

Society

Jane is not what you'd call shy. I meet her on a flight from Wellington to Auckland and by the time we've landed, I know where and when she lost her virginity, about the unscheduled appearance of her left nipple at a work function and why her last boyfriend dumped her.

"He said he couldn't go out with a woman who drinks pints!" she shrieks, stretching the patience of our fellow travellers – who include a cabinet minister and several pensioners – like an elastic band.

But it turns out she isn't the only victim of beer apartheid. A friend tells me her love of creamy stout has drawn more than just arched eyebrows over the years.

"I've had blokes, complete strangers, say things like, 'You'll never get a boyfriend drinking that, love,' and, my personal favourite, 'Be careful you don't get a beer belly.' I'm never more aware of my oestrogen than when I'm drinking a pint of Guinness, which is pretty sad in this day and age."

Another friend reaches deep into her bag of outrage to recount a recent blind date where she requested a pint, only for her date to return with two half pints. "A pint isn't very ladylike," he told her, leaving my friend to wonder since when her femininity was dependent on the size of a drinking vessel.

Earlier this year, Taranaki's "beer-drinking bride" Katrina Hayman made headlines when she was photographed necking a stubbie while appearing as a contestant in the region's Bride of the Year Competition. Comments ranged from "outrageous" to "disgusting", and even the UK's *Daily Mail* and the US-based *Huffington Post* found space for the story.

Hayman, however, couldn't understand what the fuss was about. "A lot of females drink beer and I felt more comfortable having a beer than a wine," she told the *Taranaki Daily News*. "If I feel like I want a beer, I'll have one, whether I'm in the right place or not."

Cards on the table, I don't really like beer. Not because I consider yeasty beverages to be a boy's sport, but partly because I don't like the taste and partly because of two Munich Beerfests (personal best: four steins in one day), which left me with an unexplained scar on my knee, a brain that felt like boiled marmalade and a lifetime's distrust of anything involving hops.

But while I go weak in the presence of a good pinot noir, I defend every and any woman's right to lose themselves in lagers, porters and IPAs. In the interests of research, I enlist a beer-drinking friend to see if having an extra X chromosome restricts our choice



Ladies, a pint
Women invented beer. So how come
it's still perceived as a 'manly' drink?
Sharon Stephenson reports.



ENTOURAGE YOUR WAY

Getting a handle on it

Wendy Roigard (left), Auckland brewer, beer marketer and owner of beer-tasting company Lady Glass.

So keen was Wendy to dispel the stigma of women beer drinkers that she and Otago brewer Vicki Purple established Hop Goddess, whose national 'Beer in the City' events promote quality not quantity, and include learning about taste, texture and aroma and how to match beer with food.

Why is there a negative perception of women drinking beer? "I'm not sure why, but society dictates that ladies drink wine and manly men drink beer!"

What reactions have you had? "It makes me laugh when I visit a bar and am immediately handed the wine list, even if I'm examining the beers. And when I order a beer they either offer it in a half pint or ask if I'd prefer a shandy!"

Why should women drink beer? "Beer contains more

vitamins and minerals and fewer calories than wine, women have more sensitive palates than men and that 'bloating' feeling associated with beer can be minimised by drinking from a glass, not a bottle. I prefer a stemmed, tulip-style glass – drinking beer can be feminine!"

Shannon Smith, Christchurch bartender.

Why is there a negative perception of women drinking beer? "Because men control the advertising industry. It's silly that women should only drink wine; drinking pints doesn't mean you're butch."

What reactions have you had? "None really, because as soon as anyone has a go, I bore them to death with how many amazing varieties of beer there are!"

Why should women drink beer? "Why shouldn't they? The fact that this is still an issue in 2012 shows how far society has to go."

of beverage. She's all killer heels and inner-city sophistication, about as far from the stereotypical beer drinker as you can get. The same can't be said for our first bar, a working-class Wellington establishment filled on a Saturday afternoon with old men watching racing and tradesmen on a hygiene strike. I walk past this bar every day but have never been inside and although the female count is low, we're pretty much left alone. In fact, the only comment we get is from the barman who looks askance when I request an Asahi. "Sorry, we don't sell those. But we've got RTDs for the ladies."

