

The Style Invitational

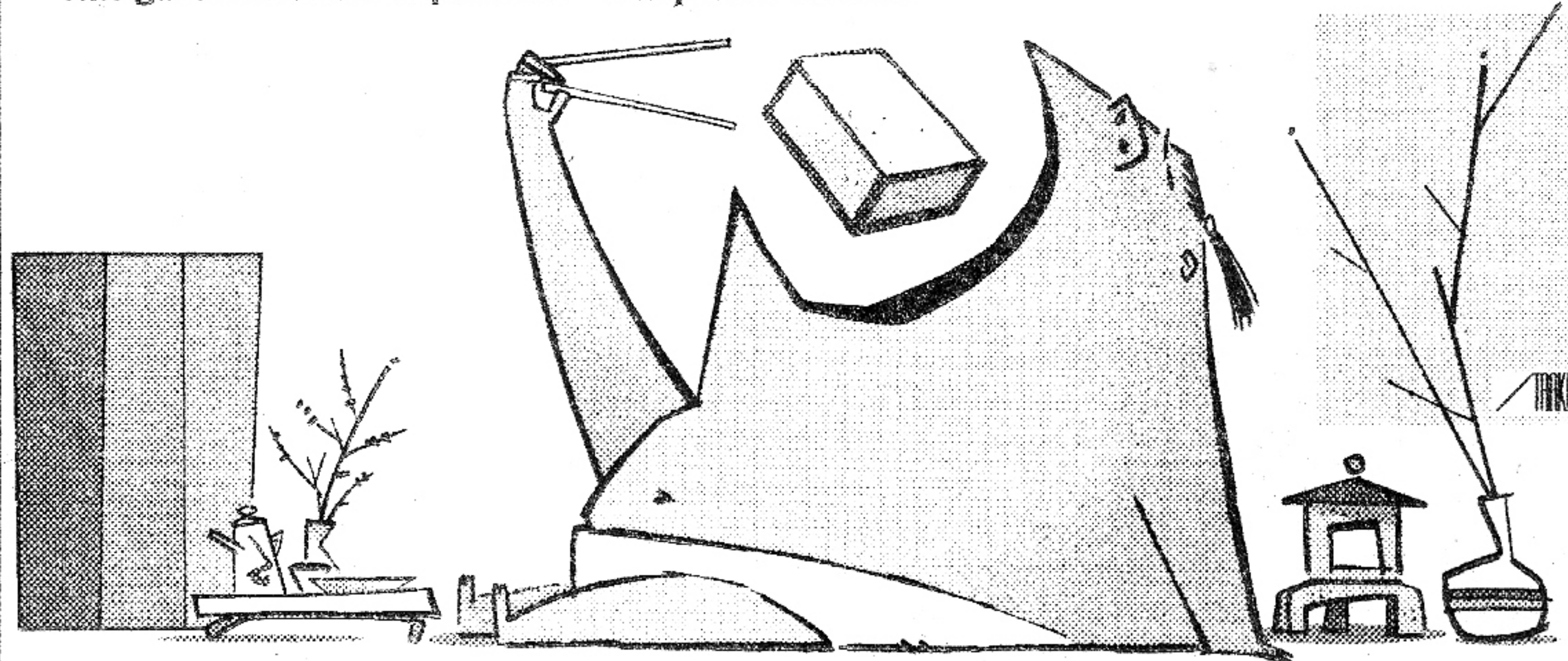
WEEK 235: ROOTS

After a wedding in ancient Babylonia, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead—an alcoholic beverage made from honey—he could drink in a month. This period was called the "honey month," which became known as the "honeymoon."

Before thermometers were invented, brewers would dip a thumb or finger into the mix to find the right temperature for adding yeast. Too cold, and the yeast wouldn't grow. Too hot, and the yeast would die. Thus the phrase "rule of thumb."

In English pubs, ale is ordered by pints and quarts. So in old England, when customers got unruly, the bartender would yell at them to mind their own pints and quarts and settle down. It's where we get the phrase "mind your P's and Q's."

Before the discovery of fish, in ancient Japan, all they had to eat were those stupid blocks of pressed tofu. Of course, eating utensils had not yet been invented, so people had to swallow them whole. This gave rise to the expression "a square meal."



