

Microbiologist-turned-brewmaster Mandy Ryan



By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Did you know over 50% of SAB's brewers are women? For Women's Month we got in touch with Mandy Ryan, the microbiologist-turned-brewing production team leader at SAB's Rosslyn Brewery in Pretoria to chat shifting gender perceptions and thriving in a traditionally male dominated industry.



Mandy Ryan

How did you get into brewing?

I have a microbiology background and started at Rosslyn Brewery in 2015 as a senior laboratory technician in the micro laboratory. The position required me to work closely with the brewing team on problem-solving and process optimisation, which introduced me to all the intricacies of brewing that I fell in love with. It was the start of an overwhelming passion and the more I learned about the brewing process, the more I wanted to know.

When an opportunity came around for a brewing traineeship, I immediately applied for it and was fortunate to get the opportunity to discover more about brewing. Alrode Brewery in Johannesburg South became my home for two years where my knowledge grew and I got to know some great people in the business.

During my second year, I received my qualification as an international brewer from the Institute of Brewing and Distilling and obtained validation as a key taster on the Africa Zone Tasting Panel.

After my final brewing checkout, I jumped into the brewing production team leader role where I manage the brewing process itself. It was during this time I realised how much I also enjoy working with teams and developing people.

■ *How would you say your microbiological background influences the way you brew?*

Microbiology is a very broad field – from the bacteria you find in the brewery and the air around it to the different yeast strains one uses to brew the beer. Yeast makes out to be the majority of the brewing process and thus understanding yeast and the way it works from a biochemistry level assists in understanding the different formation of flavours and why, when faced with certain obstacles it behaves a certain way.

It is so interesting to see and learn from micro-organisms on a daily basis.

■ *What does a typical workday look like for you?*

I am currently the team leader for the Bathlothli brewing team at Rosslyn Brewery. We are a team of 18 brewers who take pride in brewing quality beers by closely managing the brewing, fermentation and filtration processes on our shifts on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis.

Bathlothli directly translated means “brewers” and that is exactly what we are. I have found it is called the “art” of brewing for a reason because just when you think you have it all figured out; you are once again surprised by the complexity of the science behind the process. There is never a dull moment.

It is very fulfilling when everything comes together perfectly, for that 8.5 scoring beer, and I can say that I had a hand in brewing it.

I really enjoy my team! And although I am kept constantly on my toes, we work very well together. Tackling issues and having a few laughs at the same time.

▣ ***What advice would you give to aspiring female brewmasters?***

Passion for the process and the love of what you do and accomplish daily will make this journey the best one you have undertaken. Women have a natural instinct to brew beer – traditionally the first brewers were women. Let's just say the process benefits from a woman's touch. If you have the opportunity and the passion to do this, anything is possible.



SAB launches special #WomensMonth beer

2 Aug 2019



▣ ***What have been some of your career highlights?***

As a young female brewer starting my career in this business, there were many firsts that I personally have seen as highlights, the most recent ones only to mention two:

- My qualification as an international brewer from the Institute of Brewing
- Distilling and obtaining validation as a key taster on the Africa Zone Tasting Panel

▣ ***What are your thoughts on Women's Month?***

Since August 1994, we have been celebrating Women's Month to commemorate the day in 1956 when more than 20,000 brave women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the draconian pass laws implemented by the government – our country has come a long way since then.

This month we celebrate the brave women who raise families-sometimes alone, who not only fill the role of mother but sometimes the father role too, women who are strong and compassionate, who are nurturing and loving, teaching and comforting. Women who really go above and beyond daily and give so much of herself to her colleagues, family and friends.

I am proud to be a woman in South Africa and celebrate the lovely ladies we get to interact with on a daily basis.

▣ ***What would you like to see change for women in the brewing and beer industry?***

I like to say that the change is already happening. More and more women are taking the industry by storm and conquering what was once perceived as a male-dominated industry.

If you still think beer and brewing is a man's domain, think again. At SAB, this is far from the truth because in South Africa, we are making our mark on the industry and currently have 57% of women brewers at the company.

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If you haven't heard about our latest beer, BOLD BREW chosen and made by women, have a listen to see what Hallie, Apiwe and Sonia have to say about what went into the process women have practised for 100s of years in the journey of beer. #BoldBrew #BrewingTheBold #WomensMonth

A post shared by [The South African Breweries \(@thesabreweries\)](#) on Aug 19, 2019 at 10:01pm PDT



🍺 **Your all-time favourite beer?**

How do I choose from so many different flavours and aromas? I believe it is a woman's provocative to change her mind according to her mood. But Carling Black Label as well as Budweiser are at the top of my list.

🍺 **Your guilty pleasure?**

Guilty as charged, I really enjoy chocolate – Lindor chocolates to be precise.

I was in heaven when SAB launched Castle Milk Stout Chocolate Infused several years ago – two of my favourite things, beer and chocolate.

I've also discovered Crossfit and really enjoy the mental and physical challenges that the sport presents. It's another case where you think you've got it down and then another exercise or manoeuvre jumps out and surprises you. And showing the guys in the class how it's supposed to be done is also a bonus.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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