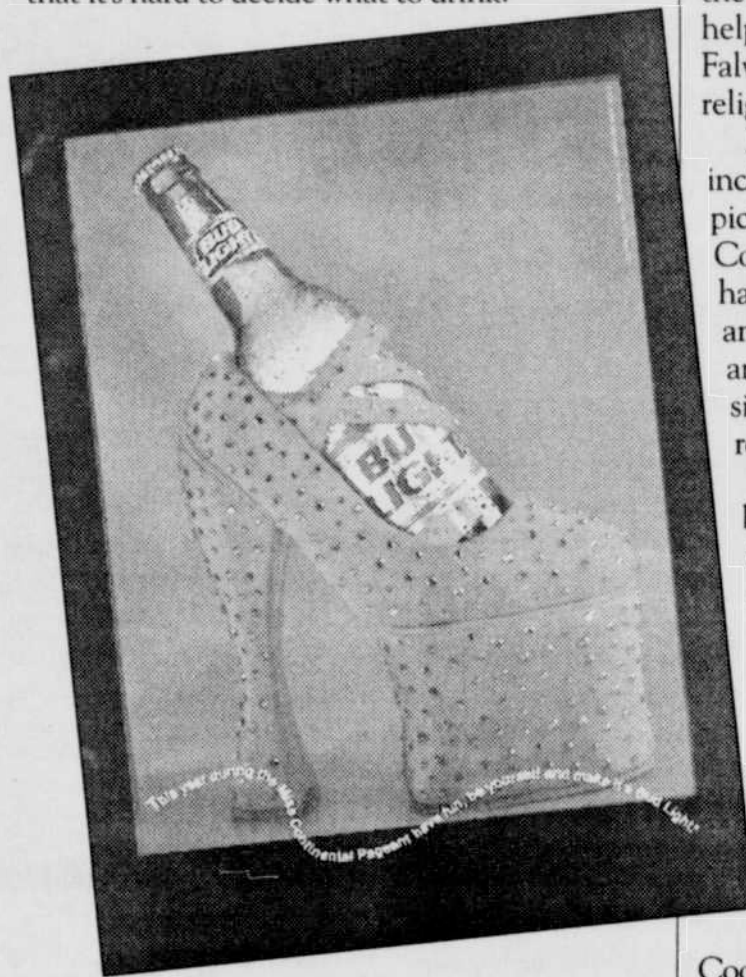


# SO WHAT'LL IT BE?

Taking a closer look at the big three brews shows there is no simple answer to one of the most commonly asked questions by Gip Plaster

"What'll it be?" the bartender innocently asks.

Perhaps the last place you want to worry about making a politically correct decision is in a bar or in the supermarket beer aisle. However, you probably don't want your money going to organizations that support right-wing religious and political causes either. We've heard so many rumors about who supports what that it's hard to decide what to drink.



Should you choose products made by Anheuser-Busch, the largest brewer in the United States, or select a beer by Miller or Coors, number two and three is U.S. sales respectively. Or does it matter?

Since 1977, a California-based group has been boycotting the Colorado-based Coors Brewing Company because the heirs of founder Adolph Coors support conservative political and religious causes.

The Coors family helped launch the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, with a \$250,000 grant in 1973.

Heritage may be best known for authoring *Mandate for Leadership*, a publication considered

the blueprint for the Reagan administration. About two-thirds of *Mandate's* recommendations were adopted within Reagan's first year in office, according to People for the American Way, a Washington, D.C.-based activism and advocacy group that counters the right-wing's political agenda.

The Coors family, along with conservative activist and political operative Paul Weyrich, also created the Committee for the Survival of a Free Press. Later, Weyrich helped engineer the formation of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, a right-wing religious group.

However, some right-wing groups—including followers of AIDS funeral picketer Fred Phelps—are boycotting Coors Brewing because the company has had a gay-inclusive employment anti-discrimination policy for 20 years and has offered domestic partnership benefits since 1995. The brewer also has a company-recognized gay and lesbian employees group.

If the brewing company is gay-friendly but the Coors family is not, who cares? It's the brewing company that makes the beer, right?

It isn't that simple. The almost 6,000-employee brewing company does make the beer, but the nearly 50-member Coors family owns all of the voting stock in the company.

