

## FOREWORD

Is there a more ancient recipe than the one for beer? It is thought that man began brewing beer even before he learned how to bake bread, and that beer was among the provisions that Noah brought on the ark. In ancient times, Egyptians were buried with a supply of beer; by the Middle Ages, beer played such a central role in the culture that it was an acceptable currency with which to pay taxes, settle debts, and donate to the church. Queen Elizabeth I was known to drink ale for breakfast. All by way of saying, it seems that *The Oxford Companion to Beer* is long overdue.

But the timing of its publication is logical. All of that rich history aside, for much of my fermented-beverage-drinking life, we were living in the dark ages of beer. A cultural staple that was for not just centuries but *millennia* made in the home, and later in abbeys and small breweries, had been, by the time Prohibition ended, taken over almost exclusively by multinational companies. These organizations were efficient at turning out bland brews devoid of individual character and deep flavor. Thinking back to my teens and twenties, I saw beer as little more than a means for getting drunk—a beverage often proceeded by the word “light”—and the big producers gave me what I wanted.

Somewhere in my adult life, the tide turned. Part of this was a result of my growing older and beginning to see beer as a drink worthy of appreciation, not just something cold to crack open after a

softball game. We’re also in the midst of a great renaissance in artisanal brewing. Microbreweries have cropped up all over North America and Europe, with small batch producers turning out wonderfully complex products that showcase beer’s wide variety of flavor profiles. Meanwhile, consumers are becoming thoughtful connoisseurs. At the beginning of 2010, when I opened Colicchio & Sons, a contemporary American restaurant in New York’s Chelsea neighborhood, I realized from the beginning that I wanted to focus on beer. I started working with my beverage director to select draft beers to feature, focusing on local products as well as the best of the artisanal international brews. There were simply too many good beers to choose from, and I ended up installing 28 taps.

*The Oxford Companion to Beer* provides an exhaustive account of not only beer’s history but its science and its art, at a time when people are more willing than ever to take beer seriously. And if I had to choose one person to be my beer guide and teacher, it would be Garrett Oliver, whose passion for beer is only surpassed by his sheer knowledge on the subject. In this volume Oliver and numerous experts have assembled beer wisdom from around the globe, creating a virtual beer symposium—the scope of which the world has never known. And we, as readers, have a front-row seat.

*Tom Colicchio, New York City, February 2011*