

MAUREEN OGLE

Ambitious Brew



The Story of American Beer

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Burch borrowed \$5,000 to print *Quality Brewing: A Guidebook for the Home Production of Fine Beers*. It was the first American homebrewing book to focus on accuracy, technical detail, and quality ingredients; the first to provide substantive information about yeasts; and the first to include a detailed discussion of hop varieties and the way in which hops could enliven the homebrewer's art. It also included the usual sop to the law: According to the Internal Revenue Service, Burch reminded readers, homebrewing was illegal, but "this interpretation is somewhat dubious, and enforcement is nonexistent." Besides, he might have added, we've got a president and various higher-ups who've been breaking the law right and left. Times are tough; homebrew is cheap. Have fun.

The Maltose Falcons were having fun. It is a measure of homebrewing's appeal that the first American brewing club sprouted in the most unlikely of places: suburban Los Angeles. Organized in 1974, the club was the brainchild of Merlin Elhardt, who developed a passion for German beer while stationed in Europe during and after World War II. Elhardt was a homebrewer's brewer: He ground his own malt and pitched a yeast smuggled out of the Tuborg brewery in Denmark. The Falcons' membership reflected homebrewing's widespread popularity: A utility lineman and a college student, a church deacon and a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA, a teacher and an artist. They tasted each other's wares, discussed techniques, and swapped yeasts and recipes. "Most of us," said one member, "are into the taste of beer, not the 'buzz.'"

Patrick Baker, who owned a Connecticut homebrewing supply shop that catered to both wine- and beer-makers, also turned to beer in the early 1970s. He started hosting Saturday-morning "Beer Doctor" sessions at his store, but in 1975 he and others supplemented them with a monthly meeting at night, which, in a nod

to the Treasury and Justice departments, they dubbed the "Underground Brewers' Club." Dozens of other clubs followed. By 1978, homebrewing had become so mainstream that the Carter administration finally legalized it.

That was the same year that the hobby gained its own national organization, thanks to Charlie Papazian. Papazian had discovered homebrewing in the early 1970s during his college days at the University of Virginia and continued to brew after graduation, when he moved to Boulder, Colorado. There he developed a minor reputation around town as a guy who served up good times and good beer, and the staff at the Community Free School asked him to share his skill one night a week. Papazian jumped at the chance. He loved to teach and relished the fellowship and community that homebrew inspired.

But Papazian was an entrepreneur at heart. He wrote and self-published a homebrewing pamphlet, a short, breezy affair that touted homebrewing as an easy, fun-filled venture. He sold copies to students enrolled in his brewing classes, but he wanted to find a larger audience for it and fashion a career out of his passion for beer. He found plenty of role models and inspiration close at hand in Boulder, a city that, in the 1970s, oozed entrepreneurial passion. Mo Siegel had created a profitable empire out of herbal teas; by the late 1970s, his Celestial Seasonings company boasted \$9 million in sales. Green Mountain Grainery, which sold health foods like granola and trail mix, operated in a smaller local market, but each year it pulled in well over \$1 million. The Naropa Institute sold ideas and religion, and owned entire blocks of Boulder real estate. Creating odd businesses was itself a kind of religion in Boulder, a town where "everybody," mused one observer who visited in the late 1970s, "believes like crazy in something or somebody."

Two events set Papazian's ship on course. In January 1978, he read Michael Jackson's *World Guide to Beer*, a glossy book on beer

styles written by an English j hours, Papazian's knowledge al possibilities "expanded by leaps also empowered Papazian to p more complex entity than he classes at the Free School. The otherwise ordinary guy making event presented itself in October signed the legislation that legaliz

That was enough for Papazi than knew, were beer lovers like enjoyed not just the flavor of hom lowship it inspired. In Decem Matzen, founded the American mailed off about a thousand copie they'd written called *Zymurgy*.

Against all odds, the group thr fatter than the last, thickened b mostly for homebrew supply shop *menter's Digest* and *All About Beer*, Patrick Baker's 1979 publication, about homebrewing clubs filled se

Homebrewing would ultimate for microbrewing, nurturing the s the people who later laid the founde industry. But in the 1970s, that cons Homebrewing was but one manifes mation in American beer culture. A pure, and foreign versus big, toxic, a versus Grottesque Goliaths.

THAT SUCH A LINE existed was lost 1970s, the industry's giants were