

A RUSSIAN RIVER & SIERRA NEVADA COLLABORATION

BRUX™

DOMESTICATED WILD ALE

*A dry and complex Belgian-style ale refermented in the bottle with *Brettanomyces bruxellensis*.*

BREWED & BOTTLED BY SIERRA NEVADA BREWING CO., CHICO, CA.
IN COLLABORATION WITH RUSSIAN RIVER BREWING CO.

1 PT. 9.4 FL. OZ. ALE ALC. 8.3% BY VOL.

When you plant wild flowers are they still wild?

words: Don Osborn photos: Courtesy of Sierra Nevada

Beer Magazine spoke with Bill Manley, Sierra Nevada Product Development Manager, to get the inside scoop on BRUX—a collaboration with Russian River Brewing Co. BRUX is bottle-conditioned with the wild yeast *Brettanomyces*, and this proved to be a significant challenge and concern for Sierra Nevada. The final product is an 8.5% ABV Belgian ale with a distinguishable Brett character that will likely become even more pronounced in years to come.



Brian and Vinnie dress like this every day.

BRUX—A COLLABORATION BETWEEN SIERRA NEVADA BREWING AND RUSSIAN RIVER BREWING

Sierra Nevada Collaborates

Ken Grossman, founder of Sierra Nevada, has been involved with the Brewer's Association and has been friends with other brewers for years. It is only somewhat recently, though, that he has begun making collaborative beers with other breweries. In 2009 they did their first, releasing Life and Limb with Dogfish Head. They have also done smaller projects that have been draft-only. On a larger scale, they did their 30th Anniversary beers, involving notable brewers and beer personalities Fritz Maytag, Jack McAuliffe, Fred Eckhardt, and Charlie Papazian. In 2012, Sierra Nevada worked with Boulevard Brewing on a special beer called

Terra Incognita for the SAVOR food and beer event. So although Sierra Nevada has not been involved in joint ventures for as long as some other breweries, they are beginning to do more of them.

How Did BRUX Come About?

Vinnie and Natalie Cilurzo, founders of Russian River, have been friends with the Grossmans for years. Sierra Nevada's General Manager Brian Grossman, Ken's son, is particularly good friends with Vinnie. Bill Manley explained that Brian thought it "... would be cool to do a beer that would change over time." Just as friendships change and mature over the years, it would be fun to make a beer that would behave likewise. Thinking along those lines, *Brettanomyces* and the way it can slowly change a beer over time became an ideal ingredient to employ.

A couple of years ago, Vinnie and Brian started making pilot batches at Russian River. They added Brett, tasted the results, and modified the recipe to get it where they wanted.



When you cultivate wild yeast is it still wild?

Don't Fear the Brett

BRUX is the first product for which Sierra Nevada has used Brettanomyces in the brewery, and the decision to do so did not come easily. Bill Manley told a story of Vinnie saying there was "... no way it's going to happen." Vinnie did not think Ken Grossman would allow Brett in the Sierra Nevada brewery. Brian Grossman said, "You worry about the beer. Let me worry about the old man."

Brian convinced Ken to go for it, but although he agreed, it had to be done his way. Bill Manley says that unwanted Brettanomyces "for a brewery like Sierra Nevada would be devastating." For most breweries that use forced carbonation, it would not be as big a deal, but Sierra Nevada does a lot of bottle conditioning. This means that the beers stay at warm temperatures while the carbonation develops. This environment would be perfect for Brett to grow and take hold. Once it is present, it can be hard to eradicate—not to mention that "clean" beer contaminated with Brett could be a public relations mess.

The risk is that this wild, somewhat unpredictable yet resilient yeast can get into all of the "soft goods" of the brewery: the valves, gaskets, and connectors that make



The inseminator is delivering a calculate amount of brett in every bottle. Science rules.

the system watertight. Ken came up with the idea of buying a pharmaceutical-grade doser, which can put the right amount of Brett yeast cells into each bottle at bottling time. In this way, Brett does not have to go into bright tanks or other beer fillers. Essentially, BRUX is simply bottle-conditioned with Brett and currently has "... a mild Brett character," says Bill. "But as it ages, it's going to get much stronger and more pronounced, and turn into something quite different."

BRUX was kept extremely segregated

from the rest of Sierra Nevada's beers. It was bottled on their smaller bottling line, and everyone involved had to wear clean suits. "It was like a Hazmat zone," Bill Manley recalled. Breweries like Russian River have totally separate equipment for any beer involved with Brett, and they keep their "clean" beers away from any equipment that has come into contact with it. Partially due to the scale of production, this is not practical for Sierra Nevada, and they had to come up with a workable solution.

More Brett in the Future?

About the possibility of using Brett again, Bill Manley said, "I think we'd probably do it again, but it really depends. The project has got to be worth it because it is an awful lot of labor and concern. It's got to be something pretty special." They probably would not be interested in doing a year-round Brett beer. They have no plans to use it again right now, but they have figured out a good way of doing it with the least amount of risk. Those are the kinds of problems that a brewer loves to solve, said Bill. Brewers like to think about "if only" scenarios, and then figure out a way to make it happen. Sierra Nevada likes to innovate and figure out solutions to the problems that they want to solve.

"I really feel like Ken is a homebrewer at heart. Nothing is off the table until it is off the table," said Manley. He spoke about sitting in brewery meetings and talking about what is next. When a cool idea



comes up, everyone gets excited and figures out what needs to happen to make it a reality. That innovative spirit makes one think that Sierra Nevada could continue to surprise us for years to come.

BRUX Dirty Details

For beer lovers who enjoy details, I asked Manley if he would share some specific information about the beer, and he complied. They used German Select hops. The primary fermenting yeast was a French Saison strain that came from Russian River. The strain of Brettanomyces used was *Bruxellensis*, and it was purchased from White Labs. The mash pH was adjusted to foster a more bitter beer without using more hops. Malts used were Belgian Pilsner, Golden Promise, Caramel 15L, and a touch of acidulated. The original gravity was 16.2 Plato, and it finished (before adding Brett) at a low .6 Plato. Currently, Bill says it is down to .2 Plato, and it could well drop all the way down to 0.0 Plato with time. The beer is 8.3% ABV and has 16 IBUs. ☞