"Most people can contribute money to anyone they want," says Coors Brewing Company spokesman Joe Fuentes. "We need to extend that same courtesy to the Coors family."

Morris Kight, the co-founder of the Los Angeles-based Coors Boycott Committee, says he agrees the family has a right to use its money in any way it wants, but his group also has a right to encourage people to refrain from purchasing Coors, Zima, Keystone and other products until the family changes its giving habits.

Fuentes says the company's policies regarding sexual orientation should speak for themselves. "In total, I think our relationship with the gay and lesbian community is very positive," he says, although he acknowledged the relationship varies from one part of the country to another.

The industry's other large competitors are Anheuser-Busch and Miller.



Miller Brewing Company, the nation's second largest beer maker ranked by sales, controls about 20 percent of the U.S. beer market. In addition to Miller Lite, Genuine Draft, Ice and High Life, it makes Red Dog, Meister Brau, Sharp's nonalcoholic and other brews.

The company has been "heavily involved in the gay and lesbian community for 10 years," company spokesperson Gina Shaffer says.

According to Shaffer, the company heavily supports gay athletics and was the "exclusive malt beverage" of the recent Gay Games V in Amsterdam. Along with Avis and United Airlines, Miller is a 1998 corporate sponsor of the International Gay Rodeo Association.

She adds Miller and its parent company are among the nation's top contributors to AIDS-related causes. "We fill in the gaps of government support," she says.

Still, the Milwaukee-based company might not be the best choice for beer drinkers who are concerned about the health effects of the second-hand smoke they breathe in many bars. The company is a subsidiary of Philip Morris, the huge tobacco business that makes Marlboro, Virginia Slims and other smokes. Philip Morris also owns Kraft, the makers of Jell-O, Oscar Meyer products and Post cereals.

Miller does not offer domestic partnership benefits, but the company has an employment

nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation, says Shaffer.

It's also worth noting that Tom Reed, Miller's openly gay director of public affairs, is a prominent player in Milwaukee's gay and lesbian community.

Anheuser-Busch, maker of the nation's best-selling beers and one of the top brewers in the world, makes Bud and Bud Light as well as Michelob, Busch, ZiegenBock Amber, Red Wolf Lager and others, including O'Doul's non-alcoholic. It controls almost half of the U.S. beer market. The corporation also operates the Busch Gardens and Sea World theme parks.

"We have a good story to tell," boasts Anheuser-Busch spokesman Roi Ewell.

The company's Bud Light brand provided more than \$200,000 in money and products to this year's gay and lesbian pride events in cities across the country, including Atlanta, Houston, San Francisco and New York.

Bud Light also has 11 national print advertising pieces promoting its support of the gay and lesbian community with the phrase "Be yourself and make it a Bud Light."

While Ewell would not reveal which political candidates or initiatives the company supports, he says Anheuser-Busch does not contribute to any religious organizations.

As for its employment practices, late last year the St. Louis-based company settled out of court a case filed by Tom Martin, a former employee who alleged the company discriminated against him because of his sexual orientation. Shortly after the settlement was reached, Anheuser-Busch amended its anti-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation.

Ewell says the company does not offer domestic partnership benefits, but "it's being reviewed for appropriateness."

Obviously, trying to decide which brand is the right beer for gay and lesbian consumers is difficult. Coors is the only one of the top three brewers that offers domestic partnership benefits, but the Coors family supports organizations that have a history of anti-gay activity. Miller and Anheuser-Busch have anti-discrimination policies and support the community in some ways, but neither offer benefits for unmarried couples.

"So what'll it be?" the bartender asks again. "Lemonade," you answer. "On the rocks."

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When Beth got some time off from her hectic job it took no time at all for her to convince Charity to cruise down the Oregon coast. It would be a spur of the moment trip, no plans, no reservations.

They headed south down Highway 101, passing through Yachats when they noticed a little motel off to the side of the road with magenta doors and blue trim. Beth said, that place looks good, so they stopped. They were pleasantly surprised to be greeted by lesbian hosts who escorted them to the Princess and the Pea room.

They spent the next three days lingering by the fire, watching the sun break through the waves, while falling in love with each other—again—and with the magic of the See Vue.

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