

Before any of this complex problem-solving begins, Sam starts with a simple pencil sketch in a notebook. Whether he's designing a beer label or a movie poster, his designs are born the size of a postage stamp.

"At that size you can't include any detail, just the main areas of dark and light, and the rough composition," he says. This view allows him to decide if the balance of the composition is working. He says it's tempting to include detail, but it's usually a mistake. He then photographs the sketch, puts it in Photoshop, and begins transforming the piece with a graphics tablet and digital brushes.



Return of the Lake Erie Monster launched in April 2024, with Spacewalker following in June, and Nosferatu in August. The series has moved to 12 oz six-packs from 16 oz four-packs, primarily to allow it to occupy the same shelf space as the brewery's Christmas Ale juggernaut, and at the same price point. The popular Chillwave Double IPA will join the series at the beginning of 2025.

The Great Lakes Cinematic Universe has just begun.

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The Glory of the Portuguese Half-Pint

Words by Maria Kruglyak.

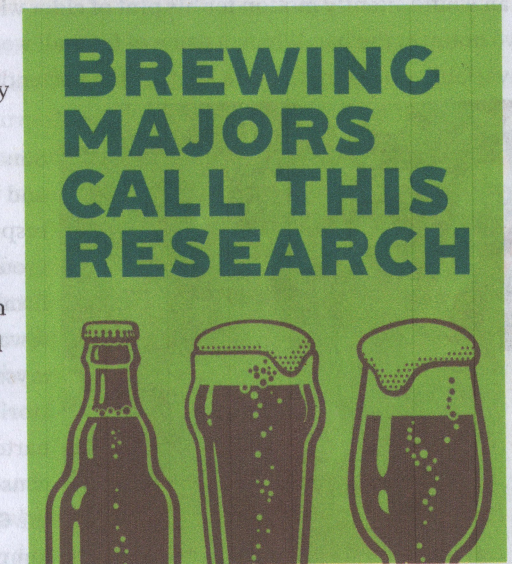
Photos by Iggy Tsarukov. Illustrations by Shan Escobar.

How a hard-core cheapest-light-lager-pint bartender fell for the imperial.

“What’s your cheapest lager?” I would ask in a half-whisper, leaning forward across the dark wooden bar of the murky East London pub. The bartender would smirk, pointing to the Amstel, Heineken, or Budweiser tap. “One pint, please.”

That’s how it would always be. Or at least, that’s what it felt like it would always be. For most of the decade that I worked in bars, pubs, and kitchens, I wouldn’t dream of ordering anything but that. At the time, though, it wasn’t just that I couldn’t afford a classy craft beer—there was also this cultural thing, and it felt as intricate as my post-Soviet cultural background. My family is a mix of East-to-West Soviet minorities and my family history is a parallel of the history of the USSR: at first, a generational divide of pro-revolutionary youths and market merchants; then, a family in Siberian exile and a communist great-grandfather shot in a labor camp as the enemy of the state. In 2000, we left, my parents giving up on the possibility of things getting better in Russia: first, to the US for two years, and then to Sweden, where I grew up. Never really finding my place in Swedish society, I left for London as soon as I turned 18.

My first night in the big city found me face-to-face with a dozen beer taps in a South London pub, none of whose names I recognized. Back then, I didn’t ask which pint was the cheapest. I just asked for a pint. “Which one?” the lady behind the bar said as I stared in



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amazement at her, asking which one she would have gone for. She just shrugged and I had to point at random. Back then I had no clue, but now I know: she would have also opted for the cheapest pint of lager. A pint of Bud, perhaps. I must admit, I would have fared better with a half-pint back then. The beer tasted bitter and the pint glass felt huge and clumsy in my hand.

Some months later, I found myself flat-out broke. CVs in hand, I made a round of neighborhood pubs: the nice, bougie one, the one that looked haunted, the one with the good music. Three days later, I was behind the bar, learning how to pour a perfect pint and getting an envelope of cash at the end of the week. A week later, I cried walking home from the job, because this was the first time I'd felt trusted, respected, like I could do things. Who knew hospitality would be so fulfilling? For my post-Soviet family in Sweden, my working in a pub was insane: "How can you work with those people? You know pub work is messy and violent." Prejudice abounded, but it wasn't their fault. This cultural resistance to hospitality—"Why not eat at home when you know how to cook?"—was a left-over of Soviet ideology, where eating or drinking out was seen as something bourgeois and therefore dirty, unless you were an artist of course. As someone who immigrated as a child (a so-called 1.5-generation immigrant), I was instead drawn to the bars, cafés, and pubs Europe had to offer. Not surprisingly, I felt most at home not in the "bougie" ones, but in the locals. The ones where the quiet old man would silently motion for his pint of cider with a slice of lemon, and nurture it for two hours at the bar. Where a game of football would bring the rowdy crowds who invariably would try to buy a shot for the bartender.



