

INDUSTRY ARTICLE

September 2020

Terroir – real philosophy or a cheap marketing trick?

Whether you're talking about humans or plants, both are deeply rooted in their origin and are shaped by it. What is 'home' for humans is the so-called 'terroir' for plants. It refers to, amongst other things, the combination of soil properties, geographical location, precipitation, (micro-)climate and the human being who cultivates and processes the plant. 'Ambassador of Indulgence and Good Taste' Annick Seiz uses examples from the spirits industry to show that the concept doesn't just work for wine.

With its origins in wine culture, it can be used in many ways

The term 'terroir' originates in French wine culture and is usually associated with the status of a protected origin and corresponding regulations. Comparable concepts can also be found in other regional specialities such as cheese or sausages. The topic can actually be applied to beer too, but research on the internet reveals only very rudimentary approaches in the USA. In Germany, too, the philosophy of origin of all ingredients is only taken up by organic breweries and some craft beer manufacturers.

Taste variation and storytelling

For most of them, the terroir path seems either too far-fetched ("whether grain or hops is grown in a hot or cool climate, you can't taste the difference"), too rocky ("deviating from the norm means new requirements"), too risky ("do my customers accept the new concept/product/price increase?"), too lengthy ("why should I revolutionise the market over the next few years, while my competitors continue to make their money with old concepts?") or simply too expensive ("then I have to buy more expensive ingredients, need a new supplier network, have to invest more in agriculture and sustainability, need trained and highly motivated employees, and have to raise prices").

Member of the **Beviale Family**

**Ideeller Träger
Honorary Sponsor**
Private Brauereien Bayern e.V.
Thomas-Wimmer-Ring 9
80539 München
Germany

**Veranstalter
Organizer**
NürnbergMesse GmbH
Messezentrum
90471 Nürnberg
Germany
T +49 9 11 86 06-0
F +49 9 11 86 06-82 28
braubeviale@nuernbergmesse.de
www.braubeviale.de

**Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrates
Chairman of the Supervisory Board**
Albert Füracker, MdL
Bayerischer Staatsminister der
Finanzen und für Heimat
Bavarian State Minister of Finance
and Regional Identity

**Geschäftsführer
CEOs**
Dr. Roland Fleck, Peter Ottmann

**Registergericht
Registration Number**
HRB 761 Nürnberg

For most breweries, the brand is traditionally the focus of communications, and sometimes the region is too. As far as the origin of the individual raw materials, their cultivation and processing are concerned, however, there is still plenty of room for improvement – for more transparency, product variation in terms of taste and emotional storytelling.

The same applies to the spirits industry. Here, too, there are only a few producers and brands that consciously follow the terroir path from A to Z.

Best practice from the spirits industry

Terroir sceptics believe that, for wine, the principle of origin may work in tastings, but for beer or spirits it cannot work simply because of the complex processing and high temperatures being used during production. However, since terroir begins right in the plant's roots and is only complete once the product has been bottled, it is worth taking a closer look at this topic.

Bruichladdich Distillery – Isle of Islay, Scotland

Scotch malt whisky is made from malted barley, which is mashed, fermented, distilled, matured and then bottled. Differentiation is achieved by the selection of raw materials and suppliers, and by adjusting individual parameters in the production process.

In 2001, Marc Reynier, wine merchant and Islay fan, enabled the reopening of the legendary Bruichladdich Distillery. With the support of Scottish whisky legend Jim McEwan, from the very first second it was clear that the factors of earth, climate, raw materials, man and experience all interact with each other – whether you're in vineyards or fields of barley. Since then, without compromise, the focus has been on terroir, transparency and traceability (barley variety, farm, field, harvest year, etc.). Originally the international whisky industry smiled at this as a romantic-but-crazy idea from the wine industry. Now though, not only has it reached all producers and end consumers, but it is now considered a role model and benchmark for the entire spirits industry.

Conflict between ideology, authenticity and tough economic efficiency

In the spirit of reflection rather than regression, the Bruichladdich Distillery produces whisky in historic facilities dating back to the Victorian era (one of the active wash stills dates back to 1881) and it is part of research projects to revive old Viking barley varieties (e.g. Bere Barley). They are also making investments in research and innovation. Virtually everything from growing to bottling takes place on the island and, with a few exceptions, barley is purchased from selected farms on the Scottish mainland. The next goal is to have their own malthouse to be able to process small batches as well.

