



THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

Despite brewing having historic roots as a female-led occupation, women have struggled to gain a foothold in the industry in recent generations. But a new wave of women is helping to turn the tide internationally. They are brewers, industry figureheads, and beacons for professionals and consumers alike. They show just how much females in the sector have to offer in terms of skill, creativity and accomplishment. **Laura Hadland** caught up with some of the most exciting and inspirational women-led beer projects across the globe to find out more about where they have come from and where they are going.

MARIANA DOMÍNGUEZ

Cervecería Nevado | Mexico City, Mexico

How did your career in beer begin?

My career began while studying for my Bachelor's in Food Chemistry. I had to choose between malting, brewing or some other very boring topic. I had always fancied learning about beer production so I began a homebrewing project with a colleague for a year. I got a job as an assistant brewer in Mexico and from there started my own nano breweries. From La Silla, to Nebulosa Brew Co and now Cervecería Nevado. I also released a beer brand in December 2020 named Macaria Brew Co.

What inspires you?

There were not a lot of women in the beer industry so I wanted to change that! I also wanted to travel and work in other parts of the world. The beer industry was growing so fast and with such vibrancy that I wanted to be part of it.

What makes your beer special?

Three things. First of all, drinkability as it is still not a common factor in the

Mexican beer industry. Secondly, I like to brew historical styles of beer because my former partner and two of my relatives are historians. Dark mild, Berliner Weisse, barley wine and English porter for example. And some more hip beers like hazy pales or Double IPA that have funny names and are easy to drink. Finally, I'm one of the first women to release a brand that has found popularity in Mexico.

Tell me more about the dark mild!

My core beers are milds. They're not so popular anymore but used to be widespread in the UK. I went there to brew and thought it was the perfect style to bring back; to give it an awesome label and introduce it to a very hazy-imperial-crazy beer world. I wanted to break down the paradigmatic notion that black beer is a very difficult, strong kind of beer.

Running my own brewery, I have the chance to brew beer I really like and to try out amazing ideas for collaborations. It makes me happy to do single batch



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experiments with new styles or ones I am familiar with but was never able to brew when I worked for other people.

JULIE O'GRADY

Neptune Brewery | Liverpool, UK

How did you get into brewing?

I have always had a love of beer, going to the pub and to beer festivals. After drinking a bad pint in a pub, my husband Les and I discussed if we could make a go of brewing our own beer. In 2013 we took up homebrewing with a view to opening our own brewery, which we did in 2015.

Tell me a bit about how Neptune Brewery got its name.

For 25 years, Les and his dad ran an Aquatics shop, selling fish and all the paraphernalia that goes with them. When we were looking for a name we thought of all things, but nothing seemed to fit. Then a lightbulb moment—why not call it Neptune Brewery? Our beers are named for fish, sea or mythological sea creatures to fit the theme.

You're the founder of Ladies That Beer – can you tell us about that?

When I visited pubs, I didn't see many women drinking beer. I wanted to know why, and if something could be done to change that. The general perception was women thought they didn't like beer, it was a man's drink, or wasn't "ladylike".

I started Ladies That Beer in 2015 as a social and educational group to let women see that beer was a liquid to be enjoyed by all and that there are so many beers available it is impossible to say you don't like it.

We encourage women to come and drink beer in a friendly and open environment where they're not intimidated. It is also a way of supporting bars on quieter nights, and in turn helps breweries too.

What are the challenges for women in the beer industry in the UK at the moment?

Women are still a minority in the industry, but it is getting better. Being taken seriously and being accepted can be a barrier for some. I believe that women offer a different perspective and way of working in the industry, and that is a good thing for both businesses and consumers.

What is your favourite part of the job?

That's easy: meeting people and visiting new venues alongside those already known. I have made so many friends and



Women thought they didn't like beer

acquaintances since our inception, and many share our ethos and passion for the industry.

AMANDA REITENBACH

Science of Beer Institute | Florianópolis, Brazil

Why did you start the Science of Beer Institute?

I was inspired by my academic research - at graduation, I saw an opportunity to offer instruction about beer because formal education was very scarce. I fell in love with science and beer, so I created the Science of Beer Institute from scratch, a beer teaching institution which today is one of the largest in this sector.

What has the impact of the Institute been so far?

The institution was founded in 2010, and has trained more than 10,000 students, with courses about Beer Pairing, Brewing Technology, Sensorial Analyses and for graduate Beer Sommeliers. In my institution, I seek to employ and provide opportunities for other women to study and work with beer. My team is mainly female, I want their voices to join mine within the sector.

How is your work received in Brazil and does your gender have any impact on that reception?

