

THE FIRST ANNUAL AMPERSAND COLLEGE

SECTION

NOTABLE FOR THREE REASONS:

It's concerned only with after-class, leisure hour, party down and hang-it-out style. No dress codes allowed.

We won't bore you with too many brand names you can't find in your local stores anyway.

The *Amper-sand* staff received no graft, no bribes, no tokens from anybody. After all our work. Not so much as a non-gourmet kernel of popcorn. We must be doing something wrong.

Beer Is a Many-Splendored Thing

BY MORLEY JONES



You can talk about your Châteauneuf-du-Pape and you can talk about your Caymus Vineyards Napa Valley Oeil de Perdrix. You can talk about your Glendronach single-malt Scotch whiskey and you can talk about your Amaretto di Saronò on the rocks with a splash of heavy cream. You can blabber on and on forever about your Tequila Sunrise and your elegantly perfect 22-to-1 martini, and you can prattle till you're blue in the face about your damned fancy-schmaney European soda water at 79 cents a pint. But when all that yackety-yak dies down and you discover that you're thirsty, *really* thirsty, brush-fire-on-a-hot-day thirsty—chances are pretty good that you'll reach for a good old-fashioned beer.

The U.S. is the largest producer of beer and related beverages (like ale, stout, etc.—about which, more later) in the world, and one of the largest consumers of the stuff. Each and every one of us, statistically at least, drinks about 22 gallons of beer and such a year—and if you personally drink somewhat less than that, don't worry, because the guy next to you probably more than makes up your share. (By way of comparison, American per capita consumption of hard booze is only about two gallons a year, and wine consumption is slightly less than that—though it's increasingly rapidly.)

Beer has been around for a long time. Since before there was whiskey. Since before there was chocolate milk. Since before plain old water was even safe to drink. Beer was probably the first alcoholic beverage known to humankind. It was made as early as 5000 B.C., in Mesopotamia. You remember Mesopotamia—the Fertile Crescent, most productive agricultural land in the ancient world. Well, most of what they grew in Mesopotamia was grain, and almost *half* of all that grain was used for making beer. Sumerian workers were paid in beer. Hammurabi took it so seriously that he wrote special rules into his Code condemning people who sold watered-down brew.

The Egyptians liked the idea of beer, and passed it along eventually to the Greeks, who were nice enough to tell the Romans about it. The Romans introduced it to what are now Germany and Great Britain, and look what *they've* done with it.

The light, medium-bitter style of beer that most of us are used to today was probably born 800 years ago or so in Czechoslovakia, at the Pilsner Urquell brewery in the town of Pilsen. (The firm is still in business today, and Pilsner Urquell is available in the U.S.)

What is beer, anyway? you might well ask—besides being just that frothy stuff that tastes so good? Well, beer is sort of like wine, except that it's made from grain instead of grapes. It starts out with a mixture of kinds of grain, usually heavy on the barley. The grain is allowed to "malt"—which means that the grain grows sprouts and the starches it contains become converted, through natural processes, to sugar (which is necessary for fermentation). The grain is then "cooked" with water, and the resulting liquid, called "wort," is drained off into a brewing vessel. Here, flavorings are added; the principle flavoring agent, the one that makes beer taste like beer, is hops, which are blossoms of a vine related to the mulberry bush. The flavored mixture is cooked a bit longer, then the flavoring substances are removed, the mixture is cooled, and brewer's yeast is added. Now fermentation begins. (To make beer, a yeast is used which sinks to the bottom of the fermenting vat and works from there; ale is made with a kind of yeast which floats on the top of the liquid. (And, as long as we're at it, it might as well be mentioned that stout is ale made with roasted malt, and porter is stout fermented to a higher degree of alcohol.) When the fermentation is finished, the beer is filtered, aged for a short time, and then bottled or canned or loaded into barrels—mostly aluminum these days.

This is where the controversy usually starts. Does beer taste better from a barrel than it does from a bottle or can? Do cans give beer a "tinny" taste? In answering these questions, it is good to remember, first of all, that beer didn't always come in cans and bottles. In fact, when the radical notion of bottling beer was first proposed earlier in this century, H.L. Mencken snorted something to the effect that putting beer in a bottle was like putting a kiss in the icebox. He was a curious man, Mencken.

