

Three friends unite in search for the perfect local beverage

by Erik Rosenblad

They each own a third of the recently founded company Opyos, already famous in Luxembourg and awarded for its handcrafted botanical gin spirits with locally sourced ingredients. But it turns out that none of the three originators was particularly enthusiastic about gin at the beginning.

- The three of us wanted to start a business together, Fränk Wagner says, and sitting at a bar we began talking about our surroundings and asked ourselves: what is there that can be turned into value? For the small group of friends, apples - abundant in the region and characteristic of the Ernztal valley - seemed to be the obvious answer. However, the slots for apple juice production were already taken, and so were the ones for schnapps and eau de vie. But *gin* - what about aromatic gin, artisanally flavoured and crafted from local ingredients, such as apples? - We all knew gin was a popular spirit, but it wasn't necessarily what we would order at the counter. But we've grown into really appreciating it, and develop our own Luxembourgish versions of the beverage, Fränk Wagener explains.

Award-winning local spirits

Around five years have passed since the idea saw the light of day, and much has happened since then. Many baskets of apples, berries and herbs have been filled from orchards and shrubs in the valley and dozens of batches of spirits have undergone rigorous balancing and fine-tuning to suit even the most refined palate. And the efforts of the Opyos team have certainly yielded results. The different types of gin have won multiple awards, both in Luxembourg and abroad. However, the successes have not prompted the three friends to abandon the artisanal and small-scale character of the business.



The three founders of Opyos: Jim Wagener, Fränk Wagner and Michel Schammel.

If anything, it has made them recognize and emphasize the artisanship even more. - The trend is definitely toward more local consumption and the people of Luxembourg apparently want to buy Luxembourgish products and appreciate local craftsmanship, Fränk Wagner says. The Chinese and German markets have also spotted the talents and beverages of the Opyos team, and exports are underway. Nonetheless, shipments headed for other countries will remain limited in scope as the amount of care and time that goes into each Opyos bottle calls for production at a smaller, controllable scale.

Cosumers are close at hand

In comparison to the Nordic countries, where production and promotion of alcoholic beverages is subjected to more regulation, microbreweries and smaller distilleries are somewhat easier to launch in Luxembourg. Opyos has its own webshop from which domestic customers can order and get products delivered to the doorstep. If customers wish to stop by when distillation is in progress, chat for a while and buy a bottle, that is also fine. The Opyos team do cherish the direct contact where the product is handed over in person from the produ-

cer to the customer, but since the distillery is shared with other firms and the team is not always on site, web orders are a better bet for the thirsty.

Circularity at the core

For Fränk Wagner and his colleagues, the participation in the CIRCLE project is a possibility for inspiration and advancement, and a chance to see the changes others have put into effect.

- Circular economy is a topic that the government talks about a lot but at the level of actually implementing the concept, it seems to get a bit more challenging, Fränk Wagner points out.

Yet, judging by the logo of Opyos that features an infinity symbol (the sideways figure eight, forming the "o" and "p"), the notion of circularity and continuous refinement was present from the very beginning. And indeed, if you ask Fränk Wagner, "good enough" does not seem to belong to the Opyos dictionary.

- We always want to reinvent ourselves, to improve and not to settle, in our circular process we're constantly trying to make things better, he says.



Opyos Sloe Gin, made with juniper, botanicals and locally harvested sloe berries.

