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**Mugshots: Alan Shapiro**  
By Geoff Kaiser **SBS Imports**



Alan Shapiro is a lucky man. Very few people in this world have the freedom to do exactly what they want, and even less follow through on their dreams and desires. Alan is the president of **SBS Imports** a small, Seattle-based import company of beer and hard cider. Actually, he is also the secretary, the janitor, the marketing guru and the sales force. He runs the entire show by himself, which means he has the freedom to do exactly what he wants for his business. For Alan, that means focusing on a small portfolio of exceptional products that he feels lucky to drink every time he pops open a bottle.

### Back to Where It All Began

While attending Boston University, Shapiro had his first taste of the liquor industry while working at one of the best wine shops in town, Brookline Liquor Mart (where local legend Doug Flutie was a regular customer). It was there that his appreciation for good beer and wine started to flourish. After a stint in sales with Seagram's, Alan joined **Pete's Brewing Company** as the pioneer brewery's first sales manager in 1989 to help roll the brand out nationally. "At 27 years old, working at Pete's was a great opportunity. The craft beer industry was just evolving and there were a lot of high-powered Silicon Valley type investors involved. It was such an exciting time and a great learning experience."

Then in 1995, Alan joined **Pike Brewing and Merchant du Vin** in Seattle to assist them in rolling out Pike to a wider audience across the country. Pike had developed a collaborative brewing arrangement with **Minnesota Brewing Company**, in St. Paul, MN, and was leveraging Merchant du Vin's well-established distribution network to increase sales. The expansion was called off due to problems with matching the taste of the Minnesota brewed beer to the original recipes in Seattle, and Alan then transitioned into a regional sales and marketing role with Merchant du Vin. In 2001, his job would have necessitated a move from Seattle in order to stay with Merchant du Vin. Rather than move, he decided to part ways with Merchant du Vin and Pike.

### Time to be Numero Uno

"After being second in command at two different jobs, I thought it was time to be #1." Alan started planning to start his own import business, and in 2003 he launched SBS-Imports. SBS currently distributes for **De Proef** brewery, located in Belgium, and **Aspall Cyder**, which is family-owned and has been making cider in the United Kingdom since 1728. Partnering with De Proef was a no-brainer for Alan. He worked with head brewer, Dirk Naudts, to develop five core beers for

distribution in the U.S. market as the *De Proef Brewmaster's Collection*, and the selections are all unique and impressive. His decision to work with Aspall, was a little tougher. "Not having much experience with hard cider, I didn't have a good impression of what the taste was. It wasn't until I tried the *Aspall Dry Cider* that I had my 'wow' moment; it was like the first time I had a good glass of wine after drinking the jug stuff." Alan compares the current market for artisan cider to the market for craft beer twenty years ago, and he's helping the industry to grow, much like he did for beer while at Pete's.

### Reunion and Collaboration

Shapiro has been involved with a couple of very special projects over the last two years. 2008 marked the second release of *Reunion - A Beer for Hope*, which is an inspiration of Alan, Pete Slosberg, from Pete's Brewing Company, and Virginia MacLean, their long time friend and colleague who was diagnosed with Myeloma and passed away in 2007. All profits are donated to the Institute for Myeloma and Bone Cancer Research. This year's style is a take on the Pete's *Wicked Red*, with some rye and caraway seed added in.

Also in 2007, Alan followed through on an idea that was influenced by one of the founding fathers of the Washington wine industry, Allen Shoup. Shoup's Long shadows project brought some of the top talent in the wine industry to Washington to create world-class wines with local vintners, and Shapiro wanted to do something similar with De Proef. Tomme Arthur, of **Port Brewing/Lost Abbey**, jumped at the chance to go to Belgium and create the *Signature Ale*; a fantastic hybrid of a west coast IPA and traditional Belgian *brettanomyces* fermentation (also released again in 2008). This year, Jason Perkins of **Allagash Brewing**, worked with Naudts to create *Les Deux Brasseurs* (The Two Brewers). This 8.5% Belgian Golden Ale was brewed with two different strains of *brettanomyces* - one from each brewery. It should be available in September. Alan is hoping to work with Vinnie Cilurzo, of **Russian River Brewing**, for the 2009 batch of the *De Proef Brewmaster's Collaboration*. Beer drinkers all over the country have been thanking Alan for bringing these talented brewers together.

Shapiro can now claim to be a certified veteran of the beer industry. "I've been around for just about the whole trip of the modern craft beer movement, but the past few years have been the most exciting." Next on Alan's list is adding a new brewery to his portfolio. SBS will start importing select beers from **Batemens Brewery**, an English brewery established in 1874. Their *XXXB* and *Combined Harvest* beers should be available in August, and their *Rosey Nosey* winter seasonal should follow later this year.