

Never underestimate the adventures taking place in our own neighborhood. If you drive to the east end of Monroe Street and turn south on Elm, you'll see a tidy little cottage, white trim, shake roof, spindle porch. Behind the house sits a newish garage. The aromas emanating from this small building in recent years would flare the nostrils of even the most discerning of beer bibbers. Here Michael Knop performs the alchemy that crafts award-winning ales and lagers. Home brewers, technically zymurgists, are those persons engaged in the yeasting and fermentation of beverages. Part artist, part grassroots chemist, Michael is one of the best.

Last week Mike described the basic processes involved in brewing to me. The complexities and subtleties, the possibilities for personal tinkering with the brewing process, appear unlimited.

Mike begins by "building up the yeast" to a "pitching rate". Two to three days prior to brewing, he mixes yeast with malt extract and boils it up to multiply the yeast. Mike places great stock in his yeast selection and cultivation. A brewer can scrounge up a bit of yeast from the darndest places. The sediment dregs left in the bottom of an empty beer glass at the local micro-brewery would suffice handsomely, for example. Next he grinds the mashed barley or "grist". One batch of beer takes about 10 pounds of ground barley. The barley to water ratio is approximately one quart water to one pound of grain. The mashed barley/water formula is then heated at varying temperatures for differing periods of time. Mash for a typical ale, called "infusion mash," sits for 90 minutes at a given temperature. Lager mashes, called "decoction mashes", require multiple temperatures and rests. Great complexity and brewing dexterity seem to be in order here. Mike says this process can last up to six hours, with the brewer carefully monitoring his creation.

After mashing, the brewer "sparges", or bathes, the mash. Called "lautering", this process rinses the grains to remove extracts and sugars. What remains is termed "sweet wort". The sweet wort is brought to a boil and hops are added. Classical pale ale hops are Kent Goldings and Fuggles hops from Britain. The classic American hops are Cascade and Willamette hops from our own region. German Tettnanger and Hallertauer hops traditionally flavor lagers. At this stage the liquid is termed a "bitter wort".

While boiling this viscous beer soup of water and vegetative matter, a "hot break" is achieved. Mike describes this as the stage "where proteins coagulate with hops and create a turbid, unwanted mess of goo." The wort is then cooled in a heat exchanger that rapidly lowers the liquid to 65-70 degrees. This drives the turbid protein sludge to the bottom as the wort cools (a "cold break").

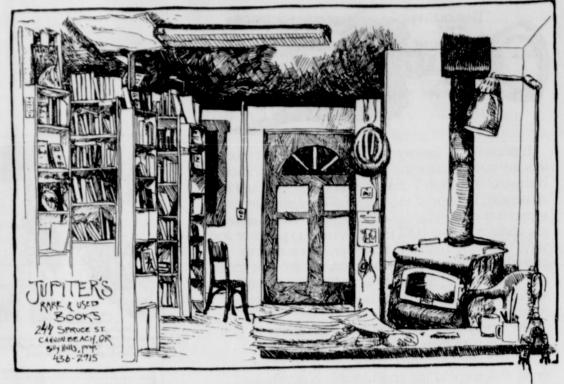
At this point the cleansed beer may be racked from the break and the yeast "pitched" into the liquid. After 3-5 days storage in a primary fermenter any unwanted residue is siphoned off and the remaining liquid rests in a secondary fermenter to achieve clarity.

When clear, bottle.

Wait, patiently, for one month and prepare yourself for beer unexcelled by any product domestic or foreign. Carefully tended homebrew is the best beer. Unequivocally.

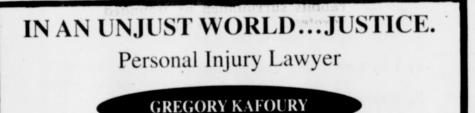
Mike has received the following awards in National Homebrewer's competition: '94, Bronze Medal, "Terry Porter"; '95, Silver Medal, English Mild Ale; '95, Gold Medal in final round, "Make Me Hoppy" American Pale Ale, 7th in nation; Best of Style, "Fly in the Rye" Amber Ale, Seattle contest sponsored by Portland Brewing Co.

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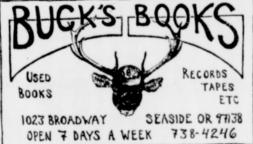






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ENVIRONMENTAL & PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Having just survived a dreadful January & February filled with wind, ice, rain, floods and road closures it is hard to focus on any other issues. Too many honest and hard working people have been devastated emotionally and financially. It is difficult not to dwell on the causes of all this adversity. Much as I'd like to chalk it up to the whims of nature, I just can't. Isn't it time to listen to what the earth is telling us and to take stock of our lifestyles? Is it too much to ask that we begin to harmonize with the environment as opposed to trying to control it? In my opinion, it makes more sense to live within the parameters of natural laws than to continually challenge and defy them. Why not place all political, religious and popular opinion aside and seriously identify the primary environmental issues we need to deal with? Perhaps getting to the root of our problems will displace the need to deal with the secondary and sometimes more trendy disputes. Not to mention it could help to alleviate some of the horrific traumas that have been occurring.

We have all been bombarded with information regarding building in flood plains or areas that are prime for erosion, the effects of global warming and the dangers of pesticides but one issue that isn't as newsworthy lately is overpopulation. One of the greatest problems we face in sustaining our environment is an ever increasing population. The notion that this is just a third world issue is as silly as not being concerned about the ozone holes because they aren't in our back yard -- at least not yet. We are already fighting about land ownership and public reserve rights. Who can cut down what trees or what can be built in an area some deem as pristine. However, as long as our population escalates we will continue to cut down trees and clear land for building, farmlands or grazing and use more chemicals to "control" that land. We will also produce and use more without much more thought than how it will benefit ourselves. It is human nature to want to create families and to provide a better life for those families. Perhaps what we should ask ourselves is if what we are providing is better or just more. This harkens back to the old quality -vs.-quantity debate. I am not advocating childless lives, but rather contemplation as to why we bring children into our lives and if what we provide them with is positive to them as well as to the collective family of mankind and our environment. Deciding to have children and the parenting of them should be the most difficult and important decision we make.

Population is one of our primary concerns in the global well-being of the earth. Overpopulation causes a myriad of problems that drain not only our resources but our society in

There are many other topics that can and need to be addressed in order to live kindly upon our earth. So as we run joyously into Spring, I am asking that we each identify which issues are the basis for our concerns about the degradation of the environment and how our lifestyles are effected; and of those issues, what can we do individually to change our habits, what needs to be done corporately and governmentally, and how can we influence those changes occurring. You know one person joined with many other individuals can make a difference.