

# A barrel full of fun





The mid-tier *Fässla* Brewery, with its 33,000 hectolitres of output, embodies precisely the picture that springs to people's minds at the mention of "a traditional family-owned brewery": specialty beers, cosy convivial taverns, and a familial, down-to-earth self-image. Its name of *Fässla*, which translates as "small barrel", fits in neatly with this archetype. What's more, the brewery is located in Bamberg, which is tacitly acknowledged as the secret capital of beer, with its extremely high density of breweries and an equally high level of per-capita consumption. The "small barrel" did have just one problem – its inner-city premises were bursting at the seams. This posed rather a tricky task for proprietor Roland Kalb when planning the installation of a new filler and labeller. Kosme found an elegant solution here, by synchronising the two machines in a monobloc.

Statistically, everyone in Bamberg drinks an average of 280 litres of beer a year, according to the calculations of the city's breweries. Within the city limits alone, 9 breweries are still brewing around 50 different beers for a population of 70,000 – including many seasonal specialities. This means there's one brewery for every 7,777 inhabitants. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the city was one of southern Germany's biggest trading centres for hops. So it's hardly surprising that 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet Jean Paul broke into rhapsodies, praising the cathedral city's beloved drink by exclaiming: "By heaven, what a beer!" Just under 200 years ago, in 1818, Bamberg boasted 65 breweries tasked with supplying around 17,000 citizens with 40,000 hl of beer. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their number had decreased to 36, making 160,000 hl of beer for 38,000 Bambergians (= 421 litres per head). The beer back then, though, had a lower alcohol content than nowadays.

### A city dedicated to the brewmaster's craft and a tourists' favourite

But the figure of 280 litres consumed per head must be put in perspective: it's not only the locals who enjoy their hometown's renowned beer, but the tourists as well. And their number is impressive: in 2012, Bamberg recorded about 550,000 overnight stays, plus an estimated 6.3 million day-trippers, all of them keen to visit the venerable imperial, episcopal, university and brewery-themed city located on the Regnitz river, with its baroque architecture, its castle, its renowned beer. Bamberg's entire old city centre has since 1993 been one of the UNESCO's world culture heritage sites, as the biggest undamaged historic town centre in Germany.

*The history of the Fässla Brewery in Bamberg's city centre goes back all the way to 1649.*





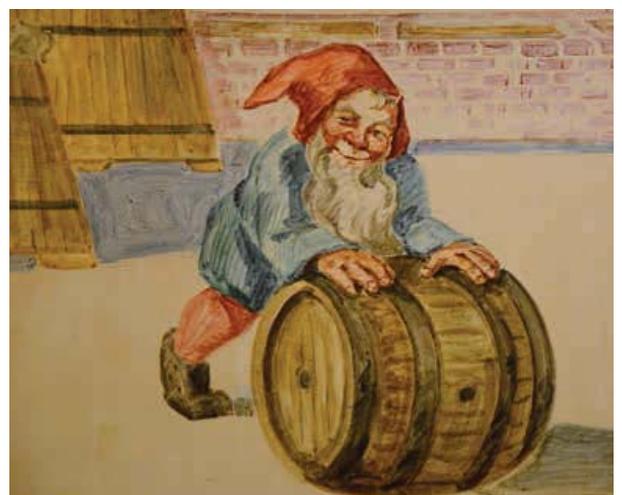
*The boss's personal domain: beer-brewing is something that Sebastian Kalb, meanwhile 73 years of age, still prefers to do himself.*

### Have a bite and a beer on the cellar

Come spring, many revellers stop at one of the cellars, sitting in the shade of the trees, eating a bite and drinking a beer. There are still three of those cellars in Bamberg: they used to be tunnel systems for mining, and then served as fermentation and storage cellars. Trees were planted on top to provide some welcome shade. So you're actually sitting "on the cellar", and relaxing.

