

TRAVELING CONNOISSEUR



TOP SECRET

The Farmhouse Brewing Traditions of Lithuania

By Martin Thibault

After driving through empty stretches of flat land lined haphazardly with half-collapsed barns, passing by the odd town or city still surrounded by the concrete vestiges of communist rule, filled with aging populations still carrying strife on their curved backs and scarred foreheads, it is difficult to believe a real beer movement, promoting unpasteurized and unfiltered brews, is alive and well in Lithuania. Yet that is the conclusion one inevitably comes to after visiting many of the country's quirky beer bars and countryside breweries.

An old homebrewer from Biržai, the diminutive capital of Lithuanian beer culture, still buys his ingredients from a shop simply called "Apyniai, Salyklas" (Hops, Malt), close to a beer store named "Alus" (Beer), not far from a bar branded "Pilstomas Alus" (Draught Beer). Such is the poetry of marketing in these parts. This man is a gentle and generous brewer too, which is not necessarily traditional in reclusive northeastern Lithuania. Although most drinkers there will say real beer starts at eight percent alcohol, this homebrewer spares no grain for