

Signature continues its high notes!



Eight huge sparkling silver silos are the first things that strike you on the approach to Signature Brew. Based on a trading estate near Blackhorse Lane, this might not be in keeping with the image of a brewery that has won SIBA's Brewery Business of the Year Award twice but is a reflection of a modern craft brewery, who meld the modern with the traditional and adds in a few musical overtures to round things off.

Signature started when, in 2011, two cousins, Sam McGregor and Tom Bott, got fed up with drinking 'rubbish' beer at music gigs, decided to do something about it and started cuckoo brewing to supply venues with 'beer with taste'. The pair were well placed to do so. Sam's background was in music and Tom's family have been brewing for 40 years; his father and uncle set up Titanic Brewery in Stoke. The ethos was to work with bands and venues producing 'own label' beer thus helping to ensure that venues took Signature's beer.

Tom and Sam did this until 2015 when they decided it was about time they set up their own brewery rather than using others. They opened their first brewery in 2016 and it was still just the two of them¹. Tom Bott said "We gradually started to get the brand established, including at festivals and other outlets. We helped found more recognition of uniting people with the idea of great beer and great music; everything from jazz to rock".

Signature left Leyton, their original home in 2018, to their new home which was funded through Crowdfunding (as their first brewery was). The old kit sold to Ascot Ales allowing this new brewery to have a complete step change. As the world opened up from Covid, they put in a new stand alone tap room at the front of the brewery in 2021, complete with a roof terrace. Tom said of the pandemic: "It was the small packaging that kept us going during lockdown. We only furloughed the events and tap room staff with the helping us pack boxes on rows of tables! We are also pleased that we were able to help musicians during time. We introduced the 'Pub in a Box' with musicians delivering the packages".



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With such a sparkling modern new brewery, the London Tasting Panel were keen to look around and so Tom Unwin, the head brewer (and son of one of the founding members of London CAMRA) took the Panel around his empire. Tom has brewed with a number a breweries, including Brodies and most latterly with Stockholm Brewing Company for four years before joining Signature in 2017 becoming head brewer the year after.

¹ For a more detailed account of Signature's early days see London Drinker Magazine, which can be found in the archive section of the London Regional website:

Tom U started his tour with the silos. “Two of silos are for malt, Super Pale Malt and Pale Malt with the other six, which are 200 hectolitres in volume, solely for producing our lager. They are temperature controlled and the beer is kept there for 5-6 weeks. We start at 4° C reducing it to 0° C about a week before the beer is finished. The weight of the liquid helps the beer to drop but we also centrifuge to ensure clarity”.



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Signature use various dry yeast strains. Tom U explained “We currently mainly use dry yeast but we are investing in lab that would help us move more towards wet yeasts”. All the ales use top fermenting yeast, with a Californian yeast being the most used due to it contributing a low flavour profile.

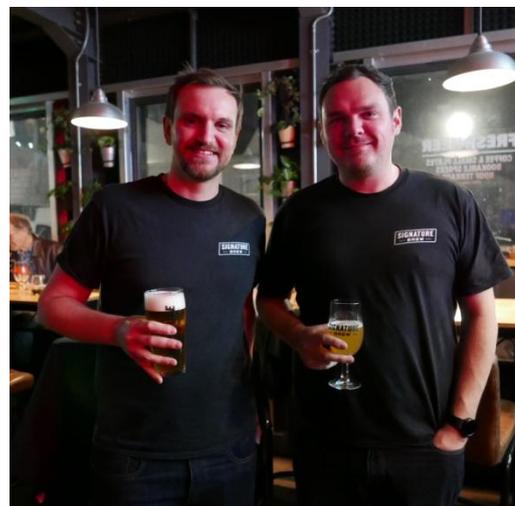


The water is treated using reverse osmosis (something many London breweries would die for) before brewing starts in the 32 hecto litres plant. The water is then treated with acidulated malt to adjust the pH. Brewing takes place three times a day, five days a week, using hop pellets and, more unusually, their own milled malt; the small mill is on the first floor at the back of the brewery. “This enables us to control the size of the milled grain so that we can maximise the efficiency of the brewing” said Tom U.

