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[www.beatmag.net/april06/collector.htm](http://www.beatmag.net/april06/collector.htm)

## OBSESSIONS



Ray Christensen, a website designer from Delaware, USA, is obsessed with beer bottles.



Born in New York in 1961, Ray Christensen started collecting beer bottles after leaving college ("when most guys stop," he laughs). He shared an apartment with three naval officers and since there was always beer about he thought he'd hang onto some of the bottles to "decorate". Nowadays he has around 650 bottles.

"That's actually quite a small collection compared to some collectors who have several thousand bottles in their garage or basement," he explains. "I can safely leave most of mine on display because I don't have children or pets. I've even renamed my dining room the 'Beer Room'. My bottles are all empty, mainly because of the weight, but also because I encourage friends to drink the beer and give me the bottle. In any case, if I had all this exotic beer around, I'd have to lock it up to prevent everyone drinking it. When possible, I try to keep the bottle's lid intact, to put back on the empty bottle. If it isn't a screw cap, the trick is to place a US Quarter or a one Euro-size coin over the cap when you remove it with an opener. This keeps it from bending."



Such a hobby must mean Ray is a popular guy.

"My friends enjoy talking about this crazy guy and all his beer bottles," he laughs, "It becomes a good reason for them to visit my house. Several of my friends enjoy donating bottles from breweries in their area. One friend brought back eight empty bottles from his honeymoon trip to Bermuda. I was impressed, but I don't know if his wife was. I'm able to share my hobby with the rest of the world through my [website](#). Because it ranks high in search engines I'm often contacted by people who want to know a bottle's value. The site seem to make me an authority. I added a bulletin board due to so many requests. Unless a bottle is quite old, say more than 25 years, it has little value. The links page of my site lists a link to eBay, collectors, and other places with information."

Ray jokes that his hobby has even brought his family closer. "I think my father is very happy with it," he ventures, "He enjoys beer and it gives him an excuse to sample beers from every place he takes trips to since he drinks them and gives me the empties. When bottles get too heavy, he brings me beer cans, so I had to start collecting them too."



Ray has other strings to his bow - his social life revolves around running, a hobby he started in 2002.

"This April, I'm running the Boston Marathon for the second time," he enthuses, "Runners like their beer - we need the carbohydrates! I've run marathons in Dublin, Paris, Chicago, Alaska and New York and always try to collect a couple of bottles during my trip. Two of my good beer-drinking friends are running the London Marathon this April. Visit [this site](#) for photos of my travels."

Collecting beer bottle, though, is a unique activity and has its share of comic pitfalls. "Since it is actually not legal to have open alcoholic containers in most US cities, my friends think it's funny when I sneak beer bottles out of bars," Ray admits, "But if I'm on a date, the lady is not usually impressed. I love going to bars that publicize their '100 Different Beer Bottles'. Being single, I invite prospective roommates to see my house - it's always interesting to hear the first words out of their mouth. Two of the top questions are 'Are they all full?' and 'Did you drink all of these?' Sadly, the answer to both is 'No'. I'm 44 and still not married, still looking for that special lady - she doesn't have to be a beer drinker."

Ray says that there is a global beer bottle-collecting community but that while some collectors pursue particular themes such as older bottles, particular breweries, bottles with animals on the label, etc, his approach is more random. Put simply Ray just likes picking up bottles as mementos. "Each one has a story of where it came from, who gave it to me, where I drank it, if it was good or wretched to drink and so on," says Ray, "I prefer bottles

to tee-shirts or other souvenirs since they aren't usually made for tourists. Beer is authentic and part of just about every culture - the drink of the common man. However, if I'm in a hotel, I have to hide my empty bottles so the maid doesn't throw them in the trash when she cleans the room - that's happened a couple times."

He does, however, have one particularly special bottle in his collection.

"It's a 1950s bottle from a pub in Germany," reveals Ray, "A man who had been stationed there with the US Army had always visited the same local pub and took an empty bottle as a souvenir when he came home to the USA. He held onto the bottle for all this time and contacted me by email to say that his wife wanted him to get rid of it. He wanted to give it to someone who'd appreciate it, so he searched the web and found my site. It's extra special since he safety-wrapped and packaged it with such loving care"



**The pride of Ray's collection.**

Finally Ray points out that his beer bottle collection served another more practical purpose for some years: "I was lucky not to lose any bottles due to earthquakes," he explains, "I lived in California for twelve years and the shaking bottles became my earthquake detector."

Seismic equipment or a good excuse for one man and his friends to sample as many different beers as possible?

Ray good-naturedly deals with as many aspects of his hobby as possible, from posters to videos to jokes, on his website [www.worldofbeerbottles.com](http://www.worldofbeerbottles.com)



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