported hops. In time, growing hops became compulsory: every farmer had to have a certain number of hop poles or pay a fine. Not until after Finland had gained political independence in 1917 was the ruling finally revoked.

The Crown, i.e. the state, controlled the price and quality of beer from the Middle Ages onwards. Beer could not be sold until it had been inspected and the dues had been paid. The prices of beer barrels and pitchers was regulated, and the prices had to be displayed. The beer inspector also had to be informed of beverages intended for consumption in the home.

The consumption of beer by various sectors of society was also regulated. Beers were made to suit the drinker. There was beer for the gentry, bailiff beer, soldier's beer, hired labourer's beer and ship's beer. The difference lay in the amount of hops and the strength. The strongly-hopped beer for the gentry had an alcohol content of about 3.5 per cent, the weaker soldier's beer 2.3 per cent.

A curb on drinking

Among the ordinary folk, visible inebriation was an accepted fact when adult men got together in public. They would come well supplied for the journey to church, the assizes and other meetings, because these were regarded as special occasions. Aggressive drinking was, on the other hand, one way of defusing class conflicts. Before long, the church and clergy nevertheless grew tired of having drunks disturb divine worship, and the Church Law of 1686 prohibited drunkenness in church.

In 1733, a law was passed prohibiting drunkenness in public. The authorities began maintaining order in the areas around the church and the city streets. Public carnivals were dispersed, and carousing transferred to private premises. Regulating drinking became a means of control.

In the 19th century, the temperance movement adopted from Sweden and the United States gained a firm foothold in Finland. The ideals of moderation intensified to total prohibition, and the Act on Prohibition finally gained unanimous support throughout Finnish society. Beer was regarded as a drink for country folk and workers, and hence taverns, in particular, came to be looked upon as dens of vice. Many rural local authorities prohibited the production, retail and on-premises licensed sale of alcohol – beer included. In the towns, the restrictions applied particularly to the taverns favoured by workers.

Brewing had become an industry in the 19th century, and with the growing temperance movement, its significance dwindled as a product made and consumed in the home. When the Prohibition Act came into force in 1919, the breweries either shut down or began producing soft drinks and weak *kalja* instead of beer.

The Exhibits (in the showcase):

1. A two-handled *sahti* tankard, undated

The serving and drinking of beer have, as with other alcoholic beverages, involved certain rituals. Tankards, cups and drinking horns are surrounded by social conventions. Cups were raised to clinch a deal or hiring contract; popular religious feasts were lubricated with beer; friendships were cemented with a cup of beer. Two-handled tankards were typical throughout Finland and would be passed round the table for each to drink in turn. Individual vessels did not become common until the 20th century.

2. A wooden stoup, Lapua, 1818

Beer culture commonly relied on wooden vessels. The Finnish word *känni*, which nowadays means 'drunk', originally denoted a small stoup, usually with one handle. It might sometimes be equipped with a lid.

3. A tin stoup, Turku, 1841

The use of tin as the material of beer mugs, as of other vessels, spread in the 17th century. Gold, silver and tin smiths were ordered to mark their products, which were also stamped with the year in which they were made. The bottom of this tin stoup shows the country and city, two master's stamps and a year code. The stoup was made by Johan Lindblad, a tin smith from Turku, in 1841.

4. A glass pear-shaped stoup, Åvik, Somero, Late 18th century

Glass stoups began to be made in the Nordic countries in the 18th century. In the 19th century, glass, crystal and porcelain became an indication of social standing, and glass vessels with intricate ornamentation designed for different beverages distinguished the gentry from the ordinary folk.

5. *Kongl. Maj:ts Nådige Förordning, Emot Swalg och Dryckenskap. Gifwen Stockholm i Råd-Cammaren den 17. Aprilis 1733*. Kongl. Tryckeriet, Stockholm 1733

The 17th century breach-of-the-Sabbath decrees and Church Law applied only to disorderly drunken behaviour. The decree of 1733 criminalised being drunk in itself in public. It applied to all public places, and times during which alcohol could be served were introduced.

Transition from work to leisure – sauna and beer

To the Finns, taking a sauna has always signified not only an act of bathing and washing but also a symbol of cleansing for Sunday, the day of rest. Alcohol has likewise marked a transition from work to leisure. Alcohol and the sauna were, however, still kept strictly separate in agrarian culture.

The combination of beer and sauna became the custom only in post-1960s urbanised Finland: saunas were becoming more common and beer more readily available. Both the sauna and beer have, however, retained their significance as a rite of passage from work to leisure.

