

BEER WITH SOUL



WHEN DANIEL ALON became partner, he helped bring Jeremy Welfeld's dream to reality.

(Photos: Jem's Beer Factory)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Jems arrived on the Israeli beer scene in a whirlwind, producing craft beers in a country dominated by rather bland global brands. They called their creation a “beer factory” rather than a “brewery.”

They branded their company in a quirky, wacky way with fun icons that have stood the test of time, and they opened a brewpub and bars to close the circle. Jem's Beer Factory is not just a place that produces a tasty beer to drink. It is designed to bring people together to eat, drink, and be entertained. And enjoy the beer while doing so.

I first came across their original Petah Tikva brewpub on an unforgettable day for me but for the wrong reasons. My late wife was in Beilinson Hospital for brain surgery. During the operation, my

children and I were looking for a place to wait it out, and we discovered the original Jems in Petah Tikva. It was better than sitting for hours in the hospital waiting room. Even then, at first glance I could see that Jems had that unique quality that attracted a cross-section of people from different walks of life.

I started my career in the drinks industry in beerage, working for Bass Charrington, then the largest brewers in the United Kingdom. Bass and Charrington had originally been historic breweries in their own right, both founded in the 18th century. Their joint company dissolved in 2000, when they decided to focus on hospitality rather than brewing. Of course, the iconic Bass Ale is still made, but today by Anheuser Busch - InBev. Bass Charrington were brewers and pub owners, but also hoteliers and vintners. It was these other interests that allowed me to move from beer to wine and from pubs to restaurants and hotels as my career changed direction.

I had wanted to meet the owners of Jems for a while. The partners are Jeremy Welfeld and Daniel Alon. They both live in Ra'anana, as do I. So it came to pass that these three sons of Ra'anana met at Jems' Ra'anana branch for a beer (what else?), and I listened to their story.

Welfeld (aka Jem, from Jeremy) is a great character, wearing the ever-present baseball cap; he sports the traditional Jewish side curl, but on one side only. Jem has a broad ear-to-ear smile, with a mischievous look and a twinkle in his eye. Sitting slightly hunched, he looks as if he is just about to rush off somewhere, and that is how it proved to be. As I arrived for an interview, he warned me that he had to disappear for an important phone call within five minutes. He sat with me, leg jiggling with impatience, as he retold his story for the umpteenth time. All the while, he was looking past me to welcome customers, like a pub landlord

acknowledging the regulars. Ultimately, he jumped up to greet someone, and the interview with him was over.

I got the well-trodden story but regretted not being able to dig deeper to decipher the person behind the image. He certainly is a force of nature, a unique, absolute individualist, and his passion, which seems to be ongoing, shines through.

Jeremy always had a thing for Israel. The Zionist bug was implanted before the beer bug. He came to Israel to serve in the IDF in the mid-1980s. He loved the experience and says it did him a lot of good, but he returned to the United States to study.

The story goes that he tasted a blueberry beer, and it opened a window in his mind. He became obsessively curious about all things beer. Jem built a domestic brewery at his home to satisfy his new hobby and sought a career in hospitality. He joined a program in hotel management at Florida International University, and then decided to dive into beer by completing a degree in brewing microbiology at the University of California, Davis. Then, taking the bit between his teeth, he decided to enroll at the Siebel Institute of Technology, founded in 1868, the most important academic institution in the world of brewing. To his shock, his application was refused. Instead, he joined the Oxford Brewing Co. in Baltimore as an intern for 18 months. With that work experience, he applied to the Siebel Institute again, and this time he was accepted.

When made *aliyah* in 1999, he had a great deal of theoretical knowledge to harness in pursuit of his passion. In the meantime, he wanted to work in catering, but there were no jobs to be found. So, he worked in construction for six months, then found work at Arcaffe, and after that as a pastry chef at Bistro 56. The greatest pioneer needs a fair amount

THIS IS Jeremy Welfeld, nicknamed 'Jem,' a passionate brewer who had a dream to open a brewery in Israel.





of luck. Jem's came when he met an urbane, sharp, well-connected lawyer and entrepreneur named Daniel Alon, in 2007.

This was Tweedle Dum meeting Tweedle Dee; think of famous partnerships like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire or Lennon and McCartney. Welfeld and Alon were total opposites, but because of that, totally complementary. While Welfeld was flying kites high, Alon was the sober, practical realist keeping a grip on the kite so it would not fly away. They are the yin and the yang of craft brewing. However, although they are so different, they meet each other in the sheer satisfaction of seeing customers enjoying one of their brews at one of their outlets. It is a marriage made in heaven.

