

# Mahr's Bräu Ungespundet hefetrüb

We know that the ancient civilisations of the Middle East brewed beer, and that the art spread westward into the lands that today comprise the Czech Republic (especially the state of Bohemia), Germany (notably Bavaria), Belgium and the British Isles, but when?

Vessels 2,800 years old, bearing traces of beer sediment, were found in 1934 in a burial mound in Franconia, the northern part of Bavaria. Even today, Franconia - which comprises three counties - has in general the most individualistic breweries in Germany. Some its smallest breweries, still use methods passed from father to son. They seem to have escaped the worst excesses of standardisation that can be a by-product of a more scientific approach.

The region has as its biggest city Nuremberg, its cultural capital Bayreuth, and its historic brewing cities Erlangen, Kulmbach and Bamberg.

Bamberg, in the county of Upper Franconia, is the most interesting by far. This town has records of brewing a thousand years ago, in a monastery that now houses a small museum of beer. More important to today's beer-lover, Bamberg has nine breweries, for only 70,000 people.

The beers made in and around Bamberg are especially individualistic. The best-known style of the area is Rauchbier, made with smoked malt, but there are also other local specialities. One is the unfiltered style of lager that is variously known as Zwickelbier, Kellerbier or Ungespundet beer. Each term has a slightly different meaning. "Zwickel" implies simply that the beer was taken from a small tap on the maturation tank; this version tends to be especially hazy. Kellerbier has sometimes has an especially heavy dose of hops, to act as a preservative. The third term means "unbunged," indicating that the maturation was in a vessel open to the atmosphere (ie not controlled by a pressure valve). This makes for a lesser carbonation. With a diminished gassiness, there is less carbonic "bite" on the tongue, so the drinker is more sensitive to the flavours in the beer.

The family-owned Mahr's brewery makes a good example bearing the legend Ungespundet hefetrüb. "Hefe" means yeast. "Trüb" has the same root as trouble, turbulent or turbid, and refers to the yeasty cloudiness.

Mahr's Bräu Ungespundet hefetrüb has an alcohol content of around 4.1 percent by weight, 5.2 by volume. It pours with a big, creamy, long-lasting head; has a golden-bronze color; a wonderfully fresh, perfumy; hop aroma; a remarkably smooth, almost oily, malty palate; very fresh flavours; and a spritzy finish. It is beautifully balanced, but leans to the dry side. This is a delicious, appetising beer and a true taste of Germany's fast-vanishing artisanal tradition.

For the technically minded: it has an original gravity of 12.5 Plato (1050), is made from pale and Munich malts (beer color 20EBC); with a single mash at low temperatures; hopped with [Northern Brewer](#) and Hallertau Tradition (36 units of bitterness); bottom-fermented with a local yeast; and lagered for eight weeks at 0-1C.

The brewery date from 1670, and has been in the same family since 1880. Its "brewery tap" (10 Wunderburg) is one of the most charming, cosy, pubs in Bamberg. It has low ceilings, a tiled stove and in summer a beer-garden with the traditional chestnut trees.