

30TH ANNIVERSARY – GREAT AMERICAN BEER FESTIVAL DENVER, COLORADO

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From our close friend and frequent contributor, Finn Bjørn Knudsen, Knudsen Beverage Consulting in Evergreen, Colorado, we have received this personal article on the 30th Great American Beer Festival that took place in Denver, Colorado, from 28 September to 1 October this year. The article gives a closer insight into the judging process at this competition, continuously competing neck to neck with the World Beer Cup® for being the largest beer competition in the world.

American brewers were looking forward to participating in the GABF's 30th Anniversary with anticipation to celebrate this milestone. The general public was again onboard and rushed to purchase tickets, as they became available. They were sold out in record time. The only way to obtain tickets after the sell-out was to try either on e-bay or to approach the scalpers outside the convention centre during the GABF. The American brewers were just as excited and submitted 4,000 entry samples to be judged in the competition by 170 professional judges all day Wednesday, Thursday and half day Friday. The results have later been published at <http://www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com/the-competition/winners/>.

THE GABF BEER COMPETITION

My GABF judging started in 1987. I was one of seven judges that year, and have participated all the years since, except for

one, when I was working in Sweden. This year, the professional judges received a couple of commemorative beer glasses and a special 30 year pin as a 'thank you for participating'. As most of the other judges, I was assigned two to three judging settings in various categories during the morning and afternoon hours. The morning judging session started at 9 AM and ran until the tables had accomplished their tasks of judging often up to 12 beers per setting. It was amazing to witness how pleasant the conversations and discussions flowed, and at the end of each session, how judges arrived at a uniform agreement selecting which beers would not make it to the next round and which ones would move forward. At the first setting, the judges filled out score sheets for each beer with their impressions and comments, and the brewers would receive a copy of those so they could learn specifics about their beers as evaluated by the judges. Eventually, the selected beers from various tables



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moved forward to the final rounds and at those sessions, the judges selected the beers to be awarded gold, silver and bronze. Each table with six to seven judges had a Judge Captain, who in addition to participating as a judge also ensured the sessions flowed smoothly. The army of volunteer competition stewards marking the test glasses with test numbers; pouring the beers in a separate hall and serving the beers, did a fantastic job.

THE GABF PUBLIC BEER FESTIVAL

The public sessions at the GABF started Thursday at 5:30 PM until closing at 10 PM. The Denver Convention Hall was filled with happy people who had queued up for more than 200 metres around the building, and after opening, the hall immediately became very lively and noisy, in celebration and anticipation. All visitors received a sturdy plastic tasting glass and programmes and then proceeded to take advantage of tasting 1 oz at a time of about 2,200 beers from about 565 breweries. If you do the math yourself, you can quickly figure out that it would be impossible during the four and a half hours to try all the beers; you would thus have had to imbibe more than 70 litres of beer!! During the public sessions, there were further educational opportunities, which filled up very quickly, with full attendance at all sessions at the various pavilions where, among others, you could learn about Beer & Food, Farm to Table, Brewers Studio Pavilion, You be the judge booth, etc. Once again, the GABF was indeed abundant for any person enthusiastic about beers and breweriana, and what an opportunity for brewers and people wanting to learn more about beer.

The public tasting glass is a clear solid plastic glass since many people in the past GABFs dropped their regular glass on the floor after having tasted several beers and this became a nightmare for the convention centre to clean and was also a little dangerous. People still sometimes somehow happen to drop their plastic glasses and then the entire hall resounds with loud uniform roars.

At the opening of the four sessions (Thursday, Friday, Saturday afternoon 12-4 PM for members only, and Saturday evening) it is always a very festive and exciting show for all, with the contingent of Scottish bagpipers and drummers playing and marching through the hall. The echo from the music truly reverberates.

At the Saturday afternoon for members only session, the medal award ceremony takes place with great excitement and cheers. →

GREAT AMERICAN BEER FESTIVALSM JUDGE TASTING NOTES

Beer Number:

Category:

Judge Number:

Subcategory Letter:

Color and Appearance

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate
 Dark
 Light

Comments:

Aroma

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate

Comments:

Bitterness

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate
 High
 Low

Comments:

Alcohol

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate
 High
 Low

Comments:

Style

- Appropriate
 Out of style

Comments:

Flavor and Aftertaste

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate
 Comments:

Balance and Drinkability

- Appropriate
 Not Appropriate
 Comments:

Technical Quality

- Excellent
 Very Good
 Good
 Acceptable
 Needs Improvement

Comments:

Carbonation

- Appropriate
 High
 Low

Comments:

Other Comments:

BA President Charlie Papazian hands out all the medals and shakes hands with the winners; his hand is very sore by the end of that afternoon!! Since the afternoon session is calmer and for members only, the GABF does provide a tasting (glass) glass to those members inscribed a little differently than the ones used at the sessions for the public. A few still end up getting dropped and shattered – the roar then rises to the ceiling!!

At a final fête this year, a small group, who has been involved with GABF for many years, was invited by the Brewers Association on Saturday evening, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary, with a special beer paired dinner (to the right). It was a fabulous feast with an exquisite culinary experience and a unique opportunity to taste specialty beers from brewers; from some who had participated in the 1982 GABF and selected others, such as a Czech style dark, delicious lager – Blinking Star #2 – brewed by Charlie for this occasion. (Blinking Star #1 was featured in the March/April 2011 'Zymurgy' issue, p. 51).

Honestly, to participate in this event, is a very valuable way to stay abreast of what is going on and to get a feel of the future directions of the almost 2,000 breweries in North America. I strongly recommend that you plan for GABF 2012 and, if so, I recommend you purchase the tickets as soon as they are available. ♪



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INFO

All specific and statistical info about the GABF can be found on their website: www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com.

GREAT AMERICAN BEER FESTIVAL 30TH ANNIVERSARY

SATURDAY OCTOBER 1, 2011

Reception

- Raw Bar paired with Boulder Beer 30th Anniversary
- Marin Miyagi's on the half shell – lemon caviar, horseradish gelee, 30th anniversary mignonette
- Peruvian Concha Negra ceviche served in the shell
- Grilled achiote marinated shrimp cocktail
- Chilled stuffed Mediterranean mussels served on the half shell
- Albacore crudo

Passed Appetizers

- Colorado lamb skewers, toasted cumin yogurt dipping sauce
- Lardo flatbread, Munson Farms sweet corn salsa

First

- Handmade cavatelli, fresh cranberry beans, radicchio, country ham, lemon
- Saranac Octoberfest – Matt Brewing Company – Märzen – 5.4% ABV

Second

- Roasted veal loin with mustard greens and pine nuts, parsley root puree, Dashe Vineyards Zinfandel chusters, mustard
- Estate Homegrown – Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. – Wet Hop Ale – 6.7% ABV

Third

- Poached meringue, Brekle's caramel, vanilla, malted marcona almond praline
- Brekle's Brown – Anchor Brewing Co. – Brown Ale – 6.0% ABV

Adam Dulye – *The Monk's Kettle*

Kyle Mendenhall – *The Kitchen*

Sean Clark – *Steamworks Brewery*

Tom Worthington – *Monterey Fish Company*