

FALL READING

Ambitious Brew: The Story of American Beer

By Maureen Ogle
(Harcourt, Inc., \$25)

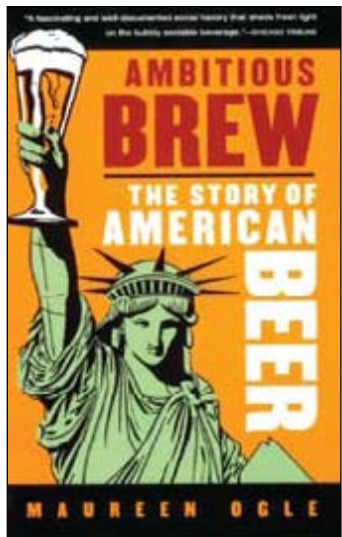
REVIEWED BY BOB VOGEL

Beer fans will find the definitive history of American beer in Maureen Ogle's "Ambitious Brew: The Story of American Beer." It's an effervescent tale of how the 7,000-year-old beverage was re-invented and re-defined to become a quintessentially American drink.

Ogle taps not the humble origins of beer in general, but its roots in the 19th-century American industrial revolution, where beer morphed from a beverage that everybody brewed in their basement (Founding Fathers included) to a refined product fit for mass distribution and consumption.

It's about the big names in brewing -- Busch, Coors, Schlitz, Pabst, Miller -- all of whom rank right up there with other industrial titans: Rockefeller, Gould and Schwab. It's about, well, not to sound trite ... the American Dream.

Of course, one couldn't talk about the history of beer without talking about temperance, prohibition, crime and health. But with a discipline that could only belong to a true historian, Ogle's breadth goes beyond the obvious, all the while



remaining on-topic and never letting the reader forget it's all about the beer.

At the same time, she recounts beer's struggle and near demise at the hands of prohibitionists of every stripe, and she details how brewers had to make ice cream, bread yeast and cheese just to keep on life support under the shadow of the Volstead Act.

The story of how it took nearly 40 years for the beer industry to recover from prohibition is a bitter one, but the story unfolds to reveal beer's present-day renaissance in America -- where a multitude of microbreweries and tens of thousands of homebrewers have once again re-invented beer in true Americans spirit.

That definitely deserves a toast. ■

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