

# Beer in Mr Edo's era

## Catching up with an old brewing friend in Japan

One of my favorite New York brewers is Ed Tringali, with whom you may not be familiar. I am always reminded of Ed when I see framed prints of Saul Steinberg's famous New Yorker cover showing Manhattan looking across the Hudson at a remote and exotic world. As a young man, Tringali left the home of all civilisation for the West Coast, where he later became a very hoppy brewer at a pub called Big Time, in Seattle.

This brewpub still makes superbly aromatic, dry ales, but Tringali has moved on, continuing his journey West. As Columbus wished to do, he has gone so far West as to have reached the East. Like a true Seattleite, he has embraced the Pacific rim. He has become a travelling beer-maker in Asia, helping set up small breweries in places like Japan, Hongkong, the Philippines and India.

Quite unexpectedly, I ran into him the other day in Yokohama. I was standing outside a brewpub with the owner, watching a perfectly red, round, setting sun (no reflection on the Japanese flag, or economy; it was just that time of day). Through my reverie, I heard an American voice behind me. "Where've you been?" inquired Ed. "Just got in today, from London," I explained. "You?"

"I came in today, too. From Macao."

One of the company laughingly volunteered that he was relieved not to have to introduce me. "We Japanese have problems with a name like Tlingari." To save their tongues, they would like to call him Mr Ed, but that does not quite work, either. In Japanese, a consonant has to be followed by a vowel. Beer is Biru. When I referred in an interview to Scott Fitzgerald, the author emerged sounding like a tabloid tv presenter. He had become Scott Fitzgerald. Our man Tringali is Mr Edo. This makes him sound very grand indeed; the epoch of Shoguns and Samurai in Japan's history is known as the Edo period. Of course, when they further Japanify him, as Edo-san, he does sound as though he had something to do with electric lights. Or cleaning products, perhaps.

Mr Edo, as I shall persist, was checking progress at the Coral House Beery, Café, Trattoria, Grill and Restaurant, in a new development in an area of reclaimed land just south of Yokohama. The establishment adjoins a yacht marina - and an island amusement park called the Hakkeijima Sea Paradise.

The compulsively watchable main attraction at the amusement park is a tower of more than 300ft which functions rather like the shiny pole at a fire station. People are clamped into gondolas attached to the pole and allowed to free-fall for four seconds until, perilously close to terra firma, their descent is slowed and arrested by some sort of bungee arrangement. This is apparently fun. Riders were testing it - well, I suppose someone had to go first - while Ed and I chatted outside the Beery.

Beaery? A beery beanery, I guess. Like Barney's, in West Hollywood. Between linguistic contortions and people falling to earth, I was getting a little dizzy at this point.

The Beaery has a bakery, created by Fauchon, of Paris, and an Italianate deli counter (panini, pizza, formaggi) on the ground floor; a trattoria (the pasta looked delicious) on the second; and on the third, a self-service charcoal grill, a fashionable item at the moment. A nearby "Fisherman's Wharf" market provides conger eel and a shrimp-like shellfish called the squilla, among other delights.

We sharpened our appetites by tasting the beers: a Golden Ale with a smooth, spicy, hop aroma (Centennial and lots of Saaz); a firm, cookie-like malt Pilsner-malt background, and fresh, hoppy flavors; a very refreshing Weizen, with suggestions of tangerines and rosewater; the malty, pinkish-red Coral Ale, with crystal malt and Nugget notes; a clean, toffee-ish, licorice-like, Porter; and an Oatmeal Stout with suggestions of cream, black chocolate and violets.

Consultant Mr Edo was worried that the hop character on his golden ale might be frightening the owners. I had no hesitation in showing solidarity by ordering a pint of this delicious beer. I did, though, have a hankering for more of the Oatmeal Stout. "Violets?" pondered Mr Edo. He thought that perhaps the resident brewers had been carried away by his enthusiasm for late hops. "Not right for a stout ... no, I don't think so".

It was late by the time I got to the Yokohama branch of the brewpub Csarda, the name of which is intended to suggest a Hungarian-style inn (though the peasant murals are on what seem to be adobe walls). It is in a downtown street, and has a pavement terrace but, even in the company of Japanese friends, it was hard to locate. Street addresses are replaced by block numbers in Japan, and nowhere is easy to find.

I was tired. The beers were pleasant enough, but seemed thin and unsatisfying compared to the rich examples I tasted at the branch of Csarda in the city of Kobe less than 18 months ago. Sad to say, the Kobe branch has closed, victim of an insufficiently attractive location. Meanwhile, my rave review (with a picture of the Milk Stout) has already gone to press in my next book. Maybe I caught the Yokohama Csarda on a weary night.

On another late night, this time in Tokyo, I called into the American-style T.Y. Harbor brewpub, one of several rehabbed warehouses in the canal district near the Tennoz monorail station. With tv studios and design companies opening in the area, the brewpub is probably more of a lunch place.

The big modern painting on the wall, a rotating exhibit, fitted the mood. I enjoyed the sweet-and-dry interplay of Special Brew: not the horrible strong lager from Carlsberg, but the pub's own version of an Extra Special Bitter. I also liked an orangey, Barley Wine, a style rarely found in Japan despite the eclecticism of its 200-odd brewpubs. This example had an alcohol content of 6.0 per cent by weight, 7.5 by volume.

The menu at T.Y. Harbor was headed with the imprecation, printed in English: "Never ask for 'a beer'." As every literate human being in the whole wide world knows, that is the opening line of my book Michael Jackson's Beer Companion. Should I congratulate them on their eye for a good sentence, or complain about theft of intellectual property? I was spared the decision: at this hour, no one from the management was present. How about TM-Michael Jackson?

I wonder how the young execs at Toyota get their tongues round Triangle? This is the new brewpub is their home city, Nagoya. It, too, is very American, in the industrial-chic style, with high walls of corrugated steel.

I stopped there for lunch one day, and greatly enjoyed the carpaccio of Nagoya chicken. This bird, said to have been bred from a fighting cock, has a firmer meat than the common-or-battery chicken. The beers were quite flavorful, too: a hoppy, lemony, Golden Ale; an almost mintily hoppy, American-accented, Bitter; a malty, fruity, Amber; a plummy Weizen; a Cherry Beer with a balancing hint of tannin; and a Spring Green Ale tinged not with young cabbage leaves but a some what medicinal spearmint.

I asked who was the brewing consultant at Triangle. "Tlingari-san," came the reply. I begged their pardon. "Mister Edo."

Ah, so...

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