

MODERN Brewery Age



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Rich Hourihan (left) the general sale manager of Manhattan Beer Distributors' Suffern branch, gets a personal tour of the famed Rodenbach Brewery from brewmaster Rudi Ghequire. Some of the brewery's 290-odd wooden aging tanks are visible in the background. Mr. Hourihan was part of a group of about 20 U.S. wholesaler and retailer representatives that recently toured the brewery during a trip to Belgium organized by Latis Imports of Ridgefield, CT. Mr. Ghequire subsequently traveled to the U.S., and visited with retailers and wholesalers as Rodenbach draught was rolled out in select U.S. markets. See story on Rodenbach reintroduction below.

U.S. reintroduction of Rodenbach underway

Rodenbach, the celebrated red ale of Flanders, is returning the U.S. market, imported by Latis Imports of Ridgefield, CT.

The importer is rolling out draught in key markets this month, to be followed by bottled product next month.

"The launch is going very well," said Latis president David van Wees. "We had Rodenbach brewmaster Rudi Ghequire in

the market for nearly two weeks. First in New York, and then Philly for their beer week. It's too early to report any sales figures, but Rudi and Rodenbach were received very well."

Mr. van Wees said New York and Philadelphia were the first two markets to get draught Rodenbach. "We are focusing

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Executives at IRI summit marvel at the speed of change

Speed and change were the bywords at the recent IRI's "Insight to Impact" CPG conference in Las Vegas, and when it wasn't "speed" or "change," it was "the speed of change."

"We are in changing times, it goes without saying," said Dr. Romesh Wadhvani,

founder of Symphony Technology Group, and chairman of IRI. "The speed of change at such lightning speed, we almost forget what happened a week ago or a month ago. Some months ago the government warned of inflation. Then a few months

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CEO of 7-Eleven says DSD model is inefficient

He has said it before, and now he's said it again. At the IRI "Insight to Impact" CPG conference this week in Las Vegas, Joe DePinto, president and CEO of 7-Eleven had a message for the beer industry—beer wholesaler trucks are blocking his parking lots, coming at the wrong intervals and the wrong times, and they aren't loaded with the right products in the right quantities.

"One of our stores might get 60 deliveries a week, scheduled by the manufacturer and not driven by the consumer," Mr. DePinto said. "Many deliveries are not frequent enough or too frequent, products are

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Veteran planning exec to leave A-B

Marie Carroll, Anheuser-Busch vice president of commercial planning and performance management, has announced her retirement from the company after almost 30 years of service. Carroll will leave the company at the end of April, according to a report in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

Ms. Carroll began her career at the company in 1980, and held posts in financial and business planning. She was named vice president of business planning and analysis in 1993, and became vice president of corporate financial planning in 1995. In 1998, she was named vice president of finance and planning.

Personnel cuts reportedly continue at Anheuser-Busch

Carlos Brito has publicly said that he has "right sized" Anheuser-Busch after 1400 pre-Christmas layoffs. But there are reports that smaller departmental-level layoffs are continuing, to the tune of perhaps 100-200 people let go since January.

By some estimates, A-B's St Louis staff has been cut by nearly half since the

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Rodenbach back in US..

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on draught right now," Mr. van Wees said, "and beyond draught in core markets, the large cork-finished bottles will be shipping next month to 15 states. We are working on a second wave to ship in the Fall."

Brewmaster Rudi Ghequire is an eloquent spokesman for his beer, and calls it "the missing link between beer and wine."

"The whole philosophy of this brewery and brewing process is the conservation of beer through acidification," Mr. Ghequire said. "The alternative, of course, is using hops. Hops are very good for preserving beer, but they also bring bitterness."

Rodenbach's symbiosis of top fermenting yeasts and lactic acid bacteria give it a tart taste unique in the beer world. "There is a little sweetness at the top of the tongue, and a dryness in the finish," Mr. Ghequire said. "So you take another swallow. That's what the brewers want. It's a refreshing product, a summer beer."

Mr. Ghequire pointed out that other popular beverages have a similar character. "Coca-Cola and lemonade also use acidity to counteract sweetness," he said.

"Acid products are more refreshing than a bitter product," he asserted. "Bitter products must be served at a colder temperature. Rodenbach is a winey beer without bitterness, it finishes dry."

Brewmaster Ghequire bristles when beer enthusiasts say the recent modernization of the brewery has changed the character of the beer. "People say wrong things about Rodenbach," he says. "They say it has changed. It has not. Our brewhouse was 130 years old, made in 1864, we could not go to eternity with it. The new brewhouse allows us to make hygenic wort."

After a long boil, he explains, Rodenbach ferments in stainless steel cylindroconical tanks, then for 4-6 weeks in horizontal tanks, before being shifted to wooden tanks. It is blended, 75% young beer and 25% old beer and stored in wood. Rodenbach's cellars boast 294 oak vats, and no brewery in the world has as much capacity in wood.

David van Wees says the challenge for Latis is to introduce the ale to a broader audience. "We want to take it beyond the beer geek community," he said. "This is a great beer for people who may have left beer for wine. We want to reach those people, and bring them back."



Old and new co-exist at Rodenbach
(Clockwise from top left) Rodenbach's gleaming modern glassed-in brew-house; the old malting tower, no longer in use; Rudi Ghequire beside one of the new stainless kettles; a stone carving commemorating the Rodenbachs, an old noble family; Lastly, the beer itself