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This Week's Contest was suggested by Kevin Cuddihy of Fairfax, who wins a CD containing 10 songs for dogs, including "If I Only Had a Thumb." Kevin sent us the above etymologies, all beer-related and all allegedly true, as compiled by Pete's Wicked Ale. Your challenge this week is to make up similar historical explanations—they should be vaguely plausible,

not necessarily beer-related—for the etymology of any term you wish. The term should be the punch line. First-prize winner gets an unopened bottle of vintage Elvis Presley "Love Me Tender" moisturizing milk bath. It smells astonishing, like a puree of Kaopectate, apricot liqueur and 20 Mule Team Borax.

Runners-up, as always, receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser's T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to The Style Invitational, Week 235, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; fax them to 202-334-4312; or submit them via Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Internet users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Sept. 22. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced three weeks from today. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. (Jonathan Paul. That's all.) Next week: Emily Dickinson Ear credit. Employees of The Washington Post, and members of their immediate families, are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 232,

in which you were asked to come up with an alphabet primer for the 1990s.

◆ Second Runner-Up:

M is for Mad Cow Disease, an ailment you've got,
N is for New World Order, a U.N. plot,
O is for Oswald—he was framed, don't you see?
P is for Paranoid. You talkin' to me?
(Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ First Runner-Up:

A is for Alimony, a financial sarcoma,
B is for Bridal shower, call Williams-Sonoma,
C is for Courtship (Does he look like Paul Newman?),
D is for Delusion (Sorry—Harry S Truman),
E is for Ego—yes I love myself best,
F is for Futon, to get rid of that guest,
M is for Macho, the stuff that guys strut,
N is for Neighbor, and yours is a nut,
O is for Orioles—Cal, Roberto and Brady,
P is for Prostate, thank God I'm a lady.
(Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

◆ And the winner of the book about white slavery:

U is for Ultramontanism, the policy that absolute authority in the church should be vested in the pope,
V is for Valetudinarian, a sickly person, in particular one so morbidly concerned with health as to be practically without hope,
W is for Wernicke's encephalopathy, a brain disease caused by thiamine deficiency,
X is for Xanthomatosis, a condition in which the afflicted individual has far more than enough lipids to form a sufficiency,
Y is for Yohimbine, a poisonous alkaloid, $C_{21}H_{26}N_2O_3$,
Z is for Zoospore, a fungus capable of independent motion though the use of a whiplike structure called a flagellum. Congratulations. You just earned a PhD.
(Jacob Weinstein, Los Angeles)

◆ And one big, fat sloppy

Honorable Mention:

(Credit for the individual lines appears below.)

A is for Armed robbery, our favorite pastime,
B is for Busted, just like the last time,
C is for Cops, and for courtroom hard-liners,
D is for Delinquent, thank God we're all minors.
E is for Enid, Joe Waldholtz's ex-love,
F is for Fatsos, see (E) above,
G is for Gen-Xers, directionless slob,
H is for Ha-ha, we hold all your jobs.
I is for Internet, where nerds find fame,
J is for Jason, which is no doubt your name,
K is for Kwanzaa, a fest in December,
L is for Liberals, but you're too young to remember.

M is for Married, Motel and Meet,
N is for Negligence, in passion's heat,
O is for Oh dear God, this can't be true!
P is for Papa, the stick has turned blue.

Q is for Quality Management, consultants galore,
R is for Robotics, the study of Gore,
S is for Snot, which one's nose doth ooze,
T is for Twenhafel, who is not amused.

UV is the sunshine that burns out your eyes,
W is for Washington, the city of lies,
XY are the chromosomes that make you a son,
Z is for Zen, with our bad rhymes we are one.

(A-B-C-D: Steven Mundt, Arlington; E-F: Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park; G-H: Nicholas Romanov, St. Petersburg, Fla.; I-J-K-L: David Genser, Arlington; M-N-O-P: P.J. Richardson, Silver Spring; Q-R: David Genser, Arlington; S-T: Niels Hoven, Silver Spring; U-V-W-X-Y: Jack Rouch, Frederick; Z: Susan Reese, Arlington.)