One of the three remaining cellars (of what used to be more than 20) is the Fässla Cellar in the Wunderburg, offering space for 500 people. It belongs to the Fässla Brewery, as do five other taverns in the city centre, including one discotheque, and of course the brewery pub. Today, Fässla is managed in the second generation by Roland Kalb. The brewery itself, though, has seen many, many more generations. Its roots go back all the way to 1649. The Thirty Years' War had been over for just one year when Hanss Lauer installed some brewing equipment in the corner house at what is today the Obere Königsstrasse. Lauer, who was not only a brewer but a cooper as well, chose the name of his brewery "Fässla" (dialect for "small barrel") advisedly. In 1898, Master Brewer Paul Lutz purchased the Fässla

*The "midget", who for aeons has been rolling a beer barrel in the brewery's coat of arms, is ubiquitous, whether it's on the elaborately carved chair-backs or the paintings in the "Schwemm", where standing customers are served in the corridor.*





***The height-adjustable rotary Isoblock G filler from Kosme, with 28 filling valves and a pitch dimension of 960 millimetres, consists of a filling unit and a crowner turret.***

***The Vinetta labeller is a space-saving rotary model, equipped with two stations for processing cold-glue labels.***



Brewery. In 1978, finally, the Kalb clan, a family of master brewers and malters, initially leased the real estate, and has been progressing the Fässla tradition as proprietors since 1 October 1986.

### **People from Bamberg drink beer from Bamberg**

In 2011, Sebastian Kalb handed the brewery over to his son Roland, a brewer by trade. Today, Fässla is the biggest out of 8 Bamberg-based breweries. “In 1978, our beer output came to 2,400 hl, for a turnover of 500,000 deutschmarks, and today we’re brewing 33,000 hl, for sales of four million euros”, is how Roland Kalb vividly describes the brewery’s rise. “People from Bamberg – thank God for this – drink beer from Bamberg. No chance here for the big players on the market. Our consumers have deep-rooted local loyalties; they also support regional butchers and bakers. Here in Bamberg, everything is just this tiny bit different – simply Upper-Franconian, you see”, says Roland Kalb. But he’s equally pleased to see all the beer tourists: “I get plenty of guests from abroad: from Belgium, Holland, England,

these are all people who appreciate a good beer, coming here especially for the wide variety of beers we're offering. They stay for a week, and are completely over the moon – for them, Bamberg is Paradise." Roland is observing the development of the craft-beer movement in the USA with all due interest, but it's a bit faraway for anything more: "I don't really know too much about that." He's firmly convinced, though, that the trend towards smaller breweries is "huge".

### Honest prices

Roland Kalb achieves three-quarters of his sales with bottled beer, with draft beer making up the rest. In his own taverns, there's only draft beer, and in the brewery pub it's tapped by Roland in person. The taproom is his office: it's a venue not only for eating and drinking but also for negotiating and purchasing – it's here that people get together. Everyone knows everyone. The brewery pub opens every day (except Sundays) at 8 a.m., and closes at midnight. The first customers in the morning are pensioners, and students and schoolkids who have their breakfast here. "We're a student town, and young people just love the atmosphere," says Roland. As from midday, you can order warm meals, Franconian specialities like "Schäuferla" (shoulder of pork) with a dumpling and sauerkraut, or various roasts – generous portions at very moderate prices of around seven or eight euros. Just like half a litre of beer for 2.40 euros, with half a litre still meaning 500 millilitres and not 0.4 litres as in the rest of Germany. "We pride ourselves on giving value for money here", says Roland. The Fässla radiates genuine Bamberg charm from every pore, thus preserving Franconian beer traditions.

### Brewing is the boss's domain

The most popular beer is "Gold Pils", accounting for roughly 45 per cent of the output, followed by "Lagerbier" and "Zwergla", a dark beer with a mellow, slightly malty taste that lingers satisfyingly on the tongue. These three types are also filled in bottles. As tradition has it, the "Bambergator", Bamberg's strongest beer at 21 per cent original gravity and 8.5 per cent alcohol, is then tapped in October. If you want to try some, you have to hurry, because after three to four weeks Bamberg's beer-drinkers have made a clean sweep (sorry: swallow) of it. Beer-brewing is something



*Moderate prices: half a litre of beer for 2.40 euros*

that the Kalb patriarch, meanwhile 73 years of age, still prefers to do himself. Although Fässla employs two brewmasters, two brewers, an apprentice and two beer truck drivers, brewing has always been the boss's personal domain. In the 50-hectolitre brewhouse, Sebastian Kalb can prepare a new brew every four hours. The brewery channels continual investment into the technologies it uses, and keeps its kit at the latest state of the art. Depending on the type of beer involved, the beers remain in the storage tanks for four to six weeks, and the high-strength beers for twelve weeks even, until their degree of maturation is just right. "Cold fermentation, cold cellars, quaffable beers. That's the secret", is Roland Kalb's firm conviction.