It is still not easy and these flags still frighten and alienate a lot of people, but I will continue in this fight because I know that it can really bring about change in the sector. After being rejected so many

times, I decided to make a difference with my own hands and to make room for competent women in the brewing market to be in equal positions. A man does not need to study or strive as hard as a woman to gain a position in the market.

How are you supporting women in beer?

I founded the Brasil Beer Cup. Last year we hosted the first edition and this year will be bigger. In this innovative project, we promoted gender equality by selecting women to make up 50% of the beer judges, contrary to a market composed mostly of men. I'm proud of this project and I hope it helps to give voice and value to the work of women in the beer sector.

What are your future aspirations and plans?

I want to continue my work, in science and the study of beer, and also helping other women's work be seen and become well known. I would like to turn the Brasil Beer Cup into a reference point for the beer industry.

I research a lot and recently I developed and patented an exclusive technology that consists of an aroma kit designed



I fell in love with science and beer

for sensory training and that can be used for smell recovery physiotherapy, called Aroma Sensory Training. This project has the potential to help a lot of people and I want to share it to develop the reputation of our sector.

JULIA HERZ

The American Homebrewers Association | US

How did you get involved with the industry?

Craft beer interests me as it is a beverage that teaches us about ourselves, each other and it can be paired incredibly with food. I got into the industry as a homebrewer in my 20s and it grew from there.

Has your gender has presented opportunities or challenges?

I have many examples on both sides. I have received quite a few opportunities being a woman as there has been a call for equitable share of voice across all industries, instead of just male influences. I have received a lot of opportunities to speak as female leader in the industry that I might not otherwise have gotten. It can be challenging being a woman leader in a male-dominated industry as being a woman always leads the conversation—when I am actually here to talk about the amazing hobby of homebrewing.

What are your aspirations for the future of female leaders like yourself in the beer industry?

I would really love to see more women-identified leaders in the beer community. This includes women educating themselves, being pro-active, getting certifications, and showing the value of the experience and knowledge.

You have recently become Executive Director of the American Homebrewers Association, how do you intend to steer the AHA forward?

In my first year, I am learning so much about the incredible community of homebrewers and members of the AHA. The future looks very bright to bring more people to the hobby and continue to make homebrewing accessible and welcoming to all.



I got into the industry as a homebrewer in my 20s

JESSI FLYNN

Kweza Craft Brewery | Kigali, Rwanda

Where is Kweza at right now?

We have been brewing on a pilot scale (40-90L batches) until now, while we got licensed and worked on our supply chains. Now we are growing! We are in the midst of importing brewery equipment to Rwanda. We hope to open our facility and a tasting room mid-year. We want to create a "pub crawl" agricultural tourism experience, where each place you drink Kweza, you see a different side of our story. In the meantime, we are supplying the US Embassy, the Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and some high-end hotels and lodges.

What characterises your beer?

We use sorghum malted by Rwandan women on their farms as the main ingredient for most of our beers. We are hybridising a native Rwandan crop, preparing it traditionally, and then applying modern global brewing knowledge and hops to create a range of beers that meet both a local and a global palate. It is not traditional Rwandan sorghum beer, *ikigage*, but a relative of it. We are also working with Rwandan ecologists and scientists to explore the use of more native plants for flavour, bittering, and yeasts. We would like to contribute uniquely Rwandan beers to the global beer world.

How are you helping to empower women?

We are women-owned, led, and brewed, all of which are minority situations for women in the brewing world. We also

source from and work with women whenever possible - through our ingredient sourcing, our consultants, our employees and our retail partners. By including more women in the brewing industry, directly and indirectly, we hope to diversify the industry.

We are employing and training women on the technical brewing side and in business management. As far as we are aware, Rwanda is the first country in the world where the commercial craft brewing industry is being started by women.

How you are making your business sustainable?

We source and process as locally as possible. The two main Rwandan industrial breweries import malted barley from abroad. We choose to make a delicious beer with local, native ingredients that showcase the flavours and biodiversity of Rwanda. We have plans to work with farming communities in planting native species that are now only found in national parks. By buying those plants and making unique Kweza beers, we hope to grow attention and demand for the commercialisation of native species to biodiversity and local farmers.

How are people responding to your beer?

With so much unexpected enthusiasm! We expected a struggle to introduce our products, and the craft beer industry, to the market. We did not know which



We use sorghum malted by Rwandan women

flavour profiles would be successful, or how Rwandans and foreigners would respond to sorghum-based clear beers. But we have pre-sold everything right through to when we can get onto our larger equipment, and even then, we have a long waitlist of restaurants, hotels etc. who have sampled our products, and are waiting for availability. The Rwandan government has been very supportive of our business because we will meet a niche in the market by showcasing local products at conventions, sporting events and such.

