

Popular Mechanics joins the beer revolution

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Popular Mechanics leads its readers in a new direction this month with the publication of a hands-on article about home brewing, explaining how an apparently simple concoction of water, grain, hops and yeast is transformed - with a little help from nature - into something rather speci



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Writer Sean Woods, who confesses to a mild obsession with craft beer and has fond memories of helping his late father brew the good stuff at home, describes the history of beermaking (apparently it was first documented thousands of years ago), the science, the equipment, the importance of a clean environment and finally, the satisfaction that comes from creating a decidedly drinkable American Pale Ale.

Says Woods: "Until a couple of months ago, I had never heard of a 'trub' or 'wort chiller', and if someone told me they had been 'sparging', I would probably have recommended medical help. Then I signed up for a BeerLab home brewing course - and all was revealed. I am now able to discuss partial-mash brews, fermentable sugars and yeast rehydration without a trace of self-consciousness. And my kitchen has never been so clean."

PM editor Alan Duggan confirmed that the magazine's editorial staff had tasted Woods's first batch of beer "in the interests of scholarly research" and declared it excellent. He commented: "South Africa's home brewing movement is flourishing at the moment and we really like the fact that the people doing it are friendly, unpretentious and eager to share their knowledge. They are also willing to experiment, sometimes with counter-intuitive ingredients. I tried a pumpkin-flavoured beer the other day and loved it."

In another departure from the conventional, May's *Popular Mechanics* introduces "cyber-guitarist" Jonathan Crossley and his hardware-hacked electronic jazz guitar. For his unusual, highly improvisational performances, this musician (he's also a doctoral candidate in Technology-enabled Performance Practice) wears a mechanical exoskeleton that's vaguely reminiscent of Matt Damon's character in the sci-fi movie, *Elysium*.

Crossley defines music as "ordered noise", which would seem to fit his approach to live performances. At his breakthrough concert at Wits University two months ago, this is how a member of the audience reacted: "Musically, I did not get it. But emotionally, I was overwhelmed."

PM's cover story in May ("Escape from the lab") is devoted to a Pentagon-sponsored competition that could

spur the next stage in robot evolution - the ability to operate effectively in the human world. Among the contenders: a four-legged robot that walks like a spider and manipulates tools like an ape, a slightly intimidating red machine with treads for travelling on all fours, and a blue robot that can climb a ladder and drive a car. You know, everyday robot stuff.

- *Popular Mechanics* will soon announce details of its FutureTech 2014 conference, an event forming part of the official World Design Capital Cape Town 2014 programme. The conference, and its associated Inventor of the Year competition, has been underwritten by Autodesk, a US-based multinational provider of 3D CAD software. The magazine is also planning a number of precursor events under the banner of "Altered Realities" - theme for its activities during 2014.



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