



What About Vietnam - S4- E6 - Craft beers in Vietnam - A heads up!

Kerry Newsome: 00:18

Xin Chào and welcome to ""[What About Vietnam!](#)"" Our subject today is "Craft Beer". And it's an amazing topic to bring up as in regard to Vietnam, but to not include it in the show and to not have it up there, as something really worth talking about would be crazy because there's a real craft beer scene happening in Vietnam as we speak. And that's been developing in a really strong way just over the last maybe three, four years in particular. And I'm delighted today to have Gary Bett on the show.

01:13

Gary is the Head Brewer and founder of "[The Five Elements](#)" Brewing Company, which is a small independent brewery in Da Nang. Gary's been in the brewing industry for over 40 years and worked in the UK, Australia, Fiji, China, India, and Vietnam. He actually started as a hot chemist. I don't know what a hot chemist does, I wish I'd asked him actually in the show, I should have done that. And he started that role, with the brewing Research Foundation in the UK before becoming an actual Brewer with CB in Melbourne, Australia.

01:48

After finding himself responsible for Foster's breweries in Asia, India, China, and Vietnam, he always loved coming to Vietnam, which is where he eventually decided to set up his business after leaving Fosters. Vietnam is a great beer market. And as it turns out, this is quite an interesting statistic to take on board is the fact that of all alcohol consumed in Vietnam, 95% of it is beer, which is quite extraordinary when you do compare it to other countries around the world. Now, the one important thing about craft beers and Vietnamese craft beers is that you've got to come to Vietnam to try them. And I'm delighted that Gary is on the show because he has the Brewhaha taprooms in Da Nang, he also has them in Quảng Ngãi and Nha Trang. And he opens more in the coming years.

02:48

He brews a very interesting Five Element Brew, or brews. And he talks about some of the local ingredients that he has access to in the Northern Highlands and in the Central Highlands, where he uses various different natural ingredients to flavor the beers. And it's those natural

ingredients and those flavors, which is the craft obviously, and he tells us a little bit about that. But it means that when you go to try them in the future when you do come to Vietnam and let's face it, you've got to, it's just an experience to have. But you're going to start thinking about some of these flavors that Gary has mentioned. Look, all the details will be in the show notes and available in the transcript on our website, WhatAboutVietnam.com If you prefer to go there and read about it, it's all going to be there.

03:45

In addition, I've kind of added on the website, a really fun activity and fun offer. So, check it out. It is the BBQ Beech Food Tour. And let me tell you what it involves. It takes you through the food markets of Da Nang and it's done with an operator who actually is a qualified chef. And he will then after you've had bite sized pieces, a little taste tests along the way, you will actually get whipped off to this secret location in Da Nang which is beach side. And then he will cook up using some of the bits and bobs that he's bought at the markets on the day. You'll get greeted there with beers, local beers, craft beers, and some wine and over a setting with a bonfire candles and music. The whole tour wraps up with you sipping some nice, long cool drinks over a sunset. I had a hand in crafting this with the operator in Da Nang and I just feel 100% Sure you're going to love it. So please check it out. However, it's time to get ourselves acquainted with craft beers in Vietnam, and I can't think of anybody else to do it better than Gary Bett, who's sitting in Da Nang. So, let's welcome Gary to the program.

: 05:19

Xin Chào and welcome to the What About Vietnam Podcast. Today I'm speaking with Gary Bett. Gary, welcome to the show.

Gary Bett: 05:29

Thanks for having me.

Kerry Newsome: 05:30

Look, today we're going to be talking about a favorite beverage amongst Vietnamese. Well, I mean, I don't think it's exclusive to Vietnamese, how much they love beer. I mean, I'm an Aussie. So clearly, I come from a country that loves beer. But in particular, today, I'm talking to you about craft beer. Because craft beer, in my experience over the last few years in Vietnam, has really been coming up in the headlines, you've got to try the craft beers. Go to Da Nang, you've got to go and try craft beer. So, Gary, I see you as the entrepreneur in this area. And you've certainly been doing a lot of work over the last few years in the craft beer industry in Vietnam having come from a beer and a brewing history. Tell us a little bit about what makes a craft beer.

Gary Bett: 06:31

How does a craft beer distinguish itself from a commercial beer? I think it's in the word craft. And that's all about natural ingredients, about the Vietnamese say, "**beer thủ công**" which means "handmade", thủ công, it's made with the hands, which I think sums it up. So, this is we're talking about small breweries, small independent breweries, making a natural product making beer. And in Vietnam, of course, there's some special ingredients that you can draw on. And also, there's a vibrant Vietnamese cuisine, which of course, influences tastes and

preferences. And so, there's been quite a variety of craft beers that have been developed in Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: 07:17

So, when we think about craft beer, we're thinking about a beer that is handcrafted. And you did say that this beer includes some natural ingredients. Can you talk to us a little bit about some of those flavors and some of those natural ingredients that define it?

