

BEVERAGEWORLD

Mazel Tov!

HE'BREW celebrates its 10th anniversary. By Jeff Cioletti

A decade ago on an apartment floor in San Francisco, Jeremy Cowan and some of his closest friends rolled up their sleeves and began aggressively squeezing the juice out of box loads of fresh pomegranates. It would be the star ingredient in the first batch of Genesis Ale, the inaugural offering in the HE'BREW line of craft beers.

"We went and bought pomegranates by the crate from a wholesale produce guy in the industrial section of San Francisco and hand-squeezed them all," Schmaltz Brewing Co. founder Cowan recalls as his brand reaches its 10th anniversary. "It was just crazy and ridiculous and delicious."

It also bore Biblical significance. "When Moses is standing on the outskirts of Israel, he sends down spies into the land to find out what's going on," he explains. "They bring seven special species of grains and fruits, barley, wheat and pomegranate are among them."

Unfortunately, 10 years ago pomegranate juice wasn't as abundant as it is today, and Cowan had to abandon the ingredient once Genesis—described as a cross between a pale and amber ale with a bit of hoppiness to it—went into commercial production. But the pomegranate has made a comeback in the 10th anniversary brew, Genesis 10:10, a 10-percent alcohol beer with 300 gallons of pomegranate juice in each batch.

HE'BREW, tagged "The Chosen Beer," evolved from years of musings among Cowan and some of his friends growing up in a suburb of San Francisco that had a relatively small Jewish community, noting he was "one of the few kids who would stay out [of school] for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur." "I was playing volleyball with a friend of mine who was the one other Jewish kid in my group of friends and we thought it would be so cool if we had a beer for the volleyball team. The punchline would be, 'Don't pass out, Passover.' It was just one of those funny inside jokes among a group of friends."

Soon the idea became less of a gag and more of a realistic



• GENESIS 10:10 is being brewed to mark HE'BREW beer's 10th anniversary.

proposition, despite Cowan's lack of industry experience. "I didn't know anything about the beer business when I started," he says. "Actually, I didn't know anything about business. I was an English major. I never heard the word 'distributor,' 'retail,' or even 'invoice.' I just drove around in my grandmother's Volvo—I didn't even own a car—and delivered cases of beer to a couple of stores."

Having gained an enthusiastic cult following in the Jewish community—with growing interest in gentile circles—Schmaltz Brewing now sells about 2,000 barrels a year, which is contract-brewed and available in about 20 states. In addition to Genesis Ale and Genesis 10:10, the line includes Bittersweet Lenny, a just-

launched double, rye-based India Pale Ale and Messiah Bold (aka "The beer you've been waiting for"), a strong, hoppy, nut brown ale. In the fall, the company will launch its third annual Jewbelation winter beer, billed as the first and only Hanukkah beer, tweaked a bit each year. It was launched for the company's eighth anniversary with eight hops and eight malts and contained 8-percent alcohol. This year it will feature 10 hops and 10 malts and contain 10-percent alcohol. Last year's iteration (for which nine was the magic number, natch) won best in show of all West Coast winter beers at Pacific Brew News' blind taste test, beating out larger craft outfits like Deschutes, Full Sail and Anderson Valley.

Cowan promotes his beers through clever on-premise events like "Hannukah vs. Christmas: The Battle Royale of Beers" and "Rosh Hashanah vs. Oktoberfest: The Ultimate Beer Grudge Match."

"We're really starting to make some incredibly special beers that people are now paying attention to," Cowan observes. "It's a good excuse for me to be super creative and make things that are really offbeat and use my unique—at least in the beer world—sensibility and sense of humor." **BW**