Somewhere in between the crude jokes and the endless pints, I found myself respected, in power, and able to stand my ground. I learned how to jokingly and firmly guide the far-too-drunk customers towards the door. Learned how to make myself heard, how to listen to the pained stories that would only be said to the bartender as a confession, and how to console my overworked co-workers. From the 60+ hours a week I ended up working, jumping from one pub job to another, I learned how to practice the common understanding, mutual aid, and care that the hospitality workers have for one another.

So, when the half-pint craft beers started



to come into fashion and the kitchen team would make jokes of the men in flowery shirts for ordering these "not even a real beer" beers, I adopted their distaste as my own. Nothing but a lager for me! A pint, for sure—I was adamant about it. As craft beer became more and more popular, I softened my approach and grew to accept the half-pint craft beer. For customers; never for myself. I wouldn't dream of it.

That is, until I came to Portugal. A looming pandemic, increasingly high rents, and extortionate prices forced me and my partner at the time to look for a place to escape to. Looking at a map of Europe in the pub smoking area, we played the exclusion game of European countries, and Portugal was the one that remained. As rumors of a lockdown came to the fore, we made a quick decision. Let's just go.

It was the best decision we could have made. We arrived on a Tuesday to an empty Faro airport with the few people we saw already wearing masks. As we spent the next days looking for the next step, we realized we'd been just in time. By Friday, the UK was in lockdown—all pubs, and thereby all our possible income, closed down. In Portugal, all the restaurants were shut by the end of the following week—voluntarily, at first, then by the government mandate. We found a guesthouse to rent on a farm by the coast and spent the next months learning the language, making projects, and building ways to work online. I got my first essay commission. My partner began to sell his music.

When lockdown restrictions began to lift, we shook the hands of the family we'd been renting the guesthouse from. They gave us a bottle of home-brewed aguardente—a spirit made out of fruit that, to this day, is far too strong for me—and off we went to the capital. Cleansed by the seaside life, I was open to new experiences, free of the former prejudices I'd acquired in the pub. There was still no way of going back to hospitality work—there was hardly enough to go around—and I was making my wage by translation, writing and editing projects. Luckily, life wasn't half as expensive as it had been in London, with rentals dropping in price from the pandemic, and the expenses out being limited to things you could have to take out: 60-cent-cafés and 1-euro-imperiais, the southern part of Portugal's word for half-pints.

Sitting on steps outside of cafés and on the stone fences of miradouros (viewpoints), I found myself absolutely unexpectedly obsessed with the imperiais. Imperial, because it was an imperial measure (in the north they're called fino, for tap). Here, the pints, canecas, are something only the English tourists would drink, and just that tad bit more expensive than two imperiais. The local go-to is the half-pint and, to my delight, light lager! The crispiest of light lagers, too. I became fixated on tasting new beer, beers of all kinds, as long as they were imperiais. The pandemic had increased my already high alcohol tolerance, and the small beers were easy and cooling to drink. A caneca would go warm and lose its crispiness, but an imperial... You could easily finish it while the beer was still cold. To my surprise, the rounds culture didn't exist here either, not because people wouldn't buy each other drinks, but because you'd order a next one just as you'd finished your first one. It was all about the temperature. As the end of the pandemic brought me back into bar work, I realized the obsession of the Portuguese with beer temperature. Nothing but the coldest. Nothing but the crispiest. Nothing bigger than an imperial or a fino. The next step—to opt for the local craft beer, brewed half a kilometer away from the bar where I was working—was suddenly not so big. Because as long as it was an imperial, I was happy.

When I returned to London, I found myself at the pub counter again. "A half-pint of your cheapest lager, please! Or actually... Do you have a craft beer from the area? What's the closest, Gypsy Hill? Perfect. A half-pint, please." 