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## BEER: Rule Beertannia

These are boom times for British brewing. Despite the downturn in the economy and the ever-decreasing volumes of beer being drunk in pubs, the small beer scene is getting bigger.



In 2004, there were only 480 microbreweries in the UK while back in 1975 the number of breweries numbered merely 141.

2011 can't rival 1900 when there were 1,324 breweries in the UK, but there's no way the turn-of-the-century brewers could compete with the UK's contemporary's craft brewing scene in terms of diversity of style, innovation, technical expertise and entrepreneurial derring-do.

*the drinks business* has consulted an array of industry observers and in-the-know ale imbibers to find out which craft brewers are the ones to watch? Who, in particular, is pushing the envelope of innovation? Which microbreweries are well-placed to go to macro? If and when there's a shakeout (and there normally is following a boom) then who will still be standing? And, more importantly, who is simply brewing lovely beer?

Alas, space doesn't allow an exhaustive list but here, in no order other than alphabetical, are a selection of small and medium-sized British microbrewers, from southern England to Scotland, being touted for bright brewing futures.



### 1) BrewDog

It's almost impossible to ignore BrewDog, its bark bigger than any other British micro. Since its formation in 2006 by James Watt and Martin Dickie, the Aberdeenshire-based operation has established itself as the naughty boy of British brewing.

Masters of mischief-making marketing, it (deliberately) drew the wrath of the *Daily Mail* and other tut-tutting temperance types by brewing the strongest beer in the world – not once, not twice, but three times in 2010.

Only 12 bottles of the last effort, a 55% Belgian-style ale called "The End of History" were released – each one packaged in various types of taxidermy including a squirrel and a stoat. It also dispatched a dwarf to the House of Commons to campaign for the introduction of the two-third of a pint measure.

While BrewDog's anarchic and antagonistic approach (one unashamedly aped from the likes of Stone Brewing in the States) has ruffled feathers of some in the brewing industry, it doesn't take away from the fact that BrewDog also happens to brew some excellent ales and lagers.

Inspired by the American craft brewing scene, BrewDog boasts a big, brash brewing signature but, unlike some Stateside suds, there's balance to its beer.

Punk IPA, which BrewDog recently started producing in aluminium cans at Daniel Thwaites' brewery, is an accessible IPA while connoisseurs get awfully excited about its whisky cask-aged imperial stout named Paradox and an imperial stout called Tokyo.



### 2) Camden Town

London was once an unrivalled brewing metropolis, its breweries the envy of the world and the engine room for a thriving and thirsty empire, the brick stacks of Whitbread, Watney, Ind Coope, Truman and Charrington smudging the city's 19th century skyline.

At its peak, London was home to more than 160 breweries but, a few years ago, the number of London breweries could be counted on one hand – even if you're TV's animal expert Terry Nutkins, who had a finger bitten off by an otter.

But, thankfully, Camden Town is one of a number of new ventures now breathing life back into London's brewing legacy. But what differs Camden from other start-ups in the Capital is, well, the capital that seems to be behind it.

The Camden Town brewhouse, housed beneath an array of arches in North London, is no botched-together bucket and barrel endeavour. It's a shimmering sea of stainless steel, that can't have come cheap, capable of creating both bottom and top fermenting beers.

Owner Jasper Cuppage, an Australian who first ran the Horseshoe brewpub in Hampstead when he arrived in the UK back in 2005, launched Camden Town last year and alongside head brewer Troels Prahl now furnish London pubs with a choice of four keg beers – Camden Hells Lager, Camden Pale Ale, Camden Wheat Beer and Camden Bitter.

Inspired by Sierra Nevada, an American micro that's gone macro without losing its integrity, Camden has cold-shouldered crazy extreme brewing in favour of quality, consistency and acute ecological awareness.



### 3) Dark Star

The Dark Star Brewing Company has been on the British brewing scene since 1994 when, in its embryonic form, it was just a home-brew operation in the cellar of the Evening Star, a super-duper specialist beer pub near Brighton station.

