

ROLL OUT THE BARREL

We plunged into the roaring tumult of the Hofbraeuhaus, swung to the rhythm of that roaring life, breathed the air, felt the warmth, the surge, the powerful communion of those enormous bodies, gulped down from stone mugs liter after liter of the cold and powerful dark beer." (Thomas Wolfe, in *The Web and the Rock*). The Hofbraeuhaus, as roaring today as it was in Wolfe's time, celebrates this year the 400th birthday of its famous brewery, founded in 1589 to provide the Bavarian royal court with a tasty beer.

As the Bavarian beer of the late sixteenth century was an unappetizing brown liquid considered unfit for royalty, Munich's Duke Wilhelm V had taken to importing the court beer from Protestant northern Germany. In 1589, he decided to build a court (*hof*) brewery (*braeuhaus*) in Munich which could brew the same quality of beer at a fraction of the price of the imported beer. Clearly the demand for beer within the royal court was great enough to support an internal brewery, as Wilhelm had preserved his father's tradition of supplying free beer daily to all 600 court employees.

Although it wasn't the first brewery in Munich, the Hofbraeuhaus was the only one to be owned and operated by the government, a status it maintains today. The brewery was completed in 1591, when it began producing beer under the purity decree (*Reinheitsgebod*), a 1516 law declaring that only malted barley, hops, yeast and water could be used to make beer. In 1614, the brewmaster was finally able to duplicate the superb northern German bock beer. In 1808, the brewery moved a few blocks to its new home at Platzl. Twenty years later, it opened a pub, today's famous Hofbraeuhaus. In 1896,



a new brewery was opened in the Haidhausen section of Munich, where it remained until November 1988, when it moved into a modern complex near Munich's airport. In its new complex, Hofbraeuhaus brews 14 different kinds of beer, including several "bock" beers, using the most advanced technology available.

Bock beer was originally a summer beer. Before the invention of refrigeration, the brewing of beer was forbidden from May 1-Sept. 30 due to the warm temperatures which made it impossible to produce a quality beer. So that Munich's residents would not have to do without their favorite drink during the summer months, the breweries used the last two months of each brewing season to make a "summer beer." Brewed with a higher hops content to ensure that it would keep until September and stored in wooden kegs in the huge brewery cellars, this stronger beer was first served at the beginning of May, earning the name May Bock. This stronger beer is still brewed and served, of course, at the beginning of May when Hofbraeuhaus's annual May Bock Festival takes place.

However, don't despair if your visit to Munich doesn't happen to coincide with the May Bock season.

Hofbraeuhaus almost always seems to have a bock beer available. There is the Christmas bock, the Delicator double bock, the Oktoberfest bock and the light (in color, not in strength) bock.

The Hofbraeuhaus, a short walk from the central square of Munich, serves more than 2,500 gallons of beer daily to its three million annual guests. The oldest and most famous part of the building is the Schwemme (watering hole) with its frescoed cross vaults depicting gastronomic motifs. Here, 1,300 guests can be served. Half of these are regular

Join the party at one of Germany's most famous and best-loved beer halls — but don't dance on the tables.



One of the Hofbraeuhaus regulars locks up his mug in his private locker.

customers, many of whom prefer to drink out of their own personal steins. In 1970, individual lockers were installed where these customers could deposit their valuable mugs between visits. As can be imagined, these 424 lockers were quickly claimed, and today, it is a supreme status symbol to have one's own beer mug box at the Hofbraeuhaus.

Behind the bandstand in the Schwemme, one finds four *stammtische* (tables for regular customers), easily identified by an ornate sign hanging above each table. There is the Royal Bavarian Table, the King Ludwig Table, the Wolpertinger (an imaginary animal) Table and the Altbayern Table. Willi Halbinger, a regular customer of the Hofbraeuhaus for the past 40 years, is a member of the King Ludwig Table. As long as there are seats free, he says, anyone can join them.

"We like to be friendly with everyone," Willi told me in his thick Bavarian accent, "as long as they behave themselves. I have friends in Chile, Madrid, Philadelphia, Dallas—all over the world, and I met them all right here at this table. They come back every year at least once, and that's enough for me to consider them members of the Table.

"I come to the Hofbraeuhaus because that's where my father always came when I was growing up. And this is my son Gunther," Willi said, gesturing toward a young blond man seated next to him. "He'll inherit my mug locker and keep up the family tradition when I'm no longer around." Willi pulled out his wallet again. "This is my ID card

proving that I am a regular guest in Hofbraeuhaus," he said. Once a year, in mid-October, Hofbraeuhaus proprietor Michael Sperger invites all ID card holders to a kind of thanksgiving festival with an enormous buffet, dance band and entertainment. This is all on the house and is an expression of appreciation for their loyalty.