The voice of beer

RESTRICTED, CONTROLLED, LEGALISED, LOVED

Beer has been a source of tax revenue for the modern state just as it was for the Crown in the days of 16th-century King Gustavus Vasa. Nowadays, it is also a scientifically researched intoxicant. The consumption of beer is on the one hand restricted by alcohol policy but on the other encouraged as an alternative to hard liquor.

The rural regions of Finland were, in the post-WWII period, officially 'dry'. Beer was sold only in special Alko stores in cities and townships, and there were no licensed restaurants. In the 1950s, half of Finland's beer was drunk in Helsinki, Turku, Tampere and Lahti, home to 15 per cent of the Finnish population. The retail and on-premises licensed sale and import of beer were governed by Alko.

An experiment in the early 1960s revolutionised the Finnish restaurant scene. Medium-strength beer* went on sale in grocery stores and cafés in 1969. Customs and pet names sprang up at grass-root level for this beverage classified according to its alcohol content. The emergence of small breweries and new beer flavours was in turn prompted by Finland's membership of the European Union in 1995, when Alko's monopoly over beer was repealed.

In the 2010s, beer no longer raises political disputes akin to the local prohibitions of days gone by. Rebellion and freedom do, however, still exist in advertising. There may no longer be anything supernatural about beer, but it nevertheless has all the more symbolic power.

*Medium-strength beer: Under the Act on Medium-strength Beer that came into force on 1.1.1969, medium-strength beer was an alcoholic beverage containing a minimum of 2.25 and maximum of 3.7 alcohol by weight. The unit was replaced by alcohol by volume in 1988. An example of a similar product is Sweden's *mellanöl*. Grade III beer: Under the Malt Tax Act of the year 1916 beer was divided into tax categories according to its alcohol content. The upper limit for grade III beer was stated at the beginning of the Act on Medium-strength Beer.

The "beer restaurant" experiment

Beer was already returning to the rural regions before the Act on Medium-strength Beer, as part of a beer-restaurant experiment conducted by Alko in 1963 to 1965. These experimental restaurants were established as a controlled test in various parts of the country to examine the consequences for alcohol consumption in the rural regions. A cautious experiment, it produced some positive results: there were no public disturbances! The restaurants were allowed to stay on the village streets. In 1969, they were joined by a new type of

restaurant: the medium-strength beer bar and café. In that year, 2,716 new restaurants licensed to sell medium-strength beer opened across the country.

In the 1970s–1980s, beer restaurants were very much regarded as haunts for workers. Viewed by some in terms of awe, they were also subject to strict supervision and the number was reduced. The gap between places governed by the Act on Medium-strength Beer and those by the Alcohol Act became slightly narrower in the late 1980s when they received equal treatment in the law. The popularity of draught grade III beer also overtook that of the stronger grade IV beer for the first time. Membership of the EU in 1995 allowed restaurants to set up their own breweries and the first Finnish brew pubs saw the light of day. Unlike in days gone by, a beer restaurant nowadays means one with a wide selection of beers. Ninety per cent of beer is sold today in retail stores. Finns nowadays drink their beer mainly at home, not a public restaurant.

Homes rebel

The “liberation” of medium-strength beer was celebrated as a revolutionary event on New Year’s Eve 1968: the radio sent out a minute-by-minute report of trucks leaving the breweries so that their first beer deliveries would reach the grocery stores by morning.

The rise in the total annual per capita consumption of alcohol from 2.9 to more than 5 litres in the few years following the liberation nevertheless came as a surprise, as did the spike in the downsides of drinking. Local authorities could if they wished prohibit the retail and on-premises licensed sale of medium-strength beer in their area, and the 1970s saw a wave of such prohibitions. In Sweden, medium-strength beer was replaced by 3.5 per cent “folk beer” (*folköl*) in 1977. In Finland, a medium-strength beer march was held in 1980 by people concerned at the rise in consumption and demanding that medium-strength beer be returned to Alko. This was followed in the same year by a popular, ironic “Medium-strength beer to R-kiosks” movement concerned at the over-strict alcohol policy.

The local bans on medium-strength beer began to be lifted as the 1980s progressed, due partly to active lobbying by the Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks Industry (Panimoliitto). The last to resist was the municipality of Luoto, which did not revoke its prohibition until forced to by Finland’s EU membership in 1995.

