



The Taste of Success

World Beers

As a nation, the British have always been up for something a bit spicy, and quite frankly, we're only getting worse, says John Porter

Indian and Chinese food have been a mainstay of the restaurant scene for many decades, and more recently there has been an explosion in restaurant styles and a greater focus on menu authenticity.

The fiery piri-piri pepper, which took centuries to work its way from its native Africa via Goa to Portugal, has colonised our high streets in a few short years, thanks to the success of Nando's and its imitators.

Wasabi has gone from being a culinary curiosity to a mainstream flavour thanks to the influence of Japanese restaurants such as Wagamama and Itsu, while office workers once content with a cheese and tomato sandwich now break up their working day with a spicy lunchtime burrito from a Mexican takeaway.

From Cajun spices to cayenne pepper, the list goes on. The bottom line is that year by year, average levels of heat and spice found in dishes served in the UK's restaurant increase, and it would be a brave menu consultant who tried to forecast the point where our palates can take no more.

Getting Down From The Table

One consequence of this trend is that the beers developed to help diners deal with all this fiery fare become more familiar over time, to the point where in many cases customers in pubs and bars are as happy to drink them in their own right as they are to match them with a meal.

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And it's not just the hot stuff that's driving this trend; a cornucopia of cuisines from Pizza and Pasta to Sushi and Tapas are all giving discerning drinkers a taste for their beer partners.

The big success story is SABMiller's Peroni brand. Originally sold in the UK in the Pizza Express chain, Peroni Nastro Azzurro was successfully transplanted into the mainstream of the on-trade. On draught, the brand commands a premium thanks to a marketing campaign which emphasises its quality and Italian heritage.

Reflecting Peroni's gastronomic roots, in October 2014 SABMiller introduced the Alta, a 750ml sharing bottle designed for occasions



when the beer is served with food, and supported by new stemmed glassware designed to look good on the dining table.

Turning Japanese

Japanese beers Asahi and Kirin Ichiban have both successfully made the jump into the mainstream, helped by distribution deals with Shepherd Neame and Charles Wells respectively, as well as the growth in popularity of Japanese cuisine. Sarah Mahoney, brand manager for Kirin Ichiban says: "In addition to the standard Kirin Ichiban in draught and 330ml and 500ml bottles, we've also launched a frozen version of the beer in the UK, which has been extremely popular. We provide selected outlets with a special dispenser to serve Kirin Frozen, which adds a whipped top frozen at minus 5 degrees to the beer, to keep the pint extra cold for around 30 minutes longer than usual, so every sip is as refreshing as the first".

"An upturn in interest in the food and drink of Central and South America seen after the 2014 World Cup in Brazil will continue through the Olympics and beyond"

From Bhaji to Bar

First developed as a less gassy lager to accompany an Indian meal, Cobra is also now as much about the bar as the bhaji. CGA figures

show the brand in 14% growth in the year to March 2014, with Molson Coors own social media research showing that a third of Cobra drinkers enjoy it without a dining experience.

One advantage of brands with restaurant roots, says Tony Gibbons, director of sales at Molson Coors, is that "these beers also provide great scope for food pairing, offering publicans the opportunity to upsell.

To capitalise on this, we would recommend offering beer matching options on food menus to provide the customer with expert guidance with their choice at the bar, and also to boost drink sales."

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John Critchley, commercial director of Morgenrot, importer of brands such as Spain's Alhambra and Quilmes from Argentina, agrees that although imported beers are increasingly enjoyed alone, emphasising links with food remains an important selling tool. "Basic food and drink matching suggestions are not only good for sales but are good for the customer too.

"Staff play the biggest role in driving food and drink matching and training is essential. It's not necessarily about being an expert but staff should have the knowledge of two or three food and drink matches from the menu that they can push and promote."

Sunshine in a Glass

However, while the popularity of tapas-style sharing and small plate dishes has helped to drive sales of Spanish beers, the trend now goes beyond links with food. Genna Burchell, brand manager for Estrella Damm at Charles Wells, says: "Lager drinkers' habits are changing; moving away from mainstream, and attracted to more premium beers that are authentic, full of character, and have more satisfying liquid. Estrella Damm drinkers are both male and female, sociable and discerning authenticity seekers."

Spain's neighbour Portugal is also well-represented in the on-trade mainstream, notably by the Heineken-owned Sagres brand, which joined JD Wetherspoon's world lager range in October 2014. This big hitter on the Euro scene has stormed straight onto the UK's World beer stage, barely glancing at the table on its way to the bar

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Latin America

Moving further afield, and building on the growth not just of Mexican food, but also Brazilian and Argentinean barbecue and grill concepts, Waitrose is forecasting that an upturn in interest in the food and drink of Central and South America seen after the 2014 World Cup in Brazil will continue through the Olympics and beyond.

As well as being good news for familiar brands such as ABInBev's Corona from Mexico and Brahma from Brazil, less well known beers also stand to benefit. SABMiller has taken over direct UK distribution of its Peruvian brand Cusqueña with a view to building its sales as part of the brewer's world lager portfolio.

Also looking for a share of the market are the Mexican Brewery's six different Day of the Dead craft beers, distributed by Pierhead Purchasing, and Amazon Beer, a Brazilian craft beer range imported by World Beers.

Peter Karsten of World Beers says of the Amazon Pilsner and Bacuri fruit varieties, which recently won Gold and Bronze awards at the International Beer Challenge: "Offering a totally unique flavour profile, packaging and back story, these beers can't help but impress consumers and set a venue apart."

"With continued interest in South America and the Brazil Olympics on the horizon, we believe that Amazon beer's quality and food matching credentials, which were highlighted at the various Brazilian pop up events in the summer, will make the brand well placed for growth."

An advertisement for Amazon Beer. The background is a lush green rainforest scene with a waterfall cascading down rocks. In the center, two dark glass beer bottles are displayed side-by-side. Both bottles have labels that include the 'Amazon Beer' logo at the top, which features a stylized red monkey jumping over the word 'AMAZON'. Below this, the left bottle is labeled 'CERVEJA FOREST FRUIT ACURI' and the right bottle is labeled 'CERVEJA FOREST PILSEN'. At the bottom of the ad, there is a large yellow diamond-shaped logo with a black border containing the words 'BELEM, BRASIL', 'AMAZON', and 'BEER' around a central illustration of a red monkey. Below this logo, the text reads 'MEDAL WINNING BEERS FROM BRAZIL'S BEST CRAFT BREWERY'. Further down, contact information is provided: 'For further details contact World Beers Ltd', followed by telephone number 't: 01279 600044', email address 'e: sales@world-beers.co.uk', and website 'www.amazonbeer.co.uk'.