Gary Bett: 07:42

Sure, sure. I mean, beer is... Beer, by definition is malted barley, malted grain, hops, and yeast. And with craft brewing, we've introduced other ingredients. So, the local ingredients, I'm brewing a range of beers, I brew five beers as the Five Elements range, the Ngu Hanh range. And so, we use... we basically have an international style beer, perhaps the well-known beer, and then we're adding a Vietnamese flavor that's complementary to that. So, for instance, I'll give an example. We brew a beer, Tho, which is a black forest ale.

08:24

Now that evokes all those- gives you a bit of a picture straightaway of what you're looking at. But we had Nam Huong which is a forest mushroom. So, it's a Vietnamese shiitake mushroom. And that adds a richness to it, that you normally- add flavor to it. But it's complimentary to the background beer craft. I make a very good, Weizen beer, but it's probably more of a Belgium style where it's a wheat beer, but it's had the citrus that you would normally find in a Belgium wheat beer, it's from Mac Mat, which is a leaf that you would see you'd see in Vietnam wrapped around pork, because there was a barbecue pork. So, we're using a Mac Mat leaf in particular- these citrus notes in a wheat beer. So, these are the kinds of things you can do and experiment with and come up with some very interesting and different flavors.

Kerry Newsome: 09:24

Be it that you are handcrafting these beers and I guess, quantity wise, does that make a batch of beer- even though you're using the same ingredients, does that make one batch of beer slightly different from another? Or are they kind of traditionally exactly all the same? So, on any given day, you can't really tell the difference, even though it's a different batch or a new batch.

Gary Bett: 09:53

Yeah, we produce in relatively small batches, certainly comparing with the big breweries, but it gives you an ability to experiment. So, we have maybe a 500-liter batch or a 1000-liter batch. And then that could get consumed very quickly and therefore, you can change the next, a bit more of this, bit less of that, which you can do.

10:21

We have our own taprooms, all the craft brewers here in Vietnam tend to have their own taprooms. So, we can have regular customers come in and you can say, the latest batch of this particular beer, you should give this one a try. So, again, it's a variety within your own range. I mean, all brewers aim for consistency, I mean, once you've gone through a good

recipe, you want to keep that recipe consistent. So, we've hit the mark with quite a few of our beers now, with some of the beers we're still experimenting, which is part of the fun, both for the brewer and for the drinker in terms of what's his latest batch.

Kerry Newsome: 11:03

Just to make sure that I'm understanding this. So, these beers that you made, obviously have got a lifespan. So, talk to me about preservatives and alcohol content and things like that. What is the life of a brewed batch of beer?

Gary Bett: 11:21

Beer should be consumed as quickly as it can be, to when it was produced. We're all natural.

- We don't use preservatives.
- We don't pasteurize.
- In fact, we don't filter at the moment.

So, it's a completely natural product. We would like to see the beer consumed probably within one or two months after we've made it. I mean, they are usually consumed quite a lot faster than that, certainly within a month. Again, it comes back to this having small batches, it gives you the opportunity to do that small batches, if you have a small batch in your own outlets, you can sell the product through and make sure it's moving. That just becomes less of an issue.

Kerry Newsome: 12:07

Okay, talk about the alcohol content.

Gary Bett: 12:12

The alcohol content, we have a range of... well, our beers have a range, we have Kim who is standard 4.6% Alcohol. So, it's very easy to drink. End of the day, either you've been to the beach, or you've been working or had to work in Vietnam. But if you are certainly convinced the beach has a great end of the day kind of drink. And then we have a range of different alcohols and different products right up to Tui, which is a Belgium Strong Dark Ale, which is seven and a half percent alcohol. That's what we brew. Now some of the other brewers think, they've been brewing a lot, some stronger alcohols that vary up to 10%. But I don't think those are particularly session beers. Maybe you have one. So, I strongly say, at the moment is a seven and a half percent alcohol. And then we have an ingredient called Tagua which is like black cardamom. Add some black cardamom in it, which gives it that kind of spicy, almost a Christmas cake addition really.

Kerry Newsome: 13:13

So, for my listeners who are coming to Vietnam, there's only one way they're going to try these beers. Because they only exist in your brewery in Vietnam. They can't buy them off the shelf anywhere else, can they?

