

# MOVES LIKE JAEGA

**In just six years, Wild Card Brewery's Jaega Wise has become one of the craft beer scene's most influential – and visible – operators. She talks sours, sexism and start-ups with JACOPO MAZZEO, and tells him why she owes everything to a pint of Castle Rock**

Wild Card Brewery, north-east London. Head brewer Jaega Wise cracks open a can of her Lime Berliner Weisse and splits it between the two of us. It's an opalescent pale lemon colour and reminds me of a Belgian witbier, but with the much sharper acidity and refreshing palate of a sour.

I'm not surprised that she welcomed me with this trendy style: Wise is one of the hottest names in Britain's craft brewing industry, and her Lime Berliner Weisse epitomises what the movement is all about.

## WISE BEGINNINGS

'At the moment I'm going through a sour phase,' she tells me. 'It's reflected in what I'm brewing, like this Lime Berliner Weisse, made with lime juice. Before, we released a passion fruit gose, a raspberry gose and I want to do a guava gose too.'

Her current palate couldn't be 'craftier', but her passion for beer started in Nottingham, well before the craft beer revolution reached Britain, kindled by a simple pint of Castle Rock Harvest Pale, a classic 3.8% abv British golden ale.

'I tried it when I was very young,' she laughs. 'It was at a pub in the Midlands,

during a beer festival. I just thought it was amazing, so now every time I go back home to Nottingham I drink it.'

'My revelation wasn't that complicated,' she goes on. 'Simply at that particular moment, with a group of friends, I found something that I wasn't expecting. I didn't think of my future, I just liked it and it grew from there.'

She is, though, a product of Nottingham's pub-going culture.

'Lots of people travel to the US and find inspiration, but I was too broke for that,' she says. 'I grew up with nothing. In Nottingham going to the pub is how you socialise, plus I used to live less than 10 miles from Burton-on-Trent. You can certainly see that the scene had been set.'

Wise is now making up for the travelling she didn't do in the past, jetsetting for her TV and radio work. She was on *The Wine Show*, which took her to Japan and Munich; she went to New York to interview Brooklyn Brewery's Garrett Oliver for

Channel 4; she's planning a trip to Belgium.

While travel didn't have much of an impact on her becoming a brewer, her scientific studies did. 'My engineering background has helped me, knowing what a heat exchanger is or how fermentation works. I

wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for that.

'It's the reason I took over the helm at Wild Card and it's the reason I still enjoy it. After all, I still work with machines.'

An aspiring craft brewer can take multiple paths to the trade: many start as homebrewers or learn on the job, while others get technical training.

'Both are totally valid, but study definitely helps,' she says, wondering why more breweries aren't recruiting chemical engineering undergraduates. 'At uni we met lots of oil and pharmaceutical companies trying to recruit us, but hardly anyone from the food sector,' she muses. 'The only thing I always said is that I would never do oil and gas, and I didn't!' >>

*'My background in engineering is the reason I took over at Wild Card... After all, I still work with machines'*

JAEGA WISE

PHOTOS: MILES WILLIS







## ESSENTIAL JAEGA

- 2010** Gets her chemical engineering degree at Loughborough University and starts working in London as a chemical trader
- 2012** Quits her chemical trading job and co-founds Wild Card Brewery
- 2017** Appears on the second series of ITV's *The Wine Show*
- 2018** Elected Chairman of SIBA South East
- First appearance on BBC 4's *The Food Programme*
- Awarded Brewer of the Year

### THE MOVE TO BREWS

BP's loss is the drinker's gain, I think as I wallow in Wild Card's DIPA II, delighted by its generosity, creaminess and double dry-hopping with Equinox and Citra.

Wise's move into beer was a bit of a happy career accident:

When Will Harris and Andrew Birkby, her former uni mates, now co-directors at Wild Card, told her they wanted to start a brewery she was trapped in chemical trading.

Harris and Birkby's project was an excuse for her to quit and join their venture; after all, she did have homebrewing experience. Wild Card took its first steps in 2012. Initially, the trio were simply renting equipment. Then, in 2014, thanks to a government loan, they set up a brewery in Walthamstow.

The business grew in line with the UK craft beer scene, and so did Wise's career.

Although it's still very much hands on, her role today is a lot more managerial than it used to be. It's not unusual to find her in the little office overlooking the brewing kit, answering emails, taking calls or checking spreadsheets. It's a far cry from the old days, when she would earn extra cash by working in a bar.

As one of the most popular craft brewers in the country, her days now are

packed. Besides her day job and TV and radio shows, she also performs as lead singer in the band Hell and Hope.

Yet, despite such a workload, her attitude is relaxed: she's learned how to deal with pressure. Behind that laid-back appearance, her mind is constantly working, ready to tackle the next job.

*'Ultimately, we would like to sell more beer to women – it would be great for the industry'*

JAEGA WISE

### BEYOND THE BUBBLE

Although her success has had a positive effect on her personal growth, it's also made her a target for trolls.

'When people tweet sexist comments at me I just don't respond,' she says. 'It's a societal issue, and it's not confined to the beer sector. In fact, most sexism that I experience now is from outside the beer industry.'

In the early days, going to festivals as the only female brewer around, she was no stranger to offensive comments. Today, however, much of the brewing sector's sexism manifests itself in the form of male-orientated advertising, which Wise believes is 'the main thing that is keeping women away from the beer industry'. Whether it's an offensive beer label or a bloke-populated TV ad, the result is that 'women don't feel included'.

Last year she got involved with the

Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) as chairwoman of the south-east region, speaking out against sexualised labels.

'I was at 2018's SIBA AGM in Liverpool [talking about setting a code of practice]. It was one of the most unexciting experiences ever.' She found peers challenging the idea that sexism in the industry was even an issue, but endeavours to see the positives.

'Talking to a room of people who agree with you isn't helpful. You should know what everyone thinks.'

In any case, she's hopeful that things are moving in the right direction. 'Things take time. Ultimately, as brewers and producers, we would like to sell more beer to women – it would be great for the industry.'

### BEER WITH PERSONALITY


With all her extra work, it's easy to forget that Wise spends most of her week at the brewery. She says she enjoys working with unusual ingredients. 'It's how I show personality. I start with a raw material, then I'll be on a hunt for juices, nuts, anything.'

She also knows the value of mastering the main ingredients. Each has a nearly human character. 'Water, you can't do without it. Malt is the mate that keeps you standing. Hops is the friend who stays out too long. Then comes yeast, the mature figure that tells you it's time to go home.'

She loves super-hoppy beers; punchy stouts are another of her passions (she's just made a barrel-aged Russian imperial). Other beers are going into cask, which Wild Card has recently reintroduced.

Whether it's a pale ale or a sour, Wise's approach to brewing is deeply personal.

'I'm brewing beers that I love. When there's pleasure in the brew, that's when true greatness comes.' 🍷



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Build the beer list of your customers' dreams with Jaega Wise and Stewart Cumming at Beer to Dine For, 12.45pm on Tuesday 2 July at the Beer & Cider Hub.