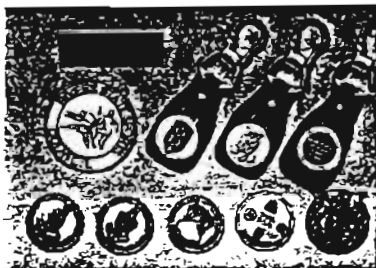
As I left the table, Willi called me back. "Send all those fine people in America a message from me," he said. "Tell them we'd love to see them here in the Hofbraeuhaus as long as they're not too rowdy. And above all, ask them

please, please not to dance on the tables! For us old-timers here, it really ruins the atmosphere."

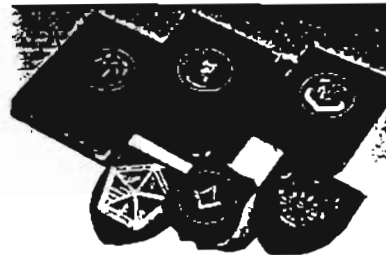
Willi took a long swig out of his mug, a hand-painted stein bearing his name and a pewter lid engraved with the Hofbraeuhaus insignia. The opaque steins are rarely seen in Munich's guest houses today as most customers prefer the glass mugs so they can see how full they are. In former times, the mugs were never properly filled. One long-time customer relates that he remembers when it was possible to order a half-liter glass of beer

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The beer garden is a shady spot in which to relax with family and friends.

(nowadays beer is served only by the liter). But it was not advisable to order the half-liter because the glass was served almost empty. A complaint to the barkeeper met with the reply, "If you can't afford a liter mug, then you don't need no half-liter neither!"

The Association to Fight Deceitful Filling of Beer Mugs was founded in the Hofbraeuhaus Schwemme in 1899. Soon thereafter, the club newspaper

noted that, although the official statistic for beer consumption in that year was 322 liters per person, "It was surely almost 500 liters of beer per person that the Munich citizens actually paid for, though they certainly weren't served that much since the barkeepers only filled the mugs two-thirds full at the most." In 1933, the association was disbanded by the Nazis, and in 1970 formed anew. It met with its first success in 1984, when city inspectors went into the beer tents at Oktoberfest to ensure that the mugs were sufficiently filled.

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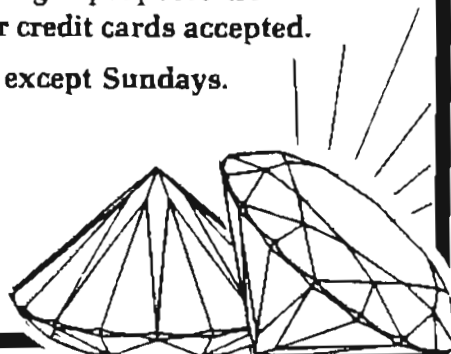
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One regular Hofbraeuhaus customer remembers that he used to accompany his father to the Schwemme. The father, a piano transporter, often drank 20 liters of beer per day. Fortunately, he lived right across the street and the horses always knew the way home. Another old-timer says he can't manage the 10 liters per day that he used to, limiting himself these days to two or three liters. "The best age is around 50," he says. "That's when you can really pour it down!"

In addition to its regular customers, the Schwemme is also a favorite stop for tourists. The atmosphere is lively, one could even say rowdy. A Bavarian band plays traditional omm-pah-pah music daily from 11 a.m. until midnight. Back near the kitchen, a self-service counter



BILDAGENTUR MAURITIUS/SHAKOENBURG

The brewery moved from downtown, but the beer hall is still there.

sells Munich specialties such as cheese, radishes and roast pork. In the beer garden in the courtyard, visitors can enjoy a refreshing cold one under the shade of huge old chestnut trees.

For those who want to get away from the maddening crowds and enjoy a pleasant, quiet meal, the place to go is upstairs. Each of the rooms on the second floor has its own individual style. On the third floor, one finds the huge Festival Hall, with its own kitchen and capacity for 1,000 guests. Here, one can enjoy an entertainment program starting at 7 p.m. each evening featuring yodelers, Bavarian dancers in traditional dress and the playing of alp horns and cowbells.

Whether you are planning a trip to Munich during the anniversary year or at some time in the future, you are sure to find a party atmosphere in the Hofbraeuhaus.

—GINGER HENRY-KUENZEL