Thankfully they do at our next stop where, as afternoon slips into evening, the beautiful people come out to play. We have fun watching young girls in very short dresses and very high heels struggling to be heard above the music. The other punters must be similarly occupied because no one even registers our presence, let alone what we're drinking.

It's all cocktails with bad names at the next bar, where the umbrella-clad drinks are wearing more clothes than the clientele. It's hardly Ground Zero for beer drinkers, but my friend manages to rustle up pints of Murphy's, which I spend the next half hour trying, and failing, to finish. When I return from the bathroom (why does no

one tell you about the high intake-to-pee ratio of beer?), a bloke is trying to engage my friend in conversation. "Funny to see two good-looking girls drinking stout," is his opening line. "But it's quite fattening so you probably shouldn't have too many," he adds, managing to speak despite the massive foot of stupidity in his mouth.

We wouldn't be having this conversation had he, and we, been around in 1700BC, when stone tablets show that not only were women credited with inventing the amber liquid, they were solely responsible for brewing and selling it. There was even a beer goddess, Ninkasi, who ensured that the magic of fermentation occurred.

But by the 18th century, brewing – and imbibing – came to be seen as an almost exclusively male pursuit. And while that's changing, figures released in May estimate only around 13 percent of Kiwi women reach for a cold one (as opposed to 36 percent in Ireland and 38 percent in Brazil).

Auckland writer Alice Galletly believes this is largely down to breweries' sexist marketing campaigns. "It's crazy because women represent half the audience, but historically beer marketing has tended to ignore women. Beer ads are generally blokey, macho and patronising, and it's clear they're not aimed at me."

Photograph: Lawrence Smith



“Suddenly beer is not just seen as fizzy stuff you guzzle in front of the rugby. Like wine, it’s a drink to be sipped and savoured, shared with friends and matched with food.”

She isn’t wrong; a quick tootle around Google throws up the ‘can you believe they called it that?’ global beer brands: *Dizzy Blonde*, *Massive Knockers*, *Old Tarts*, *Double D Blonde Ale*, *Panty Peeler* and *Golden Shower Pilsner*.

Galletly, whose blog followed her quest to try a new beer every day for a year, admits she’s received comments such as, “You don’t look like a beer drinker,” and “I’m impressed to see a girl drinking beer.”

“Thankfully, though,” says the slender blonde, “perceptions are changing. Craft beer is taking off and suddenly beer is not just seen as fizzy stuff you guzzle in front of the rugby. Like wine, it’s a drink to be sipped and savoured, shared with friends and matched with food.”

Galletly suggests anyone who still needs their perceptions nudged into shape should visit Beervana, Wellington’s annual knees-up for grain nerds. “About 40 percent of attendees at this year’s Beervana were women, which is much more than when I first went four years ago.”

And with that, Galletly is off; she’s got a date with a cold brew. ●

Getting them in?

Thirst whetted? *Sunday Star-Times* beer writer and author Michael Donaldson runs through some Kiwi classics (from the gentle to the challenging) for spring drinking:

Emerson’s Bookbinder

A beer that cuddles you and says I love you. This old-fashioned English-style bitter with low alcohol is a perfect “session” beer; i.e. you can have a few and still hold a conversation on quantitative easing.

Tuatara Pilsner

A Kiwi take on the world’s most popular beer style. Imagine a Heineken with a more gentle, voluptuous body and wearing perfume that reminds you of a Pacific island at sunset – fragrant, tropical, honeysuckle and passionfruit.

Three Boys Wheat

Uses wheat instead of barley to create a light and effervescent brew, with a spice character of clove

and nutmeg complemented by additions of lemon and coriander. It’s cloudy – but that’s the way it’s meant to be.

Yeastie Boys Gunnamatta

If any beer made here screams “spring”, it’s this glorious brew that uses Earl Grey tea. There’s tea on the nose, with the bergamot (orange) coming through in a second wave.

Epic Armageddon IPA

This is a hop-whopper bursting with orange, grapefruit and guava aromas that jump out of the glass and climb up your nose. One of the best beers on sale in New Zealand.

Garage Project’s Day Of The Dead

A dark lager celebrating the Mexican Day of the Dead festival, with smoked chipotle and cocoa nibs adding complexity and depth. High in alcohol, so share the bottle with some friends.



Beer Nation: The Art and Heart of Kiwi Beer by Michael Donaldson (Penguin), \$39.99

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