Alon helped Welfeld turn his dream into a vision, and that vision into a workable business plan. Here we are now, more than 15 years later, and Jem's is an important part of the Israeli beer scene.

Jem's Beers are natural and fresh, unfiltered, not pasteurized, and free from preservatives, flavoring, and coloring. They are made in small batches to ensure

maximum freshness. Welfeld makes beers according to instinct and feeling. He does not have a beer-making manual on hand. Like the great chefs, he follows what seems to him to be right.

I was provided with a tasting sample tray of six beers in order of bitter to sweet: IPA (inspired by the UK); Pils (Czech); Dark Lager (Germany); Amber Ale (UK); Wheat Beer (Germany); and 8.8 (Belgium). They are made to be true to the classic style produced in the countries that made them famous but are tweaked to be agreeable to the Israeli palate. Having been weaned on Bass Ale and Charrington IPA, I liked the Jem's IPA best. I also loved that the Wheat Beer was served with a thin slice of orange in it.

THE ICING on the beer cake came when accomplished restaurateur Dror Erez joined the team, bringing his expertise in bars and restaurants. The first branch of Jem's was the already mentioned brew pub in Petah Tikva. They have recently moved to new spacious premises that is bar, restaurant, event hall, and entertainment center all in one. My first time there, it was a little noisy, but it was 5



THEIR BREWERY, known as Jem's Beer Factory.

JEM'S BEERS are natural, fresh, unfiltered, and unpasteurized.

with Alexander from Israel and Krombacher from Germany. Then it closed a deal with Molson Coors, the third-largest beer company in the world, to represent Miller from America and Staropramen from the Czech Republic. The most recent news is that Carmel has an agreement with AB InBev, the largest beer company in the world, to represent Hoegaarden, Leffe, and Stella Artois from Belgium – and Corona from Mexico. It is a pretty impressive portfolio, with a great deal of variety, which places Carmel squarely as the third force behind Tempo of Netanya (Goldstar, Heineken) and IBBL of Ashkelon (Carlsberg, Tuborg) in the beer stakes.

I was moved to hear how quickly Jem's reacted to help the war effort after the trauma of Oct. 7.

Alon explained that a waitress called to ask if Jem's was doing anything to assist. Within no time at all, Alon had a plan to provide kosher food and meals to soldiers and volunteers, despite having had to dispense with a quarter of his staff. Jem's pulled it off, despite logistics problems. Alon implemented the plan, even before seeking donations to pay for it. This helped to cement the feeling that Jem's is a thoroughly Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli institution providing high-quality products and fun venues, while contributing to the common cause. All credit to them for responding to the needs of the hour.

Just before cutting the interview short, Welfeld looked at me, raised his eyebrows, and said, as though to sum things up: "It is a cosmic ballet." It sounded good, but I did not have the faintest idea what he meant.

He then explained that it was a combination of brotherhood, friendship, love, and soul. Beer with soul! That I could appreciate. ■

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p.m. and the band was rehearsing for their evening performance. It is apparently a place full of content. The food is good. I can vouch for their spicy Diablo Sausages, the large Schnitzel de Luxe, and their tasty paninis. You won't go hungry. In all, they have 13 outlets, some managed directly and others that are franchises.

I liked the fact that Carmel Winery is now the distributor of Jem's beers, especially as Palestine Breweries, the first brewery in pre-state Israel, was situated just there. Founded in 1934 by Jewish Frenchmen Gaston Dreyfus and James Rothschild, it was situated next to Rishon Le Zion Wine Cellars. When the British left, the market for beer dried up, and the brewery was closed and was later incorporated into the winery. The only remaining clue of its origins was the decorative eagle embedded in the stone step at the entrance of the accounts department, once the brewery. The first beer brand was Nesher ("eagle"). Even the first Goldstar was made there. What goes around, comes around.

Carmel is Israel's historic winery, as well as our largest winery. It was founded in 1882 by Baron Edmond de Rothschild (James's father). Now the parent company, Carmel Corp., has become a public company. It owns a 30% share of soft drinks company Jafora Tabori and, in the last couple of years, has become a very significant player in the beer market.

On several occasions over many years, Carmel had dipped its toe into the beer market but never got far. Until now. Carmel started distributing Jem's, along



JEM'S CHAIN of bars and pubs: A good place to eat, drink, and be merry.

THE BARS offer a full range of food, perfect to enjoy along with a beer.