More than a decade and a half later, and following two relocations, the latest brewhouse, all



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shiny and state-of-the-art, can currently be found in Partridge Green, north of Brighton in the heart of West Sussex.

Equipped to create both ale and lager, its Darkstar's eclectic approach and enormous array of envelope-pushing array of beers that differentiates it from hundreds of other small beer businesses.

In 2011, Darkstar is set to brew more than two dozen different beers. In addition to the core range of ales, which includes its revered Espresso Porter and its eponymous former Champion Beer of Britain, the roster includes a Belgian Saison in the summer; a Smoked Porter devised in conjunction with the Odell Brewing; a Victorian Mild and a Green Hopped IPA.

Managing director Paul Reed is also always on the lookout for possible collaborations with other brewers and recently Darkstar teamed up with Thornbridge to produce the "ThornStar" – a black IPA.

While such diversity often leads to a dilution in quality at other breweries, Darkstar has maintained its revered reputation for quality and consistency among both the trade and ale-loving elbow benders.



#### 4) Fyne Ales

"People drink with their eyes" - there can be few small breweries that adhere to this marketing mantra more passionately than Fyne Ales.

Situated in a disused dairy on the edge of Loch Fyne, this Scottish micro has been brewing great beers for a decade having been founded by former dairy farmer Jonny Delap and his wife Tuggy.

Its eight ales have won an array of awards and carved a nice little niche among craft beer enthusiasts. But, such is the shallow world in which we live and buy stuff, you need eye-catching aesthetics to thrive in the beer aisle and, regardless of the lush liquids that lay within, the homespun bottles didn't hack it with supermarket buyers.

James Delap, who took over the business last year following the sad death of his father Jonny, recruited a Glasgow-based design agency who modernised the look of the labels and bottles.

The result was incredible with sales of Fyne Ales growing its turnover to more than £800,000, and its beers can now be found on the specialist beer shelves of Oddbins and Waitrose as well as JD Wetherspoons.

Following the rebranding, Fyne's reach now stretches as far as Hong Kong and Scandinavia while word and sip of its awesome ales is spreading among the craft beer drinking community further south.



#### 5) Ilkley

People from Yorkshire tend to like things from Yorkshire – be it pudding, tea or beer. Following Carlsberg's decision to take Tetley's out of Leeds, Yorkshire ale enthusiasts need look no further than the Ilkley Brewery, an embryonic ale-making operation situated near the famous moor.

Set-up in 2009 by Stewart Ross and Chris Ives, two beer drinking buddies who'd previously worked in property, Ilkley has enjoyed impressive early success – winning several awards and decent distribution for its range of cask ales and bottle conditioned beers – of which Mary Jane, a citrusy session bitter, is the flagship drop. It was also one of a number of micros to unleash a black IPA towards the end of last year.

Such is their success and to meet burgeoning demand, Ilkley has had to upgrade to a new brewery and many in the industry are mentioning it as one to watch.



#### 6) Kent Brewery

Kent, historically a hotbed of hops and brewing, doesn't just boast Britain's oldest brewery in the shape of Shepherd Neame, it may also have the newest.

The Kent Brewery only began brewing last November but, according to Martin Hayes at the CASK Pub and Kitchen, one of London's leading beer bars, the quality of the ales is immense. "They're first four beers have been extremely good and it seems to be a very promising set-up," he said.

Founded by ale-loving entrepreneur Paul Herbert and brewer Toby Simmonds, formerly of Dark Star, the new endeavour aims to source hops from within the county where possible and encourage farmers to help them explore new varieties.

The initial batch of traditional-with-a-twist beers include a dark golden ale, a ginger infused brew called Zingiber and two classic English ales – a bitter and a pale from the Kent countryside. Not a sentence you should try saying if you'd had a few.



#### 7) Kernel

Beneath a railway bridge in Bermondsey, south London, amid the arches of the aptly-named Druid Street, ale alchemist and Irishman Evin O'Riordain is fast becoming the most talked-about microbrewer in the UK.

The former home brewer and cheesemaker began brewing professionally in 2009 and has become a lynchpin of the London brewing scene – with many of his beautifully packaged brews making into the chillers of the capital's top style bars and restaurants including Hawksmoor in Covent Garden.