Over the decades, beer has acquired iconic status in many debates on the freedom of the individual and alcohol policy. The political furore surrounding it has, however, abated since the early 1990s. Yet rebellion, manliness and freedom are very much present in beer advertisements.

The Exhibits (in the fridge):

Industrial beer bottling began in the 19th century. The beer bottle was first standardised in Finland in 1938. The commonest standard, 0.33 cl, dates from the 1980s.

About 90 per cent of empty drink containers are nowadays recycled, when a deposit paid on purchase is returned. A system for recycling and refilling bottles was created back in the early 1950s, and for recycling cans in 1996.

1. Väkevä Olut III, Uusikaupunki Brewery, 1933. The rims of the early beer bottles were designed to take flip tops.
2. Aura Linna Olut, Aura Brewery, early 1960s. The handy cardboard carrier launched by the Aura Brewery preceded the 6-pack and the 12-pack known in Finland as a "sausage dog".
3. Musta hevonen III, Sinebrychoff, 1979. The beer can came on the Finnish market in the 1960s. For a long time the cans were made of steel and usually had a volume of 45 cl.
4. Kosken kohinaa III, Wihurinkoski, 1973. The flip top, pull-off cap (shown here) and crown cap were all on the market for a while, until the crown cap finally won.
5. Lapin kulta Special III, Hartwall, 1990s. Aluminium cans went into use in 1987. The environmental tax on cans was removed in 2008, since when they have become more popular than glass bottles.
6. Small-brewery beers, Mattson and Teerenpeli brewerys. Beer packs also market their product and build brands – in any style.

Medium-strength beer in memoriam

Medium-strength beer lived from 1969 to 2017. The term 'medium-strength beer' was deleted from the legislation on 1.1.2018, when the maximum alcohol content of beer sold in retail stores was raised to 5.5 per cent.

Record your memories of medium-strength beer in the book!

Structural changes

The Act on Prohibition was replaced in 1932 with a Liquor Act assigning a state-owned monopoly, Alkoholiliike (Alko), sole rights to the retail sale, on-premises licensed sale and import of alcoholic beverages. The breweries' role was in practice that of subcontractor to Alko, which had a monopoly on the retail of beer in Finland.

Many a Finn can recall the time when the Alko stores sold only beers made by certain local breweries. The aim of the regional sales system introduced in the war year 1943 was to save on labour and transport in the distribution of beverages. This system was abolished in the mid-1960s when Finland joined the European Free Trade Area to ensure that the competitive status of the domestic breweries was not inferior to that of foreign ones.

While Alko held the full monopoly on beer, it in practice also regulated tastes – for it alone decided the types of beer, both Finnish and foreign, on the market. Its monopoly on beer came to end when Finland joined the EU in 1995.

Membership of the EU meant that the number of foreign beers soon grew as the legislation changed. There was also a sharp increase in the number of small breweries. At the end of 1995, Finland had a good 30 small breweries; those still in operation include the Suomenlinna, Mustiala, Teerenpeli (Lahti) breweries and that of the Perho restaurant college in Helsinki.

Finland at present has more breweries than at any other time in the period since it gained political independence in 1917. The number of breweries has grown hand in hand with the changing and diversifying tastes in beer. The selection of beers nowadays to be found on supermarket and Alko shelves is wider and more varied than ever before.

The Exhibits (in the showcase):

1. A beer glass from the Kaisaniemi or Alhambra Restaurant, 1884
2. A beer glass, Iittala Glass Factory, 1934
3. A beer glass, Ruoholahti Kantakrouvi, 1964. This restaurant took part in the beer-restaurant experiment.
4. A beer goblet, from the collection of the Mallassauna Beer Society, 1990s. Beer societies the primary aim of which is companionable beer tasting have been operating in Finland since the late 1980s. A tulip-shaped glass is good for tasting: it creates a nice head and brings out the aromas.
5. A pint glass, 1990s. The world's most common beer glass is the pint. Designed for bitter, ale and stout, it is now also an established glass for lager.
6. A beer glass, 'Great Beers, Small Breweries' event, 2019 (private collection). Beer festivals arrived on the scene in the late 1980s.
7. An IPA glass from the Teerenpeli Restaurant, 2010s. The head remains on the surface as the glass is tilted and the carbon dioxide and aromas blend evenly.

An Alko store info sign, undated (on the wall)

In the 1960s, Alko actively urged consumers to drink wines and beers instead of spirits. The campaign was designed to change people's drinking habits and not directly to reduce overall consumption.

Beer commercials (on the wall), from a private collection.