The hops are mainly used in the whirlpool with a little being added in the copper, allowing the aromatics to be retained rather than boiled off. The finished beer (not lager) is then put into one of the ten tanks. They also have a pilot plant with a 118 litre brew length with four one barrel conical fermenters, which, Tom explained, replicates the main kit well.

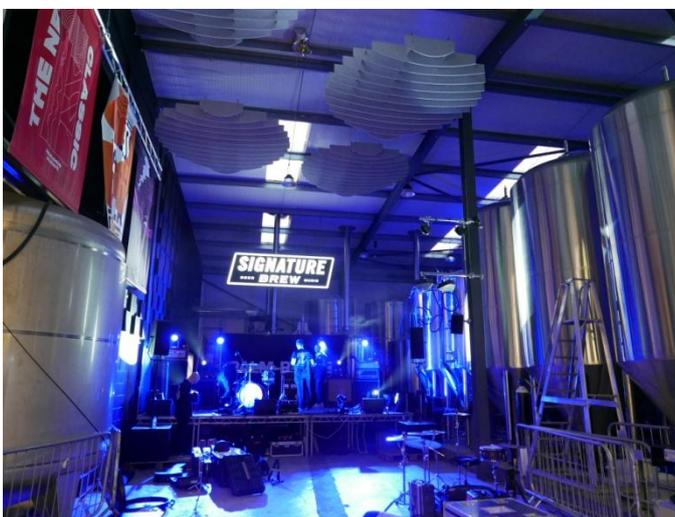
The core beer range is Roadie, Signature Lager and Backstage IPA with a of split 70% keg, 20% can and 10% cask. There is still a commitment to keep cask beer going and they recently installed two handpumps in the Tap Room (they can be found to the far left on the bar).

Looking back, Tom Bott was asked if there was anything he would have done differently, he replied “The first few



years, when we were cuckoo brewing was fun, meeting the bands and attending gigs but if we had started our own brewery earlier, we would be further along our journey”.

But the days of music gigs are by no means over. The brewery doubles as a music venue so you can watch a band and drink a beer amongst the fermenters!



And to leave the last word to Tom Bott about Signature's ethos "We are well plugged into the history of beer. Sitting with people and drinking beer is one of the best things that exist. If this isn't fun we shouldn't be here".

For details on the music events and tap room opening hours see: www.signaturebrew.co.uk.

Tasting notes

Studio Lager 4% ABV (keg)

Clean, bready aroma with a touch of lemon. These are present in the sweet, smooth flavour where a strong spiciness develops and then fades to a dry sweetish bitter finish.

Roadie All Night IPA 4.3% ABV (cask)

A hop forward refreshing golden ale with lemon and grapefruit in aroma and flavour where there is a biscuity sweetness, which is also present in the lingering dry bitter finish. The aroma is fresh with resinous hops. Hints of mango and apricot are also present on the palate.

Backstage IPA 5.6% (keg)

Slightly hazy pale gold smooth New World IPA beer with an aroma of piney and tropical hops overlaid with citrus. The flavour is of grapefruit, tropical mango, sweet biscuit and a soft bitterness. The sweetness lingers in the clean finish, which is slightly spicy and bitter with a little dryness. Easy drinking. Simcoe and Mosaic hops; pilsner caramel malt and oats

Nightliner Coffee Porter 5.7% ABV (cask)

Smoky black coffee porter with dark roast coffee dominating with hints of dark fruit and a dry toasty bitterness. The flavours are balanced with a sweet dark treacle that lingers in the finish. Full bodied, complex and smooth.

Pink Vinyl Fruited Gose 4.6 ABV (keg)

Dark pink hazy sour with raspberries, a hint of cherries and tart lemon with a trace of salt and a little sweetness Refreshing with an increasing dryness that lingers with a ghost of bitterness. Smooth mouthfeel. Aromas of raspberry and some funky notes.

Perky Blenders 4.4% ABV (keg)

A hazy straw/yellow IPA with a smooth creamy mouthfeel. A fruity flavour with a very astringent finish