O'Riordain deftly dovetails London beer styles with the innovation and experimentation that has characterised the American craft brewing scene.

In addition to a cornucopia of collaborative brews in conjunction with other brewers and beer bars, Kernel's core range consists of a London porter; a Baltic porter; an IPA brewed with three hop varieties; a SIBA award-winning export stout based on an 1890 London recipe; and a pair of single-hop pale ales.



#### 8) Lovibonds

Three years after the Brakspear brewery abandoned Henley-on-Thames in 2002, after nearly three centuries of brewing, American enthusiast, who hails from Wisconsin, Jeff Rosenmeier began brewing small-batch beers and distributing them to local pubs.

Not long after, Rosenmeier named his brewery Lovibonds after an ale-maker that brewed beers in Henley some years before. Unlike its eponymous predecessor, modern day Lovibonds has kept clear of cask ales and prefers to distribute its array of unpasteurised brews in keg and stylish bottles.

In terms of styles, and like the rowers at the local Henley Regatta, Rosenmeier pushes the boat out. Its stable of suds includes an amber ale, a smoked malt-driven dark beer, a wheat beer and an IPA called Route 69 that, unwittingly, embroiled the brewery in a rather ridiculous trademark spat with Diageo, purveyor of Vat 69 whisky.

But perhaps Lovibonds' most audacious effort is Sour Grapes, a stupendous sour Lambic-style ale brewed with wild yeast and aged in Pinot Noir barrels. They're excellent beers that many feel, by being kept in keg, are ahead of the curve.



#### 9) Marble

By far Manchester's most remarkable micro is Marble Beers, which began life in a Victorian Grade II listed Marble Arch pub in the city.

Renowned initially for their organic ales, Marble has been making magic with the mashfork for more than a decade yet it's in the last couple of years that their eclectic range beers has drifted down south and gained a strong beer following while, in Manchester, they've opened a boss little beer bar in the city's Northern Quarter.

Its beers, purveyed in seriously pucker packaging, are certified vegan as no finings are used to clear them after brewing. But Marble's reputation is not built on animal welfare nor are its drinkers merely Mung bean eating Mancunians.

The reason that Marble is making such waves in craft beer drinking circles is that it knows how to brew beers extremely well and it's not afraid to experiment with ginger beer, chocolate beer and a feverishly fruity IPA.

Here's hoping that 2011 will see Marble making its way onto the shelves of supermarkets as, as it stands, its ales are all too elusive from a southern softie perspective.



#### 10) Meantime Brewing

"We've taken what history has to offer and we're taking everything that cutting-edge technology has to offer and we're condensing it into modern London living," said Alastair Hook, Meantime Brewing's outspoken brewer and founder.

"What we're doing is taking the world beer order, grabbing it by its feet, turning it upside down, giving it a shake and watching all the grubby coins fall out."

For many boutique beer drinkers, Meantime needs no introduction. Back in 1999, from an inauspicious industrial estate near the then Millennium Dome, Meantime began ploughing a lonely brewing furrow.

Not only was it one of just three proper London breweries (Fuller's and Young's being the other two at the time), it broke from cask brewing convention by concentrating on keg ales and lush lager-style beers.

Inspired by the brewing scene in America, Hook learned how to brew in Edinburgh and Munich and lead the way in reawakening long-forgotten London beer styles such as IPA and London Porter.

2010 saw Meantime open two new breweries. First there was a boss new brewpub and restaurant at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, one of London's oldest brewing sites dating back to 1717.

And then, not long after, Meantime opened a £2m state-of-the-art brewery that constitutes the largest new brewery in London since Giles Gilbert Scott opened the Park Royal brewery for Guinness in 1936.

A core range of thirteen beers ranges from a Hospital Porter using *Brettanomyces* and a Raspberry beer to a London lager and a Franconian-style Kellerbier.