This is how the second smallest whisky producer on the island was able to become the largest employer. The island farmers also benefit from the cooperation: they grow selected barley varieties, and the distillery guarantees in return that they will take the entire harvest. This is not only an important factor for the regional economy, but a real win-win situation for everyone.

The distillery's range goes from unpeated to heavily peated, through to the most peated whiskies in the world, and they have long since become a cult favourite for collectors and connoisseurs. This convinced the French Rémy Cointreau Group (turnover approx. €1.1 billion) to invest in the Bruichladdich Distillery in 2012 without changing the team or influencing the day-to-day business. "For us, this is not an esoteric marketing trick. It's pure conviction," those responsible at Bruichladdich emphasise.

Unterthurner private distillery – South Tyrol, Italy

The family distillery from Marling near Merano has been famous for generations for its 'Waldler' (raspberry spirit). Here you can find modern distilling plants in a very small space within a building from the 13th century. And if you arrive at the right time, you will be greeted in the car park by a wonderfully fragrant raspberry cloud, which you will still have in your nose days later. If you want to experience the pure taste of South Tyrol in a glass, you should also try the world's only Schüttelbrotbrand (a type of brandy made from local bread). This distillate was created by Stephan Unterthurner on a whim through chatting with a baker friend (if you can distil grain, then you should also be able to distil grain that has been processed into bread...). What is exciting for experts is the fact that the mash ferments due to the existing ingredients (real Schüttelbrot, ground up) without the need to add additional yeast. After 15 months of maturation in wooden barrels, a unique product is created. Limited to 150 bottles per year, it's a real terroir product whose production doesn't require much fuss.

Waterford Distillery – Ireland

The idea of opening a terroir distillery on the Emerald Isle also came from Marc Reynier (see above). Accordingly, the Waterford Distillery (in contrast to many other Irish whiskey producers) has been processing exclusively Irish grain since its foundation in 2015, and it relies on distillation and bottling strictly separated according to farms in order to perfectly bring out the 'origin' in terms of taste. The barley comes from almost 100 partner farms and is stored, dried, malted and distilled separately according to suppliers.

For the brewing industry, one consultant in the team should be of particular interest: Dr Dustin Herb, a specialist in plant breeding at Oregon State University and partner in Tatlock & Thomson (analysis of wine, whisky and beer), is best known for his research into the influence of genetically different cereals on the taste of beer. The first bottlings have been on the market for a few weeks now, and initial tasting notes are already reporting major differences in taste between "the same type of barley, the same processing and maturing process, but with ingredient cultivation in different places on the island".

To be continued...

What works for wine and spirits can also be transferred to beer

The terroir approach opens up a wealth of possibilities – for example, the creation of soil maps with flavour profiles for individual hop and grain varieties in different growing regions. In this way, a brewery could tailor its suppliers according to the desired style and farmers could allocate their farmland according to demand. It is also not so far-fetched to think about classifying the best growing regions using the 'Grosse Lage' system, and also to show good harvest years in a kind of vintage recommendation list. Especially for small or young breweries, it is becoming more and more important to find a niche positioning in order to compete with the big breweries. Large corporations have to assert themselves in the international battle for market share too. In times of declining beer consumption, they should also be looking for new concepts that will ensure sustained sales and customer loyalty.

Origin that you can taste

The terroir concept offers great opportunities to differentiate a brand from the competition.

Those who participate contribute to the preservation of the industry, their own business success, and the end consumers' increased enjoyment. They also form part of a community of like-minded people who can make a difference:

- economically (turnover, premium positioning = usually a price increase, storytelling);
- socially (maintaining and creating jobs);
- ethically (sustainability, environmental & animal protection);
- culturally (preservation of tradition and craftsmanship, creation of new approaches);
- health-wise (higher quality = higher value = higher price = conscious purchase = conscious enjoyment);
- taste-wise (more 3D flavour).

Contact for press and media

Sabine Ziener, Christina Freund

T 49 9 11. 86 06-83 55

christina.freund@nuernbergmesse.de

All press releases as well as further information, photos and videos in the newsroom at: www.braubeviiale.de/en/news

Further services for journalists and media representatives at:
www.braubeviiale.de/press

More than a trade fair - the Beviiale Family:
www.beviiale-family.com