

Opinion: A craft beer with a misguided message

By Deena Shanker, Salon

MillerCoors, the company behind Coors, Miller High Life and Miller 64, wants a little respect for its other, this-one-isn't-like-the-others stepchild, Blue Moon. Perhaps in a nod to Coors' frat-boy consumer base, the company message was summed up perfectly in a recent Bloomberg headline: "Blue Moon tells beer snobs to drink up and show respect." It's the kind of line you can imagine a frat brother telling an inductee, right before shoving a beer bong in his mouth and pouring cans of Coors Light into the funnel at the top.

Back in December 2012, the Brewers Association released new standards for breweries to call themselves makers of "craft" beer. They had to be "small," making no more than 6 million barrels of beer per year; "independent," meaning that no more than 25 percent of the company is owned by a non-craft beverage industry members; and they had to make beer that qualifies as "traditional," meaning that it relies on malted barley and not what brewers consider filler ingredients, like corn and rice.

This definition did not suit MillerCoors, whose CEO Tom Long wrote an Op-Ed on CNN in response. "Based on our size," he wrote, "that definition excluded us, even though we brew some of the most popular craft beers in the marketplace." Except that they don't, because Blue Moon is, by definition, not a craft beer – not just because of MillerCoors' size (it sells 67 billion barrels of beer, compared to the largest craft brewer, Sam Adams, which sells about 2.7 million per year), but also because its so-called craft brand is not independent, as the definition requires. It's owned by MillerCoors. Ipso facto, not a craft beer.

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