Something for Beer Lovers, Arm-Chair Travelers, and Photo Buffs

EDITORS’ INTRO

In this issue, we cover a Web site that helps beer lovers find rare, but favorite, brews as well as upcoming beer events. We examine a system that uses photos contributed by tourists from around the world to reconstruct navigable worlds, perhaps for those of us unfortunate enough to stay home. Finally, we found a “concept car” intended for use by the blind and a camera that gives you a kite’s eye view of the world. Please continue to send pointers to upcoming products with exciting possibilities, your feedback on existing products, and your personal experiences along with them (your name will be included with your review). Email us at pvcpproducts@computer.org.

—Mark Corner and Maria Ebling

APPLICATIONS

WHAT’S BREWING?

Have you ever wandered around a city looking for a pub that stocked your favorite rare brew? For all you beer aficionados out there, check out BeerMenus.com. From this site, you can search for specific beers, pubs, or neighborhoods, and find out exactly what beers are on the menu, their brewery, alcohol content by volume, price per bottle or glass, and pub hours. The Web site also includes information about beer-related events, such as beer weeks, brewfests, and beer and cheese cruises. Users can submit events, menu information, and even photos of the bar. Unfortunately, BeerMenus is only available for New York City. Worse yet, it still couldn’t find a place that serves “Westvleteren,” which is notoriously rare in the US.

RECONSTRUCTING VIEWS

It might not be a product yet, but given the close proximity to Microsoft’s Photosynth, we couldn’t help but mention the latest installment in the University of Washington’s Photo Tourism project. We hope this technology will appear soon in Microsoft products. In a paper titled, “Finding Paths through the World’s Photos,” Noah Snavely and his coauthors show a system for reconstructing navigable worlds using user-contributed photos from sources such as Flickr. Using public consensus from the location and direction of photos, Finding Paths can construct what beers are on the menu, their brewery, alcohol content by volume, price per bottle or glass, and pub hours. The Web site also includes information about beer-related events, such as beer weeks, brewfests, and beer and cheese cruises. Users can submit events, menu information, and even photos of the bar. Unfortunately, BeerMenus is only available for New York City. Worse yet, it still couldn’t find a place that serves “Westvleteren,” which is notoriously rare in the US.

Figure 1. BeerMenus.com shows you where to find the perfect glass of Green Flash Le Freak ale in New York City.
tourists believe to be the most interesting views. Frankly, no static picture can do this project justice, so check out the following Web site for links to videos: http://phototour.cs.washington.edu/findingpaths.

DEVICES

CAMERA FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED
A new concept design from Samsung really blew our minds when we first read an article about it: it’s a camera created for the visually impaired. Designed by Chueh Lee at Samsung Design in China, the “Touch Sight” camera adds two user-interface controls: three seconds of audio recording with each photo so the user can audibly annotate each photo and a Braille-like display with which users can line up their photos. By placing Touch Sight on their foreheads, users can make sure their subjects are in view before taking a snap. Although we aren’t sure our foreheads are quite that sensitive, we can see how this will help bring content generation to everyone. The Touch Sight won gold at the IDEA Design Awards 2008, and we look forward to seeing it on the market.

PHOTOS FROM HIGH ABOVE
Just when you thought you could avoid having your photo taken, Eolo Sport produces the Spy Kite. By attaching a remote control camera to a standard delta-wing kite, you can take photos from 25 meters above the Earth. Although you might not take satellite-quality photos, you might be able to find out what’s going on in your neighbor’s yard. Once you land your personal U2, you can upload the photos to your computer via USB port. Once you’re equipped with wireless data transfer and a solar panel, you can launch a squadron to keep an eye on the whole neighborhood. You can pick this gem up from Gadgetshop.com for 30 British pounds, which at press time equates to approximately US$55.