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Title: A Macro Demand for Microbrews

USA Today

October 1993

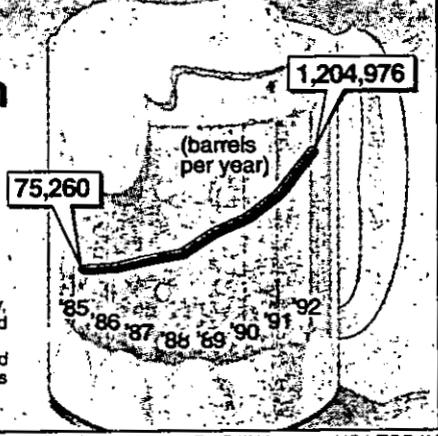
USA TODAY
Oct. 8, 1993



Heady growth

Sales of U.S. brewed specialty¹ beers since 1985

¹ includes regional specialty, microbrewery and brewpub beers, and beers brewed in small quantities under contract



Source: *The New Brews* magazine By Cliff Vancura, USA TODAY

COVER STORY

A macro demand for microbrews

Pubs build on a growing thirst for house brands among hip, hoppy crowds

By Gene Sloan
USA TODAY

DENVER — Watch out, Budweiser. The growing crop of microbrews — those rich, hand-crafted beers coming from tiny new breweries — look as though they're here to stay.

Far from the fad of the '80s some thought they would be, microbrews continue to soar in popularity,

with sales doubling over the past two years despite prices often twice as high as their mass-produced brethren.

More and more, Americans are bellying up to the bar and calling for a thick, creamy stout or red, hoppy amber. Microbreweries and brewpubs — bars that brew their own beer — are opening at a rate of one per week. And even big brewers like Miller and Rolling Rock are bringing out copycat beers that look, if not quite taste, like micros.

"Americans' taste buds have become more fine-tuned. They want beer with flavor and freshness and variety," says Lisa Lima of Bardo, a 7-month-old brewpub in Arlington, Va., that's a hit with 35 micros on tap.

Tonight, when the 12th annual Great American Beer Festival — the headiest event in brewdom — opens here at

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COVER STORY

First brewpub in '83

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Currgan Hall, there will be more beers from more microbreweries than ever before. In all, 207 U.S. breweries will show off 953 distinct products.

Among them will be India pale ales and English porters and American wheats — beers that had all but disappeared from this country two decades ago but are surging back.

The record 15,000 people arriving for tastes (tickets, \$21.50 at the door) will also find such curiosities as pumpkin ales, cranberry lambics, oatmeal stouts and coffee beer — all made and served somewhere in the USA.

And you thought the Germans had it good.

"What we're doing is pushing the envelope, introducing people to what beer can really taste like," says Jim Koch, founder of 9-year-old Boston Beer Co., which makes Samuel Adams Lager and is largest of the new generation of small breweries.

Samuel Adams — with a richer taste and deeper color than mass-produced beers like Budweiser — has soared in popularity. This year, the company will produce 450,000 barrels, 60% more than last year and up from 7,000 barrels in 1986.

Overall, sales at microbreweries and brewpubs grew 41% last year and 34% in '91. Sales at the five largest brewers — Anheuser-Busch, Miller, Coors, Stroh and Heileman — dropped 0.7% last year.

Of course, most Americans still prefer the big boys' beer — together they sell 173 million barrels a year; the smaller guys are expected to sell 1.8 million barrels this year. But craft breweries, at just over 1% of the beer market, continue to come on like gangbusters.

"I like the flavor (of microbrews). I like the fact that they don't all taste the same," says Ann Thompson, 23, of Washington, D.C. She tasted an Old Dominion lager from Ashburn, Va. two years ago and has shunned big brewers ever since.

"I had gone to Germany and tasted German beers — they were better than anything I had had back here. The micros reminded me of those," she says.

"People were skeptical of our beer at first," admits Sebastian Pastore, assistant brewmaster of 9-year-old Widmer Brewing Co. of Portland, Ore. "But they started trying it out of curiosity. Then they liked it. Then it spread by word-of-mouth."

Widmer makes an unfiltered wheat beer — a hefeweizen — something it took a while for customers to get used to, Pastore says. But now it's a hit in Oregon, accounting for more than 6% of all kegs sold there.

Microbreweries like Widmer are actually not new to America. In 1873, the United States had a staggering 4,131 breweries. Every local town had its own; people drank what was local.

But Prohibition closed most of those forever. And after the ban on booze was lifted, the rest got swallowed up by larger and larger conglomerates like Anheuser-Busch, which now makes 46% of all the beer in the USA. By the 1960s, the number of breweries had dwindled to fewer than 100.

The revival of the small, local brewery making hand-crafted beer goes back to 1965. That's when Fritz Maytag bought a tiny, dying one in San Francisco named Anchor Brewing Co. and started turning it around.

"People thought I was a nut. But it was like falling in love. I thought it was a neat idea to save this little company ... and brew quality beer," he says.

Anchor was the first microbrewery. But soon, other small breweries opened up with the same goal of making varieties of beer such as ales and stouts that were far different from the lighter lagers the big brewers were selling. The first brewpub opened in 1983 and by 1985, there were 29 microbreweries and brewpubs. At last count, there were 343.

"Most beer sold is bland. But people are becoming more aware, more conscious of what they're drinking," Maytag says. "Almost everybody eats good bread nowadays and a whole lot more drink good wine. That's what's happening with beer."

Microbreweries have had such sudden success that they're starting to draw the attention of the big brewers.

To tap the trend, Miller Brewing Co. — the nation's second largest — unveiled micro-like Special Reserve Ale this year. Last month, medium-size Latrobe Brewing Co. introduced Rolling Rock Bock.

And Stroh, the fourth largest brewer, has come up with seasonal wheat and Oktoberfest beers under its Augsburger label. Augsburger sales have surged 58% in eight months.

"You can't help but see the vitality of microbrews," says John Chappell, director of brand management for Labatt's USA, Latrobe's parent company. "We believe there's a lot of growth left. The category will expand for years to come."

"The big brewers are watching micros very closely. I don't think they're worried. But don't be surprised to see them come out with more beers that try to take advantage of the trend," says Eric Shepard of *Beer Marketer's Insights*.

For the big brewers, guarding their share of the market is do-or-die business. Many micro owners say they're just out to make great beer — and have fun doing it.

Anchor's Maytag, for instance, makes a Christmas beer that's available only during the holidays and is cooked up with a different recipe each year. It's not making him rich.

"Most people don't like it. It's got a rich, spicy flavor that they don't like. But boy, do we have fun making it," he says. "The satisfaction is to feel like we're at the leading edge of brewing creativity."

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