Gary Bett: 13:32

No, they can't at the moment anyway, maybe in time we'll, we'll package, and we'll export but at the moment we're selling only in our own outlets and some key accounts. We've got some friendly accounts that we supply to. So, at the moment, we have three outlets. We have one in

Nha Trang. We have one in Quảng Ngãi and we have one here in Da Nang. And they've been open a year now actually, the biggest one has been over a year now, pretty centrally located and easy to find in [Nha Trang](#), [Da Nang](#) and [Quảng Ngãi](#). And then we supply to some outlets down in Phú Quốc, which is a pretty famous tourist destination. And we will slowly introduce into other markets. Either we open the more outlets, or we supply to more key accounts.

14:22

But if somebody's visiting Vietnam and they want to try craft beer, there's a number of craft breweries down in Saigon. There's a number of them in Hanoi. There's not as many in Central Vietnam. So, in Saigon, you've got [Pasteur Steet](#). You've got [Heart of Darkness](#). You've got Taytay. There's been an explosion or there was an explosion of craft brewers in Vietnam. And similarly, in, in Hanoi there's more than a couple, there's a few craft brewers up in Hanoi. An interesting place for tasting beers probably not expecting their way. I think there's one thing about Vietnam, which I don't think everybody appreciates is that the Vietnamese are absolutely beer centric. It's part of their culture, it's part of their social life. I often use the statistic, of alcohol consumed, 95% of alcohol consumed in Vietnam by Vietnamese is beer. Now that might seem to be...

Kerry Newsome: 15:21

Staggering.

Gary Bett: 15:22

Well, it's an outlier. It's out there on its own, everywhere else, every other country would have a pretty mix of different alcohols. In Thailand, it will be whiskey, in Japan, it will be Saké, it might be rice wine in China. There can be Soju in Korea, there's always an alternative of wine in some markets, there's always an alternative alcohol is socialization, alcohol consumed. But in Vietnam, and it has been as far as long as I've known Vietnam, it's beer. And it's not just guys, it's wives and families, and beer is a central part of socializing.

Kerry Newsome: 16:07

How did the Vietnamese market take to craft beer?

Gary Bett: 16:12

Very well, I mean, as you say, they're just general love and openness to the product, which helps and isn't the Vietnamese are very curious. So, they're naturally curious about new things and international trends, they are very conscious. There's a lot of Vietnamese who go for education overseas, so they can go to the US, and they go to Australia, UK. So, they come back, and they know what the latest has been happening. And then they obviously- the Vietnamese see what the tourists are looking for, and the international business travelers are looking for. And then they're obviously very open to craft beer. So, I think that is generally pretty well accepted. It's not really the barrier that you would normally see for new products or new initiatives. It wasn't something that had to be overly sold.

Kerry Newsome: 17:03

Why am I laughing at that? No, it wouldn't be hard to sell. And just to clarify for me as well. Do you- I know you have it on tap. But you are obviously have it in bottles as well? Or how do you distribute it to other places like Phu Quoc?

Gary Bett: 17:26

At the moment, I'm just kegging. The new beers have bottled and canned beers in Vietnam before. There's a very pure efficient bottle recycling system in Vietnam, which is obviously environmentally friendly. And it's part of the way that beer industry in Vietnam works. And then for the model of trade, I'm talking about convenience stores and supermarkets, they're pretty open to having cans on the shelf. So, there's some canning, so actually, I'm looking at buying a canned line, maybe early next year, as there is a can plant only half a kilometer away from my brewery. So, it makes sense for me to start thinking about doing cans.

Kerry Newsome: 18:17

I wanted to just delve a little bit more into the natural ingredients that you started talking about. And maybe could you speak to us just a little bit about how and where you get some of those natural ingredients from? And is this becoming an industry that a lot of Vietnamese are wanting to work in?

Will you pass on your skills to become a brewer and things like that. Like is the industry kind of heading that way?

Yeah, I'd just like to know more about not so much the mushrooms but the mushrooms and like cardamom and things like that, because what I think is unique to Vietnam is the flavors and the flavors in Vietnam for some people are quite intense. Sometimes they can get upset tummies and things like that, but I feel it's rich in flavor. So, for me it suits me, but I think the way vegetables that are grown, the soil and all that kind of stuff plays a role. So maybe speak to us a little bit about that and why did you choose mushrooms over, something else? Or why did you go- what steered you in, in which direction?

Gary Bett: 19:43

Okay, can I start first with what the basic raw materials for beer?

Kerry Newsome: 19:48

Yes. That was a big question. I just realized that.

