

**did you
know?**

*I used to work for the
London Stock Exchange,
Barclays Capital and the
Bank of America.*

HOWZIT, BREW

Richard Chennells is a brew master, chef and author of the recently published *The Wandering Keg*. This fanatic of the foamy stuff travels around South Africa and the world in his trusty Land Rover on a beer-lover's quest. We ask him about bellies, food and beverage pairing, and whether ginger beer makes the cut

K How old were you when you had your first beer and who was it with?

RC I was 11 years old, and it was with my friend Matthew Rattray at my mother's 40th. We had half a beer and my dad saw us – he was not happy. We tossed the beer and I got reprimanded, but it obviously didn't work.

K How did you go from being a London investment banker to making a career in beer?

RC I was very bored in London – not with London, I love London – but with my job. The pay was awesome, but it wasn't for me. I went to brewery school in America, but before all that I was working in a brewery in Greenwich part-time. So, I was banking by day and brewing by night. All the brew masters thought I was mad, arriving in a suit and brewing and helping out.

K What do you make of traditional African beer?

RC It's quite tasty. In Zululand, we have good guys that make good Zulu beer.

K Umqombothi?

RC Yes, exactly. A lot of the local stuff that gets made is umqombothi, but they call it 'Amariverriver' because it's almost like it comes out of a river and it's quite dodgy [laughs]. That's what they say when they joke about a bad batch. The Zulus do put a lot of effort into their beer making. I have a friend that makes

really good Zulu beer at Thothoto Brewery. It tastes a little bit sour, a little bit milky, but it's got a real kick, like someone put a shot of vodka in it. But of course they haven't.

K Does braaiing go hand-in-hand with beer?

RC Yes. Africans do a thing called *chisa nyama*. You go buy your beers from the bottle store and your meat from the butchery and then you braai it at the back of the butchery, drinking your quarts on the side of the road. It's massive in Jo'burg. People pull up in their suits and SLKs, BMs and leather jackets.

K If you had to compare which nation or culture loves its beer the most, would you say Germany or...

RC Germans are a bit snooty about their beer. If I was to say to you, which country makes better beer, Germany or America, what would you say?

K Germany. Would you say America?

RC What I am trying to say is, if you were to take the top 20 beers in America and the top 20 beers in Germany and compare them, the results would be mind-boggling. When you think of American beer, most people just think of Budweiser. But there's more to it than that. Every small town in America has a brewery. They are crazy about their beers. →

K So, what beer do you have in your fridge at home?

RC A lot of people talk about Castle being full of chemicals and nonsense – it's BS. If I am not at a microbrewery drinking beer, then I am drinking Castle.

K What else do you keep in your fridge?

RC When I have friends coming from overseas, I ask them to bring me Sierra Nevada pale ale from the UK.

K Apparently you also worked as a chef? Can you give us some tips on food and beer pairing?

RC An obvious one is Peroni and pizza. But how's this, the other day I was absolutely gob-smacked. I had a fillet steak with chocolate sauce and a West Coast pale ale by a brewery up in Shongweni. The trifecta was amazing. In South Africa, the range starts with lager, lager, lager, but there is also pilsner, pale ale, stout...

K And each one works with different foods? Like wine?

RC Yes, but in terms of knowing what goes with

K Are you saying that there is a lack of exposure to the variety of beers out there and everyone could actually find something they like?

RC Yes, exactly. I mean, you get strawberry beers, cherry beers, pineapple beers, honey ales...

K Do you prefer drinking beer from the bottle, can or the tap? Is there a real difference?

RC Drinking beer from the bottle is vanity – think about it: it's a whole thing of, 'Look at me and what I'm drinking'. I'll tell you a fact: you should drink beer out of a can if you are going to be in sun.

K Why?

RC Because the minute sunlight hits your beer, it changes the flavour. If you are drinking from glasses, don't sit in direct sunlight.

K If you had to compare the Top 20 beers of each country, which country makes the worst beers?

Does drinking beer really put **hair on your chest** – and if so, how does this affect **women beer drinkers**?

what, we're not there yet. It's still a discovery. Each microbrewery will tell you what their beers pair with. In general a lager, like Castle or Amstel, will go with most foods. A stout for example, a pungent high-in-alcohol pale ale, would go nicely with a chilli dish.

K So do you ever cook with beer?

RC Have you heard of the beer-can chicken? You take a beer can, balance the chicken on it, up its bum on the grill and you let it cook. It's amazing, I promise you. Just don't knock the braai over [laughs].

K Beer drinking is a big part of South African culture, but do you think you need a certain acquired taste to really enjoy beer?

RC Put it this way: a lot of women say they are not beer drinkers. But let me tell you about a situation I had. A couple came to my brewery, the wife was 'not a beer drinker'. But the next thing I saw, she was on her second pint of Zulu Blonde.

RC There is no such thing as a bad beer, and I have tasted some horrible ones, but they were still good!

K Have you had any experiences with beer goggles?

RC Plenty, but you don't, you know, regret it. In Stellenbosch it happened a lot...

K Does drinking beer really put hair on your chest – and if so, how does this affect women beer drinkers?

RC I don't know if beer puts hair on your chest, but I certainly have a mop on mine [laughs].

K So, what made you decide to write a travel book like *The Wandering Keg*?

RC Well, the first step was a TV show, filmed in 2007. We decided to do a 10-minute teaser and once we had everything together we ended up doing the whole first episode and it was bloody funny. We got a lot of enquiries about it, so I planned 13 episodes but it's been sitting on the bricks for two years. Eventually I thought I'd write a book. But it's not just a boring beer book, it's a travel



did you know?
 One of our beers is named after John Dunn, who had 48 Zulu wives and over 150 children.

book – it's got recipes on cooking with beer, it's about food-and-beer pairing and the interesting characters I've met from the different breweries.

K You really have been to a lot of places around the country. What is the ultimate beer route in SA?

RC For a good route, as well as interesting places to visit, you should start in Clarens. From there, go to the Nottingham Road brewery, then to Hillcrest, Shongweni. After that, head to the SAB plant [Durban]. Drive up the coast to Ballito to the Luyt Lager Brewery – it's very impressive – and then to Eshowe to visit me at Zulu Blonde [The Zululand Brewery].

K Does ginger beer qualify as beer?

RC No.

K What is the best beer festival you've been to in the world and why?

RC The London Beer Festival in Olympia. It's not just a ra-ra-get-pissed scene like the one in Munich. But the best one – I haven't been to it yet – is in Denver, Colorado: The Great American Beer Fest. There are 385 breweries exhibiting for a week. No one else does that.

K Is that your next beer quest?

RC Definitely. It's top of the list.

K What is your opinion on beer-funnelling and would you consider yourself a master?

RC I am not a master at beer-funnelling, my brother is the master. I think it's great – a real quick way to drink beer, skip the formalities and get right down to business [laughs].

K Which countries have the best pub songs?

RC The Irish.

K And what sport goes best with beer?

RC Golf. I swear to God that golfers drink more beers than rugby players, mountain bikers or fishermen. By leaps and bounds!

K What is your big goal with beer? Is it to educate people and for them to realise that there is so much out there other than what they generally perceive?

RC Literally that. Instead of going into a restaurant and ordering Windhoek, Windhoek, Windhoek, go up to the barman and ask him, 'What beers do you have?' and try new things. ■