

use local partners, he says that Mikkel-ler takes a majority stake whenever possible. "But, even if we have an equal or almost-equal partner, we have the decision-making power," he says. "Of course I'm not as involved as I was with the first bar in Copenhagen, but I still care passionately about the smallest details. I'll stop if that's ever not the case, or if we lose control."

The new London bar, Mikkel's 41st, is in what was the George and Dragon pub on Hackney Road, which dates back to 1898 but was most recently a raucous gay club (the owners left in 2015, after the rent tripled). Like all of the Mikkel-ler bars abroad, the layout was designed in Copenhagen, with bespoke posters of beefeaters and Sherlock Holmes designed by US-based art director Keith Shore, who also designed the neon sign outside. Bjerger always creates at least one site-specific beer, in this case Ast-ley's London Lager. Astley's songs will play on loop in the toilets, though not in the main bar.

Of course, Mikkel's London outpost is atypical in that most of the brand's partners haven't sold 40m records. Bjerger and Rick Astley became friends in 2015, when a rumour circulated that Astley was living in Copenhagen (he wasn't, but his daughter Emilie lives there, and his film producer wife Lene Bausager is Danish).

Bjerger, who had Rick Astley posters on his walls as a child, picked up the phone, and offered to create a brew with his childhood idol. Despite the pop star not knowing much about beer, the pair co-created Astley's Northern Hop, with a touch of ginger nodding to Astley's hair.

Now, they've gone further than that. Astley, who was due to sing at the opening party but says he won't be pulling any pints, believes that Mikkel's bars remain special. "They have a vibe, and a soul," he says. "I've been to lots of their bars around the world, and they all have a different feel." Or, as Bjerger insists: "We're not Starbuck's, just repeating the same thing everywhere we go."

Either way, there will be those who simply see an independent local gay bar replaced by what is essentially a foreign chain. The question, really, is how big the edge that made it famous in the first place. It's one to ponder, perhaps while sipping a Mikkel's Jacke Brown ale in the new London bar, or listening to "Never Gonna Give You Up" in the loo.

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...ow, some of the company's bars which have sprung up in cities around the world — This Morsen

Mikkel's beers — the relationship soured over an apartment deal, and the fact that the first Mikkel's bar was uncomfortably close to Jeppe's shop. Jeppe went on to set up a rival brewing company called Evil Twin, decamping to New York.

"I'm not against a business growing and being successful," says Jeppe, who runs a Brooklyn bar called Torst, and is soon to open a brewery in Queens, barely six miles from a Mikkel's micro-brewery at the Citi Field baseball stadium. "But, to me, Mikkel's has become about business rather than beer. That's not got anything to do with Mikkel and me personally, and I'd say the same thing about [Scottish brewer]

