

Beeradvocate



MOST LIKELY TO MAKE YOU SHOUT "L'CHAIM!"

Jeremy Cowan

Founder, Schmaltz
Brewing Company
shmaltz.com

Israel's Maccabee was once the most recognizable beer associated with Judaism. He'Brew has since succeeded it as the undisputed king of Jewish beers, but it's also something more. Jeremy Cowan founded Schmaltz Brewing with a knowing wink back in 1996, just as craft beer began tanking. For Hanukkah that year, he delivered 100 hand-bottled cases using his grandmother's car. Today, Cowan is arguably making some of the best contract-brewed beers in America.

Cowan's vision was to tap the Jewish demographic, figuring 10 percent of any given urban market was probably Jewish. He strived to have fun with He'Brew, drawing on pop culture and Jewish history. The first offering, Genesis Ale, also included pomegranate, one of the seven sacred species from the land of milk and honey. Three others are barley, wheat and figs, which were used in He'Brew's newest release, the Rejewvenator ("Doppelbock ... Shmoppelbock").

Cowan moved production to the Mendocino Brewery in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., from California five years ago. That's when things really started to change. During the early years, walking softly but wielding a big shtick, he ended up getting He'Brew into some of the best beer bars in major cities in over half the states, selling—as he

puts it—"a little beer in a lot of places." Discovered almost on accident, it's become the secret to his success. "It's been really cool for the past few years, pushing the quality using innovative recipes. The more we do that, the more the best beer drinkers respond to us."

As the "English major behind the brewmaster," Cowan describes exactly what he wants, and then he and brewer Paul McErlean "taste an enormous array of beers" to find the next He'Brew. That's how they started making extreme beers—like Jewbelation Eleven and Bittersweet Lenny's R.I.P.A. "It's just a bummer that contract brewing got a bad name. It's really not that different in the scheme of things than the owner of a brewery who doesn't know how to brew."

Jeremy's latest project is the Coney Island line of lager beers, outfitted with provocative labels by Matt Polacheck and a Brooklyn tattoo artist. When an interviewer asked if he was selling out, Cowan summed up his philosophy: "Well, if circus freaks are more mainstream than Jews, then I guess we're going mainstream. I'm proud of sticking to my goal of digging deeper into the cult personality of the brand, using ingredients, shtick and themes that are close to the original vision for Genesis Ale." Such a mensch. —*Jay R. Brooks*