

GRAPE VS. GRAIN

by Charles Bamforth

Pit a handful of wine enthusiasts and beer advocates in a room, and even without counting squabbles about who gets the last piece of Emmental cheese, you can expect intense sparks to fly. Why the polarity? Can't people respect both types of fine beverage for what they are and are not? *Grape vs. Grain* attempts to unleash cultural, historical and technical explanations for why wine and beer have developed into their respective roles today. With the author's academic credentials, you're bound to feel duly enlightened with each chapter of curious, informative narrative. As chair of the department of food science and technology and Anheuser-Busch-endowed Professor of Malting and Brewing Sciences at the University of California, Davis (how freakin' cool is that title?), Charles Bamforth knows his booze.

The book's topics span the intense scientific process of fermentation to the health benefits of various drinks. Bamforth presents an engaging, persuasive case that wine and beer are both worthy of appreciation with distinct idiosyncrasies. Woven within the narrative are amusing little gems like, "One cure for epilepsy called for the testicles of an ass to be finely ground in wine" and an excerpt from Rune XX from the Finnish saga *The Kalevala*, which gives a 3,000-year-old literary nod to hops.

[\$27 (available in April 2008), cambridge.org]



KEG STOOL

Nothing sets my heart racing quite like the phrase, "patent pending." It precedes all sorts of fanciful innovations by the ingenuity of fellow man. ProForm's CoreMaster™ gets a leg up over the rest of ab machines with a new and improved! spine design. The Toss & Chop™ cleverly combines kitchen shears, a knife and salad tongs in one handheld thingamabob. Here we see the glory of the Keg Stool™, which converts a beer keg into a handsome barstool while impressively supporting up to 400 pounds or "three really hot chicks on your lap." Because when you're sprawled on this finely designed beast, you know the ladies will be all up-ons.

Seriously, it's an idea that you wish you thought up first. The most economical version, Keg Stool Original, comes with a stool top, footrest and about a dozen little pesky screws to fit it all in place nicely on your own keg at home. Keg Stool Vintage has everything mentioned above plus a used brewer's shell. And finally, for all you rich bastards who wish to perfectly match your slick stainless steel scheme, the Keg Stool Elite includes a "shiny new shell." There are eight different color choices for the seat (add \$15 for the stylish camo) plus eight coordinating footrest hues—so if you don't mind a hulking cylinder in your midst, there's no excuse to pass up on this deal. Beer meets grandeur, inescapably under your ass.

[\$129.99 to \$349.99, kegstool.com]

ZEN AND THE ART OF COOKING BEER-CAN CHICKEN

by Cary Black, illustrated by Don Black

When it comes to shameless, ironic throwback recipes—think sticky-sweet cola braised wings, fried mac & cheese or virtually anything devised to be eaten on a stick—beer-can chicken seems to belong right up there. The basic concept's straightforward: Grab some beer that's lying around, plunk a seasoned chicken on top (tuck the can in real nice) and roast the bird thoroughly until the meat and skin are gorgeously bronzed. Classic. This book takes the simple formula to another level entirely, analyzing different cooking techniques (all the while waxing poetic on the mighty infusion cooker), experimenting with beer as well as Kentucky Bourbon and wine, and proffering such recipes as Portuguese prancing pullet and Hollingsworth's hellacious swimming hen. Menus as evocative as J. Peterman catalogs and goofy illustrations of chickens getting into various types of mischief heap on a generous *hoo-hah* factor. For even more excitement, there are also bonus chapters on cooking beer-can turkey, brining and injecting!!—double exclamation points taken verbatim from the front cover, of course.

Despite the book's no-frills presentation, *Zen* wins charm points with a clear passion for food, especially expressed in turns of phrase like "for yuks," "stick it down butt first" and "creative license is thrust wide open." Not to mention the chicken.

[\$14.95, redowlpublications.com]

Christine Liu loves respecting a good beer, especially when it happens to match her shoes. When not slurping—and photographing—a bowl of spicy noodles, find her canvassing Boston's lifestyle scene and taking her Macbook out for a walk.