

1,000 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL

by LAURA SICILIANO-ROSEN

One glance at Bierkraft's long, bottle-lined interior is enough to excite any beer drinker, but real connoisseurs will want to take their time. "Some people just want to look at the shelves for an hour," says owner Benjamin Granger. It's no wonder: Since opening in 2001 in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the gourmet grocery has amassed a museum-worthy collection of approximately 1,000 different beers, encompassing 20 countries and as many U.S. states. "If it's available in New York," says Granger, "we have it."

As the name suggests, Bierkraft focuses on craft brews; even the shop's other epicurean offerings—250 artisanal cheeses, 100 types of boutique chocolate (including beer-flavored varieties) from several chocolatiers, an assortment of charcuterie and dry goods—generally come from local and/or small-production vendors. "Every item is hand-picked; every item we've tried," says Daphne Scholz, another owner. Moreover, customers can buy just one bottle of beer, or piece of chocolate, if they please—a concept more European than American, notes Scholz.

But back to the beer. If a requested variety isn't distributed in the state, the well-trained staff—who occasionally gathers, in strict pursuit of education, for after-hours tastings of exotic beers carted home in luggage—will try to hunt it down, or recommend a comparable brew. Knowledgeable service is key, after all, to customers making sense of the dizzying selection: Aside from those thousand bottles, 13 rotated beers are sold on tap in half-gallon, takeaway growlers. For that fresh, just-off-the-draft taste, the hand-built system uses counterpressure for each fill, a rarity for a retail store.

Of course, locals have the advantage, especially on Tuesdays (spring through fall), when five beers are paired with five cheeses or chocolates in free hour-long tastings. But non-New Yorkers can take heart in the store's fast-growing Web site: Bierkraft fields orders, and questions, from beer-drinkers around the country. "We're not about moving 30-packs," says Granger. "We're about bringing you the best beer we possibly can." www.bierkraft.com.

