

EXPAT BREWING: HOLLAND & ERIC NORDIN & STEPHEN GRIGG

BY MOLLY QUELL

From an initial encounter, Eric Nordin and Stephen Grigg do not seem like similar people. Eric is a quiet Swede who also works as a touring musician and stands over 6 feet 5 inches tall. Stephen is a gregarious, sarcastic research biologist who is of average height for a man from the United States. And yet, the two of them have something in common. They are the only two expats commercially brewing beer in the Netherlands.

Despite sharing borders with Belgium and Germany, the Netherlands is not often thought of as a country famous for its beer. Historically, the country has a brewing tradition of pale lagers, specifically pilsners. These are beers that are light in color and alcohol, and slightly fizzy. The country's largest brewer, Heineken, is internationally recognized and widely exported.

During the 1980s, the Netherlands, along with many other countries, experienced a resurgence of craft brewers. Small breweries began commercially producing different varieties of beer, in particular India Pale Ales (IPA), known for their hoppy, bitter flavor. These beers were quite different from the typical Dutch lagers or the Trappist-style beers from the country's southern neighbor, Belgium.

The growth of the microbrewery scene was due, in part, to the anarchist and punk movement of the 1980s in Amsterdam. Members refused to drink Heineken, shunning the brand for its capitalistic associations. Brouwerij 't IJ in Amsterdam was among the first of the new microbreweries to open up in the country in 1985, and the Netherlands now boasts over 200 breweries.

Two of those breweries belong to expats Eric and Stephen. Eric operates Amsterdam-based Butcher's Tears with his partners Felicia von Zweigbergk and Herbert Nelissen. Stephen runs De Kromme Haring in Utrecht and as-yet-to-be-named brewpub with his partner, Gijs Van Wiechen.

In spite of the country's relatively small size, the two entrepreneurs only met recently – at a beer festival – and don't really know each other. And despite their differences, their histories hold a lot of similarities.

Eric and Stephen have both been interested in beer for a long time. Eric's band toured in Europe extensively. "I was drinking good beer all over Europe," he said, "and when I'd come back to Sweden, I would drink sad Swedish beer." So, 10 years ago, he started home-brewing. Stephen, who had always had an aptitude for chemistry, got his start when a roommate bought a beer-brewing kit. "I watched the yeast bubbling in that first batch for hours," he said.

Eric has trained officially as a brewer, brewing at home extensively in Sweden before working at the British brewery Fuller's. And Stephen has a connection to Great Britain as well. He completed his PhD at Oxford University.

Both, however, moved to the Netherlands for different reasons. Three years ago, Eric moved to Amsterdam to be with his now-girlfriend who was attending art school in the city. Stephen, despite having a Dutch girlfriend, did not come to the Netherlands for love. He had finished his PhD and found a job working as a researcher for a university in Utrecht. "I moved *her* here, not the other way around," he said.

Butcher's Tears has been in operation longer – over two years – and has just recently been brewing at their own facility. Eric has been contract-brewing at Brouwerij Gulden Spoor in Belgium, a common practice where brewers use the facilities of another brewery with extra capacity to make their beer. He's eager to start working in his own facility, a space adjacent to their tasting room in the center of Amsterdam. "The water profile in Belgium is very specific; Amsterdam water is more versatile," he said. He's eager to start working on porters and stronger beers to add to the brewery's repertoire of ales.

Stephen is also looking forward to expansion. He's also currently contract-brewing, but in the Netherlands at Brouwerij Maximus in Utrecht. And he's still home-brewing; he's got a dedicated room in his apartment for it. Though not yet available for sale in bottle

BUTCHER'S TEARS



TOP LEFT: Eric Nordin and business partner Felicia von Zweigbergk work in the Butcher's Tears tasting room in Amsterdam.

shops, his Smokey the Barracuda porter is always on tap at Kafé België in Utrecht. Conveniently, the owner of the cafe is Stephen's business partner. Their plan is to experiment with more sour beers, when they have the space to open their planned brewpub.

Eric and Stephen have both faced similar difficulties operating businesses as foreigners. And they've solved those problems in identical ways: taking on a Dutch business partner. It's possible, however, that both of them would want a business partner regardless of the country they were operating in. They both confessed to being poor at administration.

The biggest hindrance both of them cite is the Dutch aversion to English-style beers. "The Dutch think English beer means warm, flat and disgusting," said Stephen. Eric agrees. "I would truly classify many of my beers as English Ales, but the Dutch won't drink them. When I call the same beer an IPA, they sell out." ■

DE KROMME HARING



TOP LEFT: Stephen (middle) with his De Kromme Haring partner Gijs van Wiechen (left) and friend in Utrecht. TOP RIGHT: Stephen Grigg brews his porter at Brouwerij Maximus in Utrecht.

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