The pilot brewery at the Royal Naval College allows Meantime to experiment with limited edition additions and furnish members of its College Beer Club, a made up of 500 passionate beer lovers, with exclusive one-off efforts – the latest being a superb Scotch Ale packaged in a 75cl cork-and-caged bottle



#### 11) Moor

With the drinks industry on a bond of good behaviour, suggesting people drink Moor beer may seem irresponsible. But, seriously, you should drink Moor beer as it's really rather splendid.

Started as a small five-barrel set-up in Somerset back in 1996, Moor scooped CAMRA's Champion Winter Beer of Britain for Old Freddy Walker in 2004 but it wasn't until 2007, when Justin and Maryann Hawke too the brewery over, that Moor emerged as one of the UK's most dynamic micros.

Enthused by the ale making antics of brewers in his native California, Justin brews quintessentially English ales, in both cask and keg, and bottle-conditioned beers with an aggressive American accent. While Old Freddy Walker remains a connoisseur choice, Moor makes six other staple beers of which JJJ IPA, an immense

imperial IPA, raises the most eyebrows.

Moor's experimentation can be seen in its selection of seasonals that includes an Autumnal ale brewed with sloe berries.



## 12) Ramsgate Brewing

Eddie Gadd has been in beer, from a professional perspective at least, for eighteen years having begun brewing on behalf of the Firkin brewpub chain back in the mid-1990s.

In 2002, he began brewing beer in the back of a rough-round-the-edges Ramsgate boozery only to, four years later, step things up and set-up a bigger brewhouse in a shed. An experimental ale maker, Gadd brews five regular brews, five "irregular" beers and three bottled beers that run a full gamut of styles.

As well as brewing Dogbolter, an infamous liquid legacy from the Firkin family, Gadd keeps loyal to Kent by infusing several ales with hops from the Garden of England.

Far from myopically English in outlook, the Ramsgate range also includes a wheat beer, a hoppy pilsner and a Scottish shilling beer.



## 13) Steel City

The thing about Steel City Brewing, the thing that differentiates it from other cult craft brewers, is that they don't own a brewery.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that, if you're trying to brew beer, a lack of a brewery would be rather problematic. But that's not the case.

Steel City Brewing, founded by Gazza Prescott and Dave Szejewski, is what people call a "cuckoo" brewer. Rather than being shackled by oppressive overheads, Steel City chooses to potter around Yorkshire like a hop-obsessed hobo, collaborating with the county's key craft brewers and borrowing both their brewing brains and equipment to create their dry-hopped beers.

Gazza and Dave are prolific when it comes to expanding their portfolio of hop-driven beers (the brewery tagline is "we know what hops are for") and lean unashamedly towards lupulin-laden liquids and IPAs of various different hues.



## 14) Thornbridge Brewery

Those seeking a micro-brewing blueprint for success could do a lot worse than direct their gaze towards Bakewell in Derbyshire, the £2m state-of-the-art home of Thornbridge Brewery.

In the six years since it began brewing from a stonemason's workshop in the grounds of a grandiose Jacobean manor in Ashford-in-the-Water, Thornbridge has established itself as arguably the UK's most impressive of the "new world" British brewers.

Melding food science, brewing history, modern brewing techniques and a shrewd marketing approach, Thornbridge has pretty much won every brewing award out there.

Its erudite approach to cask ale is "a contemporary take on the traditional" yet it's not overly whacky and, by intelligently integrating innovative and unusual ingredients, there's a lot of balance to the beers – all of which are unpasteurised and unfiltered.

In this age of extreme brewing, it's refreshing to see session beers like White Swan and Lord Marples being brewed while an IPA by the name of Jaipur and St. Petersburg stout cater for the connoisseur crowd.

Bracia, first introduced towards the end of 2008, is an avant-garde interpretation of an Ancient Roman ale laced with bitter Italian chestnut honey while Halcyon, a 7.7% Imperial IPA, is "wet-hopped" using hops picked the same day and released as a vintage every year using a different hop variety.

The move to its new brewery has allowed Thornbridge to broaden its range into bottom-fermenting beers and a recent collaboration with Maurizio Folli of Birrifico Italiano resulted in Italia, a pilsner brewed using four hop varieties.

Ben McFarland, February 2011

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