### Monobloc comprising filler, crowner and labeller

You'll find the bottled beers from the Fässla Brewery on the shelves of retailers, at well-stocked beverage wholesalers, and on home-delivery trucks within a catchment area of about 30 kilometres. To ensure the latest state of the art for its bottling kit as well, Fässla invested yet again, and this time cooperated with Krones for the first time. "Krones was the only company where the space-price-performance ratio was absolutely

*“Krones was the only firm where the space-price-performance ratio was absolutely spot-on: everything top-notch”, explains the proprietor Roland Kalb.*



spot-on. There was no other vendor able to accommodate equipment like that into the small amount of space we had available.” It was not least thanks to the monobloc of filler, crowner and labeller that it was possible to fit the line into the extremely cramped bottling room.

### **Bottling with nitrogen**

The height-adjustable rotary Isoblock G filler from Kosme, with 28 filling valves and a pitch dimension of 960 millimetres, consists of a filling unit and a crowner turret. The filling valves used are isobaric VKP-V types with double pre-evacuation. With reference to the 0.5-litre NRW bottle, the filler has been rated at 6,550 bottles an hour for bottling with nitrogen. “We bottle everything with nitrogen, and not with CO<sub>2</sub>, because we’ve got a system for extracting nitrogen from the air, and that doesn’t cost anything. Kronos was the only vendor to guarantee that we’d be able to run almost as fast with nitrogen as with CO<sub>2</sub>.” Bottling takes place two to three times a week, three beer variants into one type of bottle, the 0.5-litre NRW bottle, which was introduced by Fässla two decades ago.

The figures for the line are quite persuasive: efficiency levels for the individual machines are in each case over 98 per cent, oxygen pick-up during filling is under 0.02 milligrams per litre, and the residual air content in the bottle neck under 0.30 millilitres per bottle. Fill level accuracy is also very high, with a standard deviation of 1.5 to 2.8 millimetres. Nitrogen consumption, at max. 250 grams per hectolitre, is quite acceptable. The fobbing losses encountered are less than 1.5 millilitres per bottle.

### **Four labels: “You enjoy life more if you show off a bit.”**

The Vinetta labeller is a space-saving rotary model, equipped with two stations for processing cold-glue labels. A change-over to a different label type is fast, requiring no tools, meaning the machine’s efficiency levels are hardly affected. As part of Kosme’s safety and noise-protection concept, the labeller is fitted with full-vision access panels for monitoring the functions in the container area. Fässla indulges in the luxury of applying four labels to each bottle. “You enjoy life more if you show off a bit”, to quote Roland Kalb. One station dresses the front of each bottle



*Fässla employs two brewmasters, two brewers, an apprentice and two beer truck drivers, “meaning seven employees for 33,000 hectolitres. So we’re looking good on the staffing side of things.”*

in three labels: a body label measuring 90 times 90 millimetres, a shaped shoulder label 80 times 36 millimetres in size, plus a 74-times-19-mm horizontal strip label, an eye-catcher with a high recognition value for the Fässla beers. The second station dresses the bottles in a back label. The body label is additionally inkjet date-coded.

There’s less than half a metre between the monobloc and the glass façade. The operator has to make do with that. With this filler/crowner/labeller monobloc, Kosme has conjured up a small space-saving miracle indeed.

### **“We are satisfied.”**

“We work a lot, from morning till late at night. It’s fun, and we’re earning money with it”, says Roland Kalb. The question of succession has already more or less been solved as well: “I’ve got one son aged 17, who’s just starting on an apprenticeship as a brewer, one son aged 15 who wants to be a tax consultant in adult life, and a 13-year-old daughter, who’s dead-set on the catering trade. Isn’t that wonderful? As far as beer output is concerned: we don’t want to upsize this (and we’d be hard-put to it if we tried) because here right in the city centre there’s simply not enough room. More is impossible, and we’re satisfied with things as they are.”

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