Gary Bett: 19:52

So, the basic raw materials for beer are barley or malted barley, generally, and hops and yeast. So actually, Vietnam doesn't have any barley growing regions or hop growing regions in Vietnam. But it is in the middle of between the big areas that do have that. So, we can choose to get our barley from Europe, or we can choose to get our barley from Canada, or we can choose to get our barley from Australia, actually, in Vietnam, most of the barley actually comes from Australia, I think. And there is a malting plant where the barley is, is malted here in Vietnam, run by [Intermalt](#), which is associated Western Australia Barley Industry.

20:39

So that's important. And then the hops again, can come from Australia, or can come from the US or can come from Europe, Germany, or France, or wherever. So, we have a selection of all

sorts of or different varieties of hops from around the world, which gives the craft brewers the flexibility to choose where they get their hops from. Now, in terms of- that is international component of the beer, which is pretty standard. And as far as the local component, I'm quite lucky in that- my wife's Vietnamese and her relatives have landed up in the Central Highlands, in Northern Highlands. And so, we can draw directly from their farm.

21:23

So, if something like Mak Mak, we can get on the phone and have it delivered in a day or two, when we run short, the forest- the shiitake, the Nam Han, which is the shiitake mushrooms, which comes from the Northern Highlands. And that comes from the forest. So basically, people go out into the forest and harvest these, these mushrooms, and then they put them on bamboo, dry them and put them on bamboo sticks. And that's how we receive them. And so, they're very natural. And then likewise, with the Tagua, the black cardamom, and that, again, is a spice that comes from the highlands.

22:01

And then we have Soy spice, which is as a spice, a true spice, or a hot spice. And we're using [inaudible 22:09], which is the beer Quah, which is a Forest Fire. So, we use it in the spicy red ale, and we add the Soy space to that. But all the local ingredients, they add, they are complimentary to the beer and they're not going to bite your head off. They're subtle flavors that are complementary to the beer. So, you might not like them. Sometimes, we have customers that don't like a particular flavor. But that's the whole thing about having choice.

22:37

You want particular like that on, but you love that one, and we find that a lot. Some people might like it, some people might not so, but that's great. I think that's a good part about it, we see flavors, and what I'm trying to do as well with the flavors, is, there should be recognizable to Vietnamese. So, you see them, they're tasting, and they go, they recognize it,

"Not sure! Not sure!"

if there is a flavor going... And then when you say what it is,

"Yeah, that's what it is. Yeah. Okay."

So, it might feel like, my target consumer, a local consumer. And so, it gives them a- now I am used to the five elements are talking point of the Nhu Hang, the narrative about The Five Elements is a talking point, but also the flavors they recognize, not straightaway, but they suddenly realize where that flavor is coming from. So that's what I do.

Kerry Newsome: 23:31

Yeah, and that's kind of a nice story to tell about it that you are targeting locals and Vietnamese. And obviously they're resonating with those flavors. And they're trying to pick it. And I think it's just, say when you are trying these beers. That's kind of part of the adventure, isn't it?

Gary Bett: 23:55

I don't really want to do copycat craft beer. So, I don't want to do that. A New England IPA. I mean, why would I want to do a New England IPA in Vietnam, just copying a style. And leaving as it is, I don't see much point in that. So, I just want to try and create something, as you say that's appealing to the locals, which is recognizable, has a good story behind it. And I like as well, which is good too.

Kerry Newsome: 24:26

Thanks very much for being on the show. I just want to finish up with what I'm going to include in the show for everyone listening. So, we'll include obviously the addresses of where your breweries, or where people can go to try it. So, we'll definitely put those in the show. I want to put a little bit more around The Five Styles. So, I might get you to give us a little bit more information there so everyone listening can understand that. Is there anything you want to finish off with?

Gary Bett: 25:02

It's always a bit difficult talking about beer without a beer in front of you. So, I'd really like [laughter] so if anybody's coming to Vietnam, by all means come to our Brewhaha in Da Nang or and if I'm here, always ask for me. I am more than happy to sit down and talk about the beers and beer glass in front of me. I think it's a lot easier, a bit more fun.

Kerry Newsome: 25:25

A bit more fun. Brilliant. Thanks for being on the show Gary. All the best.

Gary Bett: 25:29

Okay, thank you. Thanks very much. Thank you.

Links as promised:

BREWHAHA FB - <https://m.facebook.com/brewhahavietnam>

BREWHAHA NHA TRANG

0779 027 779

<https://goo.gl/maps/h9yqLxhuH5wUh6ca6>

BrewHaHa QN

0763 537 676

<https://goo.gl/maps/FbkRWstKBqwDKgkW9>

Brewhaha - Danang

091 134 09 89

<https://goo.gl/maps/fHPig3rJPVEPmjeQ9>