

Books

Copenhagen | In the space of five years, a former science teacher has opened a chain of bars from San Diego to Seoul. By *Toby Skinner*

If you were at the opening party of the Mikkeller bar in Shoreditch on Friday night last week, the chances are you would have noticed one of its partners: Rick Astley, who still just about has the quiff, voice and northern charm he had in 1987, when “Never Gonna Give You Up” made him a pop sensation. But you might just have missed the other, possibly more important, guy: Mikkel Borg Bjergso, a soft-spoken, slim and tattooed Dane. He is the world’s most prolific craft brewer, and has become a celebrity in his own right, a leading figure in a sector that has gone from a niche trend to something so mainstream that “IPA fatigue” is now a thing.

While craft brewers tend to emphasise their locality, Mikkeller has gone global, and in a hurry. In just five years, Bjergso has expanded from his base in Copenhagen to create a brewing and hospitality empire in 41 locations as diverse as his beery concoctions — from San Diego to Taipei, Tokyo, Bucharest, Warsaw and even Torshavn, capital of the Faroe Islands. For some, this roll-out is a sign of the regrettable homogenisation of global taste — even if the Instagrammable bars each have local beers and design touches, they all come with an over-riding sense of airy, carefully arranged Danish cool — but Bjergso is not slowing down.

There are plans to push into mainland China and to further expand an already thriving lifestyle arm: fans can buy Mikkeller hoodies, T-shirts and hats, go to its beer festivals, where tattoo artists are hired specifically to ink Mikkeller tattoos (Bjergso estimates there are “over a thousand” such tattoos today, even if he doesn’t have one), or go running with the Mikkeller Running Club, which has more than 200 chapters across the world, from Almaty to Volgograd and Westchester, New York. Branded hotels and tours are under consideration. “We want to make it so that people can live in this Mikkeller universe,” Bjergso tells me.

If it sounds like a brazen quest for new revenue sources, Bjergso says he’s still driven by the same instincts he always

The king of beer



Mikkel Borg Bjergso, founder of Mikkeller, and below, some of the company’s bars which have sprung up



Mikkel’s beers — the soured over an apartment fact that the first Mikkeller bar was uncomfortably close to Jeppesen’s — went on to set up a company called Evil Twin in New York.

“I’m not against a business and being successful,” says Bjergso, who runs a Brooklyn bar called Mikkeller. He soon to open a brewery in New York, barely six miles from a Mikkeller brewery at the Citi Field stadium. “But, to me, I don’t want to become about business. I want to be a beer. That’s not got anything to do with Mikkeller and me personally. It’s the same thing about [S]