

Beacons of The Countryside Brewing Scene

Udriene, who turns out to be the exception to the rule of secrecy despite her wariness, brews some of the finest examples of what can be distinctive in Lithuanian countryside beer. She doesn't boil at all, adding a hop tea in the mash and in the fermenter. Yet her two beers show no signs of lactic acid or bacteria. She uses a yeast strain that was harvested by one of her ancestors and which has been revived countless times over the years, without the help of a lab. It even used to be stored under ground, in the garden, in hotter seasons, to be dug up when needed. Yet her beers don't show any sign of fatigue or quirky side effects from this mutated yeast. In fact her base beer, Jovaru Alus, is a comfortable quaffer with a portly malt character that quickly dips into a delicate, earthy finish. This yeast is also quite voracious; a lab test upon returning home to Montreal showed that the final gravity of her beer was 1.0025. Yet the highly attenuated beer tasted like a malt-forward ESB with a slightly eccentric finish. Mesmerizing.

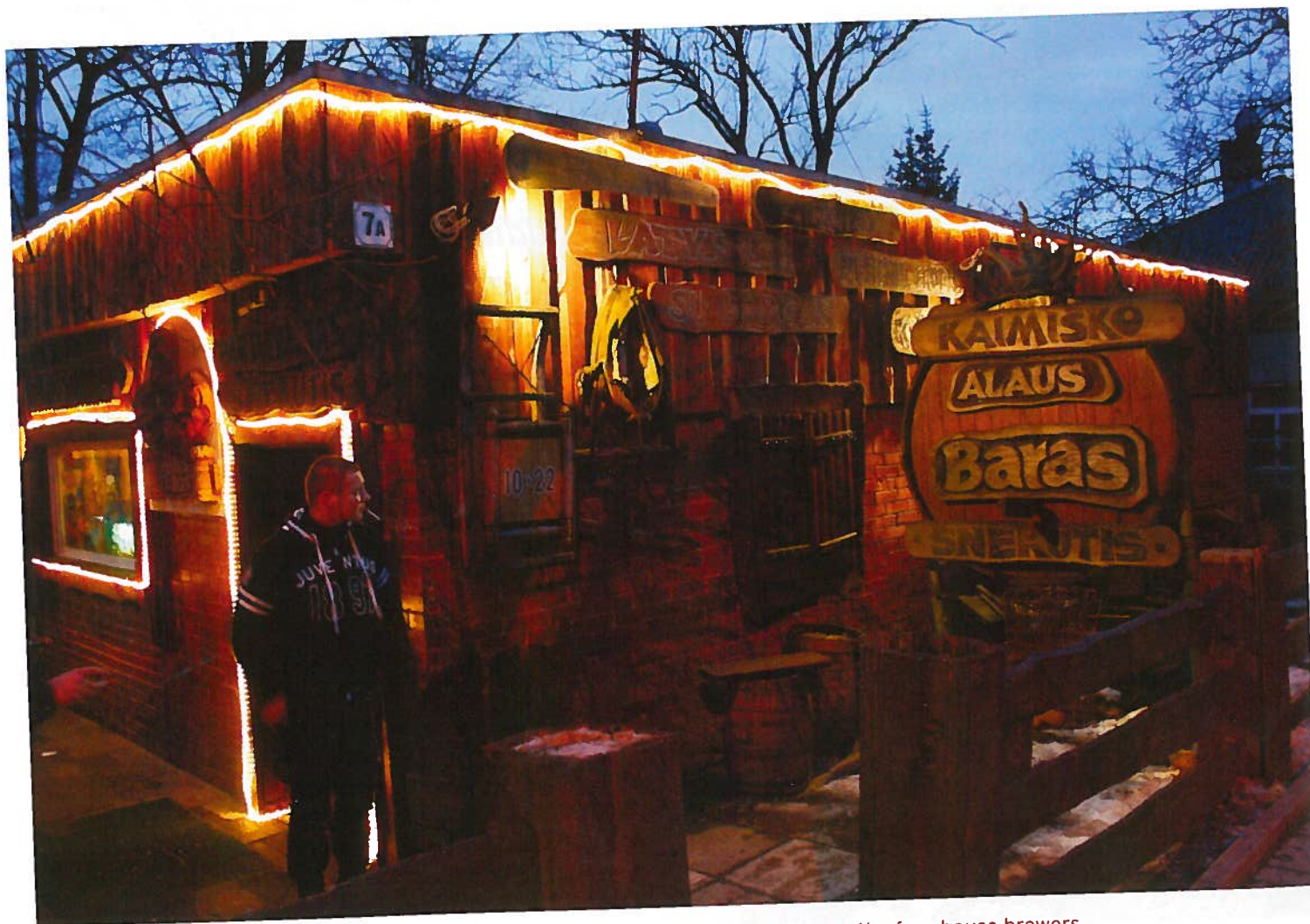
Mrs. Udriene is a long time friend of Valentas Vaškevičius, the iconic mustachioed owner of the two Šnekutis bars in Vilnius. Behind placid, pirate-like stares – or gung-ho smiles when cameras pop up – Valentas is one of the stoutest defenders

of this Lithuanian brewing tradition. Insisting on serving only quality countryside brews, even if that means getting them himself or paying for an expensive delivery, he has succeeded in not only promoting the craft of these unknown brewers, but also enables some to actually make a living almost entirely through sales at his two bars.

While the more modest Šnekutis located in the old town of Vilnius is distinguished by the many idiosyncratic brews flowing from the founts, the other Šnekutis location in the neighborhood of Užupis could be branded one of the most memorable beer bars on the entire European continent. The wooden exterior oozes with quirky Lithuanian wooden art and could easily feature in a horror film. Old farm tools abound inside, as yellowed pictures of Lithuanian beer history garnish the walls and tree stumps serve as roof-bearing posts. And the beers served here can be as impressive as the decor.

The Distinctive Flavors of Lithuanian Beer

A few rounds at either of the Šnekutis locations will quickly prove to you there is something special about Lithuanian brews. First off, their Šviesus, or pale brews, nearly always possess a decidedly toasty profile which moves in and out of nut oil flavors.



A few rounds at the Šnekutis locations, which "import" from the farmhouse brewers, confirm there